



hope and possibilities

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You lost hope



Years ago, a shaman looked at me and said, "You lost hope. You should never lose hope."

He was right -- and, boy, did I hate that. I have a long history of unflappable optimism. I'm able to make copious amounts of lemonade. I pride myself on my out-of-the-box thinking. But the shaman was right; at that

moment in time, I had lost hope. I was standing smack in the middle of a dead-end with no openings in sight. My world had become small and limited. I was in a dim, airless box and I saw no way out.

The shaman's comment -- and, undoubtedly, his healing energy as well - shook me up. My attention had been grabbed, I knew that I needed to make some changes - and fast. I didn't want to stay in this unconscious, hopeless place, but how was I going to get myself up and out of this hunkered-down position? I was -- after all - feeling hopeless. My *joie de vivre* had taken off for parts unknown; my creativity was in hiding. Emotionally, all systems were shut down; I was numb. Energetically, I was contracted into a jumbled knot. Plain and simple, I was miserable and so very afraid to see it. Because if you lose hope, you pretty much lose your footing.

Someone wise once said, "Persistence is the antidote to powerlessness." I like that; it feels hopeful. However, when I'm hopeless, there is no get-up-and-go. I don't care; nothing matters because, in my hopeless hole, nothing looks positive or possible. I am awash in unknowing. Clearly, I am disconnected from Source. I am certainly not feeling powerful. Persistence requires a vision and a vision suggests hope. It feels all rather circular and just makes the rut deeper in the hole of my despair. What was I to do? How was I going to break the chain of hopelessness and find better footing?

Admittedly, the shaman's comment helped me. It forced me to wake up and become conscious and realize -- with a fair amount of chagrin -- that my hope had gone MIA. I never saw myself like that before. Insights like this are kind of hard to ignore. I was in a quandary. What was I to do?

I decided to do what I do best when I don't know where to begin -- and that is to get organized. In other words, I needed to place everything on the table before me, metaphorically speaking, and work to make sense of it all. I was determined to connect the dots and find the thread that would lead me to my ultimate truth. It was all I had.

So with forced bravado, I turned on all of my interior lights. I wanted to end whatever unconscious hiding, equivocating or resistance there was. I wanted to see myself clearly. What had happened to pull the plug on me so completely that it had drained my entire sense of the possible? What events had stopped me in my tracks? What was the truth of my life? Obviously, there was some "something" or a "cluster of somethings" that had worn away my hope and pushed me into the place where I lost complete and utter faith in myself.

I knew I had to be very gentle with myself. I was in fragile territory. I had lost a vital current to my well-being. And I was feeling so low, so oomph-less. With patience, I followed the thread and looked at the reality of what was. I allowed myself to feel the pain and anguish of it all. And I worked hard to accept the reality of what I had been unable to accept, but to do that I needed to walk to the edge of my personal cliff and not jump.

In other words, I needed to forgive myself -- forgive myself for what could have been, what should have been or what would have been; forgive myself for what I didn't see, what I didn't trust or what I didn't believe. I needed to break open my

ice-jammed feelings; they had kept me blocked and locked and I was ready to flow again.

It was helpful to remind myself that I had done what seemed right at the time -- some of it was my best, some of it was expedient; most of it was based on faith and some of it based on fear. I realized now I made choices based on the consciousness I held at that time. I told myself, "It's OK. I'm human; I'm a work in progress. This is how I learn."

With acceptance and the oh-so-hard forgiveness of my all-too-human self, I was able to take a deeper breath and take a tiny step forward. And, you know how it goes, one step led to another, and then to another and, before you know, there was a bit of momentum and some traction and I could haul myself up and out of the damn, dark hole. It felt good to move; it felt good to imagine a way forward.

I realized two things: When I have faith in myself, I can create hope. When I have faith in the Divine, I can feel hope.

Good luck to you, my friends. Being engulfed in hopelessness is so very tough; I also know that life is anything but static. Consider making the shifts within so that you can experience the shifts without. And your temporary darkness notwithstanding, please do not forget that you are light. Take precious care.

Help, it's dark in here

Do you ever have one of those days, weeks, or, even, years when it feels nothing is going your way? There is no break from the gods. In a word, you would say that your life stinks, and it stinks out loud.



I have recently had a number of conversations with folks who are finding themselves, metaphorically speaking, in the dark. And it's no fun. In fact, it's quite painful.

There are people whose illnesses have debilitated them so thoroughly that their norm is all day in bed. It is rare for day where than can be up and about, gingerly put foot to floor and feeling like a shadow of their former selves.

