

SEPTEMBER 2025

PREMIERE ISSUE


# Spirit Thrive

Rise. Reclaim. Thrive

**From emotional  
isolation back to  
childhood  
CREATIVITY**

FROM PRISON TO  
PROSPERITY  
Weldon Long





“I have lived far too much of my life with the end goal of eternal life in heaven, and so I missed a lot of life on earth.”

— Laura E. Anderson

# MISSION & VISION



Spirit Thrive Magazine’s mission is to empower survivors of spiritual, religious, and sexual abuse by offering healing insights, real-life stories, expert guidance, and a nurturing community. We are a sanctuary for those rising from trauma, reclaiming their inner power, and learning to thrive spiritually, emotionally, and relationally.

Our vision is a world where every survivor of abuse feels seen, supported, and sovereign—living in alignment with their true self, connected to an authentic, supportive community, and thriving in wholeness and purpose.



# CONTENTS

6	From Prison to Prosperity
8	5 Tips for Leaving a High Control Group
10	Have You Heard About Unshacklethespiritpirit.org
12	Cover Story
14	Cover Story - Continued
16	Vanishing Village
18	Calming the Echo of Trauma Using Affirmations
20	How Horses Help Heal
22	Do You Struggle to Honor Your Inner Voice



# EDITOR'S NOTE

I am absolutely thrilled to introduce you to the premier issue of *Spirit Thrive* Magazine—a long-awaited passion project brought to life by the entire team at Spirit Thrive.

Each of us has journeyed through the painful terrain of spiritual abuse and other traumatic experiences—events that shook us to our core and launched us into deep existential crises. If you've found yourself in that space, please know you are not alone.

Our mission with *Spirit Thrive* Magazine and our website, [UnshackleTheSpirit.org](https://UnshackleTheSpirit.org), is to offer valuable resources and a supportive, soul-nourishing community for those recovering from abuse. We are here for those who are ready to move beyond mere survival—and finally step into a life where you can truly thrive.

We understand how difficult it is—the isolation, the emotional and spiritual devastation that often follows spiritual, religious, and even sexual abuse. It can feel like no one else gets it. But we do. We've been there. And we're here to offer you validation, comfort, and real, empowering tools to help you take the next step in your healing journey.

You may have endured soul-shocking events and significant losses, but please believe rebuilding a life you love is possible. Reclaiming your power, your sovereignty, and your authentic connection with Spirit is not only possible—it's your birthright.

We're here to help you rise, to heal, to connect, and finally to thrive. Welcome to a community of kindred spirits who see you, honor you, and walk this path alongside you. Together, we grow. Together, we thrive.

*Dr. Christina Melancon, ND*



Dr. Christina  
Melancon, ND  
Editor-in-Chief  
Trauma  
Informed  
Coach, CECP

Featured Article

# FROM PRISON TO PROSPERITY

By Weldon Long



**I**f you had told me 30 years ago that one day I'd be speaking on stages, running multimillion-dollar companies, and writing bestselling books, I would've laughed at you... That was my life: three prison sentences, homelessness, addiction, and a track record of self-destruction. But life has a way of giving us second chances... if we're willing to change what's going on between our ears.

