

# EMBRACING THE CONTEMPLATIVE PATH IN A BROKEN WORLD



SHALEM  
INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

JULY 1, 2018 TO JUNE 30, 2019 ANNUAL REPORT

# EMBRACING THE PATH OF CONTEMPLATIVE SANITY IN A BROKEN WORLD

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Recently I found a T-shirt, buried in a drawer, that I forgot was there. On it is a quote from Thomas Merton: “The radical truth of reality is that we’re all one.” I immediately put it on. That’s what I want to proclaim today in the face of our collective exposure to an ongoing stream of painful societal happenings that proclaim otherwise. The accumulation of these can leave us numb, depressed, angry, feeling helpless, or plunge us into forms of resistance to what we perceive is hurting the common good.

In *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker Palmer speaks of this situation leaving us with broken hearts, but he says, “I have choices to make about how my heart breaks. Will it break apart into a thousand shards...or will it break open into a greater capacity to hold my own and the world’s suffering and joy?”

What does contemplative awareness bring to this situation?

Above all, it brings a view of human nature that sees so much of our brokenness grounded in a belief that we are ultimately separate from God and one another, “broken-off” from the whole. We’re left then with an insulated sense of self, which can feel fragile and fearful, needing protection and control, responding to the world from this self-contained center. We’re left tethered to a sense of over-separate self and its way of life that reduces us to less than we are; both we and the world suffer as a result.

Contemplative awareness shows us that we’re far more than that. We’re a unique, intrinsic shaping of God’s Breath, and that Breath lives forever in the heart of our breath and connects us with ev-

eryone’s breath. We are created as images of God, part of God’s Body. God lives in a special way as us, in all our particularity. As Teresa of Avila says in *The Interior Castle*, “we cannot separate the rainwater of divinity from the pond water of humanity.” St. Paul adds: “In God we live and move and have our being.”

Theologian Martin Laird expands this understanding in his latest book, *An Ocean of Light*:

*Contemplative practice gradually dispels the illusion of separation from God. Through the medicine of grace, the eye of our heart is healed by the gradual removal of the lumber of mental clutter, the “plank in our eye” that obscures the radiance of the heart ... the grounding radiance of unitive awareness ... which has been present in its fullness since before we were born.*

As we dispose ourselves to this awareness in our deep desire and faithful practice, when we engage the many societal heartbreaks deluging our consciousness today, we are much more enabled to choose being broken open rather than breaking apart. We bring an inclusive awareness, realizing that we mutually indwell in God and in God’s ever-evolving creation; we are ultimately separate from no one and no thing.

When we approach a difficult societal situation, we can let ourselves see it with God’s eyes and compassion streaming through us. We may sense some people and movements as “enemies,” as their blindness and willfulness are destructive of the common good; their acts need to be exposed and resisted. However, we still are related to them, as Jesus knew when he asked us to love our

enemies. Hating them just adds more hate to the world. But we can rightly listen for our callings to let the energy of our anger and compassionate concern lead us to challenge what we see as destructive agendas and to support alternative, constructive ones. Beyond such actions we can pray for God’s grace to empower enlightened repentance (including our own) for what is being done that is harmful to God’s inclusive kin-dom and for reconciliation sufficient to live in peace and together care for one another and for our dangerously over-heated planet. God’s nature of Love requires our assent to such repentance and reconciliation, so we have an essential part in the kin-dom coming.

You can see what a difference this kind of presence and response to painful societal situations is from one of hate, violence, apathy or paralyzing fear. We all may be tempted at times to these when we’re feeling overwhelmed and more separated from God (even though we never really are), but leaning back into our spiritual hearts as best we can will help us transcend such temptations as we return home to our true self in God. That transcendence is so important to our future as a human family. Our givenness to the enlightened Love of God in and beyond us, supported by others in contemplative community, fuels that transcendence.

Whatever each of us can do to encourage everyone we know to walk the path that recognizes our mutual belonging in that great Love can increase the volume of contemplative sanity in the world that is so desperately needed. Maybe we all can walk around in public wearing a T-shirt like the one I found!

# HEARTS BROKEN OPEN FOR THE WORLD

MARGARET BENEFIEL  
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Have you ever encountered a “dementor,” like Harry Potter did? Me neither, thankfully. Or, on second thought, maybe I have. In the Harry Potter books, dementors suck the souls out of people with their dreaded kisses, leaving their victims helpless in despair. While I’ve never experienced one of those wraithlike beings sucking my soul out, I’ve experienced my own kind of dementor. In my life, dementors are those overwhelming forces that rear their ugly heads and seduce me into fear and despair: war-mongering, racism, environmental devastation, grinding poverty. Dysfunctional patterns in my family of origin that never seem to change can do it, too.

Dementors close hearts. They turn open-hearted, happy humans into closed-hearted, fearful, despairing humans. They fan the flames of fear. They drive despair.

It’s easy to live with a closed heart. Living with a closed heart is safe. It’s predictable. When my heart is closed, I don’t get hurt. When my heart is closed, I get more done. In these times of overwhelming challenges in our world, it’s easy to close my heart.

But living with a closed heart limits life. When my heart is closed, I miss out on the fullness of connection with other people. I miss love. I miss joy. I close my heart to close out pain, and I end up missing many precious parts of life.

What is the antidote for dementors? For Harry Potter, it’s his patronus, summoned by remembering happy moments. In my experience, it’s prayer. Prayer opens my closed heart. For example, in Shalem’s Prayer for the World every Wednesday morning, I experience a community of people who join by phone to open our hearts to God and, in so doing, hold at bay the dementors of fear and despair. We join our hearts together in prayer, facilitated by someone who leads a guided meditation envisioning peace, wholeness, justice and kindness on our planet. I find that prayer with a community of other contemplatives helps me open my heart wider than prayer by myself. Prayer in community softens my heart. When I pray with others, my heart is broken open for the world. I always leave feeling more hope and connection, more compassion, more energy for bringing healing and transformation to our hurting world. Deep prayer breaks hearts open.