Then, there is this unfortunate man who has been unable to swallow, much less eat for a few years. Understandably, Thanksgiving dinner, his very favorite meal, is, yet, again, out of the question. This year, he had the good sense to say,

"No, thank you," to showing up at the holiday table. It is simply too painful for him as everyone "oohs and aaahs" over the yumminess of the turkey and pumpkin pie, and he is relegated to intensely concentrating on getting sips of broth into his system.

And beyond the physical, there is the emotional.

Last night, I spoke to a young woman who has opted to stalk her now-sometimes lover. She has manipulatively befriended his cronies in the hopes of re-igniting the previous fires of passion. She admits she is out of control and chooses, at this moment, to stay in the crazy-making behavior that has her crying on a daily basis.

There is the woman whose eyes well with tears at her frustration and anger at a marriage that feels more half than whole. One is, indeed, the loneliest number, especially when experienced in a double bed.

There is the man who opens the refrigerator continuously through the middle of the night for something else to eat to fill the huge hole in his gut that has precious little to do with food.

There is the young woman who has amazingly put together 15 months of sobriety after hard-core substance abuse, but is now cutting her wrists and burning her arms with lit cigarettes because her heart is entangled in conflicting emotions.

In varying degrees, we have all been there - confused, scared, in some kind of pain, and hunkered down in a corner or a bed or a hallway waiting for the storm to pass.

Do you remember that old joke that the light you see in the tunnel is actually the train barreling towards you? My clients were forever telling me that, and I still don't like that joke any better. It feels so pessimistic and limiting.

You see, I am a hopeful type. I am believer. My world view insists that everything is part of a big, cosmic plan. If I don't understand it - and I often don't - then God does.

I believe in lessons to stretch my human being into its spiritual health. I believe in soul contracts to break open my heart and teach me love, compassion, and forgiveness. I believe in synchronicity, not accidents. I think everything fits

together in one gigantic cosmic jig saw puzzle. My Big Bang hypothesis relates to the movements of energy as well as to the hand of God.

Clearly, I could be very wrong, way too simplistic, and inordinately uninformed regarding scientific theory. And that's ok.

I think we all need something to hold on to when the going gets dark.



There is a reason we all loved the Peanuts cartoon series. We could relate to the struggle of Charlie Brown continuously feeling defeated and trying, once again, to overcome his challenges. And I believe it was blanket-carrying Linus, who lived with a dark cloud perpetually over his head.

We all get that dark cloud; some of us have such intimate relationships with our dark clouds that we have given them pet names and can read the signs of their ensuing rumbles. We know all too well what it means to live in the dark. We understand the thwarted, dejected, and despairing places. They are all too familiar.

So, what turns on the lights? Where can we find some relief and feel that the world, as

we know it, is not closing in on us?

The easy answer is joy. Joy is light-filled; it transcends our limitations. Joy makes us feel that all is possible, and, curiously, all is peaceful.

Yet, joy is hard to come by when you are flailing in the shadows, and your circumstances are bleak. I think it takes an open mind and an open heart to embrace joy. It's hard to be that open when you are trying to survive the next few minutes of pain or fear.

À la Norman Cousins who fought severe heart illness with the lightness of laughter, giggles and levity can raise the vibrations and increase the energy flow for all varieties of healing to happen.

Even better, there is communion with another person. Assorted psychological studies have verified that talking with friends, being part of a support group, doing volunteer work and the like are proven to lift a sagging spirit and ease the burdens that weigh us down. It can all seem a bit easier when we have someone to share our world, and listen with accepting ears.

It can help if we befriend the dark. We can be like one of those bulbs that is happiest for the first part of its life to be in the darkness, then, once rooted, it requires light to thrive. Maybe we need some of that dark time to develop more fully so that when the moment is right, we can burst forth with a triumphant "ta daa." And, more than likely, the wisdom and light of our experiences will help illuminate the path for others.

And the big money answer, for me, is this: We need to plug in to the electricity to turn on the lights. Yes, there is my flair for the obvious, but allow me to carry this metaphor to the bitter end. We need the electricity that comes from Source. We need the A-1 stuff, the juice of the gods. This electrical current is a connection that enlivens us, enlightens us, and illuminates us. I would name this divine electricity, faith. And that would be faith in ourselves, faith in our path, and faith in the Divine.

