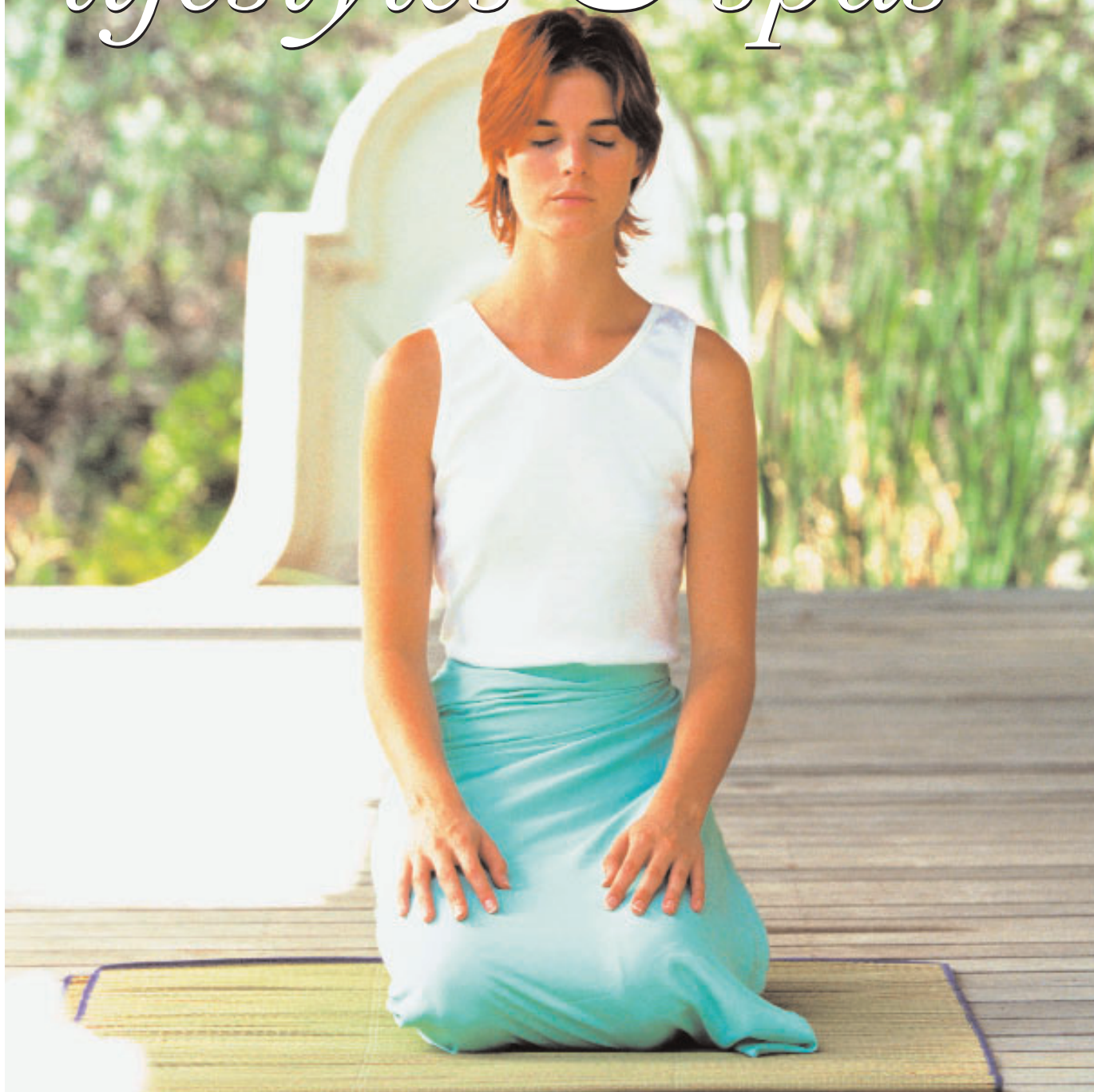


Healing

lifestyles & spas



An Inner Journey

By Alison Rose Levy

I go to spas to treat my body and visit retreats to reconnect with my spirit. I've found solace in silence and nature, watched the sunrise on five continents, and conversed with wise teachers. Retreats have ended, the adventures have concluded, my tans have faded, and the photos from it all have been placed in their frames. And from it all, I've discovered that the source of my daily joy can only be found in what I carry in my heart. What I often seek in distant places is really to restore my body and my mind, to find peace and perspective, and to return to my best self. I seek to be open-hearted, innocent, present, fresh, compassionate, and wise. How do I rediscover that shining self?

