

photo  
#1

## Giving Ourselves the Freedom to Be Free

by *Jim Gordon*

*ILM Founder & President*

I recently had an interesting experience that helped me to see a very important lesson. It had to do with allowing ourselves the freedom to move with the energy of joy and loving as it presents itself in our lives.

I was going to be joining a group of women for lunch. I had a little extra time before meeting them, so I decided to go for a little drive, just to get out of the house and relax a little bit.

As I was driving around, all of a sudden I found myself in front of a flower shop, and the thought came to me to buy some flowers for each of the women. This seemed a little strange, because I really didn't know them all that well, but I thought, "Why not? It'll be fun."

I got to the restaurant a little bit early, so I sat in the waiting area, just holding my bunch of flowers. Pretty soon, other people started coming in, and it was interesting to watch their responses, and to see how something so simple could spark so many different reactions.

Some (usually the women) would look at me and say, "How wonderful!" or ask me "What's the special event?" One man was very responsive and said, "I'm gonna do that for my wife next time." But others seemed to look embarrassed, as if to say, "I couldn't do that – surprise someone in public with flowers," or, "I'd look like a fool sitting there with a bunch of flowers." Some of the men even seemed to avoid me, maybe to keep from asking themselves, "I wonder if I could do that?" or, "Why don't I do that more often?"

It seemed that my sitting there with the flowers sparked a response that carried over into the atmosphere of the whole restaurant and the

way people seemed to interact with each other. The women I gave them to were just thrilled with them. Some of the people I had spoken to before would sometimes look over and smile or nod as if we'd been friends for a long time. And the waiter seemed to get caught up in the energy of the sharing and joy as well.

In the past, I might have let myself get stopped by fears of, "How's this going to look?" or doubts and judgments like, "It isn't a special occasion," or, "I don't know these women well enough to be giving them flowers." But instead I had just moved into an opportunity as it was presented; in buying the flowers, I had allowed myself to respond to the thought that, "This is going to be fun." It was as if there was something inside me that was offering to bring joy into my life, and I found that it not only brought joy to me, but it brought joy into other people's lives as well – not just the women who received the flowers, but all the other people that noticed them and allowed themselves to share in the energy of the giving. And for those whose resistance wouldn't let them participate in the joy and the sharing, it stirred up some questions which could help them move into the same freedom and joy some day if they wanted to.

We are constantly being presented opportunities to move into joy, peace, sharing, and loving. And we can choose to respond to those opportunities if we want to. A lot of it is just taking advantage of the moment and not resisting it with doubts, fears, or judgments. Instead, it's just saying, "Here's a moment. Here's an idea. Let me follow through with it and see where it's going to take me."

In the past, I might have stopped myself from buying those flowers and moving with the energy of the moment. But in allowing myself to do it this time, I came to realize that there's a lot of freedom in just being in the moment, moving with what's present, and allowing it to bring forward its blessings. ■

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#2

## Doing What You Love

by *Steven McAfee*

*ILM's Midwest Coordinator*

What I'd like to share is a technique called "doing what you love," which is very helpful when we're stuck in a state of mind or emotion such as fear, guilt, anger, or sadness. Whenever one of these emotions settles on us, it paralyzes us and we can't move. Instead, we stop, and in the stopping we get disconnected from an awareness of who we really are, and of the loving spirit that is with us and within us always.

In feeling disconnected, a number of things start to happen. We start to feel empty inside. We start to feel hopeless. And we begin to move out of the loving inside us and into something else.

The feelings that we get stuck in are, by themselves, not bad. They prompt us to take action, and so they serve us. For example, if we have a fear of losing our job, we'll talk to our boss about it, or we'll put together a resume and start looking for something else. But the feelings stop serving us when we hang onto them so long that we can't have anything else and thus become controlled by them. Whatever we hold onto past the time that it has served us becomes our enemy, and we end up trading away the experience of God as a reality in our lives. We trade away what we really want (joy, peace, love, success, etc.) in hanging on to those feelings of fear, guilt, grief, or sadness instead.

So, when we're stuck in one of these places and nothing seems to help, there is a technique we can use. And the nice thing about this technique is that, when we feel stuck, we don't try to move out of it. We don't try to do anything. We just go and do something we love.

Some of the things that I love to do include playing with my kids, taking a walk through the woods, or playing music. I also (secretly) love to watch reruns of the Dick Van Dyke Show. And

none of these sound very "spiritual," do they? But they all involve doing something I love, and in doing what I love to do, the energy of being stuck begins to shift, and whatever it is that has been holding me begins to break.

