

GLOBAL *EXPRESS*

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MEN What is it to be a man
in today's society?

Trying out pilgrimage
Finding solace in Sufism

EDITORIAL

When we announced this theme (What is it to be a man in today's society?) some felt it was too superficial a topic. The response, however, has been unprecedented. Never have we had such a deluge of articles. Even today, the day before we go to press, someone else was hoping it wasn't too late to submit his piece. It's been a privilege for us, as women, to receive such honest and heartfelt contributions from men around the globe. Grateful thanks go to Jeroen Gunning from The Netherlands (Research Fellow at St Anthony's College, Oxford) for suggesting the idea. We've tried to make it as culturally representative as possible but the majority of contributions have come from a Western perspective. Nevertheless, we hope what we've collated will be a helpful addition to what is clearly a hot topic.

Nicci Long and Laura Trevelyan

Next issue: Rootedness and Mobility

Deadline: March 1, 2001

Young men, statue in Oslo
Photo: Elisabeth Peters



Editors: Nicci Long, Laura Trevelyan **Layout & Design:** Nicci Long
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Why Global Express?

Global Express (GE) was started in Melbourne, Australia, in 1994 to link up young people who care about the future. Dissatisfied with what we were being offered by commercial youth magazines, we felt an alternative was needed.

Our aim is to inspire people to believe in themselves, and to believe they can make a difference. In GE you can question the way things are, and search for solutions. It is also a great opportunity to make contacts outside your 'comfort zone'.

Most of the GE team met through MRA (Moral Re-Armament), which is a worldwide network of people working for personal responsibility and conflict resolution. Absolute standards of honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, together with a search for inspiration from God (or the inner voice), are central to this approach to life. MRA is a Non Government Organisation recognised by the United Nations. For more information visit: <http://www.mra.org.uk>

Global Express, 73 Victoria Road, Oxford, OX2 7QG, United Kingdom

E-mail: gloalex@oxford.mra.org.uk

Tel: +44-1865-511800 Fax: +44-1865-311950

On the web: <http://www.mra.org.uk/gloalex/>

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Men are in crisis—yet for years I found this subject to be almost taboo. A while ago I was researching a bid for a victim/offender mediation scheme. I was struck by the overwhelming maleness of offenders, but hardly anyone wanted to talk about it. It was OK to cite other predetermining factors such as harsh parental discipline, broken homes and poverty. But not, it seemed, the most obvious one—your biological sex.

The facts speak for themselves. Over 90% of convicted acts of violence are carried out by men, around 90% of children with behavioural problems in school are male and over 80% of children with learning difficulties are boys. Most sexual abuse is committed by males, men routinely fail at close relationships, and fathers are increasingly absent from families.

And it's not a case of men getting away with behaving badly—most victims of violent crime are men, our jails are stuffed to bursting point with men, and the leading cause of death amongst young men is self-inflicted. In 1996 there were almost 6000 suicides in Britain—over 75% by males.

Despite this tragic state of affairs, there is hope because some people are actually talking about it. Crucially, some *men* are talking about it. In particular, Anthony Clare has recently published *Masculinity in Crisis*, which gives the bigger picture and is well worth reading.

We have some way to go before both men and women are liberated from their scripts. But at least we've begun to notice what's happening. As a woman I hope to work with people of all genders and sexualities to help change masculinity for the better.

Caz Ford, UK



Cleaning up graffiti, Photo: Peter Sisam

MEN AND THE CHALLENGE OF EXPRESSION.

Roy McCloughry is a British writer, researcher and broadcaster. He trained as an economist, and is a director of *Third Way* magazine and Lion Publishing. He has written ten books on economic, social and political issues, and has conducted over thirty interviews with leading political and cultural leaders, including two Prime Ministers. His most recent book on masculinity, *Hearing Men's Voices: Men in Search of their Soul*, was published in 1999 by Hodder and Stoughton. He is married to Helen and they have three daughters.

Over the last thirty years it has become increasingly difficult for men to avoid the implications of their

**if women faced the challenge of oppression, men
now face the challenge of expression**

masculinity. In a male-dominated society it is easy for masculinity to be invisible to men. After all they regard it as natural, normal and neutral. It was only when women held up a mirror to them, in the sixties, and said, 'This is what you are really like', that men

had to face up to who they were and what they had become.

So over the last couple of decades there has been a growing debate on men and masculinity. Some have looked at this image and have shrugged their shoulders and said, 'So what?'. Others have protested that they are not guilty of whatever it is men are supposed to have done to women. Others have beaten their breasts and repented on behalf of the whole gender. Others have tried to find new models of manhood.

If the word 'crisis' means 'turning point' then men are in crisis. Although



i have been struck repeatedly how few men say that they have someone to whom they could go in a serious crisis

women say that men are still in control of society—and statistically that may be true—men know that the moral justification for that has disappeared. In the world of work there is now almost nothing that men can do that women cannot. This has had a real impact on men's lives since men have traditionally invested a great deal of their identity in the world of work. In a previous generation, being the provider, procreator and protector summed up the role of the man. For men to work in the public sphere and women in the private sphere of the home may in retrospect look oppressive, but it had the virtue of providing distinctiveness between men and women which has now disappeared. 'Since women can now do anything men can do', some men ask, 'what does it mean to be a man?' This question is difficult to ask for men who feel insecure but do not want to be seen to be setting women back fifty years.

This would not be so difficult if the labour market were still generating jobs for men. But that is no longer true. In Germany for instance, between 1991 and 1995, twice as many men as women lost their jobs. Women gained 210,000 jobs while men lost 400,000. In the EU, 20% more women are graduating than men. Many of the jobs in new technology are going to women and many part-time jobs also. This is therefore a period of adjustment which is painful for many men. They feel that whereas women have added the public to the private, men are still left with the public since they do not want to go into childcare. With the number of jobs staying roughly the same, the share of jobs going to men is decreasing.

Traditional models of masculinity do not make it easy for men to share their pain. Men are three or four times more likely to commit suicide than women. Men, it

seems, still find it difficult to share pain with others, or admit that they need help. If women faced the challenge of oppression, men now face the challenge of expression. The difference is that women expressed solidarity with one another, while men, with some exceptions, are isolated from one another. There has been no men's movement in the sense that there was a women's movement. Men's groups have been set up with very different aims and, where there has been a natural forming of friendships, they have gone a long way to preventing this isolation. But I have been struck

repeatedly in my work with men over the last eleven years, how few say they have someone to whom they could go in a serious crisis. Of course, as society becomes more and more pressured, stress can build up like water behind a dam, until it cracks.

We now live in a culture of intimacy in which sharing what is close to one's heart is a sign of openness; and that openness is equated with emotional health. But many men find

it difficult to express their feelings and see such a requirement as a 'women thing'—and to do with the increased 'feminisation of society'. For them, coping with difficulty and being strong in the face of adversity is an important part of masculinity. They should not be criticised for this, as if there were only one way to live as a man. We need to talk of masculinities in the plural, rather than masculinity in the singular. Nevertheless, when such men say that their interior life is a foreign country, something is wrong. It is not that they do not have feelings but that they do not have the language to express them. This is particularly true of the generation of men who went through the war, for whom



relationships based on verbally expressed intimacy—especially between father and son—can be difficult.

