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Notes from the Director

It is dangerous to pray, for an authentic spirituality is subversive of injustice.... Discovering stillness, hearing God's voice, is... the basis for real peace and justice.

~ Desmond M. Tutu

I shared these words from Archbishop Tutu in my recent class on Mysticism and Social Change, at the Iliff School of Theology in Denver, CO. We had a rich and full time exploring examples of socially engaged spirituality found in a diversity of religious and cultural settings, and wrestling with the ethical implications of a mystic worldview for contemporary issues.

While in Denver, I was honored to speak at a gathering of the Interfaith Alliance. The morning session was attended by over 50 members of the clergy, and faith-based activists representing Buddhist, Christian, Jewish, Muslim, New Thought and other traditions. The large turnout and lively group discussion evidenced a hunger for community and a desire for support in practicing the integration of spirituality and social action.

Our featured guest author for this issue places these concerns – community and the integration of spirituality and activism – at the center of his life and work. Dr. Roberto Vargas is an educator, organizational consultant, ceremony leader, and expert facilitator. In his article he describes himself as a “*porvida* activist,” committed to life, love, respect, and justice in the creation of a new social order. Through this lens he shares part of his own story and considers a *porvida*

approach to some of the inner and outer “enemies” that work against positive transformation and the common good.

THURMAN AT INNER LIGHT

Join us at Inner Light Ministries in the Santa Cruz area for a special weekend workshop, “Howard Thurman: Mysticism and Social Action,” Friday evening, Sept. 19 and Saturday, Sept. 20. The session is open to both newcomers and those who have some past study of Thurman. For more information please visit our website. To register, contact ILM at www.innerlightministries.com.

HEALING SOUND

Our next Spirit, Sound & Silence retreat will be held on Saturday, August 2nd and features the healing celestial sound of our special guest musician Sw. Lاراaji Nandananda. Please see the related article on p.5 to learn more.

VOLUNTEER APPRECIATION

Our recent volunteer brunch was a wonderful celebration. All told we gave out 40 certificates of appreciation to individuals who have offered sacred service to OneLife during the past year. We are grateful to these magnificent folks who make our work possible. And we always have room for you! To find out how you can get involved in OneLife, please visit the Volunteers Welcome page of our website, or leave a voice message at 510-595-5598. We look forward to hearing from you.

In Peace, *Liza*



Perhaps together we can listen new creative possibilities into being. Perhaps we can hear the pulsebeat of justice and healing and help to bring them forth.

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Deep Listening

by Liza J. Rankow, PhD

“Give me the listening ear. I seek this day the ear that will not shrink from [...] the word that challenges me to deeper consecration and higher resolve – the word that lays bare needs that make my own days uneasy, that seizes upon every good decent impulse of my nature, channeling it into paths of healing in the lives of others.”

~ Howard Thurman

Deep listening. It is an evocative term, conjuring a sense of profound and reverent attentiveness to what lies beneath the surface. A simultaneous reaching out and receptivity from the belly of being; alert for the scent of what is behind, below, above, between the words spoken. Listening as a spiritual discipline. Listening to gesture, breath and tone. Listening to rhythm and to mountain, to wind and to weeping. Listening to stars and grass and street protests and campaign speechifying. Listening to hunger and to grace. To passion and to grieving and to laughter. Listening for the “sound familiar” within a stranger’s voice.

When I was training in medicine we learned to attune our diagnostic ear to the inner chambers of the heart, to perceive the subtlest rumble or rub, to describe and even imitate the whisper-soft murmurs and movements of the body’s coded language. At first it was an exercise in frustration, but then somehow, with patience and persistence, a new ear was opened, one which was able to decipher the code. When my acupuncturist places her fingers on my wrist to read my pulses, it always seems more like a listening than a touch... as if there are special ears in each of her fingertips that hear the quality of *chi* the way I used to listen to the character of my patients’ heartbeat.

Now I strive to listen with the same acuity to the hearts of those who come to me for prayer and counsel; attend to the diagnostic murmurs and rumbles of an often broken-hearted world. And at the

same time, I seek to hone my listening to discern the thread of divine connectivity – “that of God” – within all of Life. I must learn to place my careful fingers so tenderly on the pulsebeat of Being that I may sense even the rustling portents of its dreaming.

