

Self-Empowerment

Autumn 2009

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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A BENEFICIAL PRESENCE

Albert Einstein once said that the single most important decision any of us will ever have to make is whether or not to believe that the universe is friendly.

He also said that whether you can observe a thing or not depends on the theory which you use. It is the theory which decides what can be observed.

Whichever way you decide, for a friendly or unfriendly universe, you will observe much to support your theory. Those who lean toward a theory of an unfriendly universe can surely find a great number of gruesome attacks via man and nature, whereas those who believe in a friendly universe will focus on the evidence of harmony, balance, and beauty.

Maybe some of my readers believe in an unfriendly universe in which we need to be as empowered as possible in order to make our lifetime as bearable or pleasant as possible.

I am guessing, however, that a good number of you lean toward the theory of a friendly universe in which we participate. We might be responsible for accessing the highest and best within ourselves to express the positive universal intent. Our beneficial presence might make a difference.

Beneficial Presence

How might we do our part to be a beneficial presence? Does it mean that we need to help other people and make it a better world? Does it mean that we should smile, be nice and agreeable?

There are those who are helpful and nice, but are seething with rage or resentments internally. Their war rages within. They mentally replay old hurts and nurse their judgments to uphold their rightness.

Then there are those who are at war with war itself. An example of this would be the anti-war demonstrator who hates everyone who directly or indirectly is involved with the conflict, including those who work for companies that produce war-related supplies, etc. They live in a war zone within themselves.

I would like to suggest that it is not about helpfulness, pleasantness, or anti-violence efforts as much as it is about the release of our grievances.

You may wonder, "Don't we all have some hurts

from the past that justify resentment, anger, frustration, blame, or rage?" My ego would certainly agree with your ego that we are justified in our emotions toward those who may have hurt us. Others would agree with us that if we've been victimized, the victimizer needs to be set straight with education and/or punishment. That's what the world teaches us.

It is the core lesson of many spiritual teachers that forgiveness leads to freedom and peace. But the release of grievances is not just forgiving people for what they apparently did – it is much bigger than that.

The releasing of grievances includes all the ways that we wish things were different than they are. Our grievances could include the current economy's impact, an expanding waistline, a bad hair day, and spoiled plans. Grievances may fester for how co-workers do their job. Grievances may include both extremes of dealing with change: anger about changes that are happening as well as anger about not getting the changes we wanted.

Grievances are full of judgment, resistance, and lack of peace. They hide the light of joy that might shine otherwise.

Following are two examples of men who could be weighed down by grievances, but are not. One loses his job at a critical time. The other is born with a huge handicap.

Shining Example #1

Guideposts magazine shares true stories of hope and inspiration. I've subscribed for many years, enjoying stories of applied faith in real-life circumstances. People share their stories of inner peace and empowerment found despite illnesses, accidents, the passing of loved ones, financial problems, etc.

In the August 2009 issue, there was a story by James Schwenk, a college professor who was laid off from his dream job of teaching history at a seminary. His wife had recently lost her job, too. They had recently bought a new house when they were both working. Things looked very challenging for them and their two children. He described accepting a maintenance job at the Pennsylvania Renaissance Faire, wearing tights and a feathered cap, and speaking to visitors in Elizabethan English during his workday, changing light bulbs and emptying trash. I admire his positive attitude and ability to make his lower-paying and lower-prestige maintenance job seem like fun.

I am moved by the following thoughts he shares about his faith:

“Faith connects the past to the future, like a kind of spiritual gravity. What I knew – knew with the utter certainty of anything I’d ever known – is that God is in the future as fully as he was in the past or the present, in the moment and the smallest division of the moment, present in the very color of the paint I was putting on the walls. God was everywhere in all of time and would be with me and my family today, tomorrow and forever. The greatest history lesson I could know was to trust him always, especially when faced with the unknowable.”

While reading James’ story, I could imagine the light shining outward and touching many lives. James admits that he tries not to worry and is getting better at it with practice. His efforts to drop grievances, adopt a positive and playful attitude, and nurture his faith go a long way in expressing a beneficial presence.

Shining Example #2

There are many videos on the Internet of a man named Nick Vujicic who was born with no arms or legs. He is currently a motivational speaker who has been on Robert Schuller’s *Hour of Power* program. In one of the speaking engagements that I watched online, he described the time during his childhood when he was severely depressed. Yet he now courageously shares his journey from a *life without limbs to a life without limits* with the whole world. He has a website: www.lifewithoutlimbs.org.