Granted we may be inching along in the darkness with our hands on the wall, one step at a time, but we will find our way. Once we plug in, our inner fuse box will become aglow, and there is always just enough light to take the next step.

V is for vulnerable

Today, my friends, we are spinning, spinning, spinning the alphabet wheel. Can you hear it whinny and whir through its multiple rotations of 26 choices? And after the occasional stutter and stumble, it eventually settles and makes its home on the venerable "V."



Ah ... "V"; it's a letter that we know well. "V" trumpets vanquish, vessel, victory, volume and today's word of choice: vulnerability.

Vulnerable is derived the Latin and translates into "able to be wounded." Think of all those Roman gladiators without their armor; they would be vulnerable to attack. And attack, be it physical, emotional or energetic, is generally what we think of in response to being vulnerable.

Over the last few months, I have worked therapeutically with three young women, and they all share one overriding aspect. All three young women have raised their moats, so to speak. Their castles are impregnable. No one gets in. They all have chosen unequivocally to be invulnerable.

They remind me of the mythological three-headed dog, Cerberus. Each woman shows her face, both literal and metaphoric, in different ways. Yet, each young woman believes that is really not a good idea for anyone to see, much less know, their particular weaknesses or soft spots. Given their chaotic, aggressive and demeaning backgrounds, they have spent their respective years keeping everything at bay.

I can relate. I feel that I spent the first half of my life creating walls to protect myself and the last half tearing them down. It is hard to be vulnerable, especially if you have been on the receiving end of flying physical mortar or verbal missiles. Needless to say, when the stuff starts raining down you, your first instinct is to either to run and hide and protect yourself or to become paralyzed with fear and wish you were dead so you wouldn't have to live through the onslaught.

This reminds me of another example of the power of vulnerability:



Decades ago, I was working with a young mother who allowed that her home life as a kid was less than ideal. I asked if she had a safe space or a hiding place at home; she answered the roof of the house. Her bedroom was on the second floor, and she could creep out the window and be hidden from view. Yet, she was afraid to go to the roof because if she was discovered, she felt she would never, ever have a safe space at home again. So, she chose to make herself into a tight ball, be as still as possible and try to be invisible in her small closet. She was often discovered, but she felt oddly protected by holding on to the thought of her roof as her final frontier of safety.

Clearly, there is much to be said for being protected and invulnerable from attack. Whether the war comes from within or without, who wants to live in a war-torn house and constantly be under siege? It is no way to live, and it makes good sense to build walls and protect yourself. Physical safety is, or, at least, it should be, a primary, baseline requisite for all human beings.

But there is more to consider:

Physical vulnerability leads to emotional vulnerability. When our physical selves are under attack, either from the inside or outside, our emotional selves tag along as well. In other words, if I am living amidst war in Iraq, widowhood in Canada or recovering from a hospital stay in New York, my emotional self responds as well. I might become depressed, weepy, angry or, even, numb.

And, conversely, if I find myself all stressed about something, I might throw out my back, get headaches or find a rash on my arms. In fact, I have watched time and again as a majority of new employees get a cold within the first three weeks of the new job. Emotional vulnerability leads to physical vulnerability. When our emotional selves are under siege, our bodies respond with sickness, "dis-ease," rashes, breaks and all kinds of physical communiquéés. After all, we are holistic beings; mind, body and spirit do work in tandem.

Some people, like my three young women, think that if they are emotionally invulnerable they are safe in all ways. They feel in control and empowered. They have bricked up the openings and no one can get in ... and no one can get out as well. They have made themselves rigid. Their feeling states are placed on hold. In their protection, they miss the sweet juiciness of life; there is no real intimacy, much less authenticity.

Then, there are those who follow a very regimented lifestyle. They eat very clean foods in sparse, adjusted amounts; exercise regularly and seriously and devote themselves to their physical bests. Madonna with her food and exercise routine for the 18 months preceding her Sticky and Sweet Tour is a good example. The press reports that her strict training placed emotional stress on her marriage.

Whether true or false, the point is that we are multi-dimensional beings, and we need give and take in all areas of our lives. It would stand to reason that whatever we hold as rigid, fixed and strong has a counterpoint that is flexible, impermanent and weak. This is how life works; where there is yin, there is also yang.



I think of a woman I work with who has been felled with severe disabilities and chronic illnesses. Her body is weak; her spirit is strong.

Vulnerability is part of being human. As tiny babies or those who are sick, hugely stressed, burdened with worries or just trying to survive, we are all open to some kind of wounding. Vulnerability can come as a surprise in a hurricane, the betrayal of a loved one or the ill advisement of a mortgage banker. It takes many shapes and forms. It fits all ages.

