Ways of the Spirit

Ways of the Spirit
VOICES OF WOMEN

M. Darrol Bryant and Val Lariviere, eds.

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Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women

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To Delores "Debe" Bryant, Claire Hodges Bagale and Naheed Ali,
three remakable women.

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Acknowledgements

Many individuals and institutions have contributed to the Ways of the Spirit project that is the background to this volume. First, I want to thank Renison University College. Hired as a Professor of Religion and Culture in 1973, I spent thirty-four years teaching, learning, and interacting with students. For that I am immensely grateful. Then, when I retired in 2007, Renison allowed me to establish a Centre for Dialogue and Spirituality in the World Religions. At the same time, the question of a "festschrift" arose. A "festschrift" is a European academic tradition whereby former students, colleagues, and friends contribute scholarly essays to present to a retiring teacher. My immediate response was, "No, I don't want a festschrift, we have enough scholarly articles. But what I would like is a bunch of writings by former students, colleagues, and friends that would share their area of passion and expertise for the general reader." This would be something appropriate for the new Centre for Dialogue and Spirituality in the World Religions. The mandate of the Centre includes public forums and public education to encourage the remarkable growth of intra- and interfaith dialogue that has become a defining feature of the religious life of humankind in our time. Thus the "Ways of the Spirit" project began.

I want also to thank three of my former students for their assistance: Dr. Vic Froese, my first student to pursue doctoral studies, who is now the Library Director at the Canadian Mennonite University in Winnipeg, Dr. Doris Jakobsh, now in the Department of Religious Studies at the University of Waterloo, and especially Ms. Val Lariviere, now in the Costume and Prop Warehouse at the Stratford Festival in Ontario as well as Community Living Stratford. Val agreed to join me as an editor for this second volume in the Ways of the Spirit project. Her editorial acumen has been invaluable as she brought her own insights concerning the ways of women to this project.

The first volume of this unusual project was entitled *Ways of the Spirit: Dialogue, Diversity and Spirituality.* This second volume *Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women* celebrates the remarkable emergence of women in the

spiritual life of humankind, especially in the West. While women have always been the majority practioners of global spirituality, they have been denied leadership roles in the great traditions. But now that is changing, slowly, but surely and irrevocably. I want to thank all of the contributors from around the world who have shared their expertise and passion with me creating an impressive list of papers, essays, and poetic treatments that answer the question of ways of the spirit. This second volume *Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women* brings together the voices of twenty-four women and discloses something of the way women discern the presence of the spirit in human affairs. I am especially grateful to the women who have contributed to this second volume.

I want also to thank those who commented on the selections contained in this second volume. You know who you are, and I am grateful. But I do need to acknowledge the editorial assistance of Susan Hodges Bryant, partner in life and editor for all my projects. It would have been impossible without her assistance.

And finally a big thanks to our publisher, Christian Snyder at Pandora Press in Kitchener, Ontario for his sage advice and assistance. It is always a pleasure to work with such a gifted and helpful editor, designer, and publisher.

Introduction

M. Darrol Bryant

It is my conviction that we find ourselves in a time when the religious/spiritual life of humankind is undergoing a welcome sea-change. This may come as a surprise. In the popular media, we are given a different image of the religious/spiritual world, one characterized by aggression, conflict, reaction, hostility and terrorism. While violence is too often perpetrated in the name of religion, the media generally ignores the efforts of countless human beings across the globe who are living lives of love and compassion that spring from the heart of their spirituality. For every self-styled religious fanatic, there are a thousand faith-filled men and women bringing hope and healing, love and compassion to our world. For every word of hatred, hostility, and division, there are many voices engaged in dialogue.

My journey into the diverse paths of living spirituality began in the late 1970s when I realized the need to deepen my book knowledge of religion with an experiential encounter with the many traditions of spirituality. In short, I needed to meet the people who embody them. When I now reflect on these traditions, my mind is filled with memories of people rather than tenets and abstractions. Hindus Shivamurthy, Shrivatsa and Sandhya, Muslims Syed and Naheed, Buddhists Doboom, Nishiyama, and Chungkey, Sikhs Mohinder and Mona, Thomas Christians Paulos and Sister Vandana, Jews Alon and Miriam, Jains Swamiji at Shravanabelagola make up my inner image of the world of spirituality. They have been guides into this wonderfully diverse world, and have become beloved friends. Let me share with you one example of the sea-change I see happening in the world.

In September 1993, the Bryant family was again in India on sabbatical. We traveled from Rishikesh to a Christian ashram in the foothills of the Himalayas. The ride was hilarious, if not a bit dangerous. First, our bus, driven by a Sikh in a green day-glow turban, plowed through overflowing streams, soaking everyone in the bus. We then piled into an open jeep

for a careening ride up the switchbacks into the mountains. We arrived just as the ashram, Jevan Dhara, was gathering for a service in the chapel. We were welcomed by Sister Vandana, a remarkable Catholic sister who together with a colleague, Sister Ishpriya, had established Jevan Dhara. As we walked towards the chapel, she explained to Lucas (15) and Emma (12) that the ashram had many rules and she expected them to break them all.

The chapel was set on a ridge with large windows on three sides facing out towards the Himalayas. The snow-covered peaks became cherry pink ice cream in the setting sun, and an Indian dancer glided across the floor to the beat of a tabla, accompanied by the harmonium and those curious reed instruments. On the walls were the symbols of many of the world's religions, and at the altar was an image of Jesus in a lotus posture with his hand raised in the mudra of peace. Seated on the floor were the permanent residents of Jevan Dhara along with guests from Europe, the USA, and Canada, and an Irish priest on sabbatical from Japan. Texts from sacred literature were read, hymns/bhajans were sung, the eucharist was enacted, and prayers were chanted in Hindi. This confluence of many paths in one harmonious liturgy was unanticipated, stunning and moving.[1] We were so taken by the spirit of the place that we stayed a week rather than a weekend. Such stunning encounters took place time and again with Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Lingayats, Jains and Parsees in our travels across India. Our experience of being welcomed and befriended was altogether different from the media portrayal of hostility-to-the-other as a dominant feature of the religious world.

The creative and pioneering lives of people such as Vandana Mataji, charting new paths of spirituality, are the focus of *Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women*. This volume celebrates the contributions of women to the dialogue and diversity of global spirituality. It brings together many voices from the astonishing global dialogue of our time. What is especially striking about these voices is how they transcend the dichotomy between sacred and secular. Here one sees that the spiritual is deeply embedded in the worldly, that there is a numinous presence in the everyday life of humankind.

Val Lariviere, my co-editor, was quick to pick up on this feature of this volume dedicated to the experiences of women. And the next three

paragraphs are her observations. Val noticed that most cultures today spend some effort on including women in traditional male-dominated institutions. It seems, however, that a woman's path to spirit unfolds differently than that of a man and that there is something to be learned by examining this difference.

Often women begin their journeys as witnesses. It has not always been possible for a woman to enter a faith stream directly by an active choice. Men, on the other hand, can position themselves to rise within an institutional religious hierarchy. So women witness first and only later become participants, and even then their options are different than those of a man who may self-identify as an expositor of a faith from very early on.

It might be said that a woman's journey to faith is more organic. Her search may begin through her work as a caretaker, tending the young, the old, the sick. She may start her journey through a need to contribute to the welfare of others. Or she may search for solace after a tragedy. At some point, though, being a witness may not be enough to fill the gap or longing within herself, and she begins the journey to find completion or wholeness. Often a woman begins alone looking for her resonant place and when it is recognized, she can then sink deeply into it. And this deeper knowing may lead her to teach from the place of her new-found truth. And here begins the dialogue.

As you absorb the stories in this collection, you may begin to see how women are ideally situated to push forward into inter and intra religious dialogue in an organic way. Each woman has moved along a path until she has found the place where her soul could take root and she could grow out of herself toward the other. And, since, her journey is alive, organic and singular or in the company of others, it may also be new. And change may happen. Then in the meeting of "the other" she will communicate openly her own experience and listen in return to the journey of another. And there will be voices raised. These observations serve us well as we turn now to the journeys embedded in the writing encountered here.

The volume opens with two poems by Pamela O'Rourke who has traveled with me to India on several occasions. "At the Dargha" and "In Vrindaban" focus on two women, one Muslim, one Hindu, in north India.

The tone of the opening poems is amplified in "On the Way of Speaking and of Listening" by Dr. Judith Miller, Professor Emerita at Renison University College. Judith has been a colleague and friend since the 1970s. A professor of English, she has written extensively on the Canadian short story and on Alice Munro, the Canadian winner of the Nobel Prize for Literature in 2013. Here, Judith details and reflects on specific, personal moments of speaking and listening that reveal to her the very heart of dialogue. From a conversation with a Buddhist monk at a conference to a bedside chat with her grandchildren, these exchanges elicit delight and even transformation.

Casey Clifford Rock, a long-time friend and the mother of my godson Jesse, explores "The Way of Yoga" as it has come from the East to the West and enriched her life. Casey worked for the CBC as a librarian and researcher before pursuing a master of divinity degree in Toronto. But it was in yoga and meditation, especially in becoming a yoga teacher, that she discovered her ministry: one of "homecoming." Yoga has become a way of meeting across the East/West divide as well as a conjoining of the sacred and the secular, the mind and the body.

Casey's contribution is followed by "The Way of Gobind Sadan." Gobind Sadan is a spiritual community located on the outskirts of New Delhi, and Mary Pat Fisher, who has made it her home, is the noted author of the world religions textbook *Living Religions*. Founded by Baba Virsa Singh, a Sikh who taught the unity of all prophets, Gobind Sadan (House of God) has become a vibrant interfaith community celebrating the major figures and festivals of Muslims, Hindus, Buddhists, Jains, Jews, and Christians. Mary Pat introduced me to Gobind Sadan and her revered teacher Baba Virsa Singh in the 1980s. We have been friends, and I often take students to Gobind Sadan when in India.

Alice Bloch holds a doctorate from Temple University and an M.A. in choreography from UCLA. More importantly, she has been dancing all her life. Inspired by Isadora Duncan (1877–1927), Alice has danced her way into the hearts of many in performances across the USA and in Europe. She has lived much of her life in St. Louis teaching dance, and her "The Way of Dance" is a testimony to the wonder of dance. For Alice, dance can become a way of spiritual transformation.

There is much of irony, insight, and humour in "The Way of Aging: Liberation and the Later Years" by Dr. Kendra Smith. Kendra recounts some of her own story, starting with her reflections on the day her Unitarian/Universalist Church celebrated its "Doctors of Durability," whose members, including her, had turned eighty. Kendra has a doctorate in psychology, became a Buddhist in her teenage years, and tells her story in a poetic form, bringing the insights of a lifetime to her reflection on her father's and brother's later years. She has been a friend for thirty years.

"My Way of Jihad: Joys and Struggles of a Muslim Woman in North America" is a rich personal account by Dr. Idrisa Pandit. Idrisa is currently the Director of Studies in Islam at Renison University College and a colleague and friend. She grew up in Kashmir and completed her studies in the USA, where she initiated an interfaith chaplaincy at Wellesley College in Massachusetts before coming to Canada. Her struggle for a faithful authenticity in new contexts will resonate with many.

I first met Holly Pearse when she was a graduate student in the new Wilfrid Laurier/University of Waterloo doctoral program. In "Our Ways are not Your Ways," we see her charting a new way for Jewish Cultural Studies – a way that neither restricts Judaism to religious studies, nor wholly empties Jewish life and culture of its numinous dimensions. Now Dr. Pearse, she brings a wonderful sense of humour to her studies as she pioneers a new way of engaging Jewish life.

Siobhan Chandler turns our attention to the contemporary "spiritual but not religious" movement in the West. I met Siobhan when she was doing her graduate work. Her study of this contemporary movement led her to see that it had roots in the esoteric traditions of the West and the East. "The Way of the Spiritual Seeker: Western Monism" takes the reader into the worldview that underlies the "spiritual but not religious" seekers of the West.

Amber Westfall was a student at the University of Waterloo who, I discovered, had read the works of Joseph Campbell before coming to the university. She joined me on the first Study Term Abroad in 2000. We traveled for three months in India encountering the living religious traditions of India. We met with Tibetan Buddhists in Dharamsala in the north, with Hindus in Madurai in the south, as well as with Muslims,

Sikhs, Lingayats, Jains, and Thomas Christians during our travels. (Other writers in this volume, Emma Claire Bryant and Cara L. Pelletier, now Cara Pelletier-Thompson, were also among that group.) Amber's poem "In a Rickshaw" was part of the journal she kept during our travels. She is now an urban homesteader in Ottawa and runs The Wild Garden.

Amber's poem is followed by "The Way of Women: in Search of Love and Wisdom" by Dr. Ursula King, Professor Emerita of Theology and Religious Studies at Bristol University. Born in Germany, educated in India and France, and living and teaching in Great Britain and now around the world, Ursula has been a colleague and friend since the 1980s. She has written extensively on Teilhard de Chardin and on Women's Spirituality and has been deeply involved in the dialogue of religions. "The Way of Women" stands at the heart of this volume and gives orientation to the contemporary movement of women.

"The Way of Animal Friendship" points to how widely we cast our net in this volume. Dr. Anne Innis Dagg is a distinguished zoologist, teacher, and feminist. Educated at the University of Toronto and the University of Waterloo, she has taught in several universities world-wide. She has published twenty volumes including *The Giraffe: Its Biology, Behaviour, and Ecology*, a similar book on the camel, and most recently, *Animal Friendship*. In the latter, she documents the friendships within the animal world.

Pamela O'Rourke's poem "A Second Revelation" speaks to the insight that might surprisingly emerge on a journey or over a lifetime. It is a timely suggestion as we turn to the next two contributions: "The Way of the Creek" by Susan Hodges Bryant and "The Way of Serendipity" by Joyce Gladwell. Both unfold in relation to Elmira, the local community in which I live in southern Ontario.

"The Way of the Creek: Dancing the Canada Jig" tells the story of what happens when a town discovers, as Elmira did in 1989, that its water supply has become contaminated. Susan focuses the story on the Canagagigue Creek – locals call it the Canada Jig – that runs through the middle of the Uniroyal, now Chemtura, the chemical company responsible for the pollution. It is a cautionary tale that reminds readers that only persistent citizen involvement can mitigate such threats to our earth. Susan, my wife

for nearly forty years, has been constant in her activism on behalf of the creek and local water.

Joyce Gladwell, a long-time friend and fellow Elmiran, recounts in "The Way of Serendipity" the story of the amazing impact a group of women has had upon the community of Elmira over the past forty years. Mothers became the catalysts for addressing pressing social and mental health issues in the community. As they gathered together, they found strength in each other and founded lasting institutions which continue to foster well-being in our community. It is an inspiring story in which Joyce glimpses the presence of something beyond.

Cara Pelletier-Thompson was a student in my Study Term Abroad in 2000 and wrote poetically of her experience of the Harimandir, popularly known as the Golden Temple, the holiest shrine of the Sikh tradition, in Amritsar, India. "My Visit to the Golden Temple" speaks of the spiritual vitality of holy places.

We shift to the Chinese traditions in Chris Hale's contribution "The Way of the Yijing," about a text widely known in the West as the *I Ching*. Chris was a graduate student from the University of Sydney studying in Beijing with Tu Weiming, a New Confucian scholar, when we met in Beijing at a lecture on Chinese Buddhism. I learned that she had long regarded the *Yejing,* or Book of Changes, a text that goes back as far as 2500 BCE, as a practical guide in life. Her essay guides the reader into a spirituality not well known in the West.

The Grail Quest has played an important role in Western traditions since the 1200s, and has been a constant presence in the life of Kathleen Jay since her teenage years. In "The Way of the Grail," Kathleen, who was a student in my course on the Religious Quest during my first year at Renison College (1973–74), explores this tradition and its existential meaning.

Devon Spier is a recent graduate of the University of Waterloo with a double major in Religious Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies. Her contribution on "The Way of a Jewish Feminist" speaks to the emergence of Jewish women reclaiming and articulating their voice in the story of Jewish people through the ages.

Susan Kennel Harrison bravely engages the painful issue of how we

portray the "religious other." Out of her engagement with the Abrahamic traditions – she has led a "Scriptural Reasoning" group at the University of Toronto – Susan asks how Christians have portrayed Jews, Muslims, and fellow Christians. "On the Way to Creating a New Story Together" acknowledges the failures of Christians to listen to the religious other. Susan argues that we must create a new story out of dialogue with the religious other both within our own tradition and with the traditions of Jews and Muslims. I met Susan in the context of her Mennonite tradition's engagement with Shi'a Muslims from Qom in Iran.

Rehanna Rajabai, a graduate in engineering from the University of Waterloo, contributes "An Ismaili Way: Lessons from My Faith," shedding light on this little-known strand of Islam. The Ismaili community of 15 million Muslims is headed by the Aga Khan, a visionary leader who was made an Honorary Canadian Citizen in 2010. Rehanna participated in a course on Dialogue in the Abrahamic Traditions that I gave in Prague in 2006. She is now a professional engineer who has worked as an urban engineer in Calgary and recently undertaken an MA in Urban Design at the University of Toronto.

Nancy Cleaves is outwardly a spiritual guide, relationship coach, author and storyteller, but inwardly she travels the mystic road. Nancy's "The Way of the Mystic" leads us into a cosmic spirituality. It draws upon her book *A Story to Live By*. Nancy studied with Matthew Fox and has a doctorate in Creation Spirituality, but it is her own mystic journey that is at the heart of her contribution.

Emma Claire Bryant is my daughter and has been traveling with me to India since she was four years old. She now spends part of every year in India. "The Market Lady is Dead" and "The Market Lady's House" are Emma's moving accounts of being present at the death of her friend Judith's mother and their subsequent visit to clean the Market Lady's house. In their detail, these vignettes express Emma's deep love for the Indian world and its people.

Val Lariviere now works in the costume warehouse of the Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontario. In the early 1990s, she returned to university to finish her degree in Religious Studies and wrote an impressive senior honours paper on the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* before going on to do an

M.A. in Religion and Culture. "The Way of the Tibetan Book of the Dead" is a very personal account of her journey into that text. As Val explored the meaning of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead,* she found her own views of death shifting and moving. Val has also been an invaluable co-editor of this volume.

The final essay in this collection, "The Way of an Eco-Chaplain," points to a new understanding of ministry emerging in our time. Lauren Van Ham is the Dean of an interfaith seminary in Berkeley, California. I met Lauren at a BIG I Conference on Inclusive Theology, Spirituality & Consciousness at the Franciscan Renewal Center in Scottsdale, Arizona, and witnessed her ordination as an "eco-chaplain." Here, she shares her story and sense of calling to a form of ministry that is centered in the shift from "ego to eco-consciousness." Her contribution points to the creative and healing contributions women are making to contemporary spirituality across the globe.

The volume concludes with another poem by Pamela O'Rourke, "Holumba Haven." Here, Pamela evokes the place where the India 2013 trip concluded its journey into the living traditions of spirituality in India. The poem marks a fitting end to this book's journey into the many ways and voices of women, and the many paths of spirituality around the globe. I trust that you will find these voices as inspiring as Val and I have.

Endnotes

[1] Sister Vandana (1919–2013), a Catholic nun, was a remarkable person. She was inspired by the Second Vatican Council (1962–65) and deeply influenced by Swami Abhishiktanada (1910–1973), a Benedictine monk who had come to India as Father Henri LeSaux in 1948. He spent tenty-five years exploring the depths of Hindu and Christian spirituality. Sisters Vandana and Ishpriya lived for five years in the Divine Light Ashram with Swami Chidananda Saraswati (1916–2008) learning the Hindu Way before establishing the Christian ashram, Jevan Dhara. Her writings include *Living With Hindus*, *Nama Japa,* and *Christian Ashrams*. She was also a gifted musician. We had planned to stay at Jevan Dhara for a weekend but stayed a week, and the kids loved it too.

In Vrindaban

Pamela O'Rourke

Tiny frail
her eyes fill her whole face
she stands in the dust of the street
motionless
frayed cotton sari
hanging loosely
feet bare

and sings...

a sweet fragile bird
singing her prayer
from the dusty street
eyes lifted
hand raised
singing her love
from her ancient heart

Her sweetness rises like a trembling bird
her prayer gently falls
drifts
over the market place

At the Dargah

Pamela O'Rourke

she
i remember
at the great shrine - the tomb of Nizamuddin

wrapped in her pale blue sari veil
as devotees scurried
making offerings
chatting meeting picture taking
buying flowers selling offerings
petitioning weeping texting
talking praying prostrating
bowing circling singing

she held her child
still
in her lap
a point of calm
a quiet prayer
in the midst of life swirling

her stillness pulled me in

On the Way of Speaking and of Listening

Judith Maclean Miller

This morning in March is crisply cold, -8 degrees C, so the snow outside my window is bright with myriad points of light, many of them full of rainbow colour, and this room is snow-lighted, also touched with rainbows on the walls and on my page as the prism in the window moves gently in the draught. As I begin to think about dialogues I have had, M. Darrol Bryant and S. A. Ali's book, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Promise and Problems,* is on my mind. It has taught me a great deal about dialogue. I am writing on a placemat on my knee – so that there will be time/space for reflections to gather.

At a conference which Darrol Bryant helped to organize in Korea, I met a scarlet-robed Buddhist monk, whose glasses kept sliding down his nose. We were talking about the possibilities of inter-religious dialogue, both of us carefully respectful, when the conversation turned to poetry.

"Do your students write poetry?" he asked.

"Mmm. No. Not often," I replied. "It is often a struggle even to get them to read it."

He looked at me sternly over his glasses.

"Do you mean they do not read or write about the green land and the fish in the water?" His manner and way of speaking were clear-cut, edged.

"No . . . No, they don't," I stammered, thinking about snowdrifts and frozen rivers.

He drew a long breath. "You have allowed them to be not human."

In the face of his brisk statement, I could only falter, "I try my best."

It was a telling moment I have remembered for some twenty years which has informed much of my classroom practice since. Often, I hear the clear tones of his voice as I stand before resistant students in a university classroom. The delight has been to discover that more and more often,

students are open to poetry – to reading, speaking and appreciating its sometimes odd ways of being in the world. That long-ago conversation, almost a dialogue, opened a wide space for me, where poetry could be acknowledged, even taken for granted, considered essential to being human. It was a conversation that reverberated for me as a moment of clarity, chiming in my memory like a call to prayer.

In the Introduction to *Muslim-Christian Dialogue*, M. Darrol Bryant and S. A. Ali set out features of dialogue, in an attempt to answer the question "what is dialogue?" My exchange with the Buddhist monk did not match all the features of respectful dialogue set out there, but it was nevertheless a moment of resonating insight in conversation. Would he have been as frank if we had not been exchanging ideas at some length?

Scarcely a month ago, I was tucking a small granddaughter, a lively three year old, into her bed. She was stalling, seeking to prolong her day through conversation. She was telling me about her littlest cousin, Avery.

"She is our smallest cousin," she reported.

"Oh," I said. "Is she even smaller than Spencer (her younger brother who is eighteen months old)?"

"Oh yes. She is. Much smaller than Spencer." She sat up in bed to think about it, in a tie-dyed T-shirt belonging to someone much bigger than she is, her tousled blonde hair curling around her face. Her eyes widened with sudden insight, as she shrugged her shoulders and lifted her arms wide in her gesture of astonishment.

"Spencer is one," she explained, "but Avery doesn't even *have* a number."

"Oh my goodness," was my response as it so often is in these exchanges. She snuggled into her blankets with this new insight, hugging it to herself. Both of us understood that we had learned something together.

That mutual exploration does not proceed in a spirit of debate or even of apology. It seeks to proceed in a spirit of dialogue – of honest, open and frank exchange – that leads to mutual understanding.[1]

And I realized that she is often the speaker, the instructor, while I listen with all possible attentiveness. Glimpses into the child's world delight me with their unexpected juxtapositions. And I remember, as I am often the

speaker, how delicious it is to be fully the listener, to experience the grace of receiving, to be led into new places and new shared understanding.

About six months ago, two students lingered after a class meeting of "Islam in the World" to talk with me about their midterm test and how to prepare for it. Dark-eyed and enthusiastic, they were excited to be learning about the Golden Age of Islam, about the heritage of themselves and their families as Muslims.

"In school, we have always called that time 'The Dark Ages,'" one of them said indignantly. "I had no idea that Muslim scholars discovered all those things in medicine and algebra and all."

"We are Muslim," the other one said, "and we never knew these things. Last night, we were studying at my house for our midterm and asking each other about the caliphates, about what they did and my father heard us and he asked us what we were doing and we told him" (her words tumbled over one another) "and we told him and he cried. He had tears in his eyes because he was so amazed that we were learning these things in a Canadian university. Imagine. We are Palestinian and we are Muslim and we didn't know these things until we came to Canada."

We were talking about a course at the University of Waterloo which I could say began, in large measure, because of this book, *Muslim-Christian Dialogue,* which showed me several years ago how much we have to learn from each other, and how much we do not know about each other. When my family would not let me go to drive aid trucks over the mountains from Pakistan into Afghanistan after 9/11 – which I could have done – I know how to drive rickety vehicles with manual shift – I wrote poems – and then I settled into designing a program of Studies in Islam for the University of Waterloo.

Through nine levels of approval, I was the speaker often stumbling over presentations in my urgent need to show my colleagues how important it was to launch this inter-disciplinary program. They granted me the grace of listening, of listening with respect and close attention, of offering response. They entered into the spirit of the project, with helpful suggestions and advice, from Religious Studies through Engineering to Mathematics, Music, Political Science and Environment Science, they offered courses and instructors. They helped me ensure that this program

would not be an exotic, odd capsule off to one side, but would be integrated into the work of the university. They have been there to give lectures in the first term of the first course.

One of the surprises in this program has been the food. I have always enjoyed the foods of other cultures, but I had not known how important hospitality and generosity are among Muslims. Delicious offerings keep appearing on the table outside my office. Sometimes they include notes, and often they don't. My colleagues chuckle about them and offer to help taste. These gifts have become, themselves, key participants in many dialogues, as we discuss the foods, the students who brought them and the progress of this first course. Early in the term, shyly asked questions from previously uninvolved people included, "Aren't you afraid to give that course? Who would take a course like that?" Now the questions are "Did Sarah do OK on her mid-term? Is Ibrahim finding what he needs for his project? Is it really true that algebra was developed in the Muslim world? Why is our education system so Euro-centric?" Their engagement is heart-warming.

