

VISIONARY

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CHANGE

DEALING WITH IT

ACCEPTING IT

CREATING IT



VISIONARY

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ELDER'S PERCH

I believe *change* is inevitable, even pervasive in our lives. As a child, change struck from one school year to the next, or was thrust upon me by my parents. My body changed constantly, too. And I was aware the world was changing well beyond the front door of our three-bedroom, two-bath ranch house in Huntsville, Alabama. I'm old enough to remember the assassinations of a president and a civil rights leader, the scandal of Watergate, the tragedy of Vietnam



By David Salyer

and the surreal exclamation point that followed it all: disco. Okay, after all that, who can blame people for just wanting to tune out and dance? As a child, it rarely felt as if there was much I could do about changes. They were coming at me from all directions, internally and externally. But as an adult, I confess I'm not one of those people who hate change. I tend to embrace change, and more often than not, I initiate it on my own. Ultimately, I now believe change is usually about the choices we make. Way back in 1992, I chose to attend my first Gay Spirit Visions fall conference never anticipating how it might change my life or me. Now, after thirteen conferences and eleven non-consecutive years as a member of The Council of Gay Spirit Visions, I am stepping into the role of Presiding Elder.

Before I talk about what this means to me, I'd like to take you briefly back through the last eighteen years and illuminate some of the changes I've witnessed during my association with GSV. First, I feel very fortunate to have met many of the men who created GSV and organized the first conference in 1990; some are living, some are not, and some continue to show up at events. When I came along in 1992, there was no "council," only a planning committee. There were no titles, no mission statement or bylaws and no non-profit status. We were just a group of men who showed up at some designated meeting space at 10 a.m. on the second Saturday of every month to talk about putting on a conference.

We pulled off six conferences before some of us dared to consider becoming a legally existing, not-for-profit corporation of the state of Georgia. With incorporation came structure, bylaws and officers. In our first year of existence as a legal entity, we selected five *Elders* – Presiding, Recording, and Bursar plus two more – *by drawing names from a bowl!* Everyone else was called a planner. Today there are seven Elders, nominated, discussed and approved by the entire council. The rest of the men comprising the council are called *Stewards*. Over the past eighteen years this process has included Radical Faeries and Pagans, Jews and Catholics, a bevy of Democrats, at least one Libertarian and, yes, a Republican.

GSV has evolved considerably as an organization. We began by organizing and facilitating our annual fall conference, but now offer winter and spring retreats, publish a newsletter, maintain Internet-based communications and sponsor a variety of events, including potlucks. Each year we strive to be relevant and inclusive, examining new ways to serve men who love men. The composition of the council changes a bit every year as some men choose to leave and fresh faces show up at the table. One thing hasn't changed: we are all volunteers who work by consensus, looking for solidarity of opinion. Everyone on council has a chance to speak and be heard. I'll concede it can be challenging and frustrating, but ultimately a far more rewarding experience than operating by majority rule. It's taught me patience and discipline...and reminds me I don't always have the best idea in the room.

There have been four presiding elders before me, Bernhard Zinkgraf, Martin Isganitis (Treewalker), Craig Cook (Craigalee) and Michael Varnum (Ma'el). And there are other men on the current council whom I believe would make a fine Presiding Elder. But as GSV enters its nineteenth year, it's going to be me. If you already know me, you know I'm an instigator, a lightning rod and a jester with formidable mother-fucking organizational skills. I hate glitter and no one has ever given me a spirit name that stuck. None of that is likely to change.

Honestly, the first time I was asked to consider becoming Presiding Elder, I declined. But when asked to reconsider

Continues on next page

Dearest Brothers:

I am excited to be working on my 3rd issue of *Visionary*. It was only one year ago when I was asking myself if being editor was something that I could see myself doing. Well apparently it is because here I am. Talk about a change, a couple of years ago I could not have imagined myself in this role.



By Al Taylor

At this year's fall conference we looked back at our lives when we were 18 years old. For me this brought back many unpleasant memories. At the age of 18 as well as many years before that my home life was a disaster. Searching for a sense of family in my life led me to a Pentecostal church. Unfortunately Church only reinforced those feelings of guilt which

society had begun teaching me to have concerning the homosexual urges that were then becoming acutely strong. At this point of my life all I wanted to do was get out of my parent's house and away from this small town which seemed to only support young boys that played football and chewed tobacco. This process of looking back to my life at 18 reminded me how unhappy I was then. It brought back feelings of loneliness and sadness which consumed me as a teenager. Thinking back to this time made me feel those terrible feelings again.

Once I realized how depressed I was becoming I had to change the way I was looking at the situation. So fortunately I decided instead of focusing on how my life was such a car wreck at the age of 18, to start reminding myself of how far I have come since then. I was able to see

the positive changes in my life since the age of 18. And with that simple change in my thoughts I really prevented myself from falling back into my victim mode. My sadness began turning to joy.

This is how GSV has helped me change. Since my first conference in 1996 I have changed a lot. Although I do not consider every change a positive one, overall my life has changed for the positive. I have learned how to change the way I perceive things. At the age of 18 I was ashamed of my sexuality, while today I am able to embrace my sexual orientation. I have learned that if you change your thoughts you really can change your life.

Al lives in Farner, TN where he is working on his dream of opening a Spiritual Retreat Center. He may be reached at adtaccountant@yahoo.com.

