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Merry Christmas from NPN



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Spirituality

Sometimes, inner voice has something to say

The patient asked the psychiatrist: “How is it that when I say I talk to God, you call it prayer; but when I say God talks to me, you call it a hallucination – proof I am mentally ill?”

Back when I was minister of a growing parish, the last thing I wanted was to face a parishioner keen to come share with me either dreams or their experiences of “hearing the voice of God.” Though I would have been offended if anyone said so, I knew nothing about dreams. Regarding “voices” I was just as ignorant and shared the prejudice the patient in the story complains about. Now, from experience and insight, I know something about both. We’ll consider dreams in a future column. Here, I’m concerned about inner hearing – a voice within – and its importance in living a spiritual life.

Over the years, many have written to tell me about their most private, inner selves, and in doing so have opened up to describe “peak” or “cosmic-consciousness” experiences in which “hearing” a voice or voices was often a key feature. In most of these the

tone was sensible, and the content was life changing. Struck by this, I became gradually more aware or just how many occurrences there were in the Bible of leading characters, including Moses and Jesus, hearing either from outside or, most often, within, the voice of God or the Spirit. The same phenomenon proved to be true of other faiths.

St Paul's sudden conversion, and that of St Augustine later, came as the result of mystical experiences in which inner hearing and seeing was involved. Muhammad received the verses of the Qur'an from the voice of Archangel Gabriel. George Fox, with his visions of an "inner light" and his experiences of an "inner voice" brought about the founding of the Quakers, or The Society of Friends. One of the reasons Socrates was finally put to death by the ancient Athenians was for "introducing new religious ideas". He said that in daily conduct he was guided by a "daemon" or inner divinity, which never gave him positive orders to do anything, but always told him when not to follow a certain moral path or decision.

Anyone who has attempted to live a life of prayer – though and inner "voice" is by no means restricted to religious folk, since it's familiar to artists, novelists, and most who explore true creativity – knows that talking to

God is never a one-way street. For those who listen, there is a response, perhaps a “still, small voice.” Gandhi began his first long fast for social justice during an inner spiritual struggle in which he “heard” the voice of God: I can offer no proof... But I can say this – that not the unanimous verdict of the whole world against me could shake me from the belief that what I heard was the true voice of God.”

At the height of his civil-rights campaign, Martin Luther King Jr. said “more than ever... I am convinced of the reality of a personal God...God has been profoundly real to me in recent years. In the mist of outer dangers, I have felt an inner calm. In the midst of lonely days and dreary nights I have heard an inner voice saying ‘Lo, I will be with you’.” What kind of “voice” is this? Certainly, it’s not a sound that could be heard if only the right technique could be found to tune in. It’s not a vibration impacting on one’s eardrum. Yet, it’s definite, identifiable, believably, and compelling. It wells up from deep within and is received by heart and mind simultaneously. The test of authenticity is whether or not what is being “said” is for the greatest good. Does it truly love? Does it enhance the freedom and humanity of all its affects?

There are evil voices that can flow from within. Sadly, warped and ill personalities can follow and obey illusions that lead them astray and do harm. But, labelling all inner voices as “auditory hallucinations” as western psychiatry has done is a gross mistake. That’s why I find myself in such strong agreement with an article called “Inner Spiritual Voices or Auditory Hallucinations?” It’s from the Journal of Religion and Health, vol. 36, no.1, spring 1997 and was written by Beverley J. Scott the anthropology, sociology, and social work librarian at the University of British Columbia. (The quotes above form King and Ghandi am from it.

Scott calls upon the American Psychiatric Association to re-define auditory hallucinations as “inner voice” which can be positive, neutral, or negative. It depends upon the level of consciousness from which the come. The term hallucinations, she argues, distorts the issue because it starts with a built-in negative bias: “perceiving a voice does not automatically denote anything about the state of an individual’s health.”

Without the inner voice of conscience and the divine Spirit, there would be no religion and little spirituality around.

Christmas time can cause a lot of people to feel depressed

Tips for Overcoming the Winter Blues One Step at a Time

Depression drains your energy, hope, and drive, making it difficult to take the steps that will help you to feel better. But while overcoming depression isn't quick or easy, it's far from impossible. You can't just will yourself to "snap out of it," but you do have more control than you realize—even if your depression is severe and stubbornly persistent. The key is to start small and build from there. Feeling better takes time, but you can get there by making positive choices for yourself each day.

How do you deal with the blues?

Dealing with depression requires action but taking action when you're depressed can be hard. Sometimes, just thinking about the things you should do to feel better, like exercising or spending time with friends, can seem exhausting or impossible to put into action.

