

Awakening to The Holy

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SHALEM
INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

Only A Feather



By Margaret Benefiel,
Shalem's Executive Director

“A feather on the breath of God,” Hildegard of Bingen’s summary of her life, spoke to me deeply when I heard it. I longed to live as a feather on God’s breath.

Six months ago, when I felt a quiet nudge to apply for the executive director position at Shalem, I felt more like an immovable boulder. I was settled in Boston. I had lived in the same house for twenty years. My husband and I had made a home for ourselves in our neighborhood. We loved our faith community. I loved my work. My husband’s business had Boston connections. The reasons to stay far outnumbered the reasons to go.

Yet God’s nudge doesn’t obey the rule of reason. As I prayed and listened, the nudge grew stronger. I grudgingly paid attention, and the nudge grew more. The nudge grew strong enough to act as a lever to pry the boulder loose. I felt upheld as people prayed for me. I felt carried, as on eagles’ wings (if not yet light as a feather), over the barriers that had seemed insurmountable. I interviewed. The match seemed good. I was offered the position and I said yes. We found a place to live, just a three-minute walk from the Shalem office. We rented our house in Boston. We de-cluttered, with the help of friends, twenty years’ worth of accumulated possessions.

And I landed at Shalem. Some days I do indeed feel like a feather on the breath of God, as the prayerful atmosphere at Shalem helps me trust and float on the current of the Spirit’s wind. My joy is deep.

At the same time that I feel deep joy when I experience living as a feather on God’s breath, another part of me still protests:

“Only a feather?” she says. “What about your accomplishments?”

“Only a feather,” comes the response.

“What about your education?”

“Only a feather.”

“What about your training?”

“Only a feather.”

The part of me that protests also wants to control. She wants to rely on my credentials. She wants to believe that if I utilize my training I can figure everything out. She wants me to see spreadsheets as Shalem’s salvation. She wants me to turn to management manuals to motivate the minions.

To be sure, I must use my skills and training. I must draw on the knowledge and experience that I have. I must think about Shalem’s future, and together with the board and staff, make plans. I must read spreadsheets and mind the money.

Yet those skills are mine only to serve the greater good. They are not there to dazzle the board, executive committee, staff, donors, or program participants. They are there to free Shalem (and its stewards, including me) to listen as openly as possible to God’s spirit. For myself, this means that I must give up control, or rather give up the illusion of control, so that Shalem and I can float as feathers on God’s breath.

I am only a feather. Shalem is only a feather. But we are feathers that have the capacity to float on the breath of God, which is ultimately where our strength lies.

A Shalem Prayer

Eternal One,

Soften us now into sacred silence of your own being.

Deepen our desire to be alert to your Living Presence,

in every present moment.

Gentle us into letting go of any distractions or expectations

that might inhibit your own hope for intimacy

in this silent time.

Sensitize us to the pulse of your creativity in the sun and the stars,

to your whispers of wisdom in the birds and the trees,

to your breath rippling the waters.

O Beloved, enlarge our hearts in trust

that we may be comforted and renewed by your love,

strengthened by your Spirit

and fully open to your emerging vision for our soul

and the soul of the world.

A photograph of a forest with tall, thin trees and a path covered in fallen leaves. The trees are mostly bare, suggesting autumn or winter. The path is covered in a layer of brown and orange leaves. The sky is visible through the canopy of the trees.

Go Easy

By Carole Crumley,
Shalem's Senior Program Director

When I am among the trees, ...
They give off such hints of gladness,
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.

— Mary Oliver

Early in September on my way to work, I noticed the license plate on the car ahead of me. “EEEEZUP” it spelled. Just reading it, I found myself smiling, relaxing, breathing softly and, in fact, easing up.

That little moment took me back to the last two weeks of summer. We were on our way to a family vacation in New Hampshire, and our GPS had failed to keep us from making wrong turns. After our fourth trip across the Tappan Zee Bridge, forty years of meditation practice seemed to go right down the drain of frustration and defeat. Finally, I realized that we could stop for the night and start again the next day. Clearly, I needed to ease up.

This was reinforced when we reached our destination. Internet reception there was terrible. It was more frustrating to try to use my iPad, computer and cell phone than to simply let them rest. So I turned them off and went dark. In the process, I discovered that I too needed to rest from the constant attention that emails seem to demand and the interruption of cell phone calls and the pressure of work deadlines. The beautiful natural setting of our vacation place helped me let go.

Research is beginning to show that being in the natural world is associated with lower stress levels, a boost to natural killer

cells in the immune system, better mood, self-esteem, physical fitness, memory, attention and creativity, among other benefits. It also shows that those who live close to trees live longer.

A recent article in *The Washington Post* alerted me to a new “unplug and recharge in nature” program for high-tech workers. Stressed-out workers who spend most of their days inside, tethered to their devices, take a day to turn off those devices. On that day, they go to the woods to find a “sit spot” in the forest where they can be still, attentive to nature and cleanse their senses dulled by device-addicted lives. While some call this “eco-therapy,” the Japanese call it “forest bathing.” Soaking up beauty, being immersed in nature, is a counterbalance to the screen-addicted world we live in.

I like this image of bathing in nature’s forest, just letting the light and sounds, the softness of the ground, the fragrances of earth wash over us. Such a “bath” can cleanse our eyes to see more clearly, awaken our ears to hear new sounds, loosen our limbs for greater flexibility, soften our hearts for deeper compassion and fill our inner emptiness with renewed vitality. One local doctor prescribes a walk in the park and two aspirin as the cure for most of what ails us.

