

Spirituality & Community

July 2004

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Beads
By Cynthia Long

Gems in the Gravel
By Kurt Venables



Martin Luther King, Jr.

Letter from Birmingham Jail

The Dis-ease of Addiction
By Tracy Phernetton

Lord Byron: Lake Lemana

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Who We Are

www.spiritualityandcommunity.com

Origins

Spirituality & Community was founded in late 2003 by Kurt Venables to communicate with others who share an interest in spirituality and an appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs.

Mission

We are dedicated to the spiritual development of our members and promoting spirituality and appreciation for the rich array of spiritual beliefs the world provides.

Foundations

Spirituality & Community is a magazine and online community for those seeking answers to life's deepest questions. We hold closely these fundamental truths:

•To find true happiness, one must open his or her heart to the pure goodness that lies deep within. We call this pure goodness the Good, the Light, and the Lord within.

•The process of opening one's heart is a lifelong journey, which we call Spirituality.

We distinguish between spirituality and religion. *Our focus is spirituality, which we view as an inner search for happiness and fulfillment.* We are concerned with what lies within the heart. In religion, metaphysical and supernatural concepts are inextricably linked to spirituality, and you will find such religious concepts discussed here to the extent that the writer believes them to be entwined with spiritual topics. However, you will not find material written for the sole purpose of asserting, denying, or debating supernatural religious phenomena, whether they be associated with traditional religions or new age religions. Examples of such phenomena might include the existence of God, reincarnation, or extraterrestrials. It's not that we don't consider these to be worthy subjects; it's just that we believe that spirituality, the inner journey, is important in its own right, and that is our focus here.

We believe that true spiritual development depends upon a genuine appreciation for a diversity of spiritual beliefs. Among our highest values is open-mindedness. We do not require or expect others to accept the particular beliefs of any one of us. We believe that as we develop such an appreciation for diversity, our perspective shifts away from an "all or nothing" concept of spirituality, an approach that supposes that one must either wholly accept or utterly reject a particular set of spiritual beliefs. This perceptual shift allows us to view the beliefs of others from a fresh vantage point, take from each set of beliefs that which rings true, and synthesize a personal spirituality that makes sense for each of us. *We believe that spirituality may best be defined as a personal journey towards true happiness and spiritual fulfillment and that the beliefs of others serve to guide each of us on our own journey.* Our goals are the personal growth of each and every member and the promotion of spiritual values and respect for individuality.

We believe that when we view the spiritual beliefs of others with our hearts, we see truth shine through. Truth shines all around us if we know how to see it. The truth we see in the spiritual beliefs of others guides each of us. It is in this vein that we wish this organization to be viewed. ***Through Spirituality & Community, we reveal our most intimate beliefs. We sincerely hope that some will find some truth within them, and we wish you only the best on your own personal journey!***

What We Do- Opportunities for Exploring Spirituality and Communication

Spirituality & Community produces a magazine and encompasses an online community. Both aspects serve as the basis for bringing together those who share our aspirations and beliefs, to meet each other and exchange ideas. We provide many opportunities for exploring spirituality and communicating with others:

- Spirituality & Community magazine***
- Features on the site***
- Online chats***
- Retreats*** (as interest arises)

The magazine is based on a Reader's Digest® type model. It is comprised primarily of reader submitted material. It is the primary mechanism for a member to both explore spirituality and communicate his or her ideas to others. Features from the past several issues are also posted on the site. When interest is sufficiently high, we will hold chats online. An eventual goal is to organize retreats in major metropolitan areas to allow participants to meet each other and discuss issues face to face.

Membership in Spirituality & Community is free and may be withdrawn at any time. The magazine is also free. Level of participation in any aspect of Spirituality & Community is strictly voluntary.

The organization and site were launched only very recently. Currently, membership is very small- We are in growth mode right now. ***If you would like to join, please visit our web site and click the Join Us! link.***

Martin Luther King, Jr.

Letter from Birmingham Jail

(excerpt)



[Note: All typographical errors are from the original source and therefore have not been corrected.]

April 16, 1963

MY DEAR FELLOW CLERGYMEN:

While confined here in the Birmingham city jail, I came across your recent statement calling my present activities "unwise and untimely." Seldom do I pause to answer criticism of my work and ideas. If I sought to answer all the criticisms that cross my desk, my secretaries would have little time for anything other than such correspondence in the course of the day, and I would have no time for constructive work. But since I feel that you are men of genuine good will and that your criticisms are sincerely set forth, I want to try to answer your statements in what I hope will be patient and reasonable terms.

I think I should indicate why I am here in Birmingham, since you have been influenced by the view which argues against "outsiders coming in." I have the honor of serving as president of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, an organization operating in every southern state, with headquarters in Atlanta, Georgia. We have some eighty-five affiliated organizations across the South, and one of them is the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights. Frequently we share staff, educational and financial resources with our affiliates. Several months ago the affiliate here in Birmingham asked us to be on call to engage in a nonviolent direct-action program if such were deemed necessary. We readily consented, and when the hour came we lived up to our promise. So I, along with several members of my staff, am here because I was invited here. I am here because I have organizational ties here.

