

Healing From Faith

*...if that which you seek, you find not within yourself, you will never find it without.
For behold, I have been with you from the beginning,
and I am that which is attained at the end of desire.*
Starhawk

*Everything outside – doesn't matter.
Everything inside – doesn't matter.
Being, really being, in this moment is all there is.*
Tim Shay – explaining the essence of Taoism

“Jesus loves me (but he can't stand you).*” With this simple line/song title, the Austin Lounge Lizard capture the essence of what many conservative Christians believe about homosexuality. And it's not just the conservative Christians who think we're somehow deplorable. Conservative Buddhists, Jews, Hindus and Muslims also condemn us. Some people feel compelled to implore us to repent and “straighten up” and tell us that we are going to hell if we don't. Exodus International, a “nonprofit, interdenominational Christian organization promoting the message of *Freedom from homosexuality through the power of Jesus Christ*” offers to liberate us from our homosexual urges and to help us become the straight people they think God wants us to be. Fred Phelps, the notorious anti-gay preacher from Kansas, cuts through the hypocritical bullshit and puts the real message out there: “God hates fags!” Either way, the message is pretty clear: God's “unconditional love” is conditional and queer folk don't measure up. Many fundamentalist Muslims and Hassidic and Orthodox Jews hold similar non-accepting beliefs about homosexuality.

Given these messages, it's no wonder that so many of us turn our backs on religion. For some of us, life without religion is fine. We don't have to worry that eating pork or shrimp violates scriptural rules. We can sleep in rather than going to the temple, mosque, or church and we don't have to put all that energy into clearing our minds and being present.

But for others of us, our lack of spiritual connection leaves a hole in our beings that cries out to be filled. Rather than find ways to fill that hole with our own brand of spirituality or seeking out one of the many congregations and groups that not only accepts us but has put energy into recruiting us into the fold, we blame the fundies, or God, or the gods, or the Universe, or the Higher Power, or the “Asshole in the Sky” or whatever it is that we call that connecting force in the universe for our sense of emptiness. And rather than sitting with the emptiness, we fill it with resentment, blame, hatred, shame and self-hatred. And then we eat, drink, take drugs, shop, play video games, work, obsessively organize, or create overwhelmingly busy schedules in order to mask the pain of these toxic thoughts.

And yeah, I know, some of you have probably tried. You've gone to a congregation or group with the hope that you'd be accepted as you are and left in disgust because you felt like the ugly stepsister. Or you felt frustrated because you didn't like their rituals or their songs or didn't click with some of their doctrinal beliefs. Or maybe you didn't “connect” with anyone in the group. Or you sat on your cushion in silence or chanted your heart out but just couldn't “feel it” and figure it must be them.

Fundies and other anti-gay zealots may broadcast hateful messages and ignorant but well meaning people may not welcome us in a way that feels like “home,” but at the end of the day, we are the obstacle to our spiritual connection. You may be thinking, “It’s not my fault. I really did try and *they* let me down.” Or, “I prayed, honestly and sincerely – not just the ‘please God, let me pass this test and I’ll never get drunk the night before an exam again’ kind of prayer, but a real ‘open my heart and pour out my soul’ kind of prayer and God never answered. So screw you!”

I’m not letting *them* off the hook. I’m not apologizing for God/Higher Power/the Universe or whatever. I’m just being realistic. We can’t control the anti-gay zealots or convince them that we are just fine the way we are with words or arguments. But we can control our thoughts, actions and ways of being on the planet. If you come at it from this angle, it’s clear that we are the ones who block our connection with the earth, with God/the universe/spirit/higher power, with others, and ultimately with ourselves. *They* can’t take this from us. The problem is that we buy into the illusion that we are separate, that we are different, that we are disconnected. And when we do this, we are disconnected. Most of us, in any given moment, don’t know how our left big toe or our right elbow feels. Most of us, in any given moment, are lost in our thoughts and don’t notice that our breathing is shallow, that our posture is poor, or that our neck is tense. If we do notice something in our body, it’s probably because we feel discomfort or erotic arousal and our focus is on how to make the pain go away or how to satisfy the ants in our pants. In other words, we “go away.”

