

Naked...

The Infinite Joy of Peeling back the Layers: Unveiling Masks

We all wear them. We all hide behind them



Which mask did you wear today?

Drawing from the Insights of Inspired Souls

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The Infinite Joy of Peeling back the Layers: Unveiling the Mask Drawing from the Insights of Inspired Souls

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Dedication

Dedicated to all African souls wherever they may be. We all need to play a role in the revival, re-awakening, re-energising, rebirth and re-ignition of our Africa.

And so we have to heal our Africa within. We have to re-discover the true Africa, the Africa of laughter, of joy, of originality, of improvisation, the Africa of legend, of story-telling, of playfulness, the Africa of brilliant colours, the Africa of generosity, of hospitality and kindness to strangers, the Africa of immense compassion, the Africa of wisdom, of proverbs, of divination, of paradox, the Africa of ingenuity, and surprise, the Africa of a four-dimensional attitude to time, the Africa of magic, of faith, of patience, of endurance, of a profound knowledge of nature's ways and the secret cycles of destiny

Ben Okri



Mastering the art of unburdening the heavy load we carry so we can travel
light to a central haven of peace

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InsideOut

A better way of living, learning and loving



Dadi Janki

People need peace as much as they need food and shelter. Some have been searching desperately for peace, for a long time. It's missing in the lives of many. Worry, depression and exhaustion are at epidemic levels in prosperous countries, even when material needs are fully met.

I want to explain where the peace comes from and how to harness and develop it. Peace is an energy created inside. Even when I speak with peace, and you listen with peace, the energy increases.

So many types of crisis take place in our lives. There may be upheaval in the body, or in relationships, or in the atmosphere of the world. I don't think that anywhere, there is a person who has gone through life free from crisis — young, old, uneducated, wealthy.

But when I have the power of peace, I do not allow the stability of my mind to be disturbed. Stability of mind is essential to leading a good life.

Just think for a few moments: when a person is worried, fearful, or experiencing sorrow, what is his state? And how does it affect others?

If I allow myself to experience worry, fear or sorrow, I will make myself restless and unhappy and the atmosphere around me will be filled with similar feelings. How does that help either me or others?

In contrast, if I free the self from these negative emotions, I will find myself having good thoughts, filled with positive feelings towards others. This will help create a peaceful and loving atmosphere, even when harmony has been absent.

My experience tells me that when I am able to stay free from sorrow, fear and worry, there are values in me that come to the fore and that will be used in my life practically, giving me much strength and power.

When there is physical illness, you may go to the doctor and be prescribed some medicine. But when you are experiencing sorrow in the mind, what will you say or do? What will your mind be like when you think negative thoughts? Whether this negativity is directed towards the self or others, the mind feels unhappy. Either way, such thoughts commit violence to the self.

Together with sorrow, there is also peacelessness. "I don't know what my mind is doing, it is chaotic." Yet it is your mind, and so why are becoming unhappy about it? When you allow yourself to become peaceless, you will interact with others in the same way and you won't be able to speak sweetly or peacefully with them.

If there is no rain, human beings and animals become thirsty. If there is no peace or love in my mind, it is as though mind and heart are dry. The mind becomes restless and races like that of a crazy person. Even with sleeping pills, people in this condition can't sleep at night and then can't wake up in the morning.

Free yourself from the crisis that you create through your own negativity. There are so many external crisis, you can't even count them. There is nothing you can do about that. But the crisis you create in your own mind, according to the quality of your thoughts — at least put a stop to that.

Your body, your wealth, your relationships and the world: all four bring a variety of situations in front of you. They don't ask your permission. They can change at any time and you can't prevent it.

One crisis hasn't finished and another begins. Natural calamities, earthquakes, floods, all of these come by themselves. They don't come as a result of someone calling them, nor do they go away to order.

But what is the condition of mind, before the situation comes? When the mind is strong, external difficulties stay external — they do not shake me inside and rob me of my stability. The mind stays peaceful, free from sorrow and worry.

When I have this strength, situations filled with sorrow can come but I won't feel sorrow inside. If a stone is thrown, it won't hit me. If someone insults me — no problem!

My head must remain cool and not instantly react. Not even reject. Let there be an acceptance of the scene. This acceptance makes me peaceful inside. Then my peaceful feelings alone will help the situation. Also, I'll know better what to do or what not to do.

To experience sorrow is an act of senselessness. Remember this very well. When you feel sorrow about something, understand that you are lacking some understanding. For whom should I feel sorrow? Does it help either me or others?

Internally, people do create many difficult situations for themselves. Arrogance, for example, makes you feel disrespect and causes you sorrow. Arrogance brings a desire for regard and respect and when you don't receive these, you feel it to be an insult. "Look, I do so much for them, but this how they repay me." If I give from the heart, and don't have arrogance, I won't have such feelings.

If I have good virtues and actions are good, my fortune will also be very good.

But to become upset, or to be unhappy about something, even to have an off-mood, is like putting a drop of poison into a pot of nectar. It spoils everything. It doesn't just take away peace, it brings unhappiness.

That is not why I am here! It is good if I can quickly make the atmosphere around me one of great happiness and joy.

Speaking for myself, I don't know how to tell jokes, but when I see someone crying, I won't leave that person until I see him or her smile. I don't need to do anything but give peace and love to that person. Internally, I feel it is just a tiny thing they are holding on to, causing them to go around with such gloomy face. But they are making others worried or afraid, thinking about what is going on in that person's mind.

People feel sorrow when they are holding on to situations. They forget that these situations are external to them. All it takes is to let go. Once they achieve this, they become happy and peaceful again and can

begin to smile. How often have we looked back on some previous trouble, and wondered what all the fuss was about!

The art of living from inside to out is such that it not only enables us to let go of that which is outside of us, but builds such strength as to avoid being trapped by it in the first place.

When you too let go of things that are outside of you, and become free, you will begin to feel a state of stability filled with such happiness that no matter what happens, you cannot lose it. Happiness has the powers of peace and love merged within it. Where there is peace and love, you feel yourself to be king. You have self-respect and feel yourself to be very strong, not someone who easily becomes upset and tearful, like a baby.

You need to attend to the quality of the thoughts that you allow to come to mind. This is only sensible. It is, after all, your mind. Thoughts should be pure, elevated and determined. Then just see the results. Without rituals, postures, chanting, etc., you will experience peace of mind.

Ask your heart: Do I have pure, positive feelings for everyone, including myself? Am I paying attention to this, making it my priority as I move through life? Such feelings create an energy that automatically flows outwards, protecting you against negative influence.

If you do pay attention, you won't make mistakes. You won't feel sorrow, and you won't give others the opportunity to have thoughts about your state of sorrow. Otherwise, everyone else's attention will be drawn towards you, that this poor person is in difficulty, and you will feel low. That is no good for you, nor does it help others.

In my life, I have made a commitment: I will not feel sorrow or worry about anyone or anything. Nor will I allow anyone else to have such feelings for me. I will not be afraid of anyone nor will I make anyone afraid. I have to give cooperation with love, and help when help is required.

Even if someone else isn't giving me love, I don't have to spend anything in giving love to them. Others may not give me respect, but why should I let go of my virtue of giving respect? It is not good for me even to have the thought of not giving respect to someone who doesn't respect me, or who is an obstacle for me.

I am on a spiritual journey, and situations will definitely come. My duty is to continue driving in my own lane, and not obstruct others.

Healing Within

"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart"- Job 1:21

Deep seated negative emotions that seem to continually linger are heartfelt, mind boggling, they trigger tears and cause us to wear a mask to hide our pain. Obstacles that block our path to greatness can be moved by processing hidden feelings. We must find opportunities to remove our masks so we can travel light to our final destination by being open to change, willing to let go and to delve deeper, right to the core of the pain and suffering.

I was an expert at wearing masks. I mastered this art over years and years of hiding from my own truth and burying my unique gifts. One of my favourite masks to put on was the Mask of People Pleasing. In such that I always said *Yes* to everything no matter what the consequences. Until one day, I had no choice but to rip off the mask. I was forced to face reality in the form of a double stroke. My journey could easily have become just another sad story but instead it transformed into a beacon of hope which guided me to a communion with my Divine Creator. Much rhetoric is espoused on the journey of life but little is explained thereafter as often it is offered blindly and without thought or substance. Life is indeed a journey and my discovery was an affirmation of the power of good inherent in all of us, energy so powerful that once reached and harnessed, can heal and create the world we all desire.

I do not claim to be a healing angel. I am the walking wounded and have decided to put my story down on paper in the hope that I can inspire at least one person to begin their healing journey and to embrace that we are the change we are looking for.

This is my story: After a particularly challenging strategic planning get-away for the SABC (South Africa's public broadcaster) in the South of Johannesburg, I drove myself home, looking forward to a relaxing weekend on Friday, June 14th 2007. I didn't reach home that night. Instead, I landed up being called to a one-to-one meeting with my Creator.

Whilst driving home, I suffered a double stroke. I calmly drove myself to the hospital, calling my family on the way, to inform them that all was not well and at the same time, reassuring them that I was “ok.” Doctors pronounced that there was no healing for my condition, Glomous Jagulare Tumour, a rare tumour. My tumour was very big and vascular – it was pressing on key organs (brain stem, heart arteries, nerves and veins), thus was too complicated to operate on.

The doctors told me that it was important to be still and centred when I left the hospital. That however wasn't going to be possible because of all the internal noise: anger, fear, betrayal, resentment, endured abuse, guilt, secrets and feelings of rejection that I was carrying. For this reason I needed to look within. Difficult as it may be, I needed to find ways of recognising and removing my many masks one by one.

My path towards healing my body was nothing short of miraculous. As this journey unfolded, I had a number of sacred encounters that led me to a place where mind, body and soul came to rest in a holistic state of love, light, laughter, peace and gratitude. Part of my healing journey was inspired by drawing wisdom from various sources who shared their own journeys with me. This assisted me to lighten burdens, release bondages, break down barriers and clear blockages – all in all, setting myself free and lifting, what truly was a very heavy emotional mask.

The mask crept up on me. It wasn't like I woke up one day and decided to hide from myself and others. I used the mask as an excuse, as a shield and a weapon instead of engaging and dealing with the problems at hand. I will be honest and admit that sometimes I was scared of my own light and also used the mask to screen these God given gifts and talents.



Fear; guilt; the desire to be compliant; complacency; being in a comfort zone; being afraid of my own uniqueness; desire to conform; low self esteem; clinging to the past; pain and suffering; addictions and materialism. These are all reasons for hiding but all it does is deny our authenticity, it takes us away from realising our dreams and fulfilling our purpose and why we were born. We have so much to offer the world. Each and every one of us has a unique and special gift that aligns perfectly with what is needed in our time.

We can choose to be true to ourselves and give life to our unique gifts regardless of how humble they may seem. Or we can live the life that others expect of us. We have the power within to make that choice.

