

# Self-Empowerment

Winter 2005-2006

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

Vol. 13, Number 2

A publication of  Agape Interfaith Ministries

## TESTING OUR FAITH

I am a member of PFLAG (Parents, Families and Friends of Lesbians and Gays). This organization promotes the health and well-being of gay and transgendered persons and their families and friends through support, education, and advocacy. I have been a grateful recipient of their support and education for the past year as I have come to acknowledge and accept that one of my loved ones is transgender.

Issues surrounding the rights and safety of gay and transgendered people is a personal issue for me now. It was easier to have social and political opinions before my own family member “came out” to me. It becomes a test of faith to “walk the talk” of unconditional love. What does that love feel like – when a loved one no longer fits old definitions of “how it *should* be”?

History is filled with stories of marginalized people being disrespected and restricted from full participation with the larger population. Even more frightening is the history of violence perpetrated on the “lepers of the day.” Whether people are being beaten or killed for the color of their skin, their sexual orientation, their religion, their gender identification, or their geekiness, this aspect of our inhumanity is a sad and frightening fact. Physical violence is only one extreme of our intolerance. Rejection and negative judgment are painful realities for many. It is difficult for me to imagine a life of love and acceptance for those who no longer follow established expectations. Walking my talk means that I must turn to my faith for peace.

### WHAT WOULD TEVYE DO?

*Fiddler on the Roof* is a story that captures the essence of this quest for peace in the face of persecution, separation, change and rejection.

The show *Fiddler on the Roof* is a well-known creative exploration of love and the testing of faith. The central character is Tevye, a hardworking family man who endeavors to meet the expectations of his culture, community, and religion. As a man of faith, he talks to God often (as he has come to understand God). In the face of poverty, persecution, and many mundane troubles, his sense of peace rests on following the traditions of his people.

He is asked to break the rules by his eldest daughter, Tzeitel, to allow her to marry the man she loves, the tailor Motel Kamzoil, rather than the matchmaker’s offer of an older financially well-off butcher. Tevye is swayed by love for his daughter and is inspired with an idea to manipulate his wife into allowing the change of groom by concocting a made-up ominous dream. Once this scheme succeeds, Tevye expects to return to the rules of tradition, putting this challenge behind him as a tiny blip that surely could be forgiven. Tevye, however, continues to meet greater challenges to the rules he wishes he could easily live by. His second daughter, Hodel, is assertive in her pronouncement of betrothal to Perchik, the poor scholar and political radical. It is more difficult than with Tzeitel, who at least respected her father and his traditions by begging for his permission. Hodel is stepping further away from the definition of a good daughter by stating that she does not require Tevye’s permission, but is only requesting his blessing. Tevye’s hesitation crumbles and he gives the desired blessing.

What is Tevye to do when his third daughter, Chava, does the unthinkable, marrying the Christian Russian Fyedka? This is much too big a break from Tevye’s flexibility. He had found within himself the ability to bend to the smaller challenges, but felt a breaking point in this most intolerable circumstance, despite his love of Chava. No, he does not accept this marriage, and he rejects his daughter, proclaiming her as dead to the family. It is not until the end of the play that Tevya whispers a blessing for Chava that reveals the deep love that transcends his loyalty to the rules.

Tevye stands as a great symbol of tested faith. His constant devotion to God is shown throughout. When choosing between love and rules, what is he to do? What are any of us called to do? Where does our faith take us? How do we live our highest beliefs? Can we expand our definitions of life to include what was previously excluded? From where do we accept our guidance?

**We have been called to stretch and deepen our faith.** Like Tevye, I have a loved one who has stepped away from tradition. Most people have, at one time or another, been faced with some version of having to choose between accepting something new or trying to

hold on to the way things were.

We need to listen within for our best guidance over and over and over again. Each moment may hold a revised understanding. It takes courage to listen, to be open to guidance in whatever form can be perceived.

I recognize by faith that the highest and best guidance resonates with greater and deeper love. It moves in the direction of Unconditional Love. Although I am not yet unconditionally loving, I recognize love that blesses rather than judges, love that includes rather than excludes. It is up to each one of us, like Tevye, to converse with our best concept of Wisdom/Compassion/Love and pray for those qualities to infuse our decisions.

In his book *The Soul's Religion: Cultivating a Profoundly Spiritual Way of Life*, Thomas Moore writes:

Faith is strong trust in self and life even in the face of evidence to the contrary. Like belief, it consists more in love than knowledge, or perhaps it is just that love takes precedence. It is intuitive. It is a power of the soul, not of the mind alone, and therefore it is exercised more like religion than psychology. It is based on the most subtle of perceptions. It is born and nurtured in the area of the third eye, the open heart, and the sensitivity of an ear tuned to mystery.

