

# CONNECTING

Healthy Information from the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center  September/October 2005

## Cultural Myths

The counseling office is one of the few places left where life stories can be shared and received in a confidential environment that is emotionally safe and respectful. These stories are treasured gifts woven together from the joys and hurts of life. As I have listened to them over the years, my spirit has been lifted by the hope and tenaciousness of people as they struggle to make life better for themselves and the ones they love.

I have also been disheartened by the many false and unhelpful messages people have internalized. These messages are then used as measuring sticks against which they evaluate themselves and against which they are judged by others. In the process, these messages burden and encumber the spirits of those who attempt to live their lives by them. I have come to call such messages “cultural myths.”

They are “cultural” in the sense that they grow out of unexamined assumptions within the culture and are sustained and taught to people through social institutions (e.g., families, corporations, and even churches). They are “mythic” in the sense that their purpose is to comfort and assure – to help people dream and believe in a future that is better than the present.<sup>1</sup> While this function of myth can provide a needed respite at times, or even a motivating vision for change, such myths become problematic when they are left unchallenged by how things really are.

“Cultural myths,” then, are those unexamined, misrepresented, misinterpreted, and misleading messages the culture teaches about people and life that contribute to individuals becoming stuck, losing self-esteem, and even hating themselves.

One of the more common myths takes the form: “I should be able to...” Examples include: “I should be able to get it right, rather than wrong all the time!” “I should be able to face the music, rather than be such a coward!” “I should be able to leave.” “I should be over it by now!” Believing “I should be able to...” can be a goal for which to strive and can give people the illusion of power. On a deeper level, however, if one is having trouble doing something, somewhere within that person’s body, mind, or experience there is a good reason for the difficulty one is having. Rather than beating oneself up by trying over and over again, often in the same old ways, to convince oneself to do “what I should be able to do,” it is more gracious and helpful to back off, become curious, and go scouting for the underlying reason(s) for the difficulty.

A particularly burdensome and common myth is: “No one can make you feel a certain way; you choose how you feel.” While this myth seeks to help one feel more in control and less vulnerable, the fact of the matter is that people *do* make others feel certain ways. Different interactions with people naturally elicit particular emotions. Some people do things that instill fear; others say things that produce humiliation and shame; still others behave in ways that create a sense of pleasure and comfort. Reactions to specific situations spring naturally from the way human beings are put

together neurologically and physiologically. Rather than denying or trying to change these natural reactions, it is much more helpful to see them as sources of important information that can guide decision-making, e.g., in selecting who to spend time with or avoid, and what experiences to replicate and which ones to change.

A third unhelpful cultural myth is: “Everything will be fine.” This is often followed by such phrases as: “Kids are resilient, they’ll bounce back” or “She’s a resourceful person.” This myth can easily lead to minimizing the complexity, and even danger, of particular situations. It is often offered by someone who doesn’t really understand the situation or doesn’t know what to do to be supportive. Sometimes it is offered by people who work in institutions and organizations designed to help people, but which actually have limited power to effect significant change. It is also an easy response for those who really don’t want to get involved or face the discomfort of empathizing with another’s misfortune. Sometimes people call this myth to mind hoping they can temporarily delude themselves into believing a situation is not as horrible or desperate as it actually is. Yet, despite their best efforts, sometimes everything will not be fine! Sometimes a survivor is not “resourceful,” but just “lucky.” Sometimes kids *don’t* bounce back until years later or until spending hours in therapy. In such cases, debunking this myth can help those who really need help to keep looking until they find someone who agrees “things aren’t fine” and will do what it takes to help them change things.

Ordinarily myths are thought of as old stories read in books that don’t have much relevance in the modern world. However, “cultural myths” are very much a part of daily life. Without conscious awareness, they are woven into the fabric of life stories to such an extent that one may not even recognize they are there, let alone think of challenging them.

Anderson & Foley remind us, “If the stories we create are to be authentic reflections of the lives we live, we need room for ambiguity and vulnerability.”<sup>2</sup> The cultural myths I have described here, and many others like them, help reduce the disquieting effects of the ambiguity and vulnerability of life. Left unexamined, however, these same myths can become burdensome and misleading. Sometimes, they also make personal change more difficult by setting standards to live up to that never should have been set in the first place.

J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D.  
Director of Professional Education

### Resources

<sup>1</sup> Herbert Anderson and Edward Foley, *Mighty Stories, Dangerous Rituals: Weaving Together the Human and the Divine* (San Francisco: Jossey-Bass Publishers, 1998), p.15.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 14.

### Additional suggestion

John Dominic Crossan, *The Dark Interval: Toward a Theology of Story* (Santa Rosa, CA: Polebridge Press, 1988)

## C.O.O.L. Corner

Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life

### Myths of Childhood: True or False

1. T or F Children are miniature adults.
2. T or F Children have the same ability to understand and communicate, no matter their ages.
3. T or F Children are to be seen and not heard.
4. T or F Children are naturally manipulators and liars.
5. T or F It's okay to talk in front of the children because they are too young to understand.
6. T or F Big boys don't cry.
7. T or F Good girls don't have temper tantrums.
8. T or F Children cannot play and pay attention at the same time.
9. T or F Children can only learn when they are sitting quietly.