It's the Catch-22 of depression recovery: The things that help the most are the things that are the most difficult to do. There is a big difference, however, between something that's difficult and something that's impossible. You may not have much energy, but by

drawing on all your reserves, you should have enough to take a walk around the block or pick up the phone to call a loved one.

Taking the first step is always the hardest. But going for a walk or getting up and dancing to your favorite music, for example, is something you can do *right now*. And it can substantially boost your mood and energy for several hours—long enough to put a second recovery step into action, such as preparing a mood-boosting meal or arranging to meet an old friend. By taking the following small but positive steps day by day, you'll soon lift the heavy fog of depression and find yourself feeling happier, healthier, and more hopeful again.

Coping with depression tip 1: Reach out and stay connected

Getting support plays an essential role in overcoming depression. On your own, it can be difficult to maintain a healthy perspective and sustain the effort required to beat depression. At the same time, the very nature of depression makes it difficult to reach out for help. When you're depressed, the tendency is to withdraw and isolate so that connecting to even close family members and friends can be tough.

You may feel too exhausted to talk, ashamed at your situation, or guilty for neglecting certain relationships. But this is just the depression talking. Staying connected

to other people and taking part in social activities will make a world of difference in your mood and outlook. Reaching out is not a sign of weakness and it won't mean you're a burden to others. Your loved one's care about you and want to help. And if you don't feel that you have anyone to turn to, it's never too late to build new friendships and improve your support network.

How to reach out for depression support

Look for support from people who make you feel safe and cared for. The person you talk to doesn't have to be able to fix you; they just need to be a good listener—someone who'll listen attentively and compassionately without being distracted or judging you.

Make facetime a priority. Phone calls, social media, and texting are great ways to stay in touch, but they don't replace good old-fashioned in-person quality time. The simple act of talking to someone face to face about how you feel can play a big role in relieving depression and keeping it away.

Try to keep up with social activities even if you don't feel like it. Often when you're depressed, it feels more comfortable to retreat into your shell, but being around other people will make you feel less depressed.

Find ways to support others. It's nice to receive support, but research shows you get an even bigger mood boost from providing support yourself. So find ways—both big and small—to help others: volunteer, be a listening ear for a friend, do something nice for

How to reach out for depression support somebody.

Care for a pet. While nothing can replace the human connection, pets can bring joy and companionship into your life and help you feel less isolated. Caring for a pet can also get you outside of yourself and give you a sense of being needed—both powerful antidotes to depression.

Join a support group for depression. Being with others dealing with depression can go a long way in reducing your sense of isolation. You can also encourage each other, give and receive advice on how to cope, and share your experiences.

10 tips for staying connected

1. Talk to one person about your feelings
2. Help someone else by volunteering
3. Have lunch or coffee with a friend
4. Ask a loved one to check in with you regularly
5. Accompany someone to the movies, a concert, or a small get-together
6. Call or email an old friend
7. Go for a walk with a workout buddy
8. Schedule a weekly dinner date
9. Meet new people by taking a class or joining a club
10. Confide in a trusted person

Tip 2: Do things that make you feel good

To overcome depression, you have to do things that relax and energize you. This includes following a healthy lifestyle, learning how to better manage stress, setting limits on what you're able to do, and scheduling fun activities into your day.

Do things you enjoy (or used to)

While you can't force yourself to have fun or experience pleasure, you can push yourself to do things, even when you don't feel like it. You might be surprised at how much better you feel once you're out in the world. Even if your depression doesn't lift immediately, you'll gradually feel more upbeat and energetic as you make time for fun activities.

- Pick up a former hobby or a sport you used to like.
- Express yourself creatively through music, art, or writing.
- Go out with friends.
- Take a day trip to a museum, the mountains, or the ballpark.

Dealing with voices one sufferer's tips on how to cope with hearing voices

I just want to share with you a bit about my voice hearing experiences. This is my experience, but it might be different for you – as all voice hearers are individuals and we all cope with things in different ways.

It took me a long time to work out who my voices were. I thought I recognised them but wasn't sure exactly. Because I was given a label of schizophrenia for a while, I thought that meant that the voices were just anybody but then the more I worked through my issues I realised that those voices were known to me.

The voices that haunt me are the voices of people who have hurt me in the past – adults who I can trust, and I feel would still try to hurt me.

I find that staying at home and cutting myself off is the worst thing I can do because the voices have a captive audience. If I switch the TV on to distract myself, I find that it emphasises all the things that don't help like stories about rape and abuse of small children. It's like the TV makes me hear and see stuff I don't want in my head – I can't get away.

