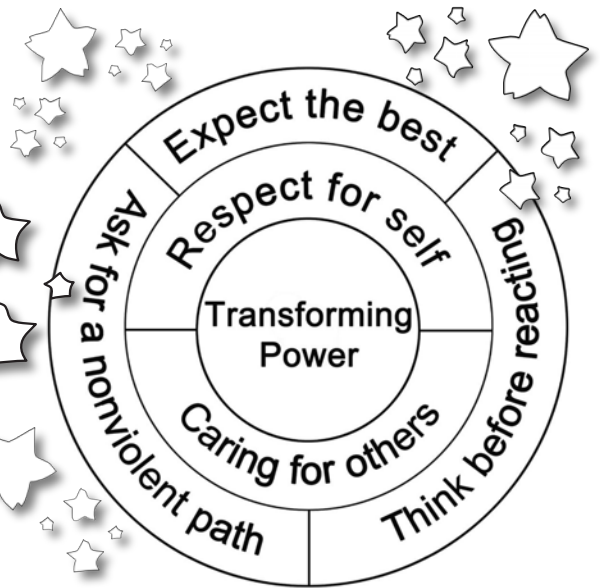


AVP Inside Out

Issue #12/December 2021



Note From the Editors

Greetings wonderful people,

We hope that this newsletter finds you healthy and safe. In this issue, we'll be looking at a way to celebrate the winter holiday season, the spirit of the season and the diversity of our AVP Community. We are delighted to include commentary from our insiders and welcome future additions. In this issue you'll find suggestions for planning for your future, and a meditation to help ground yourself in a powerful way, in the here and now. We conclude the two series, Communication Corner and Spiritual Perspectives, with reminders to take care of ourselves. Remember that the next issue you receive will be in February. Until then, we'll be thinking of you and sending positive energy your way.

The Editors



Guardian Spirit
By Perspicacious Fish, 2002
Painting in Oil, 8" x 10"

To Know the Dark

To go in the dark
with a light is to
know the light.

To know the
dark, go dark. Go
without sight,

and find that the
dark, too, blooms
and sings,

and is traveled by
dark feet and
dark wings.

by Wendell Berry

Celebrations

Spotlighting outstanding individuals of diverse backgrounds
through the lens of current events

Turning Toward the Light at a Time of Darkness:
Observing the Winter Solstice
by Diligent D.

The wheel of the year turns once again on December 21st, the Winter Solstice, a time of great antiquity and sacredness. Although it later became associated with the birth of Christ, the solstice was originally viewed as the birthday of the Sun, following a period when the Sun seemed to almost disappear.

Celebration of the return of the Midwinter Sun held a special place in civilizations throughout the ancient world. For example, sunlight enters the dark womb of the passage grave in New Grange, Ireland, only at sunrise on December 21. Similarly, at Stonehenge in England the rising sun on December 21 shines through carefully aligned standing stones. In the United States at Chaco Canyon, New Mexico, the solstice sunrise creates the shape of two daggers flanking a spiral cut into the cliff face – perhaps associated with the sacred sun ceremonies of the Hopi and Zuni.

Is there a meaningful way in which we people of the 21st century can participate in a solstice observance? Solstice offers the possibility of new beginnings, of rebirth, of a clean slate. Everyone could use that!

You might begin with cleansing your immediate environment or clearing up unfinished business. Cleansing might involve letting go of old thoughts, old positions, old ways of being that no longer nourish us as we seek new understandings. You might create a solstice altar or shrine in a special spot, filling it with objects of personal significance, perhaps stones and leaves or a traditional nativity scene.

Gift giving is central to the season, even though it has been carried to extremes in the commercialization of Christmas. Gifts may be given to others but also to one's self. Perhaps, after making a list of your own real wants and needs, you make a present to yourself of one thing on your list: e.g. give yourself more time to accomplish a goal, or give yourself permission to speak your wants out loud. You might give something you value to another person: your time, your assistance, your knowledge, praise for things you hold precious. For example, "for children everywhere, Blessings and Praise", "for the gifts of friendship, Blessings and Praise," etc.