There are many techniques and ways that can assist in lifting the mask: confessing to a priest or to a trusted ally, engaging people who have hurt you or you have hurt or with whom you have issues.

As a starting point perhaps having a truthful one on one conversation with yourself would help. Say what needs to be said out loud. The venue doesn't matter but it does help to be surrounded by nature, in an environment that makes you feel comfortable: at the sea, in the garden, touching trees and flowers with bare feet on the grass. Just releasing the energy verbally helps you to feel more in control.

I spent hours, days, weeks and months **writing to God**, putting pen to paper and saying everything that needed to be said and then burning the piece of paper in a mini ritual of letting go.

Write to God, ask for wisdom and guidance. When you have a lot of clutter in your head, ask for forgiveness. In my journey I saw that forgiveness was needed in order for me to move on. My interaction with Dadi Janki of the Brahma Kumaris has taught me that I have so much to do to journey towards total forgiveness. I must forgive myself and those that have forsaken me. It was also very clear that in order for me to do this, the first point was to peel back the layers and unveil the masks that I wear. This led me to compile these inspirational words that will inspire other souls to do the same. In short this is my letter to God and it is my hope that it will open opportunities for individuals to have good feelings for themselves, their family, environment, country and the world, by connecting to God. I can give testimony that forgiveness heals.

I went back to the seed that my mother had planted: the power of prayer. I remembered the Catholic Prayer of Forgiveness. It reads:

Loving Father, I choose to forgive everyone in my life, including myself, because You have forgiven me. Thank You, Lord, for this grace. I forgive myself for my sins, faults, and failings especially (mention here any particular sin). I forgive myself for not being perfect, accept myself and make a decision to stop picking on myself and being my own worst enemy. I release things held against myself, free myself from bondage and make peace with myself today, by the power of the Holy Spirit.

You must continue to pray for forgiveness and repeat that you forgive your mother, father, spouse, children, siblings, blood relatives, employers, employees, co-workers, teachers, professionals, religious representatives and other members of society

In all this pain, we must remember that there is also so much to be grateful for. Show grace and gratitude every day. This is something I have learnt to do.

The wisdom that I learnt from Sandra Anne Taylor, author of *The Hidden Power of Your Past Lives*, assisted me in revealing my encoded consciousness by making key choices and declarations:

- Releasing feelings of guilt that I carried all the time
- Asking for forgiveness and forgiving myself
- Releasing feelings of self hate and disgust
- Releasing feelings of shock, grief and despair

One of my friends who attended *The Journey* with me (a globally recognised and critically acclaimed healing and transformational process to awaken you to your true potential) experienced the stress and the trauma, anger and pain that I felt whilst I was going through my trauma. As one way of reaching out she gave me an article from the *Seeker Magazine* by Jamie Sanders.

What really touched me was the question: Why is forgiveness such a difficult thing to do?

His wisdom: *“Why is it that forgiveness is such a difficult thing to do? Is it that we feel if we are quick to forgive someone for what they have done, that we are in a sense letting them off the hook for the pain we believe they have caused? I remember hearing that if we think we are done with our forgiveness work in this life, we need but simply hold our hands to the light and check to see if we can see through our human form. If we can, it means we have ascended to a higher level of vibration and we are returning to the Spirit realm from which we came. If we can't, we are still in the body and have more work to do.*

I'm still checking mine occasionally and find I am still here, and I continually find things buried within me that need forgiving. Forgiveness has always seemed spiritually like such a noble thing to do; to be able to rise above feelings of hurt and anger and to just do the right thing. Is it the ego that wants to be right, wants to be revengeful, and wants to hand onto things that can't be changed?”



With all the challenges, uncertainty and anxiety that we all experience either in forgiving ourselves or those who have hurt us, it is important to look within and learn to forgive. The great teachings below from the Mayo Clinic Staff about Forgiveness helped me to deal with my own feelings

Forgiveness: Letting go of grudges and bitterness

When someone you care about hurts you, you can hold on to anger, resentment and thoughts of revenge — or embrace forgiveness and move forward (By Mayo Clinic staff

Nearly everyone has been hurt by the actions or words of another. Perhaps your mother criticized your parenting skills, your colleague sabotaged a project or your partner had an affair. These wounds can leave you with lasting feelings of anger, bitterness or even vengeance — but if you don't practice forgiveness, you might be the one who pays most dearly. By embracing forgiveness, you can also embrace peace, hope, gratitude and joy. Consider how forgiveness can lead you down the path of physical, emotional and spiritual well-being.

What is forgiveness?

Generally, forgiveness is a decision to let go of resentment and thoughts of revenge. The act that hurt or offended you might always remain a part of your life, but forgiveness can lessen its grip on you and help you focus on other, positive parts of your life. Forgiveness can even lead to feelings of understanding, empathy and compassion for the one who hurt you.

Forgiveness doesn't mean that you deny the other person's responsibility for hurting you, and it doesn't minimize or justify the wrong. You can forgive the person without excusing the act. Forgiveness brings a kind of peace that helps you go on with life.

What are the benefits of forgiving someone?

Letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for compassion, kindness and peace. Forgiveness can lead to:

- *Healthier relationships*
- *Greater spiritual and psychological well-being*
- *Less anxiety, stress and hostility*
- *Lower blood pressure*
- *Fewer symptoms of depression*
- *Lower risk of alcohol and substance abuse*

Why is it so easy to hold a grudge?

When you're hurt by someone you love and trust, you might become angry, sad or confused. If you dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice.

What are the effects of holding a grudge?

If you're unforgiving, you might pay the price repeatedly by bringing anger and bitterness into every relationship and new experience. Your life might become so wrapped up in the wrong that you can't enjoy the present. You might become depressed or anxious. You might feel that your life lacks meaning or purpose, or that you're at odds with your spiritual beliefs. You might lose valuable and enriching connectedness with others.

How do I reach a state of forgiveness?

Forgiveness is a commitment to a process of change. To begin, you might:

- *Consider the value of forgiveness and its importance in your life at a given time*
- *Reflect on the facts of the situation, how you've reacted, and how this combination has affected your life, health and well-being*
- *When you're ready, actively choose to forgive the person who's offended you*
- *Move away from your role as victim and release the control and power the offending person and situation have had in your life*

As you let go of grudges, you'll no longer define your life by how you've been hurt. You might even find compassion and understanding



What happens if I can't forgive someone?

Forgiveness can be challenging, especially if the person who's hurt you doesn't admit wrong or doesn't speak of his or her sorrow. If you find yourself stuck, consider the situation from the other person's point of view. Ask yourself why he or she would behave in such a way. Perhaps you would have reacted similarly if you faced the same situation. In addition, consider broadening your view of the world. Expect occasional imperfections from the people in your life. You might want to reflect on times you've hurt others and on those who've forgiven you. It can also be helpful to write in a journal, pray or use guided meditation — or talk with a person you've found to be wise and compassionate, such as a spiritual leader, a mental health provider, or an impartial loved one or friend.

Does forgiveness guarantee reconciliation?

If the hurtful event involved someone whose relationship you otherwise value, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation. This isn't always the case, however. Reconciliation might be impossible if the offender has died or is unwilling to communicate with you. In other cases, reconciliation might not be appropriate. Still, forgiveness is possible — even if reconciliation isn't.

What if I have to interact with the person who hurt me but I don't want to?

If you haven't reached a state of forgiveness, being near the person who hurt you might be tense and stressful. To handle these situations, remember that you can choose to attend or avoid specific functions and gatherings. Respect yourself and do what seems best. If you choose to attend, don't be surprised by a certain amount of awkwardness and perhaps even more intense feelings. Do your best to keep an open heart and mind. You might find that the experience helps you to move forward with forgiveness.

What if the person I'm forgiving doesn't change?

Getting another person to change his or her actions, behavior or words isn't the point of forgiveness. Think of forgiveness more about how it can change your life — by bringing you peace, happiness, and emotional and spiritual healing. Forgiveness can take away the power the other person continues to wield in your life.

What if I'm the one who needs forgiveness?

The first step is to honestly assess and acknowledge the wrongs you've done and how those wrongs have affected others. At the same time, avoid judging yourself too harshly. You're human, and you'll make mistakes. If you're truly sorry for something you've said or done, consider admitting it to those you've harmed. Speak of your sincere sorrow or regret, and specifically ask for forgiveness — without making excuses. Remember, however, you can't force someone to forgive you. Others need to move to forgiveness in their own time. Whatever the outcome, commit to treating others with compassion, empathy and respect.



Brandon Bays says the following about Forgiveness (excerpted from Freedom Is):

True forgiveness is one of the most healing, releasing, and freeing gifts we give to ourselves. A life full of open forgiveness is a life of grace. Forgiveness is the natural, outward expression of the open acceptance that is intrinsic to freedom. The two are inseparable. In all acceptance, forgiveness arises, and when we forgive, we are bathed in all acceptance. And peace is the final result - peace on all levels of being.

I feel an overwhelming gratitude to life for teaching me the immense healing power of forgiveness. Forgiveness was the catalyst for my own healing journey, and all of the Journeywork now being taught around the world was born from the willingness of an open heart to release the pain of the past and forgive unconditionally. In Journey seminars, no matter how many processes we do - facing issues, releasing pain, recognizing ego's games, and so on - in the end, all our work comes to wholeness and completion with the simple act of forgiveness. Because it is in forgiveness that true healing begins. Healing in a very real way - physically, cellularly, in our relationships, with life, and more importantly with ourselves.

It could even be said that healing and forgiveness are synonymous.

I remember once reading in an enlightened master's book, "The root cause of all illness is lack of forgiveness." I would add to that, "And the beginning of all healing starts with forgiveness." If we lived in open acceptance and all forgiveness each moment, we would welcome life as it is with open arms, with no resistance. Withholding forgiveness is a form of resistance, and this creates friction and suppression, which can eventually open the door to a whole host of physical symptoms and problems.

Forgiveness is a route to freedom on all levels of being.

To get a taste of what I'm saying, just try practicing an experiment right now. Think of an issue that you haven't really come to terms with, something you regret saying, or perhaps some opportunity that has passed you by that you've never really forgiven yourself for not taking action on. Make it real. Find some mistake you made, something you blame yourself for, or some memory or aspect of your life that you've not forgiven yourself for, and, for now, surround it with a bath of acceptance. Take your time...Internally, say, "I forgive myself." Open into what it really feels like to deeply forgive yourself, and say out loud, "I forgive myself."

Now check how you're feeling. When I just did that exercise, I could feel some tears welling up behind my eyes, for truth is I so needed to hear those words right now. And I felt a subtle release, a soft letting go into simplicity, into gratitude, into peace.

What was your experience? Did you feel a gentle release or a soft letting go, and experience at least a brief moment of peace? If not, open your being wider and try it again, as these feelings almost always accompany a true expression of forgiveness.

