

ASCA News • January 2001

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From the Desk of George Bilotta

Happy New Year! For me, the Happy New Year greeting is a communal commentary and exercise to say goodbye (and maybe good riddance) to the old, along with hello and welcome to the new. It is a cheerful reminder of the inevitable and constant ebb and flow of life. Happy New Year gently tweaks us to let go and to face with courage the unknown that another year will bring. I hope the New Year will usher in peace and joy, meaning and fulfillment, resolution and growth for you. Throughout this new year, I hope that we will be able to open our hearts a little more, extend more generously good will to all, increase our patience with ourselves and others, acknowledge a bit more that we are wonderful people who try their best every day.

Recently, I received an e-mail from South Africa congratulating us on our fabulous web site. Rana, one of the managers at Women Against Child Abuse in Ranburg, Gauteng, South Africa, informed me that her agency will be starting an ASCA meeting in January 2001. She was able to download all the materials from our web site to plan and invite others to join. This is a wonderful way for ASCA to begin the New Year. Welcome!

The following brief article continues our monthly series focused on pondering some of life's basic questions as we slowly move into a new millennium.



A Reflective Moment for January

What Kind of a Person?

What Kind of a Life?

by George Bilotta

January often invites us to examine and perhaps to reconsider some of the fundamental aspects of our lives. Who am I as a human being? In what manner do I go about living my daily life? What is important to me? What are my priorities? What are my thoughts and behaviors that enhance and/or constrict my life? Is there something specific about my life or person that I would like to begin to change?

Many survivors of childhood abuse find it difficult, unusual, conflicting and/or uncomfortable to lift the lid off of these fundamental questions. I consider these questions along with many other questions as formative, i.e., inquiring into and coming up with some basic practical answers. These and similar type questions help to form who we are as human beings and influence in what manner we proceed through our lives. I also think that regularly delving into these fundamental type questions is part of recovery, i.e., rediscovering who we are, who we want to be and what we want to be all about. These kinds of questions give a present and future orientation to our lives offering hope and perspective. They balances the in-depth work that we need to do - recalling our past, the incidences of past abuse

and dealing with the emotional stuff that comes up for us when we delve into the past.

When asking the question - who am I as a human being, I am referring to the essential qualities that define our humanness and our experiences as a human being. For example, I define essential qualities as those characteristics, virtues or dispositions that thrive deeply within the essence, the heart of who we are. For example, I try to be a compassionate person, a kind person, a thoughtful, reflective person, a gentle and welcoming person, a wondering person, a considerate person, etc. For me, these qualities or dispositions are important to me for my daily life. They increase my ability to be a human being. Whereas their opposites, e.g., insensitivity, mean-spiritedness, harshness, aggressiveness, rigidity, etc., decrease and constrict my ability to be the kind of human being that I envision for myself.

These qualities are what I strive to be, the way I try to be as a human being during the course of ordinary everyday activities. In trying to live in a specific way, e.g., compassionately, reflectively, receptively, etc., this trying forms me. It forms me as a person. It forms me in the ways that I interact with the various people, events and things that I encounter daily. While striving and trying to live life in specific ways I gather a concrete sense of who I am as a person. I am aware of who I am and who I am not. It is comforting, reassuring and grounding to have a sense of who we are. In many ways, pondering and responding to the questions of who we are and in what manner we go about living daily life forms the foundation of self-esteem. Self-esteem is not based on feelings. Rather self-esteem roots deeply within who we are and how we try to live daily life.

What is important to me? What are my priorities? Again, these are basic formative questions. They are formative since their answers provide orientation and direction for life's daily journey. If I do not seriously think about what is important to me and what are my priorities then I would probably use someone else's answers. Someone else's answers however might not be congenial for me; they may even be antagonistic and unhelpful for my life, leading me astray, alienating me from my true self.

I do believe that part of the foundation of our recovery from childhood abuse is asking and thinking constantly about fundamental and formative questions that influence who we are and how we live our daily lives. Imagine the depth that we could develop over the year 2001 if we dedicated time during every month dwelling on these and other important questions.



Rotation C Topic:

Possible ASCA Meeting Topic for January

Maladaptive Patterns and Destructive Behaviors

While working through our recovery, we often see in books, hear in ASCA shares and possibly experience in our own lives concerns around maladaptive patterns and destructive behaviors. Maladaptive patterns are embedded systematic thoughts and/or behaviors that are unhelpful and unproductive for our everyday lives. For example, thoughts involving self-criticism and putdowns are common maladaptive thought patterns. Behaviors such as confusing sex for love, drinking or using drugs to escape emotional pain, eating to

soothe our emotional discomfort or emptiness, are also common examples of maladaptive behavior patterns.

Destructive behaviors include cutting, hitting, addictions, behaviors that are mean, antagonistic and/or abusive toward self or others. Destructive behaviors tend to damage bridges resulting in an isolating effect. When we harm ourselves, not only do we cut ourselves off from other people, but we also disengage and separate the body, mind and spirit from its congenial integration. When we are in a destructive behavioral mode our eyes are blinded, our ears are closed and our heart hardens and turns cold.