> Dialogue can proceed only if we allow the dialogue partners to define themselves, their beliefs and practices. This self-definition (and self-revelation) is essential in dialogue. We often find in dialogue in general and especially in dialogue between Christians and Muslims that we carry, often unconsciously, very curious stereotypes of and unconscious prejudices about the other.[2]

Yes. And it is wonderful to have the opportunity to explore those in an academic atmosphere of inquiry and respect.

Two weeks ago, in Ottawa, I was putting another fair-haired, bright-eyed granddaughter to bed. Like her cousin, she too was using dialogue to stall – maybe it runs in the family? Is there a fundamental need for dialogue in the human species? Maybe. We are certainly a convivial species. This five-year-old, not ready to go to sleep, was seeking information – about fairies.

"Where do they live? Why can't we see them? Are they afraid of us?" And then, finally, in exasperation, "Why don't *any* of them live in Ottawa?"

She listened to my answers with every cell in her small body, searching and earnest, sitting lotus-fashion on her bed. She was showing me how intensely, how utterly, it is possible to ask, to listen. I wondered about

telling her that I saw fairies once. I was concerned about blundering into her world with my experience … Dialogue is not always easy. How to explain that a person does not so much see fairies as become aware of them, busy at the edge of a wood in Saint John, N.B., near the hospital, rustling about in the dry leaves, getting ready for their healing work in the hospital, letting me know that they were there, reassuring? How to explain that sometimes in the evening garden, they are simply there? I learned that a lack of courage (mine) can truncate dialogue, especially dialogue that is reaching beyond the everyday into the numinous or the spiritual, where language can be halting, inadequate, unpractised.

Dialogue is a way of meeting one another across the similarities of our religious faiths and communities. But such meeting is not easy.

Indeed. It is not easy. And often it needs more than one conversation, with time in-between to work out the language, the meeting points beyond clichés or glib exchange.

And, of course, there have been conversations with Darrol Bryant. He has been a friend and often a mentor over many years in a shared academic world. Usually, we are trying to arrive at some understanding of a situation or idea. When I go to Darrol troubled about something or other, I never come away with anything as simplistic as an "answer," but with a renewed sense of strength or purpose. The answer, of course, is the dialogue. Our conversations usually make their way toward laughter, in an amused acceptance of our own foibles and absurdities. We do not often speak directly about religion, but it is always there as sub-text. We know we both seek intensely, listen fully, respect each other and acknowledge The Other, the numinous and spiritual dimension which plays such an interesting role in our day-to-day lives. Both of us have learned from Darrol's work in inter-faith dialogue and in dialogue with colleagues, students, and toddlers.

Endnotes

[1] M. Darrol Bryant and S. A. Ali, eds., *Muslim-Christian Dialogue: Promise and Problems* (St. Paul., MN: Paragon House, 1998), xiii.

[2] Ibid.

[3] Ibid., xiv, xiv.

The Way of Yoga

Casey Clifford Rock

In the Spring of 2002, I was coming to the end of six years of part-time study leading to a Master's of Divinity. One of my favourite professors, the esteemed Canadian theologian Margaret O'Gara, strongly encouraged me to apply for the vacant Chaplaincy position at St. Michael's College, to work with an undergraduate cohort numbering about 5000. Flustered and not wanting to denigrate choices made by my classmates to work within the institutional setting, I answered that I felt more called to work with the un-churched. "Casey," she said, "they are most certainly the un-churched." We laughed. I knew what she meant. Unlike my experience a generation earlier, these students appeared to have only a nominal relationship to their Catholicism. There was an enthusiastic contingent that planned liturgies, worked on social outreach and hosted lectures – but that had been also true thirty years earlier. However in 1972, we undergraduates, in our non-participation, were quite aware of having *left something*, i.e. the pre-Vatican II Church. My sense in 2002 was that very few students feared telling their parents that one of their new-found freedoms was not attending Mass. Both they, and their parents, had been not attending church for years.

So there I found myself – a Roman Catholic woman with a degree in ministry who had no interest in working for the church: in parishes, in schools, in hospital or prison. That I had gone back to school for a theological degree was a mystery in itself. On a whim (one of the names of the Holy Spirit) I took a course. Then I took another one. After the fifth I knew I was hooked and applied for the degree program. But why choose ministry over a Master's of Theological Studies, or Religious Studies or some other specialty devoted to research if I didn't want to go into "the field?" Did I think the studies themselves might convert me, that eventually I myself would be evangelized into becoming an evangelist? Might I be exposed to some person or some situation that might inflame, or at least

mime, a "call?" I still am not sure. I just went on. (I *do* know that part of me wanted to be as knowledgeable as the "boys;" that's been true since my days on the sandlot.) What my professors were not aware of was the fact that I was at the same time seriously studying yoga. My yoga teacher training and the M.Div. were completed within one month of each other.

The history of my relationship to yoga started with the not uncommon dabbling of the 1970s but became more focused in the early 90s after I left the "workforce" of my own volition. For twelve years I was a librarian and researcher for the CBC. "I'm going to go find myself," I said to my colleagues. This was said, and received, ironically. Considering what transpired afterward, it is hard to imagine that I thought I was being facetious. But I did. While at home, with children at school and time on my hands, needing to stay in shape and loathing aerobics, (on another whim!) I wandered in to the nearest, literally the nearest, yoga studio. God bless the woman who was my first true yoga teacher. I had the chance many years later to tell her of her impact on me in those early classes. She seemed bewildered but pleased. It was a good reminder to those of us who speak publicly that you never know the impact your words may have. If you are authentic, if you are doing what you are meant to do with love and humility, your word is scripture and your presence ministry.

The first thing I found in that space was Space. I am not being facetious this time. We removed our shoes at the door (holy ground) found a spot on the floor, lay down and breathed. Then we began to move in smooth, flowing, thoughtful ways (not the strenuous competitive "boot camp" yoga so often pedaled now). We were encouraged to listen to the responses this movement unleashed in our minds and our bodies, for example, to become witnesses to resistance or relief. At the end we would lie down again, and breathe. "Give away the weight of your body to the floor," she said. "Let go. You will be held. When thoughts float in let them float away again." Occasionally mysterious tears leaked from the corner of my eyes. I became a regular. As time went on and I attended other classes and listened to other teachers, I noticed I was engaged in reflecting on the pedagogy, noting what worked, what didn't and how I might do it differently. I began teacher training.

Yoga comes from the Sanskrit word "jug," loosely translated as

"union," related linguistically to the root word for "yoke." What is being brought together, or bridged, is humanity's separation from its true home in the divine. In the classic formulations set out in sutras by the ancient sage Patanjali, yoga has eight stages, or "limbs" on the path to Union or Liberation. What we in the West commonly know as the physical practice of yoga (those pretzel postures one sees on the covers of magazines or lead by impossibly svelte teachers on cable TV) is properly termed *asana*. *Asana* practice can be highly detailed, encompassing some say as many as 900 prescribed movements. But it is only one of the limbs. The other seven involve external disciplines (*yamas*), internal disciplines (*niyamas*), breath control (*pranayama*), withdrawal of the senses (*pratyahara*), concentration (*dharana)*, absorption (*dhyana*) before reaching, finally, union (*samadhi*). When I looked around at my fellow yogis and yoginis at graduation (the great majority a decade or more younger than I), I wondered how audacious it was that we were purporting to now be teachers, not just of *asana*, but of the whole path, the Way of Yoga, to a destination: Divine. You won't find that much talked about at your Thursday night class at the YMCA.

Like the Ganges, the sacred river of India, the spiritual journey has confluences and bifurcates. Journeying to India twice, in 1993 and in 2007, I was able to immerse myself in the culture wherein yogic practices arose, but neither time was I involved directly in learning more of its philosophy or intensifying the body work that we have come to call "yoga." I anticipated and enjoyed my sojourns, very much, but both times I was focused, under the inspiring leadership of Darrol Bryant, on learning of the various religious traditions. I resided at or visited several ashrams: observing Krishna worship at Jaisinghera in Vrindban, the Tibetan Buddhist settlement at Byllakuppe, at Taralabalu Jagadguru Brihanmath in Sirigere and at the Christian-founded Anjali Ashram at Mysore. There I came to better understand the complexity and diversity of the many paths. Those visits supplied much-needed information, but the crux of the experience, on both trips, was the exposure to the seamlessness of religious experience in the day-to-day life of the people. In dress and adornment, daily ritual, at weddings and funerals, on rickshaw rides, from train windows, in the enormous hospitality shown to us in private homes,

I was constantly informed of the Holy as is it lived out – tangible, overt and unselfconscious. Had I been sequestered in an intensive yoga centre along with other North Americans in Mysore or Chennai, I might have acquired more yoga proficiency, become a true "yogini," learned more of Sanskrit, chants, subtle anatomy, and sutra, but I am not sure I would have received the benefits dialogue bestows: a mirror to hold up to one's own experience. As Charles Taylor so aptly states, " Our attachment to our own faith cannot come from a universal survey of all others from which we conclude that this is the right one. It can only come from our sense of its inner spiritual power, chastened by the challenges which we will have had to meet from other faiths."[1]

The "inner spiritual power" of my own faith in conversation with yoga was further stimulated by my discovery of, and mentorship by, Thomas Ryan, a Paulist priest whose own journey through yoga and to India resonated strongly with my own. In the preface to his *Prayer of Heart and Body*, I was astounded to discover that his preparation as a yoga teacher took place at the same site in Massachusetts that had trained my heaven-sent first teacher. (It would eventually become the site of my certification as well.) The renowned and still popular centre, Kripalu, was a former Jesuit seminary. Ryan's reflection on that irony and his insights about the appeal of Eastern religion to the West hit solidly home: "Christianity, by contrast (to Kripalu's emphasis on the body's innate wisdom) is in the awkward position of trying to affirm the goodness of creation without ever having delighted in human bodiliness. One would think that between our two central doctrines of the Incarnation and the Resurrection…we could do better at helping people to embrace and relate positively to their enspirited flesh."[2]

Over the course of several years, I attended many retreats offered by Tom Ryan at which he expanded and refined his understanding of what the yogic tradition had to offer the Christian one. In addition to emphasizing the centrality of the path of meditation, Ryan's retreats incorporated teaching on fasting, chant, and *seva* (or labour, as in the monastic tradition). I was also privileged to attend summer sessions involving other yoga teachers and "helping professionals" who were interested in exploring the intersection of yoga with their lives as Christians. Out of

these workshops came Ryan's *Reclaiming the Body in Christian Spirituality* to which I contributed an article. It should also be mentioned that Tom's "other hat" as Ecumenical Director for the Paulists has proven to be a tremendous benefit to those who wish to learn about the encounter of Christianity with world religions, especially Buddhism and Hinduism. He also ably addresses the differences within various Christian denominations that might have particular concerns with orthodoxy as it bumps up against the world of yoga.

But returning once again to the image of the Himalayas where Mother Ganga begins, there is an important underground stream in my story. In my fortieth year (that all-important wilderness number), I started listening to cassette tapes called Twelve Talks for Meditators, by the Benedictine monk Dom John Main. The tapes were given to me out of the blue by a colleague of my husband's, an accountant in the film business, and a bitterly lapsed Quebecoise. She says, "I just want to be chopping the carrots when I'm chopping the carrots." She likes the tapes but finds them "too Jeezely" (an expression I find myself using when uncomfortably confronted by Christian fundamentalism).

John Main is an example of the truth of the Buddhist proverb "when the student is ready, the teacher will appear." Though not yet re-confirmed in the faith I had left for twenty years, not at all thinking of theological study, before practicing yoga, John Main's voice touched my heart. He addresses the stress and the compartmentalization of modern life – of my life – how the activities of the day run in parallel lines, lacking a centre or a "ground." He suggests that we have lost contact with something deep and important in the mad rush to achieve and to be productive. Even if, in our confusion, we are inclined to grope for answers through a spiritual practice, our former ways of prayer often no longer satisfy. We find ourselves addressing a dimly lit God remote from experience. Some of us carry wounds and baggage from a meaningless, unhappy or repressive religious upbringing, and carry it negatively to the extent that we cannot connect with "religion" at all. The Jesus that Main speaks of is one who taught the putting away of anxious thoughts, who referred to a peace "that passeth all understanding." Main believed that meditation (in his method, the silent repetition of a mantra) was the way a modern person could

develop absolute trust. Without words, without dogma, doctrine, or creed, the simplicity and fidelity of sitting in silence brings us "home" to our true selves, to an inner knowing. It is there that we come to recognize the One who not only created us, but who sustains us, in Beauty, Truth and Love – from moment to moment.

I began to meditate. I did not initially do the twice daily thirty minutes as recommended. But I began, and I returned often enough that the practice slowly built. I experienced beginner's luck. Then I could not sit still. Sometimes there was enormous calm. There was distraction and despair. There were teenagers. There was distaste. There were tears. But slowly and steadily the hallmarks of practice began to emerge. A peaceful spirit began to emerge that was noticed by others but very rarely by me. (If you could only see inside my crazy brain, I felt like responding!) By the time I completed my theological and yoga studies, the regular practice took hold and has, for me, become that which Jesus spoke of to Mary and Martha, "the one thing necessary." That was the journey that underpinned the two key principles that have informed my life and teaching in yoga. First, that meditation, in its essence and from its origins, was the *raison d'être* of yoga.[3] And two, that the Christian tradition has, as Tom Ryan says, a "treasure chest" of contemplative, silent prayer, dating back centuries. What we can learn from yoga that might assist us in laying out those jewels is nothing but a blessing. I am so convinced of the relationship between the two practices that I really prefer, wherever possible, to include silence in my classes. Currently, seventy-five per cent of them end with twenty minutes of seated meditation.

So for me, "the way of yoga" has not been about a detailed inquiry into the "science" yoga: of *chakras* (energy centres) and *mudras* (seals) or *pranayama* (breath practices) for example. I don't attend fairs or conferences, certainly nothing having to do with the "business" of yoga. I can't imagine starting a clothing line. I am very wary of the celebrity yoga culture and the unending supply of media about technique. (We Westerners *must* get right and in the *shortest* time possible!) I welcome any information and exposure that comes my way, of course. But I am old enough now to trust experience. Practice the postures and you will learn what *asana* teaches. I repeat to myself and to my students the steps of bodily awareness taught

at Kripalu. When you enter a pose, BREATHE, RELAX, FEEL, WATCH, ALLOW. Such attention both strengthens and heals us, but it also leads gracefully to the doorway of meditation. (However, John Main said there were only two essentials for meditation: 1. begin, 2. return.)

The testimonials about yoga from the Western medical community that have grown exponentially over the past few years are definitely to be welcomed. The Mindfulness Stress Reduction programs of Jon Kabat-Zinn at the University of Massachusetts, and the lifestyle programs of Dean Ornish to curb coronary heart disease have brought body awareness and meditation to populations that might never have considered these remedies on their own. General practitioners routinely recommend yoga, though the "hard numbers" they value so highly are in fact difficult to come by. Neuroscientists are fascinated by the brain waves of contemplatives and theorize about the relationship to longevity. The mind/body split so pervasive in our North American medical culture and our religious tradition has indeed been "chastened" by the influence of yoga. Despite our penchant for capitalistic responses, it is overall a marvelous thing that what was esoteric fifty years ago has been part of the mainstream acceptance of holistic health.

The comedian Ellen DeGeneres once remarked in a stand-up routine that she knew why yoga was so popular – people are so stressed these days that they are willing to pay to have a quiet place to lie down. That contains a lot of truth, as real wit does. I have two favourite bible stories about peace and quiet. The first is that of Samuel,[4] how he lies down in the temple and thinks his teacher Eli is calling him. Three times he gets up and runs to the other room, declaring: "Here I am." Eli hasn't called him. We are told, "Samuel did not yet know the Lord, and the word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." Eventually Eli realizes that the Lord is calling the boy: "Go, lie down; and if he calls you, you shall say, 'Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.'" The other is the story of Elijah, a prophet exhausted by and afraid of the antics of the decadent world around him. He'd like to die. In a last ditch attempt for clarity, he goes up Mount Horeb. Despite the pyrotechnics that are unleashed before him (wind, earthquake and fire), it is only when he becomes aware of sheer silence that the voice comes to him saying, "What are you doing here, Elijah?"[5]

I have found my un-churched. They may be people who have no knowledge of or little care for Samuel or Elijah. They might be more engaged by the Buddha or by Gaia or even by Ellen DeGeneres. I have found and made space for people to come in and lie down. In their own way and in their own time, they may come to know a still, small voice calling them home.

Endnotes

[1] Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2007), 680.

[2] Thomas Ryan, *Prayer of Heart and Body* (Mahwah: Paulist Press, 1995), 7.

[3] "Few are aware that … Pantajali's system predates the development of most hatha yoga by many centuries and offers a radically different program, primarily addressing the meditative approach to insight and liberation." Chip Hartranft, trans. *The Yoga Sutra of Pantanjali* (Boston: Shambala, 2003), 115.

[4] 1 Samuel 3:1-9

[5] 1 Kings 19:11-12

The Way Of Gobind Sadan

Mary Pat Fisher

On the outskirts of New Delhi, a unique spiritual community has grown up organically around the revered teacher Baba Virsa Singh. Born into a family of Sikh farmers, from childhood he had a truly universal vision of the harmony of all prophets. As people gathered around him for his blessings and his teachings, he encouraged them to find God through their own prophet but also to appreciate all other messengers of God. This interfaith message blossomed into the community known as Gobind Sadan, "House of God." It is a house without walls, without any sectarian agenda. Hindus, Muslims, Sikhs, Christians, and Buddhists of all castes live, work, and worship together here as members of one human family, all understanding that they are worshipping the same God, the same Ultimate Reality.

Baba Virsa Singh left his physical body on Christmas Eve, December 24, 2007. Afterward as I was speaking to him inwardly, as many of us do, I asked him if we should celebrate Christmas. "Yes, passionately!" he responded. So we cremated his body on Christmas morning and celebrated the birth of Jesus the same night with thousands of candles lit throughout the garden where Jesus had appeared to him in 1983. Thus his great encouragement of appreciation for all religions continues, and this living interfaith community – Gobind Sadan – continues to offer sincere prayers around the clock, in many forms, addressed to many manifestations of the same One.

Under Babaji's directions, places of worship according to many religious traditions had been built. The Guru Granth Sahib, the universal scripture revered by Sikhs, is read around the clock in Darbar Sahib, and the daily devotions follow the pattern begun by Guru Nanak, starting at 2 AM every morning and ending with putting the Guru Granth Sahib to bed and saying the final evening prayer. Nearby, offerings, prayers, and scripture readings at a sacred fire continue twenty-four hours a day,

following the ancient Indian tradition of *havan*. Offerings of *ghee* (clarified butter oil) and *samagri* (mixture of grains, dried fruits, and flowers) are continually doled onto the fire on a large scale, in gratitude to the One who cannot be seen, and to spiritually purify the atmosphere. Gobind Sadan's *havan* has been burning constantly since 1968, so it has become a very powerful place of prayer and healing. A volunteer named Hardip Singh was blessed by Baba Virsa Singh to pray and make offerings at the *havan* every hour, around the clock. Doctors say it is not medically possible for one person to carry on like this without sustained sleep, but where God is constantly being remembered, anything is possible, by God's grace, so the hourly prayers continue.

At the same time, five Namaz are performed daily at Gobind Sadan's own mosque. It has become such a magnet for Muslims of the area that thousands worship there on special holy days. Those who come for Friday prayers also overflow the mosque into the garden that surrounds it. Gobind Sadan's imam preaches that Islam is a religion of love – and that in fact, all religions are based on love – and encourages a spirit of brotherhood and sincerity in worship. Thus for Eid celebrations, Hindu and Sikh men worship shoulder to shoulder with their Muslim brothers.

Near the mosque is "Jesus' Place" – the peaceful garden where a life-sized statue of Jesus has been placed on the spot where Baba Virsa Singh saw Jesus standing with arms outstretched in 1983. Jesus told Babaji that everyone who would come to that place would be blessed. It was not a garden at that time. Rather, it was a place behind the dairy where the manure used to be kept. By Babaji's order, the dairy was shifted so that the holy place where Jesus appeared could be kept sanctified. When I first came to Gobind Sadan in 1990, we had to walk barefoot across rough thorny ground to reach the sacred place. A simple stone enclosure for divas had been made there, and two young women went there every evening to light the divas in honour of Jesus. According to Babaji's directions, the area was slowly turned into a lovely garden. Now children of the area happily play on the grass, and every evening hundreds of people gather for nightly prayers before Jesus. They are not nominally Christians, but they love Jesus very much. They touch his feet reverently, put their head in his hands for blessing, and sometimes even hug him. Every day he is bathed

and dressed in fresh robes by a Hindu man. Near him is a beautiful statue of Mother Mary, donated by a devotee of Mother Teresa who was very touched by Gobind Sadan. Mother Mary is cleaned and dressed daily by a volunteer from Siberia. People bring flowers, incense, and robes for Jesus and Mother Mary, and come to lay their problems before them with faith that they are living presences.

Babaji gave me the duty to pray for people before Jesus, and by His grace, many of the prayers are answered. Every evening we light 125 candles around Jesus as Babaji told us to do. We say the Lord's Prayer in various languages, plus a passage from Psalms and the Sh'ma Israel, and sing a song about Jesus written by one of the Sikh women of Gobind Sadan. The children also recite in Hindi a prayer given to us by Babaji, which seems very real in our lives:

> Dear Lord, please bring us Your happiness, Your love to the earth that exists in heaven. Take away the sorrows and the suffering in the world. Take away thoughts of rich and poor, high and low. Let us all sit together, eat together, live and work together in Your grace and harmony.[1]

In the same garden as Jesus is the "Sh'ma Place." This is an open-roofed stone enclosure with the Sh'ma Israel engraved in stone in Hebrew, English, and Hindi. Rabbi Hillel Levine of Boston University, who helped to develop the concept of Gobind Sadan's place for Jewish worship, said that there are three essential features defining Jewish spirituality: the Torah (represented by the Sh'ma stone), worship (represented by a tall menorah), and acts of charity. To give true form to the latter, a stone-walled storage place was built, for donation and distribution of clothes for the poor. From time to time, Jewish holy days are celebrated at the Sh'ma Place by the whole community.

Around the hillside there are small shrines to various Hindu deities – Lord Krishna and Radha, Hanuman, Kali Mata, Lord Shiva with his son Ganesh, Sita and Ram. A pandit from Nepal offers traditional prayers to the deities morning and night, keeps the shrine areas clean, and tends their gardens. Every Tuesday night, thousands of poor people come to receive offerings of large rounds of sweet bread – *rot* – made by the women of

Gobind Sadan in honour of Hanuman.

A semi-open stone pavilion in a forest clearing with life-sized statues of Buddha and Mahavir offers a quiet place for contemplation, including morning meditation by guests staying at the foreigners' guest compound nearby. Stone plaques have been mounted in the wall behind the statues. Behind Buddha is his saying,

> *Beware of the restless mind,*
> Learn to discipline it.

Behind the statue of Mahavir is his teaching,

> *If the self is conquered you shall be happy*
> In this world and hereafter.

In addition to the constant round of devotions at all these holy places, Gobind Sadan celebrates the holy days of all religions with sincere enthusiasm. Be it Christmas, Eid-ul-Fitr, Eid-ul-Zuha, Janamashtmi, Navaratri, or the birthday of Guru Gobind Singh, Buddha, or Mahavir, Gobind Sadan will be celebrating with flowers, lights, food offerings, and myriads of candles and divas. Speakers will tell the community about the greatness of the day and the prophet or avatar, in this spirit of celebration that God sent this particular messenger or message to the earth to help us all. Babaji urged all holy places and institutions to follow this same model as the simplest way to develop interfaith appreciation among the people. He once explained,

> Why do we celebrate all holy days? As Guru Gobind Singh Ji says, all forms of worship are the same, all religious places are the same, and all of humanity should be considered as one human race. Guru Nanak Dev Ji says, 'There is one Father, and we are all His children.' Guru Gobind Singh, Guru Nanak, and Jesus all call God their Father. Despite differences in language and ways of worshipping, all the prophets have brought the same message. Jesus says to us, 'Love my Father and love the people also, for my Father is Love. Don't hurt anyone's feelings, don't deprive anyone of their rights, speak truth, do justice, serve others.' Abraham,

Moses, Noah, and Hazrat Muhammad all say the same thing. Lord Buddha and Lord Mahavir say 'Do no violence,' for they see life in everything.

Jesus never told people to make boundaries. He says, 'Love trees, animals, flowers – see Me in the very earth.' Jesus speaks of the kingdom of his Father, in which there is peace, justice, and truth. He calls it heaven and prays to his Father to bring this kingdom on earth. Guru Nanak refers to *sach khand*, the realm of truth where justice prevails, and he speaks of *swarag*, heaven on earth. Prophet Muhammad calls it *bahisht*.

There is only one eternal message of religion, and it has always come from the same Source. However, religious 'authorities' have divided the prophets into different religions. The priests have made Jesus a Christian, Moses a Jew, Guru Nanak a Sikh, Krishna a Hindu. The Master is so wide, but humans have made Him so small. They have made the Creator of all Creation just the leader of a sect.…

These exclusive ideas propagated by the religious authorities have been repeated so long that it will take some time for people to change their thinking.… But as people gradually learn to accept the truth that all prophets are equal, that God is one and God's message is one, our nervousness and angry conflicts between sects will cease and we will all recognize each other as brothers and sisters.…

If a person asks why Babaji celebrates Jesus' birthday, the answer is that Babaji has come from a place where there is neither friend nor enemy, where there is no opposition. For us, Jesus is our life. Hazrat Muhammad is also our life, our love. I deeply love Jesus and all the prophets. I am not celebrating their holy days to please the people.[2]

Whenever he spoke, Babaji always wove together teachings and stories from all prophets and all religions quite naturally, further educating people

to disregard the human-made boundaries between religions. He had a visionary relationship with many prophets and avatars, and therefore spoke of them all with sincere devotion. This open attitude was naturally communicated to all who heard him.

We cannot imitate Babaji's enlightened wisdom, but we can carry on his heritage of genuine appreciation for all messengers of God. Thus we continue daily devotions in all the places of worship and celebration of many religions' holy days at Gobind Sadan. We have also started a new initiative: weekly interfaith education classes for children. About fifty children from the community and the surrounding area come voluntarily each week, for they love the activities and the teachings. With high spirits and genuine devotion, the children put on plays ranging from the stories of Guru Nanak, Bhagat Nam Dev, and Moses to the Jataka Tales of Buddha. Teachers also tell stories about the lives of the prophets and even of their great forbears, such as the ancestors of the Prophet Muhammad. Videos of stories from all religions are also very popular with the children. When discussing the plays and stories, the children express a deep and natural understanding of their spiritual messages, as well as an astonishing ability to remember and recount the details. They know how to worship the same God in many ways, such as the inner meanings of the actions of Namaz, as taught to them by Gobind Sadan's *imam*. By heart they can recite the Mool Mantra of Guru Nanak, the prayer of Jesus, the Sh'ma Israel, the Gayatri Mantra, a passage from Psalms about brotherhood, and sing various Indian songs about the Oneness of God.