This is listening with the mystic’s ear, the ear that knows the hearer and that which is heard are one and the same, are one with that infinite creative Is-ness which imagined them both into expression. To listen from this place requires the cultivation of Silence. As Dorothee Soelle describes it, “the silence of the mouth, the silence of the mind, the silence of the will.” It is through this practice, and through the intention of spiritual availability, that the “third ear” begins to open.

Here is the spaciousness to listen deeply. In *Radical Presence*, Mary Rose O’Reilly identifies “deep listening” as a form of contemplation, where we offer the fullness of our attentive presence in service to the revelation of another’s wholeness. We can, she says, “listen someone into existence.” I believe this is true not only in our personal encounters, but through our reverent listening to the world – to the earth itself, and to the voices of her many children. Perhaps together we can listen new creative possibilities into being. Perhaps we can hear the pulsebeat of justice and healing and help to bring them forth.

Giving to OneLife Institute

Your generosity allows us to offer our services to all seekers, regardless of ability to pay, and to provide resources that support personal healing and compassionate social change.

As a small organization, every gift – of any amount – has a significant impact. You will have the satisfaction of knowing that you are making a difference. And since we are a 501(c)(3) nonprofit, your contributions are tax deductible to the full extent permitted by law. [Thank you!](#)

Who Are the Enemies & What Do We Do?

By Roberto Vargas, DrPH

In 1969, as a 19 year-old, I traveled to Chile to support the people's struggle to elect a president committed to ending the exploitation by their super wealthy ruling class and foreign corporations. Concerned about the potential danger involved in their community work, the student activists I befriended soon sent me home and with a charge: "Return to your nation that exploits us and figure out how to create change there."

They were correct. Within a few years many of these young people were either imprisoned or killed. Their crime was organizing services for the poor and doing voter education. As for myself, I am blessed to be alive and still working on advancing positive change. Yet, even after a lifetime of organizing, teaching and community service, I find myself asking, "Who are the enemies and what do we do?"

Many colleagues committed to peace would be upset that I even ask the question, because if peace is our vision then we should halt any use of militaristic language that perpetuates that mind-set. "Enemy" connotes opposition, and we should ideally see all people as being on the same side to advance peace and well-being for all. With all my heart I want that to be true, but given the increased injustice and suffering around us, and the more challenging times we will enter, I believe to occasionally ask the question leads to important insights as to what needs attention.

In the years following my experience in Chile, my social change work became people empowerment, future forecasting, and cultural activism. I co-founded several counseling centers that have served thousands of families, and have clarified ideas that have informed legions to better serve our communities; yet, what have I done to counter those forces

creating the injustice and perils that exist for our society today?

To put this question in context, I share my vision. It's to live in a nation that is committed to peace and prosperity for all, and that provides international leadership to ensure a healthy and sustainable earth for generations to come. So, who or what is obstructing this vision? Who is causing so much injustice, violence and misery in the world? Who are the enemies?

When I was young I saw the enemy as principally the rich and greedy. If we subscribe to the idea that "if you are not part of the solution, then you are part of the problem," then yes, some of these folks who continue to amass tremendous wealth and ignore their responsibility to the common good are the enemy. But I now know the enemy force is a more complex monster. It's a cancerous system of tangled relationships involving an economic system designed to serve the few in power at the expense of the many, which is supported by an array of cultural patterns and social institutions. The monster involves such diverse elements as self-centeredness, negativity, the corporate owned media, the predominance of militarism, the system of capitalism, and more.

This monster sounds overwhelming, and it is! However, given our commitment to positive change, if we name and illuminate its multiple tentacles, we can better clarify solutions. We can begin by asking more questions. Given the enemy of selfishness, how do we nurture among young and old a deeper maturity of love and commitment to the common good? Given the enemy of negativity and defeatism, how do we counter the "we can't create change" attitude and instead inspire hope, commitment and courage? Given the enemy of our unsustainable "suicide economy," how do we battle for

(continued on p.4) → →



Dr. Roberto Vargas
is a cultural activist
and organizational
development consultant.
His new book, *Family
Activism: Empowering
Your Community
Beginning with Family
and Friends*, provides
inspiration and tools to
create the change we
desire in the world
beginning with our
relationships.

Who Are the Enemies, continued

economic justice while halting the demise of our environment, and build a life-respectful economic system? Given the enemy of militarism, how do we advance diplomacy, compassionate justice, and reconciliation?

While we learn and act to confront these enemies, we must also deepen our wisdom to be proactive in creating our desired future. We do this by simultaneously asking ourselves how do we advance the healthier society, or how do we advance what some are calling the “Great Turning” – the shifting of our society away from the path of destruction toward that of a sustainable future.

