

Summer 2008

# VISIONARY

THE JOURNAL OF GAY SPIRIT VISIONS

Volume 14, Number 2



IMAGININGS OF THE  
***Afterlife***

# VISIONARY

*Visionary* (ISSN 1533-8231) is the journal of Gay Spirit Visions and a publication of The Council of Trusted Elders of Gay Spirit Visions, Inc., a Georgia not-for-profit corporation recognized under Section 501(c)(3) of Internal Revenue Code of the United States.

**Gay Spirit Visions**  
Mailing Address:

P.O. Box 339, Decatur, GA 30031-0339

**E-mail:** info@gayspiritvisions.org

**Website:**  
www.gayspiritvisions.org

## Council of Trusted Elders

David Salyer,  
Presiding Elder

Tony James  
Elder of Finance

Kim Pittman  
Elder of Service

George Miller,  
Elder of Archives

Phil Robst,  
Elder at Large

## The 2008 Gay Spirit Visions Council Members

consists of the Council of Trusted Elders  
plus

Jennings Fort, Migs Halpern, Bruce Parrish,  
Chase Robinson, Ray Taratoot and Al Taylor

## Journal Committee:

Al Taylor, *Editor*  
Migs Halpern, *Assistant Editor*  
Mike Goettee, *Design & Production*

## Submission Queries:

visionary@gayspiritvisions.org

Please put "GSV Visionary"  
in the subject line.

**Address changes & advertising queries:**  
visionary@gayspiritvisions.org

Copyright ©2008 Gay Spirit Visions, Inc.



# ELDER'S PERCH

I was going to use this space to talk about this year's fall conference – a dynamic annual event that nourishes my soul, reminds me what I cherish most about being a gay man and leaves me with a little bit of a love hangover. To be honest, I need a conference right now because 2008 is shaping up to be one of the most challenging years of my life, a roller coaster of events and emotions that have genuinely worn me down.

It started off well enough. In early February, GSV launched a fresh new website and presented our seventh annual Winter Meditation retreat – *with its highest attendance ever* – at The Mountain



By David Salyer

Retreat and Learning Center. But then I received personal confirmation from The Mountain's President/CEO, Tom Warth, that this tranquil, inclusive retreat center faces serious financial challenges that threaten its ongoing existence. While this is not particularly unique in the world of nonprofits, it was a devastating piece of news to digest about the place that has been our spiritual home for every fall conference since the beginning.

Later in February we heard that our dear GSV brother Jon Whiddon passed away after an extended battle with esophageal cancer. I'd last seen him at the 2007 fall conference; even in the middle of treatment his light had not been diminished. My father had succumbed to the same disease, but I thought if anyone could beat this it would be Jon – a gifted artist and impossibly optimistic, radiant hunk of a man. Jon's passing reminded me of other recent losses – *Cassandra, George Smith and Cary Jackson* – men entirely too young to have left us.

By March, the GSV council had begun coordinating the annual spring retreat at Camp Mikell, a conference facility outside Toccoa, Georgia. Intense council discussions brought us to the heart-breaking consensus that it was prudent to consider alternative retreat facilities for GSV should the worst-case scenario

unfold and The Mountain is no longer operational. We had to acknowledge that the future of GSV might very well depend upon us locating another place that would accept us as unconditionally as the folks at The Mountain have for nearly two decades. My head tells me what makes practical business sense; my heart directs me to pray daily for the financial recovery of The Mountain.

I have nothing but praise for Camp Mikell – *a beautiful setting* – and its staff – *cheerful cooperation and a warm reception*. But turnout for this event was the lowest in memory. Was there resistance to the idea of gathering at Camp Mikell instead of The Mountain? Evaluations from the event suggest that men generally liked Camp Mikell, but I knew that didn't tell the whole story. Privately, several long-time GSV brothers told me, "GSV belongs at The Mountain." This led to an unsettling question for me: *Is GSV so intrinsically connected to The Mountain that we would not survive its loss?*

I didn't get to dwell on that for long. Right after May's spring retreat, my laptop collided with a strawberry smoothie and spent two weeks in rehab. And the first email I received after its return was notification of a former colleague's death, a man I'd worked with in HIV/AIDS education for nearly a decade. On a Sunday after church, he got into a friend's car, quietly dropped back in the seat, closed his eyes and never woke up again. He was 52 years old and HIV-positive.

A month later I would turn 51, having lived 15 years with HIV myself. Four days before that birthday, I broke up with a man I'd been seeing since March, my first boyfriend in over six years. Two days later, blinded by the sun, I missed a stoplight and struck another car, totaling both vehicles and sending the other driver to the emergency room. Thankfully, no one was seriously injured, but I've never been in an accident so bad the airbags opened, ambulances arrived and my sleep was disrupted for weeks afterwards.

I had to release the car for salvage and get my belongings out of it. Some CDs, the stray stuff that collects in the glove compartment...and in that pocket on the back of the passenger seat, behind a copy of the Metropolitan Bay Area Street Guide (a souvenir of my California residency) was a book called *Living*

Continues on next page

Editors' Page

**A note from Al:**

**H**e was born on 11/17/54. He died on ??/??/?. One day this will be part of my obituary. My earthly journey will have ended, and I will have crossed over to the afterlife. What will be there to welcome me? What will I experience when I get there? As I age I wonder about the next life more and more. As a young child, I saw myself here on the ground and God up in a cloud looking down on me. Then as an older child, my beliefs evolved with the guidance of Christians to believing in God and Jesus and the sins of mankind. From there as I reached adulthood



By Al Taylor

and began to think original thoughts for myself, I threw out all religion. At that point my spirituality was "thrown out with the bath water," as some might say. Now over the past 10 or so years, my spirituality has come back, growing from a seed, seeking the true meaning of my life. As I seek the meaning of life, I have endless possibilities from which to pick and choose.

