



In this Issue:

From the Director p.1

Synergy of Spirituality
and Social Action p.2

Beloved Community.. p.3

Transformative Visions:
Art ~ Jazz ~ Word p.5

Spirit, Sound & Silence
Retreat: Sept. 23rd p.5

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Notes from the Director

*Keep fresh before me
the moments of my high resolve,
that in fair weather or in foul,
in good times or in tempests...
I may not forget that to which
my life is committed.*

These lines from Howard Thurman's meditation "The Moments of High Resolve" are probably familiar to a number of our readers. However for many this passage may be the *only* of Thurman's works that they have heard. As some of you are aware, Dr. Thurman figures prominently in the philosophy and activities of OneLife Institute. In this issue of the newsletter, I'll reflect on that philosophical foundation – the integration of spirituality (or what Thurman would call "religious experience") and social action, the inseparability of personal and social transformation.

Also in this newsletter, OneLife board member Shirley Strong offers her thoughts on the meaning of Beloved Community, which she defines as "an inclusive, interrelated society based on love, justice, compassion, responsibility, shared power, and a respect for the dignity of all people, places, and things that radically transforms individuals and restructures institutions."

LOS ANGELES CLASSES

As we go to press, I have just completed the class on Thurman that I taught for the ministerial leadership program at Agape International Spiritual Center. Still to come, for those in the Los Angeles area, is a July intensive at Loyola Marymount

University. "Howard Thurman: Mysticism and Social Change" will meet Tuesday through Friday evenings, July 18-21, as part of Ethics Week. Both graduate and continuing education credit is available, but the class is open to all. Please call 310.338.2799 for information.

QUARTERLY RETREATS

Our "Spirit, Sound & Silence" retreats provide an oasis of renewal and inspiration, bringing together people from diverse faith traditions. A recognition of the necessity for spiritual replenishment and cultivating our connection with the Divine is also part of Thurman's legacy central to the OneLife mission. This balance can be particularly important for those engaged in any type of activist work. Our next retreat will be held on Sept. 23rd, offering a resource for those preparing for Ramadan, and an alternative way to observe Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year. *All are welcome.*

ON THE WEB

We continue to develop the OneLife website with a growing collection of audio files and documents, along with photos and up-to-date information about classes, retreats, and other activities. You can sign up for our occasional e-mail updates if you are not already receiving them, or change your on-line subscription preferences at any time.

As always, we thank you for your support and look forward to seeing you in the days ahead. Until then, I bid you peace ~

Liza



Spiritual experience inspires and sustains activism. Activism provides a context for spiritual practice, transforming our selves as we transform our world.

The Synergy of Spirituality & Social Action

OneLife Institute is founded on a belief in the interdependence of all existence as one with an infinite Divine Essence expressing within and beyond creation. Whether conceived as a compassionate presence or an ineffable ultimate reality, it is the unitive force binding all lifekind in a sacred whole.

This is a principle that can be found across the boundaries of time and culture, in the mystic traditions of many faiths. In this worldview, nothing is outside the realm of the sacred. Human beings may act in ways that desecrate – that fail to respect the inherent dignity and worth of one another or of the earth – but that does not change the fundamental nature of existence. The necessity to work for social justice and transformation, then, is based not only on altruism or conscience, but on a compelling love and reverence for the Divine.

Spirituality and social activism are reciprocal and synergistic, continually informing one another. Spiritual experience inspires and sustains activism. Activism provides a context for spiritual practice, transforming our selves as we work to transform our world. And further, as each of us is individually transformed, so too is the collective of our world.

Howard Thurman's life and teachings demonstrate this seamless interweaving of personal and social transformation, the integration of the "inward" and "outward" journey.

In a 1978 lecture, "Mysticism and Social Change," Thurman noted: "The mystic's concern with the imperative of social action is not merely to improve the condition of society. It is not merely to feed the hungry, not merely to relieve human suffering and human misery. If this were all, in and of itself, it would be important surely. But this is not all. The basic consideration has to do with the removal of all that prevents God from coming to [fullness] in the life of the

individual. Whatever there is that blocks this, calls for action."