And so it is, even in the face of evidence to the contrary, we are called to exercise a faith that takes us to a position that is led by love. Despite the challenges, we can allow our open hearts to lead the way. Eventually we will meet our Tevye experience of having to choose between tradition and the more difficult path of finding a way to embrace the new. With a little faith the size of a mustard seed, we can be guided from a deep place of knowing.

I am reminded of the Chinese Bamboo. For the first few years after bamboo is planted, watered and fed, there appears to be no growth. It looks like nothing is happening. Suddenly, after several years of no visible movement, the plant might grow ninety feet in just a few weeks. While it is invisible to the eye above ground, the bamboo is developing its roots below ground. For several years the bamboo plant devotes its energy to the foundational work going on underground, not hurrying to show off to its waiting audience.

As if I am tending Bamboo, I am cultivating faith with as much patience and humility as I can, to allow the harvest to appear when it is ready. I know that arrogance and presumption can block the love that might allow me to stretch and deepen my connection

with what is.

**We have been called to stretch and deepen our faith.** Don't worry if the outward appearances are not up to your expectations yet. Have faith. Nurture the roots to support the extension of love. What will grow from those faithfully tended sprouts will bless the giver and the receiver.

Blessings, Love and Hugs!

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

Be soft in your practice. Think of the method as a fine silvery stream, not a raging waterfall. Follow the stream, have faith in its course. It will go its own way, meandering here, trickling there. It will find the grooves, the cracks, the crevices. Just follow it. Never let it out of your sight. It will take you.

Master Sheng-yen

## Books of interest:

*The Soul's Religion: Cultivating a Profoundly Spiritual Way of Life* by Thomas Moore, © 2002 HarperCollinsPublishers.

Thomas Moore, author of *Care of the Soul*, was a monk in a Catholic religious order for twelve years. Obtaining degrees in theology, musicology and philosophy, he worked as a professor of psychology and authored several books.

Rejecting simplistic paths to spiritual vision, Moore's writing is a mature exploration of spiritual life. No tome of sugar-coated easy answers leading to efforts to control the uncontrollable, this book shows the value of mystery, emptiness, darkness, doubt, honest reflection and humor, as well as the joy of spiritual connection.

*Abounding Faith* edited, with commentary by M. Scott Peck, M.D., © 2003 Andrews McMeel Publishing.

The author of *The Road Less Traveled* has compiled books of quotes on the subjects of faith, wisdom, and grace. It is rewarding to reflect on the gems of great minds. Inspirational thoughts seed our own capacity to embody Divine gifts. Sample quotes can be found on page 5 of this issue.



I know that faith made my life possible and that of many others like me. Reason hardly warranted Anne Sullivan's attempt to transform a little half-human, half-animal, deaf-blind child into a complete human being. Neither science nor philosophy had set such a goal, but faith, the eye of love did. I did not know I had a soul. Then the God in a wise heart drew me out of nothingness with cords of human love and the life belt of language, and *lo*, I found myself. In my doubly shadowed world, faith gives me a reason for trying to draw harmony out of a marred instrument. Faith is not a cushion for me to fall back upon; it is my working energy.

Helen Keller

## How To Feel Safe And Be Happy In The Midst of Personal & Planetary Chaos

By Scott Kalechstein

*The hurricanes are coming, the hurricanes are here  
Abandon all your hang-ups, evacuate your fears  
The winds of change are blowing, so find your higher ground  
Abide inside your center where you're always safe and sound  
Abide inside your center where you're always safe and sound*  
©ScottSongs 2005

When I was a child I had recurrent nightmares about a nuclear end of the world. My parents would come into my room and soothe me as I trembled. Sometimes I couldn't fall back to sleep for hours, and only with the light on.

In public school we had occasional shelter drills when, at the sound of an alarm, we would go out into the hallway and crouch against the wall with our heads curled in between our knees. In my extracurricular study I learned that if an atomic bomb exploded in my city we would all instantly vaporize. I wondered how assuming a crouch position would help.

As a young adult I started studying *A Course In Miracles*, which, in regards to the end of the world, is downright peppy: "The world will end in joy, because it is a place of sorrow. When joy has come, the purpose of the world has gone. The world will end in peace, because it is a place of war. When peace has come, what is the purpose of the world? The world will end in laughter, because it is a place of tears." Now that's an ending we can begin to look forward to!

