Our Journey Through the Houses of Healing

Writings and Reflections from the Houses of Healing Original Group in San Quentin, 2012-2013
Reflections on *Houses of Healing*

April, 2013
Dedication

This book is lovingly dedicated to the memory of Kimberlee Rasmusson, who accompanied us on the journey through the Houses of Healing until she was called to a new life among the Angels of Heaven. Kimberlee, thanks for all your love and warmth, may your spirit continue to shine on everyone who lives within the walls of all the Houses of Healing and beyond...

-with love, the men and woman in the Original Houses of Healing Group,
San Quentin State Prison 2012-2013
Acknowledgments

I want to thank Fr. George Williams for granting me the blessing of embarking on this journey through the Houses of Healing, and for his ongoing support and guidance. I want to thank Robin Casarjean, author of this guidebook for the soul, for her kind, constant support and enthusiasm, her wisdom and her dedication to all the men and women who have, can, and will benefit from her writings.

I want to thank my highly skilled, big hearted and gentle role model co-facilitator Alton 'Coach' McSween for his loyal presence, deep wisdom and commitment to making this class such a success. Most of all I want to thank all the men in this Original Houses of Healing group: Belize, Bruce, Kris, Big E, Fateen, Johnny, OT, Ronnie, Tim and Vaughn for their willingness, courage, humor, generosity, openness, truths, dedication and enthusiasm.

What a blessed journey this has been.
May I be open to the pain of grief.

May I find the inner resources to be present for my sorrow.

May I accept my sadness, knowing I am not my sadness.

May I accept my anger, fear, anxiety and sorrow.

May I accept my grief, knowing that it doesn’t make me bad or wrong.

May I forgive myself for not meeting my loved one’s needs.

May I forgive myself for mistakes made and things left undone.

May I be open with myself and others about my experience of suffering and loss.

May I find peace and strength that I may use my resources to help others.

May all those who grieve be released from their sorrow.

- Joan Halifax
Near the Bay there exists a house. An old, but grand house, and in this house lives forgiveness, compassion, understanding, respect, and at times, empathy and love. Resting on an island in the San Francisco Bay exists the house of healing where I've learned to deal with myself and reflect on my life experiences. I have come to realize the pain I caused my community and family by selling drugs and participating in gang violence.

I've heard different stories that were told to me by the people that inhabit the house of healing. They share stories of their life trials, hopes for change, while persevering. I am now able to connect better with my feelings and learn how to forgive myself and those who have hurt me. In the same breath, those I've hurt in the process as well.

My life was full of drama, but I wanted peace. Before I actually began my quest for peace, my friends and I were confronted by some rival gang members. They asked us what set/gang we were from. We tried to ignore them, but they were persistent in trying to find out the neighborhood we were from. This didn't end well. They pulled a shotgun and I was shot. Everyone else scattered, fearing for their lives, while I lay on the sidewalk in severe pain pretending to be dead, as my shooter fled. As felt the life slowly draining out of me, I wondered how I could get revenge.

What I've come to understand is that hurt people want to hurt people, and those who are healed, one day, will help heal others.

As others share their stories it opened up my mind to the same, hurt and pain. The house of healing is helping me open to a newfound freedom and growth from behind these prison walls. I can now see that there are so many ways to be locked up. We are able to create prisons of our own: mental, emotional, spiritual, or physical places that keep us from peace and freedom. I was in a prison within a prison. I have now opened my heart to the possibilities of a newfound healing from self-incarceration. My whole being can now be considered a house of healing.
Before I embarked on this journey I once existed in a house built on sandy ground where all the feelings lived: wealth, vanity, sadness, happiness. I was so caught up in the world of things that I couldn't even hear anyone calling or crying out for help. It was all about me, full of revenge, hate, callousness, cruelty, fears and abandoning all others, even, Love. As I live in this life of illusions, gradually my house started falling apart. A great storm developed: this storm is my reality challenging my life of illusions. It tossed me around like a ship lost at sea, struggling, without a rudder. The sandy foundation of my house was washed away.