Nick glows with joy and enthusiasm for life. He asks for and receives hugs, employs humor in his talks, and relies on the Christian Bible for his faith. This man is a powerful example of living a blessed life despite what most of us would consider an insurmountable physical handicap. I have seen him “walking and jumping” without legs during his motivational appearances. He is an amazing and beautiful man who is clearly a beneficial presence.

What would make you a shining example of joy and enthusiasm for life? What would be your keys to being a beneficial presence in life? Is the universe friendly? What are the grievances that you are willing to release today in order to let your light shine brightly?

May you feel and express a beneficial presence!
Blessings to you and your loved ones.

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*



My Personal Beauty Secret Revealed

by Scott Kalechstein

I have a personal beauty secret to reveal, something that makes both my skin and my heart youthful, radiant, and baby soft.

Here it is: I cry. Often. When I’m sad. When I’m happy. When I’m touched by beauty. When I let myself fully receive someone’s love. I love, love, love to cry!

I wasn’t always this way. I once was a typical male in this culture, treating my vulnerability as a weakness to be avoided. The cost of this protection plan was a closed heart, a lack of compassion for myself and others. I got the pretense of power, the illusion of being in control, yet I was emotionally removed from my life, a spectator in an ivory tower rather than a player on the field.

Then, when I was 34 I had an earthquake of a realization, which led to a flood of healing. Very clearly I was able to see how judgment was running my life. My mind was filled with judgments, almost every moment of my waking day. Judging myself and others was how I kept myself safe in the world. An interesting thing happened when I allowed myself this new awareness. I began to cry. I cried for all the pain I was in that I had been too guarded from to even notice. I cried for the separation I felt from other people, from life, and especially from my own heart. I cried for all the years I had been too afraid to cry.

A counselor supported me during this process. As I sobbed through each session, he got excited. Sometimes his enthusiasm astonished me. He would say things like, “Great job, Scott! Congratulations! Each tear you are crying is a piece of your past being released, an old pattern of rigidity dissolving out of your life. You are waking up! You are coming home to your heart!” I was so grateful for his strength of perception, his consistent trust that I was safe and on my path, for if I would have gone through it on my own I might have believed I was going crazy. I was crying every day, every night, and I had no control over when or where. After a lifetime of living in my head, I had a lot of catch up crying to do.

That process was, as I look back on it, nothing less than my time of soul retrieval. Before that I was rarely moved by beauty. Then one day a few months into my grief cycle, while watching a sunset on the beach, I found myself crying, overwhelmed by the loveliness of this daily masterpiece. I realized that it was my willingness to surrender to sadness that had given birth to this new ability to be so touched by life’s joys. Water was flowing again in my life. The drought was over!

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Our daughter, seven months old, is quite adorable. (We show baby pictures to anyone who is even mildly open to seeing them.) People often remark how ecstatically happy she looks. Yes, indeed, she is quite happy, joyful, even blissful... most of the time. It is also true that she cries every day (and every night). (We don't snap photos at these times.) She cries when she is hungry, tired, lonely, frustrated, angry, and sometimes just to release pent up energy. Once in a while she cries when one of us is suppressing our own pain, trying to be a tower of strength. She will have none of that, and topples the tower by broadcasting to us in vivid sound and color, exactly what we are pushing away or covering up.

In the magical (not really for children) children's story, *The Knight In The Rusty Armor*, Robert Fisher tells of a knight who lives in an ivory tower. He excels at covering up his heart by putting on a suit of armor every day and galloping off to rescue princesses in an attempt to win their love and adoration. He eventually finds himself stuck in his armor and can't get it off. He goes to see Gladbag, the court jester and wise man for council. Gladbag directs the knight to Merlin, a teacher in the remote forest who gets the knight to begin his emotional journey and start to grieve the many years he was hiding his vulnerability in armor.

Contemplating all the real love he missed out on while living that way, he falls to the ground, weeps for hours, and falls asleep in a puddle of his own tears. The next morning he wakes to find that his visor has rusted away. The knight discovers that it is his own tears that will melt the steel and free him from his armor.

Sondra Ray, in her book *Loving Relationships*, goes as far as to say this: 'Never miss an opportunity to cry!'

Sometimes I wonder how much the earth is affected by humanity's collective emotional drought, our unwillingness to feel our feelings, to honor and preserve our own personal rainforests. I believe that the most important thing we can do to help restore the planet to balance is to restore ourselves to balance. For most of us, that means re-discovering our ability to feel. Uncried tears harden into the bricks that build emotional walls, and that's what enables people to violate and abuse each other, and the planet, without the understanding that what they are doing they are doing to themselves.