This experience is not unique, I have learned. Research supports this phenomenon. David Kahane, a professor at the University of Alberta, shares a similar experience of hearts breaking open for the world. In his course on global justice, he presented his university students with the pain, suffering, and injustice of the world, including the fact that roughly two billion people live in abject poverty and that 800 million of those go to bed hungry each night. He then offered a few other facts: 50 cents buys enough oral rehydration salts to save a child from fatal diarrhea and 20 cents buys a daily food

ration distributed by the World Food Program. In addition, the difference between the price of a latte and the price of a regular coffee adds up to an amount that could save many lives over the course of a year. Thus, his students, by simply drinking regular coffee instead of lattes, or making other small adjustments in their spending habits, could save many lives.

Yet he found that presenting students with these facts and many other facts about global injustice did nothing to change their behavior. Over time, he realized that students had closed their hearts to the suffering of others, out of self-protection.

What would break their hearts open for the world? It was only when Kahane introduced contemplative practices into his classroom that students’ behavior began to change. Through meditation and *lectio divina* and then journaling and sharing in small groups, students’ hearts broke open and they began to feel empathy for their fellow humans who were suffering.

An intellectual approach was not enough. Even an appeal to emotion, Kahane knew from other studies, such as showing a picture of a starving child, wouldn’t move students to action. It was only the deeper level of contemplative practice and then the experience of community that helped students be present to their own fear and helplessness and at the same time to the suffering of others. Contemplation and community unblocked them, broke their hearts open, and ultimately moved them to action.

David Kahane discovered something that is not really news to most of us. Though we might not have classroom experiments to prove it, we know on a deep level that contemplation and community are essential, now more than ever, to break our hearts open to the needs of the world around us. We know that the only way we can stay grounded in the midst of the suffering we encounter is through prayer and community. I think that the wider Shalem community has much to teach the world in these perilous times. For example, the “Women to Women” program in Columbus, Ohio, with which Shalem graduate Anita Davidson is involved, helps women on the margins pray and build community and helps get them back on their feet. The anti-racism work in Black Mountain, North Carolina, with which another graduate Karen Day is involved, challenges racism through contemplatively grounded action. The Shalem “Resilience for Activists” workshops help activists re-ground themselves in contemplative prayer so that they can better serve in the world.

May we always know that our contemplation and community contribute much to the world, even at those times when we can’t see the effect. We never know how many dementors our prayers are holding at bay.

# AMAZING GRACE

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This past fall I had the wonderful invitation to attend a wedding of my nephew in Dallas, Texas. I had not seen this nephew or his parents for about 12 years. Spending extended time with my sister-in-law has been challenging in the past because of our different approaches to life. My husband and I very intentionally considered this invitation, as there were so many unknowns about it. But, after prayerfully pondering this and gathering more information, we said we would go.

The first surprise and delight was that my sister-in-law invited us to stay in their home and included us in all the pre-wedding activities. This welcome encouraged me to open my heart and notice what I could offer to this family during this special celebration.

I prepared by listening within to what was called for in this experience. I asked the question: who am I called to BE for them during this time? As I sat with this question, the phrase came: “May I be open to everything and push away nothing.” (This is something I had heard recently from Buddhist teacher and leader, Frank Ostaseski.) I started to pray this continually, especially around all the details of the trip—getting to the airport, the flight, the living arrangements, the event, etc. May I be open ... May I be open ... kept flowing through me.

The first hurdle of the trip was discovering that the Metro had an issue and we had to transfer to a bus to get to the airport. This was an inconvenience that required extra travel time, but it was very doable. Rather than complain and blame and feel annoyed from the start of this adventure, I held my

inner prayer: May I be open and push away nothing.

My nephew, the groom, met us at the airport and it was a lovely reunion and joy to be together. We had the opportunity to catch up with him and share his excitement around this occasion. And then we arrived at his parents’ house. As we walked in, his mother was clearly burdened with something—perhaps all the concerns and details that a wedding poses. Living into my prayer for openness, I went over to her and said: “I am so happy to see you. May I give you a hug? How can I assist you these days?” I watched this flow from me, easily and authentically, and it felt like grace. She melted and from that moment on, we were connected. I felt genuine care and compassion for her during our whole visit, despite her ongoing anxiety and distress about everything.

The other piece of this wedding weekend that was very moving for me was that the bride was Mexican American. When my husband and I went to the rehearsal dinner, I could see immediately that there were Spanish speakers and English speakers and some awkward separation. I ran over to the bride’s mother, told her who I was, gave her an embrace and expressed my delight in meeting her. My husband followed and then we both went on to greet her husband. I continued in my prayer: May I be open to everything and push away nothing. Throughout the dinner this happened with smiles, limited Spanish, and various kind gestures that emerged. Hearts were opening to hearts.

The day of the wedding, it all happened again. There were many opportunities to practice open heartedness to all the details, emotion, beauty, challenges of a wedding and the coming together of two different families and cultures.

As we prepared to leave, my sister-in-law had a question for me: “I see that the mother of the bride had so much affection for you. How did that happen?” In this last five minutes together before going to the airport, what was I to share about this internal prayer and intention? I paused and slowly and deliberately shared that I wanted to be open to all that showed up in this trip, that my heart wanted to make connection with this family, and the bigger commitment in my life is to empower women, in this country and around the world. “Ah,” she said quizzically, “that’s how it happens.” It seemed like I left her with something she could ponder over time.