So, I need to be active, to distract myself by doing things like cleaning the house or getting out and about.

When I first go out after a period when I have been stuck at home, I find that the voices get worse for a bit before they get better. They tell me to go home so that they control me or tell me how to take an overdose of self-harm. However, I know that if I keep going out the voices will get less.

It's horrendous though because there are more of them, they shout louder than me and they trigger me back into issues of my childhood. They can cause me to dissociate so that I feel like I go back to certain times when I was a child when my abuse was at its worst. So, I start to think, and I act as if I were 5 again. This makes it difficult for me to crossroads, I feel frightened of the adults around me, they don't feel trustworthy, and I don't know how to get home or to get to someone where I know I can be safe.

This is a very scary experience that can sometimes just last for a short while or up to 4-5 hours or more.

In that time, it is important for me to contact people that I trust because hearing the voices of real people that I trust, that won't lie to me and believe in me, really helps. The more input I get from other people the less

airtime the voices get. It's scary to do this and to keep going out but the more I do it the more chances I've got of getting rid of the bad voices.

Trusted people can tell me if what the voices are saying is true and they remind me that I'm an adult now and that these voices can no longer hurt me – they are only voices from the past.

I'm too scared to speak back to the voices I hear because when I've tried it, they seem to speak back with greater ferocity. I need other people to speak back to the voices on my behalf because the voices can't punish them.

The voices can be very threatening when I do reach out for support, but I have to ride the storm.

So, these are the things that I've worked out that help me with my voices:

- Meeting with people that understand me and with whom I can be real helps, so I can talk if I want to or not if I choose.
- Also, it's good for me to have friends who don't talk about survivor issues/voices at all – who I can just be silly with and have 'time-out'
- I've put all my 'safe-people' on speed dial on my mobile phone so I can contact them easily.

- I've got little cards in my wallet with statements that my trusted people have said which contradicts the voices. They remind me of positive things about myself. They are there for those times when I can't get hold of anybody on the phone.
- I try to ground myself. Sometimes It helps if I am needed to be responsible for someone else e.g., a dog, a child, a friend in need – because it helps me to stay adult. When I'm adult I can tackle the voices better and make sense of what they're saying. When I'm not grounded the voices just get worse and if I go into child mode, I think the voices are real and the voices have greater power.

We all need to remember that although our experiences can vary, we can all empathise with each other because we can all relate to the experiences of hearing voices.

5 Tips for the Emotionally Neglected at Christmas

Have a support person: Try to have one person with you who understands your situation. It helps if they understand the power of emotional neglect. A spouse, sibling, or trusted friend can give you great strength in the moments you need it most. Meeting your support person's understanding eyes across the room is validating and grounding. If they can't be there with you, see if they can be available by phone or text. Keep your expectations realistic: Our human brains are naturally wired to expect nurturance and care from our families of origin. But in an emotionally neglectful family, if you let yourself fully embrace those expectations, you can be left feeling twice as empty. Try to adjust your expectations before you go, so that you'll be expecting what you are likely to get. This will help protect you from feeling disappointed and let down. Be aware of your feelings: Throughout the course of the day, you may experience a variety of different emotions, like frustration, emptiness, boredom, anger, or loneliness. Pay attention to these feelings as they arise. Accept and name them and let yourself have them. You are feeling those emotions for a reason, and you can use them later to help you understand how your family affects you. Be thankful for your strengths: Know that, in some fundamental ways, growing up with

emotional neglect has made you remarkably strong. As an emotionally neglected person, you have learned to rely on yourself. On this day, focus on the gifts your family has given you, and the positives that have come from growing up as you did. Whether you realize it or not, your childhood emotional neglect taught you how to be independent, capable, self-reliant, and giving. These are all things to be grateful for. Focus on self-care: Get some exercise and wear clothes you feel comfortable and good in. Stay at your Thanksgiving family gathering only as long as you are feeling good enough, and not one minute longer. This is a day when it's especially important to put yourself first. Emotional neglect passes through the generations of a family unseen and unnoticed. Your parents may have simply done what most humans do: raised you very much in the same way they were raised. That's why it's so often no one's fault. For your healing, it's important to acknowledge everything you did not get from your family. On this day, work on accepting both what you didn't get, what you did get, and why.

Try your best to keep in mind that everything your parents couldn't and can't give you is possible to give yourself now. You can acknowledge, validate, and accept your feelings and regard them as the expressions of your deepest self that they are.

Empowerment:

What are two words that start with “ch” and end with “ces”?