The Paradox of Change

It seems to me, as many of the authors remark in the following *Visionary* articles, that change is constant and unavoidable. Yet, the paradox is, the more I change, the more I stay the same. Somewhere, buried deep inside, is my connection to Spirit, to the Universe, to the Godhead. There is part of me that is profound, unchanging, unalterable. As Rainer Maria Rilke wrote:

My eyes already touch the sunny hill,
going far ahead of the road I have begun.
So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp,
it has inner light, even from a distance –

and changes us, even if we do not reach it,
into something else, which, hardly sensing it,
we already are;
a gesture waves us on, answering our own
wave...

but what we feel is the wind on our faces.

What I am learning as I trudge the path of my life with all of its vicissitudes, is that the changes have arrived. I sometimes shunned and resisted them; I sometimes accepted them with eagerness; there have been changes that have entered into my core and remained long unnoticed. These changes, without exception, have slowly opened my connection to Spirit. As I slide down the razorblade of life (thank you, Tom Lehrer), I am opened to the unchanging and unchangeable nature of Spirit (loving and whimsical), as I am opened to my commonality and communion with other humans and humanoids, who are my mirrors and life essences.

As I change and grow, I live holding the tension of this paradox I call life: the desire to know and control all *versus* the learning that if I let Spirit do her work

unencumbered by my ego, and I let go, my life blossoms. As my life changes inexorably, I move from control to letting go. As my life changes, I move toward Rilke's something else, what I already am. Join me in this fabulously grand journey. It's a hoot!



By Migs Halpern

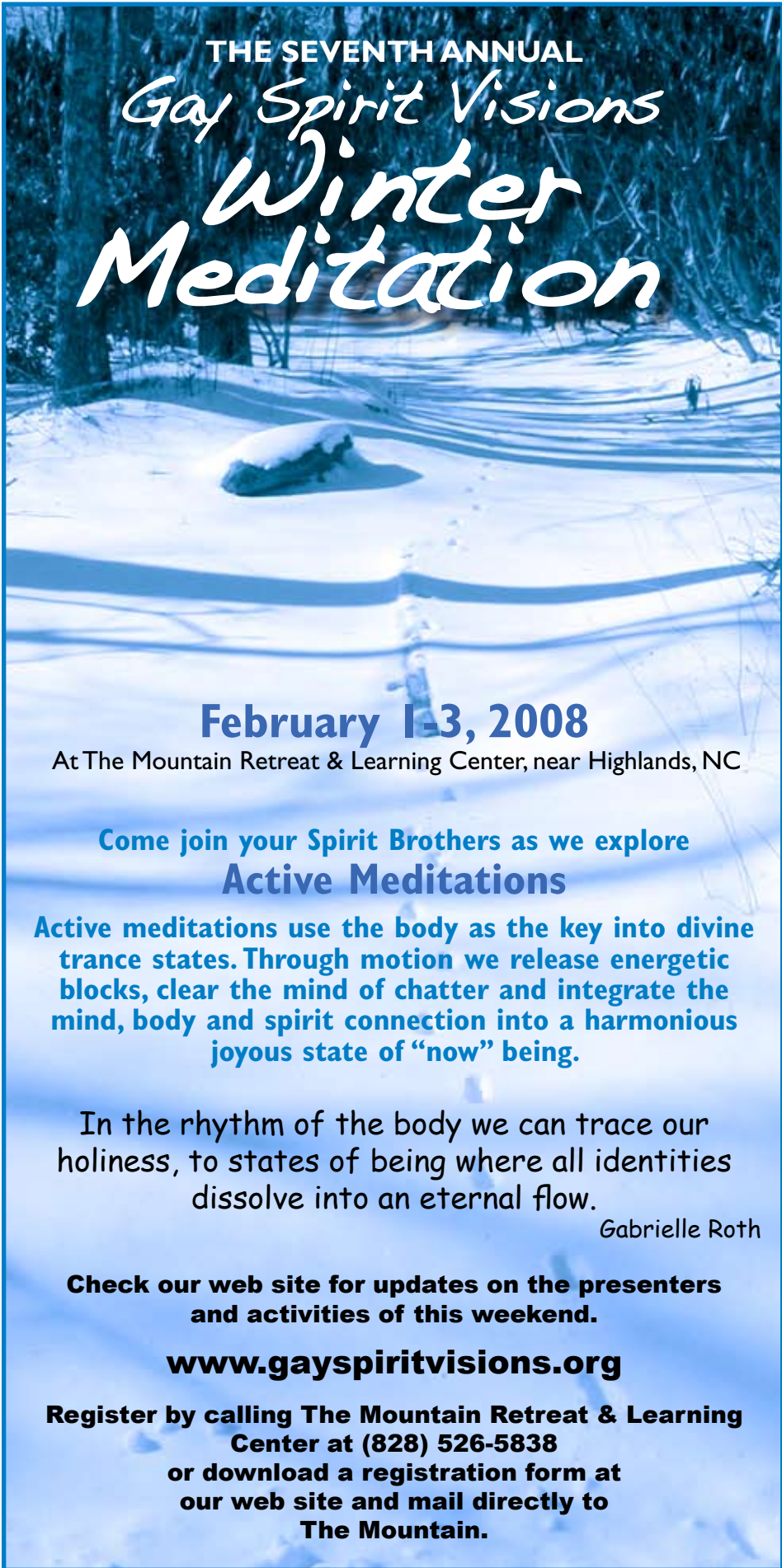
Migs Halpern is a social worker living in Asheville, NC. He lives happily alone, and would welcome a partnership with another spiritual, seeking man. If you have any questions or comments about his expository remarks above, email him at oso@mhalpern.com.