This interfaith appreciation comes very naturally to children. Why, then, isn't it the norm everywhere? Other places tend to belong to some organization, rather than to God. Organizations need to perpetuate themselves; they need to have money to survive. Religious organizations typically try to convince people that theirs is the best path, to enhance their membership. They develop creeds, rules, and power structures by which they distinguish themselves. How, then, can they encourage appreciation of all ways to God?

By contrast, Gobind Sadan is free of any institutional constraints. Babaji used to say, "This is our home. We can do whatever we want in our home." He also said that he was trying to keep alive the ancient spiritual

traditions of India, in which many different strands of spirituality once existed side by side, without any monolithic religion called "Hinduism." He said, "If you ask us what is our religion, it is the religion of Guru Granth Sahib," which reflects this intertwining of many mystical paths.

Since childhood, Babaji was taught in visions by Baba Siri Chand (elder son of Guru Nanak) and Guru Gobind Singh (the Tenth Sikh Guru) to respect all prophets. He asked God if it was necessary to become a Christian in order to love Jesus, or a Muslim in order to love the Prophet Muhammad, and he was told, "No – only love." Baba Siri Chand told him to conduct *havan* wherever he would go, and so he did, introducing people of all religions to its sacred power. Guru Gobind Singh's eternal teaching is "Let all humanity be recognized as one human race," and so Babaji worked constantly to overcome the barriers that had been erected by humans, dividing the human family into different sects. His communities do not belong to any religious institution which might try to curb their freedom, nor was he beholden to anyone for the sake of money. His communities strive to be self-supporting. From his young manhood, when people discovered his spiritual power and wisdom and started to gather around him, Babaji determined that he and his followers should not ask for charity to support themselves. Being the son of a farmer, he began working very hard to develop barren lands into productive farms whose income helps support his work. He forbade his staff to take any money for spiritual services. At Gobind Sadan, people speak about God and sing to God for love rather than money, and everything is free.

Thus people who come to Gobind Sadan are welcome to worship God in whatever way they choose. "The mission of Gobind Sadan," Babaji said, "is to help everyone draw closer to God." Nobody has to change his or her religion in order to find God; Babaji encouraged everyone to find God through their own prophet.

As we try to continue Gobind Sadan's mission, it is our hope that people everywhere will pick up Babaji's simple but very effective programme of celebrating all holy days in all places. If religious institutions are too exclusive to allow this within their walls, and professional priests too afraid of losing their jobs to adopt such a programme, then may sincere people find their own ways of sharing with their brothers and sisters of

other faiths. And thus may we all draw closer to God and to each other.

Endnotes

[1] Baba Virsa Singh, *Loving God* (New Delhi, Sterling Publications/Gobind Sadan, 2006), 83.

[2] Baba Virsa Singh, quoted in *Gobind Sadan Times*, International Edition, January 1995, p. 1.

The Way of Dance

Alice Bloch

I am a dancer. For me and many other dancers, dance is a Way, a means of experiencing a consciousness that is greater than ourselves. In Western thinking, the Way implies a path, a line that gets us from here to there. But dance is multi-dimensional. Through dance, the space/time continuum becomes visible, palpable. Dancing is not an intellectual experience, though it requires intelligence. Rather, it is sensed knowing; felt thought. One's entire being is imbued with, immersed in, dance. When I am dancing, there is a reciprocity/flow/journey between inner and outer. I am fully sensing in and through my body; utterly attuned to myself and the world around me. The air brushes my skin; my skin brushes the air. I breathe deeply – the oxygen molecules from the air through which I move pervade my being. Skin breathes.

In modern dance, the Western concert style in which I choreograph and perform, my body with all its history, personal and cultural, is the source of inspiration. I dance barefoot; my goal is the immediate expression of life experience greater than I am. Though people stopped to watch when my parents took the floor to foxtrot or mambo, I didn't start dancing seriously until I was in college. In my first ballet recital, as a tubby five year old, I went the wrong way in our formation. Ballet ended for me when we got *pointe* shoes. They hurt! But I was always what I call a secret living room dancer – no one else at home, music on, I'm dancing.

When I arrived at college as an English major, I met artists for the first time, and wanted to emulate them. I took my first modern dance classes, started choreographing, and began creating movement in my dreams. I realized I had found my Way. After graduation, I studied at the Martha Graham School in New York and at UCLA for my Masters. There I studied dance history, therapy, pedagogy, choreography, ethnic dance, and modern technique, woven together with the philosophy that we are all inherently creative. So my dance life began, my entire being engaged.

When I dance I enter a liminal space, a realm that is always beginning and always is. My bare feet are alive to the floor through the nuanced shifting of muscles and bones. Dancers speak of grounding – a sensed connection to the earth attained through an awareness of the mass of our bodies in relation to gravity. The floor and our feet have a complementary resilience that enables us to spring, bound, turn, and most profoundly, walk. It's been said that we became human through the process of walking. For Robin Berger, a tap dancer, the Way of Dance is "walking in rhythm."[1] One of my first teachers, the tai chi master and modern dancer, Al Chung Liang Huang said in class one day, "Yield to the floor and the floor will yield to you."[2]

Oh yes, class. Dance is, indeed, a practice. Dancers take or give ourselves class day in, day out, year in, year out, sore muscles, stiff feet, old injuries and the fear of new ones. "Is this the one that means I can't dance anymore?" Sweat, fatigue, stumbles - you find the perfect movement and forget it. You find another movement and do it again. And again. "It is an everlasting attempt," says Swedish ballet choreographer, Matts Ek," like writing in water."[3] If you're dancing someone else's choreography, you give your body and being over to their vision. It's you, not you, more than you.

Playwright Samuel Beckett (1906–1989), once said, "Ever tried? Ever failed? No matter. Try again. Fail again. Fail better!"[4] That's dancers. For iconic choreographer and dancer, Martha Graham (1894–1991), "Either the foot is pointed or it is not. No amount of wishing can make it so." It takes ten years to make a dancer, she said; ten years to integrate the technique that frees you to express exactly as you wish, as you must; to fulfill the choreographer's vision, to give the audience the joy of watching the human body in rhythmic motion.[5]

Some days it is so hard to get started. You've been working on a dance for weeks. You've been in the studio for hours – muscles at the end of their strength. One more time? OK. And suddenly you're imbued with motion and dance comes alive in your entire being.

Movement originates in the center of our bodies. But what is the center? It may be the *chi* spot in the lower abdomen of jazz and African dance, and of some modern techniques like Graham's with its hollowing and lengthening of the torso. It may be the whole spine, the *axis mundi* of

ballet around which the limbs move in classical harmony. For revolutionary dancer, Isadora Duncan (1875–1927), in whose dance I specialize, the center is the solar plexus, the nerve plexus nestled between the lungs and next to the heart through which pass the nerves that enliven our vital organs. Isadora wrote of standing long hours in her studio with her hands crossed over her solar plexus until she was filled with white light:

> I spent long days & nights in the studio, seeking that dance which might be the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body's movement. I … sought the source of the spiritual expression to flow into the channels of the body filling it with vibrating light – the centrifugal force reflecting the spirit's vision.

Then she began to move, stating, "I had found my dance and it was a prayer."[6] Performing Isadora's dance creates a spiritual channel for Lori Belilove, world renowned Duncan dancer. Belilove recalls that

> Isadora opened herself to a physical vitality that started when she placed her bare feet on the ground and exposed her limbs to the air. She went inward to the solar plexus, where she could access her soul. She felt that she had not *created* a dance style, but that, by moving from her solar plexus – her soul – she *rediscovered* the essence of dance which she could then give to humanity; a reciprocity of giving and receiving.

Lori experiences that as well. "When I reach that level of self-awareness and selflessness in my dancing, it is bliss."[7]

Isadora's dance performed by Annabelle Gamson, which I first saw in the late 1970s, was a revelation to me. It was an era of postmodern minimalism and uninflected movement, when dancers walked, stood, sat, turned with affectless gestures. Dancing Isadora's *Brahms Waltzes*, Gamson ran, skipped, reached, arced, soared, breathed. I sat in the audience weeping at the experience of dance as I knew it could be. Isadora spoke of

> a dance that would be so pure, so strong, that people would say: it is a soul we see moving … It is a prayer, this dance; each movement reaches in long undulations to the heavens and

> becomes part of the eternal rhythm of the spheres.[8]

For her, and for the generations of dancers she has inspired, dancing created a dynamic connection to the universal – prayer as lived experience, simultaneously active and receptive.

Dance encompasses all aspects of our being – body, emotion, mind, and spirit. Some say that dance is the most complete human artistic expression. If this is true, then sacred dance can be the fullest manifestation of spiritual awareness. Choreographing the 23rd psalm, actually lying down in the green pastures and traversing the "valley of the shadow of death," led me to an insight I could not have gained without that physicalization: not until we have followed the path of righteousness will our cups overflow. Following that path enables goodness and mercy to follow us – opens the door to the house of the Lord.

The power of dance to effect spiritual transformation has been with us since earliest times. In Neolithic cave and rock paintings, dance is the second most prominently displayed human activity after hunting. Sacred dance helps people connect the temporal, or every day, to the eternal and the divine. Through dance, worshippers enter a state of heightened spiritual awareness or ecstasy. For dance educator and arts facilitator Diana Domoracki-Kisto, "My way is movement, breath, expression, joy, 'graining' my molecules with life … Every aspect of body, mind, emotion and spirit is a dance of Divine energy.…"[9]

Dancer, anthropologist, and religious studies professor Dr. Andrea Mantell Seidel's description of her dance process echoes narratives of the most stringent and profound religious practice. For her, the Way of Dance is

> inextricably connected to a process of self-integration, a journey to arrive at a bodily expression that integrates form and feeling liberated from self-doubt, judgment, concern with self-image and 'self-consciousness…. The mind must empty itself of extraneousness thought and be fully present in the feeling and fully embodied in the integrity and discipline of the form. Music, if present, moves through the body like blood in the veins.[10]

For dancers, the phrase "The Dance of Life" is not a cliché. It is a lived

literal metaphor. "Life is about movement. Without movement of any kind, there is no life," says jazz dancer and teacher Lee Nolting. "Thus, no matter how tired, hurt, injured, depressed, sick you may be, you must find the strength within to keep moving."[11] Flamenco dancer La Meira understands the Way of Dance through a song by a great Flamenco singer who died young. She dances because "life is short, and I want to die singing, like the cricket dies..."[12] For Nietzsche, dance was "An art in which life is contained but not destroyed, and in which the terrible and irrational exist side by side with the serene."[13]

The interplay between balancing and falling – an allegory of life experience – is the core of David Marchant's Way. For David, a choreographer and somatic theorist, balance is not "something held, static, or something that we fight for or get, or keep … balance is a continuous process of sensing myself in relationship to the ground.…"[14] Pioneering modern dance choreographer Doris Humphrey (1895–1958) pointed out that everyday walking is just a controlled series of falls and recoveries. So you can't go anywhere unless you are willing to fall. And what we call balance is simply falling in all directions equally … So in dance I learn that falling is not an error to avoid, but a skill to develop. Rather than trying not to fall, we simply get good at falling.

Music is the prime mover for many dancers. Isadora Duncan and George Balanchine (1904–1983) began with the structure of the music. "Listen to the music with your soul," wrote Isadora. "Now, while you are listening, do you not feel that it is by its spirit that your head is lifted, your arms are raised, you are walking slowly towards the light. That is the first step in dancing as I understand it."[15] At age ninety, the Lifetime Tony award-winning dancer Gemze DeLappe still tunes the radio to a classical station to do a ballet *barre*, the sequence of preparatory movements that ballet dancers have done for 400 years. She dances in her kitchen, and if the music is right, finds herself improvising, inspired by what she hears.[16]

In African dance, the drums are sacred and inseparable from the dance. In many traditional cultures, masks and props come alive, are inspirited, through the dance. For me, the studio is a sacred space, permeated with ritual. I remove my shoes on entering, ensure the floor is clean, lay out my music, my water bottle, my leg warmers, my props, go to the *barre* to begin

limbering up, breathe, stretch, flex, and jump, before I am ready for the center, ready to dance.

And there is so much to dance – to dance about. Countless things inspire us: poems, paintings, nature, cultural events, or personal experiences – even something as mundane as a chair. For many of us, particularly modern dancers, our own bodies are the source, often generating dances where the subject is movement itself.

Who we are as individuals is integral to who we are as dancers. Michael Uthoff, Artistic Director of Dance St Louis, found being a man in the primarily feminine world of western dance both an opportunity and a limitation. He was fortunate to have parents who were professional dancers, yet like many men, he started dancing late and was taken into major companies before he was technically ready. His respect for the art form caused him to push himself to attain the level of his fellow dancers. "The male dancer's career is shorter than the woman's," he says, "but much too often our virtues erode sooner by the nature of what is expected from us on stage."[17]

Euro-Americans are often frightened of sensuous bodily experience. As a result, they tend to worry that they won't understand dance. Most cultures are dancing cultures. Dance is integral to their rituals of renewal. If you go to a party or festival with Africans, African Americans, Native Americans, or Latinos, there is always dancing. Significantly, the children in those cultures dance from the moment they can walk. No one tells them to get off the dance floor or not to stand so close to the musicians. They don't question their understanding of dance. However, we all possess the innate ability to understand bodily expression.

The kinesthetic sense (Gr. *Kinesis* "motion" + *aisthesis* "perception") makes this possible. The kinesthetic sense, experienced from within the muscles, is the sense that tells how much force we are using at a specific time, blended with the awareness of where our body parts are in relation to each other. It is present in all our movement, from the general, such as walking, to the specific, such as scratching our noses. We experience our emotions through this sense as well. When we see people move, whether they are jumping for joy or slumped in sorrow, we respond kinesthetically within our own bodies. We understand their experience because we have

felt it ourselves in a kind of kinesthetic empathy.

Choreographers play on this kinesthetic commonality when they create dances with specific dramatic intent such as the ballet *Swan Lake*, choreographed by Marius Petipa (1818–1910), or Bill T. Jones' *Still Here*, about people facing mortal illness. A choreographer may develop particular movements and sequences that they use repeatedly in varying contexts. We thus speak of, and can be trained in, Isadora Duncan or Jose Limon (1908–1972) technique, and develop and embellish their movements into something unique of our own.

The movement elements in sacred dance often have symbolic content. Holy principles are built into the structure of the dance. The adolescent who as part of his/her initiation into adulthood moves through the space of the Four Cardinal Directions in Pueblo dance comes to understand the sacred cosmology kinesthetically through the process of learning the dance. The Muslim Sufi poet Rumi (1207–1273) described the patterned whirling of the dervish dances as symbolizing the turning of the planets and stars on their axes. For the practitioner, the circular movements of Tai Chi Chuan, a Chinese meditative dance, are simultaneously symbol and kinesthetic experience of the harmony of the universe. Dance in a circle formation might be a metaphor for the motion of the stars, or, as for the African Ubakala tribe, it expresses belief in reincarnation, a metaphor of unity, safety, and continuity. These dances function to link the dancer directly to the divine.

Dance movements may also be more general, without specific meaning, like the steps and positions of classical ballet or Merce Cunningham (1919–2009) technique, the ubiquitous stamping dances of the Australian Aborigines or the basic step hop sequence of many Native American dances of the Western plains of the United States. Then the kinesthetic response of watchers, to whom the movement style is familiar, or for whom it is a standard part of religious practice, helps them understand the overall intent of a dance.

The three elements of movement – time, space/shape, and energy – give structure to dance, enabling our kinesthetic understanding. All dance moves through time in a rhythmic interrelationship of slow, fast, accent, beat, and stillness. Dance occupies space. That space may be a stage, a

dance hall, a sacred building such as a church or temple, a private home, the central plaza of a town or village, or even a forest clearing. Dance moves on pathways through all three spatial dimensions as the bodies of the dancers move in sculptural shapes. Finally, dance possesses energy. It may be released in a range of dynamics from smooth to percussive, and in a flow of movement that varies from bound or contained flow to free.

People speak of the language of dance, but dancing is not a sequence of synonyms. It is a felt communion. Even when you dance by yourself, you dance for yourself. When you dance with others, whether in the embrace of Western social dance, in the pulsed circles and lines of ritual sacred dance, or before an audience sitting in a darkened theatre, the energy of your body melds with the energy of many bodies in sensed understanding. Dancing creates wholeness. If someone sees you take a deep breath, that person breathes in response.

Dance is deep play. As theologian, Kimerer LaMothe puts it, "To dance is a radical act, because when we do it, we remember the primal joy of moving our bodily selves."[18] The wonder of the body in motion – how much greater a miracle do you need than the ability to open your hand? "If it could be expressed in words," we say, "I wouldn't be dancing." Dance enables us to experience, express, communicate, and commune with the ineffable. The individual body in communion with itself, that body in communion with other dancers or with an audience, brings us to a heightened presence. Dancing calls us to be present, for it exists only in the present and reminds us that now is where we always are anyhow. "To dance is to live," says Isadora Duncan.[19] The cartoonist Jules Feiffer's character, the little dancer, asks, "Is life worth dancing…yes, or no?"[20] I am thus inspired to keep on dancing to perfect both answers.

Endnotes

[1] See Bloch, Alice, "Sacred Performance and Sacred Dance in World Culture" in Frank K. Flinn & Laura Vollmer, eds., *Encyclopedia of Religion and Culture* (New York: Facts On File, forthcoming) and Robin Berger, personal communication, 28 November 2011.

[2] Chung Liang Huang, personal communication, October 1968.

[3] Matt Ek as quoted in a Joyce Theatre program, May 2009.

[4] See John Gruen, "Samuel Beckett Talks About Beckett" in *Vogue,* (December 1969), 210.

[5] See Martha Graham, *A Dancer's World.* DVD. WQED, 1957.

[6] See Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: LiveRight Press, 1927), 85.

[7] Lori Belilove, personal communication, 16 January 2011.

[8] See Isadora Duncan, *The Art of the Dance* (New York: Theatre Art Books, 1928), 56-57.

[9] Diana Kisto, personal communication, 5 December 2011.

[10] Andrea Mantell Seidel, personal communication, 16 December 2011.

[11] Lee Nolting, personal communication, 6 December 2011.

[12] Meir, Goldberg, personal communication, 13 December 2011.

[13] See Nietzche, Friederich, *The Birth of Tragedy and the Case of Wagner*, trans. W. Kaufman. (New York: Vintage Books, 1967).

[14] David Marchant, personal communication, 1 December 2011

[15] See Isadora Duncan, *The Art of Dance*, op.cit., p. 52.

[16] Gemze DeLappe, personal communication, 10 November 2011.

[17] Michael Uthoff, personal communication, 18 December 2011.

[18] See Kimmerer La Mothe, "Dance is a Radical Act," in *Psychology Today*, http://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/what-body-knows/201111/dance-is-radical-act

[19] See Isadora Duncan "The Dancer Speaks," in *The Touchstone*, 1920, p. 339.

[20] See Jules Feiffer, *Hold Me: an Entertainment* (New York: Dramatists' Play Service, 1977).

The Way of Aging
LIBERATION AND THE LATER YEARS

Kendra Smith

Once a year, my church (Unitarian/Universalist) honors those of its members who are eighty years and over in a service dedicated to the "Doctors of Durability." The current ministers strive valiantly, I suspect, to uphold this tradition they inherited. They speak of wisdom – I look around me questioningly. "Courage" – the courage of a conscripted soldier, I think. After all, who volunteers for failing eyesight, hearing, sphincters? Nevertheless, the service has its pleasures. After the last one, my reflections poured out in a poem. And then I began to think of developmental psychology, usually focused on childhood stages, and considered what might be gained from the last stage, the final stage before we exit. I intend to speak of some research and my own reflections; then memories of my father and a brother, as their days wound down. But first, the "poem":

Doctor of Durability, hey, that's me!
Thank you all for lunch, the hugs and beaming smiles.
Like something in a petting zoo, I preen and arch my back and purr.
What I'm getting now is unearned credit
For piling up the years, four score and more.
A child gives out her long stemmed roses, one to each
Knobby, wrinkled, reaching hand. She looks awed.
At lunch we laugh and eat and smile. No yesterdays
And no tomorrow figure in our pleasantries.
But I – I remember all those years that I've survived.

"Make my bed, light the light, *To be sung*
I'll arrive late tonight,
Bye bye blackbird."
My first song. I was three. It's late, and I'm *still* arriving.

Jimmy Steven's father threw himself out a window.
We were hushed around my uncles, like someone died.
Professionals out of work, they stared all day at faded carpet.
Mother. Prettier in her coffin than in illness. Like she's asleep they said.
Do you remember the 1930's song "Happy days are here again?"
Tramps who came to beg, eyes downcast and mumbling, got some buttered bread.

"The day that will live in infamy" I was in college.
My room mate's no-good cousin survived the blast.
Boys my age drilled all day, singing a funny dirty tune.
To the barked commands of their drill instructor, I kept going to philosophy class.

A submarine sighted off the coast, Heart Mountain, barbed wire.

A soldier came to dinner. He was shipping out next day, he said.
He was going to be the point man on patrol, the one who draws down fire.
He had no hope of coming back, he said. He didn't.
So many didn't get to live a long, long time, but I remember him.
My brother Bob, handsome in his Navy blues, my cousin a bombardier.
A sailor lynched, some babe in Casablanca – Bobby never talked about the
bombs and bullets.
One friend survived the fire bombs in London, another a bomb in Amsterdam.

Johanna survived on tulip bulbs when food was gone, with the Jewish family
Her family hid all through the years of war.
Some tough broads we've gotta be, Joan and Johanna more than me.

VJ Day and church bells rang! Through all the city church bells rang.
Second thoughts about the Bomb came later.
That August day deep-throated bells resounded deeply solemn joy.
Through CARE we sent what food we could to "enemies" no more.
So much energizing hope we had when war had ended, so much hope
And so much fear. Bomb shelters built (futility!) – children drilled in schools.

Let's go far away from nuclear bombs and super powers, anywhere, but far away.

So much to remember! If you're under eighty this must mean almost nothing!
Seoul, Korea, the Inchon River. Brainwashing, a neologism enters the English language.
Crosses burned, Selma. "I've got a hammer to hammer out freedom."
My daughter, in the midst of it, was disillusioned by ignoble acts in noble causes.
Too bad, I think, but understand – no great movements free from pygmy egos.
Viet Nam, the plumbers, Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist – it has its humor, yeah.
Two bumbling gumshoe FBI guys coming to my door, asking where's your husband.
Watergate, Nixon, the Saturday night massacre –
But tanks did not go rumbling down Constitution Avenue,
As Sheila Kennedy thought they would, in a military coup.
If you're too young this won't register. But you will have your own,
Your own teeterings on brinks and national insanity.
When JFK was shot we turned, many of us, away from social action.
The psychedelics hold out hope of happy be-ins, easy

transformation.
Hah!
Yet glimpses of a promised land led me to months of meditation.
Face to face with just myself, it wasn't bliss, much more like pain.

My mind is playing like a fire hose over smoking embers of the past.
Omit the embarrassments of youth, the follies of the middle years,
Old age and all its problems. Really they don't matter much.
Only social struggles and psychotherapy, that's all? You ask.
No no no. Certainly not.
But today I think of that which draws us on, some subterranean tide.
This day is for the durable, those "able to withstand decay and wear and tear."
That's the dictionary meaning for those of us now honored.
I carry within me those who didn't undergo a slow decay,
Those who died, out of turn and way too soon.
Hey you guys, you shouldn't predecease your elders.
My daughter Karen, she was first; then Henry; Serena, worst of all –

Because we didn't know the how or where.
My heart was opened by your freely given unearned love.
"Cogito ergo sum?" Dead wrong, Descartes, touché.
"Amata ergo sum," having been loved I am; and yes, I'm still becoming.

Green beans, scalloped potatoes, ham. Like every vertebrate we chew,
Ingesting plants and flesh along with soil and sun.
Even in decay we are a miracle of nerves and bones and parts that close and open.
What about that inner world each one of us inhabits?
That precious world of love and beauty, moments of transcendence, more real than real.
Hush. Approach that inner world with delicacy and care.

> More fragile than the body, these inner worlds we hardly know ourselves.
> Will you share, my dears, some little part of yours with me?

After I had written this, I googled the song "Bye Bye Blackbird" to get the rest of the lyrics. The song appeared in 1926. More to the point, it is about a prostitute leaving "the life" that is spurious to return home. It is a good metaphor for our life's journey toward the true and the good. The good and the true become more important in old age, more important than superficial appearance, success, power. What is good as love is good is valued above all. This is what was meant by the Yiddish-speaking aunt of a colleague of mine who said, "Life is a *cholem* (dream). Around eighty you wake up." (Note the echoes of Buddhism and Hinduism in that aphorism.) Now we can laugh at the dramas that used to engross us; yet we remember, and sympathize with the tribulations of the younger generation. In life's final stage, we see them from a longer perspective. This is our wisdom. We laugh at our current dragons, too, collecting jokes that often begin with "You know you are old when … when everything either dries up or leaks … when you are over the hill and don't know how you got there without getting to the top … when friends stop asking how you are and say instead "You're lookin' good!" … when you'd rather be comfortable than beautiful. But humor is only froth atop deepening appreciation of small things: the sun delivered to our doorstep with the morning paper, a kind word, dew sparkling on a spider web, an unexpected smile, the face of a friend. Slowed down, we have returned to our senses, senses once again vivid as in childhood, even if organs are impaired. In this last stage, there can be strides in personal and spiritual growth. The Israeli writer, David Grossman, puts it simply:

> … we feel our lives most when they are running out: as we age, as we lose our physical abilities, our health, and, of course, family members and friends…. Then we pause for a moment, sink into ourselves, and feel: here was something, and now it is gone. It will not return. And it may be that we understand it, truly and deeply, only when it is lost.[1]

Only then, Grossman implies, do we return to the strongest and most authentic pulse of life within us.