Poet Mary Oliver said that being among the trees was for her a saving thing, something she needed almost daily. This saving was especially needed, she wrote, when “I am so distant from the hope of myself, in which I have goodness, and discernment, and never hurry through the world but walk slowly, and bow often.” This sense of being distant from one’s truest self is one I, too, know well (see Tappan Zee Bridge).

Oliver said the trees seem to call out, “Stay awhile.” The rustle of their leaves and the light that flows from their branches keep calling to her. “It’s simple,” they say, “you, too, have come into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.”

Every day, weather permitting, our staff eats lunch outside in a little garden area set aside for the tenants in our building. It is filled with trees and flowers. In addition to the camaraderie with other colleagues, there is that sweetness of bathing in nature and letting its goodness wash over us and its gladness bless us. For those few minutes, it is our “sit spot” in nature.

Perhaps there is some similar place close to your workplace or near your home, even in your own back yard, where you can go and stay a while, where you can do this at different times of the day and in different seasons of the year, where you can spend time, pay attention and listen. This communion with nature can show us the essence of who we are and the truth of our calling. For like the trees, we, too, “have come in the world...to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.”



Awakening

By Ann Dean,
Director of Shalem's Transforming Community:
Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreats Program

...float
into Creator Spirit's deep embrace,
knowing no effort earns that all-surrounding grace.

—Denise Levertov

Some days begin with a jolt. A ringing phone or an alarm clock or a nightmare. Yet most days, however jolting they may become, begin with a gentle floating awareness of awakening. I cherish the moments of gently sensing this floating awareness when it is simple and pure, before thoughts and feelings take up their occupancy. Before my eyes open, before “my” or “eyes” have any meaning.

Somewhere along the way, I found myself wanting a little spiritual practice for transitioning from this deep floating into the day. I sensed an alluring nudge to ground the “my” and the “eyes” and everything else in the deepest reality and my truest identity. It seemed important to begin each day by making an intentional connection between the spacious freedom of being at home in this simple awareness and the movements of my active life.

Effortlessly, the simplest, most natural practice emerged. Now, my first movement in the morning, even before opening my eyes, is to bring my hands together as a gesture of oneness with the Beloved. Silently, hands touch and in their own language say, here I am, here You are. We are forever One.

Occasionally, scriptures come to mind. The Beloved speaks, “I have carved you in the palm of my hand” (Is. 49:16) or “we will come and make our home in you” (Jn. 14:23). Whether I think of them consciously or not, they are alive in me and have complete authority. I believe that “carved” intimacy of holy inscription described in Isaiah. I trust Jesus’ promise in John 14 to send the Spirit to live in me forever, to make a home in me. So as my hands come together, the movement is a

way to name and claim the truth of the One to whom I belong and who I really am. No matter what anyone else has ever said or thought. No matter how I fail in my efforts. I am beloved and steadily embraced. “We” begin each new day with love and hope because of the profound intimacy of oneness.

Then my eyes open, and a brief full body prayer begins. My feet pause as they touch the floor, I slowly stand upright, slowly stretch up and out and begin to walk away from the bed. Each movement is a prayer of gratitude for Earth, for newness, for the ability to move and pray, to do and be. Now the simple intent is claimed: to live into whatever is possible this day, together.

This awakening practice, so simple and brief, is a serious, meaningful ritual for me. Perhaps I’ve shared it with you before. Yet, just recently, it was refreshed in two ways, that showed me how routine it had become.

The first refreshment came through prayerful reflection on Pope Francis’ description of the trinity in *Laudato Si*, his recently published letter on care for our Mother Earth, our common home. God, he said, is the “ultimate source of everything, the loving and self-communicating foundation of all that exists.” Jesus, “his reflection, through whom all things were created, united himself to this earth.” And the Spirit, Pope Francis describes as “the infinite bond of love, intimately present in the very heart of the universe, inspiring and bringing new pathways.”

This beautiful, Earth-oriented meditation on a “single divine principle” moved deeply into my prayer. Suddenly, one morning, the images infused my awakening ritual.

The ultimate, self-communicating Source held me. Jesus came close as the dear reflection of that Source, one with me in this Earth life and beyond. And the empowering presence of the Spirit, at home in me, connected me through that infinite bond of love to all that is. As I put my feet to the ground and stretched and began to walk, it was a newly invigorated pathway.

Still another gift of refreshment slipped into my awakening practice unexpectedly. In August, on the first day of his life, I held my grandson. Now this is my first grandchild, so looking in his bright eyes opened my awestruck heart in a redefining way because he shifted my identity and gave me a new name: Nana. This first look was a treasure beyond words. The world sparkled and spun. The penetrating love of our mutual gaze was familiar yet unique. He opened my eyes—as only the innocent, piercing gaze of a newborn can—to a world of possibility beyond imagining.

This experience has also taken hold in my awakening ritual. As I stretch out my hands before stepping into the day, the gesture holds an intimate muscle memory of reaching for and holding my grandson. In the mystery of timeless, eternal love, that experience melts into reaching for this present moment, alive with holy possibility. The joy of reaching into the day is infused with heightened expectancy.

I love waking up in the beauty of silence. It is a gift to say my first conscious hello to God in the simple free inner space of trust and gratitude, allowing the first gestures of the body to participate in that hello, beginning each day with commitment to my deepest truth and belonging. It’s so natural. I trust that if this orienting practice becomes routine or dry, the Beloved’s all-surrounding grace is intimately present and will show a fresh pathway of love.