Elder's Perch continued

by men I have known a long time and respect enormously, I chose to step up. At the fall conference, Treewalker offered his congratulations, saying he was pleased by this development after seeing me rise up through the ranks over the years. Then, flashing that inimitable

smile, he added, "or rather dragged kicking and screaming through the ranks." And so what does it mean to me to be the next Presiding Elder? It's not about the title, it's still about the work – I take pretty seriously the business of creating safe, sacred space for men who love men.

David Salyer is a retired journalist, and HIV/AIDS educator and activist residing in Atlanta, Georgia. He is currently single, not desperate. Contact him at cubscout@mindspring.com.



THE SEVENTH ANNUAL *Gay Spirit Visions* *Winter* *Meditation*

February 1-3, 2008

At The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center, near Highlands, NC

**Come join your Spirit Brothers as we explore
Active Meditations**

Active meditations use the body as the key into divine trance states. Through motion we release energetic blocks, clear the mind of chatter and integrate the mind, body and spirit connection into a harmonious joyous state of "now" being.

In the rhythm of the body we can trace our holiness, to states of being where all identities dissolve into an eternal flow.

Gabrielle Roth

Check our web site for updates on the presenters and activities of this weekend.

www.gayspiritvisions.org

Register by calling The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center at (828) 526-5838 or download a registration form at our web site and mail directly to The Mountain.

Photo: Lem Arnold

Please feel free to suggest future themes for *Visionary*. Here is a list of some upcoming themes.

- Overcoming Addiction
- Thoughts or Visions of the After-Life
- Removing Judgment

Please contact Migs (oso@mhalpern.com) or

Al (adtaccountant@yahoo.com) to suggest a future theme or to volunteer to write an article for an announced theme.

For questions, comments, suggestions or submissions concerning *Visionary* please contact Al at

adtaccountant@yahoo.com or visionary@gayspiritvisions.org



Our Mission Statement

We are committed to creating **safe, sacred space** that is open to **all spiritual paths**, wherein **loving gay men** may explore and strengthen spiritual identity.

We are committed to creating a spiritual community with the intent to **heal, nurture** our gifts and potential, and **live with integrity** in the world.

We are **committed to supporting others** in their spiritual growth by sharing experiences and insights.

To fulfill these goals we facilitate annual retreats and conferences, sponsor social events, publish a newsletter, and maintain Internet-based communications for men who love men.



CALENDAR

GSV POTLUCKS

GSV Potlucks in Atlanta, are held the fourth Saturday of the month at 7:30 p.m., unless otherwise noted. GSV potlucks are drug- and alcohol-free events.

November—Mike Goettee, Roy Smoot and Marty Harris, maxglitz@mindspring.com

December—Wendell Johnson, louis8@hotmail.com

January—George Miller, Aagm8888@aol.com

Beginning in 2008, please check our site for locations: www.gayspiritvisions.org.



Hosting a potluck is a simple and effective way to serve GSV. Please let us know if you can host.

Contact Bruce Parrish at bparrish@earthlink.net.

GSV HEART CIRCLES

Held the second Sunday of every month at 7:30 p.m., hosted by Wendell Johnson and Lem Arnold. For location and more information, contact Wendell at louis8@hotmail.com or Lem at lem1951@mindspring.com

GSV COUNCIL MEETINGS

The GSV council usually meets on the 2nd Saturday of each month at 1151 Sheridan Road in Atlanta. They begin at 10 A.M. and usually finish before 2 P.M. Any GSV brother is welcome to attend. We also encourage our brothers to consider coming to the table as a council member. Please contact any council member for more information.

GSV GATHERINGS

The dates for GSV events at The Mountain in 2008 have been set as follows:

Winter Meditation Retreat — Feb 1-3, 2008

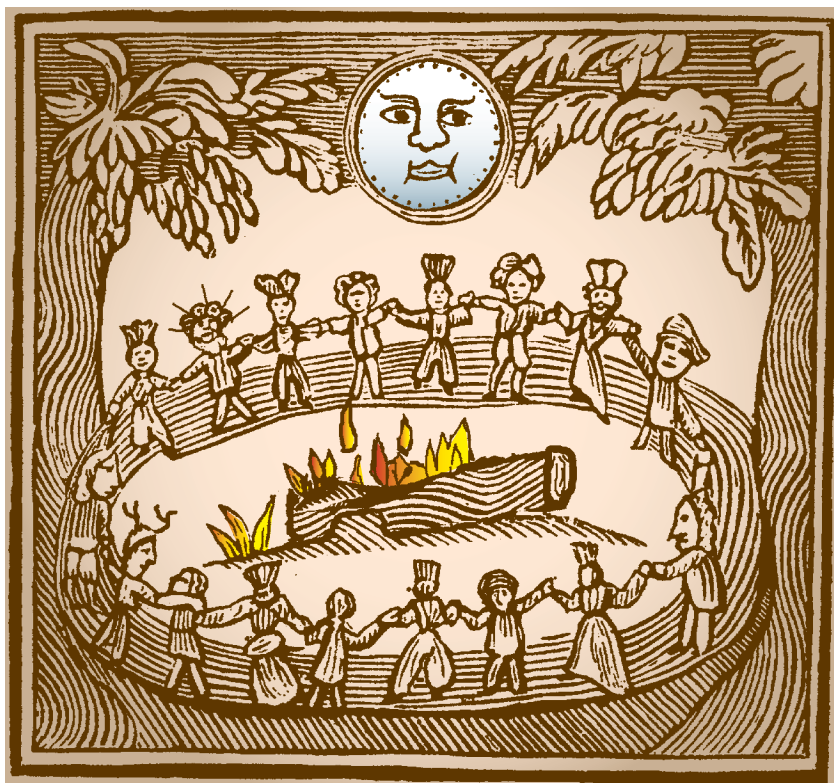
Spring Retreat — Apr 11-13, 2008 (tentative)