When my mind has no higher goal, no fixed purpose to achieve, I find life dull and tasteless. My mind's inner changes reflect the ups and down of the outer reality. I behave like a scavenger, roaming from place to place, collecting and feeding on dirt and rotting things, never awakening the simple beauty of creation. As it says in Matthew 7:24, "Therefore whoever hears these saying of mine and does them, I will liken him to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on the house; and it did not fall, for it was founded on the rock. But everyone who hears these saying of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain descended, the floods came, and the wind blew and beat on that house; and it fell. And it was a great house."

Now, I'm living a life of forgiveness, compassion, understanding, respect, and empathy. I embrace my past experience with the love that's freely given by God. I am learning how to overcome my trials and tribulations. He who is in me is greater than he who is in the world. Within me is the Kingdom of God, allowing his light to shine. Like the word of God said, Let your light shine among man.

Today I treasure every moment that I have! Treasure it more because I share it with so many special, special people in the house of healing. I've come to realize that time waits for no one. Every second of your life is important, so I have learned to use it wisely. Only through time am I capable of understanding how great love is. Like the saying goes, "Yesterday is history...Tomorrow is a mystery...Today is a gift... That's why they call it "The Present."

So don't tell me who I was yesterday, but who I am today.

Imagine that!

-Belizean Rasta

"Shout Out"

I'd like to thank the students as well as my teachers Ms. Susan, Ms. Kimberlee, Mr. Coach, for their encouragement in this endeavor in reaching my true potential and into re-discovering my God given nature. I thank you students and teachers for not putting your lights out, in order for me to find my way home, in the house of healing.
The book Houses of Healing has given me the spirit of forgiveness. It has also showed me that if I hold on to events of the past, I lose my potential for positive experiences. It goes back to the concept of holding on to extra baggage that I no longer need. Forgiveness protects me through a positive and proactive perspective, not from a negative or reactionary approach.

Forgiveness has also allowed me to protect myself enough so that I do not invite experiences that require forgiveness, and stay away from those whose integrity or honor is questionable. Forgiveness has allowed me to look beyond past negative experiences and strengthening myself internally so that I am aware and prepared to avoid such experiences in the future.

Does this mean that my success in life will be easy? No! Absolutely not. Real success does not come easy. It takes determination and dedication. It takes an unwavering dedication. It takes letting go of everything that gets in the way of my healing within.

The bottom line is this: How I choose to see something is the determining factor in my experiences. Perception is everything, but knowing that I can love and let live, not be controlled by my emotions or feelings, is where I found forgiveness in the Houses of Healing.
Honoring my Fellow Travelers
by Alton McSween “Coach”

For the past few months it has been a pleasure and a privilege to be part of Houses of Healing. What made this experience so special and meaningful was the fact I got to sit in a circle with a group of men who sincerely wanted to do all the hard work to promote healing oneself. To dig down deep emotionally, open painful mental wounds and process these emotions requires courage, humility, vulnerability and willingness, traits all of you possess.

I will always be proud to be part of the San Quentin First Houses of Healing Graduating Class. It has meant a great deal to have had the opportunity to work with you. I will always support the work you did and your acceptance of the challenge of transformation. This speaks volumes about your commitment and character.

You gentlemen called me your teacher, but I realized early on that each of you was my teacher:

Bruce Cooper-Displays an ability to turn weaknesses into strengths, builds on positives, effectively identifies objectives needed to grow and prosper in life.

Fateen-Effectively develops objectives in life, understands his personal growth, consistently strives to strengthen and refine himself.

Johnny-Has the ability to delve deep into his soul in search of answers, understands source of past hurt and more importantly knows how to transform pain instead of transmitting it.

Kimberlee- Always positive, friendly and relaxed, owner of a huge heart with a harmonious spirit, always made best impression in every situation, will forever be in our hearts

Susan-Displays a natural charm and charisma, always calm, stable, enjoyable and sincere, has positive responses to negative situations, possesses personal magnetism to all who come into contact with her, projects energy, optimism and enthusiasm. Most people Love to Live, Susan Lives to Love.
Tim- possesses the ability to stimulate ideas, promote a flow of good positive thoughts and initiate fresh ideas.

Vaughn- successfully develops creative strategies and seeks alternatives in regard to problem solving, excels in nurturing new ideas.

OT- Always considers innovating possibilities, always receptive to new ideas, willing to seek new approaches to solve issues at hand.

Belize-Demonstrates a high degree of originality and creativity utilizing humor, but also has the ability to speak from deep within the soul.

