

Spirituality

The information contained in this article is taken from an interview of the Mind-Body Connection, CHSR-FM with Cathy Holman, Campus Ministry office at St. Thomas University.

Spirituality has come to define more than what we know of it within the religious experience. It has come to be recognized as a part of the "self" that is born out of a greater awareness of the self and our connectedness to all that is. Some define it as a "way of living, or a way of experiencing life that is interconnected to your "center" or life force. It grounds us. Some traditions call it God, while others call it your spirit, or center. It unifies us to all that is nature, people, etc. It encompasses a way of living that keeps us in touch or in tune with the life forces around us. It is a personal, communal and even global way of living.

Spirituality plays an important part in our lives. Presently we are very much aware of the disconnectedness that surrounds us - through war, famine, and the ecological situation that currently exists. This has forced us to realize that the way we live and the way we think of living has directly affected our environment. Spirituality has a role to play in terms of encouraging us to live a more healthy, peaceful way of living. It is more "green", or environmentally friendly. Spirituality is a form of "transformation" of society. It is associated with freedom and responsibility concerning the forces that control society. As we get in touch with "us", our being, we realize that we can move towards a greater freedom in life and we do have some control in our lives. It can help us feel more rooted. This reduces the likelihood that we can be lead astray by others, or by conflict.

Some movements within Spirituality have been born out of oppression of certain groups. This is particularly true with some of the movements within Latin America and for women. We realize the earth is being oppressed, damaged by our lifestyles. In order for the earth or for us to have better life, we need to connect ourselves to the forces that ground us. This realization is a result of a common oppressed experience. Examples of this include sexism, physical/emotional abuse, violence, etc. By looking for this common grounding experience, we can help ourselves overcome this oppression through empowerment. We connect our personal to the political as it exists in society today.

Our consciousness has increased our awareness from, needing to reflect upon and change not only our external and political ways of living, but also our spiritual ways. There is a more complete vision. In order to change the external or political, we need to change our ways of relating of being. Most often, it has been born out of a sense of "less than life", a sense of death, oppression, which results in a yearning for more result-

ing in spiritual journey.

Our previous view of a Spiritual person was one who was quiet - a guru-type, a monk, or a hermit. This points to the fact that those who are more in touch with themselves are "centred" and appear more at peace with themselves. We look to them as steady people, who are not erratic in their response to life.

We do, however need to recover an "active spirituality" in our lives. We can be grounded and at peace, while at the same time being active. God, and the spirit can only be communicated to us through everyday reality. It is not separate from us or the world. This experience of God is through living, through the world. We need to be engaged actively with other to experience the true sense of this. This comes to us in feeling centred, knowing where we are headed, who we are, what we want, and where our source of life is coming from. We can be less caught up in the stress of the world, but also concerned about what is happening. Recently, spirituality has played a major role in its connectedness to movements for peace and justice in the world. Conflict and disorder are a result of a lack of being in touch.

Feminist spirituality for some women came about from a sense of feminist values and attitudes around social change - such as changes in law, etc. Sometimes when we are caught up in our struggles, we can still feel burnt out, and empty. Involvement in a spiritual group can help us reconnect - for example looking at our own experiences as a woman - connecting our personal experiences to our historical experiences as a group can lead to a source of strength, or power for us as individuals. This is a very communal, social form of spirituality. These experiences may be ones of mothering, saying "no" to abuse or to a dysfunctional relationship. The source of strength comes in allowing us to use a new model to look at ourselves - not from the traditional social models that have been used in the past to define our experiences. It is important for women to be able to define their experiences from their perspectives which result in a stronger connectedness and sense of being. This is very much a personal journey.

The steps involved in this spirituality include:
Coming to an awareness of oppression, or of a negative experience - usually it takes something awful to make us realize that things are not as they should be. This brings us to a realization for change - "that it has to be better", or "I can't take this any more". It can be a jarring experience.

From that experience the individual seeks the knowledge or path to go about the change which is needed. The person looks for a sense of deeper meaning in life - For a new vision of how things should be or ought to be. This then becomes part of the journey within which has been described as an "awakening" experience. These

first steps in this journey are like Spring. The view of the world is new which was in contrast to the "dark", night experience (the negative previous experience). We wake up. What progresses is largely dependent on the situation of the individual, their attitude. Some people join groups, connect themselves to others who have similar experiences. This allows them to engage in a similar journey as those in the group, and allows them to share their experiences. Some people seek out mentors or guides (a person who is experienced in the spiritual life who can help us become more connected to life). Some people read a lot about their experiences to gain insight and information that reinforces the experience and background to what they are experiencing. The next step involves being engaged in the journey itself, believing that it is "true" for you and allowing yourself to be an active part of the process. It becomes a way of life for us. To achieve this, the individual must have a form of discipline in their lives. For example, some people experience spirituality through meditations twice a day for twenty minutes. It becomes part of who they are.