Whenever we do something we really love, loving starts moving through us. And the minute loving starts moving in us, it begins to move out the other stuff not like itself (the fear, the disappointment, the grief, the anger), and it starts working, healing, reforming, restoring – doing whatever it is that love starts doing when it's moving in us. And whatever that is is always for our good, and it always makes us happier in the long run.

I don't know about you, but I have never ever really been happy except when I was in an experience of loving. Every happy moment that I can remember in my life was a loving one. And every moment that I can remember that seemed like a terrible one, I wasn't in the loving. I'm not saying the love wasn't there; *I* wasn't in the loving. I was "disconnected" and into something else at the time.

So, when no other technique inspires you, and you have no confidence that anything will work, just go and do something you love. It doesn't matter what it is. If it happens to be an "inner" thing, like sitting in the silence or doing spiritual exercises, that's fine. But maybe what you love is reading a novel, or having a party, or going out to dinner (or watching Dick Van Dyke). The "thing" is not important, but the loving *is*. So do whatever the thing is, and the loving will begin to come forward and healing will begin.

All of us are enthused about the things we love to do, and we are not enthused about the things we don't love to do. "Enthusiasm" comes from two Greek words, *en+theos*, and it means "in God." And anything we do in the spirit of enthusiasm bears fruit. As we do what we love, what comes forth first is the loving, and on that we can bring in everything else. So, when things are too hard, go back to what's simple and real: do what you love to do. ■

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#3

## What Child Is This?

by Nick Martin  
Minister/Editor

On October 17th, my wife, Kathleen, and I were blessed with the birth of a daughter, Mikhaila Rose, 5 lbs. 13 oz., 3:55 a.m., St. David's Hospital, Austin.

It seems that, in our culture, the birth of a child is a major event to be announced to the whole wide world – in letters and cards, in newspapers, and even (or especially) in church bulletins. But why is that? What's the big deal? What does having a child really mean?

For the last several months, people have been telling us that the birth of a child would change our lives forever. Some have said that our child would be our greatest teacher. And, beyond what other people say, there seems to be an endless array of "teachings" and associations that come bubbling up from our own subconscious minds. When Mikhaila (we call her "Miya") cries, I suddenly remember my little brother's unique infant cry, something I haven't thought of since 1967. When I give Miya a bath, I remember the last time my father bathed me (in 1957). And our learning process seems not only accelerated but also effortless – just a flowing series of associations and interconnections in response to suddenly having a newborn (and a firstborn). And one of the first interconnections I see has to do with the very meaning of having a child – that the way we perceive the experience of having a child becomes a rudder which steers our course for the next however many years.

In psychology classes, we learned about the incomplete sentences test – the famous "fill in the blanks." And with all the cards, notes, and helpful hints we've received from family and friends, there seem to be a variety of suggested responses to the test item that begins, "A baby is \_\_\_\_\_." Some say, "A baby is a blessing." "A baby is a precious gift." "A baby is a little bit

of heaven....a miracle of joy and love." Most of these answers are from a conscious level; what about the subconscious and unconscious levels? Is a baby a blessing, a burden, an opportunity, a possession, an extension of ourselves, or maybe "just a little old-fashioned karma coming down"?

The question seems a very important one and a very practical one, because the way we view the meaning of having a child must also reflect the way we perceive the meaning of our own lives and selves. Were we, you and I, precious gifts and bundles of joy? Were we sacred blessings from God (whether or not we were ever seen as such)? And if so, or if not, who are we today?

I think this must be one of the most crucial questions about life on earth. If I see my child as my greatest blessing, I will respond to her differently than if I see her as my heavy responsibility. If she is "my" long-awaited treasure – someone to love me and bring meaning to my life, someone to take after me and live out my dreams – I will treat her differently than if I see her not as my child but as *God's* child, who (in the words of Gibran) "comes through us but not from us."

In the personal backgrounds of every one of us, there must have been a basic philosophy that steered the course of the parenting we received, and thus shaped the way we came to perceive ourselves. Our parents perceived us in certain ways (true or false, conscious or not), and we came to perceive ourselves in certain ways (true or false, conscious or not). And now, as parents ourselves, we perceive our own children in ways true and false, conscious and not. And I just can't imagine there could be all the trouble and divisions in the world if we all saw each other (and ourselves) as precious gifts and sacred trusts.

Last month, my wife gave birth to a daughter. That's a fact. How do I know who she really is? How do I know what she will someday become? Yet I truly believe she is a miracle of Life and a sacred trust – a child of God entrusted to our care. And I believe that if I can hold to this interpretation of the facts, I will be the kind of father I would want myself to be. ■

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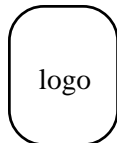
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