If we can disconnect, we can reconnect. We can “heal from faith.” We can heal from the wounds of hateful words and from the disappointment of unanswered requests and prayers. The path is both very simple and yet very difficult. We have to sit with the emptiness, with the silence, and with our suffering. We have to be present. Once we get present, God/the Universe/spirit/higher power flows through us. The challenge is that our brains are wired to distract us with thoughts and stories and worries. The solution to this challenge is to circumvent our busy minds by connecting to our bodies. Here are a few tricks:

1: In a chair: Rock forward and back on your sitz bones (if you sit on your hands, these are the bony nubs you feel). Notice how your lower back feels a little crunchy or cranky when you go too far forward and how your lower spine collapses when you go too far back. When you’re sitting directly on your sitz bones, notice how your spine elongates and you have more room to breathe. Let yourself breathe here! Just notice your breath. Notice how it feels when you inhale and how it feels when you exhale. Now let yourself breathe deep into your belly and see how that feels. Breathe into your chest and see how that feels. And breathe into the upper corners of your lungs and notice how that feels. Now, go back to breathing into your belly, but this time, follow your breath all the way up to your chest, and then up to the upper corners of your lungs. After you have done this extended breath for three breaths, allow yourself to breath normally and just notice your breath.

If you need someone to guide you, go to a yoga class, pop in a meditation CD or do it with a supportive friend. My plan is put links to guided meditations and visualizations on my website www.ReginaSewell.com soon, so check it out.

2. Sitting in a chair or standing: Notice the energy in your right hand. Can you feel it buzzing? Can you feel its aliveness? If it hurts, let yourself be with the pain. Breathe into it. Notice how the pain changes as you focus your attention on it. Once you really feel the energy in your right hand, shift

your attention to your left foot. Can you feel the energy buzzing there? What else do you feel? Watch this for a moment. And then shift your awareness to the flesh around your right sitz bone and then to the left. Gradually explore your entire body and then see if you can feel the energy in your entire body. If there are places of blockage, let yourself breathe into those spaces until they soften. If thoughts or feelings emerge, notice them and let them go.

3. Breathe as before, but this time, after several rounds of breathing, silently say, “heartbeat” and see if you can feel your heart beating as you continue to notice your breath.

4. Go outside. Take a walk, go on a hike, putz in your garden, or sit by the river and let yourself just be. When find yourself distracted by thoughts, judgments, worries, or day dreams, gently pull your awareness back to where you are, to the natural world around you.

5. Let yourself create. Paint, draw, cook, make jewelry, or make music. Start by purposefully singing out of key, missing notes, following your intuition to change the recipe, or drawing or sculpting something so hideous even your dog runs in fear and then let yourself play. Let go of the outcome. If the cookies come out funky, take them to a potluck, leave them in the break room at work or toss them into the compost pile. If the poem is beyond trite, welcome to the poet’s lament. That’s what the recycle bin is for. The point is the process, the journey, the fun of getting there.

Once you’ve connected with yourself you can probably connect with the universe/God/higher power/whatever. If you can’t, perhaps you need to search through your beliefs and see if you have negative beliefs that block the connection. If you can’t sit with yourself even in a yoga class or with a CD, you might need the help and support of a counselor so that you don’t have to face the fear and pain that you’ve been avoiding so long on your own.

Once you’ve connected on your own, once you’ve really felt the truth that you are an integral part of the universe just as you are, that you are part of the divine, then you can find others who connect in a similar way, even if it is through the paradigm of a religious group (like Catholics or Southern Baptists) whose official dogma says God can’t love us. The fundies and anti-gay zealots can spout their interpretations of reality all they want. We get to chose how we react to it whether or not we believe it.

*This is a great parody of fundy christainity. Check it out on YouTube.com

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