In this kind of culture, friendship of all kinds becomes important. Yet many men are scared of friendships with other men because they may be seen as gay. Many men would prefer to have ‘mates’ with whom they go to the match. They are very good at relationships with other men which revolve around doing something together, such as sport. They are notoriously bad at ‘being’ together without an agenda or task. Friendships based on doing something together are often seen as inferior; this reflects the dominance of the culture of intimacy. But there is room for all kinds of friendship. If chatting as we go round a golf course brings us closer together, why impose any other way of working on men? We are all different.

**when men say that their interior life is a foreign country,
something is wrong**

But one thing that is necessary if friendship is to take root is to break up the myth that the macho man is a real man. In fact, the macho man is half a person since he rejects that half of his character which he regards as ‘feminine’. So many men have been told that they have to get in touch with their feminine side. By this is presumably meant their gentle, loving and nurturing side. But men are called to be men, not fake women. Men love as men do, not as women do. Meekness, despised by macho men, is actually the gentleness of the strong. Men don’t have a feminine side. They are whole men who are free to express every part of their personality. Research shows that men who are nurturers not only make better parents, but are better performers at work and have better emotional health.

It is easy to stop at the emotional health of men without talking about their

**men are called to be men, not fake women; men love as men do,
not as women do**

spiritual needs. To what extent is there a distinctive male spirituality? Some of the attempts to recover a lost masculinity have been spiritual in the broadest sense of the word. A small movement of men has evolved, to rediscover the lost wildness of post-industrial man. Although it is quite right to talk of the need for men to recover wildness, it is not something we can discover in ourselves. It is the wildness of God. As C.S. Lewis said of Aslan, the divine lion in the Narnia stories, ‘he’s not a *tame* lion, you know...’. God’s wildness to be found in his holiness, his ability to be utterly ‘I am who I am’.

The crucifixion poses us with the question, ‘What would you die for?’. Few of us can answer. We are not so passionate about anything that we care enough to put ourselves in harm’s way. We are careful to ‘go with the flow’ and do not stand against our compromised society because we are not committed enough to do so. Yet as a Christian, I believe the recovery of male spirituality will come not from therapeutic introspection but from unconditional commitment to God.

This results in both love and justice. Jesus not only turned

**we live in a society where identity is fluid and changes with the fashions
and the brands**

over the tables of the money-changers in the temple, he knelt and washed his disciples’ feet. Because he was secure as a son, he was set free to be a servant. We need men who are secure. We live in a society where identity is fluid and changes with the fashions and the brands. Men who are deeply spiritual and wise are needed as friends, mentors, fathers and faithful husbands. It is the quality of masculinity rather than the model of masculinity which the world is looking for.

sitting in a sports car in reverse

We males are more a product of our environment than antique social stereotypes would have us believe. In Britain we are experiencing a fragmenting of our role in society, but also a growing sense of freedom. As women have been liberated from their long-standing role, the same is happening for men. We aren't as used to coping with change as women. However, a 21st Century Western male no longer has the luxury of a guaranteed life-long job and partner, nor a socially accepted role model upon which to base his behaviour...



Self-built car, Photo: Peter Sisam

This lifestyle change doesn't come without a struggle. The birth of the male lifestyle magazine coincided suspiciously with the first recorded incidence of eating disorders in males. Men are realising that women can be judgmental about how they want their men, and the beer-paunch has vanished in a flurry of six-packs and sensitivity. Research suggests that anorexia is an attempt to control some element of one's life which feels out of control. This is something that slotting into a pre-formulated 'man' model would have done for us in the past.

Now, as we burst through puberty, snapping the familial apron strings in our wake, men are required to understand what they *are*. Previously men had to identify what they *weren't* (i.e. how they differed from the social model)—a far more restricted way of being. Change has been in the air since the radical break from traditional roles in the 1960's. The 80's heralded the gentle 'New Man', able to express his 'feminine side', consider (though not really assume job of) house-husbandry, and be proud to work as a nurse. Thankfully this alternative to macho-male seems to have bitten the dust. So what is our legacy?

When we examine what lies beyond the shoulder-slapping and awkward hugs, we see a more complicated creature than we think. We are complicated,

proud and frequently arrogant, often insensitive, but no longer so self-assured about the future. How can we be? Women can reproduce without us now, and the glass-ceilings in the workplace are melting. Moreover, they understand each other better than we do. The 'subjugated female' has all that is needed for 21st Century survival, and suddenly men have to earn their place in society, not just assume it.

Does this leave us terrified or challenged? Perhaps a bit of both. And what do we do about it? Aged 21, I finally gained some control of myself. Looking somewhat shamefully at my adolescent life, I came up with my first self-appraisal: shallow, rootless, rudderless and failing. I was perfectly capable of having fun, but this wasn't enough of a platform on which to build self-esteem. Having met the 'fit-in versus stand-out' battle and fought for both camps, I still had little idea of who I was.

Two-thirds of the way through an Arts degree, I found a large part of myself missing. I undertook a 'pilgrimage' to find wisdom. It's a long slow road, but it leads to decisions that carry between jobs—even countries—which are firm enough to build on. Faith was one of the outcomes, which can feel like sitting in a sports car in reverse, since revelations usually come in the form of realising how little you understand. But you have to stay firm in the surety that you know a little more than yesterday. It has helped me know myself better.

That men now have to 'invent' themselves means we are unlikely to believe we fit the traditional stereotype. I don't know anyone who fashions themselves on Arnie, and even James started showing his weaker side in the latest 007. I take much pleasure in undermining people's preconceptions of how men should act. Challenging the accepted norms can help us understand who we really are.

Does all this introspective deliberation help? Though biologically less important than before Dolly the sheep, men will fashion a renaissance. I'm not convinced we know quite what we've got but brawn, however if all we are good for is labouring, we'll go sensitively, if not quietly.

Nick Foster, UK

iron soldier

I am a First Nations man from Tsuut'ina, near Calgary. The problem with today's man is the loss of integrity—we have forgotten our word. For my ancestors, their word was how they survived. If they agreed to meet at a given place in three mornings' time, for example, and someone didn't show up, they would know something bad had happened.

We wonder what we can do to safeguard our children's future. Since first contact (with white settlers) we have started to lose our humanness. As men, we need to say enough, to stand in our own power and not ride on others. I am a father who truly loves his three children and isn't afraid to show it. Or to clean the house. I make sure my wife has everything she needs, including someone to talk to.

I am a warrior. My name is Iron Soldier—a man's name, meaning one you can count on to do the hard things. I hunt

