

CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  March / April 2004

Sexuality and Spirituality

As my colleagues and I step back to look at what it is we wish to say to each other and the community about sexuality and spirituality, we are reminded by the many recent news events what a salient issue this is.

A long and significant history records the split between spirit and body. Beginning at least with St. Augustine, the Church declared sexual desire to be a distraction from spiritual attainment and was to be denied and suppressed, allowing sexual activity only for procreation, as an obligation to God not as an expression of God's love. This is, without question, a concept that continues to find great acceptance in our western culture. Dualism stands as a beacon to many belief systems: right or wrong, left or right, good or bad, healthy or sick, gay or straight, happy or sad, and of course, body or soul, saved or lost, heaven or hell. The idea that our body is separate from and contrary to the spirit sets the stage for a severe struggle. This is why, for so many, the words *sexuality* and *spirituality* are seemingly incompatible. The fact that our bodies are the vessels for sexual desire comes in conflict with the idealized spiritual good, and we feel shame. James B. Nelson in his landmark book, Embodiment: An Approach to Sexuality and Christian Theology (1979), explores this theological phenomenon of the schism created when spirit and body are treated as polarities. When the spirit is split from the body and its inherent sexuality, we become owners of our bodies, but are not in our bodies. Even our language betrays our feelings about this when we speak of having bodies rather than being bodies. We are split apart with a wound to our spirit in the journey through this incredible gift of life.

Fear of our sexuality results from this split. The damage done through this dualism and resultant fear of the sexual self is manifest in the nightly news and in the offices of counselors every day. The view of our sexuality as the dangerous "enemy within" can be observed everywhere in our culture. (Note the increasing number of people plagued with sexual desire problems and performance problems, or the on-going debate over sex education coupled with the epidemic of sexually transmitted disease.)

Splitting sexuality away from the other aspects of personality makes it difficult to name or experience our natural sexual/erotic arousal. So how is it that erotic stimuli are everywhere — in the movies, on television, in advertising — yet eroticism is seldom a part of serious conversation and is often absent from the bedroom? When sexual desire is aroused in this polarized conflictual environment, we experience confusion

or fear or see it as problematic. In our daily therapeutic work, my colleagues and I see the ravages of misdirected sexual energy as it is acted out with/upon those considered the objects of desire. It is the object of our desire that is "blamed" for eliciting the "enemy within." This blaming and shaming will only end when we can find peace within ourselves and reconcile our sexual and spiritual natures as coexisting and necessary to each other. It is then that we become capable of intimacy and experience the fusion of love and sex.

Our sexuality is not our foe, but rather an unfolding dynamic part of our being and experience that deserves nurturance and understanding throughout our development. Our sexuality is not a separate part of our being that is experienced only in a certain time in a certain place with a certain person. It is with us always as we walk and talk and breathe, in every moment of every day.

Now that we have looked at the conundrum, we can let you know that the Pastoral Counseling Center provides a healing place where there is an appreciation of the need to integrate the sexual and the spiritual, the body and the spirit. The Center's mission is **to enhance the emotional, spiritual, and relationship health of adults, adolescents, and children through the provision of counseling and educational services.** We strive to do that through sharing a common value base that is guided by the following principles:

- 1) **"A sensitivity to the dynamic interaction of behavior and belief"** This is central to our work with those seeking help with sexuality issues. One's belief system is at the core of most of life's dilemmas.
- 2) **"A view that healing involves questions of meaning and value, and not merely symptom relief"** This is why, in most cases, Viagra falls short of the mark. A chemical solution may temporarily relieve the symptom, but provides no understanding about what the symptom may signal in the context of relational and spiritual needs not yet acknowledged or addressed.
- 3) **"A belief in the inherent human search for personal and relational wholeness"** Wholeness will be the result of integration of all aspects of one's being. We can become unbalanced, even compulsive, if distracted by sexual pursuits to the exclusion of other aspects of our lives. Conversely, imbalance will occur if sex is ignored. Either situation kindles dualism. To engage fully in the search for wholeness is the work of life.

