

Practicing the
Presence

Annual Report

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SHALEM
INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION



Contemplative
Grounding
in the Midst of
Overwhelming Challenges

By Margaret Benefiel

In the face of bitter political division, environmental degradation, police shooting of black men and shooting of police, the refugee crisis, wars, world hunger, and international political tensions, I sometimes find myself feeling helpless and even hopeless. Over dinner with

friends, when the topic turns to such matters, we find ourselves hand-wringing. What can one person do in the face of these impossible challenges?

Well-educated, well-meaning, and well-funded people analyze these problems. They intervene and offer solutions. Sometimes they make progress. At other times, their efforts prove counterproductive. As Otto Scharmer and Katrin Kaufer, co-authors of *Leading from the Emerging Future*, point out, the rational, analytical mind reaches its limit in the face of complex, intractable problems. Scharmer and Kaufer offer an alternative, “Theory U,” which takes people to a deeper level of knowing, to a place of discernment from which transformation can occur. Other thought leaders like Margaret Wheatley, Ronald Heifetz, and Peter Senge have also discovered the need for this deeper level of knowing out of which transformation emerges.

Seeing thought leaders in the wider world discover contemplative grounding for their work reinforces for me that the gift of contemplative awareness is desperately needed in our time. While education and analytical expertise are important and useful, experts need the larger context of contemplative grounding in order to be effective over the long haul. Rational analysis alone keeps the practitioner living out of ego. Deep contemplative grounding puts gifts and training at the disposal of the greater

good. Prayer frees one to give what and where it’s needed. Prayer frees one to let go when the rational mind can’t find a solution, and to let deeper wisdom emerge. Prayer leads to more effective leadership. Indeed, prayer changes history.

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The articles in this issue bear witness to the crucial need for contemplative grounding in the face of the overwhelming pain and demands of this world. They demonstrate the power of contemplative prayer and how prayer and compassion can bring transformation to apparently impossible situations. Whether it’s practicing the presence of God in the midst of political hostilities, “feathering in” simple awareness of God when one is drained, noticing “radiant darkness” in a struggling church, loving God with a *lev shalem* in the face of impossible challenges, offering unconventional spiritual direction to skateboarders and gang members, drawing on the contemplative power of

nature in parenting a teenager, or being wordlessly and “heartfully” present to a grief-stricken friend, contemplative grounding provides the foundation for compassion and transformation.

When we find ourselves overwhelmed, wringing our hands in despair, may we remember to turn to God. When we let go of depending on the machinations of our minds, we will be surprised, again and again, by what emerges. God’s ways are not our ways. And for that I am exceedingly grateful.

Margaret is Shalem’s executive director.



Live

the Questions Now

By Ann Dean

Still half asleep, my morning prayers began with images. A tree growing roots, refugees swimming to shore, a spaceship on fire, young children playing in the yard, food stamp lines, the rings of Saturn, new seminary curriculum, political ads, faces of family and friends, a Shalem meeting ahead... Then a mandala from the past appeared and held my attention. I smiled, remembering the experience of creating it, in the last *millennium*.

I was on a silent retreat. Five years of creating and pastoring a new faith community had passed; five years of dynamic missions and community life. I suppose I went on retreat, as I always do, for simple intimacy with God. For rest and refreshment. Also, of course, I brought along a score of community questions, hoping for guidance.

Guidance did come. It astonished me because it had nothing to do with my important questions. More than guidance, really a sacred directive, completely unexpected and mysterious. A Word of four words: *Stay close to Shalem*. Simple and direct, however vague. What did this mean? I had deep connections with past Shalem programs and friends but little ongoing involvement. My life was completely full with carefully discerned commitments. And yet... I was certain this was a divine directive to be deeply held, cherished and tended.

I trusted that the meaning would be revealed in time but what could I do now? Being on retreat there was invitation and opportunity to live the question now, as the poet Rilke suggested:

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves, like locked rooms... Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. Live the questions now.

One way I find valuable in living questions is to let the right brain kick in, praying with a circle on a blank piece of paper. So I spent the afternoon praying with color, allowing something to emerge from prayer. What

emerged was a mandala, from the Sanskrit word meaning "sacred circle."

In inexplicable ways, the name *Shalem* grew larger and stronger, definitive and boldly black. I remembered that loving God with a *lev shalem* meant loving God with a whole heart. As I shaped and filled out the letters, memories of experiencing wholeness in Shalem groups filled my heart. The intensity of the black evoked my desire for more. My prayer expanded to the urgent needs of our broken world and God's own hope for wholeness.



Then, of course, came the spacious center of fluid blues, a holy oasis of life-giving waters, so beautiful, and rimmed by a clear, protective boundary. Beyond the waters, rings of energetic golden light gradually transformed into fiery rings, all still fluid, like the life-giving center. Then the red border of the mandala moved into another intensity—a solid, passionate field of engagement.

At least this is what I see now. At the time it was simply a profound experience of prayer that engraved the divine message in my heart. *Stay close to Shalem*. Somehow a possibility in the present, it was also a beckoning to the unknown but certain future. All I knew to do was to hold it in trust, keep praying with it, and remain alert.