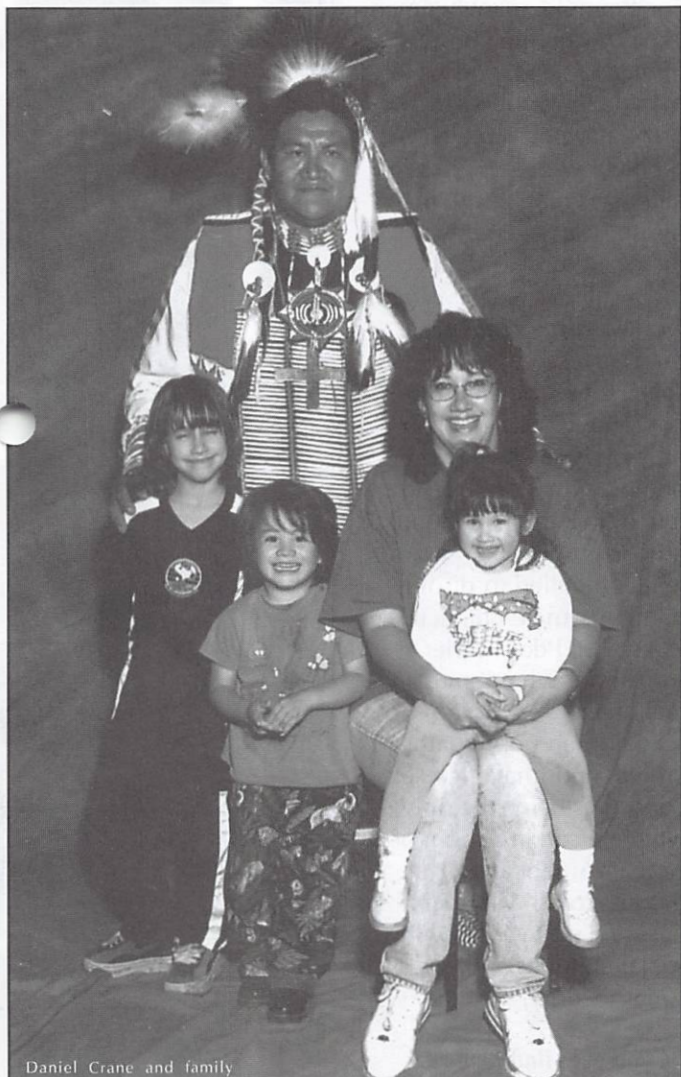
in camo, but also wear a suit—it all depends what I'm going after. Contracts or game, same thing I figure.

Above all, there has to be balance—spiritual, physical, emotional, mental. It is important not to pollute your mind-body-spirit with toxic things: booze, dope, bad food or even poor spiritual advice.

As men, the ego can predominate. We sometimes act like rutting bucks. I have seen men caught in a lifestyle that is not productive. To humble myself—to see the vastness of life and the love that makes it work—I have gone through the Sundance ceremony. Sundance is a community event, a healing, and is for all people. We believe that the only thing anyone truly owns is one's body, and even that is on loan.

For the first time since 1885 (due to colonial ignorance towards our form of prayer) we are finally bringing a Sundance to our Nation Lands. The Dance is four days of fasting with prayer, in the July sun. As men we need balance, so we dance grounding ourselves to the Earth. Women dance too, but they don't lift their legs because they are already grounded. This, I find, is very humbling.

Daniel Crane, Tsuut'ina (Calgary, Canada)
E-mail: juliedan@telusplanet.net



Daniel Crane and family

MEN

this strange murky world

Manhood by Steve Biddulph is a book that helped me see that I am not actually doing so badly when it comes to being a man. I have a job I love, have devoted myself to a lifelong partnership, and have a positive relationship with my father—things that many men find extremely difficult. However, it also articulated some of the things that society and family have unwittingly imposed on me, and that I am struggling with now.

The core message we are given about being men is to be unemotional. This is a talent I have in some abundance. It has meant that I have been able to achieve things in the outside world of work—which is, of course, how we as men today are defined. I have managed not to be brought down by criticism or to develop too much of an ego when things have gone my way. This means I have continued a steady and productive pace of work.

However, I have no idea how my emotions work and it is this strange, murky world that I am opening up at the moment. How is it that I can feel several things about an experience all at once—aren't I supposed to feel one clear thing? Emotions pop up when I am not expecting them; stuff I thought I had dealt with long ago—anger, confusion and even uncertainty.

Some months ago I made a decision to explore this world and joined a men's group. It is a slightly awkward place where we try to talk about our emotions, and a range of other topics we feel are relevant. Most of the men there are older than I am. They are showing me that older men feel many things—good, bad and ugly. As a youngster no one told me this, so I had no idea how relationships worked or how to deal with difficult situations—I had to make it up as I went along! That is why men so often get it wrong and why women feel frustrated by our lack of sophistication in relationships. Imagine if our fathers had explained to us how their marriages worked—how they had to challenge their assumptions or anger, and work out how to love in difficult times. Listening to others in the group talking through the issues they are facing helps me know I am not alone in my fears and gives me some idea of how to tackle these problems.

Feminism is supporting women in making it in the world. We, as men, are on an inward journey to our hearts. However, we are not just here to become touchy-feely creatures. It goes beyond that. There is something in male power (and I am still working out what it is) about focus, cutting through indecision, and a compassionate assertiveness and discipline that is part of the essence of what we have to offer. But we must make the journey through the heart in order to get there.

Sandy Hore-Ruthven, UK

Continued page 17

So what *does* it n

Roy McCloughry's book *Men and Masculinity: From Power to Love* poses a number of questions, which we put to a diverse group of men (and a few women) around the world. The respondents included Mike Murphy (24), youth programme director, UK; Duc Tran (27), social worker, Vietnam/Australia; John Burrows (59), conductor/vocal coach, UK/USA; Jack Lynch (48), director/movement teacher, USA; Angela (23), linguistics graduate, Ukraine; Jacqui Daukes (30), student (religious studies), England; and Michelle Chew (29), PhD student (anthropology), Singapore. Here's where we started...

When asked what it means to be a man, many men are at a loss to know what to say, as they have never reflected on it. They often resort to stereotypes, which do not describe who they are at all. Is this true?

Mike: In my experience yes, because we are surrounded by media images and stereotypes, especially in men's magazines telling us what women look for and how to give them what they want. There aren't enough decent magazines challenging men to think beyond themselves.

Duc: Of course stereotypes don't explain complexity very well and I'd like to think most men are still quite complex human beings! I hope we can appreciate the lives and contribution of different 'types' of men: gay, transvestite, heterosexual...

John: This question is too shallow to elicit much of a response from me, except to say that I have reflected on my 'maleness' very deeply over the years, and do not feel in any sense 'at a loss'

to talk about it.

Do you feel that you fit 'male' stereotypes?

Mike: I like to think I don't, but I know I do.

Duc: I don't think any man actually chooses to wear these stereotypes. We need to respect the powerful influence of culture and biology. I didn't choose to be raised by Vietnamese parents and I didn't choose to be heterosexual either. Every man and woman needs to accept and reconcile their cultural and genetic heritage and make a decision to improve on their life and live alongside others.

John: No. I am me, and the other guy is the other guy. I may or may not share similar characteristics, but can we please move on past this stereotype issue?

As a man, do you feel expected to behave in certain ways? Where does that pressure come from?

Mike: Yes, especially when I go into a pub with my mates and order a pint of water, when they are all drinking alcohol. I think the subconscious fear is

that the group will reject me if I step too far out of line, like asking for a slice of lemon.

Duc: I guess so, because we still make assumptions. For example, many women I know want their boy-friends to 'lead' and 'be a man' (strong-willed, protector etc). I have no problem with these expectations as long as the man himself can live with them. But I often find them silly, as many young women can look after themselves.

John: I feel pressured to conform to 'being a man' only by insensitive people or those who don't spend much time thinking about anything in depth. I do not feel compelled to display particular male characteristics. But I do wonder sometimes what it must feel like to be a homosexual in an unsympathetic crowd, and I have felt self-conscious being the only white person in a room of African-Americans. This has less to do with maleness and more to do with social attitudes and personal security.

Do you ever find it neces-

"I'm an atypical Western guy in his 20s. My dad was a preacher, with a sensitive, feeling side. My mum, a teacher, was more a thinking pragmatist, but with a big heart. Neither of them fit the stereotypes, and largely as a result, neither do I. I'm a creative type, quite sensitive at times, yet also capable of being rather domineering. For many blokes the creative side is trampled on by the peer group that judges rather than seeing possibilities."