But more basically, I am in Birmingham because injustice is here. Just as the prophets of the eighth century B.C. left their villages and carried their "thus saith the Lord" far beyond the boundaries of their home towns, and just as the Apostle Paul left his village of Tarsus and carried the gospel of Jesus Christ to the far corners of the Greco-Roman world, so am I compelled to carry the gospel of freedom beyond my own home town. Like Paul, I must constantly respond to the Macedonian call for aid.

Moreover, I am cognizant of the interrelatedness of all communities and states. I cannot sit idly by in Atlanta and not be concerned about what happens in Birmingham. Injustice anywhere is a threat to justice everywhere. We are caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied in a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one directly, affects all indirectly. Never again can we afford to live with the narrow, provincial "outside agitator" idea. Anyone who lives inside the United States can never be considered an outsider anywhere within its bounds.

You deplore the demonstrations taking place in Birmingham. But your statement, I am sorry to say, fails to express a similar concern for the conditions that brought about the demonstrations. I am sure that none of you would want to rest content with the superficial

kind of social analysis that deals merely with effects and does not grapple with underlying causes. It is unfortunate that demonstrations are taking place in Birmingham, but it is even more unfortunate that the city's white power structure left the Negro community with no alternative.

In any nonviolent campaign there are four basic steps: collection of the facts to determine whether injustices exist; negotiation; self-purification; and direct action. We have gone through all these steps in Birmingham. There can be no gainsaying the fact that racial injustice engulfs this community. Birmingham is probably the most thoroughly segregated city in the United States. Its ugly record of brutality is widely known. Negroes have experienced grossly unjust treatment in the courts. There have been more unsolved bombings of Negro homes and churches in Birmingham than in any other city in the nation. These are the hard, brutal facts of the case. On the basis of these conditions, Negro leaders sought to negotiate with the city fathers. But the latter consistently refused to engage in good-faith negotiation.

Then, last September, came the opportunity to talk with leaders of Birmingham's economic community. In the course of the negotiations, certain promises were made by the merchants --- for example, to remove the stores humiliating racial signs. On the basis of these promises, the Reverend Fred Shuttlesworth and the leaders of the Alabama Christian Movement for Human Rights agreed to a moratorium on all demonstrations. As the weeks and months went by, we realized that we were the victims of a broken promise. A few signs, briefly removed, returned; the others remained.

As in so many past experiences, our hopes had been blasted, and the shadow of deep disappointment settled upon us. We had no alternative except to prepare for direct action, whereby we would present our very bodies as a means of laying our case before the conscience of the local and the national community. Mindful of the difficulties involved, we decided to undertake a process of self-purification. We began a series of workshops on nonviolence, and we repeatedly asked ourselves: "Are you able to accept blows without retaliating?" "Are you able to endure the ordeal of jail?" We decided to schedule our direct-action program for the Easter season, realizing that except for Christmas, this is the main shopping period of the year. Knowing that a strong economic withdrawal program would be the by-product of direct action, we felt that this would be the best time to bring pressure to bear on the merchants for the needed change.

Then it occurred to us that Birmingham's mayoralty election was coming up in March, and we speedily decided to postpone action until after election day. When we discovered that the Commissioner of Public Safety, Eugene "Bull" Connor, had piled up enough votes to be in the run-off we decided again to postpone action until the day after the run-off so that the demonstrations could not be used to cloud the issues. Like many others, we waited to see Mr. Connor defeated, and to this end we endured postponement after postponement. Having aided in this community need, we felt that our direct-action program could be delayed no longer.

You may well ask: "Why direct action? Why sit-ins, marches and so forth? Isn't negotiation a better path?" You are quite right in calling for negotiation. Indeed, this is the very purpose of direct action. Nonviolent direct action seeks to create such a crisis and foster such a tension that a community which has constantly refused to negotiate is forced to confront the issue. It seeks so to dramatize the issue that it can no longer be ignored. My citing the creation of tension as part of the work of the nonviolent-resister may sound rather shocking. But I must confess that I am not afraid of the word "tension." I have earnestly

opposed violent tension, but there is a type of constructive, nonviolent tension which is necessary for growth. Just as Socrates felt that it was necessary to create a tension in the mind so that individuals could rise from the bondage of myths and half-truths to the unfettered realm of creative analysis and objective appraisal, we must see the need for nonviolent gadflies to create the kind of tension in society that will help men rise from the dark depths of prejudice and racism to the majestic heights of understanding and brotherhood.

The purpose of our direct-action program is to create a situation so crisis-packed that it will inevitably open the door to negotiation. I therefore concur with you in your call for negotiation. Too long has our beloved Southland been bogged down in a tragic effort to live in monologue rather than dialogue.

