

Self-Empowerment

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The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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The Next Chapter

For as long as I can remember I have been curious about Spirit, Freedom, Truth, and Love – and so I have been attracted to various spiritual, philosophical, and psychological systems for answers. For many years I considered my “search for God” to be sort of a hobby, an effort to quench my personal thirst for Truth, not thinking it might eventually be my career path.

Meanwhile, in 1975 I was hired by the City of Philadelphia for the first of several interesting municipal government jobs. I have worked for the Free Library of Philadelphia, the Board of Revision of Taxes, the Board of Pensions, the Dept of Human Services, the Police Dept and the Fire Department Emergency Medical Services.

Although I began attending college in 1971, several “interruptions” took place, resulting in my graduating with a Bachelor’s degree in psychology eighteen years later in 1988.

Eventually, my spiritual studies led to my ordination as an Interfaith Minister in 2002.

Now, in this 20th year of the Self-Empowerment newsletter publication, I have crossed the threshold of retirement after 37 years of fulltime employment with the City of Philadelphia.

Joyfully, I can say that all things worked together for my good. Despite many hardships and challenges, there were excellent lessons learned through it all. I do not regret my choices or behaviors throughout the many changes and losses that took place at home and at work. I did the best that I could with limited understanding at the time. If I knew then what I know now, who knows what might have been – but overall, I am excited to be embarking on the next big chapter of my life, armed with greater resources than the younger me.

What’s next?

Over the next few months, as the dust settles on my newfound freedom from the structured workweek schedule, I will be taking the time to listen within for guidance. I will ask Spirit what the focus of Agape Interfaith Ministries is meant to be.

For the past ten years I have had the honor and privilege of offering counseling, sermons, workshops, weddings, funerals, and ordinations. I look forward to what is yet to unfold with excitement and enthusiasm, and I look forward to sharing the journey with you.

In this issue

In this issue I share a reprint of “Finding a Personal God”, the description of an experience of mine which was published in the book *When God Spoke to Me: The Inspiring Stories of Ordinary People Who Have Received Divine Guidance and Wisdom* by DavidPaul Doyle. (I am eternally grateful for the Voice for Love teleclass offered by DavidPaul and Candace Doyle from which I graduated in 2009.)

Psalm 20, an example of a Hebrew Psalm as reinterpreted by Nan Merrill in her book *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation To Wholeness*, is balm for the soul.

“So I Stay Near The Door” by Sam Shoemaker is a powerful poem from one who has ultimately helped millions find their way to healing and 12-Step recovery from addiction. Prolific author “Dick B.” shares introductory material that brings even greater appreciation to this poetic message.

Dear Reader

Please know that there is an open invitation for you to share *your* empowering experiences of inspiration through this newsletter for the benefit of others. I look forward to hearing from you.

Peace and Blessings.

Your fellow traveler,
Rev. Jill

Finding a Personal God

by Jill Carel

The concept of God as Universal Mind, a kind of intelligent energy, had always attracted my curiosity. In my mid-twenties I joined a spiritual study group to learn meditation and to enjoy lively spiritual discussions around a book called SEARCH FOR GOD. Having grown up in a non-religious home, I did not understand what a personal relationship with God could be. Further, I judged those who said they talked to God or Jesus to be mistaken or deluded, and myself as smart, rational, and realistic.

At one meeting, a man questioned my position that God was an amorphous abstract energy that contained everything in the universe. He asked me a few questions that led to the big question: "If God is Creator and Universal Mind, why couldn't He be both abstract and personal?"

I didn't see how, but an avalanche of doubts and questions flooded my mind. I eventually realized my desire was to know God in a personal way, but I felt afraid of compromising my stance as smart, rational, and realistic. How could I release my judgment that people did God an injustice by talking to Him as if He were an invisible person who cared about the details of their day? A small prayer went forth from my heart to find a way to have an intimate relationship with God that would not breach my integrity or intelligence.

That prayer was answered about fifteen years later. My spiritual practices had been growing, yet it was an emotional upheaval at my workplace that fulfilled my desire.

My job was as an administrative assistant in the Fire Department. Several changes led to Ralph, a Bible-based Christian, becoming my new boss. My previous bosses never discussed religion with me. Ralph would periodically allude to the Bible's authority if I opened a discussion of spiritual concern. Otherwise, Ralph lived his religion by being respectful and supportive of all the people with whom he worked instead of being preachy.