It takes no effort.

A close-up photograph of a cluster of bright pink flowers with yellow centers, set against a blurred background of more flowers and green leaves. The text "Holy Laughter" is overlaid in a white serif font.

Holy Laughter

By Liz Ward,
Director of Shalem's Nurturing the Call:
Spiritual Guidance Program

“Our mouths were filled with laughter, our tongues with songs of joy. Then it was said among the nations, ‘The LORD has done great things for them.’”

—Psalm 126:2

We were just happily sitting around one of the circular tables during lunch in the dining room of Holy Trinity Spiritual Center. The large mural of Jesus on the back wall was quietly watching over us, and only a few sloping green branches of the giant linden tree were visible through the window. Our plates were full of comforting, homemade food—toasted cheese sandwiches, tomato soup, and farm fresh salad—lovingly prepared by our faithful chefs, Joe and Greg. Tantalizingly close to a bowl of healthy fruit sat a half empty cookie jar and one of their delicious chocolate desserts.

Although the morning seminar of the Spiritual Guidance Program had been prayerful and intense, as usual, there was a lightness in the group around the table. All were naturally and organically involved in whatever topic of conversation happened to float through the group, and there was an easy, relaxed sense of convivial community. Then the laughter started.

It began as a quiet chuckle in response to a story told with humble, self-deprecating humor and gradually swelled into gales of communal delight that rippled and ricocheted around the room. Heads began to turn, smiles broke out at other tables, and wonder and curiosity were aroused. Perhaps a little annoyance was felt as conversations elsewhere were interrupted by the hearty laughter. Still, “Here we go again” seemed to be a message conveyed by the kind and knowing looks of others not present at the table.

For some reason, our Shalem residencies are often bathed in laughter, especially when sitting around a table together at a meal. Why does this happen so often? What makes laughter such a natural part of Shalem residencies? What is causing so much self-forgetful communal joy?

Is this hearty laughter a natural response to the challenging intensity of our residencies? Is it merely a release from the deep and serious prayer times, a relief from the stretching of hearts and minds opening ever more fully to the oceanic flow of Holy Life? Is it a shift from prayer or yet another form of prayer? Is it a way to avoid the challenges of living in intentional spiritual community or the fruit of daring to open and reveal authentic self to others? Is it a way to forget, for a while, a heightened awareness of self-in-God or a sign of sinking ever more deeply into the gracious, communal heartbeat of God? Is it a way of remembering our individuality or a sign of our deeper unity in the Oneness that is? Perhaps it is all of these things and even more.

What does seem clear is that something holy is happening in this communal delight. Something deeper is going on than enjoying a skillfully told joke. The humor that causes this residency laughter comes from sharing stories from our lives, from sharing vulnerability in an open self-forgetful way. It comes from belonging to an authentic spiritual community where it is safe to trust those around us and their non-judgmental acceptance of our flaws and human limitations. It comes from recognizing ourselves and our own vulnerabilities in the stories others tell. It is a sign that anger has, for this present moment, melted into a lightness that sees a detached humor in our human imperfections.

It comes from sharing together an unconscious or conscious awareness that we are all still in the process of transfiguration, that God’s loving, liberating Spirit still has much to do, but that we can trust that the way we are now is not the end of the story. It suggests that even in our frailty, we can be accepted, enjoyed, and loved. It somehow gives us glimpses of God’s great love and delight in each of us.

Like so many of God’s loving gifts, this shared laughter mysteriously liberates something in us both individually and as a community. It easily and organically frees something within that has been bound and confining; something that has stunted our life-giving openness to our own true self and the true self of others. Like the hidden work of Roto-Rooter, it mysteriously opens us more fully to our authentic self in God and frees us again and again for greater truth, love, and peace. Somehow through this laughter each of us is being lovingly liberated for new and deeper life in God.

Moreover, during this gifted laughter, this laughter that paradoxically builds up rather than tears down, some Gracious Presence is freely alive in our midst. Some blessed face of the Holy One is being revealed to our bonded spiritual community in a touching, contagious way. Somehow we participate in a diversified Oneness that feels, in the moment, like the body of Christ freely alive in creation.

The picture of the laughing Jesus nestled among my books comes to mind. In this image, called “Jesus Laughing,” his whole being seems delighted during a big, hearty laugh. His head is tilted back, his jaw is relaxed, his mouth is open, and even his eyes seem to shine with delight. Jesus seems to be immersed in laughter rather than just laughing. He seems to be unselfconsciously reveling in a joy that flows through and far beyond him. Perhaps when we laugh as freely as this image of Jesus, we too are tasting God’s holy gift of joy, we too are flowing in a wave of Holy delight.

This wholehearted laughter is a gift that echoes in us long after we first experience it. Holy laughter can linger in our spiritual heart as a cleansing tide washing away our inner debris, the blocks and obstacles limiting our awareness of pervasive, mysterious Presence. Abiding in us as part of the fullness of the present moment, this remembered, yet present, laughter can continue to awaken our sense of joyfully abiding in God, and God joyfully abiding in us. What a full and rich gift for those who openly live together in Holy Life!

A small, brown and white speckled bird is perched on a thorny branch. The branch is covered in sharp, white thorns and has some small green leaves. The background is a blurred, warm-toned landscape with more thorny branches.