Over time, my call to Shalem leadership gradually unfolded. Looking at the mandala now, I can see a lot of specificity in the radiant Light shining into the passionate creativity and development of programs and retreats. So many words could now be written in that red engagement field—titles of opportunities to deepen spiritual

formation and contemplative leadership in our world.

I am exceedingly grateful for this gift of the mandala's re-appearance in my morning prayer. The landscape of my life and prayer has become bleak of late. There is so much conflict and chaos in the world that I can hardly bear to read the daily news. The political, social, and economic struggles often make intercessory prayer overwhelming. The special gift of this moment, after pulling the old art journal off the shelf and finding the mandala, is a fresh awareness of the energetic swirling of those life-giving waters in my center.

I realize afresh that I utterly depend on the Spirit's protection of that center. In the deep center of our being we are so close that we are more one than two. Staying close, aware of being close, is essential for living into wholeness. With humility I also realize how faithfully the Spirit has tended all the intimations of revelation that were hidden from me in that Word of Love.

With renewed hope, I wonder, what is hidden now, gently held in secret in God's great heart? What new beginnings there will shape the days ahead?

There are wonderful new beginnings at Shalem: applications already coming in for our long-term programs, a full October gathering of the Society for Contemplative Leadership, new groups forming around the world for our online classes, new pilgrimages ahead. This we know. But we also know that our imaginations are on alert, wide open to what is unknown but coming.

Staying close to Shalem is still a divine directive in the core of my being. It is an active call to intimacy with the Beloved on the journey inward and an active call to sacred work on the journey outward. Both are still unfolding in mystery and hope. Together, may we all try to love the questions. Stay close and live the questions now.

Ann is the director of Shalem's Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreat Program.



The contagious
Love

of Spiritual Direction with
Urban Skate Boarders

By Andrea Bliss-Lerman

What is spiritual direction really? What are we, as spiritual directors, affirming in others as a result of our input and listening stance? We can describe it as holding the space, listening beneath the surface, asking questions that help spiritual seekers know God, and companioning the prayer lives of those who respect the fact that they are receiving counsel from spiritually-affiliated sources.

But what happens when a suburban intellectual, who frequents monasteries, teaches classes in contemplative prayer, and reads St. John of the Cross and Julian of Norwich for fun, is asked by God to make a 180-degree turn into the inner city and work with high school boys and young adult men who find life and community at an inner city skate park? Spiritual direction, once thought to be a practice of the heart cultivated in quiet Zen-like spaces, now takes on a new meaning, a new anticipated outcome, and a new audience.

By the time I wound up in the inner city working with at-risk youth, I had been a staff member at a congregational church offering spiritual direction, retreats, workshops and classes in Christian contemplative prayer for 20 years. It was in 2009 that God started reminding me of my story and identity in a new way. There was something I needed to look at and God proceeded to direct me into an avenue of spiritual direction that seemed disorienting to some and out-of-character to most of the others who were the outside observers of my life.

To me, there was a resonance that felt like it completed me. I started working with some young adult gang members in 2009 and then in 2012 started working with a group of skateboarders whose ages ranged from 13-24. Completing a course in Juvenile Justice Ministry through Gordon Conwell Theological Seminary gave me the confidence and substance that I needed to bring spiritual direction into the realm of juvenile justice and juvenile companionship.

Lawrence is a town that has one of the highest crime rates in the state of Massachusetts. It is not uncommon for youth to know people who have been in jail, as most of the youth have family members who have been incarcerated. Many of the skateboarders have been incarcerated themselves in youth facilities. Gang members, weapons, rap music, drugs, and fractured family structures are all part of the scenario.

I entered into this scene knowing that God was calling me to listen. *God, what do You want me to hear?* I asked. And the myriad answers to this question are still unfolding. *God, what do You want me to hear about my own life? What do You want me to hear about the lives of these skateboarders? What do You want me to hear about Your life?*

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My self-definition was being re-invented moment by moment as I invested my time at the skate park. *Give me a teachable spirit, O God:* This was my prayer and each day was a re-education related to the possibilities of holy listening and God's perspective.

"Are you Andrea?" A young man at the skate park approached me. "Yes. Who are you?" I responded. He told me his name and I asked, "How do you know me?" "All the guys talk about you. You are the one who has mad love for the skateboarders." And I was touched to the core: *mad love*—perhaps that's what spiritual direction is all about; perhaps that's what God is all about.

This year was my fourth year in planning and facilitating a skateboard competition. This competition was the fruit of many hours of asking questions, listening, and supporting the community of skaters in a spiritual direction-like fashion. Topics such as resiliency, patience, self-worth, God, Christianity, family values, and life choices elicited conversations that were often visited and then re-visited. Drugs, death, family trauma, jail and hunger were all infused into the conversations as I found that God prepared my heart to be a gentle listener, a peaceful presence, and a trusted companion on the journey.

I facilitated a memorial service at the park for one of our youth who passed away. Boys sat on ramps, a broken picnic bench, and on the ground. The park was our prayer space. Hunger for physical food and hunger for spiritual food hovered over each meeting with the youth. There was also a hunger for significance. At this point, four years down the road of offering this out-of-the-box form of spiritual direction, they also bring up the questions and topics. "Miss, if you could meet someone who is no longer alive, who would you like to meet?"