## **The Wake-Up Call**

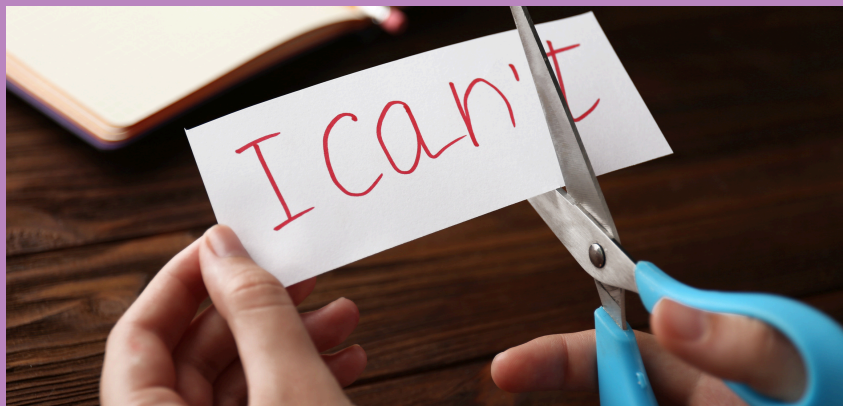
In 1996, I was sitting in a tiny prison cell with 7 years left on my sentence. I had a 3rd-grade son I barely knew and a mountain of regret behind me. Then I got the call that shattered me: my father had passed away unexpectedly. He died while I was still behind bars, still wasting my life. And I never got the chance to tell him I had changed—because I hadn't. Not yet. That night, I stood in front of the grimy little mirror bolted to the wall and asked myself one question: "What if it's not their fault? What if it's mine?" That was the moment everything changed. That was the moment I made a decision—to take control of my life and never look back.

## Success Isn't a Mystery—It's a Formula

Locked in that cell, I stumbled across a book by James Allen that said, “Circumstances do not make the man; they reveal him.” That quote hit me like a freight train. I realized I wasn't a victim—I was the architect of my disaster. So, I made a choice. I started reading. Studying.

Reflecting. I created what I call my Prosperity Plan—a written declaration of who I wanted to become: a great father, a successful businessman, a man of integrity. I repeated it every day. I didn't just read about change. I became the change. I aligned my thoughts with my actions and my actions with my vision.

*“You can't build a future while being stuck in the past”*



## The Power of the Present Moment

You can't build a future while being stuck in the past. Most people live in one of three places: the past (filled with regret), the future (filled with anxiety), or the present (where real change happens). The winners in life? We spend 95% of our time right here—doing the work. I call it the blaster shield. When you're locked in on the present, everything else—fear, resentment, excuses—fades into the background.

# TIPS FOR LEAVING 5 A HIGH CONTROL GROUP



Leaving a high-control group—whether religious, ideological, or cult-like—is a profound and often painful process! But it’s a courageous act of liberation. Because it affects every aspect of a person’s life: emotional, social, psychological, spiritual, and sometimes even physical, being prepared for the potential after math can help you navigate the process with greater ease.

## 1 Expect an Identity Crisis (and Know It’s Normal)

Why it matters: High-control groups often fuse your identity with the group’s beliefs. Leaving can feel like losing yourself.

What to do:

- Be patient with yourself as you rediscover who you are outside the group.
- Journal, explore new interests, and ask, “What do I believe? What feels true to me?”
- Understand that confusion, grief, and even guilt are part of the healing arc.

## 2 Educate Yourself About Coercive Control and Mind Control Tactics

**Why it matters:** Understanding the psychological manipulation you experienced helps dismantle internalized fear and shame.

**What to do:**

- Research topics like thought reform, spiritual abuse, undue influence, and cult dynamics.
- Read books like "Combatting Cult Mind Control" by Steven Hassan or "Take Back Your Life" by Janja Lalich.
- This knowledge re-empowers you and reframes your experience through truth and clarity.

## 3 Prioritize Nervous System Healing

**Why it matters:** High-control groups often keep members in a heightened state of fear, stress, and hypervigilance.

**What to do:**

- Practice nervous system regulation through breathwork, somatic therapy, nature immersion, or trauma-informed yoga.
- Learn to identify safe vs. unsafe cues and begin creating a sense of **felt safety** in your body.

## 4 Build a New, Safe Support System

**Why it matters:** You may lose friends, family, or an entire community—but healthy connection is essential to healing.

**What to do:**

- Seek support groups for ex-members of high-control groups.
- Work with trauma-informed therapists, coaches, or spiritual guides who understand religious trauma or coercive control.
- Choose relationships where your autonomy, questions, and emotions are welcomed.

