

September 2003

Volume 3, No. 3

BOOK REVIEWS

Catherine Ingram, *Passionate Presence: Experiencing the Seven Qualities of Awakened Awareness*, New York: Gotham/ Penguin 2003 212pp \$24.00 (HB)

This lovely book shares the wisdom of a teacher of silent meditation and Dharma Dialogues on awakened awareness. It is truly food for the soul.

Catherine Ingram describes her personal experiences in seeking and finding peace in the Now. While mindfulness meditation was a major path, a spiritual teacher catalyzed major shifts in her consciousness. Ingram now teaches mindfulness, through silence, through shared lessons, and (even through the pages of this book) through her personal centeredness.

Seven topics are highlighted: Silence, Tenderness, Embodiment, Genuineness, Discernment, Delight and Wonder. Each is illustrated with lovely stories of Ingram and other seekers on the Path.

Particularly helpful for healing are suggestions for acknowledging the presence of an inner observer who is detached even in the midst of crisis and suffering; for treasuring each present moment rather than living in the past or future; and for accepting that we need not torture ourselves with guilt and remorse because each of us has a lifetime of lessons to learn – and each experience offers us opportunities to develop deeper compassion for others who have their own lessons and make mistakes that may impact negatively on us. We can fester in negative reactions to life that is past or in our anxieties about our future life – or we might just let go of the negativity and move on to the ever-present Now.

If we allow our pain to be felt and freed, our suffering does great work in softening our hearts. It is, in the words of Trungpa Rinpoche, 'manure for the field of wisdom.' In fact, it is important to know that any difficult mind state is welcome to arise at any moment just as the sky welcomes whatever arises in it without resistance. Our suffering, if we feel it deeply and allow its natural passing, makes us stronger and yet more tender. We are whole not only despite what we have suffered but often because of it. (p. 46)

I was surprised to discover this book was immediately helpful in finding a stronger connection with my own center of quiet awareness.

There is also a pleasant current of practical advice, such as:

Some years ago a young friend of mine, six years old at the time, walked up to me and said the following: "Pretend you are surrounded by a thousand hungry tigers. What would you do?"

I gave it some thought, imagining the scary scenario and feeling more and more tense. Would I pray? Probably not. Would I run? One doesn't outrun tigers. Anxiety began to

take hold as I saw in my mind's eye the tigers closing in. I said to my young friend, "Wow, I don't know what I would do. What would *you* do?"

And he replied, "I'd stop pretending." (p. 127)

In the flow of collective consciousness discussed in the editorial in this issue of IJHC, it was also pleasant to find the following observations by Ingram:

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In retreat, I began to notice similar descriptions spoken by people who had never been exposed to these ideas. I have often been startled to hear perceptions and feelings described in nearly exact language by, for example, a person who lives in rural Scotland and one who lives in Hawaii. I realized that this intelligence crosses time as well, that the awakened awareness of the Buddha, Christ, or Rumi is not distinctly different from that of our own. People over the centuries have stumbled upon this inherent intelligence in countless ways and expressed it in art, poetry, music, science, and even religion.

(p. xix-xx)

I warmly recommend this book for a good read and re-read.

Eckhart Tolle, *The Power of Now: A Guide to Spiritual Enlightenment*, Novato, CA: New World 1999. 191 pp \$21.95 (HB)

Following a personal mystical experience, Eckhart Tolle was transformed from a callous atheist to a spiritual believer. This book shares lovely insights and wise suggestions for ways to reach into the dimensions that Tolle discovered spontaneously. He believes that all of us have this awareness within us, but that our chattering mind obscures this.

Here is one of a variety of approaches Tolle suggests for finding the quiet center where we can be present – following his format of questions and answers.

You keep talking about the state of presence as the key. I think I understand it intellectually, but I don't know if I have ever truly experienced it. I wonder – is it what I think it is, or is it something entirely different?

It's not what you think it is! You can't think about presence, and the mind can't understand it. Understanding presence is *being* present.

Try a little experiment. Close your eyes and say to yourself: "I wonder what my next thought is going to be." Then become very alert and wait for the next thought. Be like a cat watching a mouse hole. What thought is going to come out of the mouse hole? Try it now. (p. 77)

Tolle points out that good and evil are two sides of the same thing.

It may appear that if you could only eliminate the negative or destructive cycles, then all would be well and the relationship would flower beautifully – but alas, this is not

possible. The polarities are mutually interdependent. You cannot have one without the other. The positive already contains within itself the as yet unmanifested negative. Both are in fact different aspects of the same dysfunction... (p. 124)

Again and again, Tolle makes the point that the only productive spiritual goal is to find the place where we are one with “the higher good beyond good and bad.”

Thoughtful, helpful book – for letting go of thought-fullness!

Kenneth Cohen, *Honoring the Medicine: The Essential Guide to Native American Healing*, New York: One World/ Ballantine 2003, 428 pp, 67 pp. Notes, Refs, Resources \$26.95

Ken Cohen brings us an outstanding overview of Native American healing. Cohen, also known as “Bear Hawk,” is an adopted member of the Cree Nation, and has studied with many medicine persons over four decades. This clear and lucid summary explains the medicine traditions and approaches of many of the Native American nations.