As I seek the meaning of life, I have endless possibilities from which to pick and choose.

As I seek the meaning of life, I have endless possibilities from which to pick and choose.

- Could I be a spiritual being having an earthly experience? I have not ruled this one out.
- Could this really be all there is? I wonder!
- Am I a man made in the image of God as the Bible says? I say no. To this I say I believe man has made God in the image of man more so than God having

made man in his image.

- Am I here due to some of my actions in a past life? I wonder!
- Was I part of the Universe and chose the parents and the life to which I was born? Who knows, but if so, what was I thinking?

And the possibilities have just begun. I could go on and on, but I won't; however, I do have more thoughts written by five of our brothers. I hope you enjoy reading them as much as I did.

*Al lives at a place he calls Hemlock Hollow in Farner, TN. He enjoys the company of his seven dogs and looks forward to visits from friends and family. Contact him at [adtaccountant@yahoo.com](mailto:adtaccountant@yahoo.com).*

Assistant Editor

**Brief Thoughts on the Afterlife by Migs**

To me, afterlife and its meaning is captured in Mary Oliver's poem,

*The Summer Day*

Who made the world?  
 Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
 Who made the grasshopper?  
 This grasshopper; I mean—  
 the one who has flung herself out of the grass,  
 the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
 who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down—  
 who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
 Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.

Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
 I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
 I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
 into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
 how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
 which is what I have been doing all day.  
 Tell me, what else should I have done?  
 Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
 Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

**I have listened to many of the myths of death. I have been a hospice social worker, helping some transition, as well as being there to help my mom and**

dad transition. I have learned a lot, and I have learned nothing.

The last three lines of the poem strike me as the essence of living in contemplation of death. Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon? Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?

So because I will soon, too soon, die, I live gloriously. What else should I have done?



By Migs Halpern

*Migs lives in Asheville, NC. At 56 years of age, he is working and playing at having a truly healthy relationship in his life. You can contact him at [oso@mhalpern.com](mailto:oso@mhalpern.com).*

Elder's Perch continued

*the Spirit*, a compilation of writings by gay American Indians. Not mine. No idea how it got there. Flipping through it, I discovered a photograph tucked inside – Cary Jackson, a GSV brother who had died in early 2007. Cary had never been a passenger in my car.

A week or so later I began writing the brochure copy for our nineteenth annual fall conference. I needed biographical in-

formation on our keynote, Clyde Hall, an internationally recognized activist and authority on Native American culture, dance ritual and folkways. A chill ran up my spine when my research revealed he was a contributor to *Living the Spirit*.

This year's fall conference feels potentially more meaningful to me than ever before, and not just because it's my first as Presiding Elder of Gay Spirit Visions. I need it. I need my spirits lifted. I need to

be surrounded by familiar faces as well as the brave and beautiful faces of those attending for the first time. I need to be overwhelmed by men-loving-men energy. *And I need to be at The Mountain again.*

*Involved with GSV since 1992, David Salyer is a retired journalist and HIV/AIDS educator and activist residing in Atlanta, Georgia. Contact him at [cubscout@mindspring.com](mailto:cubscout@mindspring.com).*



## GSV Fall Conference XIX

September 18-21, 2008  
(Optional Early Arrival 9/17)

**In celebration of our nineteenth year,** The Council of Gay Spirit Visions welcomes Clyde Hall, an internationally recognized activist and authority on Native American culture, dance ritual and folkways. Of Shoshone-Metis descent, he is one of the founders of the contemporary Two Spirit Movement of Native American LGBT people. In 2000, Out magazine included him on its list of the 1,000 most influential gay individuals in the U.S. during the 20th century.

Join us at The Mountain Retreat & Learning Center near Highlands, NC, our spiritual home for every fall conference since the beginning. Visit [www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org) to view our online brochure and registration information.

## GSV Evergreen PROJECT

**T**he Council of Gay Spirit Visions recognizes that young gay and bisexual men sometimes struggle to integrate their sexuality and spirituality. They are more visible than ever before, but where is the acknowledgement that spirituality may be as intrinsic to their sense of identity as sexual orientation? In response, we created The Evergreen Project, a fall conference scholarship program for men 21-30 years of age.

We encourage you to identify and recommend gay and bisexual men, 21-30, to us for consideration. The Evergreen Project committee will communicate with each man, describing our mission and offering details about the fall conference experience. Those approved will be our guests at the 2008 fall conference, September 18-21.

To recommend a young man for consideration, please contact: Chase Robinson at (828) 507-8668 **or** [evergreen@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:evergreen@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.

Please check our site for locations:  
[www.gayspiritvisions.org](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org).



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

Contact Kim Pittman at  
[service@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:service@gayspiritvisions.org)

### GSV COUNCIL MEETINGS

The GSV Council usually meets on the 4th Saturday of each month at 1151 Sheridan Road, NE in Atlanta. It begins at 10 A.M. and usually finishes before 2 P.M. Any GSV brother is welcome to attend. We also encourage our brothers to consider becoming a council member. Please contact any council member for more information.

### GSV GATHERINGS

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

Fall Conference — Sept. 18-21, 2008 at  
 The Mountain (with optional Wednesday, 9/17)  
 See announcement on the previous page.



Lem Arnold

## COMMUNICATING THROUGH GSV ONLINE FORUMS

(The old [LISTSERV@LISTSERV.AOL.COM](mailto:LISTSERV@LISTSERV.AOL.COM) has been replaced.)

FROM OUR WEBSITE

### TWO OPTIONS (You may join one or both)

#### GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Group

This discussion group is designed specifically for men in the metropolitan Atlanta area of Georgia to communicate or share information about upcoming local events. Click on this link for details about joining: <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GSVAtlanta/>

#### GSV-LIST Yahoo! Group

This forum allows you to communicate with GSV brothers and other subscribers from diverse spiritual backgrounds in the United States and all over the world. Click on this link for details about joining:

<http://groups.yahoo.com/group/GSV-LIST/>

## FAQs:

#### What are GSV Atlanta and GSV-LIST Yahoo! Groups?

The GSV-LIST and GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Groups are discussion forums for gay and bisexual men to explore spirituality, tribal identity and personal growth in a safe, supportive environment. Men from all spiritual paths are welcome. There is no cost to join.