Answer Key: All nine Myths of Childhood are FALSE!

## Chakras and Healing ~ Getting to the Core

Another Evening with Anodea Judith, Ph.D.

Date: Wednesday, November 16, 2005

Time: 7:00 – 9:00 p.m.

Location: Plymouth Congregational UCC Church, Greenwood Room

Fee: \$15 pre-registration; \$20 at the door, if space is available

In March 2004, the Center sponsored *An Evening with Anodea Judith* speaking on "Everything You Wanted to Know about Chakras." Anodea is returning to Des Moines to take us to the next level of understanding.

The chakra system provides a profound formula for wholeness and a template for transformation. These seven centers, spinning at the core of the body, generate the patterns in our lives — creating health and disease, success or failure at life's tasks. Healing through the chakras involves understanding their correlation to crucial stages of childhood and how the chakras may have been compromised through necessary defense patterns that restrict the healthy flow of the life force.

This evening talk will go into the developmental psychology of the chakras, and how you can use this ancient system for self-diagnosis and treatment of common imbalances and problems.

Anodea Judith, Ph.D., is the country's foremost authority on the relationship between chakras and western psychology. She has written numerous books, including *Eastern Body/Western Mind*, *Wheels of Life*, and *The Sevenfold Journey*, and gives workshops and trainings worldwide.

## How do we get children turned on to health?

Our fall 2005 community education series will help you do just that. The Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center is once again sponsoring free community education events to explore the variety of complementary therapies available in the Des Moines community. The fall 2005 series is focusing on *Healthy Kids*. We are excited about these four special sessions. If you are a parent or grandparent, or have a special connection of any kind to a child, check these out!

All events take place the first Tuesday of the month, 5:30 – 6:30 p.m., at Plymouth Congregational Church, 42<sup>nd</sup> and Ingersoll in Des Moines. The events are free, but please call or e-mail the Center to let us know you will be attending or to obtain further information (274-4006 or info@dmpcc.org). Request our newsletter or visit our website, [www.dmpcc.org](http://www.dmpcc.org), for more information on these and other events sponsored by the Center.

### September 6 "DIET: Doing Intelligent Eating Totally" Grace Percival, M.A.

Eating habits promote healthy minds and spirits *as well as* healthy bodies. Our presenter encourages understanding the relationship between food and psychological adjustment (behavioral, emotional, and social) in children and adolescents. During this presentation, we will look at ways to

change unhealthy patterns in kids to healthy ones ~ with flair!

**Grace Percival, M.A.**, is a licensed child psychologist in the Center's C.O.O.L. (Children Overcoming the Obstacles of Life) department. She holds a Master of Arts degree in behavior analysis from Drake University. She had a yearlong training in Integrative Health through Mercy Health Sciences. Grace provides psychotherapeutic counseling to children of all ages, with a special interest in developmental disabilities and chronic illness in children.

### October 4 "Optimizing Your Child's Potential: Kids and Chiropractic" Kari Swain, D.C.

This presentation will be packed full of practical information that can be used to raise healthier children, improve nutrition, enhance school performance, and nurture the optimist within every child.

**Kari Swain, D.C.**, is a 1995 graduate of Palmer College of Chiropractic. Dr. Swain has been practicing in Altoona for ten years. She has always been an advocate for children and has worked to be an avenue for children to express their highest level of health.

### November 1 "Martial Arts: Healthy Kicks for Kids" Lance Farrell

This presentation will demonstrate how

martial arts can teach children how to set and achieve goals, how to concentrate better, how to practice self-control in different situations. By developing self-confidence in their own abilities, children develop the self-esteem to walk away from confrontations.

**Lance Farrell** has a Bachelor of Science degree from Iowa State University. Mr. Farrell has been teaching martial arts for 23 years, starting out in his hometown of Guthrie Center, moving to Creston, and then to Des Moines. Currently his schools of martial arts number four. He has nine full-time and 50 part-time teaching staff for over 1,000 students.

### December 6 "Yoga for Kids: You Be a Mountain, I'll Be a Tree" Patty Dornacker

Yoga can be as beneficial for kids as adults. Yoga helps develop better body awareness, flexibility, and coordination. Yoga can also aid relaxation and creativity. Simple ideas on how to incorporate yoga techniques into family life will be shared. Wear comfortable clothes and be prepared for fun!

**Patty Dornacker**'s yoga classes for children grew out of her love for yoga and her experience teaching elementary school students. Patty has completed Yoga Fit teacher training and is working to become a certified instructor. She has been teaching yoga to children for the past three years.

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**MANifest:**  
A Gathering of Men  
Sharing the Masculine Journey

MANifest is a program for men facilitated by male counselors, built around weekend retreats and Saturday workshops.

MANifest is for men of all ages and from every walk of life. *Lowell Houts, D.Min., and Mike Sears, Ed.D., facilitate all MANifest programs.*

### MANifest weekend

Friday – Sunday, September 9 – 11, 2005

Fee: \$175, includes lodging and five meals. MANifest weekends are held at a retreat center southeast of Winterset.