Erik Erikson, with his wife Joan, delineated stages of development throughout the entire life cycle in their seminal book, *Childhood and Society*.[2] Each stage is a period of tension and conflict, and each in its resolution has the *potential* of growth, strength, and a greater sense of coherence and wholeness; and each has a potential for its opposite. The potential for infancy is trust that the world is benevolent and will meet the infant's needs, a potential that Erikson paired with its partial failure as Basic Trust vs. Basic Mistrust. In the stormy twos, a sense of autonomous, competent selfhood is acquired – or, failing, a child reacts by becoming passive or rebellious, Autonomy vs. Shame in Erikson's scheme; and on through six more stages.

What might be attained in the period that begins at seventy-five to eighty years of age Erikson named Integrity, which he defined as an affirmation of one's life style. *Childhood and Society* made great sense to me when I read it in the 1950s except for this last stage. Affirmation of one's life style seemed insufficient. Years later, after Erik Erikson's death, I met his widow Joan, who confided that she, too, had been less than satisfied with their section on the latest years, and that it was her intention to revise it. This she did, in a small book titled *The Life Cycle Completed*,[3] which she published before dying at age ninety-five.

Concurrently with her revision, a Swedish professor, Lars Tornstam,[4] and his associates carried out a study of an elderly population. Tornstam found a considerable degree of contentment among these elderly persons. A decreased interest in material possessions and greater interest in what I have called the inner world, their own and the inner world of others, characterized this group. He found in his sample more self-acceptance, less self-centeredness, greater selectivity in how and with whom one spent time, and a positive attitude toward contemplative time alone. These elders felt an awe at being a part of this cosmos of billions of suns in billions of galaxies, of the immensity of time, and the mystery in which we are born, live, and die. Many were profoundly serene in the face of terminal illness, a serenity that did not correlate with religious belief. We see the same attainment in our own aged, but perhaps it is more common in Sweden

where the famous social safety net ensures that all its citizens have their basic needs met quite generously. It is noteworthy that peaceful deaths are witnessed more frequently by hospice nurses than by hospital nurses.

Tornstam named these attainments in the final years of life *gerotranscendence*. If he had paired it with its opposite, as Erikson did with his developmental stages, it might be Gerotranscendence vs. Petty Smallmindedness. Although the elderly population studied was spread along a continuum between these polar opposites, many of them qualified as "gerotranscendent," contrary to stereotype. There is a tendency in Western societies to see old people as preoccupied with trivia, devoid of interests or any turns of mind that might be interesting.

Healthy old age is enjoyed for a far longer span than it was one hundred years ago; and the number of years spent in invalidism is extended also because of modern medicine that stalls off death without restoring health. Changed conditions for the aged require different expedients. It is no longer assumed that the grandparent generation will be cared for in their adult children's homes, and senior residences or assisted living is a growth industry. Large numbers of elders live alone. For people on the threshold of old age, late sixties or early seventies, the fear that looms largest is the fear of dependency. One creative solution is co-housing, small intentional communities, some expressly for seniors.[5] A group of retirees at the University of Colorado some years ago bought an apartment building and together hired services that each would need in time, an instance of exceptional initiative.

More common are groups in churches and other institutions that meet to discuss common concerns, both practical services to sustain independent living and emotional issues. The taboo against facing death honestly fades, helped by discussion and by putting into writing advanced care medical directions for one's terminal illness. An essential step for realizing the potential in the final developmental stage is overcoming denial of our own death, usually a process rather than a single realization. Gerotranscendence, or simply transcendence, is a turn away from materialism toward spiritual values. It *tends* toward liberation, or enlightenment, as it is understood in Buddhism, while not yet its equivalent. The Tibetan word *bardo* is often misconstrued in the West as the transitional state between death and a next

life. Actually, in Tibetan belief "*bardos* occur continuously throughout life, and are junctures when the possibility of liberation, or enlightenment, is heightened."[6] An awareness that death and decay are no longer on the other side of the horizon is just such a juncture. The losses associated with age can lead to liberation.

Sooner or later as we age, we need the help of the younger generation. Autonomy was a huge achievement when we were very young, not won without struggle and conflict. Relinquishing it is seldom easier, and sometimes self-sufficiency is so fiercely defended that safety and sanitation become an aggravation and worry for our caring families. Learning to accept help with simple gratitude, neither fighting it nor feeling unworthy and indebted, is a spiritual attainment. The words of a columnist, Adele Starbird, stick in my memory. Writing of the chores she did for her ninety year old mother, she said that her mother made it easy for her by *not* thanking her profusely but acknowledging her care with a simple loving smile.

In my own experience, I have found a need for my daughter's help in managing things I used to do for myself. Remarking on our role reversal, I said to her, "I'm not a mother anymore. I'm an ex-mother. The statute of limitations has run out." "Oh no," my daughter smiled, "You carry mythic weight." Mythic weight – it is what I have gotten from my many relatives who lived into great age with serenity and contentment. Always responsive and interested in what I could tell them, they left me feeling affirmed and optimistic about the future after a visit. They had weathered so much – immigration, Depression, wars, drought – and had adapted to so much change from the world they had been born into, a world much like George Washington's with horses and windmills and premature deaths a common occurrence. They had mellowed, becoming warmer, less judgemental, even playful. In their nineties, in nursing homes that spell the end of bodily privacy, they embodied equanimity, even a sort of gallantry.

My older relatives are a template for the way I view old age. Curious about the perspective of a fifteen year old grandson, I asked him "What are old people good for?" He paused, then answered, "They keep the family together. And connect me with the past. You're like living history." This made me feel like Methuselah of course. Hopefully, I asked if that made

him think of future generations; but a boy of fifteen doesn't think much beyond college entrance. The notion that the last years yield spiritual rewards I would not attempt to explain.

My brother, Bob, died at eighty-four, not a great age, yet the way he met his dreadful disease, a degenerative neurological disease, is desideratum to celebrate the human spirit. The disease causes a gradual loss of control over one's muscles and a loss of the capacity for abstract thinking. For Bob it began with his right foot dragging, and then his right hand became useless. He did what he could for himself as long as possible, and then gracefully accepted help. As he confronted the truth of his situation, he became transparent to himself and others, almost luminous. From an early age he had hidden his feelings, both sad and tender. I had always sensed his kind heart, and now it was openly expressed. To give but one example, a woman in his nursing home who had lost her mind began to howl, like an animal. Bob reached over and covered her hand with his, murmuring softly and soothing her. In this juncture, this *bardo*, he was enabled to be his truest self, caring and affectionate. The howling woman presents the face of old age we dread; my brother's transparency and compassion its potential. The last time I was able to visit him, his wife asked as she brought me to him, "Do you know who this is?" With a tenderness he could not have allowed himself to show before his illness, he promptly said, "My little sister!" (And then with dismay, "But your hair is white.")

Over a lifetime we each construct a self-image, a part of our ego structure, and in our achievements and social roles we find validation of this self-image. Though the achievements and honors are long past, we tend to identify with them as long as we equate them with self-worth. Giving up this outdated identity, restricting though it may have been, is the hardest developmental task. It is a process of disidentification through which the spiritual dimension is regained. Only then can one realize one's essence as one with nature, its cycles and beauty, with soul, with Atman, with Buddha nature. This is the goal of monks who spend years in meditation, and it can happen in the *bardo* of old age. It is poignant to see photos in nursing homes that the elderly have posted of themselves, as a young and beautiful woman perhaps, or as a youthful navy officer, or a plaque with M.D. following the name. Understandably the patients

want the professional caretakers to know that this stooped and sagging mortal coil was once something else. It is more important that the persons themselves know they are something else, something larger and of the spirit. This is not easy. Neither was adolescence or the stormy twos, but all the stages mark the way toward becoming fully human.

In both my father and my brother I saw this process of disidentification and a more expansive identity take wing. My father, Henry Nelson Wieman, had been ambitious and totally committed to his work as an author and a professor, his books influential and translated into many languages. He had lived, as we say, in his head. It is a family joke that when one child fell out of the Model T as he was driving to the beach, he was so absorbed in the book he was writing in his head that it took minutes to attract his attention. In his early eighties, still teaching, he became irritable, and in debates sharply combative. Some comments indicated his fear of being a has-been and his apprehension that rivals in his field would have a greater legacy.

Then there was a transformation, almost a transfiguration. He made the decision to leave his university post and said simply that his writing was finished. He retired to a small town where, apparently contented and peaceful, he did a little gardening, walked in the woods, and limbered his stiff limbs with yoga. He read and was keenly interested in developments in the field of human relations as it was relayed to him by a younger man, but it was simply appreciative interest without striving to incorporate something more in his own work. Often his face was suffused with pleasure as he gazed at younger people. For me the change in him is encapsulated by one event. Happening to look out a window at my father as he was doing some yard work, I noticed that he was stock still, transfixed by something in a rough patch of grass, his face radiant. After he had moved on, I went out to inspect the spot that had enthralled him. In some grass that the mower had missed I found a wild pink trillium – Blake's "heaven in a wildflower!" With the old preoccupations gone, he was open to immediate experience, the freshness we knew before language and concepts grayed our experience. I believe my father was identifying with life itself. Some lines of poetry from a Buddhist monk, Sanghrakshita,[7] describe this shift:

(We) try to grasp our own lives. But Life
Slips through our fingers like snow. Life
Cannot belong to us. We
Belong to Life. Life
Is King.

Rather than believing life to be one's possession, life itself is embraced with its ongoing creativity, becoming and dying, and becoming anew.

The ego-self or self-image, that includes identification of the self with one's body, is an important and necessary development for functioning adulthood, but to release it at the end is liberation. I saw this process even more in my brother Bob. From early childhood, because of an exceptionally high I.Q. and precocity, he had been labeled genius, with commensurate great expectations. It was his pride and, like the ancient mariner's albatross, his burden. A polymath, he became a professor of philosophy who loved the subject but did little to advance his career, inhibited by his need to do nothing that might be less than brilliant. In mental games or intellectual discussion he had a compulsion to prove his superiority, even though he sensed that people found this obnoxious. Yet with the young he was nurturing and he found relaxation in all sorts of non-intellectual endeavors, from repairing his ancient car to hiking the Smokies. Release began with retirement when he became a volunteer assistant for a first grade teacher. This professor of philosophy gently encouraged six year olds, and for one slow learner he used his wood working skill to make numbers and alphabet letters out of wood.

Illness ended Bob's volunteer work. When our far flung family gathered for a last reunion, Bob was hobbling with effort. Yet he was all simplicity, ease, and what I can only call clarity. The clenched jaw was gone. When a few of our party got into a philosophical discussion, Bob listened, seemingly interested but silent. This was so out of character – what had been character – that I commented on it. Simply, without self-pity, he said, "I can't do philosophy anymore." He joined us in a game of Taboo, again surprising me because he knew he could not compete. He knew we were giving him help with hints, yet he enjoyed play as he had never enjoyed play so freely. No medieval knight sprung from his armor could have been

lighter than Bob freed from the need to prove superiority.

On learning his diagnosis, Bob had researched his disease and he had no illusions about his future. It was after he had lost control of most of the striated muscles that he had a heart attack. June, his wife, asked if he knew what had happened to him. He nodded calmly. She asked if he wanted treatment. He shook his head vigorously, no. Return full circle to the first year of life, and Erikson's view that the developmental gift of infancy is Basic Trust. It is the same at the end of life. With simple acceptance and trust in the natural order of things, or God, or Being, Bob died.

Endnotes

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My Way of Jihad
JOYS AND STRUGGLES OF A MUSLIM WOMAN IN NORTH AMERICA

Idrisa Pandit

I would like to share the story of my *Jihad* (my struggle) with all of you. It is a struggle many Muslims share with me, especially if they are visible Muslims. It is a short summary of my faith journey, my jihad to discover who I really am as a Muslim woman and my responsibilities as a Muslim living as a minority in North America. This is my personal journey in the world of social justice and interfaith, some of the lessons I have learned, the joys and challenges, and above all, the people that I encountered who have made this journey meaningful. It is my confession of how people of various persuasions, faiths and cultures have enriched my life and shaped my multiple selves, all in a state of creative tension, not belonging in any one space or land. My jihad as a Muslim woman stems from Prophet Muhammad's explanation of greater jihad, a struggle of the soul, a struggle that enables me to keep striving for justice even when the road is tough and barriers seem insurmountable.

I share these glimpses with the hope that we all prize our encounters, even though they may be so different than what may be "normal" for us. I also hope that these encounters, or the risks we take to move beyond our comfort zone, will strengthen us to move beyond tolerance and will aid us in overcoming fear of the "other," something that cripples our encounter and understanding, and by extension, limits our compassion. This is my journey of faith in which my companions, teachers, and fellow travelers from many backgrounds helped shape my faith.

Many years ago, on a journey from Delhi to Calcutta, going through security check, ahead of me I spotted three nuns clad in their crisp cotton, blue bordered white saris. One of them was particularly short and when I looked carefully, I dropped my bags – something you could still do in

the pre-security hysteria days – and jumped the line to greet her. My childhood dream had suddenly become a reality. The little woman about whom I had dreamed, who had been my hero, was standing in front of me. My chance encounter with this Albanian lady, Mother Teresa, serving the most destitute in India, seemed unreal. My first real introduction to Mother Teresa had been in my moral science class, reading a required text, her biography by Malcolm Muggeridge, a book that left an impression on my young mind.

Being schooled in an Anglican school in the Valley of Kashmir, a Muslim majority state, my only formal religious education was in Christianity, not Islam, my own faith. What I learned about Islam was by process of osmosis, watching my parents, and learning by example. While I had had years of moral science and Bible lessons, the story of Mother Teresa's life had struck a chord within me, sparked a light, a desire to somehow follow in the footsteps of this amazing woman. My faith journey and my world view were fashioned in a Christian school, a Hindu college and a secular university.

Multiculturalism was added to my vocabulary in North America. In my life, multiculturalism had been the way of life. I was born in a very observant Muslim family, schooled in an Anglican school by English teachers, and lived with people from all over the world in my neighbourhood, people who were living in Kashmir as hippies, Rajneesh followers, missionaries, artists, writers, and those merely attracted by the natural beauty of the Himalayas and their desire to climb every peak in the Valley. Seeing people from all over the world was the norm, not an exception. My classmates and friends were equally diverse – Hindus, Sikhs, Muslims, Buddhists, Bahai, Christian. Living with one another and going to school together excluded the need for multicultural education.

Once I spread my wings and left home in my teen years, I longed for the atmosphere of my childhood. From a sheltered life of absolute social harmony dotted with expressions of political discontent, I was thrust into the capital of India, a society where religious lines were drawn very sharply and being identified as a person of a minority faith was not to your advantage. I was faced with my first challenge of religious identity, of melding with the rest without being identified as a Muslim, of keeping

up my faith practice behind the closed doors of my dorm. This meant compromise, an uncomfortable compromise, of not carrying any visible symbols of faith. The first feeling of longing and missing home crept in. I had a sudden realization of home as a place where I could be at ease with myself and be surrounded by others who are like me, an environment where questions of identity and faith never seemed to be issues for consideration. Now, being a minority in an environment charged with religious hostilities was my new reality. As tensions rose after the murder of Indira Gandhi, I remember walking up to the roof of the dorm and seeing Delhi on fire. I was rescued by some Hindu family friends from my dorm and sent home on the first flight until tensions calmed in Delhi. That road trip from my dorm to the airport was no ordinary journey. The road was blocked at several points and angry mobs would stop cars to check for Sikhs, who became an easy target for anger and revenge. Passing as a Hindu sitting next to my Marwari Hindu friends in the car, I made it to the airport and went home until a sense of normalcy retuned to Delhi. Of course, Delhi after the 1984 Sikh massacres was never the same. I had witnessed firsthand the power of hate, of families being torn apart and neighbours turning into enemies.

Five years later, I would leave yet again to a new land thousands of miles away from home. All alone, I was thrust into the small mid-western twin city of Urbana-Champaign, a university campus that truly became my window to a whole new reality and learning. The University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign was truly a place that awakened my spirit and my faith. As a newcomer to the history of the United Sates, I had much to learn. My lessons in understanding the oppression of Native Americans, African Americans and many other oppressed people of the world came from my encounters on campus with the most amazing minds. My initiation into working in solidarity with the oppressed also occurred concurrently. My worldview was expanding while I also recognized the need to deepen my own faith – not the faith I had inherited, but one that I would embrace on my own. A new country, a new culture and new issues were challenging, and at the same time enriching. It was a time full of possibilities and opportunities.

Feeling homesick and alone, I looked for people I could have some

connection with. I found a small, yet vibrant, Muslim community. Going to a mosque was a rare experience, something I had never ever done back home. The mosque in North America is often the first stop for immigrant Muslims looking for a community where they can feel at home. Yet the beauty of the North American Muslim community is its diversity, especially evident on a college campus that attracts Muslims from around the world. It was my first encounter with Muslims of Indonesia, the Arab lands, Africa and the Far East. Becoming part of this diverse Muslim family was a gift I would never have received had I stayed where I was born. My search to learn began here, and I set up a group for Muslim women from around the world – the Islamic Women's Awareness Society (IWAS). Muslim women, Native Muslims, African American Muslims, African Muslims, Asians and Arabs all got together every week to study the Qu'ran and learn from and teach one another. It was our collective effort at empowerment through knowledge.

At UIUC, besides receiving a great education, I learned the true meaning of courage by observing people of conscience: academics who put their profession on the line for speaking the truth and protecting the vulnerable, Christian pastors who made room in their churches for Muslims to pray, Jews who were most vocal about the cause of Palestinian injustice, white people who advocated for the causes of natives and African Americans. This activism and people striving together for social justice made me realize the power of solidarity in words and deeds, expressions of common humanity and dignity of people as our hope to live in harmony and peace. It was evident that divisions caused by the narrow interpretation of doctrine can be overcome through collective service. I learned about the power of interfaith, not by sitting around a table and pontificating, but rather by standing shoulder to shoulder raising slogans against injustice and war. This was the time of Desert Storm when I had to face people yelling, "Nuke her," "Go back where you came from," and the FBI was asked to gather all the names of foreign students involved in dissent. The most amazing of my mentors was an elderly white couple from Decatur, Illinois, who took me in as their protégé. This couple, who I would say were like my foster parents, had been at the forefront of the civil rights movement, the issues of native Americans and vocal advocates of

Palestinian rights. Alongside them and many others, I learned to march in protest for the cause of any community experiencing injustice.

Around that same time, my own homeland, Kashmir, known as heaven on earth, was also turning into a living hell. As the struggle of Kashmir got underway, it did not stay a distant reality. Tragedy touched my family, neighbours, friends and relatives. Thrust into activism, living thousands of miles away, and gaining strength from the activism of the bold people surrounding me, I assumed the role of a spokesperson for my people, giving voice to the oppressed people of Kashmir. I learned about the history of oppression in my homeland and shared it with others. The scale and gravity of loss, death and destruction in Kashmir was incomprehensible until I returned three years later to a desolate, eerie valley of Kashmir. The tourists were gone, my neighbours had left, and sadness, depression, anger and resentment had taken over the hearts and minds of ordinary Kashmiris. The paradise was wounded and the scars were deep. The atrocities (especially against the women of Kashmir) that I witnessed and documented, stayed unexpressed. Words failed to convey the pain and vicarious trauma that I endured as a witness and continue to witness every year to this day.

Upon my return to the US, yet another grave tragedy was unfolding in the world, the Bosnian conflict. Yet again, people of conscience gathered, protested and held silent vigils. "Never again," the slogan of the Holocaust was again relevant as the worst of humankind was being displayed in the horrors committed in the name of religion.

It was during that period that I moved from Illinois to Massachusetts and landed at Wellesley College as an advisor to the College on religious and cultural issues. Sitting in a circle with a Catholic priest, a Buddhist nun, a Jewish Rabbi, an Episcopalian, a Unitarian Universalist minister and a Baptist minister, we began the journey every week of discovering each other's faith with respect and understanding. Our weekly meetings and bi-annual retreats to the Peace Abbey brought us together as people of faith, as friends and co-workers. Alongside, students from various faith traditions also designed a similar practice of engagement. To incorporate spirituality into education was a pioneering effort at Wellesley, a college campus with a strong Protestant history. The focus of the Multifaith

Chaplaincy was to adopt a pluralistic approach to faith, and the success of this program, the first ever multifaith campus program in the United States, was mainly due to the support of the administration, alumnae and the Board of trustees. Out of this effort was born Al-Muslimat, a Muslim students group.

As an advisor and counselor at Wellesley I discovered the challenges of young Muslim women, some struggling to understand and re-discover their faith, as I had struggled just a few years before, some just finding their faith, others caught in the divide between faith and culture. Some felt empowered and embraced as who they were as Muslim women and others distanced themselves from their heritage. These issues remain very much a part of the current scene of Muslim youth. My role as an advisor and counselor to women in North America has been both challenging and enlightening.

During the fateful eleventh day of September 2001, I lived just a few miles from the Pentagon and the White House. With my husband travelling, detained at a European airport for flying while Muslim, and my two young children by my side, I experienced vulnerability. I got calls from friends asking me to remove my hijab, others advising me to just stay indoors. I paid heed to neither. My neighbours reached out to me and cared for me, and my children taught me the real meaning of a human family. It was not a time to hide and be silent. I had to wrestle with claiming my faith which had literally been hijacked that day. All the war machinery pumped into full gear in the name of finding weapons of mass destruction and seeking revenge has brought untold misery, death, destruction and displacement. It never did calm the fury, but rather added fuel to the fire, highlighting the civilization and cultural divide, reviving the language of the Crusades and renewing the calls to end, in the words of Franklin Graham, the "evil" religion. The world has never been the same for any Muslim after September 11th, even for those who were closet Muslims prior to that day. While bombs were falling in Iraq and Afghanistan and anger and resentment on both sides of the divide were growing, ordinary Muslims like myself had to meet the challenge of educating our neighbours and friends about what Islam is and who Muslims really are. Once again, I was humbled to watch Jews, Christians and other people of conscience speak out against

injustice irrespective of who the victim of injustice happened to be. It is these unsung heroes who never bought into the neo-con philosophy of the permanent civilizational divide and who are never celebrated in the media that have taught Muslims like me the power of true freedom of expression in the West.

This journey of reclaiming my faith from the extremist minority and creating awareness about Islam and Muslims has become my jihad. My task as a Muslim and that of other Muslims is very hard, especially when the machinery in the business of manufacturing hate and fear is very strong and well funded. This multimillion dollar fear factory, kept alive by the likes of Robert Spencer and his protégés Hisri Ali, Daniel Pipes, David Horowitz, Pam Geller and our own Mark Spencer, drowns the voices of reason, voices that speak of a dialogue of civilizations, a coming together of community on principles of respect, harmony, understanding and above all, compassion. The inhumane crime of Andre Brevik, the Norwegian murderer, who by his own admission in his 1500 page manifesto, was inspired by the above cited self-proclaimed "Islamic experts," shows us the deadly consequences of hate mongering and manufactured fear. It is a warning that once again superiority complexes, uncontrollable egos, and the urge to maintain power and control over others will widen the chasm between people of the world and be fodder for the "civilized us" vs. the "savage them." It is indeed painful to hear ignorant statements from some who are socialized into thinking that Muslims are a threat, non-contributing members of society and civilization, and an enemy whose increasing numbers is the biggest threat to the "values" of the civilized West. These are accusations I can expect to hear at most of the events where I speak, a clear indication that the Islamophobes of the twenty first century are succeeding in spreading fear and creating a sense of alarm.

My interfaith journey continues as I walk alongside so many wonderful people of many different faith traditions who teach me about their faith, yet strengthen my own. While I hear ignorant statements from some, there is hope in others who do not let fear take over their lives and do not heed warnings of alarmists. I know that fear can be overcome, trust can be built, and knowledge and awareness can help build compassion. I know that we are capable of embracing one another and treating one another with

respect as long as we are willing to listen to one another and engage one another with equity, without the imposition of my truth as the only truth. We are capable of moving beyond the media stereotypes that, in Noam Chomsky's words, "tame the bewildered herd."

I pray that true compassion for each other will guide us all in taking a step towards ending ignorance and challenging ideas that breed mistrust. We have no option but to move beyond our closed communities and build harmonious relationships with one another, irrespective of our differences of faith, culture, language and ethnicity. Such relationships can bloom in an atmosphere of trust and true understanding where we do not all become alike; instead, we cherish one another just as we are, with all our differences and unique gifts. The question I will keep asking myself as long as I live is "Am I standing up to injustice and oppression, or, are my actions and inactions promoting injustice?" This is not the time to rest, since hate threatens harmony in our communities and fear casts its dark shadow. Justice is the guiding principle of my life, and as a Muslim I will continue to strive in my jihad to live up to the Qu'ranic commandment:

O those who have believed
Be one who is staunch in equity
As witnesses for God
Even against yourselves
Or ones who are your parents or nearest of kin.

Our Ways Are Not Your Ways
JEWISH STUDIES, RELIGIOUS STUDIES AND THE NEW JEWISH CULTURAL STUDIES

Holly A. Pearse

The academic discourse surrounding religious studies has generated a great deal of energy towards producing an all-encompassing definition of the phenomenon that it studies. It has been asked many times: What would become of a discipline that could not even define its central concern?[1] The result is that religious studies often represents an attempt to disengage traditions holding implications for many aspects of human life so they can fit into a single discipline or frame of inquiry. But traditions, developed as they were in their own contexts and not for the convenience of academics, often defy a simple essentializing definition.[2]

While the quest for something resembling a science of religion, and definitions of the spheres of concern for the discipline, has its merits, it has been problematic for scholars like me who study ethno-religious groups in diaspora from non-elite perspectives. Time and again, we find ourselves in a grey zone within religious studies, and are asked which specific parts of our research have to do with religion and which with culture. The study of Jewish communities is not easily distilled into that which is religion and that which is not. The question is complicated, in part, by the traditional Jewish lack of a separation between religion and secular life, which continues to mark the blurring of heritage and identity in modern times, as well as the tendency to draw group cohesion from both religious and cultural shared histories. Thus, there is a loggerhead of sorts between scholars of Jewishness (a term more useful to me than scholar of "Judaism"), who tend to see the complex dynamics between religion and culture as essential to our subject, and the religious studies structures in which many of us work, study, and identify.