As an example, here is Cohen’s explanation of the Native American understanding of medicine:

“To an English speaker, a ‘medicine’ is something used to treat disease or enhance well-being. Native Americans accept this definition, but in the context of traditional culture, the word *medicine* has much broader and richer meaning. Medicine means the presence and power embodied in or demonstrated by a person, a place, an event, an object, or a natural phenomenon. In some tribes, the word for medicine may connote spirit, power, energy, or mystic potency. For example, in the Wyandot (Huron) language, the word *arendi* (sometimes spelled *orenda*) means ‘spiritual power’ or ‘medicine.’ The ‘medicine man’ is the *arendiwane*, a compound of *arendi* and *wane*, meaning ‘powerful’ or great.’ Thus, the ‘medicine man’ is someone whose spiritual power is great. His medicine, whether a prayer or an herb, affects more than illness; it establishes or restores a state or harmony and positive thinking.

“A medicine may be something you have, a ‘medicine object’ that has the power to affect your or another’s well-being. For example, I have a beautiful piece of granite with a small amethyst crystal embedded in it. It was given to be by a dear friend, and whenever I look at it or hold it, I feel happy. I discovered that when I allow and client to hold it, he or she also feels happy. This is a kind of medicine.

“More important, if you live a life of integrity and kindness, then medicine (spiritual potency) will become part of you. The elders teach that some medicine is inborn. The Great Spirit gives each person a medicine, a unique spiritual gift or talent. What a tragedy when people do not take the time to explore those gifts or do not have the confidence to express them!

“Medicine may be good or bad according to the intent with which we use it or how it affects people. A kind word is good medicine, and an insulting or a discouraging word is bad medicine. A natural herb received from a compassionate healer is good medicine. The same herb, offered by an angry person, is bad medicine. A stethoscope is good medicine when used by a caring and wise physician. A stethoscope is an instrument of evil if the physician is demeaning to the patient.

“Your feelings, intuition, and culture may determine whether a medicine is good or bad. For example, the owl is good medicine to some Northern Plains peoples, who often

consider it a symbol of change and spiritual transformation. Yet my Cherokee friends won't allow an owl feather in their homes because they consider it to be an omen of death. Tobacco is a powerful healing ally to Native Americans who use it in prayer. However, to a white person who lost a loved one to emphysema or cancer, just the thought of tobacco may create feelings of anger and bitterness. Dreams may also be good or bad medicine. Dreams of healing or helpful advice or dreams that have beautiful images are good medicine. Nightmares may also be good medicine if they are sources of personal insight or if they provide warnings that lead to positive change. Native Americans believe, however, that some nightmares are bad medicine inflicted by malicious spirits, people, or sorcerers.

"Good medicine always gives you a sense of sacredness or sacred power. God medicine is healing." (p. 27-28)

As Cohen explains, this book will not teach you to be a healer in this tradition because Native American healing is not learned from books. What it will do is to give you a breadth and depth of appreciation of the rich folklore that has much to offer those of us who are raised in the (relatively) sterile tradition of Western medicine which addresses the disease the person has, often ignoring the person who has the disease. The point is well made by Cohen that the person who is the healer, together with the person seeking the healing, shape and individualize the medicine that is needed for that specific healing.

Cohen writes with great wisdom and sensitivity, sharing his voluminous knowledge and many years of experience in studying and practicing Native American healing. He brings a lightness to this monumental work by sharing many personal stories of his encounters with the wise elders and healers of many Nations.

This is a *must read* for anyone interested in shamanic traditions.

Donald Bakal, *Minding the Body: Clinical Uses of Somatic Awareness*, New York, NY: Guilford Press 2001 228 pp. \$23.00

Donald Bakal presents an outstanding discussion on mind-body and body-mind awarenesses. Of particular interest is a discussion of people who are densely insensitive to their bodies and to their mental and emotional connection with their bodies. Where many people who are suffering pain or other symptoms can productively answer the question, "What do you think/feel your body is saying?" these people may even be unaware of the possibility that their bodies may be symptomatic due to psychological tensions in their lives. When asked about factors that might contribute to their symptoms, they draw a complete blank.

The fact that their bodies are complaining about disharmonies in their lives may be grossly evident to caregivers, but it may be extremely difficult or impossible for caregivers to raise the body awareness of these people to a point that they can deal with their body problems in any way other than physical interventions. These people prefer medications and surgery – i.e. to have others "fix" them – rather than the spectrum of wholistic approaches that is the focus of the IJHC.

This suggests that people may self-select into treatment modalities that are consonant with their beliefs and awarenesses. Counselors may be treating a very different population from those seen in a chiropractor's or acupuncturist's office – despite the fact that *the symptoms presented by these populations* may be similar.