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- 4) **“A respect for the uniqueness and diversity of all human creation”** Sexual diversity has been historically minimized and trivialized. It wasn't until the research and reports by Alfred Kinsey in the late 1940s and early 1950s that people began to understand human sexual behavior as existing along a continuum rather than in the polar camps of heterosexual and homosexual. It is absolutely necessary in the work of helping others with their sexuality issues to provide a place free of dualistic/polar thinking and judgment, a place that lifts up and celebrates our differences without shame or fear, and validates our differences as the Creator's work.
- 5) **“A desire to help our clients find voice for all their concerns”** Some of the most difficult things to give voice to are our sexual concerns, feelings, experiences. And because of that, some of the strongest messages are sent in silence. It is truly remarkable that information about one of the most fundamental and basic drives in our lives is left to be learned through deciphering and reading between the lines. Because sexuality is dealt with in silence, we learn to hold it in silence. The invitation to speak openly about sexual matters is a validation that goes to the core of healing the sexual wound and reintegrating our sexual selves.
- 6) **“A belief that a caring relationship is basic to healing”** The act of divulging, exploring, and understanding one's sexuality may be one of the most sacred trusts that I, as a counselor, can imagine. The formation of a therapeutic relationship that honors the client's journey and provides caring reflection is essential to reintegration and healing.
- 7) **“A respect for the complex integration of mind, body, and spirit that exists within all persons”** This principle speaks most directly to the reflections in this article. With this guiding principle, the Center is set apart from most other places. I would say in closing how good it is for me to be in a place that truly understands and actively promotes the integration of mind, body, spirit.

J. Michael Sears, Ed.D.

Sexologist and Relationship Counselor

Doctoral degree from The Institute for Advanced Study of Human Sexuality

C.O.O.L. Corner

- Children are sexual beings.
- Most children regularly explore their bodies.
- Most children are curious about their bodies, peers' bodies, and adults' bodies.
- It is appropriate to use accurate terms and labels for body parts.
- Be aware of YOUR emotions and reactions when you are setting limits.

An Evening With Anodea Judith, Ph.D. Seven Centers of Wholeness: Everything You Wanted to Know about Chakras

Date: Monday, March 22, 2004
Time: 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.
Location: Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, New Waveland Hall
4120 Ingersoll Avenue, Des Moines
Fee: \$10

Spend an evening with Anodea Judith, considered one of the country's foremost experts on the interpretation of the chakra system for the Western lifestyle. Anodea's remarks will include a presentation of her 28-minute DVD on the *Illuminated Chakras*. Please contact the Center to pre-register for the event (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org).

Anodea Judith, Ph.D. Principles of Mind-Body Integration: Therapeutic Techniques for Wholeness

Date: Tuesday, March 23 – Saturday, March 27, 2004
Presenter: Anodea Judith, Ph.D., Psychologist and Transpersonal Somatic Therapist
Location: Grace United Methodist Church
3700 Cottage Grove Avenue, Des Moines
Fee: \$700

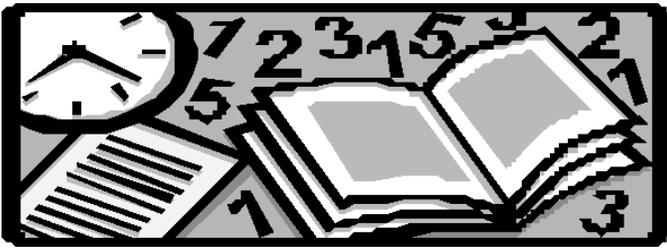
A five-day workshop for healers of all types, presenting the latest techniques for integrating mind and body within a therapeutic context. This is a 30-hour continuing education offering. Please contact the Center to pre-register for the workshop (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org).

Spirituality and Psychotherapy

Dates: March 12, 2004 – May 21, 2004
Time: Fridays, 8:15-9:45 a.m.
Location: Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center
Cost: \$200 plus optional text
Instructor: Various Center Staff and Guest Faculty

This course will introduce caregivers to common spiritual and faith issues encountered in psychotherapy and other helping relationships. The major focus will be on understanding the psychological dynamics underlying the presentation of these issues and on developing a helpful and respectful strategy for working with them.

The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is an Iowa Board of Social Work Examiners approved provider #0087 and Iowa Board of Behavioral Science Examiners approved provider #AS98-13. This course is approved for 15 hours of continuing education credit. To register, call (515) 274-4006 or e-mail info@dmpcc.org.



Educational Events for the Community

The Center is once again sponsoring three free community education events this spring to explore various complementary therapies available in the Des Moines community. The spring series will focus on energetic therapies. All events will take place in the Burling Room at Plymouth Congregational United Church of Christ, 4120 Ingersoll Avenue, in Des Moines. These events are made possible through a grant from the Community Innovation Fund of the Greater Des Moines Community Foundation.

► **Tuesday, April 6, 2004, 5:30 - 6:30 p.m.**
William Terrell, L.Ac.,
Traditional Chinese Medicine

On April 6, William Terrell will give an introduction to Traditional Chinese Medicine (TCM) and its inherent relationship to the mind-body-spirit connection. TCM views disease as the result of an imbalance or blockage in the body's natural energy flow. TCM is holistic and preventive in nature. Mr. Terrell will also discuss how TCM works in conjunction with Western medicine.