Forgiveness can be one of the simplest, most powerful acts of release we experience in life. And the results reverberate not only through our own beings but to all those concerned.

And you can't fake it. This is one thing I've learned through Journeywork. You can't just repeat the words, paying lip service to the idea of forgiveness. It has to come from an open heart. It has to be real. Otherwise it is pointless; it simply glosses over the issue. In order to truly forgive, you must be willing to open your heart and face and release the pain there.

Real forgiveness requires humility. It is by nature a humbling experience. Forgiveness requires us to give up our righteous indignation, get off our soapbox, let go of blame, and let go of the pride of being right. It means we have to be willing to drop our victim story, soften our stance, and if necessary, let our hearts be broken wide open. If we can do this when we say, "I forgive you," a palpable presence of grace floods in instantly and we can tangibly feel the healing commence.

I had so much to live for that I forgot that I was dying, and chose to focus on living instead. There's no doubt in my mind that my healing was due to faith, my will to live, the medical interventions I underwent and the alternative methods of healing and prayer that I practiced and allowed myself to receive from across the globe. Many people become so involved with trying to cope with catastrophic events that they tend to shut themselves down at these times, but I opened myself up to the love and support that I was surrounded with. I believe that this played a major role in my recovery along with the power of silence and my courage in letting go, in surrendering to the infinite and eternal Source.

I met Dr John F. Demartini not long after my stroke. Dr Demartini is considered one of the world's leading authorities on human behavior and personal development. He is the founder of the Demartini Institute, a private research and education organization with a curriculum of over 72 different courses covering multiple aspects of human development.

The greatest lesson I learnt from Dr Demartini: No matter how much I have blundered in my life I had the right to receive Grace and unconditional love without judgement. This experience taught me never to give way to discouragement or doubt and to find courage, light, strength, wisdom and fearlessness. I live this day bravely with faith and Gratitude. I now understand that I am worthy of love no matter what I have done or not done.

It has been a long journey to free my spirit and psyche. I had to take myself out of the self created boxes. One of these boxes was filled with ill feelings related to something that had happened in one of my past lives. Regression Therapy assisted me to move past it. Sandra Anne Taylor articulates it very clearly in her book, *The Hidden Power of Your Past Lives*:

“Some of the most deeply encoded memories from past lives come from violence and extreme physical disruption. In fact, it’s not uncommon for our present maladies to be sourced in the bodily traumas of previous incarnations. For example, nearly drowning in a past life could be connected to current respiratory problems. It could also be a valid explanation for a phobia of water”.

Some of the other ill feelings I had emanated from what happened at my birth. I was born into a family of ten girls and one boy in Kagiso, an industrial township west of Johannesburg. However, I spent my toddler years until I was five with my Grandmother in Witbank. Unfortunately four of our sisters died in their infancy, limiting the dynamic number of siblings to seven.

Even though I was too young at the time to understand it, when I was born there was so much fear that I too would die. I carried this unspoken fear inside myself my whole life.

I spent the first five years of my life being raised by my Grandmother whom I adored. When I was old enough to enter formal primary schooling my Grandmother passed away. I was again too young to understand the concept of death and had incredible feelings of anger that she had dumped me, that she had had enough of me. These feeling of loss and abandonment affected my daily life for years and years.

On the 16th January 2011 I had a conversation with Lerato Moruti; a young lady whom I feel is one of my soul mates. We have had many sacred encounters together. On this particular Sunday, I asked Lerato to tell me what she would do for no pay. She said that she would love to teach children how to unleash their potential. This is what she said:

Life for our native South African children is characterized by pain and struggle.

- *The **first level of pain** is genetic. Our children's DNA is coded with all the suffering their ancestors experienced for over 100 years, fighting for a sense of belonging on a continent of their birth. The same way children are born looking like their parents; similar mannerisms and hereditary disease; children also inherit deep seated emotions that were never healed from their parents and grandparents.*
- *The **second level of pain** is socio-economic. Our children are born into a system that robs them of healthy social structures, such as quality parenting, rooted family structures, with limited income, poor schooling systems with teachers having to 'mak a plan' to ensure success, and very little opportunities for recreation activities.*
- *The **third level of pain** is physical, emotional and spiritual. Every stage of development is physically, emotionally and spiritually challenging. From **birth** when the Soul is being detached from the womb and experiences for the first time the pain of living in a physical body. This is a make or break point. Some individuals who successfully survived this transition are people like Nelson Mandela, Mother Theresa and Jesus Christ. These are Souls who never forgot why they were born. The second crisis is at **puberty** when the being experiences '**identity crisis**', this is a stage when we begin to define who we are separate from our parents. The third one is what is termed '**middle age crisis**' a state in our adulthood when we are trying to reclaim back our youth.*

It is hard to go through nature's predetermined levels of physical development when the pain is genetic and socio-economic. still the core reason for our nation's emotional and spiritual suffering. Regardless of these realities, our children, like us, seem to pull through life. Their parents seem to raise future mothers and fathers and teachers still manage to produce leaders of tomorrow.

*Most of the children that you know have parents who are divorced, fathers who are alcoholics, poor children who are abused and molested, and experience challenges that have deep impact. Some children are not even aware of the damage and pain being created at the heart and soul level. I made it through school because of ego...I told myself '**Wa phapha so you better pass with a university entrance mark**', and not because I had any grand need to be great at what I do. The older I got the harder life became. I kept on making life happen just so that I would not be regarded as a failure and*

not because I had any grand ideas of who I am, why I was born (why am I here), how long I want to live and what I would have achieved when I die.

*My job took me to various interventions, not for my personal benefit, but for team building purposes to improve performance. The journey had been great, at times painful, but great. It is this journey of having found me that inspired the need to touch the life of another. For the past five years, I enjoyed putting my colleagues on a journey of self discovery and turning junior staff members into star performers. Not teaching them about work, **but rather unleashing their potential that enabled them to realize their dreams.***

This experience announces the plight of many children in pre and post Apartheid South Africa. The child in many adults is wounded. They need help to see what is unveiling itself is a very deep calling for people to be aware and to embark on the journey of healing within. Unless this is realised, they will always wear one mask or another.

This reminds me that I have walked the same path. I wore many masks caused by many things, some of the things I could control and others I couldn't. Stephen Covey teaches us about the 90/10 principle. Ten percent of life is made up of what happens to you. Ninety percent of life is decided by how you react. We have no control over 10% of what happens to us. We cannot stop the car from breaking down. We can't stop the cutting us off in traffic. We have no control over this 10%. The other 90% is different. We determine the other 90%. How? By our reaction. We cannot control a red light. but we can control our reaction to the red light. Don't let people fool you; **YOU** can control how you react.

As a daughter I journeyed along with my parents and experienced everything that they did. I saw their pain, struggles and challenges that they went through in a racist country. It was so incredibly frustrating as I couldn't help nor do anything about it. Being a member and sister of a bigger, diverse family that comes from all walks of life with varied passions, brought its own problems that were never dealt with. All of these aspects of my life caused me to create a mask to protect myself. After my stroke, I knew it was time to peel back these layers one at a time. I was taking back control.

My Healing Balance Sheet

To maintain and sustain the changes that I made, I continue to use multidisciplinary techniques and processes to ensure that I don't go back to old masks or create new ones. The tools and processes that I utilised and would like you to be aware of should be according to your own beliefs and choice:

Meditation refers to any form of a family of practices in which practitioners train their minds or self-induce a mode of consciousness to realize some benefit. Meditation is generally an inwardly oriented, personal practice. **Prayer** beads or other ritual objects may be used during meditation. Meditation may involve invoking or cultivating a feeling or internal state, such as *compassion*, or *attending to a specific focal point*. Anthony Strano's work – Slaying the Three Dragons – Overcoming doubt, worry and fear taught me:

In the depths of meditation, we not only understand, but experience – as a primary truth – that the wounds, disappointments, and anger of the past are healed and that our ideals, hopes, and aims for the future can be made real. Meditation, especially, develops an open-hearted learning attitude; it develops the ability to step back and observe, which is our utmost necessity to break free from the judgments, opinion, and criticism that consistently clog and cloud perception, and consequently the quality of our life. As the mind opens, it becomes more neutral, no longer invaded by fears, labels, and dependencies. It throws them all away. The mind moves into another gear – freedom.

For this to happen, as already mentioned, I need to start each day with positive silence. Before work, before breakfast, before doing anything, let me step inside myself for a little while. In this space of introspection, I connect with my original spiritual qualities; I discard the stale things from yesterday, if some are still remaining, and begin today fresh. Having connected with the best in myself, it helps me to live more consciously so that I am able to deal with everything more effectively.

Anthony Strano suggests the eight R's:

- RETURNING:** Find your original strength by collecting the energy of the mind. With your concentrated thought, focus on meeting your real self.
- RELAXING:** Relax to remove many tensions and demands of the outside world from the mind
- REMEMBERING:** In silence, going inward, you must begin to remember what you have forgotten: you are a spiritual being, a point source of positive energy. Your spirit is your reality!
- RELEASING:** As you begin to rule your own mind, you free yourself from the worry that cripples your confidence, from the fear that hijacks your courage and the doubt that ridicules every attempt you make to bring hope back into my life.
- RELEARNING:** You are able to understand eternity and spirituality and the feelings of your true humanity emerge
- REDISCOVERING:** You are a positive, purposeful being who has something unique to offer to life
- RESTORING:** You must value yourself as a being of peace and love and know that you have within yourself all the qualities you need to overcome all the challenges of life.
- RECHARGING:** You have the inner strength to let go of judgments, dissatisfaction and impatience and to replace negative energies with a more positive outlook.

We have all experienced **music's** physical, mental and emotional effects on us at one time or another. In fact, the mental effect is so strong at times, a few lines from a song can keep running through our minds despite our efforts to ignore them or make them stop. If you listen to the sound of your heart and breath, you'll recognize the ancient rhythms of your own internal drumming. This forever connects you to the Mother of all creation, and to the sound of the planet Earth. These rhythms can't be faked or forged; they are natural and eternal.

As we all know rhythm is a basic component to every natural living process. All people have natural rhythm, which often freezes due to unnatural and traumatic events. **Drumming** unlocks our natural right to feel alive and free. Drumming has been used for centuries to release emotional stress, raise the

spirits, enhance clarity and focus, develop co-operation and community bonds and celebrate significant events.

Reading and writing is a spontaneous spiritual calling. It can be readily used to heal. It is an opportunity to inspire the telling of our own authentic stories as we are all authors and artists of our own lives; it is a time for delving deep inside yourself and letting go so the truth heals you; telling stories inspires other souls to have the courage to author their own stories in their own organic voices. It's an eternal gift and a thought memory that will live beyond your years and live forever – stories never die.