By joining one or both of these forums, you will receive email addressed to the members of the list containing:

- Timely notices of GSV activities and events
- Announcements by members of the list
- Messages from other subscribers
- News of interest to gay and bisexual men

The GSV-LIST and GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Groups are as active, timely and relevant as the participants make it!

#### What if I have more questions about the GSV-LIST and GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Groups?

If you have more questions about these groups, or how to use them once you join, you may direct your inquiries to: [info@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:info@gayspiritvisions.org)

#### Can I receive a once-daily DIGEST form of either group?

Yes! As an alternative to receiving each individual message as it is posted to GSV-LIST or GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Group, you can receive a daily digest of all the postings of the previous twenty-four hours. Simply select the DIGEST option when you join either group. If you change your mind, you can always go back and change your settings to receive individual messages.

#### Are there GUIDELINES for participating on the GSV-LIST & GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Groups?

GSV-LIST and GSV Atlanta Yahoo! Groups have hundreds of subscribers; some contribute to the dialog regularly and some mostly observe or "lurk." These forums are open to all men who wish to discuss and explore the many facets of gay male lives and spirituality. Some of the men have attended numerous GSV conferences and retreats and have known each other for years or even decades. Others have only met via the Internet.

GSV welcomes men from all spiritual paths and our goal is to create safe space for men to interact – even in cyberspace. Your cooperation is needed to accomplish this, so please take the following guidelines and expectations into consideration before joining these discussion forums.

For more detailed guidelines visit:

[http://www.gayspiritvisions.org/online\\_forums/faq.html](http://www.gayspiritvisions.org/online_forums/faq.html)

If you have questions or comments, write to [info@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:info@gayspiritvisions.org).

FEATURE SECTION



**F**rom my teacher and “wise old man,” the renowned comparative religions professor, Joseph Campbell, I learned that the most important function of afterlife myths is as meditation inductions. In meditation practice or in intense prayer, holding in mind a concept of life beyond life reminds you that you are bigger than the life you are living, bigger than your ego. Thinking about afterlife expands consciousness.

Indeed, the myths of afterlife point to the levels of consciousness available to human experience through insight, understanding and religious discipline. Afterlife is a metaphor for mystical experience, for finding the Golden World, for seeing heaven on earth, for being in presence of God.

There is a telling parallel in the experience of high romance. When you are in love, you think and say things to your partner like: “I will love you forever,” “I’ll never leave you.” Terms like



By Toby Johnson

forever and never are slippery. They are a source of anger if the romance fades for one person and the other says, “But you promised we would be together forever.” Forever and never are not about the future. Such words are really concerned with the depth of intensity in the present. “I will love you forever” means “I love you with all my heart and soul now.” Similarly, heaven and hell are said to be about “forever,” but they are really about right now. Heaven is intense joy and vision *right now*. Hell is intense unhappiness and bad fortune *right now*.

Heaven is not somewhere else. Heaven is an attitude toward our experience. Eternity is not a long time. Eternity is *right now* with all its intensity and immediacy. If we are conscious, we can live in eternity now, free from the pain of change and loss because we can rise to a higher perspective from which we can experience our entire life as a coherent and unified whole.

Understanding what afterlife myths are

about does not mean there is no survival after death, anymore than our analysis of the language of high romance denies that love may endure. But it does mean that the point of these myths is not to displace us from the present with the promise of pie in the sky sometime in the future.

It is said that the desire for continued existence beyond death was the origin of religion in the first place. As human beings evolved enough to sense their own existence and the personal existence of their loved ones, they were horrified at the prospect of life being snuffed out. They were also guilty about the lives they took in order to live—guilty about the animals they ate and the enemies they killed. Thus they invented gods and afterlives to mute their horror by promising them death isn’t real and final.

## AFTERLIFE AS METAPHOR FOR LOVING LIFE

Certainly the notion that our loved one is in heaven is part of a beneficial denial in the grieving process. But it is also more than that. Afterlife mythology creates a context for all religious imagery. The notion of God is a layer of such mythology. A personal God residing in heaven is able to take our loved one to his bosom. In the West where God is personal and the myths are taken literally, the model is continuation of personal existence beyond death. In the East where God is more elemental and the myths are more lyrical than historical, the afterlife model is reincarnation, i.e. an impersonal afterlife. Life goes on, but not “you” the person.

Beyond the dynamics of grieving, afterlife myths function as maps to mystical experience. In the Gnostic Gospel of Thomas, Jesus says, “Do not ask when the Kingdom of God will come. The Kingdom does not come by expectation. The Kingdom of God is spread out across the face of the Earth and men do

not see it. Behold, the Kingdom of God is within you.” (Logion 113)

### Going Through the Bardo

There is a notion in Tibetan Buddhism called “the Clear Light.” This appears in the *Tibetan Book of the Dead*, which provides instruction for the soul undergoing the journey through the “bardo state” between one life and the next. The text is to be read to the deceased in the days following death, because, confused and uncertain, the soul in transition needs direction.

What the soul experiences in its journey includes a variety of lights—reddish lights, smoky blue lights, pale lights—that lead down paths to different possible incarnations (some of them quite unattractive: as an animal, for instance, or as a “hungry ghost” or a denizen of hell). The soul needs help in ascertaining which colored lights to follow and which to avoid.

Immediately upon leaving the body, according to this mythology, the soul sees Absolute Reality in a blinding vision of Clear Light, one with no color, not even white. If the soul realizes what it is seeing, Buddhahood is attained at that moment. But souls usually miss the experience because the light is not what they were expecting. Then some sort of reincarnation will befall the soul. The expectations of what afterlife will be like are so confused they prevent us from entering afterlife when it is presented.

