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Notes from the Director

Now it should be incandescently clear that no one who has any concern for the integrity and life of America today can ignore the present war... [W]e as a nation must undergo a radical revolution of values.

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

These words were spoken by Dr. King at the Riverside Church in New York City, April 4, 1967, exactly one year before his assassination. The speech, commonly known as "Beyond Vietnam," was drafted in large measure by King's close friend and colleague, Dr. Vincent Harding, and formed the centerpiece of a recent day-long symposium with Dr. Harding, co-sponsored by OneLife Institute.

Since the US invasion of Iraq, five years ago this month, the speech has received much attention for its profound relevance to the pressing concerns of today's global environment. In this issue of our newsletter, OneLife board member Terry Williams and I each offer reflections on the symposium and its significance in the collective struggle for personal and social transformation. As we approach the 40th anniversary of Dr. King's death, let us renew our commitment to creating in this nation, and in our world, "a more perfect union" – in the fullest, deepest, and most authentic sense.

THURMAN MINI-COURSE

On Tuesday evenings May 6, 13 and 20, we will present the first in a series of occasional mini-courses each focused on a specific theme within Thurman's body

of work. We begin with Mysticism and Social Action. The sessions are designed as an opportunity for continuing education for people who have taken my introductory course, but the class will be open to others who have made some significant study of Dr. Howard Thurman. Please contact us if you are interested.

SPIRIT, SOUND & SILENCE

Our next retreat will be held on Saturday, April 26. We hope you will join us for this day-long spiritual oasis, with healing soundscape provided by Sis. Destiny Muhammad, our "Harpist from the Hood." See p.5 for details.

VOLUNTEERS & RESOURCES

Our annual volunteer appreciation brunch and visioning will be held on Memorial Day, May 26. All past, present, and *future* volunteers are welcome! This is a great time to (re)connect and learn more about OneLife Institute and how you can get involved. Please visit our new "Volunteers Welcome" web page outlining some of the many volunteer opportunities available. Short and long term, local and long-distance, artistic and administrative – chances are we can put your talents to good use!

The new web page also includes a wish list for those who may have goods and resources to share.

Finally, we are in search of new venues suitable for hosting our retreats and Transformative Visions creative arts event beginning in 2009. All suggestions, leads, and contacts are appreciated! 



"A nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death."

~ Martin Luther King, Jr.

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Beyond Iraq

by Liza J. Rankow, PhD

Five years ago I watched it on television. Maybe you did too. March 19, 2003: the pre-dawn stillness of Baghdad, before the call to morning prayers. The chatter of city birds was the only sound. Then, as the countdown clock in the corner of the screen clicked past the ultimatum hour of 4:00 AM Iraqi time, to 5:00 AM, to 5:30, the shelling began. Air raid sirens sounded a different kind of call to prayer... a prelude to the horrific "Shock and Awe" campaign that would follow.

The previous month had seen the largest international mobilization of people united against a war ever in history. Coordinated via the internet, between eleven and 30 million people in more than 60 countries, on every continent, stood together for peace. The New York Times called it a new world superpower.

Five years ago, four years ago, three years ago, our protests were against the immoral and unconscionable acts of our government. There was a groundswell of grief and outrage... Today, although the percentage of US citizens opposing the war has grown to a majority, our reasons are no longer to decry the devastation perpetrated "in our name," but disapproval of resources going to Iraq rather than staying at home. We don't like the cuts to education and social services, the high price of gas, the looming recession. And we don't like the loss of American life. We think we've done enough to "help" the Iraqis and now it's time to "take care of our own." Even MoveOn has framed its fifth anniversary Iraq campaign as a "New Priorities Agenda: End the occupation to heal our US economy."

Military expenditures account for nearly half of the annual federal budget.

Forty-one years ago, Dr. King delivered his "Beyond Vietnam" speech. In it he cautioned that "a nation that continues year after year to spend more money on military defense than on programs of social uplift is approaching spiritual death." He believed that the war was "but a symptom of a far deeper malady

within the American spirit" requiring a "significant and profound change in American life and policy... a radical revolution of values."

