

POSITIVE VOICES

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- * From the Editor
- * "Women and Eating Disorders-Loss/Disconnection and Spirituality" presentation by Dr. Paula Levine
- * Treatment Clinic of the Month: Renfrew Clinics, Interview with therapist, Susan Kleinman
- * Questions To Ask in a Spirituality Group by Dr. Paula Levine
- * Poem, "No Way Out" by Shelley Privette
- * Book Review: Holy Hunger by Margaret Bullitt-Jonas

FROM THE EDITOR

I have often wondered if having a "spiritual" background helps those who have an eating disorder recover easier than those who proclaim to not have any belief in God (or any god for that matter).

I have few regrets in my life, but one of these is not providing my daughters with a more spiritual foundation. I was raised Episcopalian and my husband, Catholic. Steve is now a Unitarian and I am "undeclared". Our views on life and our upbringing are similar, however, when the girls were small, we could never agree on where to take the girls to church and Taylor's mom also had her own views on this based on her own upbringing.

This resulted in confusion on our parts and no religious upbringing for the girls. This I regret. Even though I have decided that organized religion is not where I want to be, I made that decision based on having religious training and then making up my own mind. My girls had very little and, therefore, couldn't "reject" what they simply never had.

These past few years I have leaned heavily on my beliefs in God which are strong and clear. God and my horse, Bella, have gotten me through the tough times. I hope you have something to lean on too.

Yours in spiritual health, Megan Bryan

Women and Eating Disorders - Loss/Disconnection and Spirituality By Dr. Paula Levine

When a woman is in the active throws of an eating disorder, she almost totally disconnects from her own spirituality which could be and likely has been in the past an important source of:

1. Faith
2. Hope and optimism
3. Morals and values
4. Strength
5. Healing and recovery

She suffers profound loss and literally becomes depressed and hopeless—not only because she is cut off from her own spirituality i.e., a source of hope, optimism, strengths, etc. but also because she disconnects from almost every other facet of her life as well. It is my thinking that not only is spirituality one but that rediscovering her spirituality can also assist in the painful yet exhilarating process of reconnecting to herself and others. I see spirituality as a bridge that can take her back—or forward—to all other missing pieces.

Just think about it. Think about all the young girls and women you know who are actively engaged in anorexia, bulimia, or compulsive overeating.

In addition to being disconnected from their spirituality..

1. How cut off are they from their feelings? How flattened is their affect? How literally depressed are they? How much is their eating disorder a guarantee that they will be able to continue to cut off, numb them-

The artist alone sees spirits. But after he has told of their appearing to him, everybody sees them.
-- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

selves, tranquilize and medicate in order to escape from feelings.

2. How cut off are they from family and friends? Now that they finally understand that connection is crucial to women, that it validates them, that it empowers them, what kind of profound loss do women with eating disorders feel from being outside of rather than inside of meaningful relationships? How shameful and humiliating is the secret of their eating disorder that keeps them from sharing themselves honestly and fully with other human beings? How much does the social isolation add to the eating disorder continuing to "take on a life of its own?"
3. How dissociated are women with eating disorders from their authentic self? What happens to pride, positive self esteem, and self confidence, when women are trapped inside a mind set that speaks to them only of failure, lack of control, self deprecation and shame?
4. When do the eating disorder sufferers really hear and respond to their own voice? When was the last time they acted on an opinion, a belief, or an idea that was truly theirs? How cut off from their own beliefs and ideas must they be in order to continue serving and pleasing others? How subjected are they to the "tyranny of the nice and kind" (Gilligan, 1992)? How does their eating disorder help them to continue swallowing their own voice?
5. How disconnected are women with eating disorders from their own bodies? How disconnected is the mind from the body? When was the last time they saw their bodies as a source of pleasure? How much as the body become distorted? How much has the body become something "out there", disowned, an object of hatred?
6. How much have they lost the ability to think clearly and rationally? How does the eating disorder continue to cloud their thinking, problem solving and decision making skills? How much does the eating disorder provide the content of thought so that calories, fat grams, body disgust, and self hatred become a twenty four hour a day preoccupation?
7. When was the last time they really played? How cut off are they from their inner child, from the ability to be spontaneous and carefree?
8. How cut off are they from interests, hobbies, talents, and passions, old and new? What happened to

God gave us two ears and one mouth. Some people say that's because He wanted us to spend twice as much time listening as talking. Others claim it's because He knew that listening was twice as hard.

~Author Unknown~

their sense of wonder, capacity for enjoyment, the thrill of new discoveries? When was the last time a patient burst into your office excited about her new found passion for scuba diving or tap dancing? ("Can't wear the bathing suit, won't wear the leotard")

9. How disconnected are women with eating disorders from an accurate perception of reality? What is their real place, role, power, and status in the world relative to others? When the self is undervalued and thinness is glorified, everything else is seen only in terms of this impoverished and limited view of the world.

10. Finally, how cut off are they from their own femininity and sexuality? Cut off from relationships, and further disassociated from self, body, femininity and sexuality, what chance does a woman with an eating disorder have for true intimacy?

Once again, it is my contention that a reconnection with spirituality will provide a bridge to the reconnection and reconstruction of all these other necessary components of a full life—and a full recovery.

I met Dr. Paula Levine, co-director of the Miami Counseling & Resource Center in Maryland a few years back. She was participating in the Eating Disorder Conference that I was invited to attend.

I was sad that my time was so short there because Paula is certainly someone you want to sit down and talk with. We had a tough time connecting for an interview for this issue, so Paula graciously submitted a copy of a presentation she has given on Spirituality and Eating Disorders.

Positive Voices hopes to do an interview with Dr. Levine soon so that we can feature the Miami Counseling and Resource Center in a future Treatment Clinic of the Month section.