

## EASTER REFLECTIONS

By Marina Phillips

I wouldn't call myself a religious person. Like many people, I am on the path of the seeker - realizing that no one set of doctrines is going to answer all of my questions. I have also been disillusioned on occasion, feeling that where I was, perhaps, may have been missing the mark completely.

As I've grown older though, I have committed myself to a spiritual kind of living. I think that I can be a 'spiritual' person without being a 'religious' person. In that vein, I have become interested again in the positive aspects of spirituality. Although I am not Jewish, Christian, Muslim, or Buddhist, I can see that the deeper, universal messages of these religions are all beautiful and quite similar in many ways.

April brings us two major holidays of the Jewish and Christian faiths - Passover and Easter. These two religious events offer important opportunities of reflection for all of us. In the way of celebration, I tend more towards the Easter Bunny, egg hunts, and candy, although my children are taught the traditional Christian Easter story.

Both Passover and Easter mark a spiritual rebirth that fits very nicely with the natural world's rebirth every Spring. (The snow this past week made me double-think that one, but it's true for the most part.) This is a hopeful message because it carries with it the belief that we may go through difficult and painful passages in our lives, but that these times are necessary to experience the greater joys that await us in the future.

If we think about it, it will be easy for most of us to connect to the Passover story of the Exodus of Hebrew slaves from ancient Egypt, and the beginning of their new life of freedom. Many of us have had at least some kind of Exodus in our lives, whether it be from addictions, abusive relationships, dysfunctional families, or other bad decisions we've made. Most people will know quite readily - on some level - what slavery feels like. Through observation and first-hand knowledge, I am quite convinced that the occurrence of freedom is almost always accompanied by a divine presence. Whatever a person calls that presence - God, nature, angels, or The Is - our personal beliefs tie us to the beliefs of others following their own spiritual paths, and provides continuing hope.

Easter, of course, literally celebrates the resurrection and rebirth of Christ. Again, my connection to this story lies not in its particulars, but in the larger meanings behind it. There have been a few times in my life where I believed that the situation was so hopeless that I would never feel safe and whole again. Yet I held on to a faith that there was some higher power in the universe that wanted me to be happy and to keep on living. Not only did I survive those times, I am both stronger and more fully alive today because of them. For believers, the wonder of Christianity would not be as great without the despair that Christ and his followers endured. The same is true of any one of us who have gone through incredible pain and have then experienced the wonder of life returning to us.

Spirituality at Easter can be a little difficult since it looks a lot like Christmas in the stores. I

stare, incredulous, at the shelves-upon-shelves filled with Easter baskets, toys and candy. Let's face it, the Easter basket is awesome (especially the chocolate), but perhaps we might temper it a little with a short family gathering and a discussion about the more spiritual aspects of the holiday. If you attend Church, your children will certainly have an Easter lesson there, but they will learn a lot more if something special is planned at home.

We live in a time of great religious and cultural division all around the world. Some people even believe that we are engaged in the early stages of a holy war. If that is the case, now is the time to hold our spiritual traditions and what we believe close to our hearts. If we try to take a longer view of the meanings behind the various organized religions, it should be easy to find common ground. Frankly, I don't see the difficulty.

To all my friends of all religious persuasions, I wish you freedom and rebirth this Passover season! Happy Easter, all!

P.S. - If anyone has been offended by my rambling this week, I sincerely apologize - that was certainly not my intention.