Of course there are stereotypes, and differing expectations from men and women on how to



Erik Parsons

mean to be a man?

match—or avoid matching—them. In fact, us Aussies must be up there with the British in producing emotionally stunted and uncommunicative males. Often we men don't know what we feel or think, acting primarily out of duty, accepted example, habit and logic. In reality we're the weaker sex, and use toughness or lack of vulnerability as a protection. This is also to hide the pain and loneliness we're actually very susceptible to, and would love to avoid.

I've found it quite liberating to become more emotionally open myself so, occasionally, I challenge other men to explore the possibilities of their identity. An identity that integrates their 'feminine' side, which for many is their shadow side—that which they don't wish to be seen. I see many struggling with this; lots of us have suffered for not fitting the Superman ideal. So I'm touched every time I see a guy making the (rare) effort to move outside his comfort zone. And one thing's certain: the more these issues are freely explored within our cultures the better for us all."

Erik Parsons, Australia

sary to be stereotypically 'male'? If so, is this an advantage or an imposition?

Mike: As long as it's the right time and place, it's great fun to be stereotypically male and 'hang out with the lads'. This is definitely an advantage because it can be such a good laugh in a way that only men can fully appreciate.

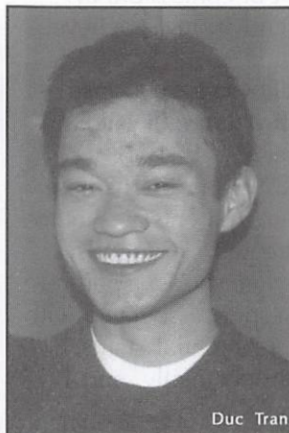
Duc: I find it an imposition, and women who can't look after themselves a little draining.

Do you, as a woman, put pressure on men to behave in certain ways?

Angela: Definitely, yes. As a 'woman', I want to be weak, vulnerable and protected by someone who can do everything. So, the way I behave with men restricts their freedom to be what they want. In action movies, men are the heroes and women just a small decoration. I enjoy this, since it takes responsibility away from me, but I realise it is unfair towards men because they are not gods who can do everything.

What is 'masculinity' in your culture?

Duc: In Vietnamese culture, it is common to see male friends hugging and touching each other (eg. pat on the back) and expressing gratitude and respect in conversation. Perhaps this is a bit different from Western masculin-



Duc Tran

ity, where such man-to-man interaction is limited to sport.

John: Being a man, just that. I don't think that men have to be the breadwinners, and don't find any prejudice against stay-at-home dads. Increasingly, men are changing their surnames to the 'maiden' names of their wives after the wedding. We now have women soldiers, women priests, and firewomen—and I find that healthy, inspiring even. I think men may be paying the price for over-aggressiveness in the past, and I am delighted the tables have been turned on us.

Angela: A hard-working man who is earning money and has connections to move his family up the ladder.

Do men suffer from a gulf between their internal reality and external image? Is your private self different from your public self?

Duc: It is easy to give in to others' expectations,

personal and cultural. Sometimes I find it difficult to be myself and to fulfil my 'inner' needs—or indeed to know what they really are. In truly multicultural societies there is a better chance of finding a cultural niche to fulfil our inner needs and wants.

John: As I get older I worry far less about what others think of me. Honesty has proved the liberator in this area: I no longer need to be so guarded about revealing my 'private' self in a public setting, and this makes everyday living fuller, happier and more relaxed.

Do you feel free to 'be yourself', as a man?

Mike: Fortunately yes. Unfortunately, I think a lot of men in my culture do not realise how lucky they are to be free. They don't take the opportunity to realise their potential until it is too late.

Duc: Yes. I believe I am free. But I am also aware that it is easier to say one is free when one is a part of the existing dominant order. It is only when one's selfhood is oppressed that one can make a clear distinction.

John: Sure, though I really don't think of freedom in those terms.

Jack: Yes, I feel freeeeeeeeeee, most of the time. I don't when I deny (or feel I have been denied) some

aspect of who I am and am out of balance.

Are you more 'yourself' with other men, women, or both?

Mike: I find I relax better with my male friends. When I am around women I want to be better, do better and at least attempt to live up to their impossible expectations (if the magazines are to be believed)!

Duc: I can express my inner feelings to both men and women. It is only with particular people that some subjects cannot be discussed.

John: I'm not good at dealing with people in powerful positions, or with those who bore me. The presence of others, male or female, has little impact (I think) on how I behave, though I do enjoy making women laugh and trying to put them at their ease more than I do with men! What does that tell you?

Jack: I find it easier to talk with women than men—though that is slowly changing as I find a 'circle of men' doing similar work.

Do men you know talk about themselves?

Jacqui: Some talk about themselves too much! Others reveal nothing, so one has no way of getting to know who they really are. It's easy to stereotype and say, 'women talk about themselves and men don't'; this is not true.

Do you find it easy to communicate how you are feeling to others?

Mike: No, very hard. When I get that knot feeling in my stomach and need listening to, I prefer to go to

women. I don't know why.

John: It depends which feelings and with whom I might share them. I have to feel very safe to open my heart fully—and ultimately only do so completely in the sacrament of confession, in which I strongly believe.

Do/did you have a close relationship with your father?

Duc: No. In Vietnamese culture, parents are not to be treated like friends. They are shown a particular respect associated with that reverential status.

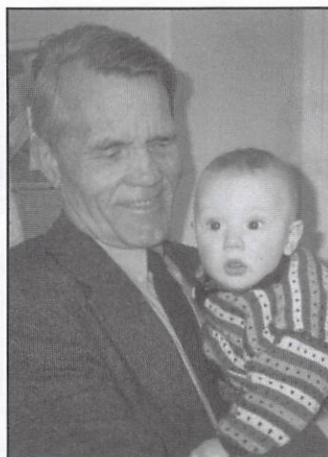
John: Not really, and I regret that.

For those of you who believe in 'god', do you see 'god' as male? If so, how is it to worship a male god?

Duc: Most Christians I know see God as male. I don't like to worship a male or a female or a thing. God is god and there shouldn't be any iconic imagery associated with God. I think Muslims are right on this one.

John: I love the imagery that God treats me as a father does. But I have no sense that I am worshipping a male God or am in male territory. The Great Creator's Son taught me to begin the most important prayer of every day with 'Our Father' and I do—because I love Him, and He loved me enough to die for me. So, I have no reason to doubt, question or disobey—or to compromise my faith to the demands of political correctness.

Jacqui: I do see God as male, and so far no amount of trying to see God as both male and female, the creative force, has worked.



Jens and grandson, Jacob

I do not want to end up as a feminist without God but my image of God has got to change if I want to retain a transforming relationship with God.

Michelle: I think a distinction needs to be made between male/female (qualities of sex or gender) and masculine-feminine (qualities that both men and women possess to varying degrees). I don't see God as 'male' in the biological sense, other than the fact that Christ became a human in male form within a cultural context where men were associated strongly with authority and power. I see God as possessing both masculine and feminine characteristics.

Why do some men view pornography?

Mike: Because some women pose pornographically. Chicken & egg type thing.

Duc: Instinctively, men are heavily dependent on their visual senses (70% of perception is from seeing).

John: Because they're terribly lonely or shy—or insecure to the point of social and mental paralysis. The danger of pornography is less that men look at it, and more that having

"Coming from a family with Viking roots, my idea of masculinity could be coloured by my background. I don't carry a sword or a helmet (except when cycling), but my wife says I can look more fierce than I think. This may be less to do with my ancestry than with a conclusion I came to as a boy: that it was too painful to live with my feelings displayed. I began to hide them behind a mask of toughness."