Fall Conference — Sep 18-21, 2008 (with optional Wednesday, 9/17)

We look forward to seeing you at The Mountain!

Dear Brothers:

Steve Deitchman recently passed away unexpectedly while having a medical procedure on August 20. Steve had attended a number of GSV events including last year's fall conference. He participated in the Asheville group, *ManSpirit*, as well as other Asheville-area gatherings. He worked at Gaia Herbs in Brevard, NC.



FEATURE SECTION

CHANGE DEALING WITH IT, ACCEPTING IT, CREATING IT CHANGE



The More Things Change...

The more things change, the more they stay the same. Seasons change. Money changes everything. We live in a world of constant and rapid change. We change channels, change lanes, change stations, change our hair, our clothes, and our minds. And



sometimes people change their minds about us. We spent a lot of time talking about being 18 years old at the last Fall Conference. That was the age I came out to my parents.

I wanted to share some of the changes I went through then, and how I got to where I am now.

I remember as a young child being horribly shy and afraid of everything around me. I hid behind my parents and depended on them to protect and shield me. I felt close to my family, and couldn't imagine my life without them. But growing up, I knew something set me apart from my family. I felt profoundly different and out of place. Where we once had been close, my secrets kept me separate and apart. My world was changing inside, and I was afraid to let my family know who I really was. I was 15 years old when I understood what "gay" meant. And once I accepted that, I knew that I had to define my world and reality. I wasn't the perfect son, or the perfect student, or even the perfect friend. But I knew that I could be the perfect me, when I decided what that perfect me was. I was curious and tentative, and fiercely protective of my emerging identity. Changes were washing over me geometrically, and I couldn't even begin to keep up with them.

I remember my parents watching me closely, curious about the man I was becoming, but not really understanding. I was changing within my own fabulous chrysalis, fueled by the Village People, Solid Gold, and movies like *Fame* and *Xanadu*. When it finally became apparent to my parents that we needed to have a conversation, things didn't go

too well. One of our strengths as a family has always been our ability to communicate; both the good and the bad. But I had emerged a new creature, and my parents wanted me to change. As a family, we are all fiercely stubborn and opinionated. My parents never changed their minds when they were set on something, especially my father. I remember when I told them I was gay, my father asked if I had ever had sex with a woman. When I responded "Hell No!" he asked, "Well how do you know you're gay?" I asked him if he had ever slept with a man, and he said "Hell No!" and I asked him "How do you know you're not?" We fought and argued and said a lot of things we would all come to regret. Things weren't so great for a while.

But it didn't stay that way. Our lives took many twists and turns. We got older, and the relationship with my parents evolved. I've spent time talking to my parents about those early years and our struggles. Frankly I was surprised by my parents' candor and honesty, especially my father's.

They told me that while I was growing up, they had hopes, dreams and ideas of how my life was going to be. They imagined fairy tales with weddings and children - the whole nine yards. When my "gayness" started to assert itself, my parents' hopes and dreams started to erode. My parents felt horrible guilt for even suspecting I was gay. My father felt extremely guilty that he couldn't protect me from all the pain and ridicule he was certain I would face. They thought being gay was a horrible life sentence and had no point of reference except their own Midwestern experience. They couldn't find a positive replacement for their dreams. When I finally did come out to them, and said the words "Yes I am gay," it confirmed their darkest fears. They likened it to a death, because the man they thought I would become would never come to be. And while I was excited and proud to be gay, they felt sadness and fear. They were mostly afraid that I would never find happiness.

Over time, I found happiness and sadness, successes and failures. I've lived a normal life very similar to what my parents had imagined I would live when I was young. As time went on, and my parents shared parts of my life, their ideas of being gay changed. They realized that I was the same son they'd raised and loved, and that would never change. They saw their friends dealing with their children, and the various issues that revolve around life itself. They have often told me how proud they are of the man I've become. My parents have said more than once that they have always been glad that I was honest with them. They feel lucky and fortunate that we went through all that crazy shit so many years ago, and have had so many years to work through it. They have both thanked me for being honest. Because the gift of that honesty is, they know that I really am happy when I say I'm happy, and sad when I say I'm sad. They never have to wonder if there's something else going on. Where I thought my parents could never change, they did change. But I had to take a chance, and be honest with them so they could have that

chance to change. It was hard and painful at times, but sometimes we have to go through that pain to find joy. I know now that my parents only ever wanted me to be happy, the same that most parents hope for their children.