Jewish identity, my prime focus, is a complex construct that is often frustratingly difficult to define and, therefore, to study and present. First, the matter is complicated by the breadth of Jewish history and culture, and the expansiveness of multiple geographical locations and nationalities. Further, we are additionally stymied by the multitude of definitions of the category of Jewish Identity itself, which have taken numerous paths, from racial to religious to ethnic.[3] Tracing and describing the expression and representation of the Jewish people is a matter of first figuring out what that construct itself entails. This could be a difficult endeavour for those educated in the understanding of Jewishness as "merely" a matter of religious identity, an idea promoted by the secularized-Protestant understanding of religious faith as a universalizing process (i.e. Galatians 3.28).[4] In contrast, Judaism has long been a religious lifestyle of particularity, and, likewise, Jewishness today is still rooted in the details of belonging and difference. Therefore, though Jewishness might be a matter of ethnicity and culture for the majority of unaffiliated or secular Jews who continue to self-identify as Jews,[5] these elements of Jewish identity continue to mimic the ancient traditions of binding together a community through distinguishing the Chosen from the non-Chosen in idiosyncratic ways. Identity is not a reified, primordial thing for humanity, but rather an active process stemming from multiple cultural and personal functions that, according to need, provide boundaries and meaning to the self and/or the community.[6] In this, the people and subject matter that we examine are able to employ any tool at will, and these will often defy easy categorization.

What my work generally seeks is an epistemology of Jewishness, *vis-à-vis* how it is rehearsed, represented and interrogated in pop culture and cinema. This research has found its place in the field of "New Jewish Cultural Studies," an emerging field that seeks to embrace different modes of scholarship towards the ultimate goal of understanding Jews/Jewishness and Judaism as organic, variegated and contemporary (yet historicized) threads in the same tapestry.[7] Jewish cultural studies is the offspring of the more common fields of Jewish studies and cultural studies. Cultural studies scholars have largely snubbed the Jewish subject as no longer being oppressed or marginalized enough to warrant inclusion in their field,

thereby exhibiting the new form of stereotyping in the university, one that automatically aligns Jews with the powerful/wealthy elite (Bronner 2008). This is a disservice to the field of cultural studies, because it fails to recognize how Jews can expand our understanding of race and ethnicity in North America. It ignores how Jewish identity can challenge the conventional opposition between a majority "white monoculture" and a marginalized "people of colour monoculture," thereby exploding the subtextual myth that those two things could ever co-exist so neatly.[8] Even more, it is a disservice to the study of Jews, because it discounts the discursive creation of Jewish identity as a marginalized Other in Western society.[9] As the Boyarins, Daniel and Jonathan, have pointed out, the erasure of Jewish difference has ultimately tainted Jewish studies, by making the academy believe that Jews are no longer racialized or marginalized, or even distinct. The downplaying of Jewish difference began after World War II[10] when secular liberal society and its academics (especially the non-Jewish ones) insisted on this position. Jewish cultural studies, however, seeks to embrace Jewish culture, identity and action, aside from just those areas which are connected to religion, and open the study up to the ideas of performance, embodiment, gender politics, racialization, difference, folklore and feeling.

Within this form of cultural studies, I continue to employ both religious studies and Jewish studies. The former is the field in which I have been trained, which teaches me the value of texts and social scientific research, and of religious history visible in the present. It also encourages me to take seriously the voices of religious Jews, something often downplayed in the secularized field of Jewish studies. Meanwhile, Jewish studies bring attention to Jewish classical traditions, to Jewish realities and to the politics of Jewishness within the academy. The addition of Jewish cultural studies is not to the exclusion of the others, but as a way to bring the two together in harmony with lived Jewishness beyond the classical, the textual or the elite. My research explores the areas surrounding the hyphen in Jewish-American – that new hybrid identity partially created by the media, and emphasized by the resounding disruption of the little dash that represents the tension between assimilation and difference, and marks the negotiation of two connected spheres of loyalty (one global and

one local).[11] In this sense, it makes perfect sense that my discipline should be likewise hybridized in order to respond to the people, communities and materials with which I work.

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The Way of a Rickshaw

Amber Westfall

I see the heart of India from the rickshaws.
I mean the *heart* of India,
where she comes alive with a throbbing, pulsing beat:

whether it is Mcleod Ganj in the afternoon
coming back from a day at the base of the waterfall in Baghsu,

and I turn my head to look out of my square of bars that keeps me from spilling out onto the road,
and makes the frame through which I see

a woman in a red sari sitting in a yellow doorway,
gazing at me with dark, liquid eyes
while she rolls out chapati dough and sunlight slants gently on her,

or on the way back from Rishikesh and the Durga Puja after the sun has set
and there a *bramhacharya* dressed in white standing under a street lamp
lifts a cup of chai to his lips,

and the bidi wallah leaning on his counter that faces the street,
the street that carries the lifeblood of this place,
precariously, almost violently,

and me perched on my little bench in that small motorized miracle,
sometimes with thirteen other people
and on someone else's knee,

I see the tailors, the welders, the shoemakers, mechanics, the beggars and mothers, children, cows, goats and dogs, saints and sinners, smiles and stares back at me,

all these things
I see from the rickshaw, fleetingly, sporadically, bittersweet and heart achingly beautifully,
this is when India comes alive for me.

The Way of the Spiritual Seeker
MONISM (OR AS ABOVE SO BELOW)

Siobhan Chandler

Seekers in North America and in many other parts of the world are in a monist mood. What do I mean by this? If you've never heard of monism, don't worry. Most spiritual seekers have never heard of monism and certainly do not associate this label with their interests and activities, and for good reason – the word is really more academic than popular. But I would like to change that. I think monism and the concepts that underlie it are so important they could change the way we think about popular religion. I am enthusiastic about the concept of monism because it has brought my "religion" into sharp focus, and helped me make sense of what looks like a disconnected cluster of personal development techniques, spiritual teachers, and commercial offerings. But before I get into that, let me share a little about myself, because although I used to think that the path I took was unique, I now know after years of studying the "spiritual but not religious" phenomenon, it is actually pretty typical. It explains a lot about the monist orientation and why it is becoming so pervasive.

I never went to church growing up. In fact, for a good part of my teen and early adult years I scoffed at religion and even considered myself an atheist for a time. I did not get much succor from this attitude, and as you probably know, life has ways of getting you to rethink things. By the time I was twenty-one, I had delved into the self-help literature to solve some personal problems I was facing. Mainly I felt my life lacked direction and purpose. I simply did not see how the things my culture taught me to want and be would make me happy. I found great comfort in books like "What Colour is Your Parachute" and "Do What You Love and the Money will Follow." These and other titles did a great deal to calm my apprehensions that I was out of touch with reality. Instead, they introduced me to what

seemed a radical notion at the time: career satisfaction meant finding out what made me happy and no-one else could tell me what that would be. I was greatly relieved by this since I did not think I was cut out for so many of the occupations I was taught were the gold standard for success. I just could not see myself as a dentist, lawyer – or God forbid! – an accountant. What I did not see at the time was that what had started out as an employment question – what should I do for a living? – was essentially the first stop en route to a much deeper and infinitely more complicated question – who am I? In the blink of an eye, I had moved, unsuspecting, into the realm of spirituality.

Many people today travel similar paths to becoming spiritual seekers. While some do undertake a deliberate spiritual search, many get thrown into it by the dictates of fortune. Whether this is because they get diagnosed, depressed, divorced or disoriented, their search for solutions leads them straight into the heart of what is sometimes called "quest culture." Why does this happen? I think it is mainly because conventional wisdom today has it that "the answers are inside you." In fact, this is such a common sentiment that in many cases it goes unquestioned. Yet this is not the classical western view. On the contrary, the great Abrahamic faiths of Judaism, Christianity and Islam, which have directed so much of our history, are quite clear the answers are not inside you. These traditions emphasize that your best bet is to look outside to a higher power that can guide and correct your corporeal misjudgments. In these traditions, God above is the source of wisdom and illumination.

Many liberal religionists will say that this is overstating things, that God is not remote or absolutely unknowable and He is certainly not the wrathful menace that some of the scriptures make Him out to be. No, they say, there is an imminent God of Love, a God that is accessible and amenable to humankind. I do not dispute this, but for us to make progress with understanding the monist ideal, we have to agree that no matter how loving the Abrahamic God might be, at some level there is an unbridgeable gap between humankind and God. Humans are made in the likeness of God, but they are not God in any practical sense. God is Lord, Father and divine Ruler. He is the unsurpassed source of all that is, a singular deity presiding over His creation of which humans are an important but relative part.

In contrast, what the self- help literature was telling me in so many ways was that I was "God." It told me that I did not realize this because, like everybody else, I was conditioned out of this knowing by the forces of socialization and culture. But that is fine, these teachers said, for there is a path of "recovery," methods to recover or reclaim my natural state of grace. Through a combination of breaking down the ego's tenacious grip on my mind and behaviors, and bolstering conscious connection to a transpersonal dimension through things like meditation, visualization, and prayer, I could find my way back to my essential nature, which was inherently divine. I was invited to get in touch with my "inner being" and experience my direct connection to a god variously described by names such as Divine Reality, Infinite Intelligence, Source, Supreme Consciousness or Absolute Awareness. In connecting to this god-force, I was told, I could unleash its creative power and wisdom to transform my small "s" self, unhelpfully fixated on competition and survival, into the Self of enlightened awareness and love. Journaling, dancing, chanting, meditating, gardening, skiing, fasting, praying were other ways I was told I could find my way "up the mountain" of spiritual insight and development. And since there are as many ways up that spiritual mountain as there are people willing to climb it, most reasonable pursuits were permitted, provided they did not harm another being. Anything could be a source of insight and transformation. Negative events like my mini existential crisis were especially prized for their ability to identify where one was cut off from their inner wisdom.

Historically speaking, though, considering the historical prominence of Christianity in the west, it is simply incredible that today we have a mega million dollar wellbeing industry committed to telling seekers like myself that the answer to life's biggest questions are inside, and that they need no particular outside authority to access this spiritual power. How did this happen?

One way to understand this is to appreciate that the "god within" is not a twentieth century notion linked to the 1960s counterculture with its eastern-mystical or hippie drug scene or even the 1980s New Age movement for that matter. Rather, it has existed on the margins of western religious life for thousands of years. For example, the idea that each person

contains a divine spark which is a source of inherent and infallible wisdom that corresponds to the infinite oneness is prominent in the writings of the early Christian Gnostics, the Renaissance Hermeticists, the writings of the Swedish polymath Emmanuel Swedenborg, and many other spiritual but not immediately recognizably religious groups including the Mesmerists, Theosophists, Jungians, and, of course, many spiritual seekers of today. Likewise, the contemporary fascination with the beauty and inerrancy of nature as a source of wisdom and wholeness is also a key premise in western monist or non-dual thought. It is seen in the Hermeticists' fascination with alchemy and astrology, the Mesmerists' methods of manipulating an invisible fluid they believed linked the whole universe together ("animal magnetism") to bring about healing, and the nature mysticism of New England Transcendentalists such as Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau. In short, the main ideas that are popular with many spiritual but not religious seekers today have a long history, and are by no means newly invented pathways to the divine.

Yet what consistently confuses people is how a path of connecting with the god within can have a shared basis if it requires each spiritual seeker to follow guidance that is uniquely his or her own. While I would be the first to admit that the landscape is eclectic, offering seekers a dazzling array of options, I also think that despite this seeming diversity, what binds much contemporary seeking into a coherent whole is its essentially monist worldview, captured at the most basic level by its guiding axiom – *as above so below.* This simple creed of "as above so below" points to the essential, non-negotiable plank of the monist cosmology which gives rise to its key doctrine: there is no separation between creator and created. What exists in the "heavens" above corresponds exactly and completely to what is below on earth. Some common metaphors that give shape to this principle of correspondence – the identicality of macrocosm and microcosm – are the concepts of holograms and DNA where the code for the whole is contained in each cell, as well as the concept of life force energy (also called *chi*, *prana*, *kundalini*, bio-plasmic or vital energy) that permeates and binds creation together through an invisible field or matrix. As a result, everything is interconnected, and despite appearances, everything is one.

While this might all seem religiously non-specific or vague, as it is

practiced today, the monist way is actually highly structured, following its predictably guiding motif that everything is interconnected and that source energy is distributed non-preferentially in all creation. This gives rise to a set of systematic corollary beliefs, namely that 1) nature is sacred and alive and a source of information and guidance about the godhead, 2) religious truth is not confined to a single faith or tradition, but rather seeds of divine wisdom are found in all the religions, and 3) the human Self is sacred and a source of guidance and wisdom because it is connected to the godhead. Furthermore, the term monism – literally 'one-ism' – is an etymological clue that points to the principle aim of these seekers, which is to develop spiritually by overcoming the illusion of separation and realize the inherent oneness of all that is. This is achieved through a special type of insight or knowledge sometimes called *gnosis*. This is not a knowledge based on reason (don't forget the mind is vulnerable to cultural misdirection and therefore unreliable) but rather on an intuitive knowing based on awareness of one's feelings, sensations, dreams, instincts and so forth. The subjectivities of the self, therefore, are not fantasies or airy-fairy whims, but impulses which must be correctly developed and understood so they can serve as a font of incredible insight and therefore power which can assist and direct the seeker on the journey to Selfhood. Delving within to connect to one's inner being is integral to the monist way because it is how one connects to the divine portal within. This leads to the readily observable fascination monist seekers have for their inner life, mapping and mastering its every detail through methods ranging from dreamwork to therapy. Philosophically, therefore, monists are non-dualists. They resist separating the "uni-verse" into the polarities of mind and matter, body and soul and certainly, God and human, in favour of an integrated or holistic approach that underscores the interconnected nature of the super-stratum.

The spiritual but not religious phenomenon that we see today is basically a monist worldview. Not only does it draw on the western monist traditions but also incorporates eastern forms of monism. This is seen in the love affair many have with reconstituted forms of Buddhism, Hinduism and Daoism, the evidence of which parades before us in myriad ways, including the recent commercialization of Buddha statues for homes and gardens, ubiquitous yoga studios, and tattoos of lotus flowers and the yin

yang. While it is frequently suggested that the weakening of Christianities has led to indiscriminate religious outsourcing, so to speak, I think it more accurate to say that these traditions have taken hold in our time because they resonate with a pre-existing though latent stream of our own monist heritage. The specific flavour of the contemporary spiritual but not religious phenomenon ultimately derives from its characteristic blend of monist philosophies east and west.

Despite the fact that most people that I would describe as monists are totally unaware of the history of monism in the west and have almost no sense of it as a tradition per se, what is astonishing is how systematically monist ideals are reproduced culturally. While monism has always been obscured (even denounced) by the historical grandeur of Christianity, this is no longer the case today. With a shift in social conditions especially since the 1960s and the overarching cultural dedication to the self, I think (and I am not alone in positing this "spiritual revolution") monism is poised to become the next big thing. The reasons for this are not complicated. Western culture is individualistic by definition. As our society has developed, it has become progressively more emphatic that humans are capable of independent reasoning, and action.

What I am saying, therefore, is that the central premise of monism – that one is God, or at least that one has complete access to that which is divine because it is rooted within the self – is wonderfully concordant with the late modern psyche and its strong predilection for self-centeredness. I mean this literally, by the way, and not as a slur. For while selfishness is a real danger in a culture of individualism, there is complete cultural permission, indeed an expectation, that we are the architects of our destiny and have the right to choose the path our lives will take. We are socialized from birth to think of ourselves as autonomous agents who can fulfill our dreams provided we have opportunities, resources and most importantly, incentive. In fact, this orientation is being so sufficiently amplified by each generation that now we hear Generation Y described as a youth culture with an excessive sense of "entitlement" to riches and opportunities based on merit that is not earned. In truth, this generation is simply heir to a prescription handed them by their similarly self-entitled predecessors, who apparently lacked the foresight to anticipate how their own values

and priorities would inevitably play out.

Why do I mention this here? Well, as it turns out, self-centeredness, autonomy and entitlement are highly relevant to any discussion of monism, and account, I believe, for its invisibility in mainstream religious scholarship. Any serious study of alternative spiritualities such as this are bound to confront the chorus of disapproval directed at monist seekers (especially "New Age" style spirituality) whose penchant for so-called "navel gazing" has earned them a reputation as being narcissists whose beliefs and practices are only accelerating the individualism of our age with all its undesirable consequences. It is said to lack discipline and integrity in part because it does not have clearly visible institutional parameters, namely churches, leaders and scriptures. Many scholars and social observers regard spirituality outside religion as a mutation, an artifact of late modern religious life that amounts principally to disconnected people each doing their own thing with no guiding principles or moral imperatives. I hope that this short essay has suggested that this is not the case; yet the view is still pervasive.

My personal experiences and scholarly efforts to meet and speak to people who have rejected organized religion for the monist way lead me to a different conclusion. I am optimistic that the monism I describe here is an integrating, even demanding path that holds great promise for personal and social transformation. My research certainly does not support the stereotype that being spiritual but not religious makes one socially and politically inert – in fact quite the contrary. Many of these seekers are very involved with their communities and each other. When one understands that the spiritual but not religious phenomenon is tied to the rebirth of monism in our time, and not simply the degradation of the monotheistic traditions, it emerges as an alternative religiosity with moral and spiritual weight. It is my hope and ambition that spiritual but not religious seekers will reclaim their past so that the community continues to gain a self-conscious awareness of itself as a new religious voice. Like all religions, it is an aggregate of its light and shadow sides. On its better days, I see it as a path of working out our common human destiny by holding to the vision that, as inhabitants of planet earth in a dangerous time, we truly are all in this together.

Notes

See the following: Robert Forman, *Grassroots Spirituality: What is it, why is it here, and where is it going?* (Exeter, UK: Imprint, 2004); Robert Fuller, *Spiritual but not Religious: Understanding Unchurched America* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001); Paul Heelas and Linda Woodhead, *The Spiritual Revolution: Why Religion is Giving Way to Spirituality* (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 2005); and Paul H. Ray and Sherry R. Anderson, *The Cultural Creatives: How 50 Million People are Waking up and Changing the World* (New York: Harmony, 2000).

A Second Revelation

Pamela O'Rourke

I.

it came to me as I watched day turn to pinks and purples
through the open window
at the old Seminary in Kottayam
silhouetting the rubber trees
pails of dripping sap
fading from view as
Vespers rose above the incense
it came to me
on prayers chanted
as I watched night arrive
that all these years
I was not looking for a god
I could like but
one that could love me
....for how many years did I think I was unlovable
....too many

II.

...and so...
climb up and through and down
look above and beyond
burrow between the words
the teachings and
stories
what this journey is about
is not written
but lived
and does not have an ending...

these simple words cannot convey
the pilgrimage within that is
deep and lasting
...until moksha

The Way of Women
IN SEARCH OF LOVE AND WISDOM

Ursula King

This is a personal reflection to celebrate the life of Darrol Bryant in connection with his work at the Centre for Dialogue and Spirituality in the World Religions at Renison University College/University of Waterloo, Canada. I feel honoured to have been invited to write this contribution, since I cherish many happy memories of interfaith dialogue meetings and discussions in Darrol's presence and under his leadership in years past, while I continue to cherish his friendship in the present.

I want to share some ideas about wisdom and love, but I would like to explore these universal themes especially from a very particular contemporary perspective. The royal road of wisdom has been pursued by countless different thinkers in human history, but is this wisdom still enough for living now, in the global world of our twenty-first century with its exponential opportunities and vast problems?

In most cultures and religions, great wisdom schools and teachings have often primarily been associated with eminent philosophical thinkers and extraordinary religious prophets and seers who have been mainly male, although we also know of some singular wise women and prophetesses in the different world faiths. Surprisingly also, the word "wisdom" is a grammatically feminine noun in many languages. So what is women's search for wisdom, especially the wisdom of love?

In our increasingly interconnected world, we are profoundly aware of our material and economic interdependencies, but we are also becoming more conscious of our spiritual interdependence as an evolving human species within the large history of life on planet Earth. This growing transformation of human consciousness makes many people much more aware of previously neglected sources of wisdom and love that we urgently need to draw upon much more effectively in order to ensure the continual

flourishing of all people and the planet.

In his seminal book *The Great Work*, the well-known ecological thinker Thomas Berry speaks of the need to rediscover the spiritual sense of the universe and the necessity "to reinvent the human." For this to occur, we need to develop a new world vision that requires the fundamental restructuring of politics, governance, education, religion and the financial arrangements around the globe, and we have to refashion our communities and relationships. This task is simply impossible to achieve if humankind does not creatively draw on what Berry calls the "fourfold wisdom." In his view, these four streams of wisdom, which have to be in dialogue with each other, are the wisdom of indigenous peoples, the wisdom of women, the wisdom of the classical traditions (that is to say the wisdom of traditional religions and philosophies), and the much more recent, newer wisdom of science (which Berry, surprisingly, refers to as "The Yoga of the West").

All four resources are equally important, but the need for their mutual interaction and creative dialogue is rarely perceived and understood in the inspiring way in which Berry speaks about them. It is more usual that only the different faiths and worldviews are thought of as in a dialogue situation, whereas today humanity needs to work with a far larger vision and work toward a more pluralistically resourced synthesis to empower it for its own further self-evolution, creating more balance and harmony rather than violence and discord in the world. In addition to the growing dialogue between different faiths, philosophies and cultures, some people may be particularly interested in the wisdom of indigenous people or in the wisdom of science, whereas I am especially interested in the hitherto much neglected wisdom of women.

We know of great women of faith and wisdom in all the religions traditions, but by and large these rather exceptional women have wielded little spiritual authority in an overwhelmingly patriarchically structured world. This situation may well be changing now, for since the beginning of the modern women's movement, and even more since the rise of a critical feminist and gender consciousness, there are women in all religions involved with transforming traditional approaches to religious beliefs and practices. There is a real "silent revolution" going on, whether among Jewish, Christian, Muslim, Hindu or Buddhist women or the women

of any other tradition. It is not sufficiently noticed by the world at large that instead of being defined *by* religion in their self-understanding and roles, as was customary in the past, women now help to define religion for themselves and for others. This revolutionary process of transformation has been aptly described as "gendering the spirit," and examples can be found all over the world.

Last September I took part with many other women in the joyful celebration of the ninetieth birthday of a well-known Dutch woman theologian, one of the first feminist theologians in Europe, who inspired many others with her teaching and writing. It was the exuberant celebration of a long, rich life, an affirmation of life itself, of its dynamism, growth, and unforeseeable transformations, as well as of the deep wisdom and love of a life that reached out to so many others. Together with all the others I felt that this celebratory event resonated with so many special celebratory moments in Catharina Halkes' writings.

For me, the theme of celebration related especially to Catharina Halkes' use of great dreams, her affirmation of life, and her perception of the closeness of the divine spirit in all of life. Her inspiring dreams, of which she speaks in her books, have woven so many connections, and her continuous search for a new feminist theological anthropology is poignantly expressed when she points to the powerful process that indicates more clearly now "die *Menschwerdung* der Frau," a German phrase that means "becoming human," noting the emergence of the full humanity of women in the world. That is what we all seek and desire so deeply.

I could mention the name of many women in different countries who have expressed or express today in practice, in social and political action, or in their writings a creative search for new approaches to wisdom and love that can transform the world. Space constraints limit me to a few brief examples. I think of the Burmese woman leader Aung San Suu Kyi with her courage, wisdom and love for her people. Or the extraordinary story of the young Jewish woman Etty Hillesum, known for her amazing works of compassion among the persecuted Dutch Jews at Westerbork camp, and the deep wisdom and love reflected in the diary that survived her death. Or the amazing life story of the more than 100-year-old pianist Alice

Herz-Sommer who survived two years in the Theresienstadt concentration camp giving concerts and bringing up her small son, one of 130 children to survive the camp out of the 15,000 children who were taken there. Her interviews speak of her deep love of music, her passionate mother's love for her child, and of the abiding love of life that stayed with her in spite of the extremes of suffering she experienced.

Love is relational in creating bonds between people. It brings forth strong connections between individuals, groups, and communities. Reflecting on the transformative power of love, Teilhard de Chardin wrote, "Love is the free and imaginative outpouring of the spirit over all unexplored paths." This statement anchors love in the dynamic action of the Spirit while implying that there still exist many unexplored paths of love that human beings can discover and follow. This is our great task today – a task with which many women are deeply involved.

For people who are religious, it is God, the Divine, the Ground of all being, who is the ultimate source, the very fountain of love, however named and experienced. The fourteenth century English mystic Julian of Norwich said that love *is* God's meaning. Her vision of divine motherly love, passionate and compassionate, accepting and supporting, helping and healing, can be a tremendous inspiration when meditating on the nature of love, especially from a woman's point of view. In a very affirming, positive way Julian expresses particularly well what many other religious sources proclaim: Love always exists, and it is always there to accompany, surround, uphold and comfort us. Love is a fire both human and divine. How can we spread it effectively today in a world so torn apart?

We need to awaken the energies of love to stir and transform the people on our planet. For this, the old ways of understanding and practising love are no longer enough. While making use of all the resources of knowledge and wisdom available to us, we have to push the boundaries of our understanding of love. It is no longer enough to think simply about love in the way our forbears did, or search in sacred scriptures, world philosophies and literature for the established meanings of love. We live in such a different world and have such a nuanced awareness of our own becoming within the cosmic epic of evolution and the grand web of life that all our assumptions need to be examined and assessed anew.

The energies of love reach out to everybody and touch on everything. They cannot be seen as something only personal and inward; they radiate outward; leap forward; overcome obstacles; move onward and upward. We can dream of *the ways and energies of love as new ways of living.* It is a dream that links up with so many other dreams; it goes beyond what existed and was possible in the past. It is the discovery of a new road, the seeding of seminal ideas, the crossing of a new threshold in the long history of our human species and the history of life, the revelation of a communal heart.

The American scholar, artist and spiritual director Beverly J. Lanzetta published in 2005 a daring, innovative book, *Radical Wisdom: A Feminist Mystical Theology* and two years later another study, *Emerging Heart: Global Spirituality and the Sacred*, of particular interest for interfaith relations.

Lanzetta speaks of women standing on the borders of a new country as mapmakers of uncharted spiritual territory. Her reflections are grounded in a deep love of God and the world, in a profound sense of belonging and trust that make her challenge many aspects of traditional spirituality from a strong feminist perspective.

She points to a new *via feminina* in mystical spirituality, a feminine way not restricted to women alone, but open to both women and men, although it expresses itself differently in females than in males. She means by this feminine way a quality of religious consciousness and a mystical path that treads new ground. Thus she redefines the spiritual journey from the perspective of women, but not in an exclusive sense. Instead of seeking union with God through either a *via positiva* or *via negativa,* she sees the *via feminina,* the feminine mystical way, as a "third way", unveiling to us "the feminine heart of divinity and the spiritual equality of women". The *via feminina* is presented as a "radical mysticism" which seeks new forms of expression and engagement, while recognizing at the same time that some features of traditional mysticism reveal themselves as products of patriarchy that have to be dismantled and replaced by something new for the present world. This means transforming and in some cases even subverting the traditional spiritual journey, by turning in two directions, "inward toward the divine center of the self, and outward toward the world." This must include the naming and eliminating of spiritual oppression as

well as eradicating the many forms of violence and of economic, sexual and social abuse of women.

