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Notes from the Director

Go far enough into the cave and you will find them, those who know the exact place where contemplation leads to action and reflection gives birth to revolution and prayer gives way to a shattering power that cannot be grasped but can only be received...

~ Jan Richardson

Contemplation and action. Reflection and revolution. These are the in-breath and out-breath of transformation, providing balance, wholeness, and depth. Our featured guest author for this issue of the newsletter strives to embody this balance in her life as a pastor, author, educator, and activist. Rev. Deborah L. Johnson is the founder of Inner Light Ministries in Soquel, CA, and a long-time friend of OneLife Institute. In her article she draws on her expertise as a consultant in coalition building and conflict resolution, inviting us to consider the context of spiritual oneness as a foundation for creating just and inclusive societies.

MORE THURMAN CLASSES

We recently completed a wonderful ten-week community course on the life and teachings of Howard Thurman. In January I will be back at Memphis Theological Seminary offering a two-week intensive on Dr. Thurman. And in the Spring, look for a series of mini-courses exploring, in greater depth, specific themes from Thurman's body of work. These are particularly intended for people who have taken the introductory course over the years and have been hungering for more; however, classes will be open to all who wish to attend.

BEYOND VIETNAM

Save the date! On March 8th OneLife will co-sponsor a special Season for Non-violence event with Dr. Vincent Harding. Hosted by Inner Light Ministries, the day-long symposium will examine the speech given by Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. at Riverside Church in NYC, exactly one year before his assassination. Together we will consider the relevance of King's message for today's global environment, as we work toward the compassionate transformation of our nation and our selves. Watch for details coming soon.

CELEBRATING OUR TENTH RETREAT

On Saturday, January 26th we will host our *tenth* Spirit, Sound & Silence retreat. Our heartfelt gratitude goes out to everyone who has made these days so successful: Sis. Destiny and Br. Cristwell Muhammad, providing healing soundscape; our awesome "Angel Teams" of dedicated volunteers; and every beautiful participant. We expect a strong turnout for this special day of inspiration, renewal, and sacred community. Please join us and begin your new year centered in spiritual intention. See p.5 for more.

TRANSFORMATIVE VISIONS

After much prayerful deliberation, we have decided to hold off on our next Transformative Visions art, jazz and spoken word event until 2009. Please contact us at any time if you are interested in participating as an artist, performer, or volunteer, and look for the call for submissions coming out in Autumn 2008. (continued on p.5) → →



*Perhaps it is in these
broken-open hearts and
minds that dreams take
life and sought-after
answers lie. Perhaps
here hopes are readied.
Perhaps this is the
promise.*

The Season of Promise

*Let the bells be silenced
Let the gifts be stillborn
Let the cheer be muted
Let the music be soundless
Violence stalks the land:
Soaring above the city of the dying
Rising above the whimper of the starving
Floating above the flying machines
of death
Listen to the long stillness:
New life is stirring
New dreams are on the wing
New hopes are being readied:
[Hu]mankind is fashioning a new heart
[Hu]mankind is forging a new mind
God is at work.*

This is the Season of Promise.

~ Howard Thurman

As the nights grow steadily longer, the feverish busy-ness of the holiday season contradicts the soul's calling to turn within. In nature, winter is the season of hibernation; mammals hunker down, plants settle back into their roots, lakes and rivers with surfaces frozen move only at their depths. It is in the stillness, in the inward-parts (as Thurman would call them), that our new visions are kindled.

There is dissonance, too, between the call for holiday cheer and the vast prevalence of suffering. How do we create a large enough space within ourselves to hold the tension, the both-and-ness of celebration and sorrow? Not to deny one in favor of the other. Not to anesthetize ourselves with consumerism, nor succumb to the numbness of despair, but rather allow our hearts to be broken open. (And please notice I am not just saying *broken*, but *broken open*.) Buddhist eco-philosopher Joanna Macy teaches that, "The heart that breaks open can contain the whole universe."

Having our hearts broken-open is a powerful alchemy, evoking a greater experience and expression of aliveness, and an expanded availability to communion with the Divine. What would it mean

to allow our hearts to not only be broken, but broken-open? Broken-open to new possibilities, broken-open to reveal more love, more courage, more patience, more faith, more vision, more understanding... more God.

Perhaps it is these broken-open hearts that are the new ones being fashioned in Thurman's poem. Perhaps broken-open minds are being forged to go with them. And perhaps it is in these broken-open hearts and minds that dreams take life and sought-after answers lie. Perhaps here hopes are readied. Perhaps this is the promise.