Performing little rituals to mark the season might appeal to you: greeting the sun each morning and welcoming its return; acknowledging your place on the planet by celebrating the cardinal directions. Keep in mind that North is associated with earth, with cold, ice and snow, with things waiting to be born. East represents air, springtime, new life. South is the direction of fire, the heat of life ripening in the earth. West is the area of water, of movement and emotion seeking new direction.

As John Matthews says, "Winter is a particularly sacred time, an opportunity for communing with the gifts of the Solstice. The mantle of the year wraps its many colors about everyone's shoulders; no one is excluded from these celebrations." Welcome.

Work Cited: Matthews, John. *The Winter Solstice: The Sacred Traditions of Christmas*, Quest Books, 1998.

Dear AVP

Advising each other through specific conflict by committee

Dear AVP,

Maybe you can help me. I'm due to be released in a couple of months, after a 26 year bid. The closer I get to release, the more anxious I feel. Inside, I know where I stand, who I can trust, what the rules are. Outside, everything's different and so much has changed since I was on the streets. People's lives moved on without me. Cars, technology, hell, even telephones aren't what they used to be. Everyone I know was or is in prison, or is connected to that life. I'm not sure I know how to act with "regular" people. I don't want to come back to prison. What can I do to make sure that doesn't happen?

Overwhelmed, but Hopeful

Dear Hopeful,

You have a major change coming up and that can feel overwhelming to anyone. You are being proactive by making plans in advance of your release. The more you can arrange ahead of time, the softer your landing will be. Remember that, as our friend Motivated Maria says, "it takes a long time to make old friends." New friends become old friends if given the chance.

Here are a few ideas that may help. Begin by envisioning what you want your new life to look like. Reach out to friends from your past who will support that ideal. Contact AVP (us!) and other positive organizations. Look for like minded people by participating in activities that you care about. Start before you

are released so that there are some things already in place when you get out.

There are programs specifically designed for those returning to society that can help with support groups and assistance. Preserve your connections, maybe by finding a different way to be with them. Take it slow. Address the most important issues first, without feeling like you have to fix everything all at once. Changes will take some time before they feel comfortable. Trust yourself to approach new relationships in a good way. Give yourself credit for the efforts you are making right now to prepare yourself. And know that there are people who care for you and are cheering the steps you take toward success.

AVP

Communication

Applying the subtle skills of nurturing true communication in everyday conversations

Corner

Guidelines for Improving Communication, Part 9: Conclusion, Empathy for Self by Pespicious Fish

This series has attempted to draw to the surface some of the skills to nurturing true communication, skills akin to our guidelines in an AVP workshop. To recap:

- Be respectful of another's time and attention
- Give space to every voice
- Practice active listening
- Feed only that which you wish to grow
- Be honest - in a gentle way
- Volunteer self - only
- Verbalize personal accountability

True communication means making space for the other, our selves, and our connection. It means slowing down and trying our best to hear and see all of

what is being said and understood in that moment. Otherwise, we're busy feeling not heard, or triggered, or spiraling off-point - but not communicating.

Yet, these guidelines focus on empathizing with the other. If the other is not in turn empathizing with us, then how and when might we feel heard and seen ourselves? For me, it was learning I could give myself the empathy I was seeking from others. The energy of my own presence satisfied that pain which I carry no longer.

At any moment you find you are in need of empathy or love, take time to tune in, to see and comfort yourself. Whenever

you're feeling anxious or fearful, speak internally the words you would want to hear: I see you're in pain. I'm here with you. Marshall Rosenberg, Author of *Nonviolent Communication*, recommends using a pet name for yourself, like beloved, or dear one. In whatever ways you find work for you, give your inner self the loving gift of your conscious presence.

In summary, to improve communication: care for the connection of a moment, draw out the other, listen well, be kind, ask for what you need, avoid negativity, assume accountability...and take comfort in your ability to be the one you need in the world.

If you are in a position to donate in any amount, please consider [Friends for a NonViolent World](http://fnvw.org) (fnvw.org) to support the printing and delivery of this newsletter to insiders.