His integrity was beyond any level I had seen. He took the blame for anything that didn't work out well and gave credit to others for everything that succeeded. His door was always open for work-related issues as well as personal concerns. For me he had become a perfect symbol of a wise and loving father, brother, friend, and chaplain, as well as a stellar boss. I had never met anybody like him and couldn't imagine life without him.

I knew that periodically Ralph suffered with

severe migraine headaches, but he rarely lost any time at work. After only a few months of working together, Ralph suddenly fell gravely ill. He had come down with the flu, complicated by internal bleeding from taking headache medication. He was in the intensive care unit of a local hospital.

I was distraught at the thought of Ralph lying gravely ill in the hospital. My friends said I sounded like my lover was dying. Fearing the loss of this amazing man and worried about his family, I called all my friends and asked them to pray for him. I couldn't bear the thought of his suffering or possible death. One friend, concerned for my extreme emotional state, suggested I call a prayer line.

And so it was, so many years after my intention to know God in a personal way that I was brought to my knees with fear for Ralph. I called the prayer line. The woman who answered asked if she could pray with me. She listened to my request for healing prayer for my boss, Ralph.

There I was, sitting in my living room with a telephone receiver held to my ear, yet it was as if a woman was no longer speaking across the miles to a worried frightened stranger. She told me to still my mind and "go within" where there is perfect peace and a knowing of wholeness and perfection. As she spoke words of faith, wholeness, miracles, healing, love and God's caring, I was no longer simply hearing hopeful words. I became a tuning fork resonating with Divine Truth. It was as if God's Voice were speaking to God's Child in a language I didn't know I knew.

As peace filled me from the inside out, all my fears about Ralph dissolved. I sat straighter and breathed more deeply. I felt lighter. The weight of fear had been taken from me. It was an experience of communion. The prayer she shared with me was God speaking to me and through me. My heart opened in a new way, letting in a new powerful Voice for Love that I could now find and recognize within me. Though I later realized it had been within me all along, it took the intense emotional longing for Ralph's healing to break down my defensive barrier. It was a barrier I didn't know I held in place through the first forty years of my life.

That prayer changed me. God's Voice became real for me through this experience. I received God's love and peace. I felt God's Love being revealed to me as a Mighty Creator turning His attention to my specific need in that moment. Only part of that message from God was about Ralph's healing. The main part was about my relationship with a loving caring God and a peace that passes all human understanding.

I am overjoyed to say that Ralph recovered fully and returned to work with me for thirteen wonderful

years. His family and our work family were blessed by his recovery. Even more than Ralph's miraculous healing was another healing that colors every day of my life. I now know the Voice for Love that brings the most delicious peace to me, no matter what difficulties I continue to face as a wife, daughter, mother, neighbor and co-worker.

Jill Carel's personal account as published in the book *When God Spoke to Me: The Inspiring Stories of Ordinary People Who Have Received Divine Guidance and Wisdom* by DavidPaul Doyle. Published by New Page Books, A Division of The Career Press, Inc. ©2010 For this and other DavidPaul Doyle books, recordings, teleclasses, and many other spiritual resources visit www.TheVoiceForLove.com

Preface to *Psalms for Praying*

by Nan C. Merrill

Who among us has not yearned to KNOW the Unknowable? For most, these moments are fleeting glimpses that may last a lifetime; in some, a Fire is kindled and life becomes a quest to live in Holy Surrender; and though fewer in number, saints dwell among us who know the Beloved, who aspire simply to co-create in harmony with the One, who is Love and Light and Power. To cherish the Beloved as you are cherished is to live in a mutual bonding that calls for action.

The Psalms have ever been a response to these deep yearnings: cries of the soul ... songs of surrender ... paeans of praise. The Psalms of the Hebrew Scripture often reflect a patriarchal society based on fear and guilt that projects evil and sin onto outer enemies. *Psalms for Praying* reflects the reciprocity of Divine Love that opens the heart to forgiveness, reconciliation, and healing. Affirming the life-giving fruits of love and acknowledging the isolation and loneliness of those separated from Love, may serve to awaken the heart to move toward wholeness and holiness.

Aspiring to live in a spirit of cooperation, co-creation, and companionship with the Beloved, rather than invoking a spirit of competition with God, other individuals and nations – so much a part of the Hebrew Scripture Psalms – seems clearly a more loving movement toward engendering peace, harmony, and healing in our wounded world.

Yet, let it be understood that *Psalms for Praying: An Invitation to Wholeness* is in no way meant to replace the well-loved, still meaningful, and historically

important Psalms of the Hebrew Scripture. May it stand as a companion, a dialogue, if you will, of one age speaking with a later age. May it serve as an invitation to listen to the Voice of Silence that speaks within your own soul.