Most spiritual journeys need times of "renewal" to help reconnect to that original "honeymoon" experience. To promote this, people often go on "retreats", or take workshops as ways of connecting.

We are all born with a form of spirituality. Some of us just lose touch

Mind-Body Connection by Janet McGeachy-Hansen

with it as we grow older. Some individuals practice their spirituality through consumerism, materialism. Others practice it in a form of life-giving experiences and increase their awareness of being connected to a "force" in their lives. It is a continual deepening of our awareness that has always existed.

Spirituality has recently been renewed as part of the North American culture. If someone was interested in discovering or renewing their spirituality Cathy suggests contacting the campus Ministry's office at St. Thomas. Cathy has started a women's group on Campus and works with Father John Vicars. They are both available to see individuals on a one-to-one basis. Besides the traditional Catholic and women's group, there is also a Jesuit form of spirituality being explored that is a focused, step-by-step process.

At U.N.B. the Ministry office is open in the Alumni building. As well, Native Awareness Days held on February 24th and 25th gave a lot of information about Native spirituality which was open to everyone to come and learn about the native way of life. We can all be enriched by others' experiences. Other community events

are being hosted by the various women's groups throughout the Fredericton Area which focus on becoming in touch with and being aware of women's spirituality. Cathy says it is important to be a part of a group, but at the same time, we must make a personal commitment and work at developing our spirituality - which is a life long journey.

Suggested readings include: Thomas Merton - "The Contemplative Life"; Henry Nowlan - "Meditative Spirituality"; "The Spiral Dance: Seven Steps to Women's Spirituality", Starhawk - The Wicca or Witch of Women Spirituality. A lot of these books have rituals and experiences such as meditations that will help discover our spirituality. Some spirituality is in the form of political spirituality in an effort to change the world around us. This is currently part of the writings in South America and Africa.

During Gender Studies Week - March 15 - 21st, there will be a Panel on Women's Spirituality - Tuesday, March 17th at 11:30 a.m. at Holy Cross House Conference Room at St. Thomas.

Presidential (rat) race: continued from page 12

almost, virtually omnipotent Dr. Know's place. I wanted to know what s/he thought of the USA presidential race, I knew s/he was originally from the States, and s/he would have some opinions. As I arrived, s/he was engrossed in some very highly esoteric, intellectual pursuits. S/he was reading his/her Stokes seed catalog. I interrupted,

"Hi! Dr. K. are you planning to plant a garden?" S/he answered joyfully,

"Right, D.J., now that Spring Break's gone and classes are almost over we're all looking forward to summer in our own way."

It made sense to me. Gardens were Dr. K's ways of getting back to nature. S/he really like to get out and get

one with the soil. The gardens s/he plants usually represent mega giveaways for friends. But I wanted to know about the silly presidential race to the south. Actually as I type these lines it's "SUPER TUESDAY". Somehow coming from the USA one expects this sort of false hype.

"Dr. K., what about the USA presidential race? What do you think of those crazy Republicans?"

"Republicans!?!? Are you kidding?!?! Look at the Democrats!! Bill Clinton running for president? He the front runner for Pete's sake (and everybody else's sake). Remember, this man is Governor of Arkansas. I lived in Arkansas for three years. He's the man who saved Mississippi!"

I was taken back. "Saved Missis-

sippi?" I gasped incredulously.

Dr. Know replied, "Naturally, for years Arkansas's economy and education system were so depressed and backward that by all measurement standards they were a distant forty ninth of the fifty states. Every year, when the annual reports came out, the hue and cry in Arkansas was 'THANK GOD FOR MISSISSIPPI!!!!' which always finished dead last. However, Clinton has managed to slip Arkansas behind even lowly 'Ole Miss'"

I was stunned, "And people are actually voting for this clown?"

Dr. K. smiled, "Words out, my old friends from Arkansas are secretly stuffing ballot boxes in every primary."

G(g)od(ess)(es) and lesbians: continued from page 11

when you go where you have never gone before, you will not be anywhere (Sitting back and picturing oblivion has always been difficult for me. Maybe it's easier for people who don't remember their dreams). You also have to believe you are only an

organism and nothing more. With the kind of imagination humans are prone to, that takes quite a bit of self discipline. Regardless, Atheist lesbians have their own "messengers of truth" to fight. Today's Biologists can't see a reason for homosexuality in the

evolution of the species. Of course tomorrow's biologists might not see a reason for today's Biologists in the evolution of the species. That's the neat thing about this particular religion. If you don't like what they're saying: wait a few years.

Unitarian

11 a.m., Sunday, March 15th
GAMING IN NEW BRUNSWICK.
BRIAN STEEVES - Lotteries Commission Of N.B.
Children's Program:
Getting To Know Our Planet: How To Reduce Your Waste.
THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF FREDERICTON
749 Charlotte Street
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