To me, vulnerabilities are like balsamic vinegar -- sweet-sour, mineral-rich, fermented wine that has settled into the bottom of the cask. Our vulnerabilities may sting, but they also open and expand us. It is through our very humanness and these self-same vulnerabilities that we connect with one another. One of the reasons that comedy resonates with so many of us is that it is built on this very sharing of vulnerabilities.

In their highest form, vulnerabilities serve as measures of acceptance. Can we accept our soft, squishy, scabby, shadowy selves? If so, that acceptance becomes a prelude to healing.

And for those of us on the spiritual path, acceptance of our vulnerabilities is the first step of surrender to the divine.



Plutarch said, "What we achieve inwardly, will change outer reality." I agree and would add the converse, "What we achieve outwardly, will change inner reality." It all goes hand-in-hand. Everything is connected.

So, then, wouldn't you agree that choosing to be consciously vulnerable with yourself can also be a great act of strength?

Call back your spirit or die

The following is my favorite healing story. I first heard this account from higher consciousness teacher, Caroline Myss, who learned this first-hand from her friend and our protagonist, David Chethlahe Paladin. And extra special bits were added with my conversation with wonderful Lynda Paladin, our protagonist's wife.

The story becomes a bit like the game, "Telephone," in that in every retelling the story morphs a little bit this way and a little bit that way. I have heard this story countless times and repeated this story countless times, I now offer this to you like a tumbled stone that is well-worn with passage.

So, without further ado, let's go back in time and let me introduce you to our hero:

David Chethlahe Paladin is a Navaho Indian living on a reservation in Arizona. David would laughingly say that his mother was a nun and his father was a priest. It turns out his mother became pregnant by a visiting priest. She, in turn, decides to become a nursing nun and leaves her son in the care of the extended family of their tribe.



David and his cousin spend a great deal of time leaving the reservation and going into town. They drink a lot, and they think life is better in the white man's world. The local constabulary is forever returning the boys to the reservation. By the time David is 13 years of age, he is an alcoholic.

David and his cousin determine that they are going to make it off the reservation once and for all - and they do. They find their way to California, wherein they lie

about their ages and sign up for work with the Merchant Marines, where David befriends another young man from Germany. He also begins drawing; some of his sketches include the eventual bunkers that the Japanese are building on the atolls in the Pacific Ocean.

World War II is declared. The US Army tells David that since he lied about his age with the Merchant Marines he has a choice. He can go to jail for a year or enlist in the army. David enlists. He is a teenager.

The army tells David as he is a Navaho, they are going to drop him behind enemy lines and use him as an information gatherer in their special services. David, using his native language, is to relay his findings to another Navaho in the army. Their language becomes a code that the Germans are unable to crack, much less decipher.

David is dropped behind enemy lines. Ultimately, he is captured and interrogated for information. The German officers find him useless and direct that he be sent to a death camp and executed as a spy.

Imagine, if you will, the scenes we all have invariably seen of the railroad station and the platform filled with lines of prisoners being pushed into box cars for transport to the camps.



Here is David. He is being pushed and shoved into a boxcar. There is German soldier behind him saying "*Schnell, schnell*" (quick, quick). David stops, turns around and looks at the German soldier. It is his friend from the merchant ship. The friend recognizes David and ushers him to a different box car that will send David to Dachau.

In the barracks at Dachau, David sees an older man, a fellow prisoner, drop something. David bends down to retrieve it. The guard, who has witnessed this moment, asks David, "Are you the Christ?"

The guard then orders that David's feet be nailed to the floor and that David stand there with his arms outstretched for three days like Christ on the cross. Every time David would falter and crumple the guards would hoist him up again. In

the middle of the night, someone would sneak in and cram raw, maggot-covered chicken innards into David's mouth.

When the Allies open up this camp, they find David a mere shell of a man, weighing maybe 70 pounds, and speaking Russian*. They turn David over to the Russians. David later speaks English and gives his name, rank and serial number to the Russians who transfer him back to the US military.

David is sent to a VA hospital in Battle Creek Michigan where he spends the next 2 years in a coma. At the end of two years, his legs are encased in metal braces, similar to what polio patients used. David, a young man, maybe not even 21 years of age, is to be sent to a VA home for the rest of his life.

David asks if he can visit his family on the reservation. The answer is, "Of course." David literally drags himself onto the reservation. He meets with the elders of tribe. They ask to hear his whole story. David tells them every horrible thing that he endured. He is full of anger, rage and hate.