Psalm 20

A re-interpretation by Nan C. Merrill

May the Great Birther who created
you in wholeness, comfort you
when you call!
May the Name of Love be your
protection
and rise up in your heart
as a tower of strength!
May all you have given in gratitude
and with open hands
be returned to you a hundredfold!
May your heart's desires and all of
Love's plans for you
be fulfilled in due season!
Let us shout for joy as Love
triumphs over fear;
Let our thankful hearts sing in
loud acclamation to the
Beloved, who answers
our heartfelt prayers for
well-being.

Now I know that Love comes to all
who open their hearts, and
dwells therein
offering gifts of peace and
harmony.
Some may boast of wealth and
personal power;
they will stumble and fall.
Let us boast of the One who
comes in the Name of Love;
We shall rise up strong and sure.

Oh Beloved, You who created us,
You bless us with your Love,
For you are the Divine Guest
Dwelling within our hearts.

Nan C. Merrill (recently deceased) published six books from 1996 to 2009. *Psalms for Praying* is perhaps Nan's best known work.



“So I Stay Near The Door”

aka “So I Stand By The Door”

Reverend Samuel Shoemaker’s Apologia for his life;
Background introduction and personal epilogue
by Dick B.

Background Introduction by Dick B.

The Reverend Samuel Moor Shoemaker, Jr., DD, (1893–1963), was an Episcopal priest, known to some as a “co-founder” of Alcoholics Anonymous.

In his time, Sam was known and applauded as one of the 10 greatest preachers in America, along with Billy Graham, Norman Vincent Peale, and others. From 1925 and for many years thereafter, Sam was Rector of the Calvary Protestant Episcopal Church in New York. Later he was called to be Rector of the Calvary Episcopal Church in Pittsburgh. Sam took a special interest in Alcoholics Anonymous and became a good friend of co-founder Bill Wilson. In fact, Sam taught Bill Wilson most of the spiritual principles that were incorporated into A.A.’s basic text and Twelve Steps. Some 200 phrases in A.A. bear the unmistakable footprints of Sam. And, at one point, Wilson asked Shoemaker to write the Twelve Steps, but Sam declined – saying they should be written by Bill. Nonetheless, the Steps are replete with Shoemaker’s ideas on how to find God, the “turning point,” the Oxford Group life-changing steps of confidence, confession, conviction, conversion, continuance, quiet time, spiritual awakening, prayer, fellowship, conversion and witness, and the need to “pass it on”.

Shoemaker’s whole dedication was to opening the door and showing people how to find God. Shoemaker several times wrote articles bearing titles like “How To Find God.”

It is not surprising that Shoemaker penned several versions of a poem which most have titled “So I Stand By The Door.” Actually, at Christmas, 1958, Sam had this poem and many others privately printed by Calvary Church in Pittsburgh. The poem has taken several forms and been known by at least two titles. The first title – apparently the one that Sam himself chose – was “So I Stay Near The Door—An Apologia For My Life.” The poem has been used, modified, reprinted, and retitled elsewhere under the better known name of “So I Stand By the Door.”

The Poem: “So I Stay Near The Door”

I stay near the door.

*I neither go too far in, nor stay too far out,
The door is the most important door in the world -
It is the door through which men walk when they
find God.*

*There’s no use my going way inside,
and staying there,
When so many are still outside and they, as much as I,
Crave to know where the door is.
And all that so many ever find
Is only the wall where the door ought to be.
They creep along the wall like blind men,
With outstretched, groping hands,
Feeling for a door, knowing there must be a door,
Yet they never find it.
So I stay near the door.*

*The most tremendous thing in the world
Is for men to find that door - the door to God.
The most important thing any man can do
Is to take hold of one of those blind, groping hands
And put it on the latch - the latch that only clicks
And opens to the man’s own touch.*

*Men die outside that door, as starving beggars die
On cold nights in cruel cities in the dead of winter -
Die for want of what is within their grasp.
They live on the other side of it - live because they
have found it.*

*Nothing else matters compared to helping them
find it,
And open it, and walk in, and find Him.
So I stay near the door.*

*Go in, great saints, go all the way in -
Go way down into the cavernous cellars,
And way up into the spacious attics.
It is a vast, roomy house, this house where God is.
Go into the deepest of hidden casements,
Of withdrawal, of silence, of sainthood.
Some must inhabit those inner rooms
And know the depths and heights of God,
And call outside to the rest of us how wonderful it is.
Sometimes I take a deeper look in,
Sometimes venture a little farther,
But my place seems closer to the opening.
So I stay near the door.*