Chris-Ability to display creative imagination, utilizes questions to gain knowledge and a better understanding of the topic being discussed.

Ronnie Cooper-Initiates good conceptual ideas with practical applications, originates unsought ideas and encourages innovation.

E. - Welcomes opportunities for improvement, a pleasure to watch and grow and nurture spiritually and emotionally, has excellent "real world" experiences to share.

I will forever be grateful for the opportunity bestowed upon me by Susan to be part of this program. Working with her has been an experience I will always cherish.

I salute you men for your commitment, compassion, honesty, perseverance, willingness and tolerance. I thank you men for helping me along my journey of healing.

Today you men are on your own journeys. It is up to each of you to determine how far you want to travel. Hopefully, your journey will be a lifelong one. Thank you for allowing me to travel part of it with you.

With much gratitude,

Alton McSween
"Coach"
The Path of Positive Possibilities

by Eric Post

I've heard a lot of stories growing up in prison, and wouldn't you know, mine is pretty much the same- no positive role model to show my true self-worth. I'm the first of 3- its a 5 and 10 year gap between my brother and sister. I still to this day remember when it was just me and my mother. The first time I remember seeing my father, I was 6 years old. My brother and sister had the same father, ole' Baby Joe. He was cool, but he wasn't my father. I never called him Dad and he didn't call me son! But when he spent money on my brother and sister, he spent on me also, so the material things wasn't an issue, but that bond as father and son wasn't there. Hearing my brother and sister call him Dad and me calling him Baby Joe is when my numbness started, and again, he didn't treat me bad.

At 7 years old my father popped up again. He wanted to take me to get some shoes. I remember my mother saying if she can't go, I can't go, and wouldn't you know, I didn't get the shoes. Even at that young age I knew something was wrong. Five years passed since the last time seeing my father. At 12 years old his mother took me to see him in prison. At 13 years old the streets truly became my father. It taught me how to become nummer. Alcohol and drugs and the gang lifestyle became very attractive to me. Being negative became the norm.

At 14 years old I started going to jail; jail became my second home. I'm starting to lose all fears and become more reckless. My mother wanting nothing but the best for me, she stayed active on me about school, but that's all she could tell me, nobody in my house had a real job! So I did as I saw, the love was there and I never went to bed hungry or to school dirty, but my mother was hands-on, do as I say, not as I do! But negativity is all I see. Being bad become the norm. At 16 years old I'm tried as an adult and sent to Tracy State Prison at 17 years old.

The positivity I've learned to understand didn't exist for me back then. I didn't get to be a kid because of the choices I made. Houses of Healing is my very first group and reading this book is kinda touching, because it speaks on things I know and have gone through, but to cut a real long story short, I honestly understand consequences. I understand that I was repeating the same cycle of bad choices of my father. When I was born, my father was locked up! When my son was born here I am locked up. It took me a long time to get it!

But I can honestly say that I'm a better and stronger person now, because I practice daily being a better me.
This is all new to me. I've been incarcerated for over 14 years and Houses of Healing is my first positive social group I've participated in, and I am glad that I have. I've always thought that I had a lot of things figured out. That life is what it is and you just deal with it accordingly, damn your emotions, you just deal with it. I thought that it was normal to see violence regularly, frequent drug use, alcoholism, physical, emotional and mental abuse. This was the norm for me as far back as I can remember.

Over time, I became numb and insensitive to some of the chaotic cruelty that took place in my environment. Only as recent as a few years ago, on a lockdown in a Level 4 prison, did I realize that my life was not natural nor normal, it was just typical for a person with my upbringing and lifestyle. Since then I've been seriously struggling with making sense of the choices I've made that hurt people in whatever way.

No answer I came to was satisfactory, and my conscience has haunted me ever since I looked deeply within myself to find those answers. I guess you can say that I was trying to find my humanity. Although it took some time, but I started to acknowledge that I've been hurting for a very long time.
I truly believe that my hurt started when I was around 5 years old, when my father disappeared on me for 11 years. There were no letters, cards, or phone calls during his absence; it was no contact whatsoever. I vividly remember enjoying spending time with my father and I looked up to him. I was devastated by his absence. I had no one to show me how to be a man, and although my mom, bless her heart, did her best to raise her only boy, but I had to figure manly things out on my own.