## 5 Give Yourself Permission to Grieve, Evolve, and Question Everything

**Why it matters:** Suppressing doubt and dissent is a hallmark of high-control systems. Reclaiming your **freedom to feel and think** is part of your rebirth.

**What to do:**

- Grieve what was lost—time, relationships, innocence, trust—and do it without shame.
- Let yourself evolve. Beliefs may shift again, and that's okay.
- Give yourself permission to question, unlearn, and then choose what's sacred to you.

**For more support, recovery,  
and to build community  
stay tuned for  
[www.unshacklethespirit.org](http://www.unshacklethespirit.org)**

# A PLACE FOR COMMUNITY AND CONNECTION UNSHACKLETHESPIRIT.ORG?

We are thrilled to announce the upcoming launch of a powerful new nonprofit social media platform: UnshackleTheSpirit.org, set to go live in the summer of 2026.

This vibrant digital sanctuary will be the online home of the Spirit Tribe—a gathering space for seekers, healers, and truth-speakers who are on a journey of spiritual awakening and healing. If you've found nourishment and resonance within the pages of Spirit Thrive Magazine, you'll feel right at home at UnshackleTheSpirit.org.

Here, you'll discover a soul-centered community committed to conscious evolution. You'll have a space to share your Spirit Truth and explore the unique yet universal ways humanity hears, sees, and connects with the Divine. In the Halls of Understanding, you'll be invited to walk through teachings, stories, and reflections from across the globe—revealing how, despite our differing cultures and backgrounds, we are united by a shared spiritual pulse.

If you feel called to be part of this sacred launch, we invite you to join our pre-launch team as an inaugural member of the Spirit Tribe. Simply send us your name, email address, and a brief statement of interest. If your soul stirs with the desire to contribute, volunteer opportunities are also available. We welcome your gifts—whether in content creation, technical support, community-building, or simply your open heart.

This is more than just a website—it's a refuge for those who are shedding outdated belief systems and reclaiming their spiritual sovereignty. A place where healing is not imposed but chosen. Not a prescription from a broken system, but a deliberate journey inward—a reclamation of wholeness.

You hold the key. The door is open. And now, you know—you are not alone. Look—your Tribe is here.

What will you do with this moment? Hold yourself accountable. Step through. This is your healing.

With open arms and radical love,  
Namaste, My Homies  
Tommy Geske  
To join or volunteer, please contact us at:  
info@unshacklethespirit.org



# Why a TRIBE?

In a world that can often feel isolating, the concept of tribe speaks to a deep and ancient part of us—a fundamental human need for connection, belonging, and shared purpose.

A tribe is more than just a group. It's a sacred circle of support beyond family, where people come together not just to survive—but to thrive. In tribal connection, the village becomes stronger. We look out for each other. We heal together. We grow together. So, how can Spirit Thrive help you find your Spirit Tribe?

You're holding it—this very magazine is your key. A key to unlock the door to your inner self, the part of you that has been silenced, suppressed, or handed over to others to manage.

We've been taught to look outward for answers—but the truth is, the answers have always been within you. Trauma and betrayal, especially by those we trusted—be it religious leaders, family members, or authority figures—can cloud our inner knowing and leave us frozen in pain. These wounds may feel indelible, but they are not incurable.

Let Spirit Thrive be your sacred mirror and accountability companion.

This is more than a magazine—it's a call to action, a guiding hand, a signal fire on your path to healing. It opens a door to new thought, new life, and a course of spiritual recovery that leads far beyond the abuse you have endured.

Whether your pain came at the hands of so-called “holy men” who abused their power, or family members who failed to protect your innocence—know this:  
You are not alone.  
You have a voice.  
You will be heard.  
Your Spirit Tribe is rising.

And the question now becomes:  
How will you reach out to connect with those walking a similar path?

Let's walk it together.  
Let's unshackle the spirit.