I thought and thought—a saint, a family member, Jesus? I asked this young man whom he would like to meet. He said, "I would like to meet my dad. He died when I was 2. I think that I look like him." The air at this graffiti-laden inner city skate park was thick with pause.

There is freedom in spiritual direction—the freedom to not achieve a specified goal, the freedom to listen to the One Who has a word to say in the moment, the One Who prepares the way for me at the park, the One Who knows what each of us has or hasn't done. We make space for the One who drenches each one of us with affection, and that is more than enough.

Andrea is a graduate of Shalem's Nurturing the Call: Spiritual Guidance Program, Class of Summer 1993.



A
Moment
in Time

By Bryan Berghoef

We stood on the old porch of an abandoned cabin, peering in the windows. The wood siding of this once-vibrant homestead was now a faded grey, with the windows broken in several spots. Grass was poking up through floorboards of this porch where no doubt a rocking chair or two once sat. My son, Henry, and I had just hiked over four miles to get here, past several abandoned private cottages, ruins of farmhouses, an old schoolhouse and several once-thriving orchards. We passed a cemetery with faded tombstones poking up amid wild dune grass—some upright, some knocked over, and several nearly impossible to read now. We saw dates as old as 1859.

We were on North Manitou Island—a small island in Lake Michigan, a few miles off the coast of northern lower Michigan. It is an isolated spot, requiring a one-hour boat ride to access. Today the island has minimal human presence and is largely undeveloped, aside from a couple of buildings owned by the National Park Service. There was once a small local population, but time and nature have reclaimed the island, leaving it an intriguing spot to hike, camp and explore.

We were celebrating the entry of my son into his teenage years, and we wanted to do something special, just the two of us. As we hiked and explored, carrying everything we needed for the weekend on our backs, it was as if time were at a standstill. No cell phone service. No Internet. No cars. No television. Hardly any other human presence, other than occasionally crossing a fellow hiker on a path.

Standing on the porch of that old abandoned home, we tried to imagine what life must have been like there over a hundred years ago. We noticed old rusted farm equipment nearby— a reminder that cultivating the land and growing one's own food would have been a crucial part of surviving in this remote spot in earlier times. We wondered what kind of boat these early

island dwellers might have arrived on. Certainly nothing like the modern ferry we rode upon, with its high-powered engines and snack counter—offering pretzels, M & M's and Diet Cokes.

Rustic camping on Manitou requires that you carry everything in and out. No campsites, no cabins, no bathrooms. Just whatever you can carry on your back. After a long initial hike with our heavy packs, we found a secluded spot near the southern shore of the island to set up camp. From there we had an unbelievable view of the

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turquoise and blue waters of Lake Michigan as well as seemingly endless stretches of beautiful shoreline to explore. No other human beings in sight. For a moment we seemed to have stepped back in time.

Even though I had no major spiritual intentions for our trip, it was a deeply nourishing time. We were present to each other and to the simple realities at hand. We occupied ourselves with the basic tasks of eating, exploring, swimming, talking, laughing, and sleeping. One day was spent hiking to the other side of the island. As we explored we

kept referring to the wrinkled paper map we had, wondering what we'd find around a new stretch of trail. "Can I see the map again, Dad?" We finally reached the other side and explored the coastline there. Huge sand dunes and a sweeping view of nothing but open water with blue skies greeted us. We swam, ate our lunch, played tic-tac-toe with sticks and rocks, and swam some more. We fell asleep on the warm sand. When conversation reached a natural break we just sat there in silence, soaking up the beauty around us. We explored further down the beach. We laughed while tossing a Frisbee in the refreshing water. It was a day that stretched on and on, mimicking the waves, which extended endlessly to the horizon. Just the two of us and this beautiful place.

While we were there only for a short time, really—it felt like an expanse. The Buddhist lama, Tarthang Tulku, notes that when we achieve a level of pure awareness, our meditation is like the open sky—like empty space. There is no subject and there is no object. We seem to transcend even time itself. A sense of the unity of all things can enter the soul at such a moment—the sand, the stones, the trees, the waves, the birds, the wind, the sun—all are connected at a deep and fundamental level. God is all, and in all.

It was almost as though we had walked through a portal into another place entirely, a place of deep peace, a place where time is irrelevant and the present moment is all that matters. No clocks, no schedules, no phones, no Internet—only existence, only right now.

As we fell asleep at night under the stars, I knew that we would both remember this trip for a long time. On the ride home, Henry couldn't stop asking, "Can we go back next year, Dad?"

Yes. I think we can.

Bryan is a Shalem staff member working with social media and online learning.



Deeper

than Words

By Liz Ward

A shimmering ray of sunlight brushed across her thick black hair. It slanted onto the table near the hard wooden chair where she sat slumped in sorrow. Her head was bowed and tears were flowing freely down her cheeks. She was surprised by this new and unexpected surge of grief. She thought it was over, yet here it was again. Another flood of sadness suddenly sweeping over her like an unwanted house guest demanding to stay another day.