I am happy to tell this story because it continues to teach me what is possible when we step into the flow of grace. I listened for and felt the invitation, I experienced the power of practice, and I witnessed the transformation for myself and for others. As you read this, may I invite you to step into the flow of life, already present, and be open to what shows up in your life.

Amazing grace!

# LEARNING TO BEAR THE BEAMS OF LOVE

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“We are put on this earth a little space to learn to bear the beams of love.” These words by English mystical poet William Blake have lived in my heart since I first read them as a teenager in love with the beauty and hidden contemplative depths of poetry. They have been both a humbling challenge and a beacon of hope in my life in God, particularly in this last year of painful loss and reluctant letting go.

Over the years, my trust was deepened and my love of The Holy One grew as a result of the many unexpected gifts and graces of contemplative prayer and the spiritual disciplines that were given in this open, vulnerable way of prayer. This contemplative path was full of both daunting surprises and rich, meaningful paths of transformation. Opening more fully to a contemplative way of being with the written scriptures and the scripture of creation expanded my awareness of the presence of the Beloved and the holy “beams of love” that pervade our intricately interconnected, painfully confusing, deeply disturbing, and gloriously luminous web of creation.

Being given the deep grace of offering regular spiritual guidance and contemplative retreats was yet another “beam of love” I was learning to bear with ongoing gratitude. Having the Shalem contemplative family and my expansive church community to nurture and nourish me helped

me sustain my openness and vulnerability to the Beloved in prayer and worship. Having the amazing honor of being with others hungering for deeper life in God showed me over and over the wide and resourceful ways the Beloved showers “beams of love” in the scripture of daily life. We only need to ask for the grace to face the challenges, and hopefully trust that we will be given the eyes to see, and the open, vulnerable hearts to receive the abundant gifts and graces. Sometimes we just need to ask for the gift of opening our doubts and fears to Abiding Love and watch them lose their power to block a path of greater love.

As I have thought of learning to “bear the beam of love” during this past year of significant losses, I think of a poster I bought years ago at St. Paul’s Cathedral in London. The poster is a radiant image of the face of Christ. The portrait is a collage of the faces of people from all over the world who had visited the cathedral during the transition to the twentieth century. Each face is important in creating this loving face of Christ. This collage invites me to greater awareness of the Beloved alive in each of us and to Spirit-led openness and vulnerability. It suggests that each of us is small and limited in our capacity to convey the liberating life and love of the Holy One, but together we can form a powerful image of goodness, truth, and beauty that can transform creation.

I could not have managed the hard and painful decisions I needed to make during the final months of my husband’s struggle with Parkinson’s and dementia without the compassionate guidance of the loving nurses, care partners, and Hospice team, and the steady support of faithful family and friends. I could not have managed the transitions from being a wife for 43 years to a grieving widow and from being a healthy person to someone battling a serious invasive cancer without all the loving care and prayerful support of my family and friends. I could not have managed all of the medical, legal, and administrative changes of receiving medical care in a different city and then in a different country without the fierce and tender love of my son and his gracious and supportive family.

Although my losses may not compare to those resulting from cruelty or injustice or the tragic death of a child or from a difficult divorce, they were still challenging and unexpected. It has been hard and humbling to learn to “bear the beams of love” from so many wondrously compassionate, prayerful companions. I have been blessed by the awesome goodness of others beyond any capacity I have had to repay—or, to my deep chagrin, many times, to even acknowledge.

This sense of humbling vulnerability to God loving me through so many others has been harder for me than open vulnerability to God in prayer. I have had to intentionally open myself ever more fully to this powerful expression of life in the Beloved and hope that whatever healing transformation it brings will be enough. I have had to accept this as yet another unearned grace I can never rightly repay, as yet another “beam of love” to learn to bear with humbling ineptitude and deep gratitude.

Even though each loving act and compassionate prayer has been humbling and challenging, each has also been powerful and rich for me. Each has been an invitation to abide in God’s love in the midst of suffering and loss. Each has both shut me down in mysterious ways while also secretly swelling my heart with love and gratitude. Each “beam of love” has deserved more thanks than I could give yet each revealed in a unique way the ever present, deeply mysterious face of the Beloved. Together these seemingly small beams form a portrait of the amazing transformative power of Living Love always flowing in any way possible through the cracks and crannies of our resistance to greater awareness. Each has been a reminder of the awesome power of Love to heal and renew in the midst of all that is.

# REIMAGINING CONFESSION AS NOTICING

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Confession has always been a part of the Christian tradition of spiritual deepening. As such, it has all too often been understood within a dynamic of payment due, penance to be done, conditional forgiveness, substitutionary Christology. No doubt for many, a deepening of their spiritual lives and even a reformation of the direction of their being has been born out of this understanding of confession. The contemplative tradition brings an alternative, transformative experience of confession, reimagining confession as an integral part of our journey into wholeness..

As a child learning the stories of Jesus in Sunday school, I was always struck by the encounter of what has been traditionally known as “the woman caught in adultery.” (You might want to re-read this Jesus story in the Gospel of John, 7:53-8:11.) Perhaps you remember it: Jesus teaching at the Temple; the established religious authorities bringing a woman who had been in an adulterous relationship asking Jesus to judge her to be stoned as the Law said; Jesus kneeling and silently writing mysteriously in the earth; Jesus finally rising to respond to the insistent authorities, “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her;” Jesus bending down again to write in the earth; slowly, beginning with the oldest, the men retreating; Jesus conversing with the woman, ending with “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin.”

An alternative understanding of confession and re-formation arises in this Jesus story that is fully within the dynamics of the contemplative tradition. There is

a movement from the mind into the heart, the spiritual heart. The religious authorities—all male—were acting on a logical extension of the rules dealing with disruption of the sacredness of marriage, although no mention of the man involved in this relationship appears. Jesus, seeing with the eyes of the heart, perceives deeper dynamics at play and the potential of transformation. “Let anyone among you who is without sin be the first to throw a stone at her.” “When they heard it, they went away, one by one, beginning with the elders....”