One of the basic points in your statement is that the action that I and my associates have taken in Birmingham is untimely. Some have asked: "Why didn't you give the new city administration time to act?" The only answer that I can give to this query is that the new Birmingham administration must be prodded about as much as the outgoing one, before it will act. We are sadly mistaken if we feel that the election of Albert Boutwell as mayor will bring the millennium to Birmingham. While Mr. Boutwell is a much more gentle person than Mr. Connor, they are both segregationists, dedicated to maintenance of the status quo. I have hope that Mr. Boutwell will be reasonable enough to see the futility of massive resistance to desegregation. But he will not see this without pressure from devotees of civil rights. My friends, I must say to you that we have not made a single gain civil rights without determined legal and nonviolent pressure. Lamentably, it is an historical fact that privileged groups seldom give up their privileges voluntarily. Individuals may see the moral light and voluntarily give up their unjust posture; but, as Reinhold Niebuhr has reminded us, groups tend to be more immoral than individuals.

We know through painful experience that freedom is never voluntarily given by the oppressor; it must be demanded by the oppressed. Frankly, I have yet to engage in a direct-action campaign that was "well timed" in the view of those who have not suffered unduly from the disease of segregation. For years now I have heard the word "Wait!" It rings in the ear of every Negro with piercing familiarity. This "Wait" has almost always meant "Never." We must come to see, with one of our distinguished jurists, that "justice too long delayed is justice denied."

We have waited for more than 340 years for our constitutional and God-given rights. The nations of Asia and Africa are moving with jetlike speed toward gaining political independence, but we stiff creep at horse-and-buggy pace toward gaining a cup of coffee at a lunch counter. Perhaps it is easy for those who have never felt the stinging dark of segregation to say, "Wait." But when you have seen vicious mobs lynch your mothers and fathers at will and drown your sisters and brothers at whim; when you have seen hate-filled policemen curse, kick and even kill your black brothers and sisters; when you see the vast majority of your twenty million Negro brothers smothering in an airtight cage of poverty in the midst of an affluent society; when you suddenly find your tongue twisted and your speech stammering as you seek to explain to your six-year-old daughter why she can't go to the public amusement park that has just been advertised on television, and see tears welling up in her eyes when she is told that Funtown is closed to colored children, and see ominous clouds of inferiority beginning to form in her little mental sky, and see her beginning to distort her personality by developing an unconscious bitterness toward white people; when you have to concoct an answer for a five-year-old son who is asking: "Daddy, why do white people treat colored people so mean?"; when you take a cross-county drive

and find it necessary to sleep night after night in the uncomfortable corners of your automobile because no motel will accept you; when you are humiliated day in and day out by nagging signs reading "white" and "colored"; when your first name becomes "nigger," your middle name becomes "boy" (however old you are) and your last name becomes "John," and your wife and mother are never given the respected title "Mrs.;" when you are harried by day and haunted by night by the fact that you are a Negro, living constantly at tiptoe stance, never quite knowing what to expect next, and are plagued with inner fears and outer resentments; when you no longer fighting a degenerating sense of "nobodiness" then you will understand why we find it difficult to wait. There comes a time when the cup of endurance runs over, and men are no longer willing to be plunged into the abyss of despair. I hope, sirs, you can understand our legitimate and unavoidable impatience.

You express a great deal of anxiety over our willingness to break laws. This is certainly a legitimate concern. Since we so diligently urge people to obey the Supreme Court's decision of 1954 outlawing segregation in the public schools, at first glance it may seem rather paradoxical for us consciously to break laws. One may well ask: "How can you advocate breaking some laws and obeying others?" The answer lies in the fact that there are two types of laws: just and unjust. I would be the first to advocate obeying just laws. One has not only a legal but a moral responsibility to obey just laws. Conversely, one has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws. I would agree with St. Augustine that "an unjust law is no law at all"

Now, what is the difference between the two? How does one determine whether a law is just or unjust? A just law is a man-made code that squares with the moral law or the law of God. An unjust law is a code that is out of harmony with the moral law. To put it in the terms of St. Thomas Aquinas: An unjust law is a human law that is not rooted in eternal law and natural law. Any law that uplifts human personality is just. Any law that degrades human personality is unjust. All segregation statutes are unjust because segregation distorts the soul and damages the personality. It gives the segregator a false sense of superiority and the segregated a false sense of inferiority. Segregation, to use the terminology of the Jewish philosopher Martin Buber, substitutes an "I-it" relationship for an "I-thou" relationship and ends up relegating persons to the status of things. Hence segregation is not only politically, economically and sociologically unsound, it is morally wrong and awful. Paul Tillich said that sin is separation. Is not segregation an existential expression 'of man's tragic separation, his awful estrangement, his terrible sinfulness? Thus it is that I can urge men to obey the 1954 decision of the Supreme Court, for it is morally right; and I can urge them to disobey segregation ordinances, for they are morally wrong.

...