The elders confer and tell David to meet them tomorrow at a designated point on the Little Colorado River. David agrees and at the appointed hour he arrives. One of the elders tethers a rope around his waist; others remove the braces from his legs. They hoist David up into the air and as they throw him into the raging current of the Little Colorado River, they say,

"Chethlahe, call back your spirit or die. Call back your spirit or die."

David would later say that those moments in the Little Colorado River were the very hardest of his life. He had to fight himself for himself. And he was able to see the big picture; he understood why things unfolded as they did. For example, he realized that the raw chicken parts were meant as a source of protein to sustain him so that he might live.

David Paladin was thrown into the river as a very broken - and broken on every level - man. And David emerged out of the Little Colorado River like the phoenix out of

the ashes. He had metaphorically walked through the fire, or, in this case, swum through the currents, and had come out alive. He was born again.

And, that, dear ones, is what I think healing is all about for each of us. It is calling home our energy; it is calling home our disenfranchised pieces and parts. It is letting go of the toxic and the outdated. It is reclaiming ourselves.

David no longer needed his braces; he became a shaman, teacher and artist and went on to work with priests and addicts. He died in his middle years in the mid 1980s.

* Remember David sketching during his tour of the Pacific and speaking Russian when the Allies first found him half-dead at the camp? It turns out that David was channeling, i.e., energetically merging, with the Russian artist Kandinsky. In fact, Kandinsky's best friend came to the U.S. from Russia. The friend, the story goes, told the press that he felt as he had spent the day with Kandinsky.

God, I'm stuck



God, I need your help.

I realize that, once again, I am stuck. Like an anchor in the mud, I am bolted to my current habit patterns. I am like a junkie mainlining the old and the familiar. I say I want to create change. I say I want to go forward. I say I want to be present to my path, but I seem to busy myself with a thousand other details.

Who knew there were so many "Law and Order" reruns? Who knew that I could edit the spam settings on my computer? And the flowers need to be watered; the calls returned and on and on it goes with life doing life. I'm busy; I am just not focused on my priority.

I promise myself that tomorrow or Monday or the first of the month that I will create the space and time to do what I know is the next right step. Yet, I am embarrassed to admit that I find myself like the kid who puts her fingers in her ears and repeatedly intones, "La, la, la, la." I am ignoring what I know to be my truth.

Why don't I do what I say I want to do? I believe what I say; there is no cognitive dissonance. I just don't take the action steps I know I need to take.

I am feeling a bit like Charlie Brown and want to yell, "Arrgh." Once again, I have created my own stewpot of misery.

I think you would recognize this state as one of resistance, that ever-familiar ten-letter word that I know is a form of fear.

And, Good God, haven't we been through this drill countless times? Why am I so damn stubborn, reluctant and the Queen of Procrastination and Postponed Starts? Why do I keep treading water along my path with my very own resistance water-wings? Why is it that I refuse to take the plunge?

Spiritual teacher, Eckhart Tolle, writes, "Resistance is an inner contraction, a hardening of the shell of the ego. You are closed." Tolle is right. Resistance does feel like a hunkered down, no-forward-movement position on the path. However, if everything, and I mean everything including the ego, is all part and parcel of the divine, isn't it possible that resistance serves a purpose?

There was some wise person who once said, "What we resist, we already own." I like that thinking for several reasons. First, it makes me feel less awful about myself. Second, it intimates that resistance is a temporary state of stop. It says I will reach that destination point beyond resistance, but before I proceed to go, I need to stop momentarily.



I realize that resistance when protracted, ignored and not addressed can become a huge smoke screen of denial and avoidance. Confucius reminded us, "Moderation in all things," and that holds true for resistance as well. As I said earlier, resistance is a temporary state of stop.

But let's get clear, is stopping so terrible? Am I a failure because I am afraid on some level, and I have a need to stop? Have I wasted my life and done harm to my process?

Isn't the spiritual path a continuum of consciousness? Aren't we all here to learn and awake from the sleepy unconscious? Aren't some of us bright and chipper in the morning; whereas others of us need a hot shower, some caffeine and no conversation to become awake? We are all different in how we awake and how we learn; the path of consciousness is no exception.

Further, I am a big believer that nothing happens a minute sooner or a minute later until it meant to happen. I don't think any of us can force the hand of God. We can accelerate and hinder our path by the choices we make. And, yes, resistance is a choice, often a default choice until we feel ready enough to take the requisite steps.