In the end, confession had begun in the hearts of the men, and it began with noticing. From outward judgment, Jesus’ comment and his silent writing in the earth caused the men to turn inward and to notice how they too had parts of their lives that were out of sync with the fullness of who they were. They began to view this situation from a different perspective, perhaps noticing not only what they were called to work on, to confess, but also understanding that their actions toward the woman were driven by self-centered, egoic motivations as bad or worse than adultery. Jesus extends the graciousness of the Beloved not only to the woman but also to the men, calling them to confession and transformation. They turn away from righteous judgment and leave one by one to ponder how they are to live.

Key to confession as part of the journey of spiritual transformation is noticing, sometimes by being hit over the head with a ton of bricks, but more often by noticing in the stillness how once again we have acted out of those old inadequate behavioral patterns

that are more interested in feeding the little, needy ego than in reforming the ego into a strong and healthy center, marked by compassion and courage, integral to the spiritual heart. Noticing may come from silently bowing down and reading the writing in the sand that reveals what spiritual work we are called to do. Like sitting still in order to wonder at the beauty of birds chanting their songs into the world, we need to be still, held in the pregnant silence of divine grace and love, in order to be freed to notice how we fall short of the person we are created to be, that we want to be, and how we might step toward that fullness, following the invitation of the Spirit.

This confession is not reserved for the confessional booth or Sunday’s general confession or any other specific time, but rather is always present as we live through our days. With clear and courageous eyes, we notice how we fall short and where we are called to go—an ongoing examen that leads us forward. We can hear for ourselves the words of Jesus, the Wisdom Teacher, “Neither do I condemn you. Go your way, and from now on do not sin.” Of course, we will fall short again and again in being the person we deeply desire to be, but again and again we see these words written in the earth to lead us into a deeper consciousness and fullness of life.

# PHOTOGRAPHY, CREATION AND THE SOURCE PERCEPTION

ZOE WHITE

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...to KNOW

Rather consists in opening out a way  
Whence the imprisoned splendour may escape,  
Than in effecting entry for a light  
Supposed to be without...

—Robert Browning



**P**hotography is a passion that began to dawn on me when I took early retirement. After the first couple of courses I was hooked, and I've been an enthusiast ever since. But, fascinating as it was to learn about depth of field, shutter speeds and the qualities of different lenses, I've always sensed there was another, deeper inquiry going on. Often, I've had the feeling that I'm very close to something that I just can't seem to see, as if what I'm trying to photograph is just beyond my reach. At these times I really empathize with Wittgenstein's frustration when he exclaimed: "How hard I find it to see what is right in front of my eyes!" Perhaps it was this tantalizing sense of something revealed, yet simultaneously inaccessible, that kept me engaged with photography. Perhaps I was hoping that the camera would eventually help me penetrate the mystery once and for all.

Then, one day, quite unexpectedly, I actually did see with a clarity I'd not known before. I didn't have a camera in my hand; in fact, I had just picked up my basket in the local supermarket and begun walking around the vegetable section, when I noticed something out of the ordinary: everything around me seemed to be suffused with light. It wasn't a brilliant light; everything was just bathed in a soft, gentle radiance.

I looked from the cabbages to the pumpkins, and then across to the apples, trying to work out where the light was coming from. Instinctively, I looked out of the window, then up to the ceiling lights. But *this* light

wasn't located anywhere. It had no source. Actually, it's not even really accurate to call it "a light," because it was *felt* as much as seen, and the feeling was one of lightness; pure relief and refreshment. So profound was this sense of relief that I was walking around with tears in my eyes, breathing out huge sighs of relief.

The lightness was actually a kind of knowing; not an intellectual knowing but the deepest intuition, which told me that, whatever this lightness is, it is wholly intrinsic and that no effort is required. The deep sense of relief arose from realizing that absolutely nothing had to be done, or could ever be done, to *get* this. The tears, which sprang up spontaneously, like water from a living source, told me that this being-at-source just is; the essence of who I am. As I continued to walk around doing my shopping, the light gradually faded and everything seemed to return to "normal," but the *knowing* of what I'd experienced did not fade.

A few months after that day in the supermarket, I noticed that I wasn't doing so much photography any more. I seemed to have lost the taste for it, so I took a break from it for almost a year in order to reflect more deeply on the role it has been playing in my life and, in particular, its relationship with that source perception.

What has become clearer to me now is that photography was probably always being driven by a search for belonging. What I was so desperately trying to see through photography was my oneness with Life. All my photographic efforts had been ways of trying to see my own lightness;

trying to realize what eventually became clear in the supermarket: that all this just *shines*, and that I can't *not* shine along with it.

The belonging I'd been searching for could never be found outside in the world of forms as *object*, because it is the essence of the *subject*. This doesn't mean, however, that photography had played no role in facilitating that perception. It had, for example, given me the opportunity to immerse myself in a passionate, living, involvement with nature. Especially when out on the beach, with the sun on my back, the cries of circling gulls in my ears, wind in my hair and sea-spray on my face, photography had brought me back to my senses and, in doing so, opened a way, through the senses, to that lightness which is being completely at source.

Another thing that became clearer is that my delight in photography actually arose as much from the process as from the product. For a long time I had assumed that photography was about the making of images. I now see how my concern with the end product had the capacity to obscure my appreciation of the fact that, for me at least, a deeper pleasure was to be found in the *looking*, in the way in which the camera drew me into contemplation.