We cannot possibly know what happens to individual consciousness after death. Perhaps as we die, if we are sufficiently aware and not too caught up in our expectations, we can experience consciousness waking up from our individuality as we wake from a wonderful dream. We become part of the life force that is ever being reborn in new human lives. Or, perhaps, eternity is in the death experience itself. As individuality fades we might experience our whole lives in an eternal moment that goes on forever because the individual perspective that could see an ending disappears into greater consciousness.

Continues on next page

Continued from previous page

If we are conscious enough to perceive our individuality and our placement in space and time fading into nonexistence, time might seem to stretch out forever. Our focus might widen to allow all our life to seem as one complete experience—full of all the people we have loved and all the happiness we have generated—all existing in the eternal moment. That is heaven. If instead we cling to our ego and try to maintain selfhood and consciousness of being in a particular perspective, we may find ourself going out of existence in a state of fear, trying to stay alive because we think we have not yet experienced enough love and happiness. That is hell.

As we begin to die, we can think “Oh no...” or we can think “Oh, wow!”

### How Gay Souls Get Reincarnated

There is a notion in Tibetan Buddhism that hints at a certain spiritual identity for gay people. That is, we can read this myth as a reminder of how to live a rich and contributing life. According to the popular belief, after death souls wait in the bardo for another incarnation. In this disembodied state, they float around, waiting for something to happen, looking for something to interest them. Frequently they become sexually attracted to the sight of human couples in sexual intercourse. (If you could be invisibly present anywhere, wouldn't you go looking for sex?)

If a particular soul happens to be too close, too attentive and too personally involved when a sperm and ovum unite, that soul will be pulled into incarnation as the offspring of that sexual union. That is how souls get reincarnated.

A homosexual soul, however, floating in the bardo state, can watch lots of acts of homosexual intercourse without ever being drawn into incarnation. In fact, it seems like it would never get pulled into incarnation at all. Thus homosexual souls must come back only because they choose to. Perhaps they become bored in the bardo and shift their consciousness from lust to compassion for the suffering they observe.

### Karmic Patterns

Karma is Sanskrit for “cause and effect.” The myth holds that things that happen to us, as if by coincidence, are sometimes caused by processes we cannot perceive. In turn, the events of our lives sometimes have effects we cannot perceive. The metaphor is based on the assumption that bad things should happen to people because of bad things they have done and good things should happen because of the good they have done. Since this is not verifiable, the causative behavior must have occurred in a past life.

Karma and the myths of reincarnation are about the effects on us in the present of the behavior of those who have lived before us. The myths are a reminder of the effects our lives will have on those

---

As we begin  
to die, we  
can think  
“Oh no...”  
or we can  
think  
“Oh, wow!”

---

after us. Karmic patterns are the resonances of other lives in ours. What are called our past lives are the ripples in the spirit field, the vibes, that have intersected in such a way as to produce us.

We resonate with the karmic vibrations from the lives before us. Like radio receivers tuned to pick up certain frequencies and not others, our minds play and replay certain patterns, like songs on the radio. These are experienced as phantom memories and innate preferences. Mythologically, they are called past lives.

### Follow Your Bliss

Understanding that afterlife myths are about mystical vision suggests to

us that we are seeing the Clear Light all the time—right now. Buddhahood/Christhood is available to us at every moment. The Beatific Vision shines forth everywhere around us. But we do not see it because it is not what we were expecting. Our beliefs and opinions, likes and dislikes get in the way. We choose the Beatific Vision by choosing things as they are, being conscious of what is real, not resisting. This is a central teaching of spiritual wisdom. Joseph Campbell said, “Follow your bliss and don't be afraid, and doors will open where you never knew there were going to be doors.”

There is a parallel in Campbell's words to the final words of the play *Auntie Mame*. You wonder if he was trying to quote Mame. This archetypally gay character ends the play, luring her grandson to the banquet of life, by saying, “Oh, the doors I will open for you ... doors you never even dreamed existed.” (Don't you think all gay men need God to be their Auntie Mame!)

Bliss is a technical term in Buddhism. It does not mean mere happiness or satisfaction. Rather it means fulfillment of who we really are, realization of Buddhahood, accomplishment of the goals that drive us to find meaning in life. To follow our bliss is to disregard all the rules that tell us how we are supposed to behave and to seek our own path.

To follow our bliss is to live in such a way that we can always love our experience. It means to make choices and decisions about our life that we will not regret. It means not giving up our dreams and settling for security or acceptability in other people's eyes.

### Want What You Get

The adage goes: “Ride the horse in the direction it's going.” The way then to respond to the problems of gay life—looksism, ageism, shallowness, loneliness, rejection—is to accept that this is the way it is. This is the world we live in. We may not like all the things that are in it. But it does no good to resist things the way they are. We begin by simply acknowledging the truth of what is so. Only once this is accomplished can we figure out ways to deal with it.

If you are left-handed, what is the point

Continues on next page



of complaining about handwriting going from left to right? Maybe that is backwards to you. But the only thing you can do is learn how to hold your pen so you do not smear the ink.

After all, looksism, ageism, etc., are projections of your own resistance. They bother you in others because you deny them in yourself. As a community we want to resolve these various problems, but we cannot resolve them by complaining about them or blaming other people. One of the basic rules of life is: "Don't complain about things except to someone who has the power to do something about it." Complaining, kvetching, and making other people wrong just makes you unhappy—and puts out bad vibes.

The wisdom and esoteric traditions tell us that when we choose things the way they are, they will transform. Releasing resistance, replacing it with clear but passive intention and lucid visualization, allows things to change. This is the secret of magic. Accepting things as they are means accepting our talents, pursuing what we are good at and like doing, instead of what we should do. This advice also means accepting that there are some things in our life that need changing, some traits that need correcting, some skills that need training.