And readiness is certainly subjective. Do we force our children when they are not ready? Usually, we don't because the results backfire in our faces. And, more often than not, parents choose to respect their child's present place on the developmental scale. Unless you are a bulb who is forced to grow prematurely, growth is difficult to manipulate.

Perhaps resistance is a kind of reflex, protective mechanism. It allows us to gather our wits, calm our fears and soothe our egos. Resistance allows us to regroup and center ourselves. We can get back into our bodies and out of our heads where the fears have been running amok playing hide-and-seek in the dark.

Resistance is a preparatory step; it's the baby step until the need for protection, safety or reassurance dissipates.

On the personality level, when we have emotionally and cognitively put ourselves in a coherent state, we can feel readied and prepared. On the soul level, we can choose to surrender to the divine. In that release, we can find godly alignment and from that place, fear is usually a non-issue.

I am coming to realize that resistance can serve as an act of self-care. It can be viewed as a developmental step akin to children regressing to an earlier behavior before a growth spurt. Resistance becomes the gateway to trust and surrender.

Resistance requires that we pay heed to the small quiet, afraid voice. The resistance process teaches us about ourselves; it helps us to call in the fractured

or disenfranchised parts and move towards wholeness. That sounds like healing to me.

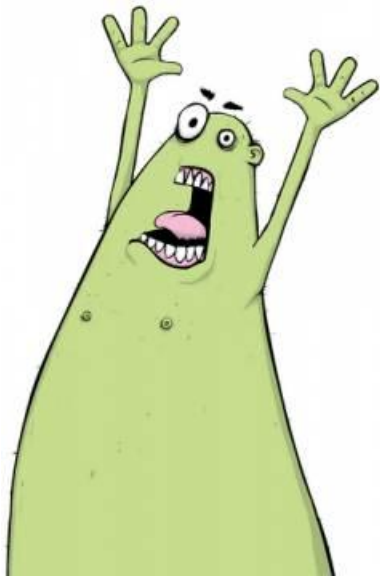
And, once we are on the downside of resistance, we use our faith - faith in ourselves, faith in the divine -- to take the first, faltering step. That sounds positive.



God, does this make sense? I realize that many of my comparisons have been to children, and I guess that really says it all. I am still learning and developing. No doubt, I will continue to hit plateaus of resistance along the way, but now I choose to see resistance as a stopping point for playing catch-up with my soul. I choose to treat myself more lovingly, and, as You well know that seems to take the edge off.

Thanks for listening, God. I feel better.

The stuckness of spiritual depression



Every have one of those seemingly endless stretches of time, when it feels as if all your get-up-and-go has got-up-and-went? You are not sick, per se. You just don't give a damn anymore. Nothing matters much.

After all of your full-speed-ahead decisions, choices and actions, you feel directionless. You are lost. You motivation is MIA. You are no longer the little engine that could. Why even your dream catcher is collecting dust. Your dreams and visions have been shuttled to the corner, where they remain barely visible. You have no oomph to make them manifest, and have begun to wonder if they really are viable.

It's as if all of your personal energy, *chi* as the Chinese would say, has left unannounced and headed to someplace warm and tropical for vacation. I can well imagine my personal chi doing a tango with a swivel-hipped someone, while I am at home, stuck and stalled, like the proverbial lump.

Recently, these particular set of symptoms have surfaced repeatedly in conversation. Many spiritual sojourners are finding themselves smack dab in the

middle of stuck. They are experiencing the symptoms of what I call spiritual depression.

What exactly is spiritual depression?

It is not clinical depression; it is not a reaction to a specific grief or loss.

Spiritual depression is a part of the spiritual journey. It is a period of no energetic flow, usually following an earlier infusion of new energy. It often comes amidst transition and change after you have taken new steps, but, then, turn the corner and the path has evaporated before your very eyes.

Spiritual depression is an in-between time that serves as a bridge from the old to the new. You can feel as if you are stuck in a rut. You can feel bored (read: unconsciously fearful). You can even feel as if you are pressing the snooze button on God. And, frequently, when you are just about to emerge out of your darkness, you can feel very panicked and confused.



Think of the caterpillar hanging on the tree bough in its silken pouch. Initially, the caterpillar is content to be snug as a bug in a rug, but the non-movement begins to wear thin. Pinned in by silken fibers and stuck in seemingly interminable darkness, the caterpillar reaches a moment of movement. It has outgrown its cocoon, and with considerable energy tears a small rent in the fabric of the chrysalis. Then, the caterpillar begins to pump and pump and pump its wet, folded wings, building momentum and allowing the butterfly to come forth. The tight darkness births movement.