In the stillness we attend in readiness. Holy days of this season anticipate the coming of new light: in Christianity, Advent prepares the way for the birth of the Christ; Buddhists observe Bodhi day as commemoration of the enlightenment of Prince Gautama; Wiccans mark the return of the sun at Winter Solstice; in Judaism, Hanukkah celebrates the miracle of the oil that burned for eight days during the rededication of the Temple; and in Islam it is the time of the sacred pilgrimage of the Hajj.

Whatever your observance, may this season be for you one of deepening spirit, open heart, and new promise.

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Sharing Our Blessings

OneLife is committed to tithing a portion of our earned income to other nonprofits whose work we are thankful for. In 2007 donations were made to: Oakland Food Connection, Indigenous Grandmothers Film Project, Intertribal Friendship House, Art in Action / Turf Unity, stone circles, and LoveLife Foundation.

Please visit our website for links to learn more about these organizations and the outstanding work they do.

Toward Wholeness

By Rev. Deborah L. Johnson, MBA

Healing ourselves, our nation, and our world requires that we be both inclusive and diverse. This can only occur when we are able to understand, appreciate, and embrace the balance between our unity and uniqueness. The melting pot paradigm has such a strong hold on the collective psyche of this country that it is even the framework in which we describe our diversity. A popular articulation is “America is comprised of many different kinds of people.” A more inclusive reflection would be “Many different kinds of people comprise America.” The difference between the two statements is more than mere semantics and should not be reduced to political correctness. It fundamentally shapes the prism through which we see the world.

We use this same type of centrist reasoning in global relations – “The world is comprised of many different types of people” as opposed to “Many different types of people comprise the world.” In the former there is single world. If we position ourselves as the leader of this single world, then all of those different kinds of people will be like us, or at least subject to us.

Until we can appreciate that many different types of people comprise the world, we are not likely to see the world through any eyes other than our own. It will be difficult for us to see that others do not experience us as we experience ourselves. Until we can acknowledge varying perceptions, it will be nearly impossible for us to comprehend the ways in which the impact of our actions on others may not reflect our intent.

I find that oftentimes the difficulty in trying to do diversity work – whether in movement building, in the corporate world, or in our communities and congregations – is that we’re asking the wrong questions. It’s common for discussions about diversity to start with

the assumption that there is one thing that is, in fact, the ‘norm,’ and that in diversifying we are moving out from that norm. So the question then becomes: who gets to say what that norm is?

We need to consider the underlying assumptions that frame our approach. What is our default position? The tendency is that my group, whatever it is, is placed in the center and the dilemma becomes “How do I venture out from my central place and bring some of those ‘other’ people into where I am?”

I’d like to put forth a different model that I think helps a lot with moving towards diversity. It shifts us from a position of centrism to a paradigm of Oneness. (Contrary to popular belief, Oneness is not uniformity, but complete integration – wholeness.) In this model, we stop thinking that ‘my world’ or ‘my reality’ is the center. The issue is no longer how to get the people who don’t share my reality to come in to my world, instead we step back and really become aware of not only who is present, but who is not. The approach is no longer “Although we are complete here, a little variety may make us look better to other people.”

The new model is more holistic than that. It assumes that diversity is not merely the goal but the *norm*. Furthermore, it recognizes that without diversity, the group is not complete. The missing elements are a vital part of the whole. The starting assumption moves from a centrist position to one of greater introspection: “Hmm, I notice that there’s something that appears to be missing,” and “What aspect of me is missing, and how am I not whole without it?”

This is very different from “How do I get them to join me?” If I reflect on what makes an integral wholeness, not only does a different discussion regarding diversity ensue, I am actually more likely to move in that direction. Diversification

(continued on p.4) → →



Rev. Deborah Johnson is the founder of Inner Light Ministries, an Omnifaith spiritual community, and The Motivational Institute specializing in cultural diversity. Author of *The Sacred Yes and Your Deepest Intent*, she is an instructor at Pacific School of Religion and UCLA’s Anderson Executive Leadership Diversity Institute. A life-long civil rights activist, she carries a message of Oneness, beyond creed and doctrine, and is dedicated to healing, empowerment, and reconciliation.

Toward Wholeness, continued

becomes more natural and less contrived. The thought of it brings a greater sense of hope and aliveness, rather than fear and trepidation.