She had been venting her frustration and disappointment when she was suddenly surprised by the surge of sadness that slipped through her words of impatient annoyance. Perhaps it was the compassionate gaze, the nod of understanding, or the soft word of kindness that shifted the conversation from frustrated resentment to silent sadness. The shift filled the room with a new way of being together, a new way of sharing. Something Sacred seemed more alive. Something Holy seemed more present.

The Sacred Presence was silently there, of course, in and through her words of righteous indignation and familiar frustration, but after the venting and tears, there was a deeper, unspoken awareness of something more alive in the room. As she regained her composure and continued the conversation, she said she felt somehow freer, more peaceful, more able to face yet again the challenges still before her. She still felt the pain, but somehow it had lost some of its power. It seemed less overwhelming and controlling. Something Else seemed present in and through her pain.

There had been no mention of God or prayer in the words that had passed between us. There was no verbal mention of the Holy One invisibly flowing in and through us. After our opening silent prayer, our words sounded like a conversation one could easily overhear in a coffee shop or café—just one friend venting to another. So was this really spiritual direction? Can it possibly be spiritual guidance when neither the Beloved nor prayer are mentioned, or only acknowledged near the end of our time together?

Is spiritual guidance only or mainly about the words we choose or is it something more than the words we use to verbally steer a conversation towards God or prayer? Are the words just one way to consciously slip into the silent ocean of Holy Life together, but not the one and only way? Is it possible for the living God in me to speak to the living God in you even though we are not talking about the Holy One? Is it possible for prayer to be happening even when words about prayer are not even mentioned?

To ask the question in a slightly different way, does the Beloved alive in me commune with the Beloved alive in another or others without our conscious awareness? Can our spiritual hearts be in transfiguring conversation even when our analytical minds are focused on something seemingly different? Can we be talking about something not immediately and verbally connected to God or prayer while something deep, prayerful, and transformative is going on in the secret levels of our beings?

Can the Holy One be secretly freeing something within each of us even though we are not verbally, or perhaps even consciously, connecting this healing gift with Divine Life? Is this another way God's loving Spirit prays within us even when we not aware? These questions keep living in me as I reflect on my spiritual guidance ministry.

I am not saying that words or awareness don't matter. They do. They are not, however, the whole story, it seems. The flow of God's compassionate mercy and liberating life cannot be totally controlled or contained by our words or awareness.

Perhaps when our spiritual hearts are "turned Godward," as Evelyn Underhill says, the Spirit's healing work can happen even when our words or awareness are distracted or focused in other ways. Perhaps even when our minds are kidnapped by content or heightened emotion, our spiritual hearts can be free and open to the Beloved's larger life. Not always, but at least sometimes.

Perhaps a daily habit of openness to Gracious Presence frees something within us that is conveyed despite our words or conscious awareness. Our presence and being in God can speak in ways that touch in and through our words. Perhaps this is why Jesus could just walk by the Sea of Galilee, ask Simon called Peter and his brother Andrew to "Come, follow me," and they left their nets at once. It is perhaps why James and John were also willing to leave their boat and immediately follow after Jesus. Perhaps we too can have in some much smaller way a living Presence within that speaks to the living Presence within another in holy wordless ways.

The image of Rublev's Holy Trinity icon comes to mind. This ancient icon conveys the power of deep, wordless communion and union. It beautifully suggests Divine prayerful communion among three equal energies of One Holy Life. The empty space in the foreground invites us to join this holy communion in an intentional, ongoing way.

Perhaps when this wordless image lives within our spiritual hearts for years, it and far more importantly, the Holy Life flowing through it, quietly transfigures something within us without our knowing. Perhaps when we are with another it is possible to slip into this larger Divine union because we are being gifted with loving Presence in this particular moment.

