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Writer dreams her way to health, returns to Jewish roots

By TAMAR KAUFMAN Of the Bulletin Staff

When Joyce Lynn was confronted with a health crisis, she dreamed it away - and returned to her Jewish roots.

Lynn's cure was a spiritual journey that led her to her own inner life, to inspirational literature, outside Judaism, back to Jewish texts, and finally a return to mainstream Reform Judaism.

"I discovered all this was right there in the prayer book I got when I was confirmed," she says with wonder.

Now she's writing a book and producing a video documentary called Mitzi - for mitzvah, or good deed - to share her discoveries and the experiences of others. She also is leading dream groups out of her Mill Valley home.

Lynn's odyssey began with a phone call.

"I had just turned 40, had a routine physical, and the doctor said I had a pre-cancerous Pap smear," the writer recalls. "I was at work and her words echoed in my ears."

Something else echoed as well - a dream she'd had the previous night. In it, she was riding a bus, sitting in the elderly or disabled seat, heading to her former gynecologist's office. The bus driver insulted her for being dirty and diseased and, in the dream she really was dirty and had lesions around her mouth.

"That was the diagnosis dream, in retrospect," Lynn says.

Diagnosis is one thing, but what Lynn wanted was a cure.

"I eventually asked God to send help in the appropriate way." For Lynn, that was through dreams, "because they were like the short stories that I liked to analyze in high school"

She "kept having these dreams," she recalls. "I was in an operating room then it turned into a kitchen... I was going to operate on my consciousness."

At the same time, her doctor was outlining various courses of therapy, “like freezing the cells in my uterus so they wouldn't keep growing,” or a hysterectomy.

Lynn had yet another dream in which a miracle-working preacher cured a blind man. Also appearing in that dream was Werner Erhard, the founder of the est training, which she had undergone in waking life.

In the dream “I literally hold him down and persevere until he performs a miracle,” Lynn says.

When she woke up, “for the first time I felt clear and calm.”

What's more, when the gynecologist examined her later that day, “he said it all looked so normal he didn't know why I was having problems. Then about seven days later, he called and told me, ‘The tests show you're fine.’”

From her experience, Lynn says she learned that “our thoughts do affect our physical health.”

Nevertheless, she is quick to warn people not to depend solely on dreams or prayer.

“I think the key thing is to ask God for guidance and then see what's appropriate for you,” she says, pointing out that throughout her ordeal she was under the care of “a regular, traditional Western doctor.”

Lynn also notes that the “appropriate help” may in fact be to take advantage of what medicine has to offer.

Often, however, what is needed is a change in attitude - if only to allow one to see clearly the courses of action available and to act on them.

One way to change attitudes is by repeating statements Lynn calls affirmations, positive statements such as the one she used: “Divine love manifests itself in me.”

Says Lynn: “You don't have to believe them but eventually they change your mind set. The responsive readings in our prayer book - those are affirmations right there.”

The existence of all her discoveries in the prayer book was a revelation for Lynn, who grew up attending a Reform congregation in Columbus, Ohio.

“I had no idea this was there,” she says. “I recall my Jewish education as throwing paper wads, and our household was more culturally and politically Jewish than spiritually Jewish.”

But her reading led her to “Kabbalah and metaphysics,” she says,

noting that dreams are important in the Bible, and that the Talmud contains a “dream manual” (Brakhot 55a-57b).

Her discoveries “led me back to mainstream Reform Judaism,” she says, “the religion which I had more or less forsaken.”

...Lynn gives talks at synagogues and other places (most recently, last Wednesday at Temple Emanu-El in San Jose).

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