By the time I seen my father again, I was 16 years old and deeply caught up in the street life, and although I didn't outwardly show it, I was happy to see him again after all that time. For some strange reason, I wasn't even mad at him. At first our relationship was awkward and strained because neither one of us knew what to expect. Then eventually we re-established some consistent contact and communication for the following 4 years, and at that point I had fully forgiven my father for that 11-year absence. He had a chance to see his grandchildren when they were infants. (I have a girl and boy twins who are now 15 years old.)

I was getting comfortable with having reliable contact with my father. Then one day I lost my wallet that had his phone # and address in it, however, he still had my phone # and address and I figured that he'll contact me sooner or later, but he never got back in touch with me.

Since 1997 to this present day I haven't had any contact with my father. I don't even know if he is dead or alive. I began to feel deep resentment toward him from then on, up until recently. For a long time I solely blamed him for the way my life turned out. But, as I became more mentally and emotionally mature, I knew that I had to accept responsibility for my own decisions and actions. I don't know why my father abandoned me again, but whatever the reasons, I forgive him. I don't know if I'll ever see or hear from him again, it doesn't matter. I'll always keep some room in my heart for him, and I wish him well whatever journey he is on.

I've ultimately learned that "forgiveness" is essential toward healing. I had to forgive myself for all the wrongs I've done and those I believed who wronged me. I sincerely hope and pray that my children forgive me for being an absentee father, and all those others I've wronged in some way, please forgive me.

My wounded inner-child is now fully understood and accepted by me, he is loved and protected now. As stated by John Bradshaw on page 41 in the Houses of Healing book, *we tend to think that all people who have a wounded inner-child are nice, quiet people, but in fact, the wounded inner-child is responsible for much of the violence and cruelty in the world.*
I finally see why I've done much of the things I've done against others. I subconsciously wanted them to hurt like me. I now believe that I am fully healed from my past wounds, now that I can take the bandages off. I feel more rejuvenated, refreshed, renewed and recharged. Thanks to the Houses of Healing book and group. I've chosen to be healed, so I can move on. And as my journey continues towards new and greater discoveries, I will keep in mind the things I've learned in this book, which confirms some of the things I've previously arrived to.

I've learned to grieve in a healthy way, to let it run its course and be thankful for the blessing of having loving memories of those loved ones who are now gone. I've learned to let go of my toxic shame and guilt and accept my flaws as work in progress. I've chosen not to let anger control my actions unless it is fuel for a positive objective. I've learned to calm myself and relax through frequent and brief meditation. I've learned to pray affirmatively just to give thanks, and to hold firm to my faith even when it seems that things are hopeless.

The book confirms that I am worthy to have peace of mind, to have joy in my heart, to be loved, and to find happiness wherever I am at the time. I've learned that compassionate communication is key to maintaining harmony in all human relations.

I've learned that kindness is its own medicine, so now I keep my emotional pharmacy fully stocked with kind prescriptions, never running out, to treat all wounded inner-childrens when we cross paths. I have free emotional health care for everybody too, so it won't cost you a penny to receive my kind medication, I just ask that you pay it forward. I hope that everyone here learned something from my experiences, as I have yours, and listening is a new quality of mine that I believe aides all healing processes. And even though I just met all of you, I truly thank all you guys for listening to my story.
The Message

By Fateen Lateef Jackson

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The misery that dwells deep inside...

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The stress and strain, the relentless pain that's hard to hide...

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The self-limitation and the self-doubt...

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The compassion, love, and affection that's hard to live without...!

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The self-pity, the depression and the hopelessness...

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The frustration, the anger, the sadness, the loneliness...

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The wish and the longing for joy and happiness...

Somebody tell me if you feel me?!
The vision of being healthy and wealthy escaping conditions that impoverish

Somebody Tell me if you feel me?!
The turnaround from sadness to gladness, from nothing to something that's in your range...

Please!
Tell me if you feel me?
That you and only you have the ultimate power to make that change.
HEY

The grass beneath a tree is content
and silent.

A squirrel holds an acorn in its praying hands,
offering thanks, it looks like.

The nut tastes sweet; I bet the prayer spiced
it up somehow.

