

2000: What Does Spiritual Mean To Me

My parents are Holocaust survivors. Did they find a spirituality in their experiences? My mother did. She was able to look past the Nazi persecution of her and her family. She was able to forgive, although the memories of the horror she lived through haven't fully gone away. She was able to find gratitude in her survival and in her new life. My father couldn't forgive, an important step on the road to spiritual awakening. He didn't see his experiences as a means to his own spiritual end or towards a spiritual awakening in others. Dachau Concentration Camp, for him, was an end completely unto itself. His conclusions about that time in his life were categorical, black and white and as stark as anything I have ever learned about the War.

I'm an American, gay man and the child of Holocaust survivors. I lost a teaching job in California because of being gay in 1989. I acknowledge that I live in a time when gays aren't universally respected. We're still persecuted. The abhorrence for gays in America is most clearly evident to me in the media. Most Americans still want to ridicule what they don't understand. Spirituality involves "under" standing, standing under something new and different and viewing it from below. It takes courage to stand "under" something new.

My spiritual eye looks at the circumstances of my life as opportunities for me to grow beyond my time and to help others to grow, as well. I feel a great tenderness for African-Americans who have such an important lesson to teach America and for whom there are too few students ready to learn. As a gay man, I've tried to escape my full identity by hiding, lying and choosing to live in foreign communities. I rose from that deep sleep slowly. I came to face my fears and my contortions. My self-exploration into awareness and consciousness took me from a rich, golden dream of complacency to the lucid, silver pool of reality. I now reflect upon my nature; the clarity of my vision of myself is the evidence of my spiritual awakening. I see my creation as fitting and my development as a consequence of everything that I am and that the world is made of.

Sand abrades stones which wears down lofty mountains. Drop upon drop of persistent water making boulders smooth to the touch. The world slowly imparts a path for truth, just as the rock gives way to water. The actions of my life mirror the actions of nature around me. The mountains erode, and it's the invisible wind, the minute drops of rain and the smallest particles of sand that do the work. By being aware of my breath and everything about me, I do my part to improve the world.

There's a marvelous story told by David J. Wolpe of a man who once stood before God, his heart breaking from the pain and injustice in the world. "Dear God," he cried out, "Look at all the suffering, the anguish and distress in the world. Why don't you send help?" God responded, "I did send help. I sent you."