Photography, like meditation, was a training in concentrated attention. It led to a kind of monastic withdrawal from the world while, at the same time, allowing me to remain immersed in the world. The camera acted as a conduit, opening a way of being, regardless of time. It's almost as if, through the lens, "I" merged with a fourth dimension, which is actually nothing other

than self-forgetfulness. Behind the lens, absorbed in the flow of the elements, the normal turbulence of mind comes to rest; the photographer disappears to herself; past and future vanish. As the photographer Annie Leibovitz has observed: "The camera makes you forget you're there. It's not like you are hiding but you forget, you are just looking so much."

What I perceived momentarily that day in the supermarket—the source-perception—was, I believe, nothing other than the natural outcome of those years spent immersed in the deep pleasure of self-forgetfulness.

It's perhaps not surprising that I'm not doing so much photography any more. The effort of trying to realize complete belonging is no longer driving it. The art now is perhaps less the art of photography and more that of deepening trust, handing myself over at source, and unlearning habitual patterns of *trying*. There is less speed now, more loving kindness and less concern with results.


When photography arises now, the images are seen to come and go. What is made of them, what is produced, now seems less important than immersion in the source-being from which they arise. Being and doing are one. Whatever role photography has played in my life in the past, it is now being dissolved in the radiant source-being which we all are. This I know; more than this I am content not to know.

*This is an abridged version of a longer article that can be found on Zoe's blog: [www.thousandwingpress.com](http://www.thousandwingpress.com)*

# LAMENTING RACISM, SEEKING CHANGE

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ut beyond the back of my house there is a clearing. Dead trees have been removed and the brush cut back, creating an opening and overlook to a path winding through a meadow and disappearing into a far horizon of trees and sky. I could not have dreamed of such a view when moving here, though that winding path in some form or another has been a longtime iconic image for my spiritual journey: a road, crooked not straight, leading somewhere, though I know not where, but instinctively, homeward bound, which is there but also right here.

In my youthful days of exploring contemplative practices my orientation was primarily on a deepening journey in silence and solitude, though community has also always been an essential component. I see the need to journey alongside others, often in ways that break my heart and take me where it is hard to go. Where I have grown is embracing the necessity to broaden my experience, heighten my consciousness, and deepen my contemplative awareness through the experience and lens of people of color.

Last spring I journeyed with 12 others, a racially diverse group, to Maryland's Eastern Shore as part of Shalem's Lenten pilgrimage, "In the Footsteps of Harriet Tubman and the Underground Railroad." Harriet Tubman was born into slavery, escaped to freedom in the north, and returned south on multiple missions to rescue others. The Underground Railroad was a network of antislavery activists, safe houses, and routes connecting to free states.

As we gathered in a sacred circle of sharing the first night, I as a white person was feeling shame

at the diabolical sin of slavery and its legacy of racism perpetuated today. I know in my own self the insidious, deeply embedded historical and cultural social conditioning that creates unequal and diminished perceptions and opportunities based simply on one's identified race. I am discomforted and disheartened by knowing that I am still not free of bias despite years of putting myself in situations and groups like this pilgrimage to grow in awareness. My contemplative orientation to see the innate divine connection, beauty, and belovedness of all creation keeps me seeking personal forgiveness, structural restitution, and a road forward together.

Our pilgrimage took us to the Harriet Tubman Underground Railroad National Monument and National Historical Park and sites along a designated 125-mile scenic byway. I was struck by the contrast between images of utter dehumanizing horror at the visitor center and the quiet beauty of the surrounding natural landscape, looking much as it had in the days of Harriet Tubman, our guide told us. I was inspired by stories of courage and survival against all odds. I was also encouraged to hear that some white people were involved in the Underground Railroad, and how many people living nearby, even descendants of slaveholders, welcome this telling of U.S. history; though I was saddened and a bit frightened to learn that not all neighbors felt this way.

At one point on our journey, we were invited on a contemplative walk through marshland, ground most likely walked by enslaved people on their way to freedom, maybe even by Harriet Tubman herself. Our guide later talked about the danger of such treks,

most in the dark of night, the escapees being barefooted. What made the passage even more difficult was the prevalence of sweetgum trees in the area at the time, their abundant porcupine-like seed pods covering paths. In a later healing ritual, each of us were given a sweetgum pod and asked to close our hand around it, slowly squeezing and releasing. My seedpod now sits on my prayer table.

At the end of a day of sites and stories, remembering and reckoning, and relating with my fellow pilgrims, our group circled on a riverfront beach where people had been both delivered into slavery and rescued from it. I was aware that each of us held some aspect of human suffering and holy desire in our bodies. Present was both pain and joy, human frailty and resilience of spirit. Sunlight flickered upon the water. We poured libation honoring the ancestors and our loved ones who had brought us to this point in our lives. The river received our offering.

When we got back in the van, I felt immensely grateful but sobered as to the road ahead. I know anti-racism work is hard. As a white person—and a contemplative—I know I need to do more. I also trust I can and will as I choose to be in the company of people of color where we share honestly and vulnerably and listen to each other's stories and dreams. Perhaps we can feel a way together that clears a space for new movement of the Spirit in ourselves and for the liberation of all people.

# IN PRAISE OF SILENCE

**KATHELEEN MOLONEY-TARR**

GRADUATE OF SHALEM'S *NURTURING THE CALL*: SPIRITUAL GUIDANCE PROGRAM







**F**or the first time in a long while, I am writing. Yesterday I wrote two pieces that had been sitting in me for a few weeks. They needed to be written but this morning I realized that they aren't the main stories. There is something under them that is more important to me and my life and maybe to you.

I have found a perfect quiet nest for my writing here on the third floor of a mountain retreat center. A roof skylight opens above me and allows me to watch pine branches sway and clouds pass above the mountains. It is here, as I sit away from others, that I consider silence, its presence and meaning in my life.

I love silence. The absence of noise, talk, and random sounds allows me to drop into my truest self, that part of me that is stardust, that is connected to all that is and beyond. When I take time to move into stillness, the times of my life in activity and connection are richer in meaning. When I sit with others in silence or prayer, we enter a spiritual place of wonder and awakening.