Oppressed people cannot remain oppressed forever. The yearning for freedom eventually manifests itself, and that is what has happened to the American Negro. Something within has reminded him of his birthright of freedom, and something without has reminded him that it can be gained. Consciously or unconsciously, he has been caught up by the Zeitgeist, and with his black brothers of Africa and his brown and yellow brothers of Asia, South America and the Caribbean, the United States Negro is moving with a sense of great urgency toward the promised land of racial justice. If one recognizes this vital urge that has engulfed the Negro community, one should readily understand why public demonstrations are taking place. The Negro has many pent-up resentments and latent frustrations, and he must release them. So let him march; let him make prayer pilgrimages to the city hall; let him go on freedom rides-and try to understand why he must do so. If his repressed

emotions are not released in nonviolent ways, they will seek expression through violence; this is not a threat but a fact of history. So I have not said to my people: "Get rid of your discontent." Rather, I have tried to say that this normal and healthy discontent can be channeled into the creative outlet of nonviolent direct action. And now this approach is being termed extremist.

But though I was initially disappointed at being categorized as an extremist, as I continued to think about the matter I gradually gained a measure of satisfaction from the label. Was not Jesus an extremist for love: "Love your enemies, bless them that curse you, do good to them that hate you, and pray for them which despitefully use you, and persecute you." Was not Amos an extremist for justice: "Let justice roll down like waters and righteousness like an ever-flowing stream." Was not Paul an extremist for the Christian gospel: "I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus." Was not Martin Luther an extremist: "Here I stand; I cannot do otherwise, so help me God." And John Bunyan: "I will stay in jail to the end of my days before I make a butchery of my conscience." And Abraham Lincoln: "This nation cannot survive half slave and half free." And Thomas Jefferson: "We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal ..." So the question is not whether we will be extremists, but what kind of extremists we will be. Will we be extremists for hate or for love? Will we be extremists for the preservation of injustice or for the extension of justice? In that dramatic scene on Calvary's hill three men were crucified. We must never forget that all three were crucified for the same crime---the crime of extremism. Two were extremists for immorality, and thus fell below their environment. The other, Jesus Christ, was an extremist for love, truth and goodness, and thereby rose above his environment. Perhaps the South, the nation and the world are in dire need of creative extremists.

...

There was a time when the church was very powerful in the time when the early Christians rejoiced at being deemed worthy to suffer for what they believed. In those days the church was not merely a thermometer that recorded the ideas and principles of popular opinion; it was a thermostat that transformed the mores of society. Whenever the early Christians entered a town, the people in power became disturbed and immediately sought to convict the Christians for being "disturbers of the peace" and "outside agitators." But the Christians pressed on, in the conviction that they were "a colony of heaven," called to obey God rather than man. Small in number, they were big in commitment. They were too God-intoxicated to be "astronomically intimidated." By their effort and example they brought an end to such ancient evils as infanticide and gladiatorial contests.

Things are different now. So often the contemporary church is a weak, ineffectual voice with an uncertain sound. So often it is an archdefender of the status quo. Far from being disturbed by the presence of the church, the power structure of the average community is consoled by the church's silent and often even vocal sanction of things as they are.

But the judgment of God is upon the church as never before. If today's church does not recapture the sacrificial spirit of the early church, it will lose its authenticity, forfeit the loyalty of millions, and be dismissed as an irrelevant social club with no meaning for the twentieth century. Every day I meet young people whose disappointment with the church has turned into outright disgust.

Perhaps I have once again been too optimistic. Is organized religion too inextricably bound to the status quo to save our nation and the world? Perhaps I must turn my faith to the

inner spiritual church, the church within the church, as the true ekklesia and the hope of the world. But again I am thankful to God that some noble souls from the ranks of organized religion have broken loose from the paralyzing chains of conformity and joined us as active partners in the struggle for freedom, They have left their secure congregations and walked the streets of Albany, Georgia, with us. They have gone down the highways of the South on tortuous rides for freedom. Yes, they have gone to jail with us. Some have been dismissed from their churches, have lost the support of their bishops and fellow ministers. But they have acted in the faith that right defeated is stronger than evil triumphant. Their witness has been the spiritual salt that has preserved the true meaning of the gospel in these troubled times. They have carved a tunnel of hope through the dark mountain of disappointment.

I hope the church as a whole will meet the challenge of this decisive hour. But even if the church does not come to the aid of justice, I have no despair about the future. I have no fear about the outcome of our struggle in Birmingham, even if our motives are at present misunderstood. We will reach the goal of freedom in Birmingham, and all over the nation, because the goal of America is freedom. Abused and scorned though we may be, our destiny is tied up with America's destiny. Before the pilgrims landed at Plymouth, we were here. Before the pen of Jefferson etched the majestic words of the Declaration of Independence across the pages of history, we were here. For more than two centuries our forebears labored in this country without wages; they made cotton king; they built the homes of their masters while suffering gross injustice and shameful humiliation-and yet out of a bottomless vitality they continued to thrive and develop. If the inexpressible cruelties of slavery could not stop us, the opposition we now face will surely fail. We will win our freedom because the sacred heritage of our nation and the eternal will of God are embodied in our echoing demands.

Before closing I feel impelled to mention one other point in your statement that has troubled me profoundly. You warmly commended the Birmingham police force for keeping "order" and "preventing violence." I doubt that you would have so warmly commended the police force if you had seen its dogs sinking their teeth into unarmed, nonviolent Negroes. I doubt that you would so quickly commend the policemen if you were to observe their ugly and inhumane treatment of Negroes here in the city jail; if you were to watch them push and curse old Negro women and young Negro girls; if you were to see them slap and kick old Negro men and young boys; if you were to observe them, as they did on two occasions, refuse to give us food because we wanted to sing our grace together. I cannot join you in your praise of the Birmingham police department.