The macho image of the Viking is not much in evidence today. Young Scandinavian men change nappies and share maternity leave. But the spirit of adventure characterising Norwegians is still there. Courage and honesty are needed for exploration of the outer and the inner world. True masculinity must include being authentic. Honesty has helped me to name my feelings, making me more realistic about my assertiveness as well as my fearful and gentler side. It has been encouraging to discover that people knowing the real me builds friendships rather than putting them off."

Just as the male animal defends his turf, self-assertion is a strong force in the masculine psyche. Civilising it means becoming more aware of other people's rights and how we affect them. Our age of individualism and narcissism does not encourage this. But discovering the potential in other people—men or women—and helping them to realise it should be characteristic of a man."

**Jens J. Wilhelmsen,
Norway**

seen ridiculously exaggerated images, they draw the mistaken conclusion that these represent some attainable reality. This desire is fuelled by idiotic 'boy-talk' that is pure fantasy, and by women who make themselves overly accessible.

Jacqui: I don't think it's viewed just by men. Perhaps we are all being sold some kind of 'sex perfection' which real life does not provide, and therefore some seek an alternative. And there is exhilaration in the 'forbidden'.

Do you tend to hide your vulnerabilities? Why?

Mike: Yes, probably because I like to think I'm invincible.

Duc: We all do, because we live in a competitive environment. Our schools and unis teach us to promote our knowledge so that we can be competitive in the labour market and be good consumers. It is not surprising that advertising, the media and even our closest friends shy away from our weaknesses and vulnerabilities.

John: I don't try to hide them.

Michelle: My close male Singaporean friends are very open in displaying their vulnerabilities in private. Overall in the West, I think there is a sense of bravado in men, and a difference between public and private displays of the self.

What is your biggest fear?

Mike: Doing things like this, and exposing myself to the world.

Duc: Don't know. Death?

John: That something untoward would happen to

my wife or family.

Jack: Biggest fear? Men. Most biggest fear? Me.

Does your work contribute much to your sense of personal identity?

Mike: My personal motivation does (whoever my employer is). Keeping a clear sense of my identity within any organisation, and knowing why I am there, is a daily struggle.

Duc: Yes. I work in a women's welfare organisation, with equal numbers of male and female staff. As a Vietnamese-managed organisation where both English and Vietnamese are spoken, I feel comfortable being who I am.

John: Considerably.

Do you use materialism as a mask?

Duc: We often fall into the trap of associating materialism with strength and power. Most car and computer advertising tries to give the purchaser a sense of superiority. Materialism is based on our inner fears not inner strengths.

Where do you find most fulfillment in life?

Mike: My work, which is voluntary, because it is challenging, effective and creative.

John: In my faith.

Jack: When I'm creating theatre, or teaching classes in movement. When I'm being still, when I'm dancing.

The most important thing in your life?

Duc: Just being, and being out with nature to enjoy it.

John: God.

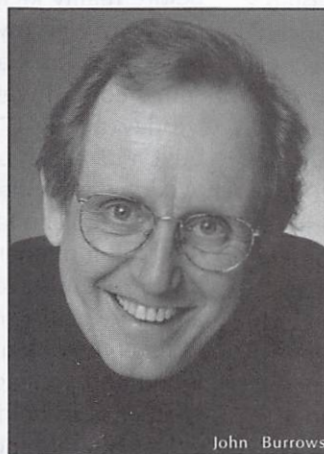
What do you see as the major problem for men

today?

Mike: Firstly, burn out—got to be this, got to have that, got to achieve and do it well. Says who? Second, relationships—not meeting enough people on a one-to-one level and sustaining long-term relationships. I have seen the consumer mentality applied to relationships. We need to create better social lives—for budding entrepreneurs, there is a market to be tapped.

Duc: Learning to live with women and others in a more multicultural and complex society.

John: The uninformed prejudice that male leaders will continue to dominate. There is a deep-seated



fear—held by a large number of men—that most women are ineffectual in positions of power.

Angela: They are put on a stand and, being too proud, do not have enough courage to get down.

What do you, as a woman, expect of men?

Angela: To be what they really want, and above all to be loving.

Jacqui: I do not expect a man to be 'the provider', but I do expect support, especially in a relationship.

"In the latter half of the 20th Century, the traditional male role of 'provider' has been threatened by the emancipation of women. Women have proved that they are capable of most of the tasks previously assigned to men. Men are having to rethink. Women, on the other hand, do not have to question their natural role of childbearing. Their difficulties arise not from a questioning of this role—it remains as it always has—but rather in juggling the priorities of partner, mother, carer and wage earner."

There is male and female in us all. Man or woman, we all have abilities and weaknesses, and good and bad. Our common goal should be to strengthen the good, and to recognise and deal with the bad in each person.

It is much easier to find fault with the other (it makes us feel superior) than to take the trouble to encourage them. But it is only by caring enough for them, be it partner, business colleague or one's children, that growth will happen—in both parties.

Men and women need each other. Do men realise that by developing their less traditional caring skills they can benefit those they care for, themselves and society? Do women realise the benefits to be gained not by trying to demean their men but loving them enough to allow them to reach their full potential? That is the challenge for us, at least in the West, for the 21st Century."

Sheila Andren, UK

TRYING OUT PILGRIMAGE



AS

a child I was known to be accident-prone. At the age of

12, I ventured onto a bus depot's roof to collect fallen conkers. Walking along the apex of the roof as if on a tightrope, I momentarily lost concentration. Desperately trying to recover my footing I stumbled down the corrugated iron panels towards the gutter, but my balance had gone. I awoke on the tarmac surface 20 feet below. Landing head first, I had suffered a fractured skull, two broken wrists and a broken ankle. Perhaps this had been my warning from God.

On August 13, 1983, at the age of 14, it all went horribly wrong once again. This time I was climbing a large tree with my cousin. I scaled some 50 feet before deciding not to go any farther; the branches did not look safe. At this point the branch I

was standing on began to creak. With a loud crack the support under me disappeared. As I fell backwards and downwards, I experienced a feeling of terrifying disbelief.

Within a second I had turned upside down. This time I expected to die. Five minutes later I became conscious. As my vision slowly cleared I felt sickening relief: how had I got away with it? But it wasn't long before reality kicked in. I may have got away with my life, but I had broken my back and severed the spinal cord. I was paralysed.

Today, nearly 17 years on, I have built a career in broadcasting. Working as a video editor for *Channel 4 News* can take me around the world at a moment's notice. As yet, my problems have not compromised any story getting on air.

I recently took a holiday with my friend and colleague, William. Neither of us held any religious values but, not inclined to close our minds to any possibility without first-hand experience, we decided to travel to places of healing. Doctors

can't help, surgeons can't help, but maybe a place of healing is not such a bad idea, we reasoned. We were sure to encounter the bizarre and extraordinary, and would film everything.

Our first stop was San Sebastian d Garabandal, the village of apparitions high in the north-eastern mountains of Spain. In 1961 four young girls from the village claimed they had seen an angel. The claim was discarded by the villagers as a silly prank, but when the girls were seen to drop to their knees in a trance on jagged rocks, without injury, people began to believe.

Over the next four years the village was flooded with pilgrims coming to see the girls in ecstasy. Sometimes they would be seen to levitate as they received a message from the Virgin Mary. One such message said that on a date known only to one of the girls, a miracle would occur in Garabandal and all those present who were sick would be cured. That day is still to come.