“Don’t try to do it all alone. Go hand in hand with others, so you can pick each other up as you fall”

by David Icke | Submitted by David Dawud

Hispanic American Heritage Month

The history of those living in the US who are descended from Spanish-speaking people is as complex as the very names used to identify them, and as controversial. Hispanic refers to people who speak Spanish or hail from Spain (excluding, for instance, Brazil where Portuguese is spoken). Latino refers to people from Latin America (excluding, for instance, Spain). Chicano identifies people who are from Mexico and who live in the US. And finally LatinX has emerged in recent years to distinguish itself from Latino/Latina as a more inclusive non-binary term. Additionally, many people prefer to identify themselves by their country of origin. People can be very passionate about these distinctions, so the best approach is to ask people to identify themselves. This article will use the term LatinX, as the most inclusive representative term.

All too often, in our euro-centric perspective, we speak of the history of a people beginning with their interactions with Europeans. Here we acknowledge the vast history and development, long before Europeans “discovered” and named “America”. Native people inhabited the continents of North and South America going back as far as 40,000 years ago, during the late Glacial Maximum period. They developed chiefdoms, states, kingdoms and empires known as Zapotec, Toltec, Aztec, Maya and Inca, among others.

When Europeans arrived in the 1500s, they found thriving communities and proceeded to conquer, “save”, and ultimately blend with the native people. This created a richly diverse and resilient collection of communities with multifaceted identities. No wonder there has been such a struggle to come up with a single term that suffices to identify them.

LatinX people of indigenous descent and Native Americans are the oldest ethnic groups inhabiting what is now the United States. LatinX is the fastest growing minority group in the US, comprising 18.7% in the 2020 census. In 1968, President Lyndon Johnson began the observation of Hispanic Heritage week, subsequently expanded it to a month, and enacted it into law on August 17, 1988. It is a month-long celebration which includes the Independence Days of several Latin-American countries, including Mexico.

Today’s LatinX people exhibit their resilience and diversity in the roles they share in our communities, as artists, scientists, inventors, actors, politicians, singers, astronauts, athletes, leaders for social justice, politicians, authors, supreme court justices, parents, teachers, laborers and more. We gratefully acknowledge the richness of their contributions to our lives and communities.

Bright Brucie

About this Newsletter

AVP Inside Out is a newsletter created by MN AVPers to support our communities and to keep AVP principles in action. Our communities include incarcerated and non-incarcerated citizens, referred to as “insiders” and “outsiders”. As of November 11, 2021, 465 insiders in 9 facilities receive print copies. Electronic copies are sent to an additional facility, a veteran’s healing community, and 1465 outsiders. Please note that editors cannot respond to correspondence, but we are delighted to hear from our readers and grateful for all feedback. We occasionally publish excerpts from correspondence (using adjective names); please indicate whether you give us permission to do so.

Editors: Bright Brucie, Perspicacious Fish, Centered Cindy, and Radical Reece.

Layout Publisher: Perspicacious Fish

Line drawings not credited are artistic fonts.

[AVP](#) (Alternatives to Violence Project, [avpusa.org](#)) is a program of [FNVW](#) (Friends for a NonViolent World, [fnvw.org](#)).



Seeking Creative Works

Share imagery of your creative works with permission for publication
- doodles welcome

Thoughts From the Inside

Insider reflections of AVP actions

Back in April, Biden suggested that "political divisions and COVID were a chance for our country to begin turning evil into possibility, crisis into community, and set back into strength."

For me, there is no surprise at backlash against vaccines. Prison's vaccine (AVP) was developed half a century ago and Society has had no problem ignoring this in favor of continued "normalcy" in criminal justice operations. I just hope they will see what I've seen - a smile from Motivated Maria, kind words from Compassionate Chris, a wave and a nod from Landmark Lorenzo, the energy and strength from Loving Lee, and encouragement from Mountain Mike and Pespiscopacious Fish...the whole AVP family. [heart]

Thank you, in love,
Radical Reece
[arms across the chest :)]

The newsletters look real nice and have good stuff in them.

David Dawud



SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVES



Exploring the divine in ourselves and one another.
AVP is not religious, but we are spiritual!