Spiritual depression is a bit like that. You find yourself hanging in the dark, still and stuck. There is no outer movement; but unbeknownst to you, you are incubating. You are simmering in your own contracted energy with your folded wings still wet and untried.

This incubation offers a calibrating effect. And that calibration is the point of spiritual depression. The stuck darkness and your condensed energies meld, merge and coalesce into a higher vibratory momentum, which is a push into the new you -- the soul-refined, alchemical you.

In other words, spiritual depression is not a bad thing; it serves a purpose. It is a necessary precursor to a big soul leap. Out of the darkness and stillness, you emerge into a higher frequency and vibration. You have reconnected with your own source of energy so that you can pump and pump and pump and, ultimately, take flight. Your consciousness grows in light; your heart glows with the twin flames of courage and compassion.

That understood, spiritual depression is very dispiriting and mightily uncomfortable. How can you handle this very tender time?

I suggest the basics:

1. Be patient.

You cannot rush a rebirth as much as you try. You are filled with old ways and new energies; they need to merge and reform into new aspect of you.

2. Be gentle and loving to yourself.

The kick-in-the-rear tactic does not work here; that only serves to tighten your contractions into the little self. You want to be reconnected with your more expansive, soul-infused Self.

3. Trust the timing.

There are always other pieces of the clockworks that are needed to make everything run in sync.

4. Remember the big picture.

The spiritual journey is not about the end point, but about the process of the journey itself. Undoubtedly, the gods hold you close when you are deep in spiritual darkness.

5. Maintain your spiritual practices.

Even in the dark, it is important to feed yourself from the divine umbilicus. It will facilitate your process.



And, then, I promise you, there will be a day when you realize you feel a little lighter, and you are ready to take a small step. One small step leads to another and leads to another and this

eventually leads to a great gallop across open spaces and new frontiers.

In the meantime, honor the hard work and strong choices that brought you to this place of transition. And please know this: a) you are not alone; b) spiritual depression is a bridge to the high octane you; and c) the gods applaud your fortitude to be of service in this lifetime, during these fast-moving days, and on this planet.

You are loved and guided far more than you realize.

Acceptance, stillness and surrender meditation



1. Center yourself and get into a quiet and comfortable position. Allow your spine to be straight, but not rigid; keep your legs and arms uncrossed; make sure all of your joints (think knees, here) are unlocked. Close your eyes or allow them to go soft. Be mindful and consciously relax your forehead and jaw.
2. Take three deep breaths. Deep is indicated by your stomach rising on each inhalation and falling with each exhalation. If unsure, place your hand over your belly button and it will move with your breath. With each of these three breaths say to yourself:

*As I breathe in, I quiet my mind.
As I breathe out, I relax my body.*

3. Give yourself permission to allow your mind to quiet and clear. Like watching leaves float on a stream, allow the non-stop thoughts you hear in your head to do what they will. They are neither good nor bad; they just are.
4. Take another set of three, deep breaths. And with mindfulness ...

- a. **INHALE ACCEPTANCE.** Allow yourself to breathe in total, complete, unconditional acceptance for all that is. As Carl Jung told us, we cannot change anything unless there is the first step of acceptance.
 - b. **HOLD ON STILLNESS.** Hold your breath for a few seconds and allow yourself to feel the fullness of the moment ... of your lungs ...of your capacity to be still in both body and mind.
 - c. **EXHALE SURRENDER.** For this moment, let go of all that does not serve you. Exhale total and complete release - of worries, fears, doubts, pain and trauma. Let go of the past. Surrender fully and see yourself held in the loving arms of whatever face or name you give God, your guardian angel or Invisible Ally.
5. If time permits, repeat step 4 two more times now and/or throughout the day. It's a great way to deal with stress and the constant rush of incoming in your life. Take precious care.

Got hope?

Hope ... it's a wonderful four-letter word. Hope offers possibilities; hope suggests that the good will prevail. It makes us happy. It fills us with expansiveness and can make our tight, constricted worlds crack open with a little wiggle room for the good stuff to find its way. Hope has us looking up. Hope, especially the big-picture



variety, inspires and motivates. We want to do better, be better. Hope is potent medicine.

What happens, however, when your personal hope goes MIA and you find yourself hunkered down in a fetal position in the corner, feeling deflated, cranky and uninspired? How do you refind that channel of expanded possibility?

