

Self-Empowerment

Summer 2007

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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WHO AM I?

In this issue

Can you imagine being known as the “Laundry Bag Man”? Good friend Scott Kalechstein shares a delightful story of the time when he was known as the Laundry Bag Man on the streets of NY City. (page 2)

A poem by Margo Ford shares her experience of seeing a changing image of herself in the mirror over a period of time. (page 2)

Perception is the issue

The issue is the often-traumatic shift of perception that takes place as we identify ourselves in new ways. Most of us have a number of externally derived definitions of ourselves that are physical, social, psychological, and spiritual. Yet, no matter how factual any of those descriptions are, we bring our own set of understandings, beliefs, and attachments to those descriptions.

Who am I? Those who have heard the music from the show “Les Miserables” might remember the song in which the lead character sings, “Who am I? Jean Valjean!” My name seems like a good starting place for the issue of identity. I am Jill, and you are ____? But if I changed my name, would I be any different? Would I have a different perception of myself with another name? What’s in a name? How attached are you to your name?

Your address, phone number, weight, and hair color can be changeable to varying degrees. When you alter any of them, how does your sense of self change?

Are you a daughter or son, a sibling, a spouse, a parent, a friend? Are you cute, graceful, clumsy, charming, mischievous, frugal, generous, or helpful? If others perceive qualities in you that are not in alignment with your own self-image, what do you make of that?

That darned ego

The ego is a thought system of separation, attack, defense, competition, guilt, fear, specialness, and hate. The ego is the obstacle to knowing ourselves as connected, divine, joyful, lovable, innocent, and loving. The ego names things, gives them meanings apart from other things, and holds them hostage to

those meanings.

I have had the experience of someone telling me that she and two other people judged me a certain way, and so I was convicted by three against one; they were in agreement, so it *must* be true. But was it true for me? Well, I could see how they might view me that way, but I do not share in their definition of me. Yet, when I dig deeper into my psyche, I find evidence of a shared projection. I see some of their judgment to be true about my personality, and I see that judgment reflected in the three who pronounced the judgment. The words were not the truth of my being, but rather a shared ego-dance of “Not me! It’s you! You’re the bad one!” To what extent is their accusation about me helpful in my understanding of myself? Am I in denial when I judge their judgment as projection of their own issues?

That Real Self

Many of us believe that we are spiritual beings with a life that extends beyond this brief physical experience between birth and death. Spiritual teachers such as Eckhart Tolle, in his book *The Power of Now*, bring our attention to experiencing a deeper reality of ourselves, one that is our natural state of connection with Being, or Presence. That Presence is greater than our ordinary daily identity. Yet, we must cultivate a conscious practice in order to make it our real experience, a knowing rather than just a belief.

It is often through our reactions to difficult situations that we can gauge our real knowing.

Be an observer of your thoughts and behavior when things go “wrong.” Use the opportunity as feedback of who we think we are when our defenses are low. Then consider a prayerful response to your self-witnessing. Allow for the possibility of healing the obstacles to knowing and experiencing the joyful and free essence of Being.

As you answer the question “Who Am I?” in each circumstance of your life, may you increasingly find a stronger, happier, and freer Self than ever before.

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*



Evolvement by Rev. Margo J. Ford

The face seems fat,
The lips are thin—
There appears to be
A double chin.

I look into
The glass and see
A stranger
Looking back at me.

It's not the girl
So young and fair!
It's someone else
Who's standing there.

It's not the face
I'd like to see,
And not the shape
I'd choose for me...

But wait a second—
What's that I see?
There's something else—
Not the "body" me.

Within the eyes
Or just behind
There's someone wise,
Sincere and kind.

That young fair girl
Through God's design,
Grew older, wiser
Over time.

The changes wrought
Can't be denied
(Most gratefully
Those that grew inside)

So thank you, God
For all I see—
And most of all
For loving me.