In the 1980's I studied with a spiritual teacher with a gift for seeing the future. Hilda foretold what we would be facing between now and the year 2012. She called these times the tribulations. She spoke of a cold new world order headed by fear-mongering leaders who would be handed power on a plate of passivity by the slumbering masses. She predicted that the United States government and those behind the scenes would chip away at our freedoms in the name of security until the people got fed up enough to find their voices and take their power back.

She asked us to respond by speaking out and peacefully not cooperating, the way Gandhi would. And she assured us we would have plenty of help from Mother Earth in the form of planetary upheaval and earth changes that would force large numbers of people to start thinking and behaving communally, as one human family, and no longer as separate nations with separate interests and agendas.

In the Chinese language the word crisis is spelled as a combination of two symbols, one signifying 'danger' and one 'opportunity'. Facing shared global crisis is an unprecedented opportunity for masses of people to set aside their differences, open their hearts, and work together.

The heat is on, and I'm not just referring to global warming. Humanity doesn't have the luxury of time anymore to evolve slowly and gradually. These days, it's evolve or perish. Black and white thinking, us and them attitudes, good versus evil ideologies - are all up for review and transformation. Polarity ice caps are melting, and the waters are overflowing the levees we constructed to keep our emotions contained and controlled.

If you are not experiencing huge changes flooding your psyche, check your pulse. We are in the midst of a wash, rinse, and spin cycle of our collective growth, and no one is exempt from some tumultuous tumbling. The personal, political, and social tossing and turning we are currently experiencing is just the beginning of a much needed airing and cleaning of some very dirty laundry. It's time for a global cleanse!

Right now I'm also cleansing physically, taking certain herbs that help flush out toxins, fungus, and parasites, and avoiding foods that feed them. Subsequently, things are appearing on the surface of my skin and in my stool that are not pretty. That stuff has been inside me and is now being released.

If I didn't understand how a cleanse proceeds I'd be worried. But I know that the process includes gook coming to the surface. Things appear worse before they get better. That's how healing works.

Many governments and corporations are currently in a cleanse as well. Dishonesty that used to

be dys-functioning quite smoothly beneath the world's radar screen is now getting a public viewing. Social and political systems everywhere are being forced to come in for numerous enemas and colonics, and what is coming out is being splashed all over the headlines for the world to see. Exciting times!

Hurricanes, earthquakes, fires and floods, as well as more personal earth changes like divorce and bankruptcy - many of us are experiencing unprecedented cleansing in our lives. Perhaps it is safe to say that the majority of people on the planet at this time are in some kind of healing crisis, having their cages rattled and their comfort zones penetrated with calamity.

People of all traditions get on their knees to pray, to feel reverence, and to practice humility. Earth changes bring us down there instantaneously. When we are faced with the end of the world as we know it, we realize pretty quick what really matters in life.

And what comes from hitting bottom, from being brought to our knees? Ask anyone in recovery. They'll tell you a whole new world.

A time of change need not be a time of fear. It is possible to have inner peace and an unshakable trust in God while everything around us is falling apart. It is possible to abide in a still and safe place inside that cannot be shaken by external events, an inner sanctuary that will stand no matter what unfolds outside of our center. Looking out from that place, we can be peaceful and even joyful about living in a world that's currently in the washing machine. In his book *Illusions* Richard Bach reminds us that "What the caterpillar calls the end of the world, the master calls a butterfly." Our story is far from over...

*Scott Kalechstein is a modern day troubadour and inspirational speaker. He travels through the United States, Canada and Europe giving concerts, talks and workshops, as well as presenting at conferences. The two of his CD's that are most aligned with the ideas in this article are Midwives Of The Light and Maps For The New World. Please visit [www.scottsongs.com](http://www.scottsongs.com) to sample them. You can send an email to [scott@scottsongs.com](mailto:scott@scottsongs.com) to receive articles like this one on a bi-monthly basis.*

Lets have faith that right makes might;  
and in that faith let us, to the end, dare  
to do our duty as we understand it.  
Abraham Lincoln

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

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## **God's Mirror**

by Margo J. Ford

I wish there were a mirror  
Held up to me by the hand of God  
Reflecting how He sees me  
And affirming I'm not so very odd.

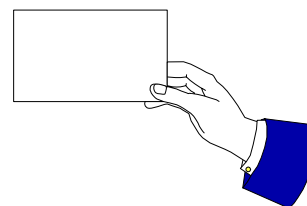
I sometimes stop and wonder  
What God would say to me  
Were I to sit and ask Him  
What good in me He sees.