The broken shells fall on the grass,
and the grass looks up and says,
"Hey."

And the squirrel looked down
and says,

"Hey."

I have been saying "Hey" lately too,
to God.

Formalities just weren't
working.

-Rumi
As I was looking up at the sky
I asked myself,
Who Am I, Really?

The answer came as I watched
a couple of birds flying by.

As I was looking up I realized
that all I was
was a nest for the birds.

What also came to me though
is that if it wasn’t for how low I was,
I would never have the joy
of knowing how much
I love to be lifted up.

To be loved so much to where
all I have to do is raise my arms
whether I am happy or sad
lets me know that the answer
to who I am is actually
just as clear as the sky itself.

The answer is,
that just like the bird
and all of the rest of creation,
all I am is a little child.

My prayer is
that the next bird I see
will fly even higher.
My name is Kris Himmelberger. I came from a dysfunctional family, but I did not know it. I was angry, hostile, and depressed, but I masked it. I was a statistic waiting to be recorded, but I couldn't see it.

When I was ten, my mother and father started having arguments. I can't recall what they were about, but after a particularly heated one my mother packed a bag and whisked my brother and I to our grandparents home in Hamburg. The only explanation I got was, "Daddy doesn't love us anymore."

Three months later, we moved to California and I started the third grade at Marina Del Ray Christian Academy. Not long afterwards, my parents’ divorce was finalized. The judge awarded custody of my brother and me to my mother. My father was given visitation rights and ordered to pay three hundred a month in child support, but my mother never got a cent. I felt unloved by my father and rejected. To me, it was only natural that I adopted my mother's anger, bitterness, and resentment towards my father.

Uneducated, my mother struggled to make ends meet. When life got too difficult, she sent me off to live with my father. When my father picked me up, I learned he was remarried. Belinda was a librarian who believed children should be seen, not heard. Consequently, I spent a lot of time reading and studying. The only TV I was permitted to watch was the six o'clock news and Saturday morning cartoons. To please my father, I turned my resentment towards my mother. When my father got tired of me, he sent me back to live with my mother. Throughout my teenage life, I felt like a soccer ball being kicked from one home to another.

As an adult, life seemed to get better, but it wouldn't last. As I was driving home from Mexico, I was involved in a car accident. While at the hospital, I learned the passenger died and I was arrested for Vehicular Manslaughter.
I bailed out and tried to get my life together. But things didn't work out as planned. Unable to get a ride from Cupertino to Hanford, I missed my court date and a warrant for my arrest was issued. I was afraid at the possibility of going to jail and went on the run. A few months later I ran out of money.

After watching a movie, I came up with the idea to commit a robbery and starting my life over with the money. I knew it was wrong, but convinced myself it was the only solution. Looking back, I should have asked for help. Nevertheless, at the time I felt I was alone and no one could possibly understand my situation.

After committing the robbery, I felt immense shame. I wanted to undo what I had done, but knew it was impossible. As I drove down the street, a sheriff stopped me. On impulse, I shot several times and took off running. I was experiencing a flood of emotions and thoughts. Was the sheriff hurt? Was someone else hurt? Should I shoot myself? Despite this thought, deep inside I knew suicide wouldn't solve my problem. I had no idea what I was going to do now.

Nine hours later I was arrested and I learned no one was physically injured. I felt a sense of relief.

At trial, I was convicted and sentenced to 20 years. A few years later, I was diagnosed with Hodgkin Lymphoma. I was too young to die and entertained thoughts that God might be punishing me for my actions. I wasn't a bad person, but I had done a bad thing. I was searching for answers and started reading self-help books, participating in college courses and therapeutic groups. As I reflect back on my life, I began to realize the impact of my actions and uncovered the root cause of my distorted thinking patterns.

At San Quentin, I took a self-help class called Houses of Healing. Half way through the book, the issue of grief came up. Learning about grief was like waking up from a deep slumber of a thousand years. As the sleet cleared from my eyes, I saw another way of living. I saw a life of peace, joy, and happiness.
Meditation opens the mind
to the greatest mystery
that takes place daily and hourly;
it widens the heart so that it may feel
the eternity of time and infinity
of space in every throb;
it gives us a life within the world
as if we were moving about in paradise;
and all these spiritual deeds take place
without any refuge into a doctrine,
but by the simple and direct holding fast
to the truth which dwells
in our innermost beings.