Bakal has good discussions on a variety of interventions that help wholistically, addressing the meaning behind the symptoms. His approach is from the body side of the spectrum, rather than from the psychological side – which makes for interesting reading for those who are coming from the opposite side of this continuum.

Susan Chernak McElroy. *Animals as Guides for the Soul*, New York: Ballentine 1999 304 pp \$12.95

This is a delightful book that is an easy read. Animal lovers will find their heartfelt stories told in either the author's personal interchanges with the animals or with the stories contributed by others. There is also a gentle weaving throughout the book of great words of wisdom by noted mystics, healers, and spiritual masters. They are not all stories of animal miracles but reflect also the day-to-day living with animals and their messages to us to lead better lives. Even so, it is a practical read for it does not save all the baby kittens.

McElroy calls on us to look at our interactions with others through stories told in a way that draws you to the next story yet to unfold. The author has a way of making the animals march across the pages so that their messages feel like they are all on a personal note. There are stories of beloved dogs and cats but also of more exotic creatures like llamas and donkeys. There is sure to be an animal story for everyone. I had lots of favorites, ones that made me cry, ones that touched my heart, and ones that made me smile inside, like the little barn cat that found its way into a warm bed on a cold wintry night!

There is a call to activism that threads throughout book, but it is done in a nudging way so as not to offend or put off. Overall, the animals speak for themselves in their courage, wisdom, and gentleness.

Diane Wind Wardell, PhD, RNC, CHTP

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Susan Chernak McElroy. *Heart in the Wild: A Journey of Self-Discovery with Animals of the Wilderness*, New York: Ballentine 2002 244 pp 3pp Refs. 1 p. resources \$24.95 HB

The animal blessings in this book abound. The gifts of the animals, their majesty and richness, are attended to in metaphorical ways. When they walk through her pages they are truly a blessing. I would have relished a chapter about the birds coming to sit and dance on her instead of having them be the final pages of a chapter.

I read this book with great anticipation of receiving words of wisdom from a renown expert in the area of animal wisdom and healing. I felt not only deeply disappointed but disturbed by this book. After many days of contemplation of why this book left me feeling so angry and raw I was no closer to any personal answers. My final conclusion is it is a treatise on how one's own personality deeply impacts who we are and how we see the world. The reflection of a wise woman is all but remote in this story of obsession, betrayal, and immaturity. The heartening aspect of this book is that if this woman is so incredibly blessed by her animal friends, so must we all have this potential for it is not dependent on any conceivable human trait, only that we look.

Is one's home partially burning down equivalent to a near fatal encounter with cancer as the author contends? She has had experience with both. Maybe I am a poor judge, not having experienced either, but I would certainly hope that life would be more valuable than possession. Her rebuilding borders on obsession and she does little to aid the reader in understanding why she needs to dwell here. The dismissal of her husband during this time

without any attempt to reconcile seems heartless and cruel. She wouldn't do the same to her animals. Although later explanation is given to why she can't trust men it seems only in justification of her new relationship.

Reviewed by Diane Wind Wardell, PhD, RNC, CHTP
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Kathleen R. Wren and Carol L. Norred. *Real World Nursing Survival Guide: Complementary & Alternative Therapies*, Saunders/Elsevier 2003 317 pp 16pp Refs. \$29.95

Kathleen Wren and Carol Norred have produced a lovely, clear, easy to use survey of a helpful range of CAM therapies. It is organized by pharmacologic and non-pharmacologic therapies, with concise explanations of the modality, indications, side effects, precautions, indications, contraindications, and key words to remember. Winsome and humorous cartoon figures counterpoint the reading. A review section presents a playful series of crossword puzzles and other word exercises that will help readers assess and firm up their knowledge about each therapy.

This is an excellent book for anyone wanting an introduction to CAM.

Ample references for further reading provide doorways for delving deeper.

Waldo Vieira, *Projectiology (Special Edition): A Panorama of Experiences of the Consciousness outside the Human Body*, Translators: Kevin de La tour, Simone de La Tour, Rio de Janeiro, RJ, Brazil: International Institute of Projectiology and Conscientiology 2002. 1,219pp

This is a fascinating but frustrating book. It details an enormous spectrum of out-of-body experiences (OBEs), with highly detailed descriptions of the perceptions of the subject, and extremely precise definitions of terminology. While these will undoubtedly be helpful to serious investigators of OBEs, they make it very difficult for a reader to follow the text.

Fuller description of this remarkable book can be found at
<http://www.iacworld.org/English/Publications/Eng/ProjectiologySpecialEdition.asp>

The International Academy of Consciousness has offices in many countries, offers others materials and courses. www.iacworld.org



Chara M. Curtis with illustrations by Cynthia Aldrich. *All I See Is Part of Me*, Belleview, WA: Illumination Arts 1994.

Beautifully illustrated spiritual book for children 4-7 and for children of all ages with a contemplative bent.

I closed my eyes to see within.
I saw a light! It made me grin.

It reminded me of Sister Star.
She said, "That light is who you are.
Your body is just a little part
Of the light that shines within your heart.

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