It is true that the police have exercised a degree of discipline in handling the demonstrators. In this sense they have conducted themselves rather "nonviolently" in public. But for what purpose? To preserve the evil system of segregation. Over the past few years I have consistently preached that nonviolence demands that the means we use must be as pure as the ends we seek. I have tried to make clear that it is wrong to use immoral means to attain moral ends. But now I must affirm that it is just as wrong, or perhaps even more so, to use moral means to preserve immoral ends. Perhaps Mr. Connor and his policemen have been rather nonviolent in public, as was Chief Pritchett in Albany, Georgia but they have used the moral means of nonviolence to maintain the immoral end of racial injustice. As T. S. Eliot has said: "The last temptation is the greatest treason: To do the right deed for the wrong reason."

I wish you had commended the Negro sit-inners and demonstrators of Birmingham for their sublime courage, their willingness to suffer and their amazing discipline in the midst of great

provocation. One day the South will recognize its real heroes. They will be the James Merediths, with the noble sense of purpose that enables them to face Jeering, and hostile mobs, and with the agonizing loneliness that characterizes the life of the pioneer. They will be old, oppressed, battered Negro women, symbolized in a seventy-two-year-old woman in Montgomery, Alabama, who rose up with a sense of dignity and with her people decided not to ride segregated buses, and who responded with ungrammatical profundity to one who inquired about her weariness: "My fleets is tired, but my soul is at rest." They will be the young high school and college students, the young ministers of the gospel and a host of their elders, courageously and nonviolently sitting in at lunch counters and willingly going to jail for conscience' sake. One day the South will know that when these disinherited children of God sat down at lunch counters, they were in reality standing up for what is best in the American dream and for the most sacred values in our Judaeo-Christian heritage, thereby bringing our nation back to those great wells of democracy which were dug deep by the founding fathers in their formulation of the Constitution and the Declaration of Independence.

Never before have I written so long a letter. I'm afraid it is much too long to take your precious time. I can assure you that it would have been much shorter if I had been writing from a comfortable desk, but what else can one do when he k alone in a narrow jail cell, other than write long letters, think long thoughts and pray long prayers?

If I have said anything in this letter that overstates the truth and indicates an unreasonable impatience, I beg you to forgive me. If I have said anything that understates the truth and indicates my having a patience that allows me to settle for anything less than brotherhood, I beg God to forgive me.

I hope this letter finds you strong in the faith. I also hope that circumstances will soon make it possible for me to meet each of you, not as an integrationist or a civil rights leader but as a fellow clergyman and a Christian brother. Let us all hope that the dark clouds of racial prejudice will soon pass away and the deep fog of misunderstanding will be lifted from our fear-drenched communities, and in some not too distant tomorrow the radiant stars of love and brotherhood will shine over our great nation with all their scintillating beauty.

Yours for the cause of Peace and Brotherhood,

MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Spiritual Soup

By Kurt Venables

Gems in the Gravel



Sometimes I feel like I'm traveling through life at a hundred miles an hour. Sometimes I feel that my life is like a glass sitting in the sink under a running faucet- already overflowing as more stuff continues to pour in. The pace of life today sometimes seems supersonic. Maybe it's always been this way. I don't know. I can't comment on the pace of daily life 100, 1000, or 100,000 years ago. I have a wife and two kids, ages 5 and 3. I work a full time job (which is sometimes more than full time), and I go to school at night as I work toward my master's degree (electrical engineering at VA Tech). Add to all this a seemingly endless supply of mundane tasks, like lawn mowing, home improvement, auto repair, picking up toys, etc. Of course, I also produce the Spirituality & Community web site and magazine. Sometimes it's difficult to find time to just relax.

Yesterday was Saturday, and sandwiched between mowing the lawn and running out to pick up some dinner was a walk down to the end of our road with my little boy Blaine (he's the 3 year old). We live out in the country on a gravel road. It's very quiet, there's a lot of open space, and there's only a couple houses past ours as you travel down to the end of the road. We recently bought a fish for Blaine's room (a Beta). The poor thing was in a bowl that was completely empty. We were walking down the road to find some rocks to put in the bowl so that Rainbow (the fish) would feel more at home.

We were looking for "gems". We found white quartz crystals, black rocks marbled with different colors, yellow ones, and sparkling ones impregnated with shiny flecks.

Walking down the road with Blaine, I was struck by one of those flashes of recognition that sometimes happens. I was reminded that life is like that walk. While much of life is hard work, sacrifice, and a seemingly endless string of tasks, the good times and the special moments are what make it all worth it. And sometimes it takes work to find the "gems" in our lives. We need to work to overcome taking things for granted. We need to work to recognize the priorities in our lives- family, friends, health, passions, and, of course, spirituality. The things that if all else in our lives vanished, we would still be fulfilled, we would still be truly happy. Filling our hearts with the Light helps us to be mindful of the important things in life, for the Light sanctifies what might otherwise seem ordinary, like the tiny motes that glisten in a sunbeam- or like the gems picked out of the gravel by a three year old boy.