# FROM EMOTIONAL ISOLATION BACK TO CHILDHOOD CREATIVITY

By Dr. Christina Melancon, ND, CECF

**W**hen we step out of something that broke us—something that once felt like truth but later revealed itself as deception—we don't always emerge with immediate clarity. The journey forward isn't linear. It's a winding, wandering path paved with questions, quiet awakenings, and unexpected rediscoveries. Along the way, we gather the scattered pieces of ourselves like fragments of a forgotten mosaic, slowly creating something whole and breathtakingly new. This is the journey Ola Cichy walked. A blossoming artist now living in the full expression of her soul, Ola has reclaimed the colors of her spirit through creativity she's known since childhood. Her story is one of courage, beauty, and healing—and a radiant reminder that we can piece ourselves back together into a masterpiece.

I looked at who I was before I joined: a girl who loved art, animals, music, nature. I started reconnecting with those parts. I also had to let go of perfectionism and allow myself to explore without judgment. That childlike curiosity was a path home to myself.

- Ola Cichy



Dr. Christina: Ola, thank you for being with us. To begin, can you paint a picture of your life as a Jehovah's Witness? What did those early years look like?

Ola: I was a deeply devoted Jehovah's Witness. At 14, I joined the organization of my own accord—my parents weren't involved—and I was baptized by 15. I became a regular pioneer at 16 and even left school to dedicate myself to ministry full-time. I remember being at an international convention with 23,000 people celebrating the fact that I chose pioneering over university. For ten years, I followed every rule wholeheartedly.

Dr. Christina: That's a tremendous commitment. Looking back, do you feel your choice to forgo higher education impacted your life?

Ola: Absolutely. It limited my job options. I became a hairdresser, which I loved, but later suffered a hand injury from the physical demands. I didn't have the qualifications to transition into another career easily. That was a harsh reality I had to face.

Dr. Christina: At what point did you begin to feel like something wasn't aligning?

Ola: Science was the tipping point. Discoveries like the Human Genome Project began contradicting our teachings. I dove into research and realized that many facts had been twisted in our literature. That, combined

## cover story

We're taught to dissociate from our bodies in high-control religions. Somatic work brought me back into mine. I screamed, cried, danced, shook, created art—I let my body speak.

with child abuse scandals within the organization and the rigid authority of elders, created a deep dissonance. It became impossible to ignore.

Dr. Christina: What was it like emotionally to walk away after twenty years of such devotion?

Ola: Terrifying. I had given everything. At first, I even wished I could stay, even if it wasn't true—just for the familiarity. But the anger came in strong—mostly at myself. How did I not see this sooner? I was also grieving. I lost my only living relative, my sister, who cut me off immediately. And since all my friends were within the religion, I lost my entire community.

Dr. Christina: That kind of isolation can be brutal. Did you experience that emotional loneliness even while trying to move forward?

Ola: Very much so. Even when surrounded by new friends, I felt emotionally isolated. People couldn't relate to my background. I'd mention that I'd never dated before or never went to university, and their reactions reminded me of how different my life had been. I often felt like I existed in a space between worlds—not a Jehovah's Witness anymore, but not quite integrated into mainstream society either.

Dr. Christina: What did the early stages of your healing look like?

Ola: Therapy was my first step—but it was incredibly disappointing. I saw three different therapists who had no understanding of religious trauma. I felt invisible. Then, I discovered Bonnie Ziemann's book on Religious Trauma Syndrome, and I cried through the entire thing. It was the first time I felt truly seen. That book gave me the vocabulary I needed to seek better support.

Dr. Christina: What eventually worked for you?

Ola: Somatic therapy. It changed everything. We're taught to dissociate from our bodies in high-control religions. Somatic work brought me back into mine. I screamed, cried, danced, shook, created art—I let my body speak. Art therapy in particular was powerful, because it was a language I had always loved but suppressed.



Dr. Christina: You mentioned psychedelics too. How did that fit into your healing?