The Power of “Our”

By Tilden Edwards,
Shalem's Founder and Senior Fellow

Sometimes one word can light us up like a burning bush. That happened to me not long ago during my morning prayer time. When I began the prayer Jesus gave his followers, I suddenly couldn't get past the first word, "OUR...." It soared infinitely beyond describing a limited human group of people addressing God; it became an illuminating window through which I realized *all* life together more fully than ever before.

Jesus speaks of his intimate relation to Abba, the Wellspring from whom his deepest words and acts flowed. The prayer he gave his disciples emerged from that fulsome, silent depth, and the first word given him to share was "our." It explodes the tight boundaries of every separate identity. It draws us to our integrally shared relationship with all that is.

How can one word contain so much? We could say that *every* word that truly emerges from the divine seedbed incipiently contains everything. Just as each of us is a spoken, created word of God that can reveal an image of the whole, so a sacred word can be a hologram that flashes the whole into human awareness.

So what more was I shown, once my mind gave thoughts to the flash of wholeness in my spiritual heart?

I was so intimately connected with everyone and everything that appeared to me in that word "our" that it was like looking in a mirror. What I saw was part of me, and I was part of it. I could not escape intrinsic relationship. All were "kin" (the kin-dom of God!). All belonged together, mutually indwelling.

The connection wasn't just with all in creation but also with the gracious, intimate Source of it all. I was reminded of Andrew Rublev's classic icon of the Holy Trinity, with its circle of three divine figures intrinsically related to one another, emptying into and filling one another, pointing to

the self-giving table of sacrificial love in their midst that expresses their deepest nature, their union in love, their communal wholeness. Rublev leaves room for us in that circle, where we and all creation share in that vibrant holy mutual indwelling.

I knew I was related even when "alien" figures appeared to me—people who seemed very different from me (or at least different from what I valued): violent, cruel individuals and movements; destroyers of a healthy earth environment; enforcers of narrow conformity that smothers the gifted unique "I" of people; oppressors or every sort. I used to think I "ought" to relate to such people, but now it's so clear that I simply *am* related to them, no matter what I do or how I feel about them. We come from the same Wellspring, whose rain falls on the just and the unjust alike, as Jesus said.

Yet they and the cultural and personal forces that shape them seem like tears in the fabric of God-envisioned creation that need healing and right use of freedom. None of us escape relationship with these forces, and to some extent we all share their broken-off-ness from the loving whole, and we are complicit in the forces that shape them. Thus Jesus' call to humility and repentance. None of us are innocent. We easily lose the "whole" and slip back into our exclusionary groupings that can negatively affect the whole unless we're very intentional about remembering that "our" has no ultimate exclusions, only functional and relative ones, such as religion, family, country, and vocation. "Our" finally trumps "them" and leaves us with "we."

Because of the toxic nature of destructive psyches and groups, Jesus says we need to be wise as serpents, recognizing the lure of divisive, self-securing forces and listening for the Spirit's guidance in responding to these forces. At the same time, he says we need to be innocent as doves—innocent in our childlike trust of inclusive Love as

the deepest stream of reality pervading everything, however hidden that Love may seem, however challenged by willfulness, fear and evil.

Such hard realities point to the incompleteness of "our-ness" in the world. My experience with the inclusiveness of "our" enlarged my vision of intimate inclusiveness, but I know how incomplete its fulfillment is in me, when I still find myself at times creating unnecessary and fearful boundaries and accepting unjust privileges. I see that incompleteness compounded individually and collectively every day in daily news stories.

The words following "our" in the Lord's Prayer show Jesus' recognition of this incompleteness and at the same time his trust in a fulfilled future: "Your will be done, your kingdom come." That kin-dom he says is already within us when we have eyes that see, the self-emptying Self-in-God filling contemplative awareness affirmed by all great contemplatives. We're called to collaborate with God's Spirit in bringing the mutual belonging we're shown within into the larger world's life. That means into all of life's human and earth-related dimensions, and beyond that into the wonder of our infinitely larger, interwoven cosmic home, which to faith can be seen as an endlessly dynamic, evolving and mysterious embodiment of gracious, divine energy.

Such mutual belonging—the power of "our-ness" that I tasted in my prayer—and such a trusted, divine movement forward toward the full realization of that mutual belonging, are Good News indeed. It is worthy of great praise and celebration, and worthy of cultivation in our prayer and our actions. I spontaneously find myself sometimes now putting my hand over my heart when I wake up in the morning, and saying with an inward smile simply, "OUR."



Taking The Next Step

By Bryan Berghoef,
Shalem Social Media & Online Learning Support

We were off the main path. The trees were getting smaller as we gained altitude. My bear sensors were on high alert.

Somewhere in Banff National Park in Western Alberta, Canada, my adventurous son, Winston, had led us off a marked path up toward higher ground. Neither my wife, Christy, nor I were too keen about this option, but as our curly-haired son scampered ahead around a bend, the rest of us—brothers and sister and mom and dad—kept moving forward.

We weren't sure we were supposed to be going this way, but hey, we were on a grand adventure, why not keep going? This was one stop of many on our way north to Alaska this summer.

As we proceeded to gain altitude, and leave the rest of civilization far below, I wondered how many people had come this way before. I wondered what we would discover. I was a bit unsure, afraid even, but also excited.

We came up over a ridge to find a plateau. A few scraggly pines were able to grow at this level, but they were small, stunted. My wife noticed a pile of rocks that had clearly been arranged by a previous hiker. People had been here before. We were going to be OK. But then Winston noticed a ridge way above us, and a steep, rocky "path" that could take us up there. Off he went.