Have fun. Be creative. Play.

You will place yourself in present time and move out (at least temporarily) of the depressive concerns of the past and the anxious worries of the future. You will break open the log jam of your energy field. You will literally lighten up.

This is a good assignment. Had any fun lately?

Talk to the relations.

You see, hope is part of triplet combination. Remember faith and charity?

Faith is an active one and requires a constancy of attention and belief — be it belief in yourself, belief in whatever process you are involved in or belief in something bigger, sacred and divine. Faith calls for your focus. Faith is the anchor

for hope. If you have faith (in yourself, a process or the divine), hope joins the parade. Finding faith will help you locate hope.

Charity is a lot like water because it is all about flow and the circulation of flow. This reminds me of a story: A woman, let's call her Mary, was down to her last few dollars. She could only hold her family together until the end of the month; then they would be up the proverbial creek without paddle, much less food and housing. Her husband worked construction; he had been laid off for quite some time. Her young adult kids were scraping by as well. Mary was desperate; she had nothing to lose and was willing to take the big risk.

She had \$10,000 line of credit left on her credit card. Mary reasoned that if she had the right intention and gave the money away that something would come back to her. After careful deliberation, much prayer and strategizing, Mary, unbeknownst to her husband, took the line of credit and sent out ten unmarked envelopes of \$1000 each to people in need. Each envelope contained the same anonymous note about money being a gift to them.

One of the recipients was her son, a local EMT. When he received the money, he dashed over to his mom's house to share the unbelievable news. He was full of excitement, curiosity and great relief. The money could not have come at a better time. He needed every penny of it. His sister was visiting his mom as well; she, too, was facing lean times. The son immediately split his money with his sister.



Mary told me she was never as proud of her son as she was that day.

Mary never said a word to anyone. Over the coming weeks, she was filled again and again with stories about how the anonymous gifts had generated much conversation and hope. It turned out the ten gifts were parceled out over and over into smaller gifts. Once someone received, they shared a piece of their windfall with another. It was a bit like pie, there were ten pieces but a number of forkfuls, and so many got a taste of the goodness.

At the end of the month, Mary's husband had an interview for a construction job in another state. They packed up the truck and headed off, desperately needing the job to become a reality. When they pulled into the housing development and Mary

saw the gorgeous show home, she knew they would be taken care of — and they were. Her husband was offered the job and they were given free housing in the show home for the next year while the development was being built. Mary believed it all came to be because she literally took her last dollars and gave them away.



Charity is all about flow, flow is all about circulation. And the energy and possibilities inherent in charity, allow hope to flourish and faith to stand tall.

May hope become a permanent guest in your home.

About the Author

Adele Ryan McDowell, Ph.D., is a psychologist and writer who came to her current place in life through the frequent and not-so-subtle prodding of the gods. She likes looking at life through the big view finder and is a perpetual student who believes in the power of an open heart, and a good laugh.

Dr. McDowell is a psychotherapist with more than 30 years' experience; a teacher of meditation, intuition development, and psychospiritual issues; an international workshop facilitator; and energy healer.

Adele's work focuses on helping clients find hope and balance in the face of crisis, trauma, and grief. She has worked with suicide, domestic violence, and sexual assault crisis hotlines, survivors of Hurricane Katrina, 9/11, the Joplin Tornado, clients struggling with addiction as well as those moving through profound life changes such as grief and health challenges. Adele's work integrates psychology with spirituality to help clients move through crises and restore balance by accessing core soul issues and to discover, and find comfort in, their authentic selves.

Adele is the author of the Amazon best-selling *Balancing Act: Reflections, Meditations, and Coping Strategies for Today's Fast-Paced Whirl*. Adele is a contributing author to the best-selling Shift Awareness anthologies, *2012: Creating Your Own Shift* and *The Sacred Shift: Co-creating Your Future in a New Renaissance* as well as *Love and Oneness*, an Abundance in Manifesting anthology. Adele's next book is *Making Peace with Suicide*.

Adele -- a Texan by birth, upbringing, and pioneering spirit -- lives in Connecticut where you will often find her driving along the highways and byways, singing loudly in her car.

You can learn more about Adele, her writing, and her thinking at www.adeleryanmcdowell.com.



The articles were originally published on my column, "wavelength," featured on United Press International (UPI)'s religionandspirituality.com from 2006 - 2008 or on my blog, theheraldedpenguin.com from 2010-2012.

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