The weekend gives men an extended opportunity to take a look inside themselves and to bridge the emotional disconnect that so often happens in the traditional rearing of most men in this society. The weekend is a time to get past the *no fear, no sadness, emphasize toughness, reinforce anger* messages and values so many men carry around with them. The emotional lives of men need to be explored, acknowledged, and celebrated by men, individually and collectively.

Please call the Center to pre-register (515) 274-4006.

### MANifest presentation

Friday, October 28, 2005 6:00 – 9:00 p.m.

“The Rules Have Changed: Male/Female Communication and Sexuality Workshop”

Fee: \$45 for individuals / \$80 for couples. This workshop is held at Inner Prosperity in Des Moines.

This workshop will provide insights to creating the relationship you really want with your life partner. Please call 779-2424 to register.

### MANifest workshop

Saturday, October 29, 2005 9:00 a.m. – 3:00 p.m.

“Men and Sex”

Fee: \$50, includes lunch. MANifest workshops are held at a turn-of-the-century stone house near St. Charles, IA.

Henry David Thoreau once said, “I lose my respect for the man who will make a coarse jest about sex, but when asked to speak seriously on the subject remains silent.” Gym classes, locker rooms, and maybe an extremely awkward “birds and the bees” talk with a parent are the sum of most male experience with sexual discourse growing up. No wonder most men find it very difficult to know where to begin to have a serious discussion about sex. It has been the observation of the facilitators that the more men can have serious discussions, the more confidence they’ll feel in their sexuality. “Men and Sex” workshop will provide an opportunity for men to explore the sexual-emotional connection and enhance their understanding of themselves as sexual human beings.

Please call the Center to pre-register (515) 274-4006. Check the Center’s website, [www.dmpcc.org/support/support.html](http://www.dmpcc.org/support/support.html).

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## An Introduction to Self-Psychology A TEN WEEK COURSE



*J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D.*

**Dates:** September 16, 2005 -  
December 2, 2005

**Time:** Fridays, 8:15 - 9:45 a.m.

**Location:** Des Moines Pastoral  
Counseling Center

**Cost:** \$200 plus optional textbook(s),  
if desired

**Instructor:** J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D.

This course is an introduction to self-psychology and its application to psychotherapy. J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., is the director of professional education for the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center. He holds a doctoral degree in pastoral counseling and psychotherapy from Northwestern University and a master of divinity degree from Christian Theological Seminary. He is a licensed clinical psychologist, pastoral counselor, and marriage and family therapist. In addition to his experience working with individuals, couples, and families, Dr. Means is the author of *Trauma & Evil: Healing the Wounded Soul*.

To register, call (515) 274-4006 or e-mail [info@dmpcc.org](mailto:info@dmpcc.org). The Center will provide a certificate for 15 hours of continuing education credit.



## New Staff at the Center Lisa Streyffeler, Ph.D.

We are very pleased to be welcoming **Lisa Streyffeler, Ph.D.**, to the Center staff. Lisa will begin seeing clients at the Center in September. Lisa received her BA in psychology and comparative religion from Harvard and her Ph.D. in counseling psychology from the University of Iowa. She is moving here from Minneapolis where she has just finished

a postdoctoral fellowship at Hennepin County Medical Center. Lisa will be working with adults. She specializes in counseling pregnant and postpartum women. She is a member of the American Psychological Association.

## A Summer's Day

An August day is a good time to notice and express gratitude for the blessing of lives lived in sunshine and in rain. Balance in nature can be a delicate thing, but it can also be bountiful. A financial gift to the Center can help restore balance to lives thrown out of kilter by circumstances and limited resources. Your generosity could make a real difference. Send your tax-deductible gift to the Center or contact Kathleen Murrin at 274-4006.

## Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation

Leaving a legacy is more than passing money to the next generation. It is also an opportunity to send a message, a message that reflects your values and continues your commitments. If you or someone you know has benefited from or been comforted by the services of the Center's fine staff, won't you consider a gift that will make that same benefit and comfort available to those who come after you? We encourage you to consider a planned gift to the Des Moines Pastoral Counseling Center Foundation. Contact Kathleen Murrin at the Center for further information.

## Pastoral Care Specialist Program – 2005-06

The Pastoral Care Specialist Program is a two-year program of professional development and renewal designed for pastors, chaplains, and other persons involved in ministries of pastoral care. Participants meet monthly to learn about areas critical to effective pastoral care, and to receive support, encouragement, and consultation on their work. The program begins the second Tuesday of September (September 13, 2005) and runs through the second Tuesday of June (June 13, 2006). Participants meet from 8:45 a.m. to 12:00 noon. Tuition for the program is \$500 for each of the two years. For additional information, contact J. Jeffrey Means, Ph.D., Director of Professional Education, at (515) 274-4006 or check the Center's website, [www.dmpcc.org/classes/classes.html](http://www.dmpcc.org/classes/classes.html).

## CONNECTING

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.  
Editor: Kathleen Murrin

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