



Happy winter solstice! As we reflect on the shortest day of the year, we are filled with gratitude. Gratitude for the people who support us. Gratitude for the Internet that allows us to connect to you, wherever you are. Gratitude for all the generous, warm gifts of 2004 – our successful Heart of the Grove fund raiser, the gentle laughter of our friends, the wonderful ideas from our survey participants, the generous donations of time and money from our supporters, volunteers and the Open Grove community, and much, much more. We have been truly blessed in 2004.

We are excited about our programming schedule for next year. ([Click here](#) for an Adobe Reader copy of the schedule.) We hope you will read, listen and grow with us in the upcoming year.

This newsletter focuses on our Spiritual Quest. In this season of the miraculous, a sun that rises every single day, a festival of lights, the American Kwanzaa, and the celebration of a child's birth, it's important to take a moment and reflect on your own spiritual journey.

Spiritual hunger

Our minds strive to create meaning out of chaos. For example, spend a few moments looking at a textured wall. If you stare at the wall long enough, your mind will begin to see patterns, faces, or animals in the random texturing. As we gaze at the world around us, we also begin to see patterns. Some people believe they see the "hand of god", while others are convinced they are "lucky or unlucky". Events are assigned meaning based on our experience of the world.

Still, in the silence of the night, many people long to connect with something greater than themselves. They might hunger for the smells and sounds of the forest or the wafting odor of incense. Others speak of an emptiness that cannot be filled by friends, family or possessions. We hunger for something we can barely express – a connection to the divine.

Scientists tell us that our spiritual experience comes from brain. The sense of God has been shown to come from our right hemisphere (temporal lobe) while the deep spiritual connection is said to come from our superior parietal lobe. These areas of the brain are usually most associated with physical sensation, movement (including movement through space) and interpretation of music. Just like we long for sensation and movement, we hunger for a connection to something greater than ourselves.

Many people believe that alcoholism and addiction are a direct result of attempting to fill our spiritual hunger with substances. We replace spiritual connection with obsession and compulsion for drugs and alcohol. We fill our spiritual hunger with substances that numb, block and otherwise disconnect us from the world and ourselves. And still our spiritual hunger persists.

Spiritual silence

Once we acknowledge our spiritual hunger, we often experience a profound silence. It's almost as if the world holds its breath until we move toward filling our spiritual hunger. It is in this silence that many people become lost or disenchanted. They might feel the need to quickly fill their spiritual hunger. The silence itself can fill the spaces and leave very little room for a spiritual quest.

Yet acknowledging our spiritual hunger is simply the first step in our spiritual quest. If you find that you are stuck in the spiritual silence, here are a few ideas to help you begin to move forward in your spiritual quest.

1. Spiritual ghosts – Many people have spiritual or religious ghosts. They may have been raised in a family with “right vs. wrong” fear oriented religious traditions. They could have been raised in traditions that are so ethereal as to lack grounding and boundaries. Whatever your spiritual ghosts might be it’s time to put them to rest. Spend some time thinking about where your spiritual quest is stuck. Try to review your history with compassion. Write in your journal about the situations you still have strong feelings about. These are merely obstacles on your spiritual quest. Try to learn from these obstacles. What do they mean about you? About the world? Beginning to look at your past may help you get unstuck.
2. Filling the void – Often we fill the spiritual silence, or void, with possessions. If you find your house filled with stuff, it’s time to do a little house cleaning. Take 15 minutes every day and go through each room. Are there things that you haven’t used in the last year or two? It’s time to give them away. Start small. Donate a few items to your favorite charity. When you feel ready, go through your closets, storage container and/or basement. Our spiritual quest requires that we have a sense of spaciousness. This void is a part of your spiritual quest. You must create some space for it to exist.
3. Too smart for your own good – Sometimes people get stuck in the spiritual silence because they strive to intellectually understand their spirituality. Intellectual process is a left-brain phenomenon where as spiritual questing is a right brain phenomenon. It doesn’t work to try to intellectualize the divine. The more you know, the more confusing disconnected you can become from the spiritual experience which is the foundation of your quest. Allow yourself to acknowledge all that you know but realize that it may have very little bearing on your actual physical experience.

Spiritual silence is a part of your spiritual quest. As you move along your spiritual journey, you will come to enjoy the spacious feeling of this spiritual silence.

The answers?

Often people look at their spiritual quest as a search for answers. They might go to their local church, synagogue or temple looking for answers. However the point of a spiritual quest is the journey itself, the experience of acknowledging your spiritual hunger and meeting this need with a connection to spirit. Religious institutions can be roads or pathways on this journey. They can facilitate you finding your answers in their religious documents, meeting places or practices. They can connect you with people who will teach you about your experience through their expertise and form a community to support your quest. They can provide a forum and ritual to help you connect with something greater than yourself. They can even give you some idea of what the end point of your spiritual quest might be.