In August 2004 my journey to Light began. I met **Dr Baruch Banai** at **The Centre of Light** where I completed the three personal transformation courses they offer. These courses empower individuals to face challenges at the workplace through personal transformation. I duly completed Turning Point, Joy Spring and The Mile the 3 courses that form the heart and core of Dr Baruch's teachings. They are uniquely designed for individuals who wish to create a most meaningful shift in their own personal lives, and if their consciousness so permits, to extend themselves further in making a significant difference in other human beings' lives. The workshops form the constructed catalysts by which individuals are sanctioned to unleash their full human capacities and thereby empowering themselves. This is what gave me the rare opportunity to learn to perceive and examine my attitude to my life and assisted me with defining who I really am. Since completing this unique experience to learn about me, I am more aware of who I am. The workshops have been conducted since 1985, and therefore an estimated 25 000 lives have been touched directly through this work, including my own.

The door to my spiritual self had been opened but I was still slow to react and took longer to respond to what my earth-angel had introduced me to and my resistance remained the same. I finally decided to open myself up fully and attended **Dr John F. Demartini's** course, which resonated with me so deeply that I eventually completed it 5 times. **The Breakthrough Experience** is a two-day program that challenges old assumptions about reality and offers you new formulas for living, relating to others and achieving your goals. This experience gave me an exceptional opportunity of a lifetime which expanded my mind, opened my heart and allowed me to journey upward and outward to a greater sphere of living to experience the truth of my own magnificence.

One of the most fascinating life lessons that I learnt from him was: *“I believe that those who are inspired to probe deeper, beyond their own initial evaluations, and those who humble themselves to their inner voice and inner vision, can experience their truest divine nature – their true loving spirit that radiates inside each one of us.”* This was a real turning point for me to discover this truth.

I received a very empowering gift that he teaches: *“When we love people for who they are, they turn into the ones we love”* and *“.....if we humble ourselves to the infinite potential that lies within us, we realise that nothing is missing.”* He also says: *“When we have nothing to live for, our vitality decreases. We all need a reason to get up in the morning and do something we love.”* What a gift of life from a world leading inspirational speaker and author at the forefront of the burgeoning personal and professional development industry.

His concept of knowledge and experience is a culmination of 40 years of research and studies of more than 28 000 texts in over 200 different disciplines, ranging from psychology, philosophy and metaphysics to theology, neurology and physiology. It was a blessing to meet this beautiful soul who radiates LOVE through his healing power of gratitude. During my attendance at Breakthrough in 2006 I learnt from Dr Demartini to keep a grace and gratitude diary. I had not been consistent with the diary previously but since that day I have done it religiously. I write every day of my life.

A few of my friends came to visit me when I was just discharged from the hospital. I vividly recall it was a Sunday when they all arrived to pray and meditate with me. A few of them expressed in unison that I had to attend **The Journey**. The Journey is a cutting-edge transformation and healing work pioneered by internationally acclaimed, best-selling author, speaker and mind-body-healing expert Brandon Bays. It is recognised worldwide as a uniquely potent tool for awakening and liberating the infinite human potential. The work has helped thousands of people worldwide free themselves from issues like fear, anxiety, stress, depression, low self-esteem, chronic anger and rage, physical illnesses and disease, and those relating to addictions and unhealthy behaviours, sexual abuse, relationship problems and career performance. They left a book and DVD with me about Brandon Bays and kept repeating that *“You must go”*. Then in August 2007, just after starting the Radio Surgery I was really ill. I had no balance, couldn't stand up properly, was constantly dizzy and had no appetite but I was inspired to attend. Just by luck, Brandon Bays was in the country at the time and I attended.

The two major things that I learnt was to let go of anger and to forgive and to not allow the past nor the future to keep me from enjoying the present. The greatest gift and life lesson I received from The Journey is to:

- * Be present
- * Nurture my soul
- * Drink lots of water
- * Stop, breathe and be present
- * Know that your body integrates and processes what you go through. This is natural when the body is healing

In June 2006 I was invited to attend the Call of Time Retreat. This retreat is designed to provide space for one on one conversations, small group dialogue and generous time for silent reflection and meditation, I met the most beautiful soul, **Dadi Janki**, the founder of **Brahma Kumaris**, the World Spiritual University. She was 90 years old at the time and gave me the most amazing gift of life and never forgot me. Dadi Janki is a spiritual teacher and leader whose life and personal well-being reveal a holistic approach to health – where physical, mental and spiritual aspects are considered. She recognises that while technological advances in diagnosis and treatment are essential and need to be shared globally, many health problems arise from emotional suffering and need to be addressed at a deeper level. Her view and understanding is that simple changes in the way we think and feel will secure a healthy future for humanity, and a better world.

She maintains that filling one's mind with positive self-awareness creates an environment of love and care, which in turn helps others to regain physical strength. Meditation and rediscovering the inner self are the two main tenants of Dadi Janki's teachings and the focus of the Spiritual University is to help people explore their inner qualities as a basis for developing their highest level of personal integrity and achieving self-mastery.

This unique method of education in human, moral and spiritual values was initiated in 1936 and is currently being offered in over 8 500 branches in over 130 countries worldwide. Throughout my trauma I have always been supported and prayed for and meditated for by the South African members. Dadi's teachings that will always follow me are:

- Letting go regardless
- Feeling the power of love
- Making God your everything
- Enjoying the wonder of silence
- Embracing the power of peace
- Feeling the power of happiness
- Practising the art of being silent
- Understanding the power of purity
- Accepting the power of divine truth
- Appreciating the source of living energy
- Knowing that everything the soul needs is in God

Sometime in early 2006, just before I was to get my Moment of Grace with my maker, a colleague told me about the **Art of Living Foundation** and encouraged me to attend the breathing classes held by the Art of Living. I scoffed at the thought and doubtfully told her that I could never take so much time off work for a silly course. Little did I know that the Art of Living would contribute to changing my life. Founded in 1981 by Sri Sri Ravi Shankar, The Art of Living is an educational and humanitarian movement engaged in stress-management and service initiatives. The organization operates globally in 152 countries and has touched the lives of over 370 million people. The programs are guided by Sri Sri's philosophy of peace: "Unless we have a stress-free mind and a violence-free society, we cannot achieve world peace." To help individuals get rid of stress and experience inner peace, The Art of Living offers stress-elimination programs which include breathing techniques, meditation and yoga. These programs have helped millions around the world to overcome stress, depression and violent tendencies. The Art of Living movement has spread peace across communities through diverse humanitarian projects, including conflict resolution, disaster relief, sustainable rural development, empowerment of women, prisoner rehabilitation, education for all, and environmental sustainability.

The **Art of Living** benefits I have derived: Reduced stress, improved health and well-being, higher energy levels, my immune system has been strengthened and my cholesterol level has been reduced. I

have a greater sense of creativity and clarity of mind, improved sleep, enhanced brain functioning and an improved ability to manage challenging situations. I am more at ease, am more joyful and feel harmony in my personal and work relationships. I have a deeper sense of community and an increased awareness of both myself and my surroundings. I am more patient and my confidence and self-esteem has increased which means I am less anxious. I also started doing yoga.

My meditation practices have been enhanced and I experience deep inner peace of mind. I have learnt to:

- Live in the present moment as it is inevitable
- Take responsibility
- Not complain constantly
- Not see bad intentions in the mistakes of others
- Be 100% committed in everything I do
- Accept people and situations as they are
- Avoid the nature of the memory and not to cling to the negative
- Be natural and comfortable in my own skin
- Stretch out my hand and be proactive in service
- Not be kicked around by others
- Know that what we resist persists
- Meditate as meditation is liberation

I also started doing yoga. I am sleeping better, my immune system is strong and I feel much more relaxed.

I also found a wonderful **BodyTalk** practitioner and attended many sessions which really helped in my healing. The BodyTalk System seeks to address the "whole person". This means that no aspect of the human psyche can be overlooked, be it emotional, physical or environmental. In BodyTalk, we have developed a whole-healthcare system that supports and promotes the wellbeing of any person, animal, or plant. BodyTalk understands the profound influence the psychology of the body has on our health. Instead of focusing on the symptom, BodyTalk finds the underlying causes of illness by addressing the whole-person and their whole-story. The BodyTalk techniques provide insights to the areas of your body that need attention. What might seem like an obvious problem to you is not necessarily the one

your body wants to address first. This is the beauty of BodyTalk. It respects the body's own needs and determines your body's priorities for healing. Then with the use of a variety of non-invasive techniques, BodyTalkers refocus your body's natural healing response to establish better communication within the body.

I now believe in myself with a deeper understanding, humility and acceptance that I can make light from the dark. When doubts set in, I turn and leave with a conviction that is strong and true. I have come to the understanding that few people face with courage all that life gives them.

At this moment I endeavour to always create beauty, harmony and perfection in all areas of my life. I fully understand that my body is not a monument that will last forever - when my purpose on planet earth is complete I will die gracefully. There is no need to fear, the Lord God will lead us and protect us every moment and every moment of every moment!!!!!!! Let us accept and find peace that our lives have their seasons and we too are a part of the natural world. I have learnt that the only person that can help me, that can free me is myself. No one else can do it. I had to be brave and open my eyes to the fact that I was denying who I was out of fear and mistrust.

There are more masks than we can ever imagine, it takes time to realise what they are, what is causing them and even more time to lift the veil. You can free yourself. Use the power within. The wisdom, knowledge, power and understanding is within you. You just need to give yourself a chance. Make that call and break through.

Letting go and opening myself up was the beginning of the awakening of my soul. It can be for you to.

The Masks We Wear (Infinite Wisdom)

In life, we dawn on ourselves many different masks (some call these labels). Some wear the mask of a career. Others, wear the masks of hobbies. Still other, put on the mask of happiness. While others wear the masks of sadness, illness. There are many types of masks, too many to mention. However, suffice it to say that each of us wear masks in our daily living.

However, the question is do we define the masks we wear or do we allow them to define who we are?

Many of us, live our lives donning these masks, hiding and covering up who we truly are. As we journey throughout our lives, we hide from the ones we love, the ones who love us and ultimately ourselves. We take on ourselves the clutter of life and piling on additional *stuff* to complicate our lives even more. Some people have donned so many masks, they no longer know who they truly are. But how is this being true to ourselves? How do we truly come face to face with true being, if we are continually hiding our true self?

The celebrated author, Ronald Rolheiser states: "We live knowing that others do not fully know and understand us and that others can never fully know and understand us, that they are 'out there' and we are 'in here'. St. Paul calls this living as 'through a glass, darkly,' a riddle, a veil, a mist of unreality that separates us from God and others, and from what is authentically real (1 Cor. 13:12-13)." (The Restless Heart, p.7)

One way to achieve the true encounter with ourselves and each other is by unveiling or removing the masks we wear. The philosophers of history call this moment, this unveiling, *aletheia*, translated from the Greek--*αλεθεια* (unveiling). If we remove the masks and let our true selves shine before all, we not only reach toward perfection, but then, we are transfigured into our more profound and genuine selves.

