

SPIRITUAL DISCIPLINE & SACRAMENTAL COMMUNITY
by Donna Wagner

Several months ago Mary Warren Moffett and I were talking about how we take care of ourselves. She described how she had become aware as a young person that she was responsible for her own spirit - that if you depended upon some minister or teacher to tell you the meaning of life, you would be crippled for your whole life. She described how some people she had known had let Joe Mathews suck all of their creative ideas out of them, feed them back with some little flourish of his own, and send them into rapture, only to plunge back into mediocre despair until Joe once again pulled some creative insight out of them. She felt sorry for them because they were the kind of people who followed one messianic person after another because they lacked the courage to face their own nothingness and could only see their own greatness when it was reflected back to them in someone else's person.

I began to realize that ten years ago I was that sort of person. In spite of the fact that I had supported myself since I was 16, put myself through college, graduated cum laude, worked and traveled all over the world, my image of myself depended upon what others reflected back to me. And when they projected to me that what I was doing was less significant than what they were doing, I assumed they must be right.

I thank God that Joe died when he did, because if he hadn't I might never have discovered that I had the interior resources to create a meaningful life of service. He died just as I was beginning a two year assignment in India. I'm not very proud of my time in India. I don't think I contributed much. But it was the first time I said No to implementing someone else's vision. At that point I didn't have a vision of my own, and I had a very low opinion of what I could do, so I asked to be a secretary in the Bombay office. There I began to do documentation and proposal writing, rather than participate in what seemed to me to be the mindless replication of Mathews Maharashtra scheme.

At the end of that time, when I returned to the states, I still thought the only way I would ever be able to earn income was to do secretarial work. I was assigned to Research and I continued to do documentation, designing the Community Extension Module. I masterminded and coordinated the Symposium at the beginning of Summer 80. I produced the first series of IMAGES in ten years. I catalyzed and helped execute the Women's PSU and in the process came across materials which altered my life, in particular, the 11th chapter of Managerial Woman. I began to think I might be finding my niche when my assignment was changed to Funding & Authorization.

The trauma of this change was that no one ever consulted me, ever asked my opinion. I was confronted with being a billiard ball on someone else's pool table. What difference did it make that I had charted a new direction for research, if it could just be wiped out by people I didn't even know? It was my "zero" experience. I finally saw that I was less than nothing in other people's eyes because I was nothing in my own eyes. That if I didn't have the courage of my own convictions, I might as well commit suicide and be done with it. I decided to take charge of my own life. Using the methods in Managerial Woman, I put together a 20 year plan for my life, which I shared with two other women, both of whom subsequently built their own 20 year plans.

three implementing decisions were important. First, I resolved to study the actual decision-making process within the order. If I was going to stop being a billiard ball for others to move around, I would have to understand how things really worked. Second, I resolved to acquire financial acumen. My experience confirmed that Games My Mother Never Taught Me was correct - only people who exercise economic responsibilities have any influence in an organization. So I chose to accept the assignment which had in fact occasioned my most profound experience of self-annihilation. Third, I resolved to create a spiritual discipline by which to care for myself.

I recalled all of the various solitary office experiments we had gone through in the sixties. Joe had drummed into us the cruciality of a solitary spiritual discipline and we had tried Time/Task Journals, meditational readings, postures and scents as aids to contemplation, prayer writing, rood screens, colour quads, odysseys and on and on. None of them had ever clicked for me, though I can see now that many of my current practices probably date back to those early experiments.

I began the search for my own spiritual discipline by looking for pictures of female exemplars. I was convinced that the heart of my self-confidence rested with a profound acknowledgement of my femaleness and that I needed to hold before me images of women who had lived up to the highest that human beings were capable of. We had rediscovered the Goddess religions in the Women's PSU in 1981 and one of my exemplars is the Japanese Goddess of Compassion. Although some of the pictures have changed over the years, this framed montage is still the most important piece of my room decor, sustaining me and talking to me when I lose confidence in myself.

Next I went to fasting and journal writing. Karen Troxel and John Cock had done a ten day fast and when I got the books they had used, I asked Karen about a reflective process. She introduced me to the Progoff Daily Log. I did several liquid fasts, including one of about a month. I found the fasting helpful in learning to focus my life because it held me over against my vulnerability and finiteness. Then I got the book on the Intensive Journal Process and began working my way through it. This process is based on the understanding that spirit is in the realities of life, therefore you begin by going through a process of becoming aware of all of the realities of your own life. Two of the realities I confronted were my fat body and my unhappy marriage.

As I began to practice the Journal exercises on a daily basis, I began to grow in self-consciousness. The more independent I grew in my thinking and action, the more unhappy my marriage became. Finally I faced the fact that the basis upon which the covenant was formed was gone and that the commitments I'd made had been fulfilled. As we began to seriously consider divorce, a whole arena of my life which I had ignored revealed itself - myself as an economic creature. I was appalled when I discovered that I had abdicated responsibility in this arena almost from the first day of our 24 year marriage. Not being willing to confront the radical differences between us on the responsible use of money, I had chosen to live with the consequences of my spouse's decisions.

During our period of separation before the divorce, I began to keep a financial log and to separate our finances. I took responsibility for all of the work with my daughter on her college finances. I discovered that when I actually kept my own stipend, it was amazing what I had the resources to do. I decided to invest in my own training.