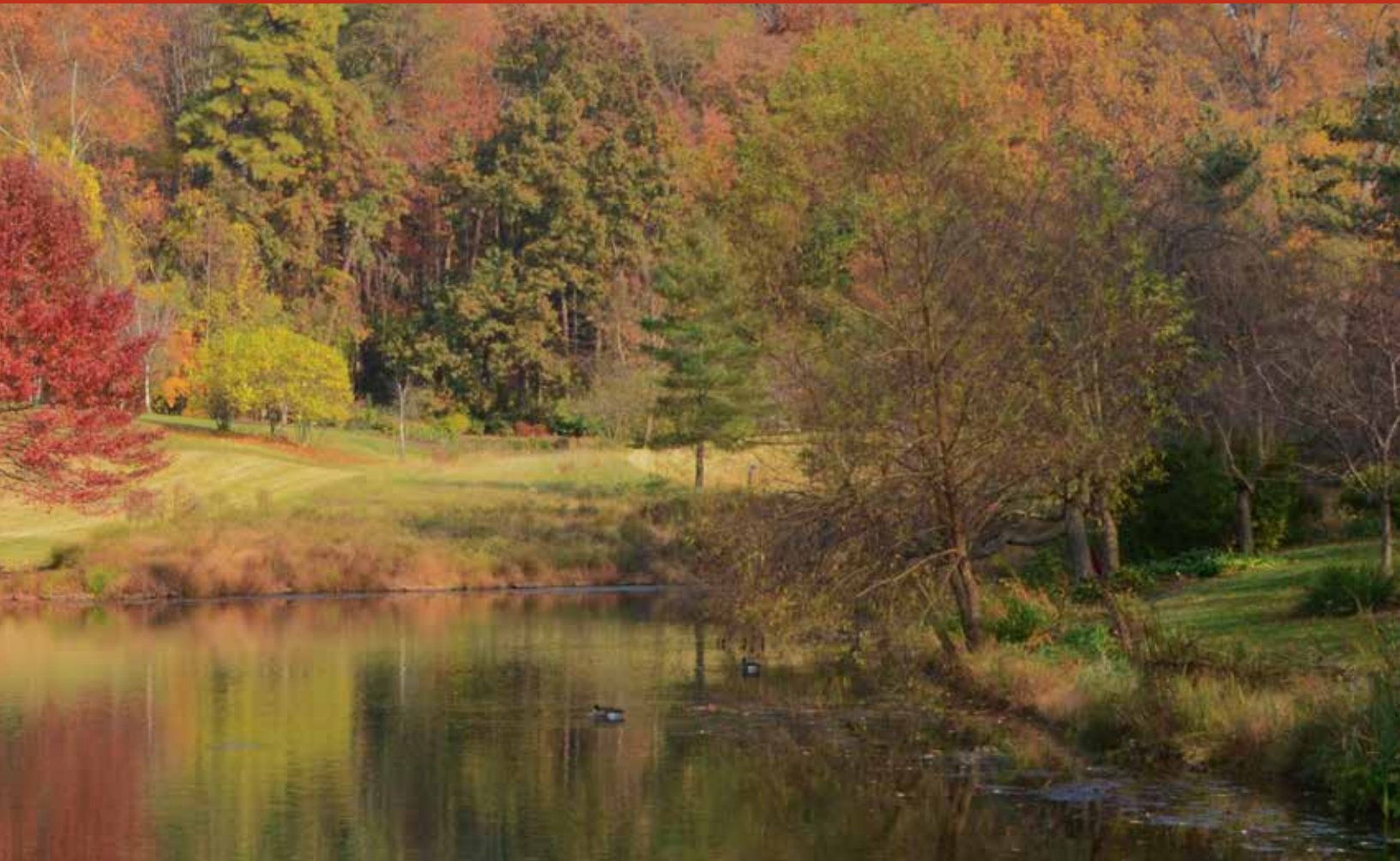
As John of the Cross suggests, our not-knowing (and not-saying) is perhaps important, even crucial, at times. If we knew or said, maybe we would interfere and slow some piece of the Divine, liberating flow. Instead we are gifted with a glimpse of one silent, unsuspected way the Beloved's Love secretly flows through pain and brings to birth hopeful new life. Instead we are blessed with ever deeper trust in the vast, mysterious depths of a silent Loving Life.

Liz is the director of Shalem's Nurturing the Call: Spiritual Guidance Program.



The
Invitation

By Patience Robbins



In recent months, I have felt more than the usual turmoil, anxiety and distress in the air as we approach the elections in the US. And more days than I would imagine, I felt tossed around by a sea of negative and hostile words and emotions, both within and without. So I have been sitting with the question: *What is the Holy One inviting me to do or be in this time?*

My pondering led me to a scripture passage from the Gospel of John: “Peace I leave with you, my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives peace, do I give it to you” (John 14:27). I pray to be open to receive that peace, to intentionally take it in, soak in it and let it flow through me so I can send it out to the world.

This is easier said than done. It is challenging to stay present to what is real—the fear, division, hostility—and to choose to embrace it with peace. It takes trust and courage to stand with arms open wide and

receive the upheaval and allow it to flow through a loving and peaceful heart.

I am reminded of another scripture phrase from the Gospel of Luke: “Fear is useless, what is needed is trust” (Luke 8:50). So as I envision a body posture with arms wide open, I am also deeply grounded and rooted in the source of divine love. I could never produce this kind of love; rather, I ask and trust that it flow through me from the Wellspring of love.

It is helpful to recall that this is a practice. Some days I forget about it entirely and other days I wonder how I could ever live without it. Although it is easy to get caught in the negative, I can choose to be aware of those things that bring me back to my desire for trust and peace. Things that come to mind for me are being in a serene or beautiful place, hearing an inspiring story, remembering a courageous and generous person, feeling grateful for clean water.

Some words that accompany this practice are: open and willing. These words, so familiar in Shalem programs, continue to have profound meaning during this tumultuous season or perhaps during any time of challenge. Each day, I offer this prayer for both:

May I be open and willing to be a channel of peace and trust.

May I be open and willing to embrace the divisions and hostility within myself.

May I be open and willing to let love and light soak the darkness of separation and fear.

And may we all be open and willing to take delight in what is good, true and beautiful and celebrate and nurture it.

Patience is a Shalem adjunct staff member.



Whistling

in the Dark

By Tilden Edwards

Recently I was listening to the lamentations of an ecumenical group of clergy. They were reflecting on the spiritual climate of their churches. Each church was different and yet many of their members shared an underlying difficulty in recognizing or even truly believing in the movement of the Spirit in their congregations and in their own lives.