Our first challenge in Garabandal

WHAT - U - THINK

Next issue we look at: **Why are some people prepared to sacrifice themselves for a principle, or for others?**
Question submitted by: **Rosa Bellino, Italy**

Deadline: **March 1, 2001**

This issue: **Are moral absolutes out of date?**

James Wood, UK

Moral absolutes were never 'in date'. They were as applicable 2000 years ago, in the Sermon on the Mount, as they are today. Wherever we go and whenever we go there, these basic values are intrinsic to

life—not only human life, but life in the universal sense. They enable us to ground ourselves in the universal laws of life/God/nature. We cannot live without them. I have experienced a very difficult few months recently, filled with confusion and uncertainty. Only when I felt I was approaching life by 'the rules' and asking questions like, 'Can I honestly do this?', did I feel I had direction, clarity and rigour as well as a connection to God.

Amelia Luzzi, Italy

The modern tendency to state that moral values must be taken as relative stems from an idea which dates as far back as Socrates: that morality cannot be defined in terms

was to climb a cluster of pine trees up the mountain from the village. This is where most of the apparitions had occurred. The path to The Pines looked impassable for a wheelchair. It was laid with sharp rocks and boulders and horrendously steep. It took all our combined effort to move the chair a couple of feet. Villagers coming down from The Pines after prayers told us it was impossible, asking if we wanted help to get back down. But we battled on. It took us two hours to get to the top, a distance that could be covered on foot in 15 minutes.

Once there, immersed in low cloud, we took shelter under The Pines, where the atmosphere was mystical. I could almost feel a presence

similar to that in a church, though much more charged. It wasn't long before we were joined by a group of American pilgrims who asked us to take part in a healing Mass the following morning: the subject of the Mass would be me.

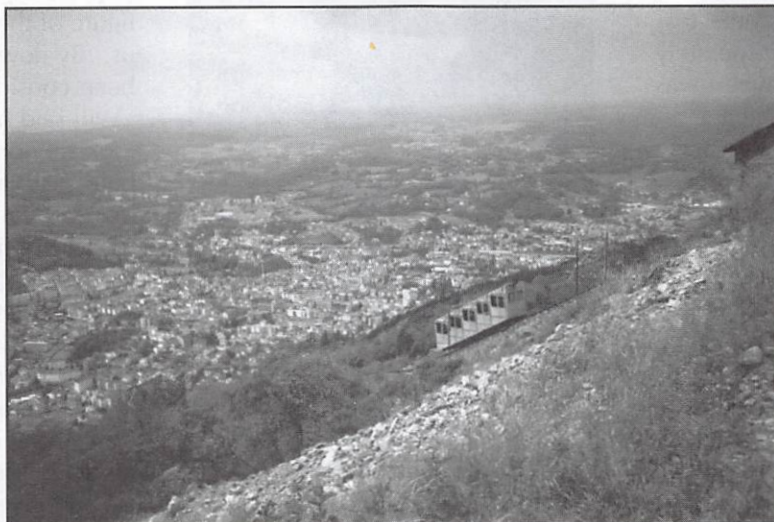
This made me apprehensive: these people did not appear to be either con artists or wacko. I tried to convince myself that I could work. For me though, seeing is believing—how could I benefit from their healing if I was not sure I believed in

God?

The next day we met at the church where I was introduced to a former Catholic priest, now the Rev Manuel Villarreal. A warm and welcoming man, he told me I would benefit from the healing: all I needed was a tiny bit of faith. I guess if I did not have that I would not have been there. He began to rub his hands over me, saying prayers and chanting: 'Come to this man. Jesus. Heal his bones, Jesus. Heal his spine, Jesus.' His followers stood with their hands in the air as if

pull me to the edge of the wheelchair. I was desperately trying not to be sceptical and to give him that little bit of faith. Perched on the

This made me apprehensive: these people did not appear to be either con artists or wacko.



Overlooking the town of Lourdes, Photo: Irene Binstead

edge of the chair I felt the muscles in my legs begin to tighten. I had been anticipating muscle spasms from the moment he began to move me. This was not unusual and I had in the past used the spasms to stand up. Three

of them supported me as Mr Villarreal pulled me to my feet, but I could not help thinking I was standing only because of the muscle spasms.

Mr Villarreal's followers cried: 'Hallelujah'. It seemed I was the only sceptic in the church. I think everyone thought they were witnessing another miracle. I decided I had to have faith, so let go my grip of Mr Villarreal. I expected to crash to the floor but felt

absorbing divine energy.

After a few minutes he began to

remarkably safe.

Soon afterwards, my legs gave up

of a finite list of moral actions. If a man kills another for his money, he is a murderer and a thief; if he kills a would-be butcherer of twenty innocent hostages, he is a hero. For any action which we are told is immoral, we can find a situation in which that very action is right and admirable. But the step from this to saying that moral values are relative is rashly taken. Socrates claimed there was a spirit within him which at times would cry out and stop him performing certain actions; I find this true of myself. Something inside me will not allow me to do certain things. This 'something' is not rational, so I cannot believe it is based on what is best for me. Its object is a greater good than just my own, one

that is absolutely determined. It is in this sense that moral values are, even now, absolute.

David Hassell, UK

Moral absolutes—out of fashion, maybe, out of date, no. As C.S. Lewis pointed out, the square on the hypotenuse hasn't gone mouldy by continuing to equal the sum of the squares on the other two sides. But your view of life will determine your ethical priorities. Certain principles will fit the idea that there is no God; that we have no link or concern with anything outside the space-time continuum: survival for ourselves and the planet is the name of

and the wheelchair was brought forward. It was a hugely emotional experience. Uncharacteristically, I was overcome with an urge to hug the reverend. He told me that I would feel the healing powers of Jesus work on my body overnight and I should see him again tomorrow. I did not feel any such powers overnight, but the next day as Mr Villarreal was giving mass, a woman sitting at the front of the church flopped to her side and down onto the stone floor.

She lay motionless, and no one went to help her. Mr Villarreal then walked forward, his flock got to their feet. One by one he placed his hands on their foreheads; one by one they too collapsed to the floor. Then he put his hand on my head. I did not feel any desire to black out. I closed my eyes and tried desperately to fight my scepticism. Maybe I was trying too hard for I felt nothing either spiritually or physically.

Our next destination was Lourdes. With upwards of five million visitors a year, Lourdes was a very different place to Garabandal. Commercial, it has countless shops selling empty plastic bottles in which to take home the precious water.

However, as people began to gather at the grotto where Bernadette Soubirous first saw the Virgin Mary in 1858, we could feel the magic we had felt at Garabandal. As the evening procession began, the banks of the river glowed with hand-held lanterns. At the front of the processions were the sick: most were in

wheelchairs, but many lay on gurneys with pillows and blankets. I felt selfish to be looking for healing among so many desperately sick people.

Afterwards the wheelchairs lined up in rows, and behind and above them the faithful stood with their glowing lanterns on huge outdoor balconies. I



was filming from a vantage point but, spotted by a steward, I was ushered towards the wheelchairs.

What had been silence broke as the faithful began to sing *Ave Maria*, and prayers were said for the sick. I wanted to capture the experience on film but I did not feel comfortable pointing a camera at people who

were praying for my healing. I had never felt such genuine goodwill from strangers, thousands simultaneously directing their prayers towards me. I kept the camera rolling but held it in one position. I wanted to absorb the experience: my primary reason for being here was healing, not television.