*There is another reason why I stay there.
Some people get part way in and become afraid
Lest God and the zeal of His house devour them;*

*For God is so very great, and asks all of us.
And these people feel a cosmic claustrophobia
And want to get out. 'Let me out!' they cry.
And the people way inside only terrify them more.
Somebody must be by the door to tell them that they
are spoiled*

*For the old life, they have seen too much;
One taste of God, and nothing but God will do
any more.*

*Somebody must be watching for the frightened
Who seek to sneak out just where they came in,
To tell them how much better it is inside.*

*The people too far in do not see how near these are
To leaving - preoccupied with the wonder of it all.
Somebody must watch for those who have entered
the door,
But would like to run away. So for them, too,
I stay near the door.*

*I admire the people who go way in.
But I wish they would not forget how it was
Before they got in. Then they would be able to help
The people who have not yet even found the door,
Or the people who want to run away again
from God.*

*You can go in too deeply, and stay in too long,
And forget the people outside the door.
As for me, I shall take my old accustomed place,
Near enough to God to hear Him, and know
He is there,
But not so far from men as not to hear them,
And remember they are there too.*

*Where? Outside the door -
Thousands of them, millions of them.
But - more important for me -
One of them, two of them, ten of them,
Whose hands I am intended to put on the latch,
So I shall stay by the door and wait
For those who seek it.*

*I had rather be a door-keeper,
So I stay near the door."*

Epilogue by Dick B.

The poem contains many reminders of the A.A. I found – newcomers crying out for help in finding God. Hesitant, frightened, even reluctant newcomers—coming in and out by the thousands each year. Newcomers who seek a guiding hand—only to hear that “god” can be a light bulb, a radiator, a chair, or “Someone.” Newcomers who can’t find Shoemaker’s “door” because there is no one leading or pointing to

the right power—Yahweh, the Creator. Newcomers who—amounting to 50% of those who come in the A.A. door—are out of it within the first year. Back to drinking. Back to drugs. Back to misery. Back to sure and certain death by one means or another if they remain “outside” the real door—the door to the power of God.

The early A.A. Pioneers in Akron, Ohio, were not trying to find God. They got their information, their belief system, and their instructions from the Bible. They studied the Bible. And they believed that God is. (See Hebrews 11:6) So did I.

Devastated by the ravages of excessive drink, like the Pioneers, I sought to rebuild my relationship with God—to establish daily fellowship with Him (1 John 1). And to seek His protection and care at every turn, mindful that obedience to His will was a vital part of the effort. Like early AAs, I was cured of alcoholism and have not had a drink from the first day in A.A. rooms until present.

For doubters, unbelievers, and those like Bill Wilson—who was an atheist and lacked both a relationship and fellowship with God—A.A.’s basic text was written to show newcomers the steps to take to find God. The very thing Rev. Sam Shoemaker was teaching to his friend Bill Wilson in New York. They told “how it worked!”

Reprinted with permission by Dick B., the pen name of the author of 46 books and over 1,250 articles on Alcoholics Anonymous History and the Christian Recovery Movement; including several on Sam Shoemaker, including “New Light on Alcoholism: God, Sam Shoemaker, and A.A.”, 2nd edition 1998, Paradise Research Publications, Inc.

See the author’s website at www.dickb.com



Daily Word

*I am aware of the presence of God,
and my life unfolds in right ways.*

Aware of the presence of God within, I live from my spiritual center, rather than strictly from my ego. I am guided by my life's purpose and meaning.

When I see my life from a divine perspective, I realize how limited my ego-based views can be. Prayer helps me achieve and maintain a higher view. I notice when my thoughts, words and actions are out of alignment with Spirit, and I open to the guidance of God in all I think, say, and do.

I have faith that my highest good is unfolding minute by minute, hour by hour, day by day, and that unlimited blessings are flowing to me now. I am God-conscious, fully open to the activity of Spirit in my life.

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Publisher & Editor-in-Chief: Rev. Jill Sabin Carel

Editor: Michael P. Tunney

Agape Interfaith Ministries, 1100 Friendship Street,
Philadelphia, PA 19111 Phone: (215) 742-0552

Email: Jilleroni@juno.com Web: www.AgapeInterfaith.org

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1100 Friendship Street
Philadelphia, PA 19111

Love

Sent to you with
Love & Blessings

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.