In *The Knight In The Rusty Armor*, early on in the story, the knight shakes the court jester's hand to thank him for his advice, and he almost crushes it. Gladbag

yelps, and then says to the knight, "When your armor isn't there, of other's pain you'll be aware."

Could the Holocaust have happened if the German people, as children, hadn't had their feelings stomped on and invalidated, over and over again? Closer to home, the United States grew and expanded our country, spreading an empire west by conquering the Native American people, practically wiping them out in the name of Manifest Destiny, a head trip used to justify massacring people who, in our minds were not really people, certainly not people with rights and hearts like ours.

If enough of us find our tears, these tragedies will not repeat themselves, for rising from the depths of our grief comes our heart connection to life, and we will not destroy whom and what we feel connected to.

The world has had enough ivory towers of ego strength, and is hungry for the power of authenticity and vulnerability, human beings embracing all parts of their humanity with unconditional acceptance and love.

Do you have a personal drought going on? Is your life so busy, your heart so protected, your mind so in control, that you rarely give yourself the time to stop and water the roses? Do you fear drowning in your emotional body, and so have chosen to stay out of the water entirely?

One of my songs contains these lyrics:
may I laugh all my laughter,
may I cry all my tears,
may I love the rain as deeply
as the sun when it clears

These words have become a steady reminder for me to go with the river's flow of my feelings. Sometimes the current takes me through turbulent white water, and other times through calm, still waters, but always it renews and refreshes me, helping me feel alive, passionately and compassionately alive.

Scott Kalechstein is a touchy-feely kind of guy who sings and speaks for his supper. He shares his own healing and awakening process through music, humor, and the spoken word. He travels the U.S.A., Canada and Europe, giving workshops, talks and concerts at churches, conferences, living rooms, and wherever people are open to a heart-centered approach to learning. Scott is also a prolific recording artist, life coach, comedian, and a licensed minister. For a catalog of his music or booking information, he can be reached at www.scottsongs.com



The following inspirational message is shared with you through Rev. Jill Carel. Jill has been sharing messages of comfort, healing, and guidance in private counseling sessions. She now offers workshops to teach others to access Inner Wisdom for themselves.

INNER WISDOM MESSAGE:

BEING A BENEFICIAL PRESENCE

Blessings, Dear One. Thank you for your question about being a beneficial presence.

Being a beneficial presence is your true nature. You might consider it a “default setting,” one that you naturally are when you do not add a goal of being something other than your own true nature. It takes effort to be something that you are not. Yet you are so habituated to acting as if the role you play in life is your true identity. No wonder you feel exhausted by the many twists and turns of the story of your life.

If you were to relax your grip on your role, you would find your true nature emerging. You would experience what has been called the peace that passes all human understanding. You would know a gentleness, a calmness, and the sense of harmony that is behind your many frantic efforts to control and react to the elements of your story.

You have heard the expression “Let go, let God” and because most of you believe that God is separate from you, you hesitate to let go when you believe that some other force will take control and possibly make decisions that you might not approve of or be willing to accept. There is another way, however, to understand the “Let go, let God” message. It is when you let go of the effort to control and allow your natural intelligence to respond appropriately to whatever is in your current experience. You will find yourself as the beneficial presence that is your true divine nature. “Let go, let God” could be interpreted or re-worded as “Let go of trying, and allow Being.” When you allow Being, you will relate to your circumstances in more loving ways. You will find yourself to be that beneficial presence that more intelligently responds to whatever situation seems to be present. And the divine intelligence within you will meet your circumstance in a more beneficial way, thus Being leads to the beneficial presence that you already are, unmasked. And so, Dear One, open your mind and heart to trusting that beneath your efforts and identifications is the beneficial presence that you truly are and can experience and express in magnificent ways.

Thank you for your openness and willingness to hear this message.

Blessings, Dear One. Amen

Special Event:

Frank West

Author of *From Guilt to the Gift of Miracles*

presents his workshop on

**Healing Our Special Relationships:
The Shift from Neediness to Holiness**

Saturday, October 24, 2009

1:00 - 4:00 pm

Holy Innocents St. Paul’s Episcopal Church

7001 Torresdale Avenue

Philadelphia, PA 19135

(NE Philadelphia / Cottman Ave exit of I-95)

In this workshop Frank focuses on the anguish we all experience in our conflicted human relationships and helps us see the redemptive power that forgiveness offers – forgiveness for our own selfishness and forgiveness for the desperate projections of our self-hate on to those special figures whom we have chosen to place in our lives. Specific stories from his own life and the lives of others he has known will illustrate this healing process.