"Let your adornment be the inner self with the lasting beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit which is very precious in God's sight." –1 Peter 3:4

From Bags To Riches

by Scott Kalechstein

"NYLON JUMBO LAUNDRY BAGS! MACHINE WASHABLE! WATER RESISTANT!" Uttered at the top of my vocal volume range, these words were my money mantra for seven years as I worked the sidewalks of New York City as an unlicensed, self-employed, street peddler. You could say I was into MLM Sales. (Maximum Lung Marketing!) I bought the laundry bags below wholesale, straight from a factory in North Carolina, and made a great profit selling them just below retail. I loved the quick cash and the gutsy, streetwise calluses that formed on my psyche. I was part of the color and pulse of New York, a place where adrenaline, art and survival all blended together in a tapestry of shadows and light.

My style for hawking the bags became something of a creative, comic performance. "How did you get into this?" people asked me as I handed them their purchase. "How do I get out of this?" became the question I asked daily as the call of a career in music and the healing arts grew louder and my patience for eluding the police grew dim.

Did I say *police*? Yes, I confess! This crazy job of mine was not exactly legal. 'Slightly illegal' was my juicy rationalization. About once a week I unwittingly donated a sack of laundry bags to the city of New York, via the police. Did breaking the law nag on my conscience? No. Well, at least not my conscious conscience. I was a rebel without a pause, enjoying the game of cops and robbers, and moving too fast to question my ethics or my sanity. Besides, I was also using the job to practice my mindfulness meditation skills.

My technique was called *Zen And The Art Of Spotting The Police Before They See You*. This spiritual discipline for finding inner strength in the inner city found me routinely in the Yoga posture of being on my toes, my head stretching from left to right, being very here and now, moment to moment.

The police sometimes dressed in civilian clothes, sandwiching themselves amongst the human sardines that crowded the city sidewalks on any given day. I developed a sixth sense, an organically grown synthesis of intuition and

paranoia. I could spot the police, pack up my bags, and slip into the crowd at a speed that Houdini would have admired. But even with my escape skills honed to a science, I did get caught on occasion.

While the temptation was to perceive those times as a bummer, I took it upon myself to make light of those moments when the police were writing me tickets and confiscating my bags. Feather dusting the situation with levity, I refused to buy into the consciousness of loss and gloom.

One day an absurd idea crossed my mind. I have learned to spring into action when a creative prompting knocks on my door. Before hesitation festered into analysis and paralysis, I took out my pen and wrote:

To Whom It May Publicly Concern:

This note is written permission for my son, Scott, to sell laundry bags on the streets of the city without a license. I know it is against the law, but my son is such a good boy in almost every other aspect of his life. I think he is entitled to some leeway here. This note officially absolves him from the law. Ignorance of the law is no excuse, but a mother's written permission sure is!

Hugs and kisses,

Mom

I put the note in my pocket and waited, almost eagerly, for the next time I was caught in the act, bags in hand. Sure enough, my sales were interrupted the next day by two of New York's Finest. "Hold it!" I confidently barked. "I've got a pardon!" I handed one of the officers my note. He read it out loud in official police business monotone. Neither of them had any change of expression, and for a moment I feared the worst. Trying to humor a New York City police officer, committed to the confines of seriousness, can have disastrous results. Finally, the pregnant moment gave birth to a response: "Take a walk! This one is on Mom!" I skipped away a free man, thankful for the juices of creativity that turned a potentially negative situation into a close encounter of the hilarious kind.

The next day I was selling bags in my usual location when a police car came out of nowhere, flashing lights and blasting sirens, and parked

halfway on the sidewalk, a breath away from my frozen body. The two officers from yesterday were right in my face before I even realized that they were after *me*. But instead of my bags, it seemed I was in possession of a rare and precious piece of literature that they wanted for their files. "We want the note!" one of them said, as if expecting me to challenge their authority. I handed him the scribbled piece of evidence. "We told everybody in the precinct about it, but they don't believe us. We're going to laminate it and post it on the bulletin board!" I relaxed, realizing that the sirens and the flashing lights were part of a joke they were playing to get back at me. So there we were, three human beings, sharing a most unusual moment, temporarily suspending the crime and punishment game and connecting at a level that the popular script did not call for. Perhaps most moments of human connection unfold when we are willing to abandon the popular script and improvise our own.