My mother and father truly see me for who I am, and love the real me, the true me. I feel so lucky to have such great parents. Way back then, when times were bad, I couldn't imagine having any kind of relationship with my parents. But seasons changed, times changed, and minds changed; my Dad's, my Mom's, and especially mine. I wish all my brothers in GSV can have that kind of relationship within their family.



Charles Foesch lives in Charlotte, NC with his two boxers. He works for The Charlotte Observer newspaper, and plays scrum half for the Charlotte Royals Rugby Football Club.

CHANGE: Source of Suffering, Source of Bliss



The Buddha said change, “impermanence,” (*anissa*) is the source of all human suffering. Seeking happiness people cling to what cannot be clung to because it necessarily changes in the grasp. All things end.



By Toby Johnson

The modern day process philosopher Alfred North Whitehead echoed that in proposing that the nature of evil can be expressed in two propositions: “things fade” and “alternatives ex-

clude.” In order to enjoy novelty, we have to let the old pass from consciousness; even for what is old today was yesterday’s novelty: time as “perpetual perishing.”

The gay-popular horror genre novelist Anne Rice expressed this idea mythologically in *Interview with the Vampire*. Her main character explains that the world hasn’t filled up with vampires because such immortal creatures regularly kill themselves after a few lifetimes, because they are overwhelmed with the experience of loss that comes from watching everything they knew and loved change and disappear into the past.

The rock group Kansas sang plaintively, “Don’t hang on. Nothing lasts forever but the earth and sky / It slips away and all your money won’t another minute buy. / All we are is dust in the wind.”

The gay *a cappella* singing group The Flirtations offered an answer to this suffering. They sang, “The secret of life is enjoying the passing of time / There ain’t nothin’ to it / All you gotta do is do it / Nobody knows how we got to the top of the hill / Since we’re on our way down / Might as well enjoy the ride.”

I think there are at least two lessons to be learned from contemplating the nature of change. One has to do with the importance of adopting developmental models of life and ethics. The other has to do with learning an attitude of enjoyment toward the future.

Traditionally in Western (Judeo-Christian dominated) culture, ethics and morality are based in the nature of the action at issue, not the age or life-stage of the person performing that action. To use sex as an example—because so much of traditional Western morality is obsessed with sex—if sexual procreation of offspring is only valid in marriage, then it doesn’t matter what age people are or what situation they are involved in. There’s no justification for sex before marriage and none for sex after, i.e., for widows, for instance, who are past childbearing age.

Yet the reality is that in our modern world of choice and courtship and serial monogamy, it would make much more sense to distinguish different phases or stages in a person’s life in which different sexual moralities would apply. Husbands and wives with children to raise have a certain obligation to maintain monogamy and not jeopardize their marriage. But young adults seeking to train themselves about emotional relationships and looking for suitable partners have an almost opposite obligation to pursue a kind of promiscuity in the interests of experiencing variety and a pattern of serial monogamy to test themselves in relationship with others. And seniors, perhaps now in “widowhood,” past the procreative period and, hopefully, fully satisfied with the joys of long-term togetherness might be encouraged to give and receive sexual and affectionate comfort with a renewed promiscuity that isn’t looking beyond the present moment.

In each case, the “sexual morality” is derived from who the people are, not what the “act” is. For the role of the “act” changes throughout a person’s life.

Similar phases, of course, apply to gay men and lesbians, though the emphasis then is not about creating a nest for children, but supporting a fulfilling and stable environment for the individuals. But again the point is the same: the morality isn’t in the sex act, but in the situation and developmental stage of the individuals.

These same phases can be applied to alcohol and drug use. And the criterion isn’t the legitimacy of using mind-altering substances, but the stage of life of the persons. Children shouldn’t use mind-altering substances because their brains are still forming and need to maintain healthy growth conditions. The young adults, on the other hand, are in their phase of adventure, risk-taking, and discovery. Having formed their characters and identities, they might benefit from realizing the arbitrariness of ego and reality by taking acid or tripping on ecstasy. Those middle aged stable people, again, are probably supposed to maintain reasonable sobriety since the developmental task of their life stage is achieving stability and satisfaction. But the seniors can again be liberated to explore the limits of consciousness.

Embracing change means understanding that the guidelines and good advice for people’s lives is also always changing. Lives go through identifiable phases; Erik Erikson devised his eight stages. Relationships go through stages and the feelings and interpersonal needs involved change predictably, and need to be honored for the sake of strengthening the bond; the late psychologist couple David McWhirter and Andrew Mattison wrote brilliantly about these stages in the lives of gay men. Faith and religiousness go through stages: what’s true for a child is not necessarily true for an adult—belief in Santa Claus is the archetypal example, with Biblical literalism the religious version; James W. Fowler described six stages of faith.

One of the biggest flaws in traditional moral theory, I’d hypothesize, is that the “rules” that are supposed to be applicable to everyone are made by males in late middle age when they’ve achieved the standing and authority to make rules, but also when the fires of youth have died down in them and the freedom of old age has yet to dawn. So the rules of stodgy old men have become the official morality of civilization. Hmmm.