To illustrate, if my group is sitting around the table and we ask the question, "Who's missing and how are we not whole without that aspect?" we may notice a few things. If we notice that we are all middle-aged people it may become obvious to us that youth is missing. This absence may be apparent to the naked eye. However, it's the introspection that elevates a simple observation into an intention to diversify. If we acknowledge that the *contributions* of youth are missing, we become more motivated to do something about it. Youth bring idealism, a passion, a fire. They have a different relationship to technology which shapes their understanding of the world. They have a better understanding of how messages need to be presented to capture the imagination of their peers. The list goes on, and the prospect of a youthful voice among us becomes exciting.

Furthermore, this is the type of analysis that people are looking for when they are being 'recruited.' They want to know if you have an understanding of the fact that they really have something to offer that is unique and important. They want to know that their presence is being sought as value added, not window dressing. They want to know that you don't perceive it as 'us and them,' but that you consider them to be an integral part of the whole.

This holistic model requires that we expand our sense of identity, of what we consider 'self' to be. For instance, if you look at the fundamental tenets of capitalism, there is a premise that everybody always operates in their own self-interest. Well, this would not be such a big problem if in fact we redefine 'self' to be inclusive of us all. So if I understand 'self' to mean this inherent inclusion, then maybe operating in self-interest is not such a bad thing; if anytime I take action I am considering its impact on the big 'Self' of all of us.

A primary assertion of my ministry is that "There is only One of us here." There is only one unitary wholeness at the center of all things, invisible and undifferentiated. As it moves into the realm of manifestation, it takes on shape and form, never manifesting itself in the exact same way twice. Thus, the Only thing there is expresses itself in diversity. This is the spiritual paradox that we must grow to understand. In order to embrace the whole, we must appreciate its variety of expression. In order to appreciate the variety, we must appreciate its single source. For example, if we really love music, we must appreciate various genres. In order to appreciate various genres, we must have an appreciation of music itself. So it is with people, as well.

America is a great nation in grave danger of not fulfilling its greatness in misguided efforts to dominate and control the world. We have become addicted to power and are bullying other nations in our efforts to be the sole superpower on the globe. Our consumptive patterns are indifferent to their impact on the rest of the planet. The days of imperialism are over, yet America continues to head down that path. Increasingly there is a gap between our actions and what we proclaim as our values and intent. Healing this gap is necessary for the survival and well-being of the world, not merely our nation. We must assume responsibility for our actions and use our power and might to make the world a more loving, egalitarian, and just place for all.

This article includes portions of a plenary address given by Rev. Deborah L. Johnson at the May 2006 national conference of the Network of Spiritual Progressives. It also includes short excerpts from several of her other writings.

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Inner Light Ministries is an Omnifaith outreach ministry dedicated to spiritual transformation.

*To learn more visit: innerlightministries.com
For information on Rev. Deborah see: deborahjohnson.org*

OneLife Board Notes

WELCOME ELEANOR!

We are delighted to announce a milestone for OneLife Institute: the hire of our first paid staff person. On Dec. 1st we welcomed Eleanor Grier as a part-time organizational associate, supporting administration, outreach, and programming. Ellie brings a wealth of experience and a true dedication to spiritual service. She writes, "I know the value in creating a sense of the sacred in undertaking all tasks. I choose to honor the work, revere the creative process, and to trust that good judgment is itself a miracle. My calling is to give sacred service and to nurture, uplift and encourage." Please visit our website to learn more about her.

END OF THE YEAR GIVING

We have always been very low-key in our requests for donations, but now, as we grow, we need your financial support more than ever. We have stepped out in the faith that we will be able to sustain

Eleanor's salary and even increase her hours – thereby increasing our ability to be of benefit. And we continue to build relationships, extending our outreach to underserved communities in Oakland and surrounding areas. Still we remain committed to making our resources available to all, regardless of ability to pay. Won't you please remember us in your end of the year giving? Or even better, consider becoming a regular supporter of OneLife Institute. As a small organization, with an even smaller budget, 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.

Thank you so much! May the blessings that you share return to you magnified and multiplied.

In Peace ~
Liza, Terry, Valerie & Shirley

Tax-deductible contributions in any amount can be mailed to our LaSalle Ave address.

To donate securely on-line please visit the "Support OneLife" page of our website and click on the JustGive logo.

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

Saturday, Jan. 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!

January 26, 2008
April 26, 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

“Our spirituality begins from the day we are born, and continues in how we live, how we care for our brothers and sisters, how we deal with our extended family, and how we care for God’s creation. It is all balanced and cannot be divided.”

~ Anne Pattel-Gray

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*Spirituality & Social
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