Sometimes my improvised sales tactics included saying things like "***The Strongest Laundry Bag You Can Buy Without A Prescription!***" Other times I got even sillier: "***You've Read The Book. You've Seen The Movie! NOW BUY THE BAG!!***" Some people enjoyed a good laugh as they passed. Others would quicken their pace and be careful not to make eye contact and possibly catch whatever I seemed to have! Joy can be dangerously contagious, easily spread by inner child-to-child contact, often rendering its victims quite vulnerable to spontaneous emissions of playful life energy.

When my laundry bags or my humor were not well received I got to work through some of my rejection issues. I used my sidewalk adventures as therapeutic stepping stones, time and space to experiment with my self-expression and to develop some confidence, as well as cockiness! I look back on those days with affection, amused and grateful that I actually did it, and even more grateful that I don't do it anymore!

Six months after selling my last laundry bag and moving to California, I went back to New York to visit friends and family. I couldn't resist paying a visit to Court Street, in Brooklyn Heights, where most of my bags were sold. I strolled into the Kosher Pizzeria that had become my hang-out

over the years. The employees gave me a warm greeting. One of the waiters excitedly handed me a copy of the last week's *Brooklyn Heights Gazette*. On the back page was a comic strip with yours truly in it. An artist had captured me in caricature, selling my wares on Court Street. The caption read, "***Whatever happened to the laundry bag man?***" I had left my mark on the streets of the city I grew up in! That felt good.

A few years later I was back in Brooklyn again, giving a concert. A woman in the audience was looking at me quite strangely all throughout the performance. She appeared dazed, confused and disoriented. At the concert's close she approached me cautiously. "I know you from somewhere," she said painfully, as she attempted to make a difficult withdrawal from her memory bank.

I looked into her eyes and instantly knew. "***NYLON JUMBO LAUNDRY BAGS!***" I exclaimed with a huge smile spread across my face. Her eyes registered both shock and the relief of recognition. "Oh, my God!" she exclaimed. "You are the laundry bag man!" She had cracked the case, but there were more pieces of the puzzle to put together. "I passed you on Court Street for years, feeling so sorry for you. What happened to you?" She had many more questions, wanting to know the details of how I had gotten off the streets and created such a rewarding career doing what I love. It was obvious that her belief system did not have much room for the possibility of people transforming their lives for the better, yet there I was, guitar in hand, proof before her eyes. She was stunned! I walked her to her car, telling her more of my story – voice lessons, recording my music, making my 'no more bags' commitment, moving to California, taking the leap, trusting the universe. Her reactions gave me a richer appreciation for my bags to riches journey. What a story to tell around the campfire!

Sometimes remembering those days feels like a past life regression. Did I really spend seven years in this life as a street peddler, running from the police like a criminal? Yes, I did, and with no apologies. I made friends with the homeless, and sang improvised rap songs to the passing high school students (who thought I was weird, but cool). I made warm, human, and creative contact

with each of my customers, sending each of them off with some positives vibes along with their purchase.

So what started as a laundry bag sales job evolved into a laundry bag performance ministry, which transitioned into what I do now. It strikes me sometimes that although I have changed products I have not really changed jobs. My job has always been about extending love and sharing joy, and that is always the business at hand, whether it is gift wrapped in laughter, singing, or selling ***NYLON JUMBO LAUNDRY BAGS!***

Scott Kalechstein is an inspirational speaker who sometimes breaks out into song during his talks and workshops. He is also an inspirational singer who has been known to break out into speaking in between songs. Scott travels near and far, comforting the disturbed and disturbing the comfortable. Please visit www.scottsongs.com for song samples and more info.