He called for this nation to develop a new level of maturity. Hear again his words, substituting "Iraq" for "Vietnam":

[Maturity] demands that we admit that we have been wrong from the beginning of our adventure in [Iraq], that we have been detrimental to the life of the [Iraqi] people. The situation is one in which we must be ready to turn sharply from our present ways. In order to atone for our sins and errors in [Iraq], we should take the initiative in bringing a halt to this tragic war.

King believed maturity demands that we listen deeply to the "enemy," striving to understand their point of view and assessment of us and our actions. And that from this we might "see the basic weaknesses of our own condition, and... learn and grow and profit from the wisdom of the brothers who are called the opposition." This, he told us, is the true meaning and value of compassion and nonviolence.

For the most part, the world's image of the US is not (as we may like to imagine) one of freedom and democracy, but rather one of violence and militarism and consumerism. Each day the war goes on the hatred and resentment increases, and the possible incentive to retaliatory attacks against our nation grows. The initiative to war was ours, King says, the initiative to end it must be ours.

In the gendered phrasing of his time, Dr. King spoke about what he called the "vocation of sonship and brotherhood." This is not casual language: *vocation*. It refers to our spiritual calling, and specifically – in King's framing – our calling as children of God and brothers and sisters to one another, and in particular our kinship and responsibility to the suffering poor in the US, in Vietnam (or Iraq), and around the world.

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Beyond Convenience

By Terry L. Williams, D.Min.

It is always a blessing to sit at the feet of Elders. It is humbling and inspiring to bask in the insights of their wisdom and wit, so rich with compelling historic import and epic proportion, while simultaneously receiving practical tools with which to negotiate the day-to-day demands of life.

Dr. Vincent Harding is such an Elder. As a preeminent human rights advocate, honored author and esteemed historian, it is appropriate that he was invited to be the keynote figure at a full day symposium hosted on Saturday, March 8th by Inner Light Ministries, the omni-faith fellowship near Santa Cruz, CA, pastored by Rev. Deborah L. Johnson. The symposium was intentionally scheduled during the time frame known as A Season for Nonviolence, the period between January 30th and April 4th – the assassination dates of the Mahatma Gandhi in New Delhi and Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. in Memphis.

OneLife Institute was a proud co-sponsor of the event, which was designed to take participants to the next phase of activism around the socio-political issues of justice and equality raised by Dr. King. OneLife board members were present and active, including Dr. Liza Rankow's able facilitation of the panel discussion and Valerie Brown's inspiring direction of the Dominion a cappella ensemble.

The symposium was doubly keynoted, after a fashion, as the approximately 250 people assembled attentively listened to a recording of the unmistakable voice of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. delivering his famous speech, "Beyond Vietnam: A Time to Break Silence." Dr. Harding, a fellow civil rights activist, confidant and close friend of Dr. King, was the principal author of the speech. King presented the speech at Riverside Church in New York City on April 4, 1967. Among other themes, the speech referred to America's

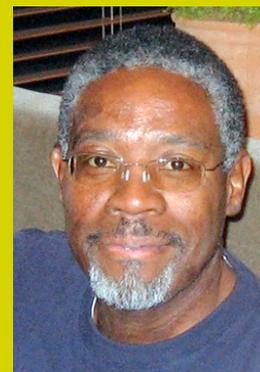
course in Vietnam as dishonorable and unjust. Dr. King insisted that militarism, materialism and racism were combined in a horrific triad that perpetuated poverty and oppression.

Up until that time his accepted position as a leader in the civil rights movement was a convenient categorization for supporters and detractors alike. But Dr. King knew that the racial indignities addressed by the movement represented a microcosm of the egregious forms of inhumanity perpetrated on a global level – particularly as it relates to war. His broadening of the activist's view from New York to the global village is a clarion call for us to step outside the box of convenient activity to the more demanding ground of sustainable change. Within one year of giving the speech King would pay the ultimate price for his unrelenting effort to save the soul of America. As activists we honor Dr. King's legacy by maintaining a world view, even as we act locally, in our efforts to secure human dignity for all.