~ Suzuki Roshi
Upon entering the House of Healing, I had to admit I was skeptical, but upon entering, and exploring, I have to say I've seen no difference than entering a Gospel Cafe. That's 'Church' for all you literal people. It was very cleansing and healing, and very introspective. What I found to be the most captivating was the Pause and Reflect section, when answering those six questions on "I Am."

Because I am better than my worst day (day of commitment of offense.) I am a better father. I am a better listener. I am a better understander of the harm I've caused the victims/survivors, the community in which I resided and my victims'/survivors' family, friends, etc. I am a better son, I am a better brother. Outside of a Gospel Cafe I've never been able to obtain that type of clarity.

This synopsis cannot be complete without the self-forgiveness. I found that to be the most perplexing for the following reasons: It's easy to say you're sorry; it's harder to mean it, to live up to it. And the hardest part was to forgive myself, because how could I possibly participate in a class that offers me insight (a wonderful insight it may be) and not be able to forgive myself? Not just say it, but truly, whole-heartedly mean it.

I forgive myself for all my past transgressions. I can say that proudly now because I know better. And when I know better, I do better.

Thank You!

(Mandatory College has a way of assisting you in finding your blessings...)
Prison is a place where freedom and power is taken away. Through Houses of Healing, and meditation, and the outside Buddhist Sangha, I discovered that I can experience an Inner Power and freedom that cannot be taken away, and that I can have some control over my own destiny.

This course addresses repeatedly that it is unconditional compassion for ourselves that leads naturally to unconditional compassion for others. True compassion does not come from wanting to help out those less fortunate than ourselves, but from realizing our kinship with all beings.

When we hear about compassion, it naturally brings up working with others, caring for others. The reason we're often not there for others is that we are not there for ourselves. There are whole parts of ourselves that are so unwanted that whenever they begin to come up we run away.

This course Houses of Healing has shown me all the suffering and drama in my life is the result of what I have learned. The image that I have of myself is alive and it lives in my mind. Ironically, for 53 years of my life I thought that image of how I perceived myself was me. It is not me. But it is eating me alive and destroying my happiness.

The voice of knowledge inside my mind controls the dream of my life. The Bible calls it evil. I call it a Parasite. This Parasite is a living being made of psychic or emotional energy. It can also be compared to a Program that thrives on the emotions that come from fear and suffering. But this Program was not there when I was born.

When we are born our mind is completely innocent. We had no concepts about good or bad, right or wrong, beauty or ugliness. We had no concepts at all. We had no idea what it means to be human, to be a man, or to be a woman, but we saw other people outside of us and we recognized them as our own kind.

When I was one, two, and three years old I cannot see myself. The only way to see myself is to look at my image in a mirror, and other people acted as that mirror. I don't know what I am, but my mother tells me what I am, and my father tells me what I am, and my brothers and sisters do the same thing.
The people around me have the capacity to project an image onto me, which means they tell me what they believe I am and none of these images are accurate. At that young age what I believe I am is a distorted image of myself that comes from other people, because I cannot see myself. I believe them and I agree with them. As soon as I agree, the image is programmed into my memory, and now I believe this is what I am.

So most if not all my opinions, beliefs, likes, dislikes, reactions, and perceptions are all part of my past programming. I thought they were my own, that they come from within me, but through this course Houses of Healing I have learned that this is not actually true. Most of my so-called knowledge has been borrowed from others. My wrong understanding is not even original. It has been accepted from others. To be free, to know the Truth, we must be free from this conditioning.

This course Houses of Healing has brought to my attention that there has always been something inside of me that was longing to be free. I have always throughout my life asked myself Who am I? What am I doing here? This is not who I am.

I now understand I was not free to be who I really am because I was trapped by images of what I thought/think I should be. My own vision has become a trap for me. It is the world we create which entraps us. (Remember the Parasite, it can also be compared to a Program that dreams through our mind and lives through our body.)

To participate in this course Houses of Healing is to participate in the process of breaking free. What do we have to break free from? Our own wrong understanding, our false ideas of ourselves, our attachments, aversions, compulsions and addictions.