How we go about achieving this moment of *aletheia* is different for everyone. Some turn to the spiritual realm, others to the aesthetics, others turn to friends, others to counseling, others retreat, others play sports, and others turn to nature. The encounter with ourselves is one that can take place at any time and place. The unmasking/unveiling is one that is essential to the journey of our lives. Therefore, it is fitting that this encounter with our truest self begin at a familiar point in our lives, one that inspires and catapults us to the unveiling and discovery process.

Albeit, the encounter with our truest self is not an easy one. Throughout our lives, especially in the fast-paced lives we live here in the United States, we are conditioned to don the masks. Sometimes, these masks are put on as a necessity. Other times, the masks are put on as defense mechanism in response to our surrounding states of being. Yet, to be truly edified, to truly enter into a genuine encounter with

self and others, we must unveil our true selves and let ourselves and others encounter the beauty that is OUR TRUEST SELF. In this encounter, we are uplifted, we are fortified, and we are resolved to become the best self/person we can be. We are works in progress, and that progress needs to be shown for what it is and not hidden behind some mask.

Ask yourself, in the encounter of self and others, do we remove the masks that we wear? Do we allow ourselves and others to see us for who we truly are? Do we engage ourselves without any presuppositions? Do we learn to understand ourselves and others as through a glass?

The unveiling of the masks we wear is a life-long journey. Let us begin it! Doing so will let us encounter who we are, and allow us to better our lives (be it spiritual, psychological, emotional, physical, or relational betterment).

Full of Wisdom

P.S.--"In the torment of the insufficiency of everything attainable, we come to realize that, in this life, all symphonies must remain unfinished."--Karl Rahner

Masks (Paul Sohn)

On one of my birthdays my sister gave me a full-face rubber mask...one of those crazy things you slip over your head. She told me she'd give me ten dollars if I'd wear it into the pulpit one Sunday (my kids raised it to fifteen dollars), but I just couldn't do it! One night I wore it to a speaking engagement. Without any explanation, I just stood up and began to speak on being authentic. There I stood pressing on, making one statement after another as the place came apart at the seams. Why? Anybody knows why! My mask canceled out everything I had to say, especially on that subject. It's impossible to be very convincing while you wear a mask.

I finally pulled the thing off and the place settled down almost immediately. As soon as it did, everybody got the point. It's a funny thing, when we wear *literal* masks, nobody is fooled. But how easy it is to wear invisible ones and fake people out by the hundreds week after week. Did you know that the word *hypocrite* comes from the ancient Greek plays? An actor would place a large, grinning mask in front of his face and quote his comedy lines as the audience would roar with laughter. He would then slip backstage and grab a frowning, sad, oversized mask and come back quoting tragic lines as the audience would moan and weep. Guess what was called. A *hyprocritos*, one who wears a mask.

Wow, what a poignant story. When I first read this story from one of Charles Swindoll's book, I became pensive. Immersed in deep thoughts, I felt God was challenging me to answer the inconvenient question "*Paul, are you wearing an invisible mask? Are you like a Greek actor hyprocritos – one who wears a mask?*" My initial gut reaction was "No, of course not, God – how could I? I'm a Christian." Immediately, I was humbled by a quote that jumped out of me. The very words from Irish evangelist Gypsy Smith: "There are five gospels. Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and the Christian. And some people will never read the first four." In other words, the message is seen before it is heard.

One insight I've gained as a leader is this: As your sphere of influence grows, your words and actions have an exponential ripple effect among your followers. Every saying, behavior, and interaction counts. The choice is yours. Choose either exemplary leadership or abysmal leadership.

Another implication of greater influence follows the numerous temptations, power struggles, pressures, and unexpected risks that challenge the very core of your character. These situations will either make or break you. To simply avoid these situations is naïve. As James Froude said, "You cannot dream yourself into a character; you must hammer and forge yourself one."

Going back to my internal question around "wearing an invisible mask," I was compelled to admit that at times, I found I was wearing the mask of pride, mask of success, mask of kindness because I had this pre-defined image or brand of myself. God thankfully reminds me through painful experiences that "what good will it be for someone to gain the whole world, yet forfeit [his] soul?" My focus in retaining a self-image superseded my identity in Christ.

We are called to live a different, holy, and purposeful life. Elie Wiesel said it best:

*When we die and go to heaven
our Maker is not going to say,
why didn't you discover the
cure for such and such?*

*The only thing we're going
to be asked at that precious
moment is why didn't you
become you?*

We are called to lead like Jesus. To do so requires us to unveil our duplicitous self and realize that we are born-again in Christ, given a new identity. When we live authenticity instead of do authenticity, not only will we have greater influence and credibility as salt and light, but God will glorified through who we are.

Question: What masks have you worn before? What have you done to be authentic in who you are?

Unveiling the masks (Beauty and Bedlam)

This is a week where children are clamoring to try on their latest costume. Excitement permeates the air as they become someone by which they typically only dream. Hiding behind a mask, they have Superman powers or Cinderella's beauty and grace. They are affirmed in that role as they embrace a new reality.

But what about you, sweet girlfriends?

When you look in the mirror, do you don a mask of perfection and performance? Or maybe hide behind another mask for fear of reaction? Lies whisper shame and accusation, "You'll never measure up – if only they knew!" And then we listen...we listen and embrace...a lie! Women are really good at that, but why? Do you need someone today to tell you how special you are, to affirm your appointed role whether it be in your family, marriage, workforce, or ministry?

I may not know your circumstances, nor understand your background personally, but I do know ONE thing...you were uniquely created by God for an amazing purpose. 95% of teen girls believe the lie that they "must perform to be loved and accepted." Did you read that correctly? 95%!! And the statistic for adult women is not much less.

Precious Ladies, our worth is not based on what others think of us, or what we do. And that is so hard to process, especially when it feels so personal. Our value is determined by how God views us and He loves us more than we can ever fathom...warts and all.

I guess that's why I'm passionate that this being a place where we can share both our beauty AND our bedlam, a little corner where everyone can be free to take off those masks. So use the comments section as a place to dialogue. I speak with so many women every year who struggle with this issue. It's difficult to be real and authentic when we live in a society that stresses perfection, and doesn't have the time to care about your struggles. I do care, and I wish I could give you each a hug. I've been

there, I know. It seems like no matter how old we are, we still struggle with those “I’ll never be on Prom Court” tendencies.

So, pour yourself some coffee, and enjoy browsing all these amazing blogs, but please don’t compare yourself to a “virtual life” or let “appearances” make you feel inadequate. For instance, I may be able to dress well on a Frugal Fashionista budget, but right now, I have stacks of laundry piled on my bedroom sofa, and it’s been there forever. This week, as you watch the “dress up” anticipation grow, remember that this may be just the time to let that mask down, and revel in your wonderful uniqueness.

Wearing a mask? Take off your mask!

(Fueling Christian Life)

In this Genesis Bible study we'll take a look at the reasons why people hide their struggles and hurt from others, and sometimes from God as well. We'll have a look at what society demands, then make a turn in the Garden of Eden to make comparisons, draw conclusions and then look at some solutions and the benefits of an intimate relationship with Jesus Christ. If you think of a masquerade - it's a place where people come with their beautiful masks and their beautiful ball room gowns and they dance away the night. You would not necessarily know *who's* behind that mask. All you do, is to admire the beautiful mask, but you don't know who the person really is. Everyone of us, at some stage in our lives, maybe every day or some days - we all possess a set of masks. Maybe you can think of your masks hanging on the wall. Maybe you just have one mask?

Reasons Why You Would Be Wearing A Mask:

- The main reason why masks exist, is to **conceal**.
- By using our masks, we attempt to **control** how well other people know us. Let's have a deeper look at this statement. Typically we allow a person to know us as well as *we* want them to know us. "I will only show you how much / want to show you." How well I allow you to know me, depends on how *secure* I feel with you. So if you are a **stranger**, I might have a certain mask – you will only know certain things about me. If you are a **friend** – well, you will know a little bit more; a different set of masks. If you're a **best friend** then my mask is not concealing my whole face. If you're a **spouse**, maybe you don't even have a mask...

But all of us possess a set of masks.

- Sometimes we put on these masks deliberately, consciously, because we **fear** the dangers of someone else knowing us a bit too well.
- We use masks to **protect** ourselves. It is a protective mechanism. Maybe you think, "I don't want to be hurt any longer, so I'll just protect myself and 'block' myself off from you and wear my mask."
- We **hide** behind our masks.
- We **hide ourselves from God**

Imagine if ladies dress up and go out into the world and everyone thinks "Wow! She's so *beautiful!*" What if people with the naked eye could see our blemishes? What if they could see that string of "pride" behind our ears? Imagine if they come around and say, "Ah well... I think there's a spot of 'shame' on your cheek. Do you mind wiping it out?" Or what if they say, "There's a piece of "guilt" hanging from your mouth..."

Imagine if through the naked eye people could see all of these things!

Society demands that we **hide** and **cover up** those things. So what do we do? We put up our concealers, we wear our masks and we **hide** that from those around us.

If you wear this mask, there is a big smiley face. If I however go home and take off that mask, you might see **tears** - secret tears that you can't see. You can see **loneliness**. Sometimes people appear so content with life, so happy... but what's behind that mask?

It may be:

- loneliness
- guilt for things they may have done
- bitterness
- anger
- insecurity
- embarrassment
- disappointment or
- grief.

Yet we are thinking XXX is so beautiful and XXX is perfect. Only XXX will know what he/she is going through behind that mask. We use this smiley face mask to convey the message that everything is jolly and everything is fine, but in reality we are using these masks to protect and hide ourselves from being naked and exposed.

The concept of hiding and the concept of so-called masks is not something that has just popped up today.

The concept of hiding actually started in the garden of Eden.

It is in the nature of man to hide. We all know that Satan came into the garden to tempt Eve to eat of the tree of knowledge.

So Adam and Eve lived in perfect harmony with God. They had *perfect alignment* with God. There was no reason for them to be afraid of God, because they enjoyed their perfect relationship with Him. God had given them dominion and authority over all His creation. But now all of a sudden they were **nervous** and **fearful**, so they hid.

What did they lose? They knew that they had lost something of great value. More than just becoming vulnerable, they had lost their confidence and *worst* of all – they had lost their carefree, open communication with God. They would soon learn that they had lost their spiritual connection, their right, their privilege, their dominion and even their home in the garden of Eden.

The Bible says immediately that both of their eyes were opened and they knew that they were naked. More than just an awareness of their physical nakedness, they were aware that something *dreadful* happened. (They obviously disobeyed God.)

They felt exposed and guilty and for the first time ever **man had experienced fear**. Their first initial reaction was to hide. Human nature has not changed since then. When we sin, when we're guilty, when we feel exposed and vulnerable, what do we do? We hide!!! How silly of Adam and Eve to think that they could hide behind *fig leaves* from and all-seeing, all-knowing God.