Thurman used the term "spiritual disciplines" to refer to those practices that help us to grow and mature spiritually, removing the blocks to our experience of unity with God and with Life. Some, for example prayer and meditation, we may engage by choice. Others, such as suffering, are the stuff of human incarnation that forces us to dig deeper, developing inner qualities that might otherwise go unexplored and unexpressed. In this context social activism can be recognized as a spiritual discipline clearing away individual and societal barriers to Divine fulfillment.

Spiritual practices of renewal and communion provide the replenishment essential to ongoing activism and the avoidance of "burn out." And spiritual commitment fosters integrity, humility, and compassion as we do the work of our calling; helping us, in the words of Dr. Thurman that opened our newsletter, to "keep fresh before us the moments of our high resolve."

OneLife Institute seeks to provide resources for the integration of spirituality and social transformation through our classes, retreats, publications, counseling and consultation services. 

OneLife Mailing List

Please help us stay in touch with you by keeping us updated with your current contact information. Most of our communication about upcoming events and classes is via e-mail. You can also receive our newsletter by e-mail if you prefer. Know that we will never share your information with any other organization.

Please take a moment to send us your preferred contact information now.

Thank you!

Building the Movement for Beloved Community

By Shirley Joyce Strong

In *Stride Toward Freedom* Martin Luther King, Jr. asked: “Where do we go from here?” The Montgomery bus boycott had finally ended after 381 days, and the question became how do we come together from a place of wholeness and reconciliation? How do we begin to foster and create a Beloved Community? The question is as relevant today as it was then, nearly a half-century ago. It may be even more relevant now, after 9/11 and a “preemptive” war against Iraq.

So what exactly is the Beloved Community? I understand King’s ideal as an inclusive and interrelated society based on love, justice, compassion, responsibility, shared power, and a respect for the dignity of all people, places, and things that radically transforms individuals and restructures institutions. The organizing principle and philosophy is that we are more than just autonomous individuals; we are also persons-in-community concerned about the welfare of others. Building Beloved Community requires us to address what King called the “triple evils” of racism, militarism, and materialism – raising fundamental questions about our economic system and challenging the current distribution of wealth and power.

In October 2004 Project Change, the national anti-racism initiative that I have been involved with since its founding in 1991, along with the Claremont Graduate University Institute for Democratic Renewal, brought together a group of twenty-two people to explore the connection between spirit and activism through the lens of Beloved Community. Using a model developed by the Women’s Theological Center in Boston, looking specifically at how the Beloved Community might be nurtured and manifested in internal, interpersonal, institutional, and cultural interactions, the group identified the following:

- Honoring hospitality and traditions of welcoming

- Encouraging dynamic, respectful intergenerational engagement
- Engaging in storytelling
- Acknowledging fear and encouraging awareness of personal and collective power
- Accepting change and vicissitudes
- Addressing concerns for physical and emotional safety
- Committing to work for the well-being of youth and elders
- Recognizing and adapting to complexity
- Developing structural responses to address Dr. King’s critique of racism, materialism, and militarism
- Promoting radical inclusiveness

Grace Lee Boggs, an elder stateswoman of the Black Power movement and a participant in the meeting, said: “Thinking back over the years, I can’t help wondering: might events have taken a different path if we had found a way to infuse our struggle for Black Power with King’s philosophy of nonviolence? Is it possible that our relationships today, not only inter- but intra- racially, would be more harmonious if we had discovered how to blend Malcolm’s militancy with King’s vision of Beloved Community?”

Is it too late, I wonder? Is such a revolutionary power available to us today? Boggs went on to say that it has become increasingly clear to her that King’s prophetic vision is now the indispensable starting point for 21st century revolutionaries.

When Project Change was started as a program of the Levi Strauss Foundation, we received some crucial advice. First, we were told that the organization could play an important role in addressing and reducing racism, but in order to do so we must be willing to commit for the long

(continued on p.4)



Shirley Strong is the Executive Director of Project Change and a senior fellow at the Claremont Graduate University Institute for Democratic Renewal. She is a founding member of the Beloved Communities Initiative, and a board member of OneLife Institute.