Houses of Healing page 19 says being aligned with our true self quite consistently is an experience that few of us in civilized society have had. Very few people, especially in our culture, have been consciously aware of the existence of the self. And yet the self is always where we are.

The self is consciousness and consciousness is our own awareness. This consciousness has been referred to and known by many names and many titles. It is what we have always thought of as God, Jesus, Allah. It is the Creator, the Absolute. Our own awareness of being is not different from Divine Consciousness itself. There is not more than one self. There is only one inner self.
This same self/consciousness animates all forms and beings, gives life to everything that has life, gives intelligence to everything that has intelligence, gives feeling to whatever is experienced as feeling.

This is the simple teaching behind all the saints and scriptures: God has manifested Himself, or Herself, or Itself, as everything. He has become all people, all conditions and situations, all thoughts and feeling. There is nothing that exists where He is not. For me, this is the single most important teaching to learn in life and on one's spiritual journey.

The experience of the self is not cold, or dry, or intellectual. The self is warm and euphoric; it exists within an inner smile. Our experience of "fun," "amusement," and "enjoyment," all are from the self. The self is supreme contentment, supreme fulfillment. It is embodied in laughter, and its sensation is love. The self is our true and eternal nature. It is who we truly are, who we always have been, and who we always will be.

This class has opened me up to glimpses of my true self. The point is not to try to change ourselves. It isn't about trying to throw ourselves away and become something better. It’s about befriending who we are already. Trusting the basic goodness of what we have, and who we are, and of realizing that any wisdom that exists in what we already have.

All thanks to the universe for affecting how people, conditions, situations, and circumstances in our lives arise for specific reasons, having to do with our own spiritual growth. Thank you for helping me stay on The Path.

Our teacher Susan, I see you. Jacques, Anne, Bronie, Crista, and Tamyra, and most of all my classmates, I love you all. Thank you for being there.

"What has been long neglected cannot be restored immediately. Fruit falls from the tree when it is ripe. The way cannot be forced." — Buddhist Saying
Near the Bay there exists a house.
An old, but grand house,
and in this house live forgiveness,
compassion, understanding, respect and at times, empathy and love…” –belizean rasta

To Belize, Bruce, Coach, Eric, Fateen, Johnny, Kimberlee, Kris, OT, Ronnie, Tim, and Vaughn, A lifetime of Gratitude for each and all of you!

It has taken me hours of pondering our journey through the Houses of Healing to finally be able to put into words what it has meant to spend these months with you all. Each week we met added another layer of honor, respect, and gratitude I feel for you all as individuals and towards our group. The power and grace behind this experience has included the joyous experience of shared heart openings as well as the painful experience of our shared loss of Kimberlee, all held gently in the healing trust and wisdom woven into the fabric of our group.

Every Friday afternoon felt like time around the campfire; stories, silence, struggles, breakthroughs, joy. I am eternally grateful for our small room, the perfect size. Birds visited, a fly or a bee came in, warm breeze and cold. By grace, this coming together of individuals gelled to become a rich cauldron of healing power, generated by, from, and to everyone present, and beyond!

On a whim, I decided to give you all the assignment of presenting to the class in whatever form you wanted, a few minutes about what you have gleaned from our Houses of Healing group so far. Never in my wildest dreams could I have guessed what was to unfold. Over the weeks to come, one by one, our group became privy to the joys, and heartbreaks of all you all, that were so honestly, eloquently and intimately written about. A veritable family was formed out of this deep sharing and trust, one which I will always be proud to be a member of.
Though Fridays was our day, for me, I also spent Thursday evenings with you all as I sat home and typed up your stories. I so looked forward to my Thursday nights and guarded them from other distractions! As I read your words in your own handwriting and typed them into my ipad, without fail my heart would swell beyond the limits of my body. I heard Your Voices telling Your Story. I saw images of what you wrote about and felt the feelings you described. Always, without fail, all the words would blur (as they are right now writing this) because my eyes, like my heart, had swollen to the point of spilling over. Tears-so simple and so complicated! Tears of sadness at the complicated, often unjust world we share; tears of interconnectedness and the universal truth of suffering; tears for the people on the outside who don’t know you like I have gotten to know you.

Always though, there are tears of the deepest gratitude for this rich, deep time we have had together, and to each and every one of you for inviting me into your lives. Tears of joy and gratitude for this incredibly inspiring and accessible book, Houses of Healing.

