

Apparently my first prayer as a little girl started, "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild, look upon a little child." It is a famous poem by Charles Wesley." I changed it into Gentle Jesus, milk and Milo (chocolate powder for milk), give to me, a little child." So, clearly, I thought of this god person as someone really nice and gentle who gave me treats. My first understanding of the goodness of God was the hymn, "All things bright and beautiful, the good Lord made them all." I was very much in love with animals and flowers and nature and so to me the creator of all this was quite amazing to me. I am grateful for these young experiences because the doctrine, dogma and outright abuse from the religious institution later in life could have made me throw the whole enterprise out of the window. However, what people said and what I knew in my young heart was not the same and it lead to a life-long search for understanding of what God is, what Love is, what Spirit is. Some kind of spiritual foundation, some kind of understanding that there is something beyond our physical experience and that is inherent within us as a basic goodness is a basic need for all children.

Over and over again, as we ask people to find the essential, the pure, the love, the truth, wisdom and compassion to their suffering, we realize there is a pervasive spiritual bankruptcy - there is no inkling of what love is, what truth is, what spirit is, and no understanding that consciousness itself is the Force of God within - that which gives life, that which can observe and see and know. That it is this Spirit within that can hold the experience of human life in reverence, awe and love. So, it seems important to look at the ways in which there was religious abuse in your lives and at least introduce the idea, vision, hope, that this Consciousness is within you. It is this that is eternal and that can be brought to the finite experiences of your life. It is this that is YOU. You are one drop of the infinite sea of love in which you swim and that moves through and in you, in which you have your source and your ending. And it is this that you must recognize and bring to your human life experience.

When you were a child:

- Were you taught and reassured that no matter what you did, no matter how the world treated you, nothing could touch your intrinsic value?
 - Did you learn you have intrinsic value or was it all conditional on achievement?
 - Did you have any foundational teaching on Love, Spirit, God?
 - Were you taught about a God of Wrath or a God of Love?
 - Were you taught that you are bad and God is good?
 - Were you taught that the only way to heaven is through trying to be good and that you would go to hell if you were not good?
 - Did you learn that God is out there - somewhere, separate from you?
 - Did you go to Sunday School? Church? Were you confirmed into your religion?
 - Consider what you learned about yourself from the religious teachings you received
 - Consider the ways in which your spiritual boundaries were violated and how your spiritual needs were not met, by examining the list below.
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- living in a family that's over religious
 - excess rituals in religion or no rituals in religion
 - no spirituality, no spiritual guidance
 - empty shell religion - prayer offered as mindless repetition or forced prayer
 - no sense of prayer or gratitude
 - excess religious rules, anti-sex, anti-pleasure, legalistic religious practices and inconsistent enforcement
 - a fearful god image - punishing and judgmental - fear based religion - religious terrorism

- no sense of right and wrong
- not having our own or differing beliefs allowed
- being punished for rebelling against the family religious practices
- being punished for having the “wrong” religion or the “wrong” beliefs
- not being allowed to choose our friends because of their religious beliefs
- overzealousness, obsessiveness and fanaticism
- being involved in religious hate, religious wars
- overly mystical
- being involved with cults
- anti-religious sentiments
- satanism and abuse
- living with no beliefs, no exposure to religious beliefs
- religious cynicism
- women hate in religion
- religion as a form of pro-family activity that is actually anti-women and anti-child
- too much focus on a father/God image or having a father who acts as God in the system and our image of God is affected by the behavior of our father
- a one-sided gendered God
- religious wars within the family, religious intolerance
- excess of religious cliches
- over emphasis on evil, focus on the devil
- seeing children as evil, sinful, possessed and bad
- puritanism, we are pure, chosen - evil must come from outside forces
- not seeing the duality of humankind as good with a potential for doing harm
- religious restrictions regarding gender or race
- narrow and rigid interpretation of religious tenets of sacred texts
- religious extortion and exploitation
- being taught to believe in a meddling God of power and miracles rather than a creator of harmony and balance
- isolation because of rigid, weird or different religious practices
- religious leaders acting out, including seduction and sexual abuse
- denying the reality of the real people issues by religious leaders
- unapproachable ministers
- arrogant ministry
- over emotionalized religion

Adapted from Broken Toys Broken Dreams
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