

# AUTISM

## Raising Acceptance and Consciousness



*By Christian and Kalli Sørensen*

Life officially changed for us shortly after our son Trevor Dane's second birthday. His godparents showed up unexpectedly at our front door. They both had experience working with children and felt it was their responsibility as godparents to push through their discomfort to talk to us about what they noticed in Trevor's development.

Out of love for him and us, they had the courage to face an honest but difficult conversation. They believed Trevor was not developing as other neurotypical children his age and encouraged us to seek professional guidance and evaluations. This began our spiritual journey along the path of Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD) in 2002.

Shortly after this, we recalled a conversation we had over lunch with Louise Hay. We shared our concerns and how we often wondered what we could have done differently or what we might have done wrong.

She was quick to say we had a soul agreement with Trevor before any of us arrived in this world. Louise was clear in stating for us not to give another thought to having done anything wrong. We did the best we could with what we knew. Rather, she said, we are profound teachers for one another when we are fulfilling our perfect soul's journey together.

She went on to share how important it would be to remain fully present for the life lessons that were about to unfold. We shared with Louise this didn't look like what we envisioned parenting would be. She laughed and said, "Every parent says that, whether their child is on the spectrum or not." Louise knew we pray and meditate constantly, and she pointed out that what was unfolding was actually answered prayers and our new spiritual practice.

We prayed for wholeness and self-expression for our child from before the day he was born. Somehow this conversation created a turning point that seemed to unify us in deepening our prayers for our beautiful son.

### *New Opportunities. New Approaches*

As difficult as it was to face or admit, we knew something was not quite right with our baby boy when he stopped developing in a typical way. Having Trevor evaluated for the first time when he was 2 confirmed what we already knew in our hearts: He was developing differently than his peers.

We witnessed his coordination skills regressing, not crawling until 14 months, little speech development and losing his ability to track. Trevor became more uncomfortable being touched, and he didn't like to interact with other children.

Sometimes it would be as if his spirit would disappear from his little body and leave what seemed to be just a shell behind. It was beyond frightening to wait for his spirit to return.

With every new meeting, whether with the school, county resource center, social workers, doctors, therapist, nutritionists, holistic practitioners or advisors, we were offered more opportunities to explore, new approaches to consider, all with promising possibilities. Dragging Trevor to yet another evaluation or assessment seemed endless to us and unfair to him.

The impact of autism on families can be challenging, not only within the marriage but for siblings as well. The high rate of divorce rate among parents with children with autism can leave a child with one parent attempting to accomplish what takes a team to do and a bank to finance. This further challenges the journey for a sensitive and often empathic ASD child.

For us, finding balance, practicing self-care and having a strong spiritual practice fortunately kept our marriage and family strong.

### *Advocating a Path Forward*

We have never shied away from sharing our personal experience with anyone interested enough to inquire. Now that our son is older than 21, we feel it is time to speak up more publicly in support of autism acceptance.

The autism rate in 2000, the year our son was born, was one in 150. Today, among 8-year-old children in the United States, it has increased to 1 in 54, with boys outnumbering girls 4.2 to 1. This rate is the highest estimate to date by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Clearly, we need better strategies to improve early detection of autism, along with new research to identify environmental triggers and risk factors. Autism is the fastest growing developmental disability in the world, more common than childhood cancer, diabetes and AIDS combined.

The Autism Society celebrates Autism Acceptance Month each April to foster acceptance, and to inform and encourage communities to celebrate differences and become more inclusive. These same qualities of acceptance, inclusivity and diversity we often hear are what brings members to Science of Mind centers.

### *Shine a Light Brightly*

Over the years, well-intentioned friends and family compassionately offered to be with Trevor but often would not follow through due to their discomfort with not knowing how to be with someone on the spectrum. Many in our own spiritual community care deeply but feel helpless as to how to best support our family.