My own life has been profoundly affected by knowing you all.

I have spoken to you often of the Buddhist idea of Bodhicitta, the energy, power, and manifestation of enlightened Mind and Heart. As the weeks went by of our study of Robin Casarjian’s book Houses of Healing, It seemed more and more like the flame of Bodhicitta got stronger and stronger in our gathering. I so look forward to when we meet again, as I am certain our gathering will bring more abundance and fruit to the table we share in the House of Healing-which is created every time we get together.

Love and blessings to all of you!
Most Sincerely,

Susan

“Based on precious bodhicitta,
the supreme nobel ones
cause aspirations to be fulfilled,
bring humans to maturity,
purify their paradise,
and actualize enlightenment.”

-Verse 95, The Jewel Lamp, A Praise of Bodhicitta, by Khunu Rinpoche
I never thought that from a 40 second conversation with my good friend Jimmy, that I would soon embark on a journey filled with love, compassion, forgiveness, understanding and a great sense of improved self-worth.

My inspirational journey began as I wandered through the pages of a book called Houses of Healing. I must admit, I had some reservations on my expectation about the group called Houses of Healing when I signed up, but Oh Thank God I did sign up.

Houses of Healing has blessed me in so many ways.

Starting with my own inner child, who locked himself up in the cellar of my soul many years ago, all because of a thing called toxic shame. However, through Houses of Healing, my inner child has been given additional tools to continue my surrender to forgiveness, the unresolved pain that has been rambling throughout the halls of my subconscious mind for many years.

With this, a broad understanding on forgiving those who cause my toxic shame, realizing that they simply could not love me during their fragile state of being, at least not in the manner that I tried to love them.

Also, my sense of compassion has deepened for those who I one day may have to forgive on neutral territory. I've learned that for some, it’s only because of their own willingness to surrender to forgiveness, their unresolved shameful toxins, which are blocking their chance to ever love again.
Keeping in mind that I was once shattered by some of these same toxins. I'll wait patiently for the day when they are willing to allow me the opportunity to shine my light of love, compassion and understanding into the abyss of their brokenness; to bring forth some clarity into the mis-understood foundation of their lives; remembering that goodness lies within us all, if we would only take the time out to see it.

This book has improved my sense of self-worth, sending it soaring into the stratosphere of determination, because of its insight, truth, and the simple way it teaches one to surrender their hurt and pain in order to live and love again.

I'll close with this: Sometimes the hurt and pain that one causes, or that which was inflicted upon them, is so callous, unforgivable or unbearable that it strips away the core of their self-worth to the point that one becomes de-sensitized, leaving them in a state of destruction that has but two endings: prison, or death.

I thank God that it was not the latter of the two for me.

However, with the kind of love, respect, trust, compassion, and the sense of belonging that I received from this group is truly what we all need; to reinforce the humanity within us. Together we can change the vicious cycle of Hurt People Hurt People.

So today I give a well-deserved honor to the author of Houses of Healing, as well as to each man and women in this group. I thank God for giving me this opportunity to share and be a part of this healing process, and I love and thank each one of you for taking this inspirational journey with me, through the Houses of Healing.

Thank You.
Climbing the Tree of Life
by Vaughn Miles

I reached my Ausar and I utilize my ability to influence events in the environment through the use of words of power.

I intuitively overstand all of life's situations. For this I am omnipotent.

My indwelling intelligence comes from within, I disregard all religion, I'm spiritually cultivated.

No longer do I dwell on my past sins cause I learned to re-create.

I reside in my highest state, so in meditation I hyperconcentrate to strongly impress the spirits.

Thanks to Houses of Healing I dissected my heart and discovered God chillin’.

Slipping in and out of consciousness as I wrestle with my own subconscious, fighting my way out of ignorance as I bring forth remembrance from the hemispheres of my brain.

I operate on both right and left hemispheres he who has ears let him hear I'm dominated by the right hemisphere.

I have this overwhelming enlightenment with full consciousness of my infinite potential. I struggle to remain calm with my realization of both my subjective and objective realm and recognition of my oneness in the midst of many differences.

Ten manifestations called The Tree of Life zero through ten spheres in the completion of my evolution.

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