Working to fix our own problems and the problems around us is part of accepting things as they are. The attitude

of "no resistance" is a way of active, serene, disinterested participation.

Most of all, this age-old advice means loving life, loving *our* life, looking back on all the things that have happened to us and saying: "Yes, wasn't that wonderful—even when it hurt."

### The Meditation Practice

Holding such thoughts about dying and afterlife is a meditation practice for rising above ourselves. As we meditate about waking up and popping out of our body and floating through a "tunnel of light," we can shift our consciousness beyond our ego. The image of afterlife is a practice of mystical perception.

Realizing we cannot possibly imagine afterlife allows us to understand we cannot tell what is and is not the Clear Light. Once we understand this, we can understand that we see the Clear Light right now. Such a vision, always fleeting and available only in special moments achieved through meditation or psychedelic realization, helps us overcome the limitations of ego.

If we think we are our name and looks and body and the history we remember, there is going to be nothing left of us when these things fall away—as they inevitably will. If we understand instead that we are just a point of view of the consciousness of the universe, then even when that particular point of view

comes to an end, we go on.

When we see beyond ourselves, we can see that everybody else is also just a point of view of consciousness. Then when our ego sees other egos, it can rejoice in their joy, experiencing their joy as its own with no judgment, no disapproval, no jealousy. What a comforting meditation it is to see that the being inside the beautiful young men you see is you! They are not separate, alien entities. You can enjoy their beauty as a sign and manifestation of your own true beauty, their supple bodies as yours. This is, indeed, the meditation that founds a positive experience of pornography.

The images of the myths—and the exercise of seeing into and through them—are practices in awakening consciousness now. If we have seen heaven during life, we are more apt to recognize it after life. At any rate, if we can manage to experience heaven now, whether there is an afterlife or not, why wait?

---

Toby Johnson, *novelist, writer and former editor of White Crane Journal, only half-jokingly fancies himself "Joseph Campbell's apostle to the gay community." He and Kip Dollar, partners now for going on 25 years, live in central Texas.*

*This essay is adapted from Johnson's book Gay Spirituality: Gay Identity and the Transformation of Consciousness.*

---

## *In Memory of Our Beloved Brothers*

STEVE DEITCHMAN

ART "CASSANDRA" POLANSKY

CARY JACKSON

GEORGE SMITH

LARRY JACKSON

KING THACKSTON

WILLIAM MCNEELY

ROGER WEINSTEIN

JOHN MUNGO

JON WHIDDON

RAMON NOYA

RAVEN WOLFDANCER

I recently found out that a dear friend of mine, Peter, passed away just over two months ago. Around that time, something within me felt a need to get in touch with him. I dialed the two phone numbers I had for him; both disconnected. I sent out several emails; no response. I didn't really know. But, I *knew*. Eventually, his daughter replied to one of my emails. He had passed away unexpectedly. I think I cried. My mind was ok with the news but I found that my body shut down for almost two days after. Then I meditated, going into a theta state, and found myself on a familiar beautiful green hillside in the 4<sup>th</sup> Plane of Existence. There was my friend Peter, waiting for me. I sobbed and cried as we exchanged unconditional love and said goodbye...for now.



I was raised Catholic but never completed my Confirmation into the church. Early in my life I never felt connected to my church at all, or to God for that matter. To me, church was nothing but mechanical, empty rituals with an unseen god. I vaguely remember some teachings of Heaven, Hell, and Purgatory growing up. When my mom died when I was 11, I was so pissed off at God that for years I didn't even think about an afterlife or even want to be in the same Heaven with a God that would take my mom away from me. As I realized more and more that even as a young boy I was attracted to men, I felt there was no support for me in the church at all. I felt that the whole community hated who I was (homosexual). I (secretly) hated them all back. When I was old enough, I left the church and never looked back. I felt the need to seek out God on my own terms and not somebody else's version of what god was supposed to be. That personal quest eventually led me to Gay Spirit Visions.

I attended GSV potlucks for almost a

year before talking with the Body Electric coordinator about upcoming workshops. My interest was peaked and I finally did my first Body Electric workshop, *Celebrating the Body Erotic*. It totally changed my perception of reality and the way the universe really is (at least from my perspective). For almost two days, forty of us men were instructed in various tantric massage techniques to build erotic energy within the body. The workshop culminates with men exchanging tantric massages into what's called the *Big Draw*, full-body orgasm without cumming (aka ejection of consciousness).

I was lying on the massage table for almost 90 minutes, being massaged by at least 6 different masseurs. The time for my Big Draw was approaching. The music was so loud, the drumming, the breathing, the breath. The time arrived. I took three deep breaths, holding the last one, and clenched every muscle in my body. I lasted for over a minute in that contracted breathless state. Time stopped. My heart beat louder. I let go.

Every cell in my body felt incredibly energized yet very relaxed. I felt more grounded in my body than I ever had before. I laid there relaxing and listening to the music playing loudly in the background. This next part is when things really got interesting. After about five minutes, the masseurs were instructed to wrap the men being massaged with the sheets they were lying on. My entire body was shrouded; my life was never the same. I heard music from the movie *Schindler's List* playing in the distance. In my mind's eye, I started seeing the part of the black and white movie near the end where Schindler and his family are standing by their car about to leave the camp, surrounded by all of the Jews he helped to save. Suddenly, it wasn't Schindler in the middle of the group; it was me standing naked in front of everybody. Then I noticed it wasn't the Jews from the movie, it was all of my dead friends and relatives crowded around me. My

view was gray and white silhouettes, but blurry. I recognized shapes and characteristics and this fantastic knowing of who they were. The next thing I remember was this incredible warmth and brilliant white light off to my right. It was so bright that I could barely look directly at it. As I slowly turned to face it, I realized this fabulous glowing being was my dead mom. As I stood there naked in front of her, I felt no shame, no embarrassment; nothing but unbelievable waves of unconditional love radiated from her being. I felt my physical body convulsing, contorting, and sobbing in a way I have never experienced before or since. That day, I touched reality and got to see my mom for the first time in over 25 years. My views of the world and the afterlife as I believed them then were completely shattered. This experience couldn't be touched by any *belief* I was ever taught in Catechism.