On our last day in Lourdes we set off for the baths, where we were taken behind a curtain and instructed to remove our clothing. I sat on a wooden stretcher supported between two chairs, before being carried to the water. The bath was 10 feet long and 3 feet wide, sunk into the stone floor. I was immersed up to my chest. The four men who had carried the stretcher then began to pray and slop the icy water over me, while a figure of the Virgin Mary looked over us. By now my little bit of faith had been considerably amplified.

Will said he had never seen me look so vibrant as I did after the baths. Lourdes was a hugely uplifting experience, and I was on a wonderful high for six weeks. Sadly, living in London and working in the cynical television industry, those feelings have gone.

But I understand now why people travel to these places. It is not necessarily in search of a physical miracle: it is to recharge their batteries and give themselves the strength to continue their lives.

© Andrew Slorance, UK
The Times, 20th April 2000

WHAT - U - THINK

the game, and death = total extinction. Moral absolutes stem from the beliefs of the great faiths, i.e. there is a Mind which created matter, space and time (and therefore is independent of them), a Person of perfection who cares and loves more, not less, than we can and has left some Maker's Instructions. He's revealed that our short life on this planet is part of something bigger and offered us a chance to share in this.

These guidelines cover both human and environmental needs, but divorce them from their roots in spiritual tradition

and you'll get obsessions and distortions—I've suffered from some. Only faith provides authenticity

for and interpretation of such values, empowers us to attempt them and helps us get back into the saddle when we're thrown.

Mike Lowe, UK

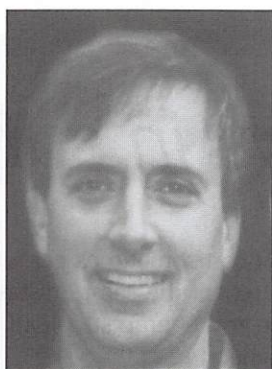
People who argue that everyone's 'values' are equally valid are deceiving themselves (although this is almost regarded as an absolute truth). If they really believed that then they wouldn't be engaging in moral discourse (which is what they do when they try to persuade you of their point of view). There is probably more moral discourse going on now—more people making pronouncements—than at any time

is this parenting

For me, to be a man is to be fully human. It is to get to a point of accepting myself physically, mentally, spiritually and emotionally. Before I accept myself, how can I accept others? To be fully a man is to say, 'this is who I am'. No denial. No mask. No bullshit. This is me in all my nakedness; my ups and downs, my loves and hates. It is terrifying to live this way, and I'm not very good at it, but it is honest and alive.

Men are sexual beings. Confusion arises when we have to pretend that we are not. As a result we have to learn about sexuality behind the barn or by peeking in books, rather than having confident men, comfortable enough in themselves to teach their sons honestly. How can sons trust fathers who cannot tell them the facts of life? How can we trust each other when we cannot acknowledge each other as full human beings? And men, how can women trust us if we can't trust each other with this wonderful (and I mean 'full of wonder') part of ourselves? I am not a man who can put my sexual self somewhere and pretend it doesn't exist. By acknowledging and truly loving that aspect of myself I am a more balanced, happy individual. If I deny some aspect of myself, it will come out in ugly, unwanted ways. This is why we have 'sex crimes' and why men are drawn to pornography.

When my son was nine, he surprised me one afternoon with a question. I can't remember exactly what it was, but he and I were alone and I realised this was an opportunity I had never had with my own father. I decided to risk it and have 'the talk'. We spent the rest of the afternoon talking about sex. I was amazed at how nervous I was at first, and then how wonderfully easy it became. I was quite frank, but also selective in what I thought he was able to handle. I also tried to gauge when he'd had enough. Children are



wonderfully satisfied once they feel they have received an honest response to their curiosity.

When I took him home to his mother's house (I had recently divorced), I escorted him to the front door. He rushed inside as he usually did, then stopped, dropped his things, turned round and ran back out the door. He gave me a huge hug and said, 'This has been the most important day of my life.' I nearly fainted. I thought, 'Could it be that I did something right? Is this parenting?' My son (now 23) and I continue to be very honest with each other. But had I denied his question years ago—something so basic, so much a part of our humanness—how could he have trusted me with anything else?

Jack Lynch, USA

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before. However, the focus has shifted. Until about 40 years ago there was a big emphasis on conformity—being seen to be 'normal'. Societies were very homogeneous. Moral discourse mainly revolved around personal behaviour and concerned the sexual code, because that was the thing people found most difficult. Today, the emphasis has shifted to broader economic issues, the environment, equality, pluralism.

A lot of the moral discourse people experience is self-righteous, whether from the tub-thumping moral majority or from left-wing intellectuals. To me, the 'absoluteness' of values such as honesty, purity, unselfishness and love, lies

in their universality and in the sense of depth (or height) found in them. There is no room for complacency; all fall short of these absolutes. It is not possible to be self-righteous when we point people towards them.

Occasionally these values may conflict with each other, and this is the argument people usually put forward against them. I accept that this happens, but I don't accept that this denies their value. Life is full of moral dilemmas where one set of values conflicts with another set of values. At a deep level this is the basis of free will. It is certainly not a reason for abandoning moral values.



finding solace *in sufism*

I am proud of my Egyptian, Arab and Muslim heritage, but I feel I have been greatly enriched by encounters with other faith traditions and with the Western world. My spiritual journey has been exciting and unexpected, but has not spared me suffering or conflicts. Through my reading and study of the Sufi tradition I have learnt much that has helped me.

Western writers speak of Sufis as mystics who emerged about 200 years after the start of Islam. I would describe Sufism more as a philosophical path. The Sufis are rooted in the conventional tenets of Islam and its practices but seek to link the outer practice of the faith with an inner knowledge of God. Central to this inner knowledge of God is self-purification and self-knowledge.

Poetry has a long tradition in the Persian and Arabic speaking worlds; even 1600 years ago there were what we would describe as 'poetry evenings'. So many of the great Sufis in Islam have used poetry to express their thought about the life of faith.

As you read the poems, some may touch you, others may challenge or cause discomfort. The meaning behind the poems which touch you more deeply could be the starting point for some personal reflection.

I used to think that sometimes, particularly in the West, we have a very narrow concept of 'purity'. We often think of it in relation to personal relationships, especially relations between male and female. In the Sufi tradition purity is really about discovering God. I think we need to recapture this concept of purity if we really want to walk a meaningful life of faith.

'I am amazed at the seeker of purity who, when it's time to be polished, complains of rough handling.'

*That harshness is not towards you, my son, but towards the harmful qualities within you.'*¹

*'Be aware that on this path to make someone happy is a thousand times better than to indulge oneself, day and night, in prayers.'*²

One of the words which the Sufis use a lot is 'unconditional'; everything that we do has to be unconditional. This has helped me to understand the word 'absolute' and what it may mean in terms of applying moral standards such as love, unselfishness, sincerity and purity in everyday life.

*'Beware that you do not tell others what to do or impose your views on others, for each heart has its own kind of connection with God and any such connection is worthy of respect.'*²

I can sometimes get really frustrated with myself because I repeat the same mistakes, or I make even more mistakes in my attempts to lead a spiritual life. I found it helpful when I read this:

'Spiritual progress is not measured in the same way that one measures other endeavours. One may spend years without anything happening, and then suddenly in a few days everything happens! In that slow period in reality a great deal of spiritual rust may have been removed.'