I didn't always value silence as I do now. An active and full life provides plenty of distraction and movement, often accompanied by sounds. And don't get me wrong. I played West African drums daily for 17 years, so I can get into the rhythms and vibrations of djembe and balafone and feel alive connected to generations of musicians from countries far from this mountain top. Now I facilitate spiritual journey writing groups and sit with directees. I delight in conversations with others as we share personal stories and find new meanings in and for our lives.

Once upon a time, I had to sit still for a very long time. The pain in my shins was intense enough that my active life came to a halt. It felt as if the ligaments in my shins were tearing from the bones. I could not concentrate to read novels or write. After the pain subsided, I wondered at why knitting or lap loom weaving didn't come to me until I was back on my feet and active again. Why was that? I could have had something to do with my hands and mind. Instead I sat alone in silence. Perhaps having yarn and needles or plots and characters would have preoccupied me. Instead, I was in a space of waiting, practicing patience. I had to be totally in what I was in. I sat week after week for nearly a year and a half and now refer to this period as my sitting time. I could not drive or walk for those long months, so every long day was spent in my favorite chair looking into our natural gardens.

The trees lost their leaves and my hostas melted in the cold. Winter woods allowed more sunlight into the house, chickadees flitted and hawk flew from cherry tree to birdbath. Squirrels hunted and gathered acorns. Eventually spring returned, and I watched green leaves sprout, crocuses push through the soil and cherry trees, redbuds and dogwoods blossom. One season passed into another and still I sat, slept little and was held in silence.

At night the strangest thing happened. Whereas I used to have long dreams and spiraling thoughts or lists of to-dos, during this period I did not sleep. I lay in bed letting one moment move to the next. It was strange not to sleep, but lacking sleep didn't matter much because I just sat all day. One night I realized there

was nothing in my mind. Not one thought, worry, quandary, question. For weeks I lay in a black silence awake without anything stirring or turning in my head. The experience was surreal and unsettling. I wondered if I was losing my mental grounding. I did not understand this silence. Sometimes I would consciously put a Taizé chant or prayer in my head and focus on repeating it over and over to pass the sleepless hours. "Spirit most high, I love you and open myself to your healing love."

Over time I began to see this silence as a blessing. Who gets to lose the tape of tasks and worries, must-dos and lists, expectations and self-questioning? The night mind-silence became normal and acceptable to me. I felt it was a gift of spirit to know such absence of inner noise and mental gyrations. Peace and a sense of oneness increased over time. I trusted that this experience was in my highest good even though it was confusing. Perhaps it might help me be who I truly am and be affirming of others on their spiritual journeys. I hope that is the case.

Silence invites me into great solace and awakening to my truest self and who I am called to be. Peace and consolation become the well of my being. Now, years later, I lift my eyes to the skylight where pine branches wave, sit in my nest away from others on retreat, and am grateful for both the struggle and gifts of my sitting time.

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Darlene Meyers  
Darlene Muschett  
John & Karin Nurnberger  
Dawn Peck  
Nan Perkins  
Joy Rains  
Leah & David Rampy  
Ellen Ratmeyer  
Katherine Riggins  
Connie Seraphine  
Jayne Shontell  
Phil & Anne Stone  
Linda Toia  
Clair Ullmann  
Nancy Wagner  
Suzanne Dale Wilcox  
Katherine Young

## SHALEM SUSTAINERS

### Monthly donors to the annual fund

Eleanor & Robert Abarno  
Norman Anderson  
William Bone  
O. Robert Brown  
Ella Campbell  
Rhonda Canby  
Dennis Cho

Greg & Carole Cochran  
Catherine Cox  
Anne Crosthwait  
Randy Crozsmann  
Anita Davidson  
Amy Dills-Moore  
Robin Dorko

Jackson Droney  
Susan Etherton  
Judith Favor  
Jehanne Gheith  
Caroline Goodkind  
Jackie Halstead  
Joan Hatcher

Michael & Barbara Jupin  
Albert Keeney  
Maureen Kramlinger  
Leslie Miller  
Michael Mueller  
John & Karin Nurnberger  
Dawn Peck

Rich Plant  
Mary Pulick  
Tessi Rickabaugh  
Adela Rose  
Janet Salbert  
Robin Seiler  
Jane Sharp

Jessie Smith  
Jo Ann Staebler  
Liz Tuckermanty  
Nan Weir  
Martin Young  
Katie Zimmerman

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

## WIDER WORLD INITIATIVE

Eleanor & Bob Abarno  
Fay Acker  
N. Franklin Adkinson, Jr.  
Anonymous (1)  
CeCe & Gerry Balboni  
O. Robert Brown  
Margaret Bullitt-Jonas  
Mary Catherine Bunting  
Jamie Burnett  
Winston B. Charles  
Greg Cochran  
Crystal Corman  
Henry & Nancy DeNero  
Amy Dills-Moore

Jackson Droney  
Tilden H. Edwards, Jr.  
Carol Eckerman  
Susan Etherton  
Gene & Suzanne Foehl  
Kate Fox  
David Frazelle  
Mark Goodwin  
Dana Greene  
Anne Grizzle  
Buffy Illum  
Lois Lindbloom  
Clare Openshaw  
Kim Parker

Dawn Peck  
Leah & David Rampy  
Scott Rohr  
Lisa Senuta  
Jane Sharp  
Jessie Smith  
Todd Schobel  
Jeanie Sweeney  
Ruth Taylor  
Linda Toia  
Ostein Truitt  
Nan Weir  
Katie Zimmerman