We may have sin, we may have bitterness, whatever it is that you are hiding - we think we're hiding it from our spouses, from those that are closest to us. We may even think that we are fooling others around us, but we often forget that God is *everywhere* and He *sees* everything. **No one can fool God**. He is far more greater than we even think that He is!

We know that we have gifts and talents to play music, to counsel, to do whatever in the Kingdom of God. We've **heard His voice** like Adam, but... we are *too scared, too afraid*... Don't we find ourselves hiding in the bushes, hiding behind the fig trees? Thinking again that no one can see us. In Matthew 10:30 it says that Jesus even knows how many hairs we have on our heads.

How many of you perhaps have lost a loved one in your lives? It could be five years; it could be ten years; it could be thirty years ago. Are we holding onto that grief because it's safe and comfortable? Are we putting on our "You-know-what-I'm really-depressed" mask? It's perfect to grieve, but Jesus wants to come in and Jesus wants to heal. Jesus wants to restore, but we have that mask on because it's comfortable and we have a safe place. We just refuse to take off that mask, but we pray, "God please heal me, I want to move forward." In this way you don't allow Him to work in your life.

The things in everyday life that you and I face, are *real*. We have *real* feelings. *Real* challenges, *real* emotions. We will never experience God's liberating power, His healing power, His saving power, if we don't show Him the *real* us. It's time for you to stand, like Adam, naked and unashamed. It's time to pray: **"Lord, I am tired of living a facade and pretending that everything is fine when it's not. I am tired of keeping appearances. Jesus, I am taking off my mask. Come heal me, come restore me."**

We cannot cover up from God. It is futile to even try and do it. He is omnipresent and His intelligence is what exposes us. It allow Him to see us at the *core* of our being. Who else knows you, but your God? He formed you in your mother's womb. He didn't just use a generic template to create you! He took time to put you together. The Bible says that you've been "skillfully and wonderfully made."

- He designed you to be who you are.
- He knows your weaknesses.
- He knows your vulnerability.

You are *not* a generic. You are an original! Only God knows how to deal with you the way you need to. It is **scary**, but also in a sense **comforting** to know that God sees *all* our actions. There has never been a thought that we entertained that God did not know about. There has never been a deed that we did, that God was not aware of.

His intelligence is like a high-tech x-ray.

- 1 - He can see **right** through you!
- 2 - He knows where the problem is – Either in your heart or in your mind...
- 3 – He knows exactly how to remediate it.

A surgeon can only do surgery and remove those malignancies and tumors when we signed and give consent for that surgeon to operate. God is standing there and saying, "I know how to heal you; liberate you, but if you are not going to allow me to, there is nothing that I can do about it."

Rev 3:20 says, "Here I am, I stand at the door and knock. If anyone hears my voice and opens the door, I will come in and I will eat with him and he with me."

God is a perfect gentleman – waiting for your invitation. God longs for your invitation. God longs for an open, honest, transparent relationship with you. He wants to have communion with us. The masks that we use, prevent us from having intimacy with God. Rather than try and impress God, we should pursue an honest and open relationship with Him. We need to unveil our masks and get *real* with God. God is continually working in us. He is cleansing and restoring us. He cannot clean and purify what we hide in the corners of our hearts. If we do not show Him the places of brokenness in our hearts, how is He going to get there?... It is only by invitation and by allowing Him...

John 1:9 - When we hide, we hide in darkness. You do not hide in light. Light exposes too much. Jesus is the true Light. Let us step out of our dark places and get into His Light. How about taking off those masks? Come out of hiding. Come out of those bushes like Adam and Eve into the Light of God.

We cannot **experience the blessings** of God in the darkness. We cannot **experience the benefits of an intimate relationship** if we're hiding in the bushes...

Sometimes it is hard to share very intimate things with other people, but **God** is there for you.

- He longs to wipe that secret tear.
- He wants to deliver you from rejection and intimidation.

There is a God in the garden who *wants* to listen!

Why wear a mask? Gallery.sjsu.edu

- What are masks used for? Why do people make masks? -

One reason for wearing a mask is to pretend to be someone or something else. The mask can be a kind of language that expresses the emotion of the figure one chooses to create. When one sees a person wearing a mask depicting a happy expression, what do you think it means? It may infer several meanings. It may convey the mask wearer's genuine happiness to other people, and make them laugh, or it may mask, or hide, the wearer's real emotions, such as unhappiness. Some masks may serve more than one purpose

We all wear masks but do you know what hides behind the last one - Chicagonow.com

Masks are okay. Everyone wears one or two. It's called civilization, because without them, we stand before our fellow masqueraders as the brutes we really are. Among the many pleasant faces we project among one another, is our most brutish secret. You and I live with a gnawing fear of the very world in which we walk. Usually unexpressed and repressed, it is the primordial fear of the jungle.

As children we see our world as an adventure. As adults we learn its perils, the most elementary of which is the peril of being getting caught up into the jungle. Into those places and people for whom civilized mask-wearing has no place, for this where people function by power not principle. Where they operate with their fists not their fluency.

Think of the last time you drove into a dark city street by mistake....or were caught up in a screaming stadium crowd...or watched a gang of angry kids screeching by you in their juiced-up car...or perhaps that sports bar that turned ugly when young toughs decided to settle their arguments with their hands. You see, my fellow masked friend, these are the times when our repressed fears of the jungle culture ignite in our faces. Quite suddenly all our education and social niceties are swept aside as we crash into the raw fact that -- bottom bottom line -- there are only two types of people in this world: The physically strong and the physically weak.

By this definition, criminals are strong, street punks are strong, police and feds are strong, survivalists and special ops are strong, athletes and bodyguards are strong. In contrast, teachers are weak, lawyers are weak, CPAs are weak, authors and poets are weak, mothers and grandmothers are weak. The point....? In the jungle, the more jungle-like someone is, the more power they hold. Something we may hate to admit, but live with so long as WE don't have to confront that jungle ourselves.

I mean, isn't that what our police are for? For keeping a lid on the jungle and safe from us? How they do it -- legally or brutally -- is something we don't want to know. Just keep us safe so we can continue to wear these civilizing masks. Fortunately, the physically strong and brutish tend to wane over time; whereas time seems to be on the side of the intellectually strong and bright. For the sake of civilization, at least let's hope so.

Being Honest with Ourselves and Removing Our Masks

- Charlie Tranchemontagne

“Our lives only improve when we are willing to take chances and the first and most difficult risk we can take is to be honest with ourselves.” ~Walter Anderson

For almost two-and-a-half decades, I hid behind masks. I sensed as a very young child that I lived honoring my true self, like most children do, but as I got older, I started putting on masks as a way to fit in. One of my first masks was that of a juvenile delinquent. Over time, this mask became almost embedded in my skin. I discovered the world of alcohol, drugs, and mayhem, and I felt trapped and unable to escape from it. Shame and guilt filled me with fear and kept me from breaking free from this chaotic lifestyle. I was afraid to ask for help.

But in the late eighties, I attended a self-help workshop. This presentation introduced me to a way of living that radically altered my life—inner journeying. I was intrigued by the presenter’s story and his thoughts of living a life that required him to look inside for answers. I had very little understanding or practice with looking within. The workshop opened up a whole new way of living for me. It focused on removing masks. As I listened to the speaker, I found myself thinking about my own life and the masks that I hid behind. I felt uncomfortable, so I started to question myself on how I was living.

This new self-awareness pushed me to start looking inside of myself for answers to the problems that were plaguing me. I was young and self-employed, on my way to making a name for myself in my business community. I was also self-absorbed with weightlifting and exercising. I was the typical story of the “skinny kid who transformed his body.” To others, my life looked good. But my inner landscape told a different story. I was lost in a world of darkness, pain, and anxiety. Even though I was experiencing some modest success with my business, my past was starting to haunt me.

I felt like a fraud, and I was starting to feel like my outer world was about to crumble. What had kept me going through all these years of turmoil was the fact that I had become an expert on wearing masks! I had no idea who I was, and despite all the good things going on in my life, I felt like I wasn’t being honest with myself. I wanted to be real. When reflecting on what I could possibly share with

others in regards to wearing masks, I immediately thought of a poem that I read shortly after attending the self-help workshop. The poem, written by Charles C. Finn was titled *Please Hear What I am Not Saying*.

The opening lines read, "Don't be fooled by me. Don't be fooled by the face I wear, for I wear a mask, a thousand masks, masks that I am afraid to take off and none of them is me." His words seemed to tell my story, and I knew after reading his poem that I wanted to start changing my life. Change did not come quickly. I resisted anything that would disrupt my life. Spending time reading new books and reflecting on my life in solitude did not come easily for me. I had to rearrange my priorities, which took practice.

As I spent time reading and reflecting on the poem, my walls of resistance began to weaken. Light was starting to shine in some very dark places within me. My initial reaction was joy, followed quickly by fear. I knew I desperately wanted to change, but felt afraid of the unknown. When my masks started to come off, I felt like people could look right through me. I felt raw and naked. I did, however, experience a new inner freedom that was unfamiliar to me. My self-confidence rose along with my self-esteem, and despite the long road that lay ahead, I felt ready to start traveling it.

Presently, I am working on trying to remove a mask that has worn out its welcome with me. This is the mask that I started to wear shortly after I had a very profound experience through skydiving.

On October 8th, 1990 I was sitting on the floor in a small Cessna airplane, flying at an altitude of about 4000 feet. Resting on a small platform, with both legs hanging outside of the door, I was seconds away from jumping. What brought me to this crossroad was the fact that, despite appearances, I was still a mess on the inside because I still lacked inner peace. The workshop and poem had helped move me in a good direction, but I needed something more to push me over the edge. Skydiving would be that push.

I had chosen to skydive as a way to surrender my life to a power greater than myself. I no longer wanted to endure the pain I was experiencing. I knew I needed help with overcoming this obstacle I was facing. Sitting in the doorway of the plane was a surreal moment for me—one that would break through years of pain. At that moment before I jumped, I told myself, "Keep your eyes open," and with

a silent prayer, I leapt from the doorway. In an instant, I knew with certainty that I would never be the same after this experience. Yet, as ecstatic as I was, I choose not to tell anyone why I had jumped. I thought it would be best to keep it to myself.

Up until that point, I had not shared with anyone about my inner journeying. Religious or spiritual “stuff” still made me a little uncomfortable. I didn’t realize that in not sharing this, I was hiding my true self—my “real” self. People around me knew that something was going on in my life, but I didn’t disclose the driving force behind the changes they were seeing. It seemed easy just to keep things quiet. So here I am, ready to take this “closet seeker” mask off. How do I do that? For me it is about finally admitting to myself that the mask no longer fits, and I am no longer willing to live this way. I wouldn’t say that I have a “one size fits all” mask removal strategy, but I have found that when I am willing to step out of my comfort zone, good things will happen. I need to trust that.