As we huffed and puffed behind, not yet in our best hiking shape, I pondered the wisdom of going further on. Haven't we already gone far enough? Look, trees can hardly grow here. That means less oxygen. That means it really isn't fit for people either, right?

Still we climbed. One foot after the next. Find a foothold, take a step. Avoid the loosest rocks. I was pulling up the rear. For protection, I told myself, in case a bear decided to come from behind.

Winston reached the secondary peak of this mountain, and whooped and hollered. I hoped those were calls of joy.

As I finally caught up with the rest of the group, to a stony, flat area with almost no trees, I counted to make sure we had all made it. Then I turned around and looked down. It took my breath away.

Far below us was Peyto Lake. We had seen it much closer up, from a viewing platform on the maintained trail. But from here, it was simply spectacular. The hues of bright turquoise in the lake were cushioned by mountains with snow-capped peaks. The beauty was stunning.

And Winston was standing there beaming. Our little adventurer.

It made me think about how sometimes we let fear of the unknown keep us from taking a step forward. I wondered what views I had missed at other moments in my life because I hadn't trusted that something beautiful was around the next bend.

When I looked around where we were standing, I saw little rock formations all over. Rocks balancing on each other. Rocks in circles. And I realized it was almost a pilgrimage spot, of sorts. A holy place. Others too, had been captivated by this very spot and wanted to leave a marker of their visit.

We were also high enough to walk through some snow, even though it was mid-July. The kids laughed and threw snowballs. Christy and I marveled at the view and made a rock formation or two of our own. We simply soaked in the beauty and holiness of the moment.

We were the only ones around. But others had marked the trail.

As we made our descent, we passed several hikers, who wondered if they too were heading too far, or the wrong way.

"Keep going. It's so worth it," we told them.

Sometimes we need encouragement to take the next step. It may come as a little nudge: from the Spirit, or a friend, or a fearless child.

"A Fleeting Simplicity of Soul"

A line in a poem once read
now slides into my presence,
shyly beckoning with outstretched palm;
"We glimpse a fleeting simplicity of soul..."

In silence, a precious seed of grace,
I wonder why certain words and images
glisten and sparkle
when they first encounter us.

Are they lying in wait,
ready to pounce when we walk by,
dazzling us with unstated brilliance;
a poetic call for attention?

But what am I to see?
What deep meaning to find?
My rational brain kicks into action
as I sense the brilliance fading.

Often I watch in dismay
as a splashy sunset grows dim,
willing the splendor to linger,
to savor it more fully.

Perhaps a glimpse of grace
is all we mortals can take,
unfettered by thinking
and allowed to just be.

The complexities of life,
though real in one sense,
distract us from glimpsing
a fleeting simplicity of soul.

— Connie Seraphine

Connie is a graduate of Shalem's Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreats Program.

An aerial photograph of a winding river or stream flowing through a vast, textured landscape. The landscape is a mix of brown, grey, and blue tones, suggesting a dry, possibly volcanic or glacial, environment. The river is a dark, winding line that cuts through the textured surface. The title "Stepping Into The Flow" is overlaid in a large, white, serif font, with "The Flow" being significantly larger than "Stepping Into".

Stepping Into The Flow

By Patience Robbins,
Shalem Adjunct Staff Member

I step into the flow and then let go, I open my mind, my heart and my soul.

O, I surrender, I surrender, I open my mind, my heart and my soul.

These are the words of one of my favorite songs to lead in groups. Many of you may recognize singing it and praying the gestures when participating in a Shalem program. When doing it in a large group, it can feel very moving, centering and allow for deepening surrender. At this time in my life, it is an ongoing prayer in my heart as I live into a major change, calling for letting go, opening and surrendering.

Letting go happens on so many levels and is so constant in life. I often struggle with welcoming the way life is—that is, what is showing up rather than my idea of the way reality should look. In this case, I am letting go of a home that I have lived in for 25 years as well of much of its contents. There are so many pieces to this experience as well as choosing to step into the flow. Memories of other experiences come to my awareness.

I recall that two years ago, I was struggling to “let go” of my desire and plan to keep my mom in the family home while she has dementia, which was progressing. For about three months, I carried this struggle in my heart with a prayer to let go and join the flow of what was being invited. It was while on a week-long, silent retreat that the surrender came and the peace flooded in. One evening I was sitting on a lifeguard chair on a beach; I was the only person around as there had been a recent storm and everything was wet and overcast. While sitting there, deeply still and alert to all around me, I saw a stream of dolphins in the ocean swimming along one after the other. They offered peace and seemed to carry the message: it is okay, all is well, this is your mother's next step of the journey. I cried

and I laughed and I relaxed. When I returned home from my retreat, I felt ready to accompany my mom on her journey into a nursing home.

This story comes back to me as I am in the midst of another big transition and a letting go. The discernment to change homes began about a year ago. It came out of a desire to simplify, downsize and have less: less to care for, less to have, less to use. It is part of a desire to identify more fully with people around the world impacted by climate change as well as to open up more space and time for attending to what I am called to do on behalf of the world.

This move has required lots of letting go: letting go of my timeline, any particular way it should happen, any certainty that this was the right choice and now, letting go of the current house and lots of stuff that has defined me. Can I trust that this is the next step on my journey, challenging and scary as it may be? Can I step into this flow of love, knowing that all will be well? Even though I can't explain this discernment and I definitely do not know if it is right, can I surrender into the great Mystery?