Frank West has practiced psychotherapy and family counseling for over fifty years; 25 years in Manhattan, and later in Connecticut. The psycho-spiritual precepts of *A Course in Miracles* have become the cornerstone of his work with patients.

A signing of his recently published book will follow the workshop.

Save the date and mark your calendar

Pre-registration recommended

Contact: 215-742-0552 or Jilleroni@juno.com

Suggested Donation: \$15



Inner Wisdom Workshop

Sunday, November 8, 2009

1:00 - 5:00 pm

NE Philadelphia

In this experiential workshop led by Rev. Jill we will learn, practice, and integrate the 5-step Voice for Love technique to access our Inner Wisdom for the divine guidance, healing, and comfort that is available to us in all circumstances.

First-time and repeat students are welcome.

Suggested Donation: \$25

Register: 215-742-0552 or Jilleroni@juno.com

A Course in Miracles study group

Open your mind and heart to the consciousness and experience of miracles. Share in the peace and joy that results from changing your perceptions as you allow Inner Wisdom to lead the way.

NE Philadelphia

1st & 3rd Sundays, 7:30 - 9:00 pm

1100 Friendship Street

Corner of Friendship Street & Algon Avenue,
4 streets south of Cottman Avenue (Route 73)

Moorestown, NJ

2nd & 4th Mondays, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Center for Conscious Living

302 N. Washington Avenue, #101

For info call Rev. Jill Sabin Carel 215-742-0552.

Finish each day and be done with it. You have done what you could. Some blunders and absurdities no doubt crept in; forget them as soon as you can. Tomorrow is a new day; begin it well and serenely and with too high a spirit to be encumbered with your old nonsense.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

Wisdom Keepers

There is an article in the Sept/Oct 2009 issue of AARP magazine by author Margaret Atwood in which she tells of a video series that she participated in, called *Wisdom Keepers*. The video project is made up of short interviews with older people of accomplishment, including environmentalists, writers, dancers, etc.

In the article, Ms. Atwood related her respect for Dr. Joe MacInnis, the project creator, who was a physician who became a pioneer of deep sea diving techniques in the Arctic. Atwood says that Dr. MacInnis stresses the importance of dealing with life-threatening conditions with resilience, courage, a sense of humor, and the ability to think as a member of a team. Obviously, it takes strength of character and wisdom to survive in the Arctic.

Seen on a neighborhood sign: “Some minds are like concrete – thoroughly mixed up and permanently set.”

Wisdom cannot be permanently set, like concrete. Wisdom is not found in hard and fast rules of conduct. It is dynamic. Maybe, like Dr. MacInnis’ Arctic survival list, it is a product of the combination of resilience, courage, a sense of humor, and the ability to think as a member of a team.

On a whim I did an online search for the phrase “Wisdom Keepers.” There are over 305,000 possible sites for that topic. Wow! That phrase must be a powerful one. There are many projects called Wisdom Keepers besides Dr. MacInnis’. A great number of Wisdom Keepers would be those who keep alive and pass on to others the honored traditions of their culture and spiritual traditions.

Are you a Wisdom Keeper, a Wisdom Seeker, or a Wisdom Sharer? In these challenging times, like deep sea diving in the Arctic, it is time that we nurture our resilience, courage, sense of humor, and the ability to think as a member of a team.

May we nurture the qualities that lead to wisdom.

Choosing What Matters

In the book *The Secret Life of Bees* by Sue Monk Kidd, the character of August Boatwright exudes the quality of a wise woman, despite the racial tensions of the times and the hardships she has lived through. In one part of the story she says, “...The problem is they *know* what matters, but they don’t *choose* it. ... The hardest thing on earth is choosing what matters.”

Daily Word

I shine the light of love and understanding.

Looking up at the night sky, I cannot count the multitude of stars, but the longer I look, the more I see. Each one is a beacon of light.

I, too, am a beacon of light, a light of love and understanding in the world. I may never know when my light is inspiring someone else along his or her way. I do know that as divine light shines through me, I radiate love and acceptance.

I feel joy as I consider that I am brought to each situation in my life for a purpose. It is up to me to let my light shine brightly, and I do, for I am expressing the divine light that illumines my soul.

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Blessings to you!

The mission of Agape Interfaith Ministries is to encourage, support and inspire a deepening conscious relationship with Divinity for the greater experience of wholeness, abundance, love and peace. We serve to elevate consciousness through individual and group educational activities, and community service.