Turning inward, Lanzetta subtly traces the deep longing to love in the great women mystics of the past, especially in Julian of Norwich and Teresa of Avila.

Lanzetta also speaks of an "ethic of ultimate concern," an embodied engagement that moves out of contemplation into action in the human social sphere, thereby expanding into a deeply caring and transforming *love* for the world. She calls this a "mystical ethic" described as "in essence, a mothering one; it embraces the world as a mother's body surrounds and nurtures life within her womb. Metaphors of pregnancy and birth help convey how each day we bear – lay our bodies down for – the spiritual renewal of life."

Lanzetta's book *Radical Wisdom* celebrates the powers of a different kind of love by seeking the love of God through the transformation of the self, of women's lives, and of the world. Her vision of the organic wholeness and spiritual unity of humanity is strengthened by her comparative perspective in acknowledging the mystical richness of different faiths. Her reflections on sexual love as a type of contemplation, of embodiment as a writing of divinity into the world, and her critical stance on our material culture, "blinded to the unseen," are very challenging and deeply inspiring.

Another example of searching for the wisdom of love – for an altogether different kind of love – is provided by Anne Hillman, another American writer whose book *Awakening the Energies of Love: Discovering Fire for a Second Time* provides an extraordinary inspiration for learning to love in a new and different way. Steeped in rich personal experience as a musician, singer, poet and professional consultant on organisational development, Hillman is deeply interested in the internal aspects of social change, and how interior personal development can contribute to fundamental changes in our culture. Drawing on deep insights from mystics of all cultures, she traces the process of awakening – whether as gradual transformation or sudden mystical epiphany – to the ever-present powers of love that run like a current of fire through all of life. Full of passionate wisdom and a great love of life, her book invites everyone to the great adventure of harnessing the energies of love for the transformation of the world and

ourselves.

Hillman's pioneering work deserves close reading and meditation. Her emphasis is very much on the need for *a new awakening now*. She traces this process in an evolutionary framework by following the rise of consciousness within the development of humanity and within each person. We each carry two beginnings in ourselves, that of a child, and as a child of the human race. Reflecting on the evolution of our mind and the foundations of our soul, we discover a profound capacity for relatedness and for a qualitatively different love that can embrace differences. We need to discover our fundamental relatedness to everything that exists, not only to other persons, but to the whole natural world. Awakening the energies of love and learning to live with fire inside, "we learn to live in relationship – all relationship – in wholly new ways: to live as the greater community of life." For Hillman, those whose awakening makes them increasingly transparent to the mystery of love are lights, carriers of fire and conduits of power. She traces the different changes and learning curves that accompany this profound transformation into practising a different kind of love. At this evolutionary juncture of the human species, we are all called to awaken to a new kind of love, a love that is not a feeling, but a great power.

Animated and motivated by that tremendous evolutionary energy wave, we begin to see and hear things differently, learn to access life in a new way. Our sense of identity begins to change and we learn to live in a conscious communion with life, to live as relationship, and to be motivated in all things by love. To use Meister Eckhart's term, it is a "one-ing" in a deep mystical sense that helps us to overcome our misunderstanding of love, a "one-ing" lived in community. Hillman writes, "To put it another way, we experience the difference between having a relationship to *thoughts* about love … or to *feelings* of love … or *sensations* we associate with love – *and come into a quality of deep relatedness with Love, Itself*." It means living in conscious communion with the larger Life.[1]

These few examples must suffice to show that contemporary women's search for new ways of wisdom and love point to the possibility of new connections and new communities. Women across different traditions and cultures are in dialogue, seeking to work together with their hands,

their heads, and their hearts. They seek a wisdom of love that is holistic, all-embracing and grounded in the deepest connections of trust, and in spiritualities for life. More and more people are recognising that a new spirit is abroad among us, nurtured by the wisdom and ways of women. This can give us ground for hope and strength. Even the Pope seems to have recognized this when, during his 2010 visit to England, he was quoted as saying, "I believe that women themselves, with their energy and strength, with their superiority, with what I'd call their 'spiritual power,' will know how to make their own space. And we will have to try and listen to God so as not to stand in their way…"

May the wisdom of love prevail and create new paths for the flourishing of all life now and in the future – the life of the Earth and of all living beings, including the human community. What we truly need is a "new creation," to quote Catharina Halkes once more, made possible by women and men working together in love and wisdom.

Endnotes

[1] Hillman's journey into "awakening the energies of love" was originally inspired by the saying of Pierre Teilhard de Chardin: "Someday, after mastering the winds, the waves, the tides, and gravity, we shall harness for God the energies of love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, humanity will have discovered fire." This quotation is a slightly reworked translation of the final passage of an essay on "The Evolution of Chastity" written in February 1934. See Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, *Toward the Future* (London: Collins, 1975), 86f.

The Way of Animal Friendships

Anne Innis Dagg

Probably most people in the world have a special friendship with at least one other person. It may be a member of the family, a daughter who adores her mother, or two brothers who have together set up a successful business. It may be a playmate from one's youth who has remained a staunch friend, or a buddy from the war or a long hospital stay who shares many of the same unforgettable memories.

Animals in the wild may form fast friendships too, as I found out while researching and writing my new book, *Animal Friendships*.[1] There may be an evolutionary reason for such friendships, as we shall see, or it may be just a matter of love, often of one lonely animal for another.

Monogamous pairs are the basis for fast friendships in many species, both male and female working harmoniously together to raise their offspring. This means that fathers have to be more attentive to this work than is the case in non-monogamous species such as cats or tigers. Tamarin and marmoset males are the most devoted fathers of all. These tiny squirrel-like primates from South American rain forests have a unique lifestyle, with nine different species having males who help their spouses raise their young; some tamarin fathers spend up to 78% of each day with their babies! In these species, despite their small size, twins are the norm. Their fathers carry these twins soon after they are born, and over many weeks work hard supplying them with choice insects and fruits to eat. Each mother is devoted to the twins too, especially physiologically – together they weigh at birth about twenty per cent of her body weight, and as they grow she supplies them with both milk and solid foods. (If women had newborn babies relatively as heavy, their twins would weigh 14 lbs each.) The infants are obviously a huge drain on the energies of their mother, who could not raise them alone.

Why are tamarins and marmosets males so loyal to their families? The evolutionary theory goes like this. Tamarins and marmosets could have evolved to their diminutive size for two possible reasons. It could have been that small size and multiple births were primitive traits retained over millions of years, or it could have been that these characteristics evolved over time. This second possibility is the more likely one. Why? Presumably tamarin and marmoset ancestors were evolving to occupy the ecological niche of small individuals eating fruit and insects that had been filled in the Old World by rodent species that did not then live in the New World tropics. Yet the smaller these animals were, the more they had to fear from predators. If the species were going to survive, the animals had to have a high rate of reproduction.

This was a challenge for the females. How to ramp up their production of babies? In general, the smaller a female mammal, the larger in proportion to her weight is her newborn. Fairly small monkeys in captivity have difficulty giving birth to a single young which weighs fifteen per cent of the mother's weight, so how could an even smaller mother manage? The best way to evolve to an even smaller size, with adults weighing a pound or less in some species, was to have twins with heads that could more easily slip out of the mother's birth canal.

So far so good. But how could the mother raise twins successfully by herself, especially when they were so hefty compared to her own weight? She couldn't, so it made sense for their father to join her in bringing them up. Because they were a monogamous pair, he had as much invested in them as she did, and would do what he could for them. As we have seen, his task was to carry the young about when they were a few weeks old and, along with their mother, help find for them high quality food such as large insects.

Australian Anne Goldizen,who studied the behavior of saddle-back tamarins in Peru, knew all this before she began her field research, so she was puzzled by some of her findings.[2] To travel with two growing youngsters on your back is hard work, especially when you must cover as much as two kilometers a day through tropical forest hunting for food, so Goldizen assumed that the father would be the one doing this. However, she noticed that when an encumbered father became so tired he scraped

the twins off his back onto a large branch, it wasn't the mother who hurried to the screaming infants but another male, equally friendly with the male, the female and the twins. He too carried them about as solicitously as the first male had done. What was going on? These tamarins lived in small groups, so could this male also have mated with the mother and be the possible father?

Female saddle-back tamarins do indeed mate with two males if possible, or even three or four, all of whom form presumably a happy family. These males will help rear the youngsters even though only one can be their father. If there are offspring from an earlier litter in the group, they too will help. This unusual situation, called cooperative polyandry, produces strong youngsters who are likely to live to maturity. Male members of this group have evolved to be not only excellent husbands and fathers, but also good buddies with each other as they labor to rear as many young as the female can produce. The teamwork of these little monkeys makes for maximum reproductive success.

Although bonobos, once called pygmy chimpanzees, resemble common chimpanzees, they have very different behaviors. In common chimps the males are more likely to be buddies than are the females, but in bonobos the opposite is true. When a female reaches puberty, she leaves her natal group to join another. There she makes contact with all the other females in the troop, but tends to select one who is especially appealing to her. Once she has chosen her "specific senior female" (or SSF as researchers refer to her), she makes a play for her affection, approaching her, following her, enticing her into grooming activities and into active sex, in which the two rub their genital regions together until they achieve orgasm. (This behavior is so common, seen many times a day among females, that researchers refer to it as GG rubbing.) The SSF seems less keen than her lusty young partner, but in reality has more interaction with this new adolescent than with the other resident females. Their close relationship is important in easing the newcomer's integration into a group. Female bonobos, unlike chimpanzees, tend to travel in stable groups so it is important that they each be familiar with and accepted by the other females as part of their community.

Frequent sex is an important commodity among female bonobos. It

not only helps cement friendships, but it also facilitates the sharing of food, expedites reconciliation after a dispute, and helps in the formation of coalitions to chase away harassing males or corral food. By evolving a social network of close friendships, female bonobos control both access to food and the aggression of males, to whom they are dominant. Compared to common chimpanzees, these females begin to reproduce earlier in their lives and therefore have, on average, a higher lifetime reproductive success. In connection with their homosexual behaviour, Bruce Bagemihl, who has written a book called *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity*, notes that "almost without exception, animals with 'different' sexualities and/or genders are completely integrated into the social fabric of their species, eliciting little of the attention, hostility, segregation, or secrecy that we are accustomed to associating with homosexuality in our society."[3]

Although adult males within a group are in effect rivals for the privilege of mating with group females, they sometimes form close personal bonds. Such was the case for Alexander and Boz, two elderly male olive baboons living in Kenya. Boz, who was the older, sometimes defended Alexander in battle. Once he heard Alexander scream from fifty meters away because he was being attacked by a young prime male; Boz rushed to the scene and leapt onto the assailant's back, rescuing his friend. These two males paired up to lure estrus females away from younger prime males (each was too old to be able to do this on his own); they cooperated in protecting each other from the aggression of high-ranking males; and they greeted each other much more often than did most pairs. Their greeting involved one mounting the other, grasping his hips, or "diddling" his genitalia – they used this diddling behavior more often than did other dyads, the seemingly most risky and intimate form of contact given the unprotected nature of the scrotum. Most strikingly, they were the only pair who showed complete symmetry of active and passive roles in these greetings. If one were the mounter on one occasion, then the other would do the mounting the next time, and the same with diddling and hip grasping. Their close friendship helped them live a satisfactory life, even though they were older and less strong then the prime males in their troop.

Rarely can all the animals of each sex in a group be closely bonded,

as happens in lions. Cubs are born into an incredibly social polygamous environment. Initially they live with their mothers in a safe den, and then with other mothers and young about the same age in a pride. If their mothers are away on a hunt, they can suckle from a female who has stayed behind to be with them. They have endless time to play and explore as they grow. This communal upbringing sets the stage for bonding between contemporaries within each sex when they reach adulthood, attachments which are vital to their way of life.

Lion pride females comprise sisters, cousins, nieces, aunts, grandmothers, and even great grandmothers, all close friends who spend most of their time together, playing, grooming, resting in a heap, rubbing against each other or licking faces as they relax. Their cubs romp or wrestle among them. Females of all ages are equal, forming a true democracy without any leaders. Their intimacy is vital because as the pride hunters, females must work efficiently and closely together to bring down enough prey animals to feed the whole pride. Sometimes a few females will lie in wait for gazelles while their friends circle around behind the prey before chasing them into the trap.

Pride males may be brothers or cousins born about the same time and reared in the same pride, or they may be unrelated males who met as nomads, became familiar with each other and teamed up together. Rarely can a lone male join a pride because he will be defeated in battle by larger male groups. Even these larger groups only retain the status of pride males for a few years before they are deposed by younger and stronger rivals, preventing incest between a male and his grown daughters. The bond between pride males is not necessarily genetic, but always that of familiarity and congeniality. When they come together after a long night, united by roars that enable them to find each other, their shared greetings are exuberant: rubbing faces (there are glands above the eyes), sliding their bodies along each other to exchange individual scent, and perhaps one falling against another and toppling him to the ground where they roll and loll about.

Pride males seldom fight among themselves (the possibility of injury would be great), nor do they compete for mating opportunities with a female in estrus once she has accepted one of them. If one male begins to

copulate with a female, a companion will wait (if he has a day or more to spare, because mating courtships can last up to fifty-five hours) until his friend is satiated; then he himself can hope to mate with the female if she is still willing, which she often is. This tolerance seems strange, but indicates how strong the friendship bond can be among pride males; by allowing an unrelated lion instead of himself to copulate with a female, he may forfeit his own chance to be a father and to pass along his DNA to the next generation. However, statistics show that male lions in groups of three or more, compared to groups of one or two, can hold onto a pride longer, mate with more females and produce more infants who survive, so that each male has a higher reproductive fitness because of their cooperation. Male lions act rather like group ranchers, all for one and one for all. Together, by driving away all rival male lions, they defend their large territory which includes their cubs, prey animals to provide them with food, and females with whom to mate and reproduce.

There can be no evolutionary (i.e. reproductive) purpose between members of different species becoming close buddies, and this occurs very rarely in the wild. But it occurs often in our own world – think dogs and cats and their loving human companions. The strangest example is that of animals imprinted on human beings – that is, raised from such an early age by people that they come to think of themselves as human, too. This was the case for Tiko, a red-colored Amazon parrot lucky enough to come at last, when he was thirty and in his prime, to live with Joanna Burger, an ornithologist who teaches animal behavior at Rutgers University. Burger wanted to observe Tiko's behavior and be his friend. But you can't rush a parrot, as Burger explains in her book *The Parrot Who Owns Me.*[4]

She took pains never to invade Tiko's space unless he wanted her to do so. She writes, "Parrots want to make their own friends at their own speed; pushing them provokes fear or aggression." He was often moody at first, but then he began to fit into family life; watching Burger as she rode her exercise bike; finding chocolates hidden for him by Mike, Joanna's husband; allowing his new acquaintances to gently scratch his head; and flying from room to room once he had regained his strength from being caged too long. He is tame, but not domesticated.

Tiko had bonded earlier with two women and, having been born in

captivity, was imprinted on human beings. He fell in love with and began courting Joanna Burger five years after he moved into her house. He became the alpha parrot of the household, Joanna his mate and Mike an imposter of whom he was intensely jealous. When Joanna woke each morning, he softly preened her finger tips with his bill and tongue, gently removing stray bits of skin and trimming her nails. He watched TV with his people (he and Mike especially liked reruns of *Cheers* and *Friends*) but refused to allow Mike to touch Joanna in his presence, or Joanna to address Mike in a sentimental voice. He even chose a place for the nest he and Joanna would share – under the credenza which was only two inches above the floor. He would peek out from this cramped space, fixing Joanna with his eyes and moaning enticingly. Sometimes he rushed out frantically to preen her toes before scooting back to his nest. Joanna proved an unwilling consort, though, and refused ever to join him there.

Parrots are intensely social. Without company they will often lapse into depression, refuse to eat, stop playing and become morose or angry. Their loneliness leads them to excessive preening and to pulling out their feathers, leaving patches of bare skin. Joanna Burger saved Tiko from this fate. He is now in his fifties with perhaps twenty more years to live, sure of himself and of his close friendship with Joanna. She must go on field trips for her scientific research, but she begins to worry about him after she has been away for three weeks or so. He continues to court her each spring, more frantically now than ever with new nesting sites such as under the bedroom dresser, but these also are unsuccessful in attracting his finicky Joanna to nest with him. Even so, the woman and the parrot will surely remain fast friends for as long as they live.

Friendship between animals can evolve in a number of ways, as we have seen. It is vital in monogamous species for couples to raise their young successfully. For bonobos, sex facilitates the acceptance of young immigrant females into their new group homes. Friendship eases the lives of two elderly baboons, facilitates the hunting success of female lions and forges close bonds among male lions, which help them to defend their pride. Or it can flower between members of different species, in a human family with their cats or dogs, or for a woman with her parrot. In any of its many guises, it is a blessing.

Endnotes

[1] Anne Dagg, *Animal Friendships* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2011).

[2] Anne Wilson Goldizen, "Facultative polyandry and the role of infant-carrying in wild saddle-back tamarins (Saguinus fuscicollis)," *Behavioral Ecology and Sociobiology* 20.2 (1987): 99-109.

[3] Bruce Bagemihl, *Biological Exuberance: Animal Homosexuality and Natural Diversity* (New York: Stonewall Inn Editions, 2000).

[4] Joanne Burger, *The Parrot Who Owns Me* (New York: Random House, 2001).

The Way of the Creek
DANCING THE CANADA JIG

Susan Hodges Bryant

The Canagagigue Creek – called the Canada Jig by locals – runs through our hometown of Elmira, Ontario, and has been part of our family life for forty years. I'm told that the name means "long and winding" in the Ojibway language. Long and winding is also a good description of the creek story I want to tell here.

When the kids were small, we'd head up the road to the dam, surrounded by woods and meadows, near to where the creek starts – to picnic, walk, mess around with frogs. Most Thanksgiving weekends, we'd hike there with friends and family, playing hide and seek with the kids and covering ourselves with burrs. I never imagined then that the creek would wind its way into the very heart of our lives and become my focus for over two decades.

That phase began in November 1989, when the local radio station warned Elmira residents (then, about 7,000 people) not to drink the tap water because it was contaminated with chemicals. The warning travelled through the grapevine, but it was late Friday afternoon and nobody could get any more information. We had our suspicions about the source, and they turned out to be correct. An old but operating chemical company, Uniroyal Chemical Limited (now called Chemtura), located on the edge of town and straddling the creek, was the source of NDMA (N-nitrosodimethylamine), a cancer-causing chemical found in the town's several drinking water wells.

The chemical company had been in the news the summer before with its proposal to add a hazardous waste incinerator. Some of us wondered about the prospect of toxic air emissions, and our concern grew as it looked as if the facility would be rubber-stamped, with no one asking questions. There was often a strong smell of chemicals in the air – a smell one long-

time resident called "the smell of prosperity." With over 300 employees at Uniroyal, the mindset of a company town was firmly established.

A small group of people, including me, formed a citizens' environmental group to ensure a full environmental assessment of the incinerator project. None were rabble-rousers or activists. We were teachers, homemakers, and social workers seeking a prudent evaluation of the health and safety issues. As our group, APT Environment (Assuring Protection for Tomorrow's Environment), began organizing meetings and asking questions, we were surprised by the hostility of some townspeople.

The Elmira Water Crisis

When the water crisis hit, APT began meeting weekly, seeking information about the chemicals in our water, how they got there, what else was in the soil and air in Elmira, and what would be done about it. At first, the chemical company denied all knowledge and responsibility, and public officials told us NDMA was found in bacon and beer and not to worry. Meanwhile, Elmira residents were buying bottled water and filling jugs from water tanks brought in by the fire department.

It was weeks before the public was given even the basic facts. But APT research into the history of the chemical plant uncovered a legacy that should have set off alarm bells long before 1989. Our growing astonishment at everyone's failure to heed these warnings fuelled our determination to find out more – and to do whatever possible to make the future different from the past.

We learned that Uniroyal (a branch plant of a multinational corporation based in the U.S.) had been producing chemicals on the site since the 1940s: rocket fuel and explosives for World War II, rubber products, and an array of agricultural pesticides and herbicides, which included Agent Orange for use in the Vietnam War. Many people who had worked at the plant over generations knew that chemical waste had been buried all over the property, dumped into the creek, and stored in leaky, overflowing lagoons along the creek.

In the 1960s, workers building the Elmira Sewage Treatment Plant at the edge of the creek on land donated by Uniroyal discovered hundreds of buried barrels leaking a gooey mess of chemicals into the ground. The

leaking chemicals included dioxins, the toxic ingredient in Agent Orange. We learned that in the 1970s, over ten cows grazing along the Canagagigue Creek downstream of the factory died one day of liver failure. Uniroyal reimbursed the farmer.

In 1980, a water expert from the provincial Ministry of Environment prepared a report concluding that Elmira's drinking water supply was threatened by Uniroyal contamination. The consultant for Uniroyal agreed. Committees involving several levels of government were formed to keep an eye on the situation. Yet no tests were done to see if chemicals were migrating off the Uniroyal property toward the water supply wells. It remains a mystery, even twenty-five years later, why no action was taken then to prevent the well contamination – or for how long Elmirans were drinking water laced with chemicals.

Such questions were not welcome in the months following the discovery of the chemicals in the wells. Tensions rose as an emergency pipeline was constructed to bring water from Kitchener-Waterloo, the neighbouring twin cities. Plans were made to bring in portable public showers in case NDMA levels in the two remaining wells exceeded the danger point before the pipeline was finished.

For the next two years, Uniroyal and three levels of government wrangled (along with their bevy of lawyers and experts) about who was responsible, what should be done, and who should pay. Testimony and debate took place in hearings before an environmental tribunal, ending in 1991 – the longest such hearings ever held in Ontario. The company remained belligerent, and the government bodies charged with protecting our water tiptoed around in a landscape dominated by corporate money. They were afraid the still-operating company would leave town, abandoning the massively contaminated site.

Elmira's water crisis was front-page news across the country, which certainly added to the town's distress. Media people roamed the streets looking for the odd person who would comment and trying to get the money-shot – a photo of a Mennonite horse and buggy trotting by the smokestacks of the polluting company. In conservative small-town Ontario, talking to the media was viewed as unbecoming attention-seeking. APT members gave plenty of interviews, believing that everyone had a right to

know what was going on. We tried hard to stick to facts, but some saw us as "giving the town a bad name." There were even a few incidents of graffiti and egging of the homes of APT members. We soon got over any naïve assumptions that our community and politicians would welcome citizen interest and input.

The Canagagigue Creek

Attention from outsiders spiked as tests showed that the contamination from the Uniroyal plant was not confined to the aquifers under Elmira. The Grand River, a major water source for downstream communities in its 100-kilometer journey to Lake Erie, was also affected. Water intakes for downstream towns were shut down. It was the Canagagigue Creek, flowing into the Grand River, that provided – and still provides – the conduit for the contamination to spread far beyond Elmira.

We learned at the hearings that wastewater from the Uniroyal plant was full of chemicals even after passing through the sewage treatment plant, ending up in the creek and then in the Grand River. We also learned that the shallow aquifer on the Uniroyal property – the one nearest the surface and most contaminated – discharges into the creek. Roughly a million litres per day flow off the site into the creek, carrying not just NDMA but over 100 different chemicals. Erosion of contaminated soil from the creek banks on the property contributes yet more toxins to the creek.

In short, our creek was used as a sewer, every which way, for the company's waste chemicals.

The revelations of past and present abuse of the creek were disturbing. Worse, however, was the dawning realization that no one planned to do much about it. The hearings ended with Ministry of Environment orders on Uniroyal to cease discharging toxic wastewater to the sewage plant, clean up the underground aquifers under the town within thirty years, and remove some hot spots of chemicals on the factory site. Other than reducing the chemicals getting into the creek through the sewage plant, there were no requirements to clean up and protect the creek for the future.

When APT objected loudly to the omission, the Ontario Minister of the Environment visited Elmira to assure us, in person, that the creek issues would be addressed. "Saving the Creek" became our major campaign.

We're still working on it, twenty-five years later.

Saving the Creek

First, and because of pressure from APT, Uniroyal installed eleven pump-and-treat wells in the highly contaminated shallow aquifer that flows into the creek. The water pumped from these wells is treated to remove most of the chemicals and then put back in the creek. The company placed the wells in one part of the Uniroyal site, allowing the rest of the contaminated aquifer to continue flowing into the creek. With the help of experts, APT fought for more wells along the creek. We lost that battle.

We expected better success in pushing for a clean-up of the dioxins and DDT. In 1994, the Ministry did a thorough study of DDT and dioxin deposits in creek sediment and creek banks. The report showed excessive levels of these highly toxic chemicals not only on the Uniroyal property but also in the creek banks for kilometers downstream. We awaited the clean-up order and work plan. Absolutely nothing happened.

A key reason why no action was taken is the downstream demographic. The land adjacent to the creek is owned by Mennonite farmers – a community of people who, like the Amish, prefer to live apart from the mainstream and don't participate in civic affairs and political life. Their cows and horses water in the creek and graze the banks, creating a deceptively lovely pastoral scene. Since Mennonites don't complain, they make the perfect downstream hostages for polluters.

APT had learned that voicing frustration in the media sometimes helped get things done. However, we were loath to attract the public eye to a community that valued its privacy. Perhaps worse would be the threat to the livelihood of downstream farm families if the public perceived their milk and produce as contaminated.

Our campaign for downstream clean-up had to be quiet, slow, and behind the scenes. But when we discovered that no one in authority had even told the farmers that their creek and floodplains were contaminated, posing health risks to their families and livestock, we were fuelled by indignation. "It's not our job. Maybe you should call one of those Christian farmer organizations," was one bureaucrat's response.

It thus became our job, by default. We were most fortunate in finding

a local hero in public health who picked up the ball. He helped us contact farmers on the creek and hold a meeting to discuss what we knew and didn't know. We had no answers for people who asked if their family member's liver cancer or miscarriages were caused by the contamination. We strongly discouraged using sand from the creek banks in children's sandboxes or mixing it into the vegetable patch, as some families did.

The evening meeting was held in a Mennonite country schoolhouse with no electricity. It was dark when the meeting ended. The farmers clip-clopped home in their buggies while we stumbled around trying to find our cars. It seemed a fitting image for the situation in which we found ourselves. At least the people most immediately affected by the contamination now had the same information – and lack of it – we had.