William Terrell has his Master's Degree in Oriental Medicine from the Southwest Acupuncture College in Santa Fe, NM. He practices Holistic Chinese Medicine with his wife Elizabeth at Iowa Acupuncture Clinic. He has been studying holistic medicine for 14 years.

► **Tuesday, May 4, 2004, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.**
Morgan Rivers, Zero Balancing ~
The Reunion of Body and Soul

On May 4, Morgan Rivers will introduce Zero Balancing, a hands-on bodywork method for aligning body energy with body structure through touch. It incorporates principles of Eastern and Western healing philosophies to help balance energy in the densest tissues of the body, the bone and skeletal system. In Zero Balancing, the practitioner works simultaneously with both the structural and energy systems of the body to bring balance. The presentation will include a brief demonstration.

Morgan Rivers, BA, Healing Arts Practitioner, has been doing massage since 1991 and Zero Balancing since 1995. She has a private practice at the College of Massage and the Healing Arts Center, where she also teaches part-time.

► **Tuesday, June 1, 2004, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m.**
Kathy Gates, Qigong ~ Exploring Healing Energy

Start the month of June by taking some time to focus on your SELF! Breathe, feel, move, relax, explore your body/mind's potentials to let go of stress and tension and breathe in more vitality and tranquility via this Chinese form of energy healing. Qigong is a combination of gentle movement and meditation that is highly experiential.

Kathy Gates, BS, LMT, RM, is a holistic health facilitator with over 20 years experience facilitating mind/body/spirit exploration through individual training, therapeutic healing sessions, and classes. She has a B.S. from Iowa State University. She began studying Qigong and other energy-based modalities in 1993.

The events are free, but please call or e-mail the Center to let us know you will be attending or for further information (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org).

Sixth Annual Luncheon Women Helping Women



Speaker: Rekha Basu, *Des Moines Register* Columnist
Topic: "Taking Heat and Making Peace With It"
Date: Friday, March 12, 2004
Time: 11:30 a.m. – 1:00 p.m.
Location: Hotel Fort Des Moines, Grand Ballroom
10th and Walnut, Des Moines
Reservation: \$18/lunch. Call 274-4006 to RSVP.

Since 1999, the Center has sponsored an annual luncheon to raise both awareness of the Center's work with women and girls, and funds to help subsidize our services to low-income women and girls. Fifty-seven percent of the Center's clients are female. Over half of these women cannot afford the full cost of therapy. Through the Women Helping Women Fund, the Center has helped low-income women and girls with issues of abuse, depression, anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, and grief. Our highly trained and compassionate counselors help them to grieve their losses, increase their self-esteem, start positive behavior patterns, and consider new options for their lives. Women and girls who are counseled at the Center report increased feelings of self-worth and a greater understanding of the choices available to them. When women and girls heal their wounds and experience their self worth, the whole community benefits.

New Board Member

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center welcomes James Bennett as a new board member in 2004. Jim is the retired Secretary and Assistant General Counsel, Maytag Corporation, Newton. He and his wife, Virginia, reside in Des Moines.

In Brief: Clergy e-mail

The Center has inaugurated a monthly e-mail to pastors and other ministering professionals, called *In Brief*. We hope this will be a service that extends the ministry of church staff by providing helpful information for ministering to those who may be experiencing difficulties or life changes. If you would be interested in being on the e-mail list, please contact the Center (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org).

Memorial / Tribute Gifts

Consider honoring a loved one with a memorial or tribute gift to the Center. Making a gift to the Center extends care, compassion, and esteem far longer than flowers can bloom. A gift to the Center is a meaningful way to remember a loved one or to pay tribute to someone on a special occasion. Let us know if we can help you arrange such a gift.

Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

Endow Iowa: Helping Non-profit Organizations Ensure their Future

The Iowa legislature has authorized legislation to Endow Iowa. Endow Iowa allows Iowa taxpayers to take a 20% Iowa tax CREDIT (in addition to the normal state and federal charitable income tax deductions) for charitable gifts made to a permanent endowment fund between 1/1/2003 and 12/31/2005. The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation qualifies for this program. The tax credit is 20% of the gift amount and can be used against 2004 taxes. Please contact the Center if you have an interest in pursuing this opportunity.

www.dmpcc.org

Visit the Center's website for more information on the Center's counseling services and staff, special events and classes.

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is a publication of the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center, an independent, interfaith, not-for-profit organization. For over 30 years, the Center has been providing counseling and educational services to adults, families, adolescents, and children for the purpose of enhancing emotional, spiritual, and relationship health. The Center has satellite offices in West Des Moines, Altoona, Ankeny, and Urbandale.

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Des Moines Pastoral

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