

# Ask Connie—Do You Feel...

Connie Myslik-McFadden

Dear Connie,

**L**ately I feel like that girl who tried a solo sailing trip around the world must have felt when the storm hit, broke her mast, and left her adrift at sea. My car was t-boned two weeks ago, actually shoved thirty feet by someone talking on a cell phone, and I have a broken arm and lots of bruises. I'm still in shock. Between the accident and all the crises in the world, I'm finding it really hard to stay calm and centered. I feel like I've been and still am being tossed around by huge waves, the way I felt as a child trying to swim in the ocean—helpless, disoriented and can't catch my breath! I do want to know what's going on in the world, but on top of my personal issues sometimes it's just too much. How can I stay sane and happy in this crazy world?

Sincerely, —Marianne

Dear Marianne,

**M**y sense is that many people are experiencing life as topsy-turvy these days and wondering the same thing.

Even if we aren't dealing with challenging personal issues, we are bombarded daily with disturbing news about the Gulf oil disaster, two wars, the ongoing threat of a terrorist attack, and a major recession. It's a lot to process and adds to whatever stress already exists in our lives. We can easily get overloaded and overwhelmed. Our communications devices, beneficial as they are in many ways, overstimulate our minds and our senses. We are addicted to our "need to know" and our desire for instant, constant communication, while being unaware of the nega-

tive effects on our nervous and emotional systems. We all need to find ways to protect ourselves from too much input, especially negative input. After a traumatic experience such as a car crash, it's especially important to take care of yourself. Your entire system has been affected, and time is needed to recover not just from physical injury, but emotional trauma as well.

One concept and image that I find useful is that of a surfer riding a wave. If we learn how to ride the wave, we don't get tossed and turned. The outer world may correspond to the waves of the ocean, the surfboard to our inner sense of balance and composure.

There are ways to minimize the effects of the outer world on our psyche, and spiritual practices to develop more inner peace and harmony. Let's consider the outer world first:

It may be helpful to make a conscious choice as to how much you want to expose yourself to news that may really be unimportant for you to know and will only add stress and negativity to your life. Most of the time it isn't necessary for us to know about, or to see in living, gory, color, the details of car wrecks, tornadoes, bombings, etc. that are hundreds or thousands of miles from where we live. Yes, it's important to be an informed citizen, but that doesn't mean we have to hear every detail of the sensationalist news that's on all day long, every day.

It might be wise to decide, before you pick up the newspaper or turn on the computer in the



morning, what to read and what to skip, what to listen to and what to just turn off. Some people limit TV watching and computer use to a certain amount of time each day, which forces choice rather than aimless drifting from one subject or program to another. Can you consciously choose what influences to open yourself up to?

Much of our happiness is not dependent on what happens outside ourselves. Happiness is a state of being that emanates from within. There are spiritual practices which can increase your sense of happiness, peacefulness, and centeredness. In these turbulent times it's more important than ever to make them a high priority in your life.

Here are five spiritual practices that will help you find and hold your center even when winds or waves are swirling around you:

1. **MEDITATION**—A simple way to meditate is to sit quietly, close your eyes, take three long, slow, deep breaths, and allow all the muscles in your body to relax. Then continue breathing normally, focusing your attention at the tip of your nose. Follow the in and the out of your breath. If (when!)

thoughts intrude, gently let them go and bring your attention back to the tip of your nose. Do this for ten minutes every day, preferably at the same time each day. Gradually, over a period of weeks, increase your meditation time to twenty minutes a day. Many studies have demonstrated that meditation synchronizes the left and right hemispheres of the brain, creating a sense of oneness.

2. **JOURNALING**—Keep a journal of your joys, sorrows, challenges, successes, longings, frustrations, and problematic patterns of interaction on a daily basis. Half an hour a day of journaling will help you stay in touch with the truth of who you are, and once you have written things down they are less likely to clutter your mind.
3. **DREAMWORK**—Write your dreams. We all dream, but dreams are elusive. Mostly they disappear into thin air if we don't write them down. Tell your dreams to your mate, a friend, or a dream worker who can help you understand their meaning. Dreams are gifts from the unconscious; they need to be “unwrapped” to be fully appreciated.
4. **PRAYER**—Beginning your day with an attitude of gratitude for all that is good in your life is a good practice. There is so much to be thankful for; include some of it in your journaling. Then, to whatever higher source is meaningful to you, ask for help and healing, for yourself and for those you love. Extend that prayer to those places and situations that go way beyond your immediate circle. Ask for help and guidance in achieving the inner and outer goals that matter to you, always with the caveat that the outcome be for your highest good and the highest good of others.
5. **GENEROSITY**—It has been shown over and over again that people who give of their time and talents, without expecting a reward, feel better about themselves and the world around them than those who hold tight to what they have. Volunteering in some way that is meaningful to you will enhance your life and the lives of those you help. When our hearts are open, when we feel and act out of love and compassion for others, we are happier. Those around us are, too! ■

*Blessings, — Connie*

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**Do you have a relationship question?** E-mail [conniem@mcn.net](mailto:conniem@mcn.net), or call 406-582-7450 and ask! E-mail sent to Connie is read only by Connie Myslik-McFadden, MSS, LCSW, and will be held in strictest confidence. No identities will be published. Disclaimer: The responses to questions in this column are for information only. Never disregard professional advice or delay seeking it because of anything you read here. Working with a skilled professional is highly recommended.

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**Connie Myslik-McFadden**, MSS, LCSW, is a psychotherapist in Bozeman with 25 years of experience working with individuals, couples and groups. She leads workshops, retreats and teaches Dreamwork and Pathwork. Connie devoted 9 years to Jungian analysis, training, and supervision, after graduating from the Bryn Mawr School of Social Work. She went on to graduate from the Barbara Brennan School of Healing, and Society of Souls, a kabbalistic school of healing. She is the author of “Gathering the Soul, a True Story of Spiritual Healing.” Pathwork ([Pathwork.org](http://Pathwork.org)) and Imago Relationship Therapy [www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org](http://www.GettingTheLoveYouWant.org)) are two easily accessible sources for the theories upon which much of this column is based.