We were told that yet another study – a human-health risk assessment – was needed before action could be taken. The company consultants did the study, sampling dioxin and DDT levels on the Uniroyal property and calculating the health risks to "workers and trespassers." The massive report, finally issued in 2003, contained no recommendations related to the contamination of downstream farmers' land or water. They were ignored.

But to our great surprise, some of the Mennonite farmers attended the community meeting where the findings were discussed. I believe that this unusual, public sign of their engagement sent a message. In 2005, the company excavated part of the creek bank on their property that was highly contaminated with DDT and dioxins.

The company's response in this case reflects the typical pattern. A hotspot of contamination comes to light, a study or two or three is done, taking years, and no action follows until public pressure mounts. Then the company does a partial clean-up of the spot. We saw this yet again in 2013. The 2003 study had revealed a massive cache of dioxins in the floodplain on the Uniroyal site – probably the biggest such deposit in the entire Great Lake Basin. Ten years later, the company scraped off the top foot of contaminated soil in half of the affected area.

Where are our government regulators – the Ontario Ministry of the Environment – in this process? They observe from the sidelines. Ontario does not give the Ministry the authority to require contaminant clean-

up on private property, such as the Uniroyal facility, unless there's hard evidence of "adverse effects" extending off the property. Even then, government is loath to push the company, knowing that years of expensive litigation would follow any such initiative.

The reality is that the Uniroyal site, and the water and sediment that flows off the property, can never be wholly cleaned up. The soil and water is saturated with hundreds of chemicals, and they will continue to flow and erode off the site in the aquifers and the creek. All we can do is continue to pressure the company to pick away at the hotspots to limit the extent of the damage.

In 2004 APT found a few more heroes in local government and the local conservation authority to help reduce the exposure of downstream farm families. An expert from the conservation authority worked with the farmers to identify the areas along the creek where cattle grazed and wandered into the creek. She convinced them to fence the cattle out of the creek and floodplain, and persuaded the company to pay the fencing costs. The Mennonite farmers refused to the take the money, doing the fencing themselves. The conservation authority did take money to plant trees in the fenced-off floodplain to stabilize the banks and improve water quality.

That's the status of the Canada Jig in 2014. We continue to monitor the creek and push for actions to reduce sources of pollution.

This version of the creek story focuses on only one of the ways of the creek – its role as a crusty Old Testament prophet, warning us humans of the errors and consequences of our careless ways. Equally powerful, however, is its forgiving, resilient quality, its way of healing. Responding to efforts to improve water quality, however limited, fish and other aquatic organisms have returned to the creek, restoring life to what was a "dead zone" in the reaches downstream of Uniroyal.

Healing has also taken place in the human sphere. The tension in the community has gradually resolved into cooperative efforts to renew the natural environment around Elmira. The town has always been known for dedicated volunteers providing human services. Now, that public spirit has expanded to include water, soil and the non-human creatures that depend on a healthy ecosystem. Volunteers plant trees, maintain trails, monitor the Uniroyal clean-up, support land and water stewardship, and create

educational opportunities for children.

The long and winding creek has brought us together to renew healthy relationships with one another and the world around us.

The Way of Serendipity

Joyce Gladwell

I was a stranger and you welcomed me (Matt 25: 35)

I was thirty-seven years old in July 1969 when our family left England and came to live in Canada. I am from Jamaica, my husband Graham is English; we met as students at University College London, and married in England after I graduated.

We left England when Graham was appointed professor at the Univesity of Waterloo, in southwestern Ontario. We came directly to Elmira, a small town surrounded by Mennonite farms just twenty minutes away from the twin cities of Kitchener-Waterloo. We were drawn to living in Elmira: both Graham and I enjoy being in the country; besides, our sons were 10, 8, and 5 years old and we heard that the schools in Elmira had a good reputation. A few days after arriving, we bought a house and settled there.

Our family began life in Elmira in a splash of publicity. During my ten years as a housewife and mother in England, I had written my autobiography, *Brown Face, Big Master,* about skin color and God in my life.[1] It was published in 1969 just as we were about to leave England. I brought with me to Canada several copies of my freshly printed book, eager to let my new neighbors know who we were, and where we were from. It happened that the owner of the house we bought was a university graduate, an English major. She took charge of my books and distributed them. The regional newspaper interviewed and photographed us. The local people came to know who we were; they were pleased to have us in town and they invited me to speak to their clubs and Church groups.

In spite of being different – a racially mixed couple in a white community – we were welcomed and accepted at once. This was healing for me: we had come from England where people were wrestling with the problem of too many coloured immigrants, and I had felt their rejection and hostility.

Community is essential if the self is to be free,
for the isolated individual is the most unfree of all[2].

In September the school year began and our three sons were away all day. For the first time in 11 years of marriage, I had time on my hands. I sat on the couch in our new living room, and prayed: "Lord, give me something to do."

It happened that when we first arrived in Elmira, we stayed in the house of a university professor who was away on sabbatical with his family. When they returned, he and his wife Mimi befriended us. Mimi Ramshaw and I had a number of things in common: we were about the same age, with children in primary school in Elmira; we were both married to Englishmen, though neither of us is English, and she too was a stay-at-home mother with a college education. My degree was in psychology, and Mimi, when she came to Canada, had left behind a career as a hospital social worker. Like me, Mimi was on the lookout for something to do.

…seek the welfare of the city where I have sent you into exile,
and pray to the Lord on its behalf,
for in its welfare you will find your welfare. (Jeremiah 29: 7)

One of the striking features of Elmira is the number of churches serving a relatively small population. In the 1960s and 70s there were thirteen churches in all, and the population of the town numbered less than 7000. Graham and I chose to join Gale Presbyterian church. The minister, Fred Reed, had recently come to Elmira with his family, from Saskatchewan. They were disappointed in the lack of social services in Elmira. Fred's wife suffered from bouts of depression. In their previous community she had been part of a support group for people with mental illness. In Elmira, she dared not even admit that she was sometimes depressed.

Mimi and I, in our search for occupation, consulted with Fred. We took with us an Elmira acquaintance, Sandra Martin, another under-occupied housewife and mother of school-aged children. It happened that Fred was a director on the board of the Canadian Mental Health Association

(CMHA) in nearby Kitchener-Waterloo (KW). He suggested we join that organization.

We followed through on Fred's suggestion, and late in 1969 the KW branch sent us a liaison worker who guided us in forming an Elmira chapter of the association. Through Fred's influence, the new chapter was well advertised. The staff of the KW CHMA held a public meeting in Elmira to invite volunteers to join us. Charles Blow, the mayor of Elmira was at that first public meeting. He was invited to become an *ex officio* member of the new chapter, and he agreed. The KW branch director spoke to the clergy in town at their ministerial meeting. As well, he arranged a bus tour for them, to visit the psychiatric sections of the hospitals in both London and KW. He was seeking their support for the work of the CMHA and he wanted them to raise awareness in the community about matters of mental health. In response to the public meeting and a newspaper advertisement, about twenty people signed up to join our group. Soon there were eight or ten members, mostly housewives, who met every month in the basement of St. Aidans, the Anglican church in Elmira.

Mimi took the role of coordinator and I kept the minutes. Our guide from the KW branch gave us our first task: to raise funds for the work of the organization. We struggled with this request. Sandra, especially, having lived all her life in Elmira, was worried: "Do they want us to knock on doors, and ask for money?" She balked at the idea.

The mayor, Charles Blow, was also a member of the committee of the Elmira Maple Syrup Festival (MSF). It happened that in the spring of 1970, the committee was looking for places to give their money that year. The KW CMHA applied successfully to the festival committee for funding, and remained on the festival list for years. This released the Elmira group from fundraising, and we turned our attention elsewhere.

Very soon we began instead to sort out what goals we would be comfortable to pursue in our Elmira community. We sat around a table in the St. Aidan's church basement and asked each other *What does Elmira need?*

The group members came up with a variety of answers. The first suggestion came from Mae Klassen: "We need a baby-sitting service." Mae had already established her role in the community. She was a singlehanded

social service agent. When newcomers like me needed a babysitter, we were directed to Mae, who kept a list of teenagers known to her. Mae also kept a calendar of events for the churches in town. When the United Church women wanted to hold a rummage sale, they checked the date with Mae: perhaps the Catholic ladies were having their fundraising tea on that day. Mae knew the answer.

In the group, Mae focused on the need to provide training for babysitters. Another volunteer, Linda Snyder, picked up on the other part of Mae's role in the community. Linda saw an opening for an information centre. She too was at home with young children: she aspired to a career in social work, and was biding her time until she could return to university. Linda combined the ability to imagine and plan for a broad vision with the energy to work at the detailed process. There was a "granny flat" attached to her house, and, with Mae's help, she began setting up the information centre there.

Sandra saw the need for a thrift shop, and Linda made space in the granny flat for this project. The thrift shop was a welcoming place for mothers with young children. They brought the toys and the clothing their children had outgrown and exchanged them, and the children found new toys there. Soon the project made enough money that Sandra was able to leave the granny flat and rent premises in the centre of town. The thrift shop project continued to thrive and was taken over by the Mennonite Central Committee when Sandra left. A second shop was opened when the information centre expanded its services in later years.

For my part, I was still close to the experience of being at home with three small children, feeling isolated and without adult stimulation. I suggested a weekly "interest" group for mothers at home with babies and toddlers. "Interest" referred to any activity the mothers chose to pursue, whether it was knitting or listening to a lecture. The Trinity United church in town let us use their building every Tuesday morning, with separate facilities where children could be cared for apart from their mothers. Sandra Martin and Donna Baker gave this project their steady support, and a thriving group began which lasted for decades. Donna remembers that those weekly meetings not only gave women a social outlet, but also helped them to grow in confidence.

Meeting in a circle of equals: a different process.

The informal style of our meetings was a departure from the prevailing pattern in the clubs and church groups in Elmira. In them, a formidable executive held sway, and *Robert's Rules* dictated the process. In our group, there was no hierarchy – everyone was a potential leader, and our process was simple. We received all suggestions and gave them equal consideration. We did not discard any. It did not occur to us to make a list of priorities, and focus on one or two ideas to the exclusion of others. We had one condition for the outworking of an idea; that the person who suggested it would take charge of carrying it out, while the others would provide support. The result was that we started a number of separate projects at the same time and developed them in a short span of time.

At our monthly meetings we listened to the initiators describe their efforts, and we brainstormed with them. We were a sounding board, a cheering line, as well as partners in their work. To belong to this group was exhilarating for me; I felt both free and securely rooted. I was free to choose what I would do. As well, I kept returning to companions also engaged in fulfilling themselves while we worked at putting in place the services lacking in the community.

Not all our suggestions were new to Elmira. Given her career bias, Mimi favoured work with seniors: she promoted visits to residents in nursing homes and meals to seniors at home. These activities were already being carried out by women's groups in the churches. Mimi brought more volunteers and activities to the Elmira nursing homes.

We were disappointed in one outreach; that of youth work. The youngest person in our group was a teenager still in high school, Ann Morden. She joined us to represent other young people in town. They needed a space where they could get together after school, a safe place where drugs, alcohol and gambling were not allowed. We tried and failed to provide such a place; the task was beyond us. Later, others would take on this challenge.

Ann is now a school principal with a special interest in children with disabilities. She gives credit to the group for receiving and inspiring her, allowing her to grow from engaging with us.

What does recycling have to do with mental health?

In most of our projects we were seeking to meet the needs of people at different life stages. However, we pursued one project not even vaguely connected with mental health matters.

Rosemary Backman had a strong concern for the environment, and she spoke up for a recycling project. Graham and I offered the use of a barn on our property to store the items that local people brought. Rosemary engaged the service of a recycling company to collect these items. It was hard work sorting tins, bottles, and paper before collection day. Sometimes it was unpleasant: for obvious reasons, Rosemary banned sardine cans. The project flourished briefly, and then ended when the collecting company went out of business. Rosemary had asked the town council for support and funding; by 1979 a councilor had taken over the project. Recycling is now a regional affair and a regular part of garbage collection.

We like to think that our brief activity was a signal to the town council that people in Elmira were conscious of the environment and ready to cooperate in efforts to protect it.

The far-reaching consequences of having a granny flat.

Other projects have had long lives. The most striking example is Linda Snyder's project in starting an information centre in the family granny flat. She began by approaching the Kitchener Waterloo Social Planning Council, which had an information centre in their building. They received her generously. The information centre staff gave Linda copies of their files, a mine of resource material.

As she began her work, Linda needed a phone line. She appealed to Lorna Jarvis, who had succeeded Mimi as coordinator of the group. Lorna applied for a grant from CMHA and received $100.00. This was enough to have the phone line installed in the granny flat. Linda also needed volunteers to service the phone line. Bob Verdun, editor of the local newspaper, the *Independent*, ran a story about Linda and her project, with an appeal for volunteers. This brought in more housewives-in-waiting at

home with young children. Linda shaped the project to accommodate them and their children. During the summer months the centre was taken over by student interns paid under a federal program.

Linda and her volunteers quickly responded to the needs the callers expressed, adding to their service an income tax clinic and a Christmas hamper program.

At about that time, the local member of Provincial Parliament, Ed Good, came to Elmira seeking space for his constituency office. Linda made room for him in the granny flat. He brought with him an assistant, Donna. She happened to be one of the student summer interns. As well as assisting the MPP, Donna began helping to administer the information centre, and Ed Good paid her for the work she did there.

When Linda and her family went abroad in 1976, the work continued, but not in the granny flat. The local town council adopted the centre and provided space in the town hall. They recruited and paid two workers to run the programs, Pat McLean and Marg Brubacher.

Eight years later enough money was raised for a free-standing building to house the centre on land donated by the Township. The centre became known as the *Woolwich Community Services* (WCS), under a full-time director, Don Harloff. Among the programs offered is a youth centre: "to provide a supervised safe environment … activities of interest to youth … opportunities for youth to participate in their community." Space was found for the centre in the township arena in 2002. And so after three decades, WCS began to provide what Ann Morden had asked for and our small group was unable to deliver in 1972. Other WCS services include a food bank, a thrift shop, resources for children and young families, community gardens, employment services, volunteers to drive people to medical appointments, and a family violence prevention program. In 2014, forty years after Linda Snyder installed a phone line in her granny flat, WCS will move to a new million-dollar building as the expansion continues.

Linda returned to University, earned her Ph.D. and became a professor at Renison University College at the University of Waterloo. She was now a lecturer in the social work program; one of the stay-at-home mothers who eventually realized her ambition.

A new enterprise came out of the women's interest group. In the first year, I invited a speaker from Toronto, a specialist in early childhood education. She described to the women how they themselves could organize and operate a nursery school program for their children. This they did. The co-op nursery came to the attention of the local regional councilor, Don Brox, who lived in Elmira. He had a plan to build a daycare centre in town. To receive government funding, he had to demonstrate that the community wanted such a centre. Don chose three women to carry out a survey; I was one of them. The survey results were favourable, and Don was given the money to build a daycare centre. He did so with one innovation: in the building plans he included space for the women's interest group to continue independently with their co-op nursery. Don claims that this was the first daycare centre to be built in the province with such a provision.

The centre opened in 1974, and forty years later the joint arrangement still continues; a child care centre, funded and regulated by regional government and a community nursery school run by volunteers, under a supervisor and a board of directors.

Arriving at the beginning.
…God, who works for those who wait for him. You meet those who gladly do right (Isaiah 64: vv 4,5).

In the early years of the group of mental health volunteers, we had an ongoing sense of unease: how could we justify using the label of mental health when we were doing nothing to reach out to people with mental illness? The idea for our group had begun with Fred, the Presbyterian minister and his wife, who longed for a support group for people with depression. Sandra and I took the risk of inviting ourselves to the women's group at the Presbyterian Church to speak about mental illness. They responded with fear and hostility. Sandra and I retreated in dismay.

We tried to connect with people discharged from psychiatric hospital. We discovered how difficult it is to make contact with a hidden stranger unless that person seeks you out.

We wanted to start something that was specific to the needs of Elmira

residents, but we were frustrated. Instead, we attached ourselves to the programs initiated by the KW branch. They already had a one-to-one program for befriending psychiatric ex-patients. They had also set up a HELP phone line so that people in distress could talk out their problem with a volunteer. For both these programs the KW branch screened and trained the volunteers. We reconciled ourselves to recruiting volunteers for these programs. We did make one innovation: the HELP phone line in KW was at that time a long distance call for people in Elmira. We arranged for a St. Jacobs phone number that was free for local residents, and we persuaded the town council to pay for the line.

The idea of a *mental health clinic* in Elmira surfaced early in our group meetings. We held a public meeting to test the community response to the idea. At the meeting were church pastors and a representative doctor from the Elmira medical centre. In the discussion that followed, we sensed some resistance from the doctor. We did nothing more to pursue the idea.

Occasionally at our group meetings someone came to our attention who was troubled emotionally. I began visiting one such person. However, a group member, Guldner Roach, a social worker, pointed out that attempting to help someone suffering from mental illness was not a task for amateurs. I soon gave up these visits. For me, this setback was transforming.

The group tried another approach – one that was within our competence. We launched a lecture series on matters of mental health and illness to inform the local community. In Elmira in the 1970s, homes were not yet equipped with today's sophisticated technology for information and entertainment. People seemed free and willing to leave home in the evenings to attend public lectures. We promised discussion, offered refreshments, and found room for the lectures in local schools and churches. Gradually, the attendance increased. The speakers came from the nearby city, Kitchener/Waterloo, where there were two universities as well as counselling centers. The professors and counselling directors responded readily to our requests and did not expect to be paid.

The topics were wide-ranging, including marriage and parenting, conflict and self esteem, dying and grieving. As secretary of the group, my task was to report on these lectures for the local paper, the *Independent*.

Bob Verdun, the editor, supported us. I submitted lengthy reports, giving the full content of the lectures, so that readers would be almost as well informed as those who attended the lecture. Bob published every word. He also pointed out that my writing was not in the orthodox style of newspaper reporting: "You are too involved," he said. He then offered a course on journalistic writing and invited me to take it. After that he paid me for what I submitted.

Two of the speakers at the public education lectures were Claude and Dixie Guldner, directors of the Kitchener Interfaith Centre, which offered courses in counselling and training for interns. They also offered courses for clergy in pastoral care and counselling. *It happened that* the Lutheran minister of St. James church in Elmira, Howard Guse, attended one of these courses. Howard recognized the need for a counselling centre in Elmira, and he set about to make it happen. He arranged space for the centre in the church building, and formed a steering committee. He invited me to join that committee.

A troubling question hovered vaguely in the minds of the steering committee: "Would the people of Elmira use a counselling service?" In a small town, gossip is a prevailing feature. In self-defense, people aim to present a favourable front to the world, to hide their family secrets, and to protect themselves from shame. Would people fear the risk of gossip and shame if they were seen entering a counselling centre? For the most part, townspeople confided in their doctors and church pastors if they had problems. Would they accept a new kind of professional and open up their secrets to a stranger? Church groups provided support for their members in acceptable crises such as hospital stays or a death in the family. But for matters such as family violence, incest, mental illness, families were likely to keep closed off from the world. In this sense it seemed Elmira was a reticent and divided community: people were set apart in churches and families, and across the boundaries, conversations were pleasant, polite and superficial.

In the 1970s there was one Elmira church pastor who led people in crossing these boundaries. *It happened that* the Mennonite pastor, Vernon Leis, was influenced by the growth groups and the sensitivity movement coming out of California in the 1960s. Vernon created his own version of

these groups for people in Elmira. He brought us together in small groups, mixing people from different denominations. This was one barrier he broke down – the church barrier. He also changed the superficial nature of our conversation. We met as couples or in separate groups for men and women. He taught us how to talk with one another, not in social pleasantries, but in the sharing of personal stories in a healing exchange. And he insisted on confidentiality. I made two close friends in those groups, one a catholic, the other a protestant from a different church. For four decades, we have continued to meet and to share our stories in healing conversation.

Vernon's work was a liberating influence in the town; he brought us together and made our lives richer. It is my view that his work, together with the lecture series, opened a way for people in Elmira to accept and use a counseling centre.

The Elmira counselling centre opened in St. James Lutheran church in 1976 with one counsellor seconded from the Kitchener Interfaith Counseling Centre. That agency, led by Claude and Dixie Guldner, had agreed to sponsor the new Elmira centre until it became independent with its own board of directors. This happened in 1978. With the opening of the Woolwich Interfaith Counselling Centre (WICC), the Elmira group of mental health volunteers moved to a new phase. We felt that with a counselling service in town our central purpose had been achieved: to meet the needs of people suffering with mental illness. We agreed "to direct our energies towards acting as an auxiliary to WICC:" arranging public meetings, recruiting volunteers and redirecting the funding we received to the work of WICC.

For myself, still smarting from Guldner's rebuke, I returned to University in 1981 to qualify as a counsellor in marriage and family therapy. It happened that in nearby Guelph University, a master's program had recently started to provide this training. The founding director of this program was Claude Guldner, who had played key roles in starting the Elmira centre and in giving lectures for the mental health series. In 1981 I was fifty years old – probably the oldest applicant for this program. However, I was accepted by the university and Claude welcomed me into the course, which I successfully completed.

I returned to the Elmira centre to fulfill the required internship hours.

I became a staff counsellor and then the director for ten years.

The work of WICC expanded gradually, and under my successor, Gerlinde Petz, the pace quickened. With Gerlinde's leadership, the board began to consider finding more spacious premises for the centre.

It happened that the Anglican church building was for sale. Given generous community support and skillful fundraising, the agency board bought the building and redesigned the interior. This was St. Aidan's, the same church where our group used to meet in the 1970s, asking *What does Elmira need?* The work had come full circle. At the opening of the new agency in 2008, I was surprised and elated to find out that the centre was being named after me: the Joyce Gladwell building.

Together with my sense of satisfaction, I also had feelings of dismay: "Why just me? What about the others?"

That is why I am writing this tale: to describe the intricate weave of people who brought these things about – people responding, connecting, and taking action. I also want to bear witness to what *happened*: to the circumstances which were not of our doing.

It happened that …
serendipity?
when things work together for good,
who gets the credit?
where do our gifts and skills come from
our ideas and our motivation?
whom do we acknowledge and acclaim?

when like-minded people come together in one place?
when the community is ready for what they bring?
when resources are within easy reach?
when resources, readiness, and agents of change
coincide in time?

I cannot account for what we call serendipity, but I believe in it, and it gives me cause to rejoice. I believe and rejoice that God is present and active in us and in the details of our world; that when we take action in

good heart, God works for us to bring about what is good.

I continue to rejoice in that time forty years ago, and in the outcome of our efforts. I had asked only for "something to do." I received that in plenty, and much more besides.

Endnotes

[1] Joyce Gladwell, *Brown Skin, Big Master* (New York: MacMillanCaribbean, 2nd edition, 2004).

[2] See Paul Jones, *Weavings*, Vol. 28 , Winter 2013.

My Visit to the Golden Temple

Cara L. Pelletier-Thompson

Ik Onkar. God is One.

I am seated in the *parikrama* (courtyard) surrounding the *Amrit Sarovar* (lake of holy water), at the centre of which sits the *Harmandir Sahib*, otherwise known as *Darbar Sahib* or the Golden Temple, the Sikh world's most revered site.[1] Although it is after nightfall, the holy book *Adi Granth*[2] is being sung, and thousands of people are filling the lanes, circumambulating in reverence to God. I have made my way around the temple and within, and am now serenely seated beneath the branches of a giant jubi tree, over 450 years old, whose branches are laden with hummingbirds: I have never seen so many in my life. They sit at rest, even though a wily kitten, prowling, has climbed the trunk. The tree is said to possess healing powers, and so I touch it and say a prayer: my heels are in pain from too much traveling in sandals and the cracks won't close long enough to heal. Hundreds of devotees are seated on the banks of the lake in meditation. Sitting here with them, I feel the peace of this place. I am sitting to the south of the temple, and the gold-gilt face is majestically illuminated. Every now and again a fish comes to the surface in anticipation of catching a satisfying morsel. Others, too, come here hungry and I hope they are satisfied. This is part of what it means to be a pilgrim in Sikhism, as it is in other of the world's great religions.

During the day, the *Adi Granth* is carried atop shoulders in a golden palanquin (a canopied litter to carry persons of honour) to the sounds of horns and percussion to the centre of the temple, considered its heavenly abode. After complete sunset, at a prescribed time, it is transported with the same pomp back to the *Akal Takht*[3] – the throne-room representing divine action in the earthly realm – where the holy book "sleeps" until sunrise the following morning, when the procession begins again.

Along the *parikrama* walls, which are dotted with donation boxes, *Granthis* (caretakers and officiators) sit silently in lecture and in prayer.

The rhythmically-vocalized scriptures of the *Adi Granth* emanate not only from the heart of this sacred place, but also via loudspeakers from every main corner in the complex. Blessed song fills the air. It is believed that once a sound is produced, it never ceases to be. It ascends beyond our range of hearing, higher and higher across the universe. It is also believed that divine energy is the ultimate source of all existence. Together, it means that divinity suffuses all things, and that purposeful, laudable sound is a positive conduit of this divinity. If these ideas are true, then the Golden Temple maintains an unceasing stream of praises and prayers – a cosmic beacon or pillar of sound to the heavens.

I continue to be in awe, being here. A few members of my travelling study group have taken to sleeping outdoors in a garden between the guest-houses and the temple's courtyard. They sleep on large mats on the ground, among other pilgrims. Being able to share this experience fills me with wonder, surrounded as I am by a community with so much practiced faith. All of these people live with a strong message centrally in their hearts: *Ik Onkar*, God is One.

Ik Onkar Sat Nam Siri Waheguru.[4]

Endnotes

[1] The moment described here occurred on 30 September 2000. I was in India participating in RS 450, "Encountering the Living Religious Traditions of India," a Semester Abroad led by Professor M. Darrol Bryant, Renison University College, University of Waterloo.

[2] Otherwise known as the *Guru Granth Sahib*, a more anthropomorphic and honourific title reflecting its status within the Sikh community as the eleventh and eternal teacher.

[3] Translation: "Throne of the Timeless One," or "Throne of God." In the *Akal Takht*, spiritual, social, and political issues are brought forth, discussed, and often acted upon. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Akal_Takht

[4] Translation: "God is One, whose name is Truth, oh wondrous teacher who brings us from darkness to light." Mantra and English translation shared by the late Baba Virsa Singh, leader of Gobind Sadan ashram and founder of the Institute for Advanced Studies and Comparative Religions, http://www.thefreedictionary.com/Granthis, 16 October 2000.