## LEADERSHIP CIRCLE

### Gifts of \$5,000 and above to the annual fund

N. Franklin Adkinson, Jr.  
Anonymous (1)  
CeCe & Gerry Balboni  
Margaret Benefiel  
William Bone  
Winston B. Charles

Raymond E. & Naomi C. Dungan Foundation  
Tilden Edwards  
Susan Etherton  
Nicholas Gilbert  
Mark Goodwin

Carolyn Tanner Irish  
Albert Keeney  
Lois Lindbloom  
Howard Snyder

## SCHOLARSHIP GIFTS

Margaret Benefiel  
Sue Czarnetzky

Susan Etherton  
Lois Lindbloom

## GERALD MAY MEMORIAL FUND DONORS

O. Robert Brown  
Raymond E. & Naomi C. Dungan Foundation  
Clare Openshaw

## VOLUNTEERS & IN-KIND DONATIONS

We are grateful to the many individuals who give of their time or donate travel and other expenses to support Shalem's ministry. This year we are especially thankful for:

- » Susan Etherton, Margaret Benefiel, Robbin Brent, June Schulte, Zoe White, and Christy Berghoef, whose photographs grace these pages, our web site, our monthly eNews, our Facebook page and other places.
- » Frank Neville-Hamilton for his continuing help with Shalem's website and database.
- » Lerita Coleman Brown for her inspired leadership and creative expansion of the Online Howard Thurman Day.
- » Patience Robbins for her creation and leadership of the weekly Prayers for the World and for others who have helped out with leadership this year: Nancy Corson Carter, Karen Day, Dana Greene and Ann Quinn.
- » Those who volunteered at one or both of our Gerald May Seminars: Julia Abdala, Erica Aungst, Kevin Bliss, Laura Caperton, Catalina Connolly-Salazar, Sue

Czarnetzky, Ken Haase, Joan and John Hatcher, Nadine Hathaway, Annie Hisle, Marjorie Lueck, Jean Mennone, Darlene Meyers, Leslie Miller, Richie Siford, Mary Tschudy, Jean Wright.

- » Alan Evans for his continuing fundraising guidance.
- » Shalem's Board of Directors, who donated their time and talent in many different ways throughout the year.
- » Shalem's non-Board Committee members, Sarah Kate Fishback and Susan Dillon, who served Shalem through their committee work.
- » Anne Grizzle, who offered her beautiful Bellfry for our group spiritual direction programs.
- » Those who keep in contact with, and hold in prayer, recent program participants: *Spiritual Guidance Program*: Eleanor Abarno, Margaret Benefiel, Camille Capiello, Anita Davidson, Susan Etherton (coordinator), Sharon Glass, Scott Landis, Rhoda Nary, Adela Rose, Heather Strang, and Keith Walker. *Leading*

*Contemplative Prayer Groups & Retreats Program*: Kristin Bowen, Sallie Chatfield, Lorie Conway, Linda Longmire, Ian White Maher, Kenzie Raulin, Robin Seiler, Susan Steinberg, and Judy Walsh-Mellett.

- » Those who have shared their original reflections with us through a blog or eNews article: Tom Adams, Margaret Benefiel, Bryan Berghoef, Savannah Kate Coffey, Lerita Coleman-Brown, Carole Crumley, Patricia Farrell, Sarah Kate Fishback, Dana Greene, Stuart Higginbotham, Tim Leadem, Shirin McArthur, Jeff Nelson, Patience Robbins, Leah Rampy, Jane Sharp, Mary van Balen, Ernest Yau
- » Other individuals who made additional in-kind contributions: Ridgeway Addison, CeCe Balboni, David Canada, Kiok Cho, Greg Cochran, Phil Cover, Joy Crawford, Ann Dean, Bill Dietrich, Tilden Edwards, Sid Fowler, Marshall Jenkins, Cheryl Notari, Clare Openshaw, Diane Paras, Eileen Quinn, Phillip Stephens, Jeanie Sweeney, Therese Taylor-Stinson, Francie Thayer, Liz Ward, Nan Weir, Matthew Wright



# A PLACE OF GOD'S TRANSFORMING LOVE

NAN WEIR



I have many fond memories of my Shalem experiences over the past twenty years—long-term program residencies, Iona/Lindisfarne pilgrimages, wilderness retreats, Shalem Society gatherings, group spiritual direction workshops, Personal Spiritual Deepening Programs—and more recently, as a participant in the Soul of Leadership Program and as a member of the Board of Directors. As I write these words, and reflect on my Shalem experiences, I realize they have been so much more than just fond memories; they have provided spiritual community, core faith experiences, times of awakening and discovery, and opportunities to share the great joys and sorrows of life. Through these experiences, both my faith and relationship with God have deepened and I have learned more about the nature of my true self, developed many friendships, and been inspired to serve others. I've also had the great privilege of listening to the stories of many other

people whose lives have been transformed through Shalem programs.

As Thomas Merton wrote, *“Love is our true destiny. We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves—we find it with another.”* I am very grateful for being a part of the Shalem spiritual community and for the impact that Shalem has had on my life. In the midst of these challenging times where people are longing for greater purpose and meaning in their lives, I believe that Shalem is uniquely positioned to offer spiritual community that transforms lives, ongoing support for contemplative living and leadership, and inspiration to serve. Because I hope to ensure that the gifts I have been given will be shared with future generations, many years ago I named Shalem as a beneficiary in my will and became a member of The Shekinah Society. My hope is that Shalem can continue to extend its reach in the world and be a place of God's transforming love for many years.

## MAKING A BEQUEST TO SHALEM

When you make your estate plans, we hope you will consider a gift to Shalem. We have been richly blessed by those who have remembered Shalem in their wills, as Nan Weir has done. These gifts greatly assist Shalem's ministry in the world and are a special way for a 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 thank you and welcome you as a Shekinah Society member!