Religious institutions cannot give you answers to your questions. The questions are your own so you must find your own answers. Your spiritual hunger is your own and can only be filled through your personal experiences with the divine. Do not be discouraged when your religious institution cannot fill your hunger. They are designed to point you in a direction and support you along the journey. It is up to you to find your way.

Your own spiritual connection

You are filled with your spiritual hunger. You have experienced or are experiencing the spiritual silence. You realize that your religious institution can support you but cannot answer your questions for you. How do you find your own spiritual connection? How do you begin your life long spiritual quest through your connection with the divine? Here are a few ideas about finding your own spiritual connection.

- Learn to listen to your own voice. We are often filled up with other people's thoughts and opinions. Finding your spiritual connection is about learning to listen to your own voice, your own heart. The easiest way to begin this process is with journaling. Start a practice of writing in your journal for 15 minutes every morning. Ask yourself, "How am I today?" Can you hear yourself?
- Create a place of spiritual connection. It's important to create a space where you intend to experience a spiritual connection. Some people create small alters in their home. Other people find a beautiful spot in nature that they can visit easily in person or in their imagination. It's not uncommon to find a place of worship as the place of connection. You can start this process by noticing where you feel spiritually connected.
- Find reading that emphasizes your spiritual quest. There are numerous books about spiritual quests. Find something that makes sense to you. Read a chapter before you go to bed at night or first thing in the morning. An autobiography that tells of someone else's journey may inspire you. Many people find inspiration in learning about other people's religions or faith. Don't hesitate to investigate something that seems interesting to you.
- Join a group. While this might seem like the last thing that would be helpful, many spiritual and religious groups focus around our individual spiritual connection. Ask the people you trust. Speak with the leader of the group to make certain that they are focusing on individual connection. In the right group, you can have an amazing individual experience.
- Say "yes" to life. Often our spiritual quest is disguised in the form of people and experiences. Practice simply saying "yes" for a while. Watch yourself and your experience. Your spiritual lessons might be right in front of you if you simply say "yes" to them!

Real self care for real people

As a part of our Real Self Care program, we will publish a retreat from 20-Minute Retreats by Dr. Rachel Harris. These retreats are short and designed to fit into your daily life. Feel free to take a look at the Real Self Care 2004 section of our bulletin board (www.opengrove.com/bulletinboard/) for more retreats and other ideas about real self care for real people.

"Five minute retreat – No time to retreat"

"Lama Surya Das, a Tibetan Buddhist, writes that "Even the Dalai Lama says he doesn't have sufficient time for quiet meditation and reflection." So how can we poor mortals come up with twenty minutes a day?"

"The Dalai Lama is probably wishing not for twenty minutes of quiet time but perhaps twenty hours. We, on the other hand, probably watch twenty minutes of TV commercials a day. So let's get very honest with ourselves."

"*We're too busy* - For many of us, this statement is a reflection of our attachment or addiction to our daily lives. For the rest of us, it's that we imagine the world will fall apart if we didn't do everything ourselves."

"*We're fearful of the unknown* – Retreats invite us into different state of consciousness, expanding our awareness by shining light on what was previously unconscious. This can be uncomfortable until we learn to navigate our inner world."

"*What inner life?* – Some of us may be so out of balance that we think our daily activities are all there is to life. The development of spiritually nourishing inner life requires both solitude and silence."

"*I have no discipline* – That may be true. We live in a self-indulgent culture. We seek comfort and ease, having forgotten how to say no to ourselves."

For the next few minutes, simply consider these questions: What reason or excuse do you give yourself for not having twenty minutes a day to nurture your soul? Is your rationalization for not having the time significantly different from the reasons listed above? If you're really honest with yourself, can you find the time?"--Reprinted with permission from 20 minute retreats by Rachel Harris, Ph.D.

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News in the Grove -

- We are delaying the release of our "Endings/Beginnings" audio magazine. We decided to give the good people who work for us some time off this holiday season. Therefore we are delaying the release of our "Endings/Beginnings" Audio Magazine until later in the month of January. We apologize for any inconvenience.
- Watch for our new website! Webmaster Brian is diligently working to create a new and improved Open Grove website. We had hoped to present it to you by January 1, 2005. As it always is with this kind of thing, we are behind schedule. We'll let you know what happens!
- Thank you to everyone who participated in the Heart of the Grove! This year's Heart of the Grove was incredible! Thank you for your support during this event!
- Next year's featured book? Based on your answers to the fall questionnaire, we decided to highlight 3 different books next year in our newsletter. We will rotate sections from Michael Carroll's Awake at work focusing on stress reduction and connection to spirit while working, Camille Maurine and Lorin Roche's Meditation 24/7 for insight into practical tips on meditation, and Barbara Stoker's Intelligent Risking for inspiration on creating balance in your life. We will also present these authors in our upcoming Webinars. Stay tuned!

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Contact us at: info@opengrove.com

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