This difficulty was increased by the endless distractions, busyness and changes in their lives that left little or no time for sustained spiritual/contemplative practices. Without those daily practices to help them lean back into their spiritual hearts for deep listening, and then lean forward into their lives bathed in the spaciousness, love and availability to the Spirit found in their hearts, they were easily engulfed by their ego fears, by the enervating pressures of their work and by the confining expectations of the people around them.

The church for many of these people was a place that presented words and acts conveying a God who wasn't experienced as a living reality in their daily lives, yet whom they still turned to with a vague hope that Someone was there to comfort them in times of pain and crisis. They didn't really look to the church for the transformation of consciousness advocated by Jesus and St. Paul, but rather for solace in their fearful, frantic lives as they were. They weren't seriously looking for spiritual deepening in the church any more than they were looking for it in themselves. They would help one another in crises, but they didn't look at the crises as opportunities for spiritual growth just as something to get out of and be restored to the way they were before.

At the end of that honest, painful, sharing time, the group fell silent. They had exhausted for the moment what they sensed about the dominant spiritual climate of their churches. They were left in the larger mystery of what was really going on and

what the hidden Spirit might be up to in their churches.

A vivid image arose in me during that silence: a vast black sky, below which were the black silhouettes of many people on the ground. They were restlessly moving around, searching in the darkness for their true nature and transcendent calling and for signs of divine presence. Sometimes

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they would see flashes of light in the night sky that hinted of a deeper hidden Reality.

I was left aware of how deep the mystery of G-d is, and why great mystics give names like "radiant darkness" to the divine depth of our lives. I sensed how much the church and other spiritual communities struggle to be in fuller touch with the heart of that darkness and to trust its goodness. I realized all the more surely how vital contemplative practices are that draw us beyond our mind's incapacity to grasp such Mystery—practices that bring us to our ego-forgetful, mind-transcendent spiritual

heart. There the veil is thinnest between the Real One and us. There, with grace, true compassionate wisdom and freedom can appear, along with a sense of being alive in the indestructible home of G-d, who in turn is at home in us.

In the heart we might come to realize the paradox that the darkness we know is itself the infinite Presence that radiates healing, transfigurative sight and openness. That gracious Presence sends us into the world emboldened to let creative, loving light be shaped through us to shine amidst the many situations of our lives. That holy Presence also can inspire a deep, confident joy, deeper than the suffering, sin and confusion in us and in the world. We hear the echo of John 1:5: "The light shines in darkness, and the (world's) darkness did not overcome it."

I think that the more clergy, congregations and every other human gathering can trustingly ground themselves in the radiant Darkness shown in the spiritual heart, the more sanity, peace and awareness of mutual belonging become possible—in us, in our communities, and in our relation to Earth. Such grounding frees our minds to respect and embrace the darkness beyond the mind's limited concepts and images. It also can move the body's breath to vibrate with lyrical sound, whistling in the Dark that enfolds us.

"Even though I walk through the darkest valley, I fear no evil; for You are with me." (Psalm 23:4 NRSV)

Let's hold hands and whistle in the dark together, walking and caring through the dark valley of life, ever returning to a confident, heart-grounded trust through all the troublesome and wondrous mysteries of life.

Tilden is Shalem's founder and senior fellow.



Feathering-In the
Divine
Presence

By Winston Breeden Charles

How many of us, after faithfully practicing our morning devotion, turn toward the day's schedule and leave behind the deeper consciousness that has been given in those sacred moments? How can we feather into the mad midst of our day the prayerful presence out of which flows a contemplative stance toward the joys and challenges that confront us? How can we feather this contemplative ground into the fullness of our days so that we can practice compassionate and courageous presence no matter what?

The number of contemplative practices of feathering-in increases with every heart that discovers new ways of opening to God's gracious presence in the split second of a moment when emotions fire a response. This cornucopia of contemplative practices "on the go" includes breathing deeply, leaning back, recalling a sacred word, pausing for spaciousness, stopping to sense one's feet grounded on the earth, walking at half-speed while sensing the opening heart, and so many more. Contemplative creativity holds unlimited resources for new spiritual practices that in a flash return us to the vital spiritual source from which we desire to live. One of these feathering practices surrounds us wherever we are: contemplative connection with creation.

The luscious Carolina heirloom tomatoes that come in abundance in August are enough alone to connect me deeply to creation, but my gardening includes more: landscape design; hardscape creation of flower beds, paths, steps; flowers that grace each season; okra, collards, garlic, cucumbers, squash, peppers that take the express route from garden to kitchen to table. At the heart of all is the creation of beauty. And, at the heart of that beauty, is the oneness with God's creation.

Recently I returned home from a wonderful time away, drained from the intensity of the experience. The fuel empty light flared in my soul. As I awoke the next day, my

feet led me into the garden, barefoot on the soft Zoysia grass, saying my morning devotion that includes, "Facing one another and all creation, in the Spirit of the One in whom we live and move and have our being, receive the gift of community and life shared." As I pruned and planted, watered and weeded, the kinship with the earth gradually restored a sense of vitality and gratefulness in my soul. A visceral connection with the earth affirmed a life-giving kinship with all of God's creation.

When I look up at
the heavens,
at the work of Love's
creation,
at the infinite
variety of your
Plan...