The joke about the human condition is that “nobody gets out of here alive.” The way to “get out of here” is to do so *while* you are still alive. This is the esoteric meaning of the myths of afterlife and of “heaven.” The time to get to heaven is while you’re still alive and aware enough to experience it. The function of the myths of afterlife is to inform your meditation and spiritual practice to wake you up to blissful consciousness now.

This is what The Flirtations meant when they sang “Since we’re on our way down / Might as well enjoy the ride.” Remember the title of that song - it’s a life-saver of an aphorism: “The Secret of Life is Enjoying the Passing of Time.”

Whitehead described this shift in attitude when he wrote: “Time has then lost its character of ‘perpetual perishing’; it becomes the ‘moving image of eternity.’”

Buddha said the answer to suffering is

being more and more conscious and attentive in the here and now.

You know, we might be but specks of dust blowing in the wind. But it’s a lovely day. The sky is perfect blue. The sun shines warmly, bestowing life and raising the winds. The great rush of movement that is driving us through our lives is showing us a marvelous view, even if sometimes it hurts and sometimes we have to grieve. “All we are is dust in the wind” is great oc-

casation for joy and expectation and hope. It’s a great ride and you never know what might be coming up next.

Toby Johnson is the author of Gay Spirituality, Gay Perspective, Two Spirits, Charmed Lives, Secret Matter, Getting Life in Perspective, Plague, The Myth of the Great Secret, and In Search of God in the Sexual Underworld. He is the former editor of the



Dealing with, Creating and Accepting CHANGE

Oh, what comes up when faced with change.....

Fear? Anticipation? Dread? Excitement? New perspective? Growth?

For me, it can be any or many of those, and my intention is to continue on a path that includes change in how I view and experience life. Possibly the



By Ray/
Starshine

first time my creating change was brought to my attention was during the divorce procedures from Carol, my wife of 22 years. She, in an effort to explain why she was divorcing me, (though she said she “still loved

me,”) said, “you’ve changed, and I don’t like the new you.” I had recognized that to grow, I must change.

So, I responded instantly, and automatically, “Thank you” (for acknowledging that I changed, not for not liking the new me). It was not my intention to remain the same, subconsciously, I imagine.

Even my wise Rabbi said to his congregation, “If, spiritually, we remain the same, we are stagnant, not growing. Which is the same as sliding rearward or downward.” I concluded that without change,

life is shallow and contains less meaning.

Dealing with change, for me, is about facing the reality as is illustrated by the quotation, “The only consistent thing is change.” The Universe will continue to bombard our everyday existence with a new look. We can fight it, deny it, or welcome it for the opportunities it offers. Even the occurrences that at first appear negative and might be labeled problems, I have found bring with them a new perspective: hence another potentiality for learning and expansion of whom I am.

And, then there is dealing with the changes that occur in other people in my life. Obviously, Carol could not deal with mine. I had some struggles with each of my children as to where their paths and decisions took them at various points of their life. For instance, our daughter, who had grown up in what I felt was a healthy Jewish home, in her college years decided to be baptized.

I survived this, and so did she. As it turns out, shortly thereafter, she bravely changed again, and realized that choice/change did not fit her lifestyle. She admitted she had taken a road that, once

she was upon it, did not feel right, so she returned to her Jewish roots, and today is immersed in a life as an observant Jew, raising two kids to be the same. Whew! What a change!

In 2005, when my male lover in Florida chose to seek a different Spiritual path, excluding me from his life as a partner, I was put to the toughest test of my life that I recall: accepting the change in another human being. It was a difficult pill to swallow.

What I conclude is that the changes I intentionally implement in my life are generally somewhat easy for me. But not always simple or without struggle.

Those that the Universe hands me, and those that occur in the behavior and actions of my relationships, are often a greater test of another, sometimes tough, but valuable, positive, character trait, *ACCEPTANCE*.

Namasté
Ray/Starshine

Ray is a not quite single, retired, Gay, Jewish member of Religious Science who currently lives in Atlanta/Decatur. He can be reached at ray-peace2u@hotmail.com

CHANGE: The Ascension of Dissension

Evolve or die... I heard this from my freshman science class instructor. Something about dinosaurs and a plethora of other species going extinct. The premise is that if one does not change with the changing environment, one will eventually be required to move out of this environment or... *Die!* As I continue to grow into maturity, this statement becomes more and more profound for me.



By Joe Kiser

I grew up in the rural south, the Appalachian Mountains of Virginia, where change was seldom encouraged. Rather, change was more often discouraged. "Change? What on earth for? Things are just fine the way they are." Thus was created the great inner struggle of my life. My own personal yin and yang. "Evolve or die" versus "Change? Heavens no!"

I felt the desire to change at an early age. I was just a wee lad of 6 or 7 years when my attraction to boys and men began to manifest itself within me. As I continued into adolescence, I began to believe these feelings to be evil - nasty even. I was taught that this desire was Satan's way of plucking me from the hand of God. I knew that if I wanted to be liked by friends, loved by family, God and country, I would have to change my evil ways. My desire for change was not that I wanted to be unique or different. Instead, I wanted to change in order to be the same as everyone else, to be another sheep in the flock, content in being exactly like everyone else. Such a simple desire, and yet, a desire that would cause havoc for a significant portion of my adult life.