Remember Who You Really Are

By: Tracy Phernetton

Digging Deeper: The Dis-ease of Addiction



We, as humans, are very good at keeping ourselves from ourselves. The hiding from our own beings is what has propelled addictions of all types to manifest.

When we are born into this physical reality, we are welcomed with already intact belief systems from our parents, teachers, doctors, and even our entertainment and media outlets. Most beliefs are continuations from generations before, which I like to call, 'beliefs by default.' Natural exposure to others' beliefs is not the concern; however, it is when our parents, teachers and caregivers go one step further, and enforce their beliefs on us, failing to encourage us to find our *own* ways. From rules, to scare tactics, we grow up fearful of life, itself, and the correct relationship we are to have with it. This is the beginning of the internal reaction of inadequacy. As we are, we are not 'ok.'

As time goes on, and our mental capacities grow, we begin to notice the contradictions. Beliefs vs. the behaviors of our predecessors. We then become aware of "The Mixed Messages." When we start to question others' beliefs, we begin to release the shackles and 'rock the boat,' as society would view it. We rebel.

Rebellion is often misperceived. Rebellion is at the core of the challenging of old, un-serving beliefs, and self-diluting patterns. It is the cornerstone for evolution. Rebellion is also found at the core of any addiction known to humans. Rebellion can be the stem for two very different outcomes. One path of rebellion may take you first to questioning, then to researching followed by your own decision-making, and eventually to pro-active, positive change. The flip side path of rebellion, and where addiction is conceived, is when we become angry and resentful and implode our frustration at ourselves in destructive ways.

All addictions originate from the same platform. The platform that says, "I am going to do this, because what you say doesn't feel right to me."

The significance is where our energy is focused. When we begin to see hypocrisy around us, what do we do with the original questioning? Do we push towards self-discovery, and seek the truth by our *own* means? Or do we become passive-aggressive and misdirect our energy towards ourselves, in destructive ways?

Seeing myself as "less than," or "unworthy," I adopted my self-inflicted blanket of shame. The shame I carried provoked me into self-destruct mode. My growing conflict led me to seek anything that would take my focus off feeling. By the time I was sixteen, it was no surprise when I took my first drink, and immediately fell in love. The feeling of being totally detached (drunk) from painful feelings and self-doubt became my sedative for my feelings of inadequacy.

The drinking moved from social to fatal very quickly. In truth, I was slowly committing suicide. But the temporary fixes seemed to override any negative consequences. All of my consequences seemed to compliment my original belief about myself. That I was not ok the way I was. So a self-induced death sentence seemed to fit. The terrible effects my actions created were supporting my insane belief; I deserved pain.

Addiction is referred to as a disease. It is linked with diseases like cancer and diabetes. The more accurate representation of addiction, I believe, is **dis-ease**; the **obsessive-compulsive thoughts that are created from a state of self-denial**. I am not at **ease** when I can't stand myself. Alcohol was a great coping mechanism for my dis-ease with self. Therefore, my dis-ease of addiction was my pacifier that kept the pain of my inner world anesthetized, in other words, far away from Self.

In complete desperation, I finally sought relief in 12 step programs. My new foundation encouraged me to search for my *own* answers. Step two, offers a suggestion to claim new territory with a higher power; in my case; God. What was new to me was the liberating urge to pursue my *own* understanding and unique relationship with God.

So I was free to just be me, as I felt was 'ok.' So I set off to seek God and Self with full administrative authority. I dove deep into spirituality, and after two years, I found that the life that savors from the 12 steps wasn't keeping me afloat as it once was. The 1st step suggests admitting I am powerless, and traditions had me continually introducing myself as an "addict." I *am* an addict, I *am*. Suddenly my personal evolution was making it difficult to believe I was still and will always be 'powerless.'

My new relationship with God led me to conceive that I am not separate from God. I was never separate, I just forgot. Guess what? Now I remember. My new found belief was born: *When I am in awareness of my Godhood, I am Power, itself.* I now contain the power of choice. I soon found my new insight on power and self an unpopular concept in the rooms of 12-step programs. I was stereotyped to be another relapse in waiting. But my inner voice had attained higher status. Finally, I believed *me*.

For fifty plus years the twelve steps has served as a spiritual/emotional/physical band aid on humanity. Evolution is inevitable. With the collective mind shifting, comes the individual minds expanding. What served alcoholics in 1939, (The first edition of Alcoholic Anonymous was published.) didn't serve 'drug addicts' in the same way in 1953. (The year Narcotics Anonymous was established.) Looks like its time for some positive rebellion.

Addictions are at the root of all negative experiences permeating humanity. Addictions keep me away from you, and you away from me. The illusion itself, began with the misinterpretation of power. Power, when viewed from our egos, (which are only with us to establish a sense of identity) has us seeing our outward relationships as competition or struggle. Power viewed from the place of spirit, is a force, a predestined claim to our divinity. We, as spiritual beings are *power in place*, of the human event.

