

Dale Rhodes speaks softly and eloquently when he talks about the process of spiritual mentoring. His knowledge and his passion are obvious as he speaks of his work in interfaith counseling and, in particular, the subject of gay men's spirituality.

"A real faith is challenged all the time," he says. "Faith is ever changing and growing. I frequently ask, 'Where is God in this? What does this mean?'"

A growing number of people today, gay and straight, are seeking a path to spiritual awareness. Our lives may be full, yet we feel an emptiness inside. Perhaps one simply has a desire to encounter the sacredness in everyday life but lacks the ties to any traditional religious upbringing—many questions and even fewer answers.

If you are a gay man, how does your lifestyle fit into your need to explore and to integrate a sense of the divine in your daily life?

The guidance that many individuals seek may be found in spiritual direction.

Dale Rhodes, M.S., M.A., is a spiritual director who provides guidance to gay men who desire a deepening of their experience of faith. He is a member of Spiritual Directors International, which is a group of professionals representing a number of the world's faith traditions, dedicated to working with those who seek a deeper meaning to their lives.

His consulting practice is located at the Interfaith Spiritual Center in Southeast Portland. He embraces both Eastern and Western traditions, and interfaith work is his passion.

"I believe that God, Buddha and Allah manifest in very unique ways," he says.

Rhodes has a master's degree in human services administration from Spertus Institute of Jewish Studies, and he received his M.A. in spiritual traditions and ethics from Marylhurst University, where his thesis study was gay men's spiritual development.

His work touches upon themes and issues that he believes are unique to the gay man's experience of spiritual development. As a gay man himself, he seeks to present the gay male perspective in the study of religion and spirituality and to enjoin other gay men to define, understand and embrace the uniqueness of their life experience and how it affects their own spiritual path.

"My sexuality affects how I see the divine. God has an interest in every aspect of my life," Rhodes says.

Christian tradition teaches that all of humanity was created as an expression of God's love; all life is holy and sacred. What homosexuals bring to the straight world, Rhodes suggests, is the wonderful expression of God's diversity.

PHOTO BY MARRY DAVIS



C'MON GET HOLY

Spiritual director Dale Rhodes wants to help gay men continue their personal explorations of the divine

by Bonita Bielski

Dale Rhodes wants you to show him your spiritual side

Dale Rhodes believes the external heterosexual messages and imagery that a gay boy or man receives are in direct opposition to the internal feelings he is experiencing. The absence of external affirmations of his personal truth, along with negative messages regarding homosexuality, contribute to feelings of self-hate and erode self-esteem.

Obviously, and most unfortunately, his is not the interpretation accepted by the conservative Christian right wing. This conflict has resulted for many gay men in an exile, whether self-imposed or not, from the mainstream spiritual community, Rhodes explains. Some individuals question their right to the divine or attempt to suppress their expression of it. But if they are able to accept and honor the sacredness of the individuality of their lifestyles, they may come to understand the contribution they can make to the mainstream community.

Rhodes facilitates a workshop for gay men called "What Makes a Gay Soul?" It is an eight-week educational support group for gay men who wish to reclaim their spiritual nature or who simply desire a more complete experience of life. The workshop provides the opportunity for a group of individuals to form, in effect, a spiritual community in a safe and supportive environment. Rhodes explores with them the specific issues of gay men's spirituality by sharing experiences, ideas, readings, meditations and laughter.

Rhodes describes four distinct developmental stages in a gay man's pursuit of a spiritual path. He also contends that this process, though it sometimes can be a struggle, will result in the gift of greater self-awareness and can reveal new sources of inner strength.

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The second stage is coming out. Rhodes believes the gay male faces great risks in the decision to come out both to himself and to others, even though there can be a rebirth that accompanies this part of the process.

The third phase is the personal exile, sometimes self-imposed, from loved ones and institutions upon which one previously relied for support.

The final issue for the gay man who chooses

to maintain his path of spiritual exploration is the realization and acceptance that his experience can be a growth opportunity.

Rhodes' workshops provide a meaningful way to connect with other individuals who are exploring their own spiritual paths. The reviews and comments from some participants emphasize the benefits of increased focus, confidence, knowledge, a sense of brotherhood, and the realization that being gay is a gift.

Rhodes is available for individual counseling, teaching classes, preaching and Sunday services. He facilitates a number of workshops and classes held at the Interfaith Spiritual Center.

■ DALE RHODES can be reached at his office, (503) 289-4103, or Djrho5@aol.com. For additional information, please visit his Internet site, hometown.aol.com/djrho5/webpage.html.

THE INTERFAITH SPIRITUAL CENTER offers many resources for spiritual growth and development. It is located at the Sacred Heart Rectory, 3910 S.E. 11th Ave. in Portland. For more information about the center, call (503) 233-2026.

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