Nan Merrill, Psalms for Praying

In the last century, Pierre Teilhard de Chardin offered a new way of understanding the kinship of all created things through the lens of evolution. All of creation is made out of the same stuff. Through a stunningly amazing process, the universe evolved into the immensity that we are just beginning to grasp. For good and for ill, human beings have the awesome calling to care for creation. The future, at least, of our world with all of the plants and animals contained therein rests with us. The ability and necessity of accepting this responsibility is grounded in knowing with the spiritual

heart that we are one with all of creation. Our spirituality must include creation spirituality, for this is our special calling.

Just so, this kinship with creation is always with us as a resource that opens to the restorative and empowering presence of God deep within us. It need not be okra and collards that connects us with creation (to which many are grateful). Take whatever is at hand: the ever unique clouds, the glowing moon, the caressing breeze, the solid earth, the sparkling stars, the fluttering butterfly, the glorious goldfinch, the wiggling worm, the elusive trout, the radiant rose, the dancing daffodils, the stately oak or the weeping willow. Take any little part of God's creation and be with it in stillness and openness. Affirm that we are indeed one, for we are all creations of the one Creator, made of the same stuff that expanded into the universe with all it contains. See the beauty. Be in wonder and gratitude.

This reconnecting with the Deepest Reality within us and all of creation can happen in a glance out the window or as part of a slow walk outside or even as a recollection of a time when the beauty of earth took our breath away, stirring within something deeper than rational thoughts. Connecting with creation is just one of an abundance of spiritual practices that connect us in a flash to the Divine to whom we give the whole of ourselves. It is one always available to open us to beauty.

Winston is the director of Going Deeper: Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership Program.



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Paul Purta (left) and Kasey Kaseman (right)

From Paul Purta, Member of Shalem's Shekinah Society

I am a member of the Shekinah Society. Shalem is in my will. The fact that the people of Shalem continue to pray for my continuing good health is a sign of Shalem's high selflessness! Why is Shalem in my will? Because I believe that:

The contemporary surge of interest in things spiritual, especially the contemplative, is not a passing fad or simply one of those every-couple-of-centuries cyclical reappearance of such interests. It is here to stay.

The Spirit is producing a sea change in the evolution of homo sapiens into homo spiritus (John Yungblut's terminology), and I want to play some part, however miniscule in it.

Shalem is the best means I know to participate in these movements of the Spirit. It is dedicated, responsible, prayerful. It is blessed with graced leaders, both veterans and new ones.

I feel an obligation to help assure that future contemplative seekers will continue to have the place and people who were there for me when I wondered if I were odd in asking if what I was experiencing might really be of the Spirit.

I invite you to add Shalem to your will/estate planning and join this special group of Shalem friends.

A longer version of this piece was written by Paul when the Shekinah Society was first created.

Shalem's Shekinah Society

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

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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. These gifts have greatly assisted Shalem's mission and ministry and are a spe-

cial 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 Shekinah Society member!

Volunteers & In-Kind Donations

It is a pleasure to acknowledge those individuals who give of their time or donate travel and other expenses to Shalem. This year we are especially grateful for:

- **Susan Etherton, Margaret Benefiel, Ayliffe Mumford, Leah Rampy, June Schulte, and Christy Berghoef**, whose photographs you see in these pages, on our web site, in our monthly eNews, on our Facebook page and many other places.
- **Brenda Bertrand** and **Lenneita Haigler**, our wonderful interns, who contributed in so many ways and especially helped with organizing and digitalizing information in the office.
- **Frank Neville-Hamilton** for his help in developing Shalem's new website.
- **Al Keeney** for covering the cost of Shalem's blog site since its beginning.
- **Clair Ullmann** for her much appreciated assistance in our On-line School of Prayer.
- **Sandra Kerka** for her creative work on Shalem's Contemplative Voices Award program.
- **Shalem's Board of Directors**, who donated their time and talent in many ways, but especially for their good work at the Gerald May Seminar and the Contemplative Voices Award.
- **Shalem's non-Board Committee members: Leslie Miller, Liz Kuhn, Erika Schleifman** and **Susan Pullin**, who served Shalem through their committee work.

- **Chris Lucey** for his help with our office place transition.
- **Anne Grizzle**, who offered the Bellfry, her beautiful retreat center, for group spiritual direction residential programs.
- **Jann Briscoe** for her special gifts to the Spiritual Guidance Program Classes of 2016 and 2017.
- **Mark Viani** for his legal advice.
- **Eleanor Abarno, Margaret Benefiel, Camille Cappiello, Anita Davidson, Susan Etherton, Sharon Glass, Christina Guerra, Jan Lugibihl, Rhoda Nary, Mary Taylor, and Keith Walker**, who are keeping in contact with, and holding in prayer, the Spiritual Guidance Program Classes of 2016 and 2017, and especially for Susan Etherton, who is coordinating this connection.
- **Individuals who made additional in-kind contributions:** Robert Abarno, Kathy Adams, CeCe Balboni, Douglas Battenberg, Margaret Benefiel, Janet Burkhart, Laura Caperton, Sue Clark, Greg Cochran, Phil Cover, Anita Davidson, Bill Dietrich, Donna DuMolo, Tilden Edwards, Mary Edwards, Susan Etherton, Katy Gaughan, Sharon Glass, Joan & John Hatcher, Ann Hisle, Rhegan Hyypio, Darlene Little, Marjorie Ann Lueck, Julio Martinez, Leslie Miller, Mary Lou Miller, Nancy Nikiforow, Cheryl Notari, Sarah O'Brien, Dana Peterson, Leslie Proctor, Eileen Quinn, David Rampy, Leah Rampy, Patience Robbins, Janet Salbert, Frank Sasinowski, Emily Schwenker, Phillip Stephens, Sara Ellen Swatt, Jean Sweeney, Francie Thayer, Mary Tschudy, Dee Viehman, Judy Walsh-Mellett, Liz Ward, Matthew Wright.