I felt the arena in which I was still weak was my spiritual discipline and my ability to relate to the spiritual needs of others. I enrolled in the Advanced Studies Program for the Intensive Journal Process. It was an entirely independent course of study which I basically did during Sunday discontinuity and holidays. In three years, I became a registered consultant. It never occurred to me to ask the corporate body for money for something which clearly had to do with my becoming a more responsible and useful member of society!

Another arena in which I decided to invest was in learning to care for my body. Through a Cyber-Vision course I finally began to understand the importance of exercise. I examined all of the options and decided walking took no equipment and was something I could do whatever city or country I showed up in. At first twenty minutes was hard. Later I got up to an hour and now I do an hour and a half a day. But it wasn't until Jan Barr introduced me to the Fit for Life diet that I began to change my attitudes toward food and my body.

It was my physical collapse last fall due to overwork and too much stress that finally made me realize that the problem was that I was still trying to control my body. I was not willing to accept it as a full partner for which I am responsible, but over which I finally do not have ultimate control. This time I invested in Shiatsu, Japanese acupuncture, to help me recover my physical strength. In learning self-Shiatsu to be able to care for my body myself, I discovered that even though I'd been living in this body for 47 years, I had never known it.

Today I have absolutely no doubts about my ability to financially support myself and others. I am totally confident that in addition to fundraising and consulting contracts for ICA, I could have any position in society I want. I have learned how to analyze decision-making processes and how to influence decision-making. The Order's process of consensus-building requires mastering skills like taking responsibility for your own thinking and homework, listening to, recording and reflecting on what other people say, being willing to articulate and stand behind the corporate consensus whether or not you agree with it, and taking the consequences of your decisions and those of the community. I experience my life as extremely rich and meaningful. I have a deep appreciation for a variety of spiritual practices, have several daily practices of my own, and enjoy the opportunity to lead Journal retreats for others.

During this entire ten year journey toward individual responsibility for determining the meaning of life, what I find interesting is that it has never drawn me away from the covenanted community of which I am a part. On the contrary, it has drawn me toward more authentic community. I find that I enjoy living in community, I enjoy the intellectual dialogue and the synergy of ideas it generates, I enjoy the global connectedness, I enjoy having an impact on society through corporate action, I enjoy all the multi-generational contacts, I enjoy coming "home" to my friends, I enjoy bringing outside resources into the community, I enjoy the quality of life which is possible at low cost (truly voluntary simplicity), I enjoy having friends who care for my plants when I'm gone, I enjoy having corporate celebrations, I enjoy sharing with people who are self-consciously on a spirit journey. And on and on. I ENJOY LIVING IN COMMUNITY.

And as I have become more of an individual, I believe others have come to more enjoy having me in the community. I think people count on me to do my enablement assignments, to always be exploring an intellectual edge, to be self-generating in my work, to be responsible in earning and spending income, to respect needs for confidentiality, to encourage them in their personal and professional journeys, to share insights from my spiritual path, to be loyal to and responsible for the covenanted community.

I have no problem with the discussion about the "big order" and the "larger we" as long as people understand that what they are talking about is the movemental dynamic in history. I think it's wonderful that some of us who have had cloistered minds are reawakening to the reality of fellow travelers in the world.

But I myself am clear that movements come and go, even spirit movements. My covenant is to be that dynamic that births new movements when the time is ripe and that departs from old movements when they have served their usefulness. I know that a sacramental core is needed to give focus and direction to movements and networks. I know that all movements require an intensification of their commitment and passion. It's impossible to draw a circle without a central pivot point. And without points of attraction, there is simply random activity. Nehru was part of the Freedom movement in India, but Gandhi was it's sacramental centre. It doesn't make Gandhi any better than Nehru. But imagine what the movement would have been if Gandhi had tried to become Nehru!

But everyone has to discover their election, whether it's to be Ghandis or Nehrus. There will always be those who dedicate themselves to the Mystery beyond yet within history. There will always be those who are fascinated with the Mystery, but whose love of self, power, fame, or family come first. For those of the Gandhian path, I personally believe it requires learning and practicing an individual spiritual discipline appropriate to one's temperament and history. I believe it requires taking personal responsibility for naming the meaning of life. I believe it means finding one's security in God rather than the community. I believe it means embracing perpetual change.

The covenanted community of which I am a part has a history and a tradition. I believe it stands for:

- Mission - being of service to the world
- Globality - being inclusive of all human expressions
- Discipline - being responsible stewards of the earth's resources
- Risk - being willing to stand between the no longer and not yet
- On behalf of - not seeking benefit for self but for the larger society
- Spirituality - defining one's own meaning, giving time to the meaning dimension, being in touch with the deeps

Last year I traveled and worked in thirteen primary units. I found in all of them many examples of the movemental dynamic and the sacramental core. The outer trappings of the Global Order may have changed in the last four years, but its essential integrity is intact in the individuals who have not gone whoring after the generativity of others, who have not attempted to imitate the charisma of others, who have not succumbed to the bourgeois materialism of the world, but instead have quietly and unobtrusively cared for their own spirit.

I think I may be starting to understand, "Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth." But I also wonder if it isn't time for some of these meek ones to rise up and claim their inheritance? I find myself wondering what Gandhi the strategist would do - for you see strategy, vision and spirit all come from the same source - raw courage and creativity. And these are all products of a regularly practiced spiritual discipline. And that which cultivates such practices is a sacramental community.