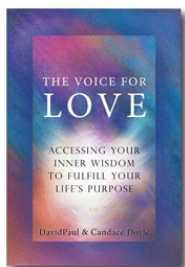
A Prayer to the Spirit of Life

Dear Life,

I sense intuitively that there is so much more to this experience called life than I have heard from others. While some seem to be experts about health, relationships, finances, or psychological and emotional states, I appeal to Universal Intelligence to reveal to me answers that quench my thirst for Truth. I shall continue to be open to the knowledge and wisdom of others when it resonates with my Inner Knowing. I shall also continue to seek within for Spiritual Guidance, as I know that Universal Wisdom is available to me directly when I am truly listening. Help me to hear you through whatever means are available. May my mind and heart be open to the Spirit of Life and all the wisdom and goodness that Life has to offer. Amen

What if you could learn specific techniques to access Infinite Knowledge any time you wanted?

What if you could learn HOW to receive ongoing guidance and direction, fulfill your life's purpose, and answer your deepest calling to BE the Presence of Peace and Love in the world?



***The Voice for Love* is the Key that can unlock your greatest potential by showing you step-by-step HOW to tap into this Infinite Knowledge.**

In their latest book, ***The Voice for Love***, DavidPaul and Candace Doyle show you HOW to hear and connect with your Inner Voice, a voice many people call Inner Wisdom, the Holy Spirit, or the Voice for God.

You will find this book to be the **most comprehensive, in-depth book** ever written on how to hear God's Voice within you.

DavidPaul and Candace asked over a hundred different questions about HOW to hear God's Voice within, recorded the answers they received, transcribed them, and share the answers with you now in ***The Voice for Love***.

Discover how the greatest teachers and masters of the past have opened up to hearing this Voice within them and exactly how you can do it, too. This book includes exercises for quieting your mind and hearing God's Voice in over a dozen different ways! It also gives you specific exercises for discovering your True Purpose in the world. Just reading the profound and unconditionally loving words God shares in this book will melt away lifetimes of guilt and fear.

Order your copy of *The Voice for Love* for only \$14.95 plus \$2.50 shipping
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Whether you sent a financial contribution, a book of stamps, a note of appreciation, or a prayer, please know that each of you is loved and appreciated.

**Thank you for your support!
Blessings to you!**

A Course in Miracles study groups

Open your mind and heart to the consciousness and experience of miracles. Share in the peace and joy that results from changing your perceptions.

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2nd & 4th Mondays, 7:00 – 8:30 pm

Center for Conscious Living

302 N. Washington Avenue, #101

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

Congrats to Hometown Hero: Lissa Hilsee

The Philadelphia 76ers honored Lissa Hilsee of Philadelphia, PA as the “76ers Hometown Hero” on March 2, 2007. The “76ers Hometown Hero: In the Spirit of Alex Scott” program recognizes “an everyday hero in the community” and awards two tickets to a Sixers game.

Formerly Vice President of Union Bank of Switzerland in Washington D.C, Lissa turned her focus to the city of Brotherly Love by founding Greater Philadelphia Cares, an organization that spurs the rejuvenation of communities in the region through volunteer efforts. Greater Philadelphia Cares was recently named Non-Profit of the Year by the Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce.

Be a hero in your community – volunteer your time, talent and resources.

For more information about Greater Philadelphia Cares call 215-564-4544 or visit www.gpcares.com



Daily Word

I express the freedom of Spirit within.

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True freedom arises from within. It is not determined by status or wealth. It is the freedom of Spirit within that cannot be denied by any external limitations.

When I awake each morning, I have the freedom to choose how to greet the day ahead. My choice is to look forward to this day with joyous expectation.

I am also free to choose which qualities I will encompass throughout the day. My decision is that I am going to allow God's presence to shine brightly through me today. And in this way, I am loving and compassionate in all of my activities.

My choices of expression are limitless. Thank You, God, for this joyous opportunity to express the freedom of Spirit within.

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Agape Interfaith Ministries
1100 Friendship Street
Philadelphia, PA 19111



Have a fulfilling and delightful Summer

Blessings to you!

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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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