Conclusion, Part 8 in a series on Becoming
by Pespiscopacious Fish

With this series, I've described my journey, pieced together from varied yet universal spiritual texts; it is a circular path of becoming one's highest spiritual ideal. To recap:

- Contemplate and find connection with Oneness
- Work with your own spiritual, mental and physical ideals and use these to focus your beliefs, thoughts, and actions
- Train your vibrations to attune to your highest ideal
- Keep a consistent meditation practice that works for you
- Act mentally and physically in the world in ways that model what you have gained spiritually
- Rely on the use of affirmational words or phrases to transform your energy in a moment

I'm pretty sure at least some of our reality comes about because our subconscious minds conspire with the universal mind to create challenges we still need to learn from. Sometimes, an ongoing pattern means we've yet to learn the lesson, or need another reminder. (And sometimes, there's no rhyme or reason for our suffering.) All this to say, while in deep pain I once promised myself: I no longer need to learn my lessons of spiritual growth the hard way. I can have safety and stability, and will continue to push myself to grow and evolve even from a place of comfort. This might even be the origin story of AVP's Transforming Power in my life.

I imagine we are each little sparks of our whole self, a oneness of sentient consciousness. We've been out exploring and getting to know all of our aspects. But we've been separated from our source for so long that our vibrations have lost our original attunement. This to me explains the universal sense of pain that cannot be touched. But this also brings me hope. It is within us, individually and collectively, given a lot of time, to raise our vibrations. Our true bodies, all forms, are basically energy. And on a level our conscious minds are not aware of, we are connected as one.

Though pain and suffering are a condition of living in physical form, when a person realizes Oneness, they begin to nurture themselves and the well-being of others. They begin to transform, to lighten heart and soul. They find and nurture sanctuaries of comfort, gratitude, and love, and find these expand.

"The only way through pain is to transform it into love."
- a tv series character

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to support the printing and delivery of this newsletter to insiders.



Meditation

Providing opportunity for personal growth and reflection

Connecting with the Earth by Bright Brucie

This meditation can be adapted by choosing what aspect(s) of nature you focus on and how much time you take. When I use this, I feel a stronger connection to the universe, more at peace, full of joy, and empowered.

The words below are an example of the stream-of-consciousness process I follow, (whether in thought or spoken aloud). It is never the same twice. There is no right or wrong. I find focusing on earth, water and air a very powerful combination. If you find this works for you, take it and make it your own.

Find a safe place where you will not be interrupted. Be at ease in your body (sitting, lying down, or walking). Take a deep breath, deep into your belly and lungs, hold it for a count of three, and slowly release it. Repeat twice more.

Say to yourself, I am earth. Then imagine all the manifestations of earth. I am the bedrock on which skyscrapers are built. I am the vessel holding open spaces for air and water to move through. I am carbon transformed into diamonds by the pressures around me. I am granite and I am sand. I am immovable and an ocean of particles blown by forces out of my control. I am magma – liquid stone. I am scorching hot, rising from the core of the earth. I am the glass-like obsidian that reflects my true nature. I am soil that is created by the layering of living essences deposited in my care. I hold safe the creatures who build their nests in me. I feed the living plants that draw nourishment from me through their roots. I am earth... Take a moment and feel the enormity of what it is to be earth. Take a deep breath, and release it.

Continue this process by fully immersing yourself in what it is to be water and air.

Say to yourself, I am water. Imagine all the manifestations of water... Take a moment and feel the enormity of what it is to be water. Take a deep breath, and release it.

Say to yourself, I am air. Imagine all the manifestations of air... Take a moment and feel the enormity of what it is to be air. Take a deep breath, and release it.

When you have completed your journey, take a few minutes to experience the expanded sense of who and what you are and how you are connected. Slowly, begin the process of coming back to the present place, time and physical presence. Take deep breaths and feel the air enter your lungs. Feel your body – what do you see? What do you hear? What do you smell?

Be in a place of peace. Take all of the gathered energy and send it out to the universe, with gratitude.

Take a deep breath, deep into your belly and lungs, hold it for a count of three and slowly release it. Repeat twice more. Come back to your Self knowing that you may be a little bit more your Self than when you started. Be gentle with yourself as you move back into your day or night.