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, 2016 and 2015

ASSETS	2016	2015
Current Assets	\$ 304,786	\$ 323,856
Investments	606,004	614,310
Fixed Assets	54,326	8,091
Other Assets	<u>13,835</u>	<u>13,835</u>
TOTAL ASSETS	<u>978,951</u>	<u>960,092</u>

LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS

Current Liabilities	107,821	<u>44,895</u>
Net Assets		
Unrestricted	788,623	810,059
Temporarily restricted	<u>82,507</u>	<u>105,138</u>
TOTAL NET ASSETS	<u>871,130</u>	<u>915,197</u>

TOTAL LIABILITIES &

NET ASSETS	<u>\$ 978,951</u>	<u>\$ 960,092</u>
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Condensed Statement of Activities for Years Ended June 30, 2016 and 2015

REVENUE AND SUPPORT	2016	2015
Programs, contractual work and publications	\$ 608,760	\$ 592,529
Contributions	387,738	447,377
Loss on Disposal	-	(25,300)
Other Income	30,184	-
Investment income (losses)	<u>22,982</u>	<u>31,618</u>

TOTAL REVENUE

AND SUPPORT	<u>1,049,664</u>	<u>1,046,224</u>
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EXPENSES

Programs, including allocated staff compensation	754,008	766,967
Administration:		
Staff compensation & benefits	18,560	71,255
Rent and other	245,323	170,679
Fundraising expenses	<u>75,840</u>	<u>69,654</u>
TOTAL EXPENSES	<u>1,093,731</u>	<u>1,078,555</u>

Total Increase (Decrease)

in Net Assets	(44,067)	(32,331)
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NET ASSETS, Beginning of Year	<u>915,197</u>	<u>947,528</u>
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NET ASSETS, End of Year	<u>\$ 871,130</u>	<u>\$ 915,197</u>
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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

Shalem Board of Directors 2015-2016

Eleanor Abaro
Ridgeway Addison
CeCe Balboni
Winston B. Charles
Carol Eckerman
Susan Etherton
David Frazelle
Mark Goodwin
Dana Greene

Albert Keeney
Aria Kirkland-Harris
Nancy Nikiforow
Frank Sasinowski
Jane Sharp
Carolyn Silver
Elizabeth Tuckermanty
Clair Ullmann
Ellen Willenbecher

Shalem Adjunct Staff 2015-2016

CeCe Balboni
Douglas Battenberg
Lerita Coleman Brown
Kate Coffey
Phil Cover
Marshall Craver
William Dietrich
Bob Donnell
Mary Edwards
Margot Eyring
Sid Fowler
Katy Gaughan
Marlin Good
Anne Grizzle
Jim Hall
Hong-il Kim
Maureen Kramlinger

Carol Ludwig
Mary Lou Miller
Nancy Nikiforow
Cheryl Notari
Diane Paras
Ed Poling
Eileen Quinn
Leah Rumpy
Patience Robbins
Emily Schwenker
Trish Stefanik
Phillip Stephens
Jean Sweeney
Frances Thayer
Elizabeth Tuckermanty
Nancy Weir
Matthew Wright

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Shalem Staff 2015-2016

Executive Director

Margaret Benefiel

Program Directors

Winston Charles & Carole Crumley
Ann Dean
Hayley O'Connor & Bill Stone
Elizabeth Ward

Program Administrators

Katy Gaughan & Trish Stefanik

Director of Development & Communications

Monica Maxon

Director of Finance

Laura Caperton

Director of Online Learning & Technology

Ruth Taylor

Social Media & Online Learning Support

Bryan Berghoef

Bookkeeper

Dana Peterson

Senior Fellow for Spiritual Guidance

Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND

Founder & Senior Fellow

Tilden H. Edwards, Jr.

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Ayliffe Mumford*

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Washington, DC 20017

Contemplative Life & Leadership

Shalem's in-depth programs support your
God-guided career, personal life and
ministry with others.



SHALEM
INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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301-897-7334

Nurturing the Call: Spiritual Guidance

For those in the ministry of one-to-one spiritual companionship

Going Deeper: Clergy Spiritual Life and Leadership

For congregational clergy seeking to nurture their spiritual heart and leadership

Transforming Community: Leading Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreats

For those called to lead groups and retreats in churches and other settings

Living in God: Personal Spiritual Deepening

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

The Soul of Leadership

For help in integrating spiritual heart practices with leadership realities