Maladaptive patterns and destructive behaviors are unsuccessful ways of coping with life. We may have learned them through negative modeling while growing up. If we come from a highly dysfunctional family and/or abusive family background, we probably never had the opportunity to learn positive and nurturing thought and behavioral patterns and behaviors. In a crude adaptive manner, we often reenact and duplicate the maladaptive patterns and destructive behaviors we learned while growing up and/or adapted to cope with a painful life.

One way to go about changing a maladaptive pattern or destructive behavior is to first single out the pattern or behavior. Then figure out its opposite or antidote. Third, through thoughts and/or behaviors engage and practice the antidote. For example, if I am in the pattern of criticizing myself then I might practice acknowledging the parts of myself that I like, that are successful and that are whole or moving toward wholeness.

For example, if physically abusing myself is part of my destructive behavior, then I might engage in the antidote of taking leisurely baths to soothe my body. I might apply sensual and fragrant lotions to my body to moisturize and vitalize my skin. I might treat myself to a manicure, pedicure, massage and/or hairstyling on a regular basis.

We cannot do two things as once. We cannot nurture the body, mind and spirit; while at the same moment hurt and harm the body, mind and spirit. The more we try to nurture, the less opportunity there is to use maladaptive and destructive behaviors in our every day life. Sometimes, maybe even often, we do not feel like doing x. Just like sometimes we do not feel like going to work, or when we were students to study. Sometimes we just have to do it. Sometimes we just have to go through the motions of taking a relaxing bath, of applying soothing lotions to our skin. It might take 100 baths before the body begins to enjoy and soak-in the experience of nurturing baths.

Part of reducing maladaptive patterns and destructive behaviors simply involves trying. Trying provides us with hope, encouragement and eventually the insightful experience that we can change.

Questions:

1. What are some of your maladaptive patterns and/or destructive behaviors?
2. What do you understand to be their opposites or their antidotes?

3. What have been successful strategies to changing your patterns and behaviors?
4. What do you think might be some of the obstacles to trying?



ASCA Meeting Ongoing Education Moment: Conflicts Within A Meeting

In many ways an ASCA meeting is a microcosm of our daily lives, i.e., the manner by which we interact with people, events and things we encounter during the course of our day. Conflicts within an ASCA meeting can arise in a variety of ways. Common meeting conflicts revolve around miscommunication and personality clashes.

Communication difficulties might include cross-talk, an unkind or insensitive remark before or after the meeting, an clumsy or awkward intervention by a co-secretary. We may feel misunderstood, angry, anxious, uncomfortable, etc. When such situations arise, they provide us with opportunities to practice constructive assertiveness, improved communication skills and a desire to reconnect with the other. In the past when we have felt misunderstood, angry, anxious, etc., we might have withdrawn, blamed ourselves or responded aggressively and harshly. Part of what an ASCA meeting is all about is practicing, practicing new and better ways of interacting with others. We can practice being constructive rather than destructive, tolerant rather than impatient, empathetic rather than distant. In a sense practicing is part of reconfiguring old maladaptive thoughts and behaviors in positive, constructive and connecting ways.

The meeting might decide to discuss how to practice ways of dealing with conflict inside and outside of a meeting. What do we do when there is miscommunication or misunderstanding in a meeting? What do we do when we have a personality clash with another ASCA member? Discussing these matters prior to an actual conflict might provide some practice dealing with difficult situations. Practice does not make us perfect, but it sure helps smooth off the rough edges of life.



Poetry

THE MAN WITH THE ODD-NUMBERED CHAKRAS

by James Daniel, Copyright 1999

Nate's in his forties, but's still kinda cute.
He walks around tall in a blue tailored suit.
Pin stripes accentuate angles and lines.
All that he touches is all he designs.
Passing through freely, a cloud in the air;
Public life's easy, domestic's a bear.

Living alone since the age of nineteen

In an efficiency he can't keep clean.
Glad that there's some place he needn't perform.
There's no place inside of him dry, safe and warm.
Seeing his life through perceptions of others,
Nate's only love is for fantasy lovers.

He knows how to do, but not how to be.
He knows naught of even, he's all oddity.
More form than function, he'd like to change roles.
But he's much too polarized now to set goals.
The best he can do then, is just play his part
And fall asleep clutching his pills to his heart.



Co-Secretary Update

Any updates for current Co-Secretaries of ASCA meetings are included in this section of the ASCA News. Currently, we forward a hardcopy of the ASCA News to all the meetings. A Co-Secretary or some designated person from the meeting should be duplicating and distributing the ASCA News to the meeting membership.

1. If there are changes in co-secretary assignments, please let me know. Also if co-secretaries have a change in address or telephone number, please send me these changes. Finally, if as a co-secretary you have e-mail, would you please e-mail me at georgebilotta@cs.com so I can verify and have your e-mail. You can also contact me at 173 Malden Street, West Boylston, MA 01583-1020, 508.835.6054.



Observations, Questions, Comments!

If you have any observations, questions and/or comments that you want to share concerning ASCA and THE MORRIS CENTER, George Bilotta, welcomes your inquiries, phone: 508.835.6054, e-mail: georgebilotta@cs.com. If you would like to contribute a poem, story, article, etc. to our **ASCA News** please contact us.