## SHALEM'S SHEKINAH SOCIETY

The Shekinah Society is for those individuals who have put Shalem in their wills. We give for this special support and care 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  
Susan & Jon Etherton  
Alan Evans  
Judith Favor  
Doris Froelich  
Linda M. Kapurch  
Joann Klink  
Kirby Lewis

Sandra Mackie  
Carl McColman  
Monica Maxon  
Louise E. Miller  
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 & Frank Toia  
Nan Weir  
Emily Wilmer  
Sandra Hay Wilson



## 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, 2019 AND 2018

ASSETS	2019	2018
Current Assets . . . . .	\$ 939,878	\$ 825,385
Investments . . . . .	941,701	677,952
Fixed Assets . . . . .	24,594	31,526
Contributions Receivable . . . . .	40,867	90,122
Other Assets . . . . .	<u>13,795</u>	<u>13,795</u>
<b>TOTAL ASSETS . . . . .</b>	<b><u>1,960,835</u></b>	<b><u>1,638,780</u></b>
LIABILITIES AND NET ASSETS		
Current Liabilities. . . . .	78,038	90,525
Net Assets		
Unrestricted . . . . .	1,166,550	985,101
Temporarily restricted . . . . .	716,247	563,154
TOTAL NET ASSETS . . . . .	<u>1,882,797</u>	<u>1,548,255</u>
<b>TOTAL LIABILITIES &amp; NET ASSETS . . . . .</b>	<b><u>\$ 1,960,835</u></b>	<b><u>1,638,780</u></b>

### CONDENSED STATEMENT OF ACTIVITIES FOR YEARS ENDED JUNE 30, 2019 AND 2018

REVENUE AND SUPPORT	2019	2018
Programs, contractual work and publications. . . . .	\$ 659,732	657,292
Contributions. . . . .	557,877	900,198
Other Income. . . . .	6,120	8,151
Investment income (losses). . . . .	<u>61,924</u>	<u>51,380</u>
<b>TOTAL REVENUE AND SUPPORT . . . . .</b>	<b><u>1,285,653</u></b>	<b><u>1,617,021</u></b>
EXPENSES		
Programs, including allocated staff compensation . . . . .	704,921	676,528
Administration:		
Staff compensation & benefits . . . . .	63,419	59,607
Rent and other. . . . .	52,593	229,654
Fundraising expenses. . . . .	<u>130,178</u>	<u>88,551</u>
<b>TOTAL EXPENSES. . . . .</b>	<b><u>951,111</u></b>	<b><u>1,054,340</u></b>
<b>Total Increase (Decrease) in Net Assets . . . . .</b>	<b>334,542</b>	<b>562,681</b>
<b>NET ASSETS, Beginning of Year . . . . .</b>	<b><u>1,548,255</u></b>	<b><u>985,574</u></b>
<b>NET ASSETS, End of Year . . . . .</b>	<b><u>\$ 1,882,797</u></b>	<b><u>\$1,548,255</u></b>

## SHALEM BOARD OF DIRECTORS 2018-2019

Fay Acker  
Winston B. Charles  
Greg Cochran  
Amy Dills-Moore  
Jackson Droney  
Rhett Engelking  
Susan Etherton  
Mark Goodwin  
Buffy Illum

Keith Kristich  
Kim Parker  
Dawn Peck  
Scott Rohr  
Lisa Senuta  
Jessie Smith  
Ostein Truitt  
Nan Weir  
Katie Zimmerman

## SHALEM ADJUNCT STAFF 2018-2019

Fay Acker  
Ridgeway Addison  
Susie Allen  
CeCe Balboni  
David Canada  
Lerita Coleman Brown  
Greg Cochran  
Kiok Chang Cho  
Phil Cover  
Susan Vincent Cox  
Marshall Craver  
Joy Crawford  
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Anne Grizzle  
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Marshall Jenkins  
Hong-il Kim  
Chuck McCorkle  
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Diane Paras  
Eileen Quinn  
Eliza Ramos  
Leah Rampy  
Patience Robbins  
Emily Schwenker  
Trish Stefanik  
Phillip Stephens  
Frances Thayer  
Nancy Weir  
Matthew Wright

## OFFICE INFORMATION

Shalem Institute  
3025 Fourth Street, NE  
Washington, DC 20017  
301-897-7334  
Fax: 202-595-0336

Office Hours: Monday to Friday,  
9 a.m.-5 p.m.  
shalem.org  
E-mail: info@shalem.org

## SHALEM STAFF 2018-2019

### **Executive Director**

Margaret Benefiel

### **Program Directors**

Margaret Benefiel  
Winston B. Charles  
Ann Dean  
Elizabeth Ward

### **Program Administrators**

Katy Gaughan, Michelle Abbott Geuder, 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**

Pearl Nana-Atoo/Stacy Rancourt

### **Senior Fellow for Spiritual Guidance**

Rose Mary Dougherty, SSND

### **Founder & Senior Fellow**

Tilden H. Edwards, Jr.

EDITED BY MONICA MAXON

DESIGN: PEÑA DESIGN, INC.

PHOTOGRAPHY: MARGARET BENEFIEL, ROBBIN BRENT, SUSAN ETHERTON (INCLUDING COVER), JUNE SCHULTE, ZOE WHITE

# 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

## CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE & LEADERSHIP

SHALEM'S IN-DEPTH PROGRAMS SUPPORT YOUR GOD-GUIDED CAREER,  
PERSONAL LIFE AND MINISTRY WITH OTHERS.

### 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

### YOUNG ADULT CONTEMPLATIVE LIFE & LEADERSHIP INITIATIVE

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

### THE SOUL OF LEADERSHIP: ENGLAND & U.S.

For help in integrating spiritual heart practices with leadership realities



SHALEM  
INSTITUTE FOR SPIRITUAL FORMATION

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