*f*ortunately, I had eight days between projects to find out. Though loved ones urged me to collapse on a beach, I intrepidly decided to undergo the Hoffman Quadrinity Process, which claims to help people attain permanent relief from the unconscious patterns, which can originate in childhood, and to which we often unknowingly re-enact to our detriment. Past conditioning can crimp experience, cloud perception, and diminish the ability to receive and give love. That's why many therapies and spiritual practices aim to cleanse the mirror of the soul.

The mirror of my soul was definitely overdue for a cleaning. A multi-tasking career woman, I'd find myself awake at three a.m. planning what I'd say to so-and-so or tapping my foot when I spoke to my own family members. I routinely paid bills when I was on the phone with my mother. But the outer busyness was just a covering for self-doubt. A beach respite would temporarily allay but not remove these feelings, nor would it stop these habits. Instead I yearned for transformation and searched for a retreat that would keep on giving.

The Hoffman Process is a residential program (offered at sites throughout the world), which takes twenty-five initiates through an intensive series of experiences, a kind of hero's journey. The changes effected by the Hoffman Process (which some 60,000 have undertaken), can impact one's relations with others, family, work, financial grounding, health, as well as other critical areas of life. Hoffman Quadrinity graduates include psychologist Joan Borysenko and business management leader and author, Ken Blanchard.

Bob Hoffman, a Bay area healer, created the Process in 1967 with the help of Dr. Claudio Naranjo and another prominent psychotherapist. Raz Ingrassi, the current Hoffman Institute director, worked closely with Hoffman from 1989 until Hoffman's death in 1997. A recent study done by University of California researchers showed significant decreases in markers for depression, anxiety, and obsessive-compulsive symptoms coupled with increases in emotional intelligence, spirituality, forgiveness and compassion, in participants immediately after undergoing the Hoffman Process and even greater improvement in one year. The retreat keeps on giving!

Impressed with these results, I traveled to California's Napa Valley where the White Sulphur Springs Spa is the Hoffman Process U.S. home. The spa features sulfur springs, a pool and whirlpool, redwood groves, and hills with tumbling waterfalls. Fabulous, healthy meals would support our daily program and all participants agreed to forgo phones, email, outside contacts (except in emergencies) as well as all mood altering activities like jogging, news consumption, and meditation. Creating this disconnect would permit buried feelings to freely arise without allowing our normal habits to stuff, deny, or deaden them.

Prior to the workshop, we filled out extensive questionnaires to help surface troubling patterns, tracing them back to either or both parents. For me, workaholism, self-doubt, and fear topped the list. Hoffman defined what he called the "Negative Love Syndrome," as the process that leads people to adopt their parents' worst traits in an effort



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to get love. Typically, people imitate the trait, rebel and do the opposite, or attract people who enact the pattern for them or with them.

I knew my own patterns all too well, but recognition and resolution are not the same. That's why this process builds upon recognition with a structured and progressive series of experiences. Performed individually or in groups, these experiences incorporate a range of cathartic approaches, visualization and spiritual reconnection exercises, and potent rituals to help break bad patterns. The Hoffman philosophy views people as multi-leveled beings who consist of emotional, intellectual, and spiritual selves, housed in the body. Throughout the process, these four aspects of the Quadrinity (emotion, intellect, spirit, and body) are addressed. And the entire process takes place within a safe group setting that is supported by four skilled and experienced teachers, who lead sessions and provide extensive individual support and daily check-in's to keep each participant on track. Every day of the experience is intense and action-packed, a sort of psycho-spiritual Outward Bound where you surmount your most outsized obstacles.

At first, when we addressed our patterns, I surfaced my adopting dad's workaholic as a way to be close to him. The upside: A successful career. The downside: A duty-bound professionalism that blocked my creative fun side. In my early twenties, I'd lived in the country,

danced every day, ran children's theatre groups, painted watercolor landscapes, and baked Viennese desserts. I wondered why I had abandoned these expressions.