An unassuming and gentle man, Dr. Harding is an unwavering advocate of the social democratic process, which he contends must always have at its core a vision of the common good. As a latter day Elder, it is easy to envision him in the best spirit of our nation's founding fore parents as he often says, "We are here to form a more perfect union."

During the symposium he challenged the bemoaning of complacency and apathy created by what appears to be overwhelming odds by reminding the participants that sitting back and falling into despair is not an option. In response to one person's observation about how we activists often tend to share internally – "preaching to the choir" – he noted that you can't have a choir that is nourished, inspired, and able to do its work *unless* it is preached to. That convening with like-minded compatriots in the larger "choir"

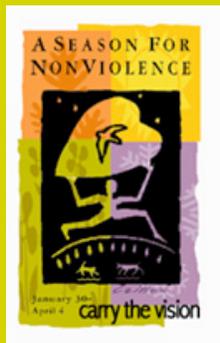
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Terry L. Williams

is a health sciences administrator with the University of California Office of the President in Oakland, CA. He has served as an ordained Elder and Pastor in the African Methodist Episcopal tradition. As a Utah State Senator (1980-1986), Terry sponsored social justice legislation including the creation of the Martin Luther King, Jr. state holiday, nuclear disarmament resolutions, and economic divestiture to end apartheid. He is a founding board member of OneLife Institute.

There is never a convenient time to confront indignities of the spirit. There is only the necessary time, which is each time an offense against the spirit of truth and mercy is perpetrated.



Season for Nonviolence is observed annually from January 30th to April 4th, the memorial anniversaries of Mohandas K. Gandhi & Martin Luther King Jr. To learn more visit: www.agnt.org/snv03.htm

Beyond Convenience, continued

of movement workers, helps keep us focused on our fundamental purpose. Even during the book signing session for his newest publication, a revised edition of *Martin Luther King: The Inconvenient Hero*, Dr. Harding patiently and generously dispensed words of wisdom and encouragement.

These reflections on the day-long symposium are punctuated by the wonderful sense of community and commitment that was evident among participants. Some were energetic and eager souls fresh into the scene of activism. Some were weary souls who have traversed the often difficult byways while wrestling equality from powerful opposition. We were reminded that whether new to the front lines or veterans in the struggle, the importance of courage cannot be overlooked in championing any cause. Dr. Harding quoted Eleanor Roosevelt's dictate to do at least one thing we are afraid of every day. He shared the testimony of Freedom Singer, Dr. Bernice Johnson Reagon, that it was only at the point of extremity, pushing beyond what she thought were her limits, that she found the full power of her voice.

It is appropriate to note that the word *courage*, from the French language, means enlargement of the heart and that the Tao says that courage is derived from love. These word origins are fitting as we release the preoccupation with harm, intimidation and obstacles when pursuing the work of securing human dignity.

Dr. Harding reminded us of the deep need in our society to receive attention, to be heard and understood. He made reference to Dr. King's visit to the smoldering streets of Watts after the riots of 1965. King wanted to be with the people and to understand the reasoning behind the violence that appeared to be so self-destructive. Their reply that "At least we made everybody pay attention to us!" was profound in its explanation of why people will often go to extreme lengths to have the yearnings of their aggrieved spirit addressed.

This need applies most poignantly on the personal level, which was evident in the rich dialogue that took place in break-out sessions during the event. These small groups provided opportunities for each individual to voice opinions, listen deeply, and move toward healing. The demands of peace-making activities can cause burnout and the sessions offered a glimpse of restoration, refreshment and renewal. It was good for activists to see that they were not alone. The struggle for justice and loving expressions of human dignity continues, and the charge to raise consciousness and actively press toward the goal of peace is still a high resolve.