Once again, I am on a week-long, silent retreat, pondering the oneness of all—that deep interconnection we share with all of life. I have had the opportunity for some rest, time to just sit and be, and time to step fully into this flow of Love, within and around me. And I once again have the joy of seeing the dolphins swimming along in the ocean, reminding me that all is well and whispering: risk into this next step, open, surrender and trust the flow of Love!

What the Stone Says

How can you not see it,
if you stand still enough,
or walk out far enough:
the light shimmering from every leaf,
the actual hardness of every stone?

This stone says something
of humility and presence,
of where it came from,
and the belly of stars,
but it stays silent to draw you nearer.

We are, all of us, even the thin geranium
on the back stoop, reaching up
for light, for life, for beauty,
singing out with the great silent voice
of the immense glory of being,
the long, amazing story
and a love story it is.

Without your having to remember—
such a gift, such a gift—
your lungs open to the world
and take in life, each moment.

Who gave you that?

How can you not sing, even in silence?

When we grow afraid we forget,
we wear protective layers
of things to believe, things to do,
so many things to do,
so that we don't come too near
and catch fire.

— Steve Garnaas-Holmes

*Steve is a graduate of Shalem's Going Deeper:
Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership Program.*

A photograph of a dirt path winding through a grassy hillside. The path is light brown and leads from the bottom center towards the top of the frame. The hillside is covered in green grass and some dry, brownish vegetation. In the background, the hill rises and levels out under a clear blue sky. A few small figures of people can be seen on the distant ridge.

Cherishing The Journey

By Trish Stefanik,
Shalem's Program Administrator
& Adjunct Staff Member

A favorite T-shirt of mine reads, “Cherish the journey.” It has been through the wash quite a bit and is worn, faded, and stretched from its original shapeliness. Yet I delight in opening the drawer and catching the phrase as I unfold the shirt and pull it over my head. I feel the softness against my skin; it still “fits” even with all the wear and tear.

As I reflect now on my own life and the spiritual journey, “cherish” seems an apt directive, meaning “to hold dear,” “cultivate with care,” “harbor deeply.” But what I cherish now is somewhat different from what I once cherished. Much of what was is no longer or has changed—everything from relationships to vocational expression to the neighborhood in which I am situated. I even sense a shifting landscape in prayer. In many ways, outwardly and inwardly, I find myself in the dark. And yet it feels like this is a good place to be.

I have always been a lover of silence and solitude, natural creation, and prayer of the heart. Through reading and retreat, contemplative walks and daily quiet time, spiritual community and work in varying forms, I have immersed myself in opportunities and practices to center, listen, wake up, see with new eyes, let go, open, and surrender to the mystery. I continue to cherish a life of loves and losses, ups and downs, disappointments and celebrations, heartache and healing. But how I look at the journey and how I engage with it has changed.

For many years the spiritual journey for me was about “seeking God.” I liked fashioning that as a quest that led somewhere, an adventurous winding road over hill and dale, with different scenes, experiences, and companions. I remember loving the children’s stories of the saints, which read so fantastically, and being captivated by Joseph Campbell’s telling of the mythic Hero’s Journey. I learned to expect missteps

along the way and that I would get lost; but I trusted I would be found or manage to get back on track. The destination could shift, but with some changing on my part, I could keep making progress toward a site just over the horizon, which would eventually become both nearer and clearer.

It is difficult to admit that all this is an illusion, but that is precisely the teaching of the great mystics. When it comes to the spiritual life, I cannot get anywhere for trying or understanding. Not only has my road hit a dead end, my destination never really existed. With where I find myself now, I resonate with Barbara Brown Taylor in her book, *Learning to Walk in the Dark*: “There is no permanently safe place to settle. I will always be at sea, steering by the stars. Yet as dark as this sounds, it provides great relief, because it now sounds truer than anything that came before.”

I am coming to see that there is not only wisdom in learning to walk in the dark, but this is where I am called to abide, be, every day. It is where transformation takes shape. It is homecoming with God.

The spiritual journey is more a mystifying relationship than a road. I even shy away now from explicitly “seeking God,” all too aware of the temptation to see the spiritual life as something to achieve rather than simply participate in. I have no road map or GPS, only an intention to abide. God is not a destination but a long loving gaze, right here, right now.

There is only so much I will ever know, and what I desire the most, I will never know. In wondrous, unfathomable faith, I can simply accept what is before me at the moment, what I am given—and cherish it, truly.

Silence

Silence is the embrace of God

Silence is the fullness out of which creation was spoken

Silence is the staff on which hangs Chopin’s Nocturnes

swaying in the breath of God

Silence is the net that catches us as we fall

Silence is the hands that ever-so-gently hold

our authentic selves

waiting to be discovered again

Silence is the deep connection between friends and lovers,

strangers and enemies

Silence is the darkness into which we fear to go for its untold joy

Silence is the deep rich soil from which grows the cherry tree

Silence is the emptiness that cradles all

Silence is the invitation to death that leads to life

Silence is the embrace of God

— Winston Breedon Charles

Winston is a Shalem board member and a staff member for Shalem’s *Going Deeper: Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership Program*.