Beloved Community, continued

haul – there are no quick fixes. Second, the work must be community driven; it could not be a foundation driven initiative. Third, the foundation must be willing to invest more than just money; it must be willing to provide other kinds of resources including leadership, influence, technical assistance, and management support. These recommendations were adopted and became part of the Project Change model.

After almost fifteen years of work, we have learned there must also be an ability to articulate a vision that includes the kind of world we want and not just the capacity to describe what we don't want. We must be prepared to address all the issues; racism can be a primary focus, however we cannot ignore other "isms" or offer only lip service when opposing them. We must become strong allies to others in fighting oppression. We must be willing to engage both our heads and our hearts. Our personal growth and transformation are essential when trying to build and sustain a 21st century movement to reshape our values and reorder our priorities.

In so doing, we need to create a new prototype for 21st century movement builders. The following is the beginning of a prototype for movement builders inspired by Grace Lee Boggs that I hope others will add to in an effort to create the Beloved Communities we seek:

- Movement builders understand that suffering and oppression are not enough create a movement. A movement begins when the oppressed begin seeing themselves not just as victims but also as pioneers in creating a new, more humane society.
- Movement builders are able to recognize the humanity in others, including their opponents, and therefore are able to see within them the possibility of change.
- Movement builders are conscious of the need to go beyond slogans and to create programs that transform and empower participants.
- Movement builders believe in the concept of two-sided transformation, both of our institutions and ourselves.
- Movement builders are intergenerational – involving children, youth, and adults.
- Movement builders can accept contradictions that develop in the course of a struggle. Great movements create great hopes, but they can also lead to great disappointments.
- Movement builders choose boldness over timidity.
- Movement builders call forth a vision that is larger than the issue at hand – distinguishing between social reform and social transformation.
- Movement builders strike a balance between control and autonomy – recognizing the importance of allowing people to make mistakes.
- Movement builders recognize the possibility for historical moments in the in the convergence of time and events.

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Transformative Visions: Art Show & Jazz / Spoken Word

In March 2007 OneLife Institute will host **Transformative Visions**, a multi-media art show and jazz / spoken word concert lifting up a vision of peace, justice, and possibility for our world. Scheduled to coincide with the annual observance of A Season for Nonviolence and the anniversary of the U.S. invasion of Iraq, this event is intended to both challenge and inspire, offering a spiritually-rooted response to the crucial events of the present day.

The concert will be anchored by our own "Harpist from the Hood," Sister Destiny Muhammad, and the Band of Angels. (If you haven't heard them throw down some jazz, you're in for a special treat!) The Linen Life gallery has generously donated use of their beautiful Emeryville venue to host the event.

Visual and spoken word artists will be invited to submit works that address peace and justice issues through the theme of

Transformative Visions. Please contact us if you are interested in submitting work (in any medium) for consideration, or if you know people we should be in touch with.

We are seeking underwriters to help make this event possible and appreciate your resources, ideas, and assistance. Grants, financial gifts, and in-kind donations from individuals, businesses, foundations or other sources are welcomed. OneLife is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and contributions are tax deductible.

To ensure access to everyone, there will be no admission charge. Rather than selling tickets, we are "selling" sponsorships. Recognizing that everybody has a unique financial situation, each contributor (whether of \$1 or \$100,000) is valued and will be acknowledged as a sponsor. Funds remaining after expenses will support the ongoing work of OneLife Institute, helping us to make our services available to all seekers regardless of ability to pay.

**Transformative Visions:
Art Show & Jazz /
Spoken Word
Concert**

Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ Sept. 23, 2006

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, Sept. 23rd 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!**

September 23, 2006

January 27, 2007

April 28, 2007



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Visit us on the web at:

www.onelifeinstitute.org

OneLife Institute is a nonprofit interfaith organization providing services of spiritual ministry and education for the realization of a world of wholeness, justice, and compassion.

Our services include: counseling & prayer support; ceremonies for life passages; consulting & facilitation; creative arts ministry; classes, workshops & retreats that are designed to be informative, inspirational, and practically applicable.

*Compassion requires a plunge to the depths of life –
where oneness is reality and divisions merely
an illusion...*

*The force of love is the force of total revolution. It is
the unreleased force, unknown and unexplored
as a dynamic for change.*

~ Vimala Thakar

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*Spirituality & Social
Transformation*