Since that first very spiritually-expanding experience ten years ago, I've been on this incredible journey of expanded states of consciousness, spirituality, God, connection, grounding, and Unconditional Love. Various trainings and teachings along this path have made it possible for me to attain (drug-free) altered states of consciousness and gave me the tools to be able to experience my dead (physically) friend, Peter, on that beautiful hillside. For me, there is really no fear about dying or what's beyond death's door. I know I'll continue being a consciousness after I leave this physical body. I think the fear about death is gone for me because the "unknown" is "known" (for me). I experienced something outside of taught or believed reality. No religion or religious *belief* can top a felt sense experience; a *knowing*. Being a soul having a human experience, I still grieve for my friend's passing. But I also know I'll be seeing him again...soon.

---

*Phil Robst, LMT, lives in Atlanta, Georgia, and is a member of the GSV Council. A graduate of Atlanta School of Massage, a licensed massage therapist, and a ThetaHealing™ practitioner, Phil has established his own energy healing & massage therapy practice in Atlanta. He can be reached at phil@robst.com or through his website, www.massagexcursions.com.*

# LIFE IS GOOD DEATH IS BAD



I am not a scholar, though I have read a lot of books. When I think I am speaking from my heart, there is a good chance I may be speaking from someone else's heart. I want these words to come from my heart and be felt by you in your hearts. The hearts of those whose words I have read, your heart and my heart, now beat in unison. The rhythm of our collective breathing is in sync with the expansion and contraction of the universe. And I dare to speak to you about death, dying, and the afterlife.

Life is good. Death is bad. That sums it up. Why is this so? Fear? Fear of the unknown? No one seems to have been able to declare for sure what absolutely happens when we die. Let's assume that reincarnation is the way things are. When we are in the realm of spirit, anticipating reentering the realm of the physical, what might we experience? When we come into the physical realm, we do so by being born. Birth into the physical might be perceived as death from the realm of spirit. Is it possible we might experience fear of being born? We leave the realm of the physical through death. We leave the realm of spirit through birth. We might choose to alter our terms from death and birth to one term: transition. If we accept reincarnation as the way things are, we are in an exciting series of adventures into the realm of spirit and the realm of the physical.

There are metaphysicians who tell us that death is an illusion. What they mean by this is that we are not our bodies. Although, as we all very well know, we spend lots of time and energy with bodily concerns. When our bodies cease functioning, and who we really are leaves, we call that dying. One writer I read described it this way: "Our bodies

are lovelomachines. When our bodies are no longer capable of loving, we leave." A little over a year ago, the home I was living in had deteriorated to an extent that the cost of fixing it would exceed its value. The way things worked out, I moved next door. I had my former home demolished and witnessed its demolition. With detached amusement I watched as broken sections of what had been bathroom, bedroom, living room and kitchen were crushed in the jaws of a monster backhoe and deposited into a huge dumpster on wheels. I was what had animated that house. My former house is dead. My new house is alive. It's that simple. It's not complicated. Sorry if that's no fun. Death is a major move to a way of being without a body. The moment we are conceived we begin the process of dying. It's the only way to move on. It takes a lifetime to die. In a sense, we are terminally ill with life, the cure for which is death. And the process is so delicious, filled with drama, excitement, learning, growing, loving, dreaming, achieving and finally winding down, then it's time for the big move.

What can we do to undermine the experience of fearing death? Well, I'm confident that if we pay attention, we are given information and preparation to that end. One attention-getter that I have experienced is reading about and actually meeting people who have had near-death experiences. About 30 years ago, I was given a pamphlet that was an anecdotal account of a woman who had died and come back. She went to a place that was "heavenly." It was inhabited by many friends and relatives who had passed before her. There was indescribably beautiful music playing and angelic

beings were present. The environment was flawlessly pleasant. At some point she had an option. She could stay or she could return. She returned a changed woman; most significantly, she no longer feared dying. About that same time, Dr. Moody published his first book, *Life After Life*. It was promoted as being actual accounts of experiences of a cross section of ordinary people who had died and come back. Unanimously, all no longer feared dying.

So we go through the process of dying. We leave. Where do we go? Do we have options? Maybe a more intriguing question is: "Where would you like to go?" Some metaphysicians tell us there are as many options as there are people. When we die we go wherever we thought or hoped we would go. My favorite metaphysician says, "Wherever we go, if we find it's really not where we want to be, we can make a different choice." In death, as in life, we always have choices. That appeals to me. Another curiosity about life after life is: who will be there? My favorite response to that is, "Whoever we thought or hoped would be there will be there." That really appeals to me.

I can hear you asking, "What about heaven and hell? What about salvation and damnation? What about good people and bad people? What about those things?"

Well, what about those things? You have probably guessed my response. Whatever you choose is what you will experience until you change your choice, just like here and now. The one thing we can be confident about is that here and now will continue whatever you choose to experience. It will always be now and we will always be here. If, after reading these words, you still fear dying, that's all right. The actual experience will quickly replace fear with love. There is no reason to fear death, dying, or the afterlife unless you choose to.

---

*Gerry Cowley is an elder, semi-retired, and lives in Sarasota, FL. He has been attending GSV for 10 years. He may be reached at (941) 400-0922.*



# STARTING THE JOURNEY

## or Psychopomp in the Transition Process

The first experience with the “afterlife” that I recall was when my paternal grandmother made her transition. I was about 16 years old. In amazement, I saw that the world around me continued as if nothing had happened. A life lesson for me about this world, but I had little understanding of the transition process and what might be happening for the person/spirit making that transition.