I also know that self-honesty has a way of breaking through walls—big walls! What follows self-honesty, for me, is always action—taking some action, whether it’s a small step or a giant leap. Either way, it’s life changing. You may need to take a leap of your own to get in touch with your true self. It doesn’t need to be huge, as long as you move forward in some way. Like the Nike commercials says, “Just Do it!” What’s important is to find what works for you and start moving, inch by inch, beyond your fear.

Writing this small post for Tiny Buddha is *my way* of trying to move beyond my fear, and removing this mask that has kept me isolated from other seekers. Most importantly, I did this to be honest with myself. Being honest with ourselves is the surest way to move forward on the path of self-discovery.

Emotional masks: we all wear them, we all hide behind them – The Journey of Yaya

Sometimes I need to realize that I am not the only person in this world experiencing certain emotions and hardships. Sometimes we get so caught up in our little world, that we forget that everyone fights their own battle. We often say 'Why me?!', but in reality you are not the only one. We all are afraid sometimes, insecure, self-conscious or lonely. Not everyone is an open book and will broadcast their deepest pains and insecurities to the world. Because this will make us look vulnerable, and being vulnerable is weak. And we don't want to be pitied or perceived as a weak person. Especially not the ones among us who have their pride and ego and have to keep up appearances. We can never look inside someone's soul, someone's deepest desires, regrets and insecurities. Unless we talk about them of course with the people we trust.

But how can you presume that what you see is the truth? Just because you are struggling doesn't mean someone else is not struggling. And your poor neighbor who is on welfare and struggling to make ends meet, may be the happiest person in your neighborhood because he is surrounded by the most loving and caring people. In spite of how happy and lucky people seem, you never know what is going on behind the scenes. Or what is going on inside themselves, the inner battle they fight. As you may already know, happiness comes from within, what you have and how much money you got does not guarantee happiness. If you are genuinely happy and satisfied with yourself and your life, this happiness will automatically show on the outside and it doesn't matter in what kind of situation you are. If you feel happy, you are happy and if you are happy, you look happy.

Someone's life may look perfect, but you can never know what other issues they are dealing with. And they may be genuinely happy, but that doesn't mean that they never struggled or that they never feel sad or lonely. They also go through the hardships of life, they also experience different kinds of emotion; they are human. Life is a roller coaster, an emotional ride. We cannot feel happy 100% of the time. One day we feel happy, one day we feel sad or misunderstood. What differentiates us from each other is how we deal with these emotions, how we deal with life experiences. Someone may hide his tears and sadness very well, while someone else may not.

The people who can hide their true emotion and portray another emotion on top of it may have very good acting skills, but you have to be able to catch them in the act. We all wear masks once in a while. Imagine you are having a present from a friend. You unwrap the present in front of him, and the present turns out to be something you don't like at all. Inside you feel indifference, but from the outside you will show happiness and gratitude. People hide their emotions behind several masks. Sometimes when you look closely you can see if someone is wearing a mask or not. Ask yourself, is their emotion genuine or not?:

Masks: sad, surprise, happy, resentment, angry, scared.

True emotions may be: hurt, insecurity, self-consciousness, fear, envy, jealousy, happiness, satisfaction, doubt, indifference, surprise, sadness, depression, resentment

Wearing Masks – Dr Karyn Hall

The world can be a bruising place for emotionally sensitive people. A regular day can feel like being covered in biting, Texas-sized fire ants. A natural response is to do whatever works to avoid the pain of believing others have judged, rejected or left you out. Feeling powerless to stop injustice adds to the hurt. One option is to wear a mask and hide who you really are—an **Avoidance Mask**. You know, avoid all the pain and protect your authentic self as well.

An Avoidance Mask is different from a **Functional Mask**. A Functional Mask is one everyone needs. That's the one you wear at work when you need to look like you're in charge even though your daughter just eloped with a guy in a rock band.

A Functional Mask is put on for those necessary times, like when famous people don't want to show how sad they are so the tabloids won't figure out they're devastated that they were fired as the star of a movie or television show. With a Functional Mask you feel your feelings and are only temporarily shielding them from others. Having a functional mask is helpful but often difficult for emotionally sensitive people. So sometimes they choose more permanent masks in an effort to protect themselves emotionally.

People Pleaser Mask. The People Pleaser Mask means doing whatever it takes to make other people happy so they'll accept you and be less likely to emotionally attack you. When you have thoughts or feelings or preferences that are different than those of your companions, you shove them down or push them away. When someone says your friend is a two-faced Neanderthal who doesn't know how to dress and belongs to the wrong church, you nod or don't say anything out of fear, terrifying fear, even though you don't agree. Then you feel angry at yourself because you were afraid. You can do this so often that you lose yourself and don't know what your own thoughts and ideas are anymore.

Mask of Anger: Anger can keep people away from you and protect you from feeling vulnerable. Anger feels more powerful than hurt, fear or sadness and can be used to avoid those painful feelings. Angry people cover up their sensitivity in a way that few people guess that they are sheep dressed in

porcupine quills. Emotionally sensitive people who use the mask of anger are often lonely and feel worthless on the inside.

Happy Mask: Another way of protecting yourself is to behave as if you're happy all the time. No one ever knows when your feelings are hurt and to the outside world nothing gets you down. Happiness covers your real feelings. You joke and smile even when the lady next to you volunteers you to host the next sit down dinner for the neighborhood right at the time you are expecting six guests from out of town. Almost any emotion/behavior can be used as a mask. Maybe you mask insecurity by disliking others or mask sadness by being the life of the party or mask fear by being a perfectionist. Putting on a mask is a way of disappearing—being invisible.

Masks provide some emotional protection in the short run. But the costs of wearing masks are high. When you wear a mask, you don't really feel the warmth of belonging because others don't really know you. One of the most basic needs people have is to feel connected to other people and that can't happen when you are hidden. Not only that, but you may wear masks so long you don't really know yourself or what you are feeling. Not knowing yourself creates a lot of anxiety because you can't make decisions and who you are is defined by others or how the day went. Avoiding feelings means you lose part of who you are and increases the likelihood that you'll be depressed or anxious. Plus it's exhausting to wear masks.

Dropping the Mask and Reclaiming Your Identity

Make the Decision: The first step is to decide you want to drop the Avoidance Mask. This means you are committed to taking action even though it may be painful in the beginning. If you aren't sure, make a list of pros and cons—pros and cons of dropping the mask and pros and cons of keeping the mask. Dropping the mask will not be easy and recognizing the difficulty of this task will help you succeed. Remember taking one step at a time may work best. For example, speaking up about which restaurant you'd prefer for dinner might be one initial step.

Focus on Awareness: If you've lost touch with your own preferences and feelings, spend some time asking yourself what you really think and feel. Keep asking and keep experimenting—it will come back to you. Consider keeping a journal, writing down what you liked and didn't like each day. Accept your feelings and trust that they will pass.

Be Visible: Notice if you have the posture of someone who is trying to hide. If you do, stand up straight and let yourself be visible. Begin to express your opinion and thoughts gently, with kindness.

Develop New Coping Skills: Before you drop the mask, it's important to have alternative, more effective ways to cope with emotional pain. More about that in future posts.

Face Whatever You've Been Avoiding: Whatever your thoughts and feelings, they are your thoughts and feelings. Everyone has their own internal experience and yours is likely different from that of your friends'.

Accepting your internal experience instead of avoiding it will allow you to check to see if your feelings have any base in external reality and to choose healthier, more effective ways of coping. Facing the external fears will help you overcome those as well. Being rejected or criticized by others is not pleasant, but you will find out you can survive it. Take small steps, have support, and use alternative coping skills.

Tips to Help Remove the Mask - The Reap Team

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT YOU WEAR MASKS

People in various kinds of recovery groups would tell you that the first step to healing is to admit that you have a problem. I am proud of you that you have done that. I think that everyone wears masks sometimes, by the way - and we need to establish this fact not so that we go a guilt trip about it, but so that we can begin to remove them. So here are some questions - When, and with whom, do you wear masks? Is it with friends? A certain group or groups of friends? At school? At home? With adults? We need to recognize those situations in our lives where we are wearing masks and doing something that doesn't reflect who we really are. Once we have the self-awareness of these particular situations, we can deal with them. I think a lot of people continue to wear masks without even realizing it because they haven't really thought about the areas of their life where they wear masks.

WHY WE WEAR MASKS

There can be various reasons why people wear masks. For most people it is the fear that other people - mainly friends - will reject the real person behind the mask. Others wear masks to hide hurt, low self-esteem, or anger. Spend some time exploring why you wear a mask. What are you afraid of? Does wearing a mask keep you from being hurt? Does it truly raise your self-esteem or keep you from being angry? If you are wearing a mask to keep from being hurt or to hide anger, find healthy ways to let go of that hurt or anger. Talk to someone you trust, write down your feelings in a journal, talk honestly to God in prayer, write a poem, go to Confession, or combine some of these things. Find out what works for you. And keep doing it!

THINK ABOUT WHAT YOU LIKE TO DO

Can you remember a time when you were younger and when you didn't wear masks? What were you like then? Many people struggle with the mask of being a follower and doing what other people want them to do, rather than being themselves. What do you really like to do? Are there certain hobbies/sports/activities that you really like? Rediscover these. If you are not sure, you might want to begin experimenting with healthy and fun activities that sound interesting to you. Join a club, play a sport, volunteer for a charitable organization - all of these are great ways to meet new people, develop new interests, and rediscover who you really are. Even if certain people may not consider these

activities "cool", all that really matters is that you like them. A teenager I know once wrote this about joining clubs, "That is one of the easiest ways I have found to make friends who are mask-free, because you don't have to mask anything since everyone has the same interest. Also, one of the ways that worked for me was attending a youth group. It doesn't even have to be his/her church youth group; just whatever youth group the person feels comfortable and accepted in. If the person has a friend they find mask-free that goes to a youth group, visit the mask-free friend's youth group. That's how I found my youth group."

REMOVE MASKS SLOWLY

If you hang out with people who wear masks, walking away suddenly would be a shock to your system as well as theirs. However, if you recognize that you have been wearing masks and realize that you can't completely be yourself around these so-called friends, hopefully you'll desire less and less to be with such people. Slowly start finding friends who let you be yourself, even if they aren't the coolest in school. If they accept you completely, they are the coolest - the coolest friends you can have. Don't completely run from your old friends, but start to be more honest with them. If they exclude you when you try to be yourself, walk away. Realize it may hurt to lose their "friendship" and that it may be awkward-but they aren't good friends if they exclude the real you. Try being the nice one in the crowd; continually try to be mask-free with them. If they blow you off or make fun of you for this (sticking up for people or for being nice), then that is truly their problem. When you start making better friends, spend more time with them. Find people who will stand up for you and people you want to stand up for. Realize that many other people, even your own friends, struggle with masks. Sometimes all it takes is for one person to be honest about it, and that allows the whole group to start to make changes.