There is never a convenient time to confront indignities of the spirit. There is only the necessary time, which is each time an offense against the spirit of truth and mercy is perpetrated. This supplies us with the answer to the question, "Where do we go from here?" We lay aside our convenience and enter the discomfiting discord to find common ground and wholeness on behalf of the beloved community. The cause of justice and equality has suffered injury and also accomplished success along the hallowed road between New Delhi and Memphis.

It is always a blessing to heed the wisdom of Elders. We are mindful of Dr. Harding's resounding words entitling the last chapter of his new book and which became a benediction adjourning the symposium: "*We have work to do.*"

Dr. Vincent Harding is professor emeritus at Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO and co-founder of the Veterans of Hope Project: www.veteransofhope.org

An audio file and the complete text of the Beyond Vietnam speech can be obtained at: <http://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkatimetobreaksilence.htm>

Beyond Iraq, continued

What is the mandate inherent in these identities – our intimate relation to God and to one another – and how do such identities inform the responsibilities of our identity as citizens of a violent, immature, and hegemonic nation? The complex calculus of identity is central to what our response must be...

The issues at stake are beyond the particulars of any individual circumstance. Beyond Vietnam. Beyond Iraq. Beyond Afghanistan. Beyond 9-11. Beyond Katrina. These are simply the evidence of our deep spiritual and ethical malady. We must go beyond them, beneath them, to dig out the roots of this national soul-sickness and work toward healing and authentic transformation.

I have been wrestling with what this must mean in my own life and calling. What must be my faithful response? How must I stretch beyond the borders of comfort, convenience, and complacency to respond with integrity... to be part of the redemption of this nation. My nation. Our nation. Our world. Perhaps you are also wrestling.

As a citizen, King loved America enough to demand more of it and work for its transformation. As a pastor he was committed to the teachings of Jesus requiring both unconditional love and unrelenting work for justice and for peace. He risked everything for this cause. Despite the relative privilege of his middle class upbringing and educational accomplishments, he chose to align solidly with the poor and the oppressed. King died not in some ivory tower of the academy, not in the pastorate of a prestigious church, but standing with garbage workers for basic human dignity and justice.

On March 25, 1968, ten days before King was killed, his friend and ally Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel introduced him to the annual convention of the Rabbinical Assembly, saying: "Martin Luther King, Jr. is a voice, a vision, and a way... [We must] harken to his voice, share his vision, follow his way. The whole future of America will depend on the impact and influence of Dr. King." Forty years later we have yet to heed that prophetic word, and forty years later it is perhaps more urgent than ever. 🌐

What is the mandate inherent in these identities - our intimate relation to God and to one another - and how do such identities inform the responsibilities of our identity as citizens of a violent, immature, and hegemonic nation?

Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ April. 26, 2008

Join us for a day of renewal, inspiration and enrichment...

- Replenish your soul in the gentle power of intentional silence
- Open to inner wisdom through a guided visioning process
- Walk the meditation labyrinth
- Savor the healing properties of sound and music

Saturday, April 26th 10:00 AM – 4:00 PM (9:30 AM arrival & registration)

With special guest: Destiny Muhammad, "Harpist from the Hood"

Retreat location: Holy Redeemer Center, 8945 Golf Links Rd., Oakland, CA 94605
This is a wheelchair accessible site.

Tuition: Sliding scale \$35- 100 (more if you can / less if you can't ~ no one turned away for lack of funds) *RSVP requested for planning purposes.*



Upcoming Retreats:
Save the Dates!

April 26, 2008
August 2, 2008
October 18, 2008



OneLife Institute is a nonprofit interfaith organization providing resources for the integration of spirituality and social action. Through classes, retreats, publications, events, counseling and consultation services we seek to support and empower individuals and groups in their commitment to personal and social transformation.

6114 LaSalle Ave. #759
Oakland, CA 94611

Phone: 510-595-5598

Visit us on the web at:
www.onelifeinstitute.org

“Without a revolution of the spirit, the forces which produced the iniquities of the old order would continue to be operative, posing a constant threat to the process of reform and regeneration.”

~ Aung San Suu Kyi

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*Spirituality & Social
Transformation*