The Way of the *Yijing* (I Ching)

Christine A. Hale[1]

The numbering of the past is flowing with the current.
The knowledge of the future is countercurrent.[2]

Is it possible for a person who does not have a background in classical Chinese to understand and penetrate the meaning of the *Yijing* (易經)?[3] Here I seek to show how the *Yijing* goes beyond cultural and linguistic boundaries and addresses the universality and multi-dimensionality of being human. It has become my conviction that the *Yijing* not only connects and "reads" the internal machinations of the individual in any given time and circumstance, but also the complex dynamics of the individual in connection with the "other." It is a 'mapping' – or contextualization – of the self and the "other" (inner↔outer states) within perpetually changing situations. It is part of the genius of the *Yijing* to recognize that change is central to the nature of the universe.

I. Meeting the Living Text: Yijing as Sage

The first time I met the *Yijing* was in tropical Australia in a large rambling house with a surrounding verandah and white painted shutters. I was sixteen years old and was visiting the house with a friend. I remember nothing of this visit except a man sitting cross-legged on a large cushion in a side room throwing coins and consulting a book which had a simple dust cover of gray and yellow. I was immediately drawn into the room and watched at a distance. That same day I bought the book: the Wilhelm/Baynes 1950 edition of the *I Ching* (foreword by C.G. Jung).

Learning to focus my mind, read the fall of the coins, and understand the basic structure of the eight trigrams (八卦 *bagua*) as they form any one of 64 hexagrams (卦 *gua*) came quickly. Penetrating and understanding

the essence of the text took another fifteen years of daily praxis and reflection – and that was only the beginning. I knew language was a limitation. The Wilhelm/Baynes translation/interpretation was the only serious scholarly work available at the time,[4] so as other scholarly translations appeared in English, I quickly obtained them so I could study each interpretation in contrast as an interpretive process,[5] comparing and seeking commonalities which, often, were far from clear. As I read each commentary simultaneously on obtaining a *gua*, I could eventually reach beyond language and unearth the intention and enigma of a given *gua* and its moving lines by identifying overlapping meanings of the often divergent interpretations. This process felt like "scraping off" the surface of linguistics and this author's lens of interpretation to find the gem, the wordless depiction, of the original meaning (which was, by hermeneutical definition, only *my* interpretation). Nevertheless, the *Yijing* beyond language was in sight – a door was opened, albeit only slightly ajar.

As time progressed, I came to the conclusion that penetrating the meaning of the *Yijing*, applying its profound insights, accessing its acute "perceptions" as real-time shifts of one's nature within life's over- and under-currents and, accordingly, understanding the flowing counter-points between self and "other" within an infinite string of moments, is a never ending process. On that day in 1973, in that rambling high-set tropical house, I found a sage and friend who would eventually guide me through the labyrinths of my own nature as I participated in the world of other humans. From my study of the *Yijing* I have come to realize that one's nature is known through the *reflection* of the "other." And, once known, one can then experience the commonality and connection with all beings. For these reasons I claim the *Yijing* as an oracle of infinite living wisdom; no more, no less.

After long-term consistent practice and self-reflection on the *Yijing*'s moment-by-moment wisdom, I have come to realize there is no separation between the inner and the outer, and this realization is necessary for a true perspective on reality. That is, what one perceives and concludes about the outer world – or a given situation in the outer world of circumstance – is seen through the lens of the inner world of the individual and, as such, is *perceived* reality – as opposed to an immutable reality (which does not exist).

Conversely, the outer world simultaneously reflects back our actions and reactions (in the process of ongoing participation in life) and we interpret this reflected information through the lens of our evolving inner self. This was a major insight I experienced in my early days of *Yijing* praxis.

Before this insight of the non-separation of the inner↔outer, I found that sometimes when receiving a certain hexagram, I would be bewildered at its apparent irrelevance: Did I focus correctly when asking the (open-ended) question? Was there a sub-thought operating in my mind which dominated and influenced the *Yijing*'s response? Is the *Yijing* fallible? Is this hexagram I have received simply an anomaly? The trap I fell into by asking these questions is "preconception:" preconception, in that I was looking for guidance in approaching a given situation in the outer world, believing I was an objective observer to a situation which exists "outside self." In fact, the *Yijing* was informing me about the state of my inner world and offering a suggestion on changing that view so the outer circumstance in question could be negotiated with balance and harmony. This would, in fact, then make the outer circumstance (which was problematic) different. That is, when one shifts inner perspectives, the outer circumstances also shift in meaning and consequence – a critical lesson in self cultivation (*xiushen*, 修身). One then begins to understand the cosmological self *in* and *of* the world.

II. Cosmological Self within the World

> The shallow [wo]man sees shallowness, while the deep [wo]man sees depth.
>
> A Chinese proverb[6]

This truism reflects the enigma of the *Yijing*. What one perceives through the self's inner lens of predisposition and preconception *is* the reality – the outer world will reflect that back as if a mirror, albeit refracted and distorted. Accordingly, the *Yijing*, as a praxis – as opposed to an intellectual exercise – disabuses us of the notion that the inner and outer are separate phenomena. Therein lies the enigma if one is searching for a definitive answer in any given consultation with the text. Once disabused of the fallacy of the inner↔outer being discrete, the *Yijing* becomes a faceted

gem of perfect clarity which transcends the intellect.

The classical scholar and *Yijing* master Alfred Huang, in alluding to this potential of the mind merging with the *Yijing* to eventually access the cosmological self, states, "Once readers have come to a true understanding of the symbols, names, texts, and interrelations of the *I Ching*, they can fly on their own wings, ignoring the commentaries and explanations."[7] In this constant becoming, the self transcends both the inner and outer worlds in perceptive meaning: duality of inner-outer, subject-object, the self and the "other" dissipate and the individual becomes incrementally enlightened as an ever-expanding consciousness.[8]

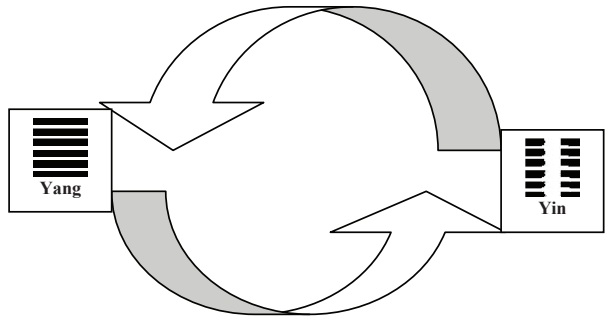
In this ongoing process of enlightenment, one realizes the innate interconnection of all phenomena (tangible and intangible), personifying the *Yijing* in thought and action. That is, ideally, one becomes a sage (*sheng* 圣) – a personification in intent and action of the wisdom of the *Yijing*. This is a dynamic, multi-valent process in which one attains a cosmological perspective beyond dualities; a perspective in which the individual realizes that *all* phenomena (material and non-material) are innately interconnected and affect each other in various degrees and capacities.[9] The realized person, possessing harmony and balance of mind, radiates harmony and balance in his and her external actions.

If this potentiality of the *Yijing* is accepted by one who has not had the experience, the question could be asked: What is the key aspect of the *Yijing* in instigating such enlightenment where other texts tend to fail? I believe it is the *yin-yang* moving lines within a *gua* which "maps" the tension a person is experiencing in a given situation. That is, the tension within a situation (as identified by the obtained *gua* and its designated moving line/s) is the point – the opportunity – in which balance and harmony can be redressed by the wisdom and insight offered. If the wisdom is absorbed and applied, a shift in attitude within the individual takes place and, subsequently, wise actions remedy or enhance the situation for the greater good. The moving lines of a *gua*, I believe, are what sets the *Yijing* apart from other classics.

III. Yin (陰) and Yang (陽): The Tensions of the Gua (hexagrams)

Determinism presupposes a concept of nature in which the universe is

conceived of as a giant machine, a conglomeration of lifeless substances governed by the physical laws of nature. This concept of nature is totally alien to Chinese metaphysics. The concept of nature as embodied in the *Yijing* is that the universe is an organic whole, a process of never-ceasing growth. All the existences within this growing context are organically interrelated, and form a comprehensive continuum advancing into novelty.[10]
Determinism is a distinctly Western notion and, as the quotation succinctly outlines, anathema to the Chinese way of thinking; the "comprehensive continuum [of] existences" which constantly influence each other "advancing into novelty" – an indeterminate 'new-ness' of outcomes. Although a superficial initial impression of the tension in the *yin-yang* construct bespeaks dualism, these tensions are, in fact, *a complementary dynamic of intertwined energies, expressed in the depicting symbol*: ☯. The white point of the *yang* is embedded in the black field of the *yin*, and *vice versa*, to denote the intrinsic relationship between the two qualities of energy. These qualities are not mutually exclusive, but the opposite – mutually inclusive – as they come from the same singular source of *qi* (气 lifeforce). So within the context of the *Yijing* – as expressing the "continuum of existences" – the *yin-yang* dynamic is represented by the sixty-four *gua* combinations of *qian* (乾) and *kun* (坤), as 'heaven'[11] and 'earth,' *yang* and *yin*, and given full expression in the first and second hexagrams, respectively. Fig. 1) *The dynamic polarities of Yin and Yang – the remaining sixty-two gua express varying combinations of these two energy qualities.*



In the words of the eminent Neo-Confucian, Mou Zongsan (牟宗三

1909-1996): "'One *yin* and one *yang*' means *yin* and *yang* replacing each other to form a continuous change, and the great Way [*dao,*道] manifests itself within the process."[12] When there is too much *yin,* the energy in that given situation will revert towards *yang,* and conversely, when there is too much *yang,* the *yin* energy will begin to influence the situation: the universe seeks balance – where there are extremes, there can be no harmony. Nevertheless, the universe is in perpetual change. There is no stasis only dynamism. Hence, *harmony is not stagnation*, but a constant becoming. It is worth noting here that the second last *gua,* the 63rd, is named 'After Completion' – at the tenuous point of a completed cycle and momentarily harmony reigns – before the *final* 64th *gua*, "Before Completion," and a new cycle begins.[13] These *yin-yang* combinations are exemplified in the moving lines of a *gua* which, when consulted, pinpoint the specific tensions inherent in the current situation.

The Song philosopher, Zhang Zai (张载 1020–1077), in commenting on the *Yijing*, stated,

> If we understand that "emptiness" is material force, then we know that being and non-being, the invisible and visible, the mysterious and subtle changes, nature and fate are holistically one and not divided. Those who can trace the origins of assembly and dispersal, exiting and entering, and having form and not having form, know the subtle meaning of *Yijing* deeply.[14]

In the West, the idea that there is no fundamental division within the universe has been slow to arrive, and its eventual arrival in the 20th century came through the "new physics" (post-Newtonian of quantum mechanics). Fritjof Capra, the physicist and popular author who was one of the first to explore the philosophic impact of quantum theory on our cultural thinking, states:

> Quantum mechanics thus reveals a basic oneness of the universe. It shows we can not decompose the world into independently existing smallest units. As we penetrate into matter, nature does not show us any isolated basic building blocks, but rather appears as a complicated web of relations between the various parts of the whole.[15]

Now, almost forty years after Capra's highly influential book, various intellectuals have developed the thesis of a "Quantum Sea" in fields other than physics.[16] The idea that all phenomena – tangible and intangible – are interconnected, locally and non-locally, has slowly gained purchase in the West. Perhaps, this relative shift in thinking may well account for the *Yijing* now becoming more accessible to the Western mind.

Within the chaos of the modern world, where identities become confused – and sometimes shattered – the praxis of *Yijing* offers a calm point of profound reflection; a navigation tool for self-within-the-world. Humans have always sought pleasure, an escape from pain and suffering. But as the Buddha made clear in his Four Noble Truths, there *is* suffering. What the *Yijing* facilitates in a consultation is the wisdom latent within us to understand what *caused* us suffering in any given situation. Deep, contemplative *Yijing* praxis activates the innate connection we have with heaven and earth (the inner and the outer) by highlighting the conundrums in the tensions of existence. To *be* in the tensions of existence, as opposed to seeking immediate escape from (inevitable) emotional pain, bespeaks attaining a depth of insight which will serve the individual as consolidated wisdom. Consolidated wisdom clarifies the purpose of the pain for our own learning and evolution as humans. The *Yijing* is a catalyst for this process.

It can be argued that the *Yijing* is a text like no other. The millennia of refinement, historical commentaries of sages through the ages, and ongoing interpretations exemplify a living text in its most enhanced and elegant form. As the *Yijing* reflects and is absorbed deeper and deeper into the inner self, it finally penetrates and reveals the cosmological self in all its latent infinitude, and one becomes truly human.

Endnotes

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[2] Gua Shou, trans. Wu Jing-Nuan *Yi Jing* (Washington, DC: The Taoist Center, 1991), 282.

[3] More commonly understood in English in the Wade-Giles romanization: *I Ching* or *Book*

of Changes – the latter being the literal translation of the title. It is also worth noting here that modern Mandarin speakers must consult translations to access the *Yijing* linguistically.

[4] The James Legge translation was in existence in 1882 (revised 1963), but Legge's approach to the original Chinese text is one of a philologist. That is, he translated the Chinese *literally* – phrase by phrase – into English. The resultant text is obscure and misses the subtler meanings of the *Yijing*.

[5] Understanding works in the context they were written – historical, cultural, and from what is understood of the original author.

[6] Kiang Kang-hu, *On Chinese Studies,* (Shanghai: The Commercial Press, 1934), 64 (slightly modified). Cited in Smith (2006), 466.

[7] *The Complete I Ching (*Rochester, VT: Inner Traditions, 1998), *xix.*

[8] I, personally, do not believe enlightenment, *per se*, is an end-game – nor a defined final point for human consciousness – but an infinite processual state.

[9] Grandpierre "Measurement of Collective and Social Fields of Consciousness." In *World Futures,* 57 (2001), 85-94; "The Physics of Collective Consciousness." In *World Futures,* 48 (1997) 23-56.

[10] Wu "Causality: Confucianism and Pragmatism." In *Philosophy East and West* 25.1 (1975), 13–22, 18–19.

[11] *Qian* originally meant the sun – as depicted by the classical character here. As *qian* is the name of the first *gua* which consists of all *yang* lines, the image is of dragons flying in the sky. See Cheng D. Chi-Hsiung, "Interpretations of *Yang* in the Yijing Commentarial Traditions." In *Journal of Chinese Philosophy,* 35.2 (2008), 219–234 & Huang (1998) as cited above.

[12] Cited in Cheng (2008) above, p. 219.

[13] Note that the 63rd and 64th *gua* have reversed trigrams.

[14] Cheng (2008) as cited above, p. 229

[15] *The Tao of Physics: An Exploration of the Parallels between Modern Physics and Eastern Mysticism.* (New York: Bantam, 1975), 57.

[16] To name a few: Gao Shan "A Possible Connection between Self-Consciousness and Quantum." In *Axiomathes* 14 (2004), 295–305; Grandpierre (1997) as cited above; Hameroff "Consciousness, the Brain, and Spacetime Geometry," in *Annals of the New York Academy of Sciences*, 929.1 (April 2001), 74–104; Keen "A Model of Consciousness." In *World Futures,* 65 (2009), 225–240; Klemm & Klink "Consciousness and Quantum Mechanics: Opting from Alternatives," in *Zygon*, 43.2 (June 2008), 307–327; Lampis "The Theory of Reality." In *International Journal of Humanities and Peace,* 20.1 (2004); Laughlin, C & Troop, J., "Imagination and Reality: On the Relations between Myth, Consciousness, and the Quantum Sea," in *Zygon* 36.4 (December 2001), 709–736; Ma S.S.Y., "The *I Ching* and the psyche-body connection," in *Journal of Analytical Psychology*, 50 (2005), 237–250; Robbins

& Roe "An Empirical Test of the Theory of Morphic Resonance by Using Recognition for Chinese Symbols." In *Explore,* 6.4 (July/August 2010), 256–262.

The Way of the Grail

Kathleen Jay

Preface

I come from a family with Irish-English heritage. As a young person I had a broad imagination and a natural interest in folk tales and Celtic traditions. My mother read to us and I was encouraged to take out as many library books as I wanted. I favoured fairy tales and Hans Christian Anderson stories for a period of time. The stories were entertaining yet sad sometimes because the characters inevitably experienced loss, trauma, death or torment. These were pre-Disney days so I did not expect happy endings in every tale that I read.

I also spent a lot of time in church buildings and church services as a child. My father was a clergyman in the Anglican/Episcopalian tradition. Church matters held a significant focus in our household as well as in my own inner world. I actually remember reading the Book of Common Prayer one afternoon just for something to do. I went to Sunday school and I learned how to process up the main aisle of the church with the choir. I liked the stained glass windows and the symbols that seemed to be everywhere on the church furnishings, vestments and hangings. I tried to picture the people and the scenes that were taking place in the scripture readings. I listened to prayers, hymns, sermons and music of all kinds. I enjoyed adult conversations, especially if the debates were about the miracles of Jesus or some other compelling theological topic. For a short while I also took delight in helping myself to a snack of holy wafers if the ladies from the altar guild forgot to lock up the cupboards where they were kept.

As I grew older I became secularized to quite an extent. It was my particular fortune however, to be introduced to the Legend of the Holy Grail by a visiting minister. He was a jolly sort of person with a glint in his eye – a natural raconteur who clearly relished the tales that he was telling. After the service was over, he addressed many of my questions with

respect and great delicacy. Inwardly, I wondered why I had not encountered stories about the Holy Grail earlier, either in church or through reading. I decided to make Arthurian fiction my new focus. I also looked into Celtic mythology and accounts of early British history. I became familiar with the recurring themes, characters and plot lines in the Arthurian cycle, and as far as possible, I grasped an understanding of the setting as well. It felt very satisfying that I could "locate" these imaginative tales in a particular historical place and time (southern England and Wales, sometime after the Roman legions left in 610 C.E.).

In the Anglican Church, a service called "the Eucharist" is celebrated almost every Sunday as well as on other important occasions. How many hundreds of times have I been to the altar rail to receive the wafer and the chalice? It eventually occurred to me that the Eucharist I participate in has many parallels to the ceremony that takes place in the Legend of the Holy Grail. Both involve a sacred cup, a wafer called "the Host," candles, processions and a great deal of reverence. It seemed natural to link the two and to wonder about Perceval's experience with the Holy Grail.

After I began to read the original twelfth and thirteenth century versions of the legend, a friend introduced me to an in-depth and fascinating interpretation written by Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz. I did not realize initially, that to study this legend would mean that I would get involved, psychologically, in the complexities of the quest that the main character undertakes, or that like the hero, I would occasionally get lost in the woods. The Jungian interpretations of the legend tantalized me and led me to those places. However, when I would attempt to write about it, like a mystery, understanding would recede from my grasp. It was very difficult to articulate what I was reading. Like a dream, aspects of the legend seemed to enchant, elude, and occasionally paralyze me. The problems it posed became challenges that seemed far too complicated for me to resolve.

Here then I want to offer a brief synopsis of the Legend and then to explore its meaning drawing upon the insights of Joseph Campbell and my own more limited resources.

A Brief Synopsis of the Legend:

As source material, I have used the two earliest written accounts of the legend – Chretien de Troyes' *The Story of the Grail* (Perceval)[1] and Wolfram Von Eschenbach's *Parzival*.[2] These accounts are thought to be closest to the original, popular, oral versions of the legend. Chretien's story is brief; he either died or quit before he finished it. Wolfram's version builds directly upon Chretien's foundation, although he altered names and forms, and he added a great many extra chapters.

In the first part of the legend we encounter an inexperienced youth who leaves his mother to become a knight in King Arthur's court. He gains skills and has a series of adventures. He marries a beautiful woman who is his equal in every respect. Feeling restless, he decides to return home. But eventually he realizes that he is lost. He comes upon a man of mature years who is quietly fishing in a small boat. When Perceval asks him if he knows where he might find lodging for the night, the fisherman replies that there are no places of lodging anywhere in the area except for his own home. He asks Perceval if he would like to spend the night there and Perceval accepts.

Perceval's host for the evening is, of course, the Maimed King. He is also called the Rich Fisher, the Fisher King, and Anfortas. At the Castle he encounters curious objects including a lance (with human blood dripping from its tyne) and a sword. The whole place is lit by the uncommon light of the Grail. The Grail gives them the food and drink they most desire.

Everyone receives except the King. Perceval who is seated beside him says nothing. As they are about to retire, the King gives Perceval a sword. They retire. But the narrator cues the reader: Perceval was supposed to engage his host in conversation, or at least ask some questions, but alas, he did not.

Perceval does not sleep well that night and when he awakes, the entire castle is deserted. And, as he leaves, the whole Castle disappears.

Perceval wanders for years. He has many knightly adventures and performs many chivalrous deeds. He encounters King Arthur and some very peculiar women who again castigate him for his failure to address the Fisher King. Cundie, for example, says to Perceval: "You entered the Castle

of the Fisher King and saw the bleeding lance...but you didn't ask why the blood flowed." These women also give him new insights into his lineage.

Perceval wanders for five more years. He loses his faith, but is sustained by the memory of his beloved wife, Condiwiramurs. He then encounters an anchorite's cell in the forest. He learns more of the Grail, "the Grail sustains whoever looks on it." And he also learns more of his lineage.

Time passes. He encounters and is defeated by an "infidel" who spares him. The infidel, Feirefiz, turns out to be a half brother, who eventually rules India. Now the story draws towards its conclusion.

How does the story end? Perceval along with Feirfiz follows Cundrie to the Grail Castle, where the Templars receive them on bended knees, knowing that Perceval will bring joy and relief to the entire kingdom once he completes his mission. Perceval has an audience with Anfortas. In front of everyone he asks, "Uncle, what ails thee?" and Anfortas is healed. Colour comes back to his face and the wounded king can now rise. He is restored. An announcement is made that Perceval will become the esteemed sovereign of the realm, and that his wife, Condwiramurs, will become queen.

At this point in the story the narrator in Wolfram's version tells us that

> The news spreads to every land that it was not to be won by force, with the result that many abandoned the Quest of the Grail and all that went with it, and that is why it is hidden to this day. (W – Book XV)

It is a story in which the hero, Perceval, falls from grace and fails miserably in the legend. He is scorned and abused by characters who tell him that he behaved badly in the Grail Castle, and that he should have known better. He loses his belief in a God of kindness and mercy and he becomes deeply injured by soul stagnation and despair. This painful part of his journey is echoed in the perplexing and seemingly unresolveable problems that torment the King. Anfortas, the Maimed King, suffers from intense physical pain in his groin area. At certain times of the year his condition worsens and he longs to die. Pale and weak, he sadly languishes about in his kingdom. All of his hopes have resulted in disappointment, and every form of medicinal treatment has failed to alleviate his suffering.

The only thing that gives him a bit of respite is fishing. The hero's task, of course, is to work with "the wound" in such a way that the King (and everyone else in the legend) is released from its power. And after many trials and tribulations his quest is successful.

Musings on the Meaning of the Grail Quest

Perceval succeeded in his task of returning to the Grail Castle to heal Anfortas. In so doing, he freed the entire kingdom of "the wound." As readers of this legend, we assume that the lands grew green again, and that the people became well nourished, unburdened by care and happy once again. This ending, however, begs the question: how did Perceval "achieve" the Grail and how did Anfortas "forfeit" it? What did these characters actually do or believe that merited these results? Was Perceval's triumph that he remained loyal to Condwiramurs, his lawfully wedded wife? Is this legend mainly a moral tale about celibacy or unswerving spiritual devotion to the Holy Grail? We can legitimately ponder these things and continue to seek other meanings behind Wolfram's closing words.

It is hard not to see a proto-Protestant element in the legend; there are few ordained priests in Wolfram's account, and he shows great respect for the authority of lay people's piety and views. The hermit who pardons Perceval and from whom we learn so much Christian doctrine is a lay person, as is Sigune, the bereft female penitent. Perceval is a rugged individual who searches his heart and trusts that Fortune (the Unseen Hand) will lead him where he needs to go. He follows the moral codes of chivalry and bravely meets each challenge of arms that comes his way. When chivalry and acts of valour seem insufficient for receiving the aid he wants from God, Perceval has a crisis of faith which is eventually resolved through his own readiness, as well as through the assistance of Trevrizent's wise and gentle guidance. These views and actions prefigure the kind of Protestantism that evolved several centuries later with Luther and other reformers.

The Holy Grail may well speak of the immanence of God as well as our souls' longing for communion with the divine. It could also be seen as a teaching device that helped lay people become more acquainted with the ceremonial aspects of the Mass. The Grail can also be seen having magical

qualities and enduring entertainment value. It is a symbol that attracts audiences on many levels. We see in the legend an unswerving conviction that all cultures are attracted to the Grail; that Muslims and pagans are as much in search of it as Christian knights, damsels and penitents.

The symbol of the Waste Land may be a particularly potent means of describing the spiritual problem of 12th century (and also modern) Christianity. Joseph Campbell's insights into this discussion are most penetrating. From one of Campbell's later works we read:

> There is no doubt that in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries a major threshold of cultural change had been attained. The aims of the Christian conquest of Europe had been accomplished – largely by force; the power of the papacy was at its height; the crusades were in full career; and yet from every side sounds and alarms of heresy were beginning to arise and to spread. The whole structure was cracking.[3]

And, he continues,

> The Waste Land is any world in which force and not love, indoctrination, not education, authority, not experience, prevail in the ordering of lives, and where the myths and rites enforced and received are consequently unrelated to the actual inward realizations, needs, and potentialities of those upon whom they are impressed.[4]

The mutilated Grail King "stands symbolic for his time for the sterilization of heart, body and mind that the Waste Land theme represents."[5]

Anfortas, the Maimed King, inherited his title rather than earned it. Anfortas may well have been unsuited to the role of Grail King, but in the structure of his immediate society there was no discussion about the depth dimension of his character or his talents; he was simply expected to perform dutifully the role that had been assigned to him.[6] Perceval, in contrast, transcended many of the dictates of his religious and cultural milieu. He embarked upon a path that was as authentic and natural to him as Anfortas' was structured and contrived. Perceval's was the way of a secular Christian knight: a country bumpkin in his youth, he

eventually left behind his mother's teachings, the institution of arranged marriages, the institution of the church, and the unwise castigations of many spiritually-minded women; he engaged in frank man-to-man discussions with Trevrizent, and with his integrity intact, discovered the way to the Grail Castle a second time. Perceval stayed completely true to what he knew was real: his love for Condwiramurs and his own individual path to the Grail Castle. Campbell calls this "secular mythology:" it is an honouring of the individual and a clear statement that nature, including human nature, is ultimately graced and holy (rather than fallen).