I believe that Addiction is not the root, but it is a problem stemming from even a deeper root; the ***Illusion of Separation.***

Let us take our power back in the upcoming now moments. Let us not just believe everything we were told to believe. Change begins with a question. Don't just settle for the surface. Dig, and focus your energy towards positive change. Yes, question everything! Challenge the system by seeing through the surface. Addiction no longer needs to be a powerless trip to nowhere. Addiction can be a choice to sleep through physical life or not. I choose to stay awake. What do you choose?

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Stringing Together Cultural Symbols- One Bead at a Time

By Cynthia M. Long

Scientists have had their say about the Big Bang theory and the dawn of a new culture for years, but until recently symbols like sacred beads, or *prayer beads*, have generally been omitted in such discussions despite the fact most of the world's inhabitants—nearly two-thirds of the planet's population—pray with beads, which some scholars have theorized naturally evolved from the abacus, the Chinese counting instrument that also used beads. (*Spirituality on a String*, Maggie Oman Shannon and Eleanor Wiley). However, archeologist Richard Klien, a Stanford University professor, takes the dawn-of-a-new-culture discussion in an exciting new direction. In a *Stanford Magazine* article last year, Klien disagreed that upheavals like the Russian and French Revolutions, or the construction of the first cities, or even the introduction of the internal-combustion engine effected the greatest social changes. Klien contends the most influential revolution occurred in East Africa roughly 45,000 years ago. He suggests that if beads were among humanity's first symbols, they represent one of the most important revolutions in our species career—the dawning of modern behavior:

...Once symbols appeared we know we're dealing with people with advanced cognitive skills who could not only invent sophisticated tools, weapons and develop complex social networks for mutual security but could also marvel at the intricacies of nature and their place in it, people who were self-aware. ... ["Suddenly Smarter," Mitchell Leslie, *Stanford Magazine*, July-Aug. 2002]

What does history reveal about ancient sacred beads?

In his book, *The Dawn of The Human Culture*, archeologist Randall White of New York University, who specializes in the study of upper-Paleolithic art (earth embedded), believes that beads, perforated shells, pierced animal teeth, and other ornaments were remarkably symbolic and sacred to the ancients. White's research indicated over 30,000 years ago the intricacy of beads required extraordinary time and effort, implying notable profound symbolic meaning. White's experiments illustrate a single bead typically required one to three hours to craft. In Sungir, Russia, occupied 29,000 years ago, ancient Sungars who had to invest substantial time finding food and keeping warm, in addition to other challenging circumstances, still managed to produce 13,000 beads. Three thousand beads were discovered in an adult male grave; the remaining 10,000 beads were divided between two children's graves. (Recalling a single bead required as much as three hours to craft, such a collection of beads could easily have taken as much as 39,000 hours to generate, or *five years!*) The abundance of beads could have easily signified that the children buried in the graves occupied a special position or status in their respective society.

What significance and/or purpose did the ancient beads symbolize?

A handful of fragile ostrich eggshell beads were excavated from a Kenyan site called *Enkapune Ya Mato*, or Twilight Cave, established 40,000 years ago. Sediment found in the cave reveals a record of important cultural changes during the past few thousand years. According to writer Mitchell Leslie, "...they appeared to be the earliest known jewelry. But some anthropologists think they are much more. The people of the Twilight Cave may have exchanged them as ritual gifts or tokens making the Cheerio-like object the oldest known example of symbolism. ..." (Mitchell, July-Aug.

2002) Of particular interest is the commonality and widespread application of beads as symbols across many different cultures due to the inherent value the symbol(s) provide:

... In addition to helping keep one's place in structured prayers, prayer beads also symbolize the commitment to spiritual life. With their circular form, a string represents the interconnectedness of all who pray. Each bead counted is an individual prayer or mantra, and the rote repetition of prayers and mantras is meant to facilitate a sole focus on the prayer or mantra itself. ... [Maggie Oman Shannon and Eleanor, Wiley in *A String and a Prayer*]

Based on Shannon and Wiley's observations, it's of little surprise that the use of prayer beads—or similar customs involving symbols—in also evident in non-Christian practices across a far-reaching cultural, religious, and spiritual spectrum: the ancient Egyptians used beads, perhaps as a means of bringing luck, dating back to 3,200 B.C.; Native American beadwork honors their spiritual ancestors; African history reveals beads were used as a form of communication and in rituals evoking the power of gods; Hindus used prayer beads for counting breaths and repeating mantras; Buddhist bead practices served to attain enlightenment; Islamic bead practices helped Muslims praise Allah; and even within Judaism—long considering “prayer beads” as a form of paganism—a prayer shawl, known as a *tallit*, features craftsmanship that is based on a number of specified knots, quite similar to prayer beads.

Did the ancients project “intention” onto these sacred beads?