Things just move slowly in the south, and for me, more slowly still. All through my teenage years and well into my adult years, I did everything I could in order to change myself into something 'normal'; or, at least, to appear to be normal. In high school, everyone had me figured out. "Faggot," "pussy," "queer boy," all became syn-

onymous with me. And still I knew that I *could* change. I knew, deep in my heart, ('cause the bible told me so), that I could be just like them: those cruel people that I wanted so much to be 'just like.' As I moved into adulthood, I knew that I would have to leave the 'comfort' of my own personal hell in order that I may start anew. A clean slate on which I could be the well respected heterosexual man that my father so desired to have as a son. I would find a good woman to settle down with, make a few babies and live happily ever after. I would force my star shaped peg into the square hole of normality. So, at 19 years of age, I packed all of my worldly belonging into my car to begin my journey into 'straight' manhood. In my chartreuse convertible VW bug, wearing my sis-

Instead of "just do it" try "just let it."

ter's Jordache jeans, I began my quest for the oh-so-illusory 'straight man' that I knew lived within me.

And so, it happened. I married. Tah-dah! And here you have it folks. Straight man!! (Straight man!! Straight man!! Where do you come from? [Thank you, Bernice]). This proved, once and for all, that change was possible. All it took was persistence and a strong will to make myself acceptable to my family, God and country. Acceptable to all except me. I began to die because of the constant supply of energy this required. Slowly but surely, happiness and joy left my life.

I was able to maintain this façade for seven years before the first visible cracks appeared. Through the 'rabbit hole' that was the World Wide Web, I began to al-

low the demon living within me to come out and play. My glass house began to shatter. I remained married for another 3 years before separating from the wonderful lady that I so desperately wanted to desire. After 11 years of marital separation, I became divorced. (Change? What's the hurry?)

After many years of self exploration and lots and lots of therapy, I allowed myself to change into what I was all along. And I began to understand, it wasn't this change that caused so much turmoil in my life. Rather, it was my resistance to this change that caused the pain. Sometimes, perhaps, change isn't something that we make happen. Sometimes, perhaps, change is something that we let happen. To allow ourselves the trust to step off the cliff. Not to force ourselves to fly, but to allow ourselves to soar on the wings that we have had since birth.

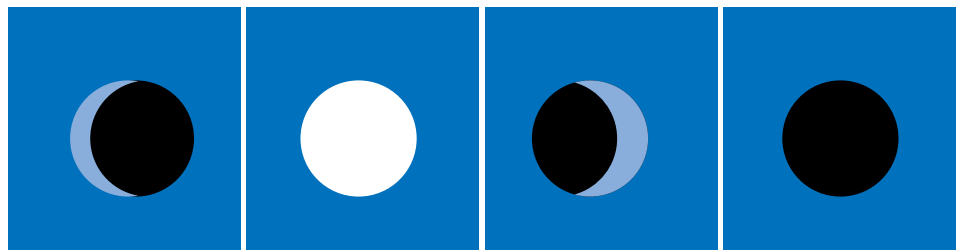
Note to self:

New Mantra... Instead of "just do it" try "just let it."

And now, as I believe less and less that I am evil and unworthy of love, I cherish my sexuality. I have evolved. I now understand that I am worthy of love and respect. That I am not "less than." I now understand that I am a creative and beautiful creature, with a desire to live, love, be loved, and be happy in peace. I am evolving so that I may trust and love myself completely and wholly, without doubt, without question. As I should have been doing all along.

Now then, isn't that a nice change?

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INSIDEOUT



Childhood was a time for growth, learning and change. Yes, change in many ways and forms. As I was growing up my thoughts, ideas, sense of what was right or wrong, and even emotions were guided and influenced by my parents, family, teachers



By Arnold Peluso
"Dragonfire"

and others. My real self, mind, body and spirit, that I was born with was shaped and *changed* to conform to generally accepted thoughts, behavior and ideas of our society. You might say that this was a form of

programming. Of course everyone had their own program and tried to change me to their ways. All of this led to some conflicts, turmoil, and confusion. Can you just picture it?

Meanwhile, as I was getting older I was told to "think" for myself, use my mind, deal with change, etc. HOW?

I suspect this story in some form or other is true for most of us.

How to deal with this life of change is the challenge. Over the years I have broken free of some programming that was not me—not right for me. I accept and understand that much of childhood programming was good and is needed even now. I know also that even now and throughout our lives there will always be people and situations trying to influence or change our life. Knowing who I am and living life fully keeps me in control.

Now back to that "think for myself, use my mind, deal with change, etc." I now realize that *dealing with change* also means dealing with its close family: fear, lies, evil, pain and emotions. Through the years I have used many different approaches to deal with and make changes in my life; some worked, some didn't. In the past, my favorite ways of dealing with change has been to let it go away,

ignore it or give in and let it happen. I now realize this wasn't good, although I survived and did reasonably well: not living life fully, just alive and existing.

Now I deal with change and my life by something I call "Living Life Inside Out." This allows me to focus on me, my thoughts and feelings from inside. I completely block old "programming" and think for myself.

Living Life Inside Out means:

- Taking "me" (thoughts, feelings, ideas, etc.) *OUT* of my head, heart or wherever they are and creating my change.
- Coming from inside with external influences to institute change.
- Living life fully. Tell your story!
- Don't like it (anything)? Changing it starts with you.
- Letting go, bringing power/energy *OUT*. Not holding back.
- Follow through on your ideas, dreams or thoughts that just seem to pop into your head at any time.