*'Every heart contains a blueprint of truth. Our innate nature is like a spring of fresh cool water. During a person's upbringing the well fills up with rubbish, and the time comes when it is found that there is no more fresh water flowing because the well of his innate nature has been filled with debris. Many of those living in crowded and modern cities have to do a lot of digging and archaeological work before reaching the original foundation and the source of the spring of the well.'*³

I am a paediatrician. Many people say to me that it must be difficult work, but I absolutely love being with children and treating them. But it is true that you see a lot of pain, a lot of suffering. It's very challenging. I can more readily accept pain in people if it's self-inflicted. When it's children in pain and other people have inflicted it on them, then I can get really angry. I don't think the following passages make pain easier, but they give me the sense that there is always hope, and that helps me get through it.

*'God turns you from one feeling to another and teaches by means of opposites, so that you will have two wings to fly with, not one.'*⁴

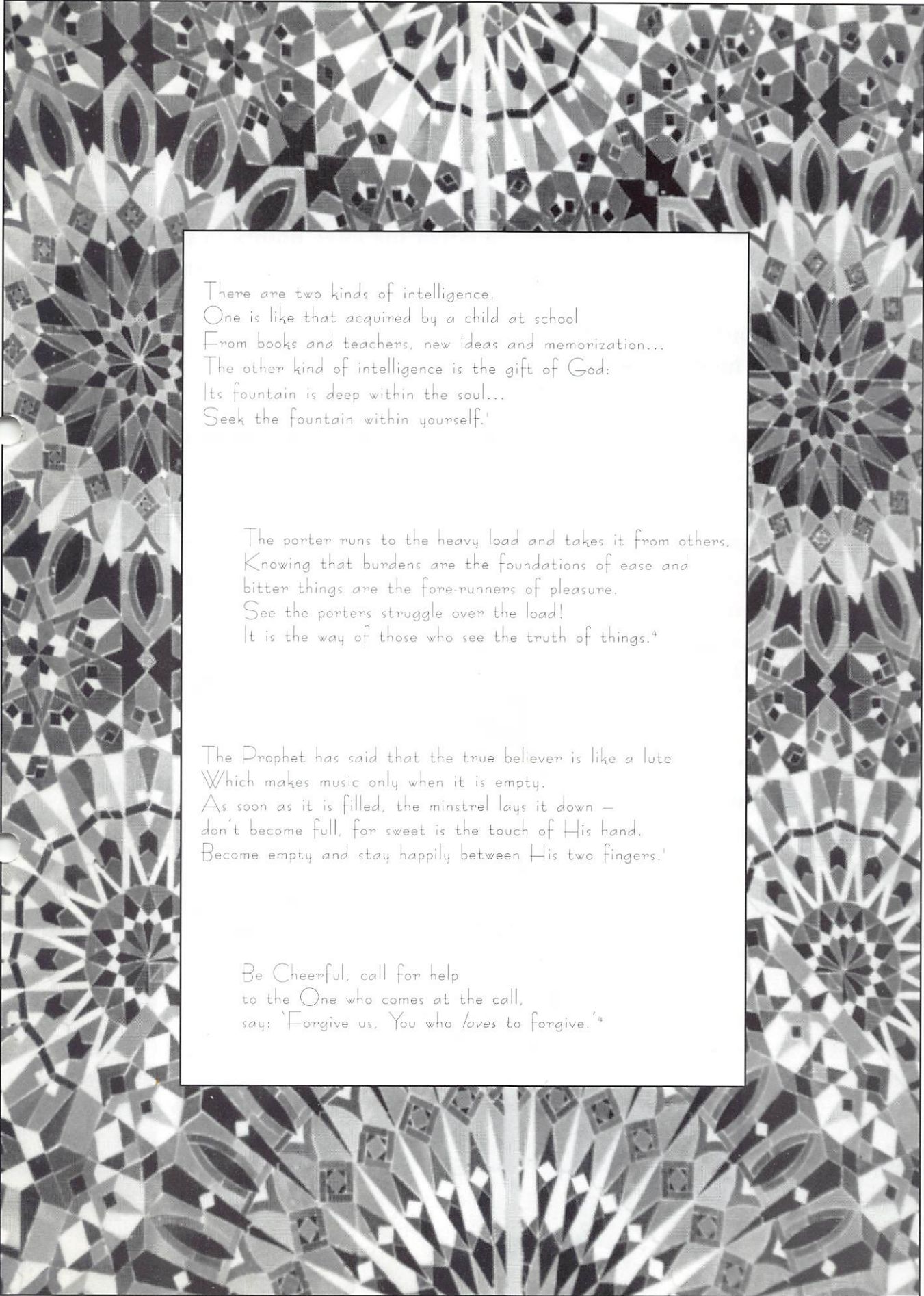
I think that in all faith traditions there are things that give one hope, the sense that there is always a Spring after the Winter, and it's just around the corner.

*'The soil is faithful to its trust: Whatever you have sown in it, you reap the same. But until Springtime brings the touch of God, The soil does not reveal its mysteries.'*⁴

Omnia Marzouk, Egypt

Footnotes (above and opposite)

1. Rumi, Jalaluddin, trans. Camille and Kabir Helminski, *Rumi Daylight*, Threshold, USA, 1994.
2. Javad Nurbakhsh, *Discourses on the Sufi Path*, Khanigahi Nimatullahi Publications, USA, 1996.
3. Shaykh Fadhalla Hauri, *The Elements of Sufism*, Element, UK, 1990.
4. Waddy, Charis, *The Muslim Mind*, Grosvenor Books, UK, 1990.



There are two kinds of intelligence.
One is like that acquired by a child at school
From books and teachers, new ideas and memorization...
The other kind of intelligence is the gift of God:
Its fountain is deep within the soul...
Seek the fountain within yourself.'

The porter runs to the heavy load and takes it from others,
Knowing that burdens are the foundations of ease and
bitter things are the fore-runners of pleasure.
See the porters struggle over the load!
It is the way of those who see the truth of things.⁴

The Prophet has said that the true believer is like a lute
Which makes music only when it is empty.
As soon as it is filled, the minstrel lays it down —
don't become full, for sweet is the touch of His hand.
Become empty and stay happily between His two fingers.'

Be Cheerful, call for help
to the One who comes at the call,
say: 'Forgive us, You who loves to forgive.'⁴

Scattered Thoughts

**Men resemble their times more than
they do their fathers - 14th Century
N. African philosopher, Ibn Khaldun**

**For the person for whom small
things do not exist, the great is
not great - Ortega y Gasset**

**Inside every Englishman there's an
Italian trying to get out**

**When the sage points to the moon,
all the idiot sees is the finger**

**Too long a sacrifice can make a
stone of the heart - W B Yeats**

Fear is a liar - Ray Simpson

There is more to life than increasing its speed - Mahatma Gandhi

**Life is about more than just
maintaining oneself, it is
about extending oneself.
Otherwise living is only not
dying - Simone de Beauvoir**

**Greatness lies not in being strong,
but in the right use of strength**

**Sometimes even to live is an act of
courage - Lucius Annaeus Seneca**

**I cannot be what I am
not - Desmond Tutu**

**A pure mind soon becomes
a deep mind - The Buddha**

**You are good
enough to do
what you are
called to do**

**What return can I make for
the gift I have received?**

**When we try to pick out
anything by itself, we find it
hitched to everything else in
the universe - John Muir**

**When I was born I was
so surprised I couldn't
talk for a year and a
half - Gracie Allen**