In her *Book of Intentions*, Dianne Martin writes about ‘intention.’ Our whole world changes with intention. The collision and interactions of intentions profoundly affects our behavior, our environment, our communities, our world, the universe, and therefore *ourselves*. Did the ancients know this? A Beliefnet interview with Wayne Dyer, discussing his book *The Power of Intention*, features a significant quote by Carlos Castaneda: “There’s an immeasurable indescribable force, which shamans called ‘intent’ and absolutely everything that exists in the entire cosmos is connected to it... an invisible source that ‘intends’ everything into the universe.”

Discovering how our ancestors around the world gave purpose and meaning to their beads helps provide remarkable insights into many of our present-day religious and spiritual customs, be they ceremonial, spiritual, in celebration, as currency, as part of healing rituals, as a form of status (power and wealth). Yet it is within the act of prayer itself that we can most recognize the symbolic and far-reaching significance of beads.

It has been said, portraits of Jesus Christ as a child include coral beads. Why?

Author Melody describes in her book *Love Is in the Earth: A Kaleidoscope of Crystals* how coral vibrates to the astrological sign of Pisces. According to Melody's findings that suggest the coral/Pisces relationship assists imagination, visualization, intuition, and brings peace within. It helps one to both understand the qualities of the mystic and to bring one into communication with the past spiritual masters of this world. Such a process can expedite and accelerate the transfer of knowledge. (*Also, in reviewing the significance of minerals in history, crystals alone are mentioned in the Bible more than 200 times!*)

Witnessing the dawn of this new spiritual era unfold is intriguing from all angles, especially if the use of beads and other precious resources becomes as significant and sacred as it was 45,000 years ago. Ultimately symbols such as beads unite us both spiritually as well as *universally* (as one people

living on the same planet). Think about it: In how many other ways does evidence exist of such far-reaching human unification? In our modern attempts to use highly evolved technology to “unite” humankind, perhaps we’re overlooking an existing, totally simplistic and fully attainable method of universal connectedness that lies in a “simple” string of beads?

In keeping with examining our history in order to learn about our future, perhaps such a powerfully symbolic and purposeful symbol as beads—one that is embedded with sacred intentions—can in fact influence a shift toward spiritual unification and make this journey of living a more peaceful existence for all.

By Cynthia M. Long

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Lord Byron

Childe Harold's Pilgrimage, Canto 3, Stanzas 68 - 75

Lake Lemman woos me with its crystal face,
The mirror where the stars and mountains view
The stillness of their aspect in each trace
Its clear depth yields of their far height and hue:
There is too much of man here, to look through
With a fit mindt he might which I behold;
But soon in me shall Loneliness renew
Thoughts hid, but not less cherish'd than of old,
Ere mingling with the herd had penn'd me in their fold.

To fly from, need not be to hate, mankind;
All are not fit with them to stire and toil,
Nor is it discontent to keep the mind
Deep in its fountain, lest it overvoil
In the hot throng, where we become the spoil
Of our infection, till too late and long
We may deplore and struggle with the coil,
In wretched interchange of wrong for wrong
'Midst a contentious world, striving where none are strong.

There, in a moment, we may plunge our years
In fatal penitence, and in the blight
Of our own soul, turn all our blood to tears,
And colour things to come with hues of Night;
The race of life becomes a hopeless flight
To those that walk in darkness: on the sea,
The boldest steer but where their ports invite,
But there are wanderers o'er Eternity
Whose bark drives on and one, and anchored ne'er shall be.

Is it not better, then, to be alone,
And love Earth only for its earthly sake?
By the blue rushing of the arroy Rhone,
Or the pure bosom of its nursing lake,
Which feeds it as a mother who doth make
A fair but froward infant her own care,
Kissing its cries away as these awake;--
Is it not better thus our lives to wear,
Than join the crushing crowd, doom'd to inflict or bear?

I live not in myself, but I become
Portion of that around me; and to me
High mountains are a feeling, but the hum
Of human cities torture: I can see
Nothing to loathe in nature, save to be
A link reluctant in a fleshly chain,
Class'd among creatures, when the soul can flee,
And with the sky, the peak, the heaving plain
Of ocean, or the stars, mingle, and not in vain.

And thus I am absorb'd, and this is life:
I look upon the peopled desert past,
As on a place of agony and strife,
Where, for some sin, to Sorrow I was cast,
To act and suffer, but remount at last
With a fresh pinion; which I feel to spring,
Though young, yet waxing vigorous, as the blast
Which it would cope with, on delighted wing,
Spurning the clay-cold bonds with round our being cling.

And when, at length, the mind shall all be free
From what it hates in this degraded form,
Reft of its carnal life, save what shall be
Existent happier in the fly and worm,--
When elements to elements conform,
And dust is as it should be, shall I note
Feel all I see, less dazzling, but more warm?
The bodiless thought? the Spirit of each spot?
Of which, even now, I share at times the immortal lot?

Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part
Of me and of my soul, as I of them?
Is not the love of these deep in my heart
With a pure passion? should I not contemn
All objects, if compared with these? and stem
A tide of suffering, rather than forego
Such feelings for the hard and worldly phlegm
Of those whose eyes are only turn'd below,
Gazing upon the ground, with thoughts which dare not glow?