HANG OUT WITH YOUR FAMILY MORE

Hopefully you can at least be yourself at home. If so, try to think of fun activities that you and your parents/siblings can do together. Maybe you could even ask your folks if you could have a brainstorming meeting to think of fun family activities. They know you best and can help you be your best.

SEEK SACRAMENTAL GRACE

The next time you have a chance, I encourage you to go to Confession and share with the priest your struggles with masks. There is nothing more freeing than knowing that God has forgiven us and given us a new start! In addition, whenever you go to Mass and receive Jesus in the Eucharist, ask Him in the

silence of your heart to make you into the person He wants you to be. This is, for real, a regular prayer of mine. God wants you to be mask-free, and He will help you if you ask Him.

CHOOSE YOUR FRIENDS WISELY

A wise friend of mine once said, "Show me your friends, and I'll show you your future." Start trying to be open to more people, maybe even those not accepted in the 'cool' crowd. Try to stop putting masks on other people; a part of trying to be mask-free is to stop judging other people. Give lots of people a chance to be a good friend of yours. I have talked to many people who have labeled others inaccurately and who have found out later that a person they thought to be very 'uncool' ended up being a great friend! Pray to God that he will lead you to people who will treasure you and love you as you are. Start looking for people who might be in a similar situation as you. Youth groups and youth Masses are great places to look because young people there are usually trying to be mask-free, too. If you need help finding a good youth group or youth Mass in your area, let me know.

SEEK WISDOM FROM OTHERS

I want to encourage you to keep seeking wisdom on this topic. I hope that there are people in your life who don't wear masks, or at least some who don't wear them very often. Hang out with these people! In the Bible it says, "If you see a man of prudence, seek him out; let your feet wear away his doorstep!" (Sirach 6:36) This means that wisdom is contagious, and hanging out with wise people will make you wise. Countless teens on REAP retreats have shared with me that a grandparent, parent, or older relative is one of the most mask-free people that they know. Life is short, so take advantage of any opportunity you might have to spend time with the people you most admire, even if it is just an occasional lunch meeting. If you can find a spiritually mature person in your community, like a priest or youth minister or otherwise adult, you might want to prayerfully consider asking that person to be a spiritual director for you. There is even a great article on this website that can help you to know what Jesus himself teaches us about masks and why a friendship with Him helps more than anything.

KEEP PRAYING

Finally, I really encourage you to really pray to God for help. Every morning or before walking into a crowd of people, ask God to give you the courage to simply be yourself. At the end of the day, before falling asleep, in prayer, ask God how you did that day. If you did wear masks in certain situations, ask for His forgiveness for not being true to the person He created you to be. But if you were honest and

true to yourself, especially in a tough situation, thank Him for giving you courage. God truly wants us to be free of masks and able to be ourselves at all times. He has helped many amazing people to find incredible friends who really love them - they aren't always the most popular and they range in age - but they all have great hearts. That's what is most important. God can help you recognize when you are wearing a mask and help you to not wear that mask. It's a struggle at times, but it is so worth it. Most people I know would gladly choose one hour with true friends over spending one year with fake ones. And never forget that God loves you. He loves you just as you are, at all times; and He sees through all those masks and knows your heart deeply. Let Him love you so that you can feel confident enough without any masks or phony friends.

*In a futile attempt to erase our past, we deprive the community of our healing gift. If we conceal our wounds out of fear and shame, our inner darkness can neither be illuminated nor become a light for others - Brennan Manning from *Abba's Child: The Cry of the Heart for Intimate Belonging**

Acknowledgements

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About the Author



Yvonne Kgame is a professional with twenty-nine years experience as a leader and senior executive in local and international print publishing and public broadcasting at the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC). Yvonne is also a teacher, chief examiner, mentor, inspirational speaker and researcher and is currently The Executive: Innovations and Editorial Manager of Local Content at the SABC.

During the period of South Africa's transition to democracy, Yvonne provided insightful leadership in educational broadcasting. The collective work of her and the team she led has been recognised through 150 international and local awards, and the development of strategic partnerships resulting in a number of co-productions. Among the most prestigious awards she has received are: the Peabody Award, the CBA Broadcasting Award for Outstanding Children's programmes, and four awards in Italy including the Grand Jury Prize. She was nominated for a South African Feather Award in her personal capacity. She received an award from Images and Voices of Hope, an international organisation focusing on International Dialogues for Thought Leaders in Media – Journalism.

Following her successful leadership in education broadcasting, Yvonne headed up the SABC's Content Hub, overseeing a broad spectrum of programming genres. At the apex of work in this role, she was overseeing the conceptualisation and broadcasting of more than 800 programmes. During this time her work was recognised through more than 80 local and international awards in just over two and a half years. Amongst these are: an Emmy Award of Recognition for Hosting the Semi-final round of the International Emmys; FEPACI (Pan African Federation of Filmmakers): a Recognition Award for services rendered. In August 2013 Yvonne received 3 awards: Inspiration; Vision and Modesty; Leadership as voted by SABC staff.

After her double stroke, Yvonne was appointed Executive Manager: Innovation and Editorial. In this role, she supports content houses across various media platforms which express, celebrate and affirm South African and African stories. Yvonne's passion for weaving and positioning the African tapestry in a global context represents her quest for making Africa's great stories widely known.

Yvonne's academic qualifications include a Master of Arts (University of Stellenbosch, South Africa), a Materials Development Certificate (Thames Valley University, United Kingdom), Bachelor of Arts Hons (Wits University, South Africa, 1992), a Bachelor of Arts in Education (Honours) (Wits University), Bachelor of Arts with distinction in Education (UNISA, South Africa), a Senior Secondary Teachers Diploma (Soweto College). She has recently obtained a Certificate in Occupationally Directed Education & Training Development Practices – NQF 4 (Maccauvlei Learning Academy).

Yvonne has served as a board member of various international and national boards, including: International Public Television; Basel Forum; Sithengi Board (International Film and TV Festival); Academy of Television, Arts and Sciences; Oscar Selection Committee; Chowac (Christ Haven of Workers Adult Literacy Centre) and Chief Examiner at the IEB. She is the Chair of the Board of the International Association of Human Values and is an Ambassador for United Way Worldwide.

The Books

Infinite Grace

This book, is about Yvonne Kgame's acceptance of possible death and her surrender to the Divine while simultaneously, taking full responsibility for her spiritual, emotional and physical healing. Yvonne's path towards healing the body, mind and soul is nothing short of miraculous. As her journey unfolds, a number of sacred encounters with various international and local medics, alternative healers, teachers, masters, gurus and pastors bring their love and light to carry her through the healing process. Master minded by none other than the Divine, the power and love in each of these sacred encounters leads Yvonne to an awesome experience of reawakening. She becomes conscious of God's infinite grace that has been bestowed on her.

Yvonne Kgame's story will inspire you to believe in living with purpose and have faith in your magnificence. *Infinite Grace* is a story that will take you to the edge of your own cliff and bring you back, transformed and inspired to live your authentic life. This book is an open invitation to delve deeper into yourself and find the light and grace within.

Nuggets of Hope

Time is the fourth dimension. It is real, and yet we regard it as mysterious. We prefer to leave it in the realm of the quantum physics. But it is not only physics. It is life. Time is a day, a week, a month, and a year. Yvonne Busisiwe Kgame extends her wisdom expressed in her deeply spiritual work on personal insight, the best-seller: *Infinite Grace*. She sees time in a year. She sees the year in twelve distinct months that develop the path of the spirit on its annual journey. She collects thought for every day, from her own inner exploration to the wisdom of the world's greatest thinkers. **Nuggets of Hope** is a piece of gold for every day of the year. It is the start of the day, designed to last the full day. It follows the development of the inner spirit on its daily voyage through to the start of the next day. It gives guidance that is congruent with the cycle of the year. It aligns to the numbers that count the minutes. In *Nuggets of Hope*, Yvonne takes her remarkable personal journey and sees it as a continuity of milestones. Where *Infinite Grace* portrayed her overview of the healing power of spirituality, *Nuggets of Hope* translates the wheel of life into a straight line journey of just a year, and each year. *Nuggets of Hope* is the outer collection of Yvonne's inner thoughts.

Nolitha ... Only a Mother

Only a mother experiences an undeniable connection with her child. From the moment that her body is connected to the child, the souls connect in the physical world. From the meeting of the eyes to the first touch between mother and child – the connection is infinite, eternal and can never be denied.

Nolitha ... Only a Mother is Yvonne Kgame's third work of inspiration and a pathway into joyous living.

Ways to connect with Yvonne Kgame

Website: www.infinitegrace.co.za

Facebook: Infinite Grace

Twitter: @infinite_grace

IF BY RUDYARD KIPLING

If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you;
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or, being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated don't give way to hating,
And yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise;

If you can dream--and not make dreams your master;
If you can think--and not make thoughts your aim,
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster
And treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken
Twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools,
Or watch the things you gave your life to, broken,
And stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools;

If you can make one heap of all your winnings
And risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings,
And never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew
To serve your turn long after they are gone,
And so hold on when there is nothing in you
Except the Will which says to them: "Hold on!"

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue,
Or walk with Kings--nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you,

If all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute
With sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it,

The Great Learning

The way of great learning consist in manifesting one's bright virtue, consists in loving the people, consists in stopping in perfect goodness.

When you know where to stop, you have stability.

When you have stability, you can be tranquil.

When you are tranquil, you can be at ease.

When you are at ease, you can deliberate.

When you can deliberate, you can attain your aims.

Things have their roots and branches, affairs have their end and beginning.

When you know what comes first and what comes last, then you are near the way.

The ancients who wanted to manifest their bright virtue to all in the world first governed well their own states.

Wanting to govern well their states, they first harmonised their own clans.

Wanting to harmonise their own clans, they first cultivated themselves.

Wanting to cultivate themselves, they first corrected their minds.

Wanting to correct their minds, they first made their wills sincere.

Wanting to make their wills sincere, they first extended their knowledge.

Extension of knowledge consist of the investigation of things.

When things are investigated, knowledge is extended.

When knowledge is extended, the world becomes sincere.

When the will is sincere, the mind is correct.

When the mind is correct, the self is cultivated.

When the self is cultivated, the clan is harmonised.

When the clan is harmonised, the country is well governed.

When the country is well governed, there will be peace throughout the land.

From the king down to the common people,

All must regard the cultivation of the self as the most essential thing.

It is impossible to have a situation wherein the essentials are in disorder,

And the externals are well managed.

You simply cannot take the essential things as superficial, and the superficial things as essential.

Translated by Charles Muller (first translated in July 1990)