By living inside out you are letting that real you, without "programming," be free as you were meant to be.

Some thoughts and questions that help me:

- When I say no, don't or disagree, I am prepared to ask myself "so what do I want?"
- Inspiration within is waiting for me. It's time to go deep.
- Doing what is right? Or, should that be: Doing what you feel?
- Doing what matters.
- Knowing when to stop or change.

On this journey of life, change is with you always, until the end. Embrace it fully and Live Life Inside Out!

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INVOCATION

For the men of Gay Spirit Visions, and in memory of James Broughton

Spirit infuse us
 Spirit bemuse us
 Spirit engage us
 Spirit enrage us
 Spirit enfold us
 Spirit embold us

Raise us and blaze us
 Bend us and mend us
 Lead us and feed us

Spirit embrace us
 Spirit deface us
 Spirit refine us
 Spirit define us
 Spirit anoint us
 Spirit disjoint us

Hold us and mold us
 Anneal us and heal us
 Bless us and bliss us
 And take us back home

—Dave Cable

Encuentro

I'm grateful for the cute boy who makes my food
 at California Tortilla.
 He has dreams in his eyes,
 tastes in his smile.
 Salsa. Avocado. Mango. Lime.
 When he hands me the order, he grins
 and gives me extra chips.

Occasionally he stops by the table
 to ask "Can I get you anything?"
 I request a napkin since I've spilled
 White creamy horchata in my lap.

I like that he has touched my food.
 It feels like a blessing.

Someday, I'll get my nerve up
 to ask if I can cook a meal for him.
 After all, my mole is uncompromising,
 my tamales, hot and fresh.
 When he's had his fill, maybe
 he'll tell me of the dreams
 in his eyes.

—Bob Strain 9/28/07

Nasty

All my life I was told that I was nasty
 All I knew is that I was as I was
 I knew I felt different
 But I did not understand what nasty meant

I grew and became aware of my difference
 Instead of girls I like boys,
 Boys like myself.
 They excited me
 And I was drawn to them.

But others told me that was nasty.
 My parents, my friends, my church
 And even the man who stood in front
 Of my church
 Who said "God is Love"
 Pronounce that I and others like me
 Were Nasty.

I tried to fit in their mold
 But found that to do so
 Made me deny the self that God had created
 And therefore
 Made me nasty to myself.

I had to come to grips
 With not my nastiness but my difference
 I had to reach down
 And Find "Love" in my difference.
 I was fortunate to do so.

Today I know
 God is Love
 And nastiness
 Is only in the eyes of humans.
 And in the words they say
 to each other.

Today I know, "God is Love"
 And I am careful of
 How I judge others,
 And especially
 What I call Nasty.

—David B. Witt

A LETTER FROM AN EVERGREEN PROJECT RECIPIENT

I would like to start by thanking all the men that were involved with creating, funding, and organizing the Evergreen Project. Without you wonderful people I would not have been able to experience this life-altering event. Through the Evergreen Project I was able to participate this year, but after experiencing this wonderful environment I will surely be coming back again.

This weekend allowed me to realize so many things about myself, and the male gay community at large. It made me realize that we as gay men can love ourselves, and be okay with that. I found that a gay man can accept himself, and have his own conception of a higher power to carry him through this darkest time. Most importantly I realized that others love us, no matter our imperfections.

This year's theme of "18" was especially meaningful to me. Many of the problems that I have faced about my own spirituality and sexuality developed around this time in my life, so it was especially meaningful to hear that many other gay men had been through the same experiences.

GSV
Evergreen
PROJECT

I remember Scott quoting a Rumi poem that says "don't go back to sleep." My first response to that was that this weekend is the first time I have felt awake. Walking through this world filled with such judgment, and discrimination I had long ago fallen asleep to hide from all the negative feelings. This experience, filled with such wonderful loving men, woke me up, brought life back into the shell that I was, and filled me with hope.

The breeze at dawn has secrets to tell you; Don't go back to sleep.
You must ask for what you really want; Don't go back to sleep.
People are going back and forth across the doorsill where the two worlds touch.
The door is round and open. Don't go back to sleep.

—Rumi



Front (left to right): Marco Sanchez, Robbie Mortone.
Back (left to right): BJ Smith, Jeremy Martin

Walking away from this retreat I carry with me the hope for more time with such wonderful men, hope for the future of the world that we live in, and hope that each and every one of us present there can change the world around us into a loving, accepting environment like we have found on The Mountain.

None of this would have been possible without the Evergreen Project. So many of the younger gay population are wandering around lost and hiding, just as I was. When and if they are ready, this program can help them find the love and acceptance that is needed to wake up. I hope that each of you remembers this program, and when that young wanderer walks into your life, lost and full of doubt, that you point them to The Mountain to find what we have already found there.

Thank you to all that were present for being yourself, for showing such an abundance of love, and for letting me know that no matter what, there are others out there that support and love me. Thank you for WAKING ME UP!

—Jeremy Martin



Photographs by Jim Creasy and Lem Arnold



Well.... It's kind of like Hogwarts



We Gots **TALENT** 'in' **STYLE!**
The Talent Show

Men! Men! Men!
Where ARE the men?

◀ **Oh. Here are some (kind of).**



Photographs by Jim Creasy

Remember!
"Bad taste costs no more!"