By SassyCat  
TigerHeart

As a 30-something openly gay man and Seeker, I had been back in touch with my spiritual practice(s) for a few years: Reiki, Luminous Body Healing, Shamanic practice, energy stones. You name it and I was into it! I had been introduced to the term psychopomp in my shamanic training. Psychopomp is a term that translates from the Greek as Guide to the Souls. Shamanic practitioners are often trained in psychopomp activities as we stand in two worlds for most of the healing work we accomplish. A more popular phrase for similar activities is “midwife to the dying.”

My most personal experience with psychopomp activities was when my maternal grandmother passed away. I was in Columbia, South Carolina, and she was in Miami, Florida, where she had lived for about 70 years. As I write this, I confirm with her spirit that it is okay to share my experience with the group. “Danny, just tell the whole story,” was her reply. Since my sister and I both lived out of town, we supported our mother by one of us attending the visitation/funeral and the other attending the memorial service. Later, we both participated in scattering the ashes with our mother in the Rose Garden at Unity Village. But I digress...

I found out that my grandmother had transitioned after a day of offering en-

ergy sessions at a local metaphysical bookstore. That day was filled with interesting people with different sorts of energetic needs: a fascinating experience. I had scheduled a second day, which proved much more quiet, with few, if any, clients, almost as if the universe knew that I needed this time for my own processing. I left the bookstore early and found a quiet place at home to focus on my grandmother. My image of her was that she was having trouble moving forward, even though she was carrying a walking stick. She was definitely distracted, held back trying to collect all of her “stuff” before she moved on. One of my roles was to help collect these different bits and pieces of experiential energy. I knew that I was also present with her to provide encouragement and support.

In particular, I could sense that she needed additional strength and I suggested that she lean on the Tiger that was walking along beside her. “Here Gran, lean on this Tiger, who will help you on your journey.” Tiger’s presence with my grandmother confirmed for me that Tiger is our family ally. My role in helping to collect things seemed effortless. Everything came together in what seemed like an instant—no struggle at all. While I knew I was there to encourage and support her, it was clear that I was not to accompany her after a certain point. Her strength improved quickly after she touched Tiger’s back and she was able to proceed on her journey aided by the love that was being expressed by all who knew her and were sending prayers and best wishes to her and to the family.

This experience remains a powerful memory because I know that one of my roles in this life is as a healer. Another, as I learned at the recent GSV spring retreat, is as an Anchor of Light. The experience with my grandmother blended the two together. I anchored the light and held that space for my grandmother to accomplish the preparations for her

journey. I simply held a clear focus: to assist. And while the energy felt similar to a shamanic state, it also felt like a deep meditation. Just in the flow, I guess.

Men who love men, standing between the worlds of spirit and flesh, are often tapped as midwives to the dying. This traditionally shamanic role as psychopomp is a gift that we can give to our community and the broader society as well. Many of the men who read this may feel a connection to this vibration, even without having a conscious understanding of what is happening. I believe that this is an ancient and core function of our tribe. Our ancient and historic role models and allies are always just a call away: Archangel Michael; Melchizedek; Jesus; Saint Peter; Horus; Hermes; Buddha; Ixtab; Odin; Tayarti; Owl; Dolphin; Raven; Crow; as well as many others.

For me, the journey to the “afterlife” starts with the psychopomp activities, or guiding the soul to the next chapter in its glorious tome. What comes next? Being in Spirit! We have been in Spirit before—that expanded feeling of being part of everything and everything a part of us. Only when we come to learn and play on the third dimension in this world do we squeeze our consciousness into a single life form. To me, the “afterlife” is a place to celebrate all we accomplished in this life. There, we share our brilliant colors of experience, as Kryon would call them.

I am honored to be a part of this tribe and grateful for the gifts of love, peace, acceptance, touch, stimulation, and release that being present with you brings me. Stay in the light and experience the “afterlife,” or being present with all things, in your every moment!

---

*SassyCat TigerHeart (known as Dan Elswick in the third-dimensional world) is a healer experiencing the light in Columbia, South Carolina.*

# THOUGHTS ON THE AFTERLIFE

**G**rowing up in rural North Georgia, I was exposed to the dominant Appalachian world view of a land across the river where all trials cease. This literalist world view of inevitable suffering in the present world with a hoped-for time of rejoicing and reward for the faithful after death permeates the folk culture of the mountain South. I heard it so often that I have surely been affected by it, although now far removed by education and time. Probably on my deathbed I will hallucinate just those scenes.



By Pat Boyle

Nevertheless, my particular church group was less literalist and not fundamentalist. From them I got a different idea of time and eternity as described in Jesus' teachings beginning in Matthew 5. That is, the Kingdom of God begins in the now when sincere hearts open to God's loving reality. This kingdom continues in the heart of the believer throughout this life and into the next. Jesus called it the Kingdom of Heaven and its principles were rather shocking. Blessed are the peacemakers. The meek shall inherit the earth. Greater love has no man... Therefore, death represents only a transition into a richer experience of God's presence and the presence of all beings in whom God's love reigns. It is definitely a spiritual reality that we can participate in to some degree in the current life space. It is not even remotely related to earthly politics or nations and rulers. It is a totally different quality as well as quantity of life. When I was studying for the ministry, my fellow students and I would have long discussions about the difference between eternal life (life in a spiritual realm) and life eternal (everlasting). This line of thought also has influenced my imaginings about whatever lies beyond or continues.