Ola: Ayahuasca ceremonies played a big role in deeper release and spiritual reconnection. But I always caution people—these are not for everyone and should be approached with care and proper support. For me, it stirred things I couldn't access with words.

Dr. Christina: One of the most profound wounds from religious trauma is loss of identity. How did you begin rediscovering who you are?

Ola: I'm still discovering. I tried everything—sometimes the pendulum swung too far. But I think that trial-and-error is necessary. I looked at who I was before I joined: a girl who loved art, animals, music, nature. I started reconnecting with those parts. I also had to let go of perfectionism and allow myself to explore without judgment. That childlike curiosity was a path home to myself.

Dr. Christina: You and I spoke about how religious organizations often mirror narcissistic abuse—idealization, gaslighting, then abandonment. How did that realization shape your healing?

Ola: It clicked. Seeing the organization as a narcissistic entity helped me put my experience into a larger context. It made sense of the power dynamics, the emotional suppression

## HEALING TIP

Somatic therapy is a body-centered approach that helps individuals process and release trauma stored in the nervous system and body tissues. For those healing from religious trauma—which often involves chronic fear, guilt, dissociation, and suppression of bodily autonomy—somatic therapy offers a way to reconnect with the self beyond rigid belief systems.

Unlike traditional talk therapy, somatic therapy emphasizes felt experience over intellectual analysis. It helps survivors recognize how spiritual abuse may have conditioned their bodies to live in a constant state of hypervigilance, shame, or disconnection.

# Leaving The Tribe

(Dedicated to Beverly)

By Marjorie Cohen

What happened to you when you tried to leave your tribe?  
You were successful because you weren't vulnerable to their bribe.

At first the tribe showered you with things you held most dear.  
When that didn't work they threatened you with fear.

Being in the tribe literally made you a slave.  
You were able to cut loose because you were brave.

When you bucked the tribe, they brought out the big guns to hunt you  
down.  
So for a while you were willing to go deeply underground.

For the tribe, that made absolutely no sense.  
It proved your willingness to withstand any consequence.

At that point, they realized they no longer had any leverage over you.  
They had to face the fact that there was nothing more they could do.

Despite the threats of public disgrace,  
You withstood the ugly words they hurled in your face.

The venom they spewed was designed to put you in a tight spot.  
But you wiggled your way out from their constraints using all the  
strength you got.

The tribe was determined to cause you pain.  
When you no longer gave a damn, it drove them insane.

Once you stopped obeying their cultish commands,  
Your tribal membership was no longer in their hands.

As you were willing to fight the good fight,  
You were able to get your life right.

Instead of being under constant pressure,  
You enabled yourself to live a life of pleasure.

Because you spoke against your oppressors so loudly,  
You earned the right to openly live your life proudly!



# THE VANISHING VILLAGE

By Ellie Hart

**C**hildren, our most incredible legacy, shape the future and embody the promise of a stronger, more connected tomorrow. They deserve our collective care and wisdom to thrive.

Throughout human history, raising children has never been a solitary task. The adage “it takes a village” was a lived reality. Parents relied on extended family, neighbors, and elders for support, from navigating conception and postpartum recovery to guiding children through life’s milestones. Grandparents imparted wisdom, aunts provided respite, and neighbors became kin. This village ensured no parent felt alone, and every child grew up under a shared, watchful gaze. Yet, in today’s fast-paced, individualistic world, this village is fading, leaving parents isolated and children vulnerable.

The Collaborative Collective will explore ways to rebuild these vital connections. From practical parenting tips to stories of triumph and resilience, we will offer a source of support, acting as your village to empower and guide you. When we educate and connect with parents, we don’t just protect our most precious children; we revive the strength of the collective, ensuring every family thrives.