"This is one of my biggest heartaches and ongoing challenges," Kalli says, "that I never really figured out when he was younger how to successfully integrate our son fully into our spiritual community or ask for their support. Now that he is older and our community of 30 years is even more of our spiritual family, I regret that Trevor didn't come to church every week with me his whole life."

We consider ourselves blessed in that our son is an expression of joy with no tendency toward any kind of violence. Not all ASD families are this fortunate. Spirit has kept him healthy and happy. By the grace of God and prayers of spiritual practitioners, his life has been protected enough to allow him to keep his light and continue to shine brightly just by his presence.

Our son lives his life in hyper vigilance, finding peace by being alone in his familiar, sensory controlled space. Yet he aches to be out among friends and feel like he belongs, as we all do. When Trevor is out in the world, he frequently approaches complete strangers with the full expression of fearless joy and says, "Hi, how are you? Want to hang out?"

In a spiritual world this is a beautiful way to be. In the human world, it can be unsettling, especially when he has nothing to add after the response he solicits. Witnessing the social rejection is agonizing for us. For him it's perplexing. Add all the current social distancing rules and face masks we are living with and ASD individuals are further challenged or lost trying to navigate it all since they often rely on reading faces.

### The Wonder of Dance

Trevor came into our lives when we were both a bit older, so we know we won't be in his physical world in the second half of his life. Our biggest concern, and that of most ASD families, is who will care for our loved one when we are gone.

Since Trevor has no siblings or close relatives, state agencies encourage us to set him up in a group home soon so he can learn to live more independently. The time will come when we will know we need to do so. We have a soul contract with him, having agreed to support him the best we can with our love and joy for as long as we can. His consciousness found us to assist him, and we know he will continue to attract that which is perfect for his soul's evolution when we are gone. This is truly a trust walk with God for each of us.

For us, parenting has been our spiritual practice with Trevor as our guru, teacher and guide in the lesson of trusting life beyond what we know. He has shown us how to be less self-conscious and more present. We have become far less judgmental of other people's journeys and choices.

Living with Trevor's unique expression has taught us a great deal about patience, letting go and trusting the process. We know there is a greater wisdom in play for our son's life other than our own. We continue to surrender to that knowing while doing our best as parents. This provides us fulfillment rather than frustration, joy instead of sorrow and a realization of how blessed our family is to have found each other. We are grateful for the gifts in it all. ❀



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I love Ernest Holmes' saying that when we let the Divine Spirit flow through us, God dances every dance, sings every song, plays every play and writes every book.

It reminds me of the ancient Sufi mystics, such as the 13th century Rumi and 14th century Hafiz, who discovered and then perfected the mystical, meditative and holy dance called dervish, which literally means "doorway" or the doorway into the divine world. This highly disciplined dance involves rapid turning and spinning with ecstatic music, where the bodily pull spins together the human and the Divine into a state of oneness. Some view dervish dances for entertainment, but they are much more.

The Sufi masters teach us that achieving oneness isn't just a mental exercise, but it best involves the physical and emotional as well. After all, the poet Rumi said that the heart, the center of emotion, acts as a translator between mystical experience and intelligence. When the Spirit of God is felt, Rumi said, something opens our wings, makes any boredom and hurt disappear and fills the cup in front of us, the cup that tastes of sacredness.

A century later, Hafiz explained that God, the Beloved, opens Its arms and moves your heart to eternally dance. Furthermore, God loves playing tag with you by kissing you and effectively saying, "You're it – I mean, you're *really* It!" Clearly, the Sufi mystics knew as much or more about oneness with the One than many of us do, and we can learn from them.

Consider a poem on the subject written by Hafiz entitled "God Only Knows Four Words," wherein God often speaks through the Sufi's heart, "Come, dance with Me," enticing him to literally spin into oneness. Holmes said God sings, dances and plays through us, and Hafiz said God wants us and asks us to do so.

Letting God play through us is the true mystical way, for oneness is experiential and certainly not a spectator sport. Let us play. But it's best not to try the dervish spinning at home. ❀



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