Both have seven letters

One you make and one you take:

CHOICES AND CHANCES

We have many choices in life. It is up to us to make each one. We may feel that we have no choices left: yet we must exercise our power to choose. We can choose our attitude and our thoughts. We have more freedom than we may realize. We can choose good for our lives or stay in the same routine. Sometimes by not choosing, we are making a choice to stick with what we know best.

Taking chances is a part of life. We all have a different risk tolerance and need to be able to accept these consequences of the chances we take. Some of us are more of a risk taker – it is a matter of time till we get bitten by our chances. We need to be careful.

Others of us may have gotten stuck in a negative rut. We need to take some action to take a chance, perhaps leave the house or talk to someone. Feel and be empowered with the choices you make and the chances you take. Intend to have good consequences in your life.

Live with the consequences of your choices. Consider the cost, seek the counsel of others that you trust to help you with decisions. Learn to gain more independence in your life to look after yourself. Remember the power you have with every choice you make and every chance you take.

You deserve good in your life. Don't get stuck in a rut – make choices and take a chance on getting out of your rut – if you are in one. Is there anything holding you back from accepting good in your life? Is there something that you need to let go of? Learn to grow and cultivate good in your life. Cultivate good thoughts. Be kind to yourself with the choices you make and the chances you take.

SETTING YOURSELF ACHIEVABLE GOALS

(Branching out)

Identify what you used to like doing in your life what were your dreams? It is important to hold onto your dreams

Identify what you would like out of life now what would make your quality of life acceptable to you now?

Be realistic-you're not going to get out of bed one morning and find your life is perfect, but you can make small changes that will make a difference

For example, you may decide to get out of bed before lunchtime, weekday's maybe this feels difficult, but it is an **ACHIEVABLE** goal

Keep working on your own achievable goals

Set new ones only when you are ready

If you don't manage to do something on a particular day

Don't give up

A step back is not a failure it is a learning curve

Always remember it is OK to have a bad day we all have them it doesn't mean you are having a relapse

Tips on How to Stop Intrusive Thoughts

When you allow the thoughts to run your life, you make choices that negatively affect you. How to stop OCD intrusive thoughts depends on the severity of the problem. If you've already been avoiding the problem for some time, you may also have co-occurrence disorder as a result of negative behaviours. Treatment can be as simple as using intrusive thoughts self-help methods like mindfulness. Others may require medication for intrusive thoughts from OCD along with cognitive therapy. Here are some things you can do to help you not react negatively to intrusive thoughts that come up.

1. Understand Why Intrusive Thoughts Disturb You

Intrusive thoughts latch onto things that mean a lot to you. This is what makes it such a disturbance for your nervous system. It could be your family, animals, your job, or your reputation. If something pops into your mind that you're hurting an animal when you love them, it's going to get your attention. Alternatively, there are people who hunt animals so the same thought wouldn't be intrusive. There are many unwanted thoughts running through your mind. It's the ones that go against your core values that become intrusive. An unwanted thought will naturally make you feel fear,

disgust, or alarm. If you react negatively, it's going to make the thought seem even stronger. Understanding your own core values will help you to understand those unwanted thoughts you have. You will understand why they make you feel afraid or why you'd react negatively to them. Eventually, you can turn these obsessive thoughts into ones you can simply move on without.

2. Attend the Intrusive Thoughts

You can minimize the damage of intrusive thoughts with self-help. This includes being mindful in the wake of an intrusive thought. In the moment of an unwelcome thought, you might react to them as though they're real. You may incessantly fear that you'll act upon these obsessive thoughts. Accepting intrusive thoughts is the key to dealing with them. They no longer mean anything to you when you acknowledge them. Don't try to figure out what it all means or use tactics to avoid causing harm to others. This causes your mind to pay extra attention to the intrusive thoughts, which is the last thing you want. How to get rid of intrusive thoughts is to see them come through you and move on.

3. Don't Fear the Thoughts

One of the coping mechanisms for dealing with intrusive thoughts can include avoidance. Commonly you'll avoid these intense thoughts because you don't know how to deal with them. When intrusive thoughts are fear-based, it's key not to push it away. Talk yourself down

and tell yourself its fine. Accept that the obsessive thought is there and don't try to resist the experience. You may feel tension all throughout your body, but it will pass. Trying to run and hide from a fearful thought with your own feelings of fear qualifies it.

4. Take Intrusive Thoughts Less Personally

OCD thoughts are not always real and yet we tend to believe them to the extent that we'll apologize for something that never happened. It's important not to take the thoughts you have as the person you are. An emotional reaction to how you think just keeps the thought alive. Letting go of thoughts is something we do all the time. It shouldn't differ when it's a disturbing thought. You know that these intrusive thoughts are not likely to happen. Find the deeper sense of trust in yourself. You can reason with yourself by saying,

"This thought could become a reality, but the chances are pretty slim. I won't worry about it right now. Everything is okay at this moment."