In asking these questions, I choose to live as a *porvida* activist. In my Chicano tradition “*por vida*” means to be “for life,” such as to make a life long commitment. I use the term “*porvida*” to describe the inherent character of our human spirit and to mean being radically “for life, love, respect and justice.” As a *porvida* activist, I am optimistic about our human potential because I believe that besides being born somewhat selfish we are also innately *porvida*, “for life and love.”

Our fundamental human purpose is to mature beyond our selfishness to become more loving and caring people. We are not born unto life to merely enjoy our time and die. We are here to discover and grow our ability to be more *porvida*. I believe this because I feel it in my spirit, and my spirit is a reflection of the spirit that resides in all others. As I have made the choice to know this, anyone else can do the same. We can choose to believe that our essential character is *porvida* and then live with more power to inspire change because we know that the same potential exists in every other person.

What does *porvida* activism look like in our daily lives? It is waking up and feeling gratitude for another day. It is consciously interacting with children or loved ones to help them to feel better about themselves and their potential. It is consciously gathering family or friends together to create opportunities to build trust and practice their expression of love. It is taking care of self with exercise, prayer, relationship time, or visits to nature.

Porvida activism is a mindful way of living in which we extend love to all our relations, including Mother Earth. It is engaging in random acts of kindness to inspire others to share love. It is reading more than the morning newspaper to determine how best to use our voice and vote to promote justice and halt corporate greed. It is choosing to spend our money wisely to counter wasteful materialism or environmental destruction. It is donating time and money to both aid the needy, and to build community and political movements committed to advancing worker's rights, multicultural respect and environmental protection. It is interacting with every other person in a manner that helps them discover their ability to more profoundly love themselves, one another, justice and life. It is holding on to our idealism and hope as we work to transform prejudice, ignorance, selfishness and greed.

So, who are the enemies and what do we do? The enemies are multiple and require more illumination. Yet, more important is that we continue finding ways to inspire our passion for life, love and justice. We connect with our spirit and other good people. We unite with concerned others to strengthen our power for advocacy and change. Among family, friends and colleagues we find ways to support each other, and to be the change we desire in the world. Finally, to confront our enemies we passionately hold on to the vision that our every act of caring and respect advances love and the energy to transform the world.

In my Chicano tradition “por vida” means to be “for life,” such as to make a life long commitment. I use the term “porvida”... to mean being radically “for life, love, respect and justice.”



We can choose to believe that our essential human character is porvida and then live with more power to creatively inspire change because we know that the same potential exists in every other person.

To learn more about Dr. Roberto Vargas and his work please visit:
www.robortovargas.com

The Healing Sound of Laraaji Nadananda



Yoga (union with the Divine Source through sacred sound). His original compositions and spontaneous musical expressions incorporate a specially designed electric open tuned zither, keyboards, kalimba, Tibetan gong, hand drums, and voice. The transformative vibration of sound (Nadam) can attune and harmonize the body-mind-spirit, inviting deeper states of meditation and supporting healing on every level.

Laraaji travels the world offering concerts and a variety of workshops, including his signature Laughter as Energy Medicine. On Wednesday, August 6th at 7:00 PM he will present one of these sessions at the Oakland Center for Spiritual Living. Please see www.oaklandcsl.org for details.

And save the date for our final retreat of 2008, which will be held on Saturday, October 18th. Share the day with us as we welcome back our beloved Harpist from the Hood, Sis. Destiny Muhammad.

OneLife is delighted to welcome Swami Laraaji Nadananda as our special guest musician for the August 2nd 'Spirit, Sound & Silence' retreat. Based in New York City, Laraaji is an internationally respected master musician, recording artist, and teacher-practitioner of Nada

The transformative vibration of sound (Nadam) can attune and harmonize the body-mind-spirit, inviting deeper states of meditation and supporting healing on every level.

Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ Aug. 2, 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
- Be inspired by the words of mystics from diverse faith traditions

Saturday, Aug. 2nd 10:00 AM - 4:00 PM (9:30 AM arrival & registration)

With special guest musician: Laraaji Nadananda

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!

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.

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

“We must fully understand that we do not live separate lives; that we are all intertwined and interconnected; and that your suffering is my suffering, your joy is my joy, the upliftment of one person is the upliftment of all persons, and the degradation of one human being is the degradation of us all.”

~ Audrey Kitagawa

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*Spirituality & Social
Transformation*