Invitation of Silence

By Kathleen Moloney-Tarr,
Graduate of Shalem's Spiritual Guidance Program

The stark branches in the gray woods welcome me, invite me into clearness, peace and an abiding, bounding grace. With feet tucked into slippers and a shawl around my shoulders, I sit next to the windows overlooking the winter woods in the morning of silence. The hard rocking chair barely fits between windows and my bed at the retreat center. I gaze out into the monotone of gray, the winter woods inhabited by hundreds of trunks dotted with black wounds where branches fell and the tree healed itself, maybe ten years ago, maybe last fall. The branches twist and turn, thick at the trunk and then thinning to a softer and softer gray that finally disappears into the forest space.

It is here in these woods that I feel sadness, a loss, the awareness of green life passing, season after season, and yet there is comfort, too. I can see so much further than in verdant summer or Easter-colored spring. It is in the winter that my eye follows the tree trunks and branches, tracing their silhouettes against blue sky. White clouds and slivers of blue pass between the high notches as trees reach to the light. Patches of lichen on

the hardy trunks remind me that growing happens even right now. Even in the gray brown woods.

Walking outside now, I am under the trees I saw first from the window. They called to me, "Come out, come out. Listen to our silence beyond your quiet room. Join us in being, stirring, moving to the spirit and the breeze." A gray stone path winds through the woods. The winter woods open me beyond this moment, beyond loss and worry.

My soul awakens to what is and to what is to come. Now the gray trees and brown leaves—soon the spring of red-tipped buds, early green leaf, soaring bird songs and rustling by brown thrasher and chipmunk. Here is where You are. Here in the winter woods, mourning and celebrating, remembering past and opening to future. Here in the new of life, the new of winter into spring, the new of this one life, this one day, this one moment. This One.

"Contemplative awareness provides a door through which the Spirit can take us deeper, freer, and truer, a door through which we can walk beyond any confining room that smothers the Spirit's call to abundant life."

— *Tilden Edwards*

"... Nature taught me about being who I am in this world, just as it is in this present moment, just *as it is*."

— *Gerald May*

"Listening to our hearts brings us to the core of our being, where we are most authentically ourselves. In that place, we can hear God's prayer within us."

— *Rose Mary Dougherty*



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The Trust for the Meditation Process

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The following individuals have helped sustain Shalem's ministry by giving for 10 years or more. We list them here with deep gratitude for their faithful support.

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If you are not on this list of names and feel you should be, please let us know.

Widening the Doors of Shalem

N. Franklin Adkinson, Jr.

I remember vividly my first trip to Washington to attend a Shalem program led by Jerry May, one of whose books I had recently read with trepidation. I was consumed by the affairs of the “first half of life,” such as achieving a sense of self-worth, recognition by others, assuring security for myself and my family, and planning my legacy for my personal and professional world. Much has changed in the ensuing 25 years, leaving me in a very different place today, with newfound gifts of identity and “enoughness” to live in relative peace. Shalem and its visionaries have walked with me here in so many ways, opening me up to Spirit, and inviting me into a community like no other I have ever witnessed.

When I contemplate how my life can begin to make a difference for those who come after me, I immediately think of widening the doors of a future Shalem to those struggling to lead our evolving world toward greater harmony and compassion. That, of course, includes all of us who have found a contemplative presence in the world.

So with a glad heart, and in addition to my Annual Fund giving, I have planned for my legacy to include a major gift—not to insure Shalem’s survival, which the Spirit will assure—but to fund continuing access to Shalem’s offerings for those who hunger



for them but lack sufficient resources. My hope is to “widen the doors” for the underserved, and my prayer is that the blessings of Shalem’s contemplative leadership will continue to grow and evolve, changing other lives as mine has been changed.

Shalem’s Shekinah Society

The Shekinah Society is for those individuals who have let us know that Shalem is in their wills. We are truly grateful for their special support and all that it means for Shalem’s future.

- N. Franklin Adkinson, Jr. • Ann Barry • Margaret Bullitt-Jonas
- Merrill Ware Carrington • Jean Crawford • John Denham
- Rosemary Dickerson • Susan Dillon • Tilden Edwards

- Alan Evans • Judith Favor • Doris Froelich • Linda M. Kapurch
- Joann Klink • Kirby Lewis • Sandra Mackie • Monica Maxon
- Brooke Morrigan • K. Sheila Noyes • Linda Allport Neumaier
- Mary-Louise O’Day • Clare Openshaw • Laurence Pagnoni
- Don & Alixe Park • Paul Purta • Leah Rampy • Lisa Richey
- Lyta Seddig • Betty Stoddard • Joan Stogis • Jan Thurston
- Linda Toia • Nan Weir • Emily Wilmer • Sandra Hay Wilson

Making A Bequest to Shalem

When making your estate plans, we hope you will consider a gift to Shalem. Over the last several years, we have been richly blessed by those who have remembered Shalem in their wills. Not only have these gifts greatly assisted Shalem’s mission and ministry, they are a very special way for the donor’s care to extend

into the future. Please let us know if you have included a bequest to Shalem in your estate plans. We’d like to say thank you and welcome you as a member of our Shekinah Society!



Statements of Financial Position and Activities

The Condensed Financial Statements shown below were derived from the audited financial statements of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, Inc. These condensed statements do not include all disclosures normally included in financial statements prepared in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles. The complete financial statements, including statements of cash flows, footnote disclosures and the report of our independent accountants, Aronson LLC, are available for review upon request.