In times that feel like crises  
When faith and trust have flown  
I wish I'd hear God saying  
"Beloved, you're My very own."

So I would always honor  
The self that's deep within  
And clearly see myself  
The way that I appear to Him.

But deep inside I really know  
That I am perfect in His mind  
And affirming that I know this truth,  
I leave my doubts and fears behind.

*Reprinted with permission by the author-poet.*



## On the subject of Faith....

*Faith is much better than belief. Belief is when someone else does the thinking.*

.....  
R. Buckminster Fuller

*“Professor Jung, a lot of your writings have a religious flavor. Do you believe in God?”*

*“Believe in God? Well, believe is a word we use when we think that something is true, but for which we do not yet have a substantial body of evidence. No. No, I don’t believe in God. I know there’s a God.”*

.....  
Interview with Carl Jung

*You can’t solve many of today’s problems by straight linear thinking. It takes leaps of faith to sense the connections that are not necessarily obvious.*

.....  
Matina Horner

*Faith embraces itself and the doubt about itself.*

.....  
Paul Tillich

*A man consists of the faith that is in him. Whatever his faith is, he is.*

.....  
Bhagavad Gita

*We live by faith or we do not live at all. Either we venture – or we vegetate. If we venture, we do so by faith simply because we cannot know the end of anything at its beginning. We risk marriage on faith or we stay single. We prepare for a profession by faith or we give up before we start. By faith we move mountains of opposition or we are stopped by molehills.*

.....  
Harold Walker

*My reason nourishes my faith, and my faith my reason.*

.....  
Norman Cousins

*Doubt is not the opposite of faith; it is one element of faith.*

.....  
Paul Tillich

*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*

.....  
Hebrews 11:1

*Real faith is not the stuff dreams are made of; rather it is tough, practical and altogether realistic. Faith sees the invisible but it does not see the nonexistent.*

.....  
A.W. Tozer

*The principal part of faith is patience.*

.....  
George Macdonald

*It is cynicism and fear that freeze life; it is faith that thaws it out, releases it, sets it free.*

.....  
Harry Emerson Fosdick

*Live by faith until you have faith.*

.....  
Peter Boehler

*Orthodoxy can be learned from others; living faith must be a matter of personal experience.*

.....  
J. W. Buchsel

*Faith is the daring of the soul to go farther than it can see.*

.....  
William Newton Clarke

*If you have abandoned one faith, do not abandon all faith. There is always an alternative to the faith we lose. Or is it the same faith under another mask?*

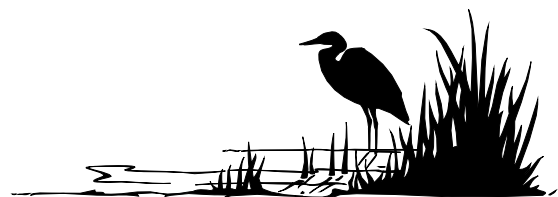
.....  
Graham Greene

*It seems to me that in our time faith in God is the same thing as faith in good and the ultimate triumph of good over evil.*

.....  
Svetlana Alliluyeva

*Faith is like the little night-light that burns in a sickroom; as long as it is there, the obscurity is not complete, we turn toward it and await the daylight.*

.....  
Abbe Huvelin



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# Daily Word

*God's presence strengthens and  
sustains me in every moment.*

In the silence of prayer, I release any concerns of the day to You, God, for You created me and continue to strengthen and sustain me. I feel the everlasting comfort of Your presence, which is nearer than my breath and more steadfast than the ground that supports me.

Opening my heart and mind to You, I am guided in ways that promote harmony and goodwill, peace and prosperity. I know what to do, and I grow in the awareness of my abilities and my willingness to observe Your presence within all people and all situations.

I give thanks for Your gentle presence, God, a holy presence that enables me to see beyond circumstances and conditions. I am grateful that all is in divine order concerning me and my world.

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Agape Interfaith Ministries  
1100 Friendship Street  
Philadelphia, PA 19111



## PUBLICATION INFORMATION

Self-Empowerment is published quarterly (4 issues/year)  
Publisher & Editor-in-Chief: Rev. Jill Sabin Carel, B.S., RScP  
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](http://www.AgapeInterfaith.org)  
Subscriptions are available without charge, but tax-deductible donations are gratefully received to support the printing and mailing expenses of this publication. A suggested donation of \$5 or more per year is invited.

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