Experience has also been a teacher about present and future reality. As I have matured over the years, I have par-

ticipated in many funerals both as a minister and a friend. I have been with the dying and have become more comfortable with death as a normal part of living. Sometimes I can sort of understand the old-timers when they talk about death as rest. In fact, many liturgical traditions present death as rest at the end of a long spiritual journey. On certain days, when multiple demands of caregiving, working, and serving the community get a bit much, I can understand a desire for a simple state of peace and rest. Some of my favorite musical compositions, especially Mozart's Requiem in D Minor, are various renditions of Requiem (rest). Some of them mix the desire for both light (*lux perpetua*) and rest. I think that there is probably a universal human longing for some sense of purity, purification, or oneness as a culmination of spiritual growth across the lifespan. Hinduism allows the individual soul to merge at the end of all the

---

I do not really conceive of an afterlife, but rather a continued life in a different form: some kind of transition.

---

reincarnations and upward karma back into the universal soul. Not really all that far from the Christian return of the spirit to God the Creator.

Some sort of merging or return is about where I come out these days in my thinking. I do not really conceive of an afterlife, but rather a continued life in a different form: some kind of transition. Merging back into the godbeing would be fine, or being absorbed into an overwhelming light would be fine, or just floating away into some eternal music would be grand. I really do not see anything concrete like the stories of mansions over the hilltop or the streets of gold that I heard about as a child growing up in North Georgia. Mansions, gold streets, or even an earth-like heaven with no evil or suffering? NAH!!

Life is too rich and complex and the good stuff is not even material, mostly love and caring and being with people one loves. So, I expect any afterlife to be much more abstract and spiritual than the common folk tales one hears from television evangelists. Eternal light suits me fine. Now, how would I imagine it? Well, my imaginary model would be a village of people who love each other, definitely a GAY ambience, with lots of natural beauty (mountains and waterfalls) and creativity and color (rainbows and rainbow banners). Music of course, singing, dancing. Sort of like an eternal GSV Fall Retreat, but not having to go back down the mountain. Did I say SEX? Of course, but I am not at all sure what that would be like with glorified spiritual beings. (Oh, there was that sweet little angel in Guadalajara some years ago). Well lots of togetherness and mergings, at least. So, in my imagination, you would be there with me and all my lovers and loving persons, just carrying on shamelessly. Shamelessly, I said. Of this I am completely persuaded: There ain't no homophobia in heaven!! Wow! I can see it now. Come on over into Canaan Land! Did I say Wine?

---

*Pat Boyle is Professor of Social Work and Dean of the School of Social Work at Dalton (GA) State College. Pat has been an ordained minister since 1980. He continues to serve in community ministries, especially with the frail elderly. He may be reached at [dboyle@daltonstate.edu](mailto:dboyle@daltonstate.edu).*

Please feel free to suggest future themes for *Visionary*. Here are some upcoming themes:

- Removing Judgment
- Forgiveness

For questions, comments, suggestions or submissions concerning *Visionary* please contact Al at [visionary@gayspiritvisions.org](mailto:visionary@gayspiritvisions.org)

## Poems – Michael Chavez

**River**

The great Mother Mississippi  
Falls into the valley  
Pushing into the abyss  
Of the rift in the land  
Mud so grand, oozing south  
To the mouth of the womb.

Her presence is felt here.  
Soon, we shall see the Moon  
Shine on the twists and turns  
That barges feint as their fuel burns  
Smoking against the flow  
That tumbles and rumbles  
Forever as they tow  
Masses of material and grease and things  
Towering over the grasses and corn  
As the Grandmother sings  
In low tones  
With others, all on their porches

Bones keep memories of when strangers came  
With torches  
And hoods  
And still, the barges tote goods  
And bads  
Up the lonely channel of water and dirt.

I fly over it with others in flannel and the occasional skirt.

Not thinking  
But sinking into my seat  
Not knowing  
But flowing with the bottom of the River  
Thriving and silty,  
I shiver at the thought of getting into my car  
And driving home  
Past the Dome and the bar

To civilization.

—Peregrine, September 2005

---

*Peregrine is an initiated witch from Atlanta. He celebrated his first Short Mountain Sanctuary Beltane in 2006, where he experienced another initiation. His friends and co-crafters who nudged him to the Sanctuary—especially Meadow, Aeolus, El, and Jimmy B.—and his new friend Do, are the inspiration for his poem. It is dedicated to them and to the magickal wishes bound to the Maypole.*

**Sanctuary**

It is here that things are sharpened.  
Sloping forest, falling toward me,  
Out of the clinging clouds.  
White shrouds  
The mud before they boil and fade  
In the extending shade  
Of the wet-strewn dusk.  
Musk and crescent moon;  
Silent, silty and salty,  
Seasoned by the undying scent  
Of woodsmoke.  
I choke  
On my chanting as I see  
The rays, weak, wizard-white  
And slanting  
To bless the knoll  
And the pole.  
There is not contrast between dirt and  
skirt  
Play and decay  
Drum and cum  
Circle and miracle.  
All seeps together as one  
And yet sharpening is done.  
The axe strikes at the ended year  
By so many, and by so many not here.  
Fear  
Is let out in screams and chops  
And laughter  
That lingers after  
The everpouring blue smoke stops.  
The sickle swipes and, with a mean tickle,  
Wipes away  
The May  
Of ancient hope.  
With a rope  
And a thud, and a cheer  
That comes with a tear,  
The tree that anchored us to the sky  
Falls with a sigh.  
All the ribbons glitter in the slippery sun  
And still, sharpening is done.  
The rain beats a stream into a moat  
But I remember best the smell of goat  
And the thundering music of fireflies  
And the taste of wine that toasted  
death  
That lingered innocently, giggling  
At the outrageous beauty  
Of hot, bearded breath  
In his ear.  
The rain comes juicy-fast  
And I run  
But even now, from the past,  
Sharpening is done.

—Peregrine, May 2006



A scrapbook from

THE 11<sup>TH</sup> ANNUAL GAY SPIRIT VISIONS  
*Spring Retreat*  
May 16-18, 2008

Mikell Camp  
Toccoa, Georgia



Photos by Lem Arnold