Condensed Statement of Financial Position as of June 30, 2015 and 2014

ASSETS	2015	2014
CURRENT ASSETS	\$ 323,856	\$ 288,921
INVESTMENTS	614,310	755,080
FIXED ASSETS	8,091	35,786
OTHER ASSETS	<u>13,835</u>	<u>13,835</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>960,092</u>	<u>1,093,622</u>

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

CURRENT LIABILITIES	<u>44,895</u>	<u>146,094</u>
NET ASSETS		
Unrestricted	810,059	797,491
Temporarily restricted	<u>105,138</u>	<u>150,037</u>
TOTAL NET ASSETS	<u>915,197</u>	<u>947,528</u>

TOTAL LIABILITIES & NET ASSETS	<u>\$ 960,092</u>	<u>\$ 1,093,622</u>
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Condensed Statement of Activities for Years Ended June 30, 2015 and 2014

REVENUE AND SUPPORT	2015	2014
Programs, contractual work and publications	\$ 592,529	\$ 629,293
Contributions	447,377	457,261
Loss on Disposal	(25,300)	—
Investment income (losses)	<u>31,618</u>	<u>95,778</u>
TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT	<u>1,046,224</u>	<u>1,182,332</u>

EXPENSES

Programs, including allocated staff compensation	766,967	918,914
Administration:		
Staff compensation & benefits	71,255	59,405
Rent and other	170,679	145,935
Fundraising expenses	<u>69,654</u>	<u>66,538</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>1,078,555</u>	<u>1,190,792</u>

Total Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets	(32,331)	(8,460)
NET ASSETS, Beginning of Year	<u>947,528</u>	<u>955,988</u>
NET ASSETS, End of Year	<u>\$ 915,197</u>	<u>\$ 947,528</u>



Volunteers & In-Kind Donations

Each program year, we want to acknowledge those individuals who give of their time or donate travel and other expenses to Shalem. This year we are especially grateful for:

- **Christy** and **Bryan Berghoef** for their beautiful work in creating a video of “Changeless and Calm.”
- **Lisa Richey** and **June Schulte** for their hand-made cards created for Shalem.
- **Patrick Harris** and **Mel Shapcott**, of **Cyberian Frontier**, our web site managers.
- **Frank Toia**, **June Schulte**, **Susan Etherton**, **Ana Rampy** and **Leah Rampy**, whose photographs you see in these pages, on our web site, in our monthly eNews and many other places, and for **Christy Berghoef**, whose photos often appear with our daily Facebook inspirational quotes.
- **Sarah Etherton** and **Paige McAdams**, Shalem’s technology interns, who contributed in so many ways and especially for Sarah’s help in creating the Shalem thank-you video for FY15.
- **Sandra Kerka** for her creative work on Shalem’s Contemplative Voices Award program.
- **Shalem’s Board of Directors**, who as always donated their time and talent in many ways, especially for their assistance at the Gerald May Seminar and the Contemplative Voices Award.

- Shalem’s non-Board **Committee members: Leslie Miller** and **Susan Pullin**, who gave so much to our committee work over the past year.

- **Jeremy Klass**, **Ed Wilson** and **Stephen Broadhead** for their legal advice.

- **Anne Grizzle**, who offered the Bellfry, her beautiful retreat center, for group spiritual direction residential programs.

- **Members of Shalem’s Development Committee and Communications Committee** who are keeping in contact with the Spiritual Guidance Program Class of 2016.

- **Individuals who made additional in-kind contributions:** Robert Abarno, Douglas Battenberg, Kevin Bliss, Amy Cole, Damien Brouillard, Janet Burkhart, John & Sue Clark, Phil Cover, Bill Dietrich, Tilden Edwards, Susan Etherton, Sharon Glass, Anne Grizzle, Joan & John Hatcher, Suzanne Henley, Ann Hisle, Rhagan Hyypio, Marti Karchner, Suzi Kindervatter, Darlene Little, Marjorie Ann Lueck, Kristy Malochee, Paige McAdams, Mary Lou Miller, Bruce Pickle, Ana & David Rampy, Patience Robbins, Mark Siler, Phillip Stephens, Emily Schwenker, Therese Taylor-Stinson, Francie Thayer, Mary Tschudy, Tracy Tucker, Liz Tuckermanty, Liz Ward, Matthew Wright

Special Thanks

We thank Frank Sasinowski for his help in bringing James Finley to the Gerald May Seminar.



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E-mail: info@shalem.org

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Edited by Monica Maxon

Design: Peña Design, Inc.

*Photography: Christy Berghoef, John Clark, Susan Etherton,
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SHALEM'S MISSION

To nurture contemplative living and leadership

SHALEM'S CORE VALUES

- Awareness that God is intimately present within and among us
- Reverence for the mystery of God's presence
- Desire for spiritual discernment in all things
- Radical willingness to trust God
- Respect for the unique spiritual path of each individual
- Recognition that contemplative living and leadership require spiritual support
- Commitment to action in the world arising from a contemplative orientation toward life

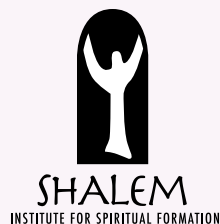




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Contemplative Life & Leadership

**Shalem's in-depth programs support
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life and ministry with others.**



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For congregational clergy seeking to nurture their spiritual heart and leadership

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For those wanting support to live prayerfully and authentically

Young Adult Contemplative Life & Leadership Initiative

For young adults who seek a deeper spiritual foundation for their lives and leadership

*Staff: Carole Crumley, Ann Dean, Rose Mary Dougherty, Tilden Edwards,
Patience Robbins, Liz Ward and others*