Next, we were asked to write uncensored letters to the parents of our childhood that revealed our true feelings about the patterns we'd adopted from them. Studies show that uncensored letter writing reduces stress and strengthens immunity—although it's essential never to send and, in some cases, best never to reread the letter either—in fact, at the Process, we burned these letters after writing them. Although my father had passed away, I found that I still had a lot to say to him. During my upbringing, my father ruled. Disagreement was forbidden. I was taught that sharing anger, hurt, or any vulnerable feelings with men was a turn-off and verboten. I shyly avoided the eyes of male loved ones, friends, and colleagues since I feared they'd reject me unless I acted "professionally." No wonder I awoke at three a.m. to compose neat professional statements. No wonder the feedback I got from my Hoffman Process group members was that I looked hard-working, shy, and joyless. I'd been in an emotional straitjacket. Ouch!

After writing letters to our dads, the group gathered to express and release pent up emotions, along with the unwanted patterns that accompanied them. We were armed with bats and pillows, which are sometimes used in Gestalt psychology

For more information on the Hoffman Quadrinity Process contact (800) 506-5253 or visit www.hoffmaninstitute.org. *The Hoffman Process* by Tim Laurence (Bantam, 2005) and *Journey Into Love: 10 Steps to Wholeness* by Kani Comstock and Marisa Thame (Willow Press, 2000) are two books that contain in-depth information about this process and its underlying philosophy. An intense experience, the Hoffman Process is best undertaken by those with the time, ability, and support to integrate the changes into their lives after the experience is complete. Please consult your therapist or health care practitioner if you're uncertain of whether it's right for you.

since just talking about it will not always suffice. When I realized that this mixed group of men and women would be pounding bats on pillows, while hollering our respective hurts, angers, and pains, I was mortified and felt certain that the men in the group would never again join me at lunch once they realized the anger I harbored. But in a guided contemplation, I heard a voice of inner guidance that urged: "Don't hold back!"

Hello? How did that voice know that "Hold back!" was practically our family motto?

As other group members vented their feelings, I realized we were all in the same boat. Expressing all I could never tell my dad opened up a cathartic flow that helped restore my authentic voice and self-respect, and removed my negative self-judgments. I wasn't an angry bitch; I was a passionate woman making contact! Seeing another participant, a man I knew to be a kind business consultant and father, raise his bat overhead and pound with full force as he screamed a choice epithet at his parent helped egg me on. Afterwards, to my surprise, instead of shunning me, group members (including the guys) continued to join me at the scrumptious meals. We had a shared bond. Seeing peo-

ple at their so-called "worst"—venting their taboo emotions—bred closeness. At the same time, since the 1960s (when the Hoffman Process was developed), therapists have discovered that reliving trauma or recycling anger can in some cases be "re-traumatizing," especially when the trauma is severe and the person is fragile. That's why the this process may not be right for everyone—nor should you take up venting on your own.

At the next stage of the experience, we were guided to see our all-powerful parents as little children. Looking deeply into my dad's childhood, for the first time, I fully understood the rejection and isolation he'd suffered, which undoubtedly played some role in turning him into the armored, work-oriented man he became. I wept with empathy for him. Surprisingly, experiencing the anger and hurt freed me to feel the love. Now I no longer had to take his coldness personally or dutifully enact his agenda; I was also able to connect with him in a more authentic, heartfelt way.

Looking around me, I saw that mine was just one of many hearts touched by the Hoffman Process. As we were invited to share, an array of shining selves glowed. One man, terrified of his own anger, discov-

ered the great love within him. A shy young woman found courage to express her abundant artistic gifts. A loyal and caring man finally learned how to care for himself. A woman who felt like an outsider was welcomed for her authenticity and spirit. A man at the pinnacle of success found a new vocation as a healer. A woman, poised in transition, found hope for a new life. And I learned to look into the eyes of another without fear or the armor of professionalism.

Once we had worked on our patterns, we were given the opportunity to look into the eyes of other group members and place a gentle hand on their heart centers. As I looked into their eyes, the vulnerability and sweetness of each soul with whom I connected imprinted a blessing on my heart that I will never forget.

Back home, I've carried the openheartedness I rediscovered back into my life, and whenever I fall back into the old patterns of workaholic, self-doubt, and fear, I just remember those eyes, and repeat to myself a healing statement we often heard throughout the Hoffman Quadrinity Process, "I am love, I am loving, and I am loveable." I had found the retreat that keeps on giving—and with it I've found my shining, best self. 🌟