The absence of this communal structure carries profound consequences. Postpartum depression affects up to 20% of new mothers, often worsened by insufficient support, studies show. Parents balance work, childcare, and household demands without the safety net of extended family or community elders. Children lose exposure to diverse role models, and generational wisdom is supplanted by fleeting online advice. In a society where screens often outnumber face-to-face connections, the villages that once safeguarded families are vanishing.



Educating parents is the cornerstone of rebuilding the vanishing village. Knowledge empowers parents to protect their children in every aspect, from understanding developmental needs to recognizing signs of distress. However, this education must transcend individual homes. Community-driven learning, where parents exchange experiences and resources, is essential. Workshops on child safety, mental health, and nutrition can fill gaps left by absent elders. Community groups can recreate the village’s support network, offering advice on everything from breastfeeding to managing screen time. Creating these modern villages requires intention. In a disconnected world, parents must seek out like-minded families, whether through school events, community centers, or virtual platforms. Building connections through shared activities and mutual support can revive the collective spirit. By pooling our knowledge, parents can raise confident children with creative minds and compassionate hearts.

# CALMING THE ECHO OF TRAUMA USING AFFIRMATIONS

If you are recovering from abuse, you know the mind can often loop through cycles of shame, fear, and unworthiness. These echoes of trauma can shape your perception of life and you're your identity.

Positive affirmations act as gentle yet powerful tools that can serve as pattern interruptions, guiding the nervous system into safety and the heart into deepening into self-trust. In this way, the echo begins to get quieter.

By repeatedly affirming truth, worth, and your personal agency, the brain begins to rewire itself, creating new neural pathways rooted in love, safety, and wholeness.

Reframing the mind through affirmations is not about bypassing pain with sugarcoated words. It's but about planting seeds of renewal—anchoring a survivor in their sacred right to healing, dignity, and joy.



## TRY THIS!

1. My body is sacred, and I reclaim it as my own with love and compassion.
2. I release the shame that was never mine to carry.
3. I am safe to trust myself and my intuition.
4. My spirit is sovereign, whole, and divinely worthy.
5. I give myself permission to heal at my own pace.
6. I honor the truth of my story and the courage it takes to speak it.
7. I am no longer defined by what happened to me—I am defined by my resilience.
8. Each breath I take is a step toward freedom, peace, and empowerment.
9. I am deeply connected to a higher love that sees and values all of me.
10. My healing is sacred, and I am becoming more radiant every day.





# HOW HORSES HEAL

Dr. Christina Melancon, ND, CECP

*There's something sacred that happens in the stillness of a round pen. When you step into the arena with a horse, you're not just entering a space of learning — you're entering a living field of awareness..*

In Equine Assisted Learning, healing often begins the moment you let go of control and allow yourself to simply be. So many of us grip life so tightly, we stand in our own way of truly, deeply healing. With no set agenda and no expectation for performance, the horse becomes a mirror for your energy, your emotion, and your intention. In that space of vulnerability and presence, deep transformation can occur. The horse invites you to drop into your heart, to feel what's real, and to meet yourself — sometimes for the very first time. It's not about fixing or forcing. It's about attuning to the wisdom of the moment, and allowing trapped emotions to surface, shift, and soften in the presence of a grounded, nonjudgmental being. This is not just therapy — it's a remembrance. A return to the language of the body, the spirit, and the soul.

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# 5 WAYS HORSES LEAD YOU TO HEALING

## CALMING THE NERVOUS SYSTEM

Horses respond to calm. As clients learn to regulate their own breathing and presence, horses mirror that shift. The body begins to remember peace.

## REBUILDING TRUST AND SAFETY

Trauma disrupts safety and connection. Horses gently teach us how to trust again — not by demanding it, but by offering it moment by moment.

## EMPOWERMENT THROUGH ACTION

Simple tasks — leading a horse, gaining its trust — can be profound acts of reclaiming agency, especially for those who've felt powerless.

## HEALING WITHOUT WORDS

Talking isn't always safe. Equine work allows healing through movement, rhythm, and the nervous system — bypassing verbal trauma triggers.

## AUTHENTIC CONNECTION

Horses demand authenticity. They don't respond to masks. That honest relationship becomes a model for new, healthy connections.



*The Spirit in the Stable  
Whether you're healing  
from spiritual abuse or  
rediscovering your worth  
after trauma, equine-  
assisted therapy offers a  
gentle invitation:  
Come as you are. You  
don't have to speak. Just  
be.*

*Healing isn't always loud.  
Sometimes, it's a breath.  
A brush. A shared  
stillness between soul and  
spirit — and a horse who  
shows you the way.*

# DO YOU STRUGGLE TO HONOR YOUR INNER VOICE?



If you've walked away from a church, a cult, or any spiritual system that silenced you — I want you to know this: you're not alone. And you're not broken.

Many of us were taught that obedience meant denying ourselves — our thoughts, our emotions, even our intuition. We were conditioned to hand over our inner compass in exchange for belonging. But the cost? Losing the ability to hear ourselves.

That inner voice — the one that aches to be heard — is still inside you. It may be quiet. It may feel distant. But it's not gone.

The truth is, spiritual abuse wounds us in invisible places. It makes us second-guess our gut, doubt our memories, and question our worth. That's why honoring your inner voice again feels so hard — because for so long, someone else was speaking over it.

But here's what I've learned: healing begins when we slow down. When we stop trying to be perfect and just be present. Sit with yourself, even if it feels uncomfortable. Cry if you need to. Breathe. You don't have to perform here. You just have to be honest.

Your inner voice might speak in whispers at first — a gut feeling, a moment of peace, a quiet “no more.” That is sacred. That is you.

I know how exhausting it can feel to untangle truth from fear. Some days you'll feel strong, other days you'll want to hide. That's okay. Healing isn't a straight line. Give yourself grace. You've survived so much.

The voice inside you — that small, steady knowing — is not something to fear. It's something to come home to. You don't have to earn it. It's always been yours.



You deserve to trust yourself again. You deserve a life that feels safe, and true, and yours. And I promise — you're not crazy for wanting that. You're brave for reaching toward it. So if no one's told you lately, let me: you're doing beautifully. Keep going. Your voice is sacred. And it's time you heard it again.

## 4 WAYS TO HONOR YOUR INNER VOICE

### 1. Slow Down and Listen Intentionally

In a fast-paced world, your inner voice often gets drowned out. Slowing down your pace—through breathwork, meditation, or simply unplugging—creates the stillness needed to hear the soft wisdom within.

Clarity comes in the quiet.

### 2. Journal Without Censoring

Free writing allows your subconscious voice to rise to the surface. Don't worry about grammar or structure—just let your thoughts spill out. Over time, patterns, truths, and intuitive nudges will reveal themselves.

Your truth is often hiding in the words you're scared to write.

### 3. Notice the Body's Signals

Your body reacts before your mind catches up. A tightening in your gut, a lift in your chest, or a wave of fatigue can all be messages. Honor these cues as sacred communication from your inner knowing.

Your body is the messenger—your intuition is the message.

### 4. Stop Outsourcing Your Truth

Advice can be helpful, but constant seeking from others can drown your own voice. Before asking someone else, ask yourself: What do I really think? What feels true to me?

You already carry the compass—you just forgot how to trust it.



Connect with Dale at  
[www.theconnection.studio](http://www.theconnection.studio)

*Dale Jinsley*





We are a healing-centered publication highlighting survivor stories, expert insights, spiritual tools, and trauma-informed resources.

Who is this publication for?

Individuals healing from spiritual/religious abuse, seekers on a spiritual path, and advocates of trauma-informed healing.

Look for this each issue:

Survivor features

Healing tips and featured modalities

Conscious spirituality

Advocacy & education



[www.unshacklethespirit.org](http://www.unshacklethespirit.org)  
Launching in the summer of 2006