5. Stop Changing Your Behaviours

Compulsive behaviour can manifest when you try to change who you are based on the intrusive thoughts you experience. OCD thoughts are not real so changing your reality to try to work around it is not a solution.

Compulsions are mental behaviours you'll do to get some kind of comfort or certainty about these thoughts. Somewhere in your mind, you believe that obsessive hand washing is how to get rid of bad thoughts forever. You may change your life around too. If you have intrusive thoughts about kids, you may avoid parties for example. You can't avoid triggers of these obsessive thoughts. This strategy just keeps the cycle going.

6. Cognitive Therapy for Treatment of OCD Intrusive Thoughts

Those with intrusive thoughts from OCD or complex PTSD intrusive thoughts benefit from mindfulness exercises but usually require treatment past self-help also. Cognitive Behavioural Therapy (CBT) has shown to be 70% effective in patients with OCD. Through CBT, patients have to deal with their fears which helps alleviate the compulsions. It's essentially a treatment of detoxing the mind holistically. A modified CBT approach for intrusive thoughts include Taking a self-report questionnaire like an OCD intrusive thoughts test. Role-play simulation with electronic cueing. Determining the thought process a person goes through. Refocus the brain through mental education. Gathering evidence to challenge the deep beliefs the patient has. Intentional thought exposure. Situational exposure. On-judgemental acceptance.

Help & Support Links

Helplines

Infoline: 0300 123 3393

Email: info@mind.org.uk

Text: 86463

Samaritans

Confidential support for people experiencing feelings of distress or despair.

Phone: 116 123 (free 24-hour helpline)

Website: www.samaritans.org.uk

OCD Action

Support for people with OCD. Includes information on treatment and online resources.

Phone: 0845 390 6232 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5pm). Calls cost 5p per minute plus your phone provider's Access Charge

Website: www.ocdaction.org.uk

Mental Health Foundation

Provides information and support for anyone with mental health problems or learning disabilities.

Website: www.mentalhealth.org.uk

Men's Health Forum

24/7 stress support for men by text, chat and email.

Website: www.menshealthforum.org.uk

Bipolar UK

A charity helping people living with manic depression or bipolar disorder.

Website: www.bipolaruk.org.uk

CALM

CALM is the Campaign Against Living Miserably, for men aged 15 to 35.

Phone: 0800 58 58 58 (daily, 5pm to midnight)

Website: www.thecalmzone.net

Anxiety UK

Charity providing support if you have been diagnosed with an anxiety condition.

Phone: 03444 775 774 (Monday to Friday, 9.30am to 5.30pm)

Website: www.anxietyuk.org.uk

Maastricht Interview Training for Hearing Voices & Problematic Thought Beliefs & Paranoia Is available online and face to face from the National Paranoia Network. Other training available, Working through Paranoia, Making Sense of Hearing Voices & Working with Childhood Trauma It can be delivered across the world for more information and costings Email enquiries@nationalparanoianetwork.org

Online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Groups Join our online Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group Meetings on ZOOM

Thursday 3pm -4.30pm with Paul Meeting ID 88460268952 Password 375878

Sundays: HVN USA on ZOOM 6:30p - 8:00p USA Time with Cindee 11.30pm – 1.00 am UK Time Meeting ID 827 5463 8654 No Password Needed

Saturdays Texas USA HVN Meeting on ZOOM 10am-11.30 USA Time with Paul 4pm-5.30pm UK Time Meeting ID 83079149464 No Password Needed

Sheffield Hearing Voices & Paranoia Support Group. The group runs Every Monday 11.00am-12.00pm at the Gardner's Rest 105 Neepsend Lane Sheffield S3 8AT

Contact peterbullimore@yahoo.co.uk

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Tel 07590837694

**Online Hearing Voices Group in Ireland Facilitated by
Michael Ryan**

Hearing Voices Group Ireland

A group for people who hear voices or experience
paranoia and unusual beliefs, on Zoom

Facilitated by Michael Ryan

Every Sunday @ 4pm

Zoom Link <https://us02web.zoom.web/j/89201253186>

Email: vhmichael9345@gmail.com

With enquiries

Families/friends can contact

families@usahearingvoices.org

For support groups

Unusual beliefs group St Mungos

Every Thursday 2.30-3.30

93 Shirland Road, London W9 2EL

Contact Helen Claire Taylor (tayloh15@lsbu.ac.uk)

