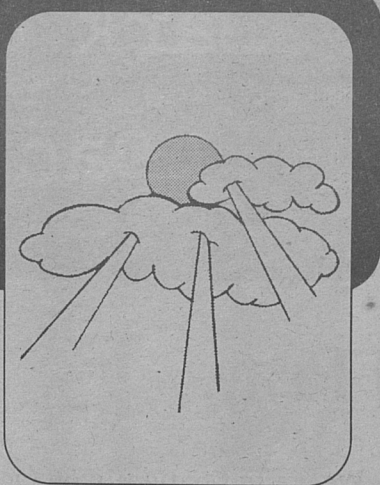


# The Spiritual Essence

by The Rev. Jane Dwinell



## Pick a Story, and Tell It

Many of us are involved with social change work, either on a personal or a more global level. Social change work is hard work. It is emotional work. It is physical work. It is spiritual work. We all dream of a world where people are not oppressed – for their gender identity, their sexual orientation, their race, religion, age or class. The oppressions go on and on, and all of us carry multiple oppressions. No one oppression is any better or more important than another. Oppression is oppression, painful and hurtful to our innermost selves.

One way to find some peace and healing from oppression is to have an opportunity to tell our stories in a safe and loving atmosphere. Perhaps with a friend, or in your religious community, or with a mental health practitioner. We hold so many stories inside of us, and we want to be heard.

So try this – find that trusted other who will listen, and begin.

Be close to your trusted person so that you can touch and have eye contact as needed. Tell them a story about a time when you felt oppressed. It can be when the other third graders teased you for being fat. It can be when your aunt chastised you, her nephew, for playing with dolls. It can be when you, as a person of color, were trailed by guards in a shopping mall.

It can be when a man approached you with vicious words and a two by four outside of a gay bar. The list is endless. Pick a story, one story of many, and tell it.

**Oppression will never stop. Hopefully it will lessen. But it will only lessen if we can change people's hearts.**

Ask your friend to listen without interruption. Let them know if it would be helpful if they held your hand. When you are done telling the story, have them briefly tell the story back to you. When they are done, look inside yourself – or have them ask you – is there someone, a character from the story, that you would like to speak to? Maybe those schoolmates, or aunt, or mall guards, or the threatening man. What would you like to say to this person?

If your friend can handle it (check with them first), speak to them as you would have liked to speak to this person who oppressed you. Don't be nice and polite. Don't try and convince them they were wrong. Yell at them!

Tell them how scared you were or how much their actions hurt you. Let it out. Let it out in a safe place. Then breathe a big sigh of relief and let it all go. One more oppressive act has been removed from your soul.

Doesn't it feel wonderful?

Oppression will never stop. Hopefully it will lessen. But it will only lessen if we can change people's hearts. Intellectual arguments will never do the trick. We found out how true this is during the Civil Union debate. Legislators said over and over again that it was the personal stories that changed their minds and allowed them to vote "yes."

Think of when a personal story has changed your heart. Start finding times to tell your stories, in safety and in trust. Freeing up the pain in our souls will help us change the world. Open up your heart, and tell your story. And, as much as that, listen to the stories of those around you.

They, too, have much in their souls worth listening to. Speak and listen.

It's a powerful combination.

*The Rev. Jane Dwinell serves the First Universalist Parish, a Unitarian Universalist congregation, in Derby Line, VT. She lives with her partner, Sky, and their two children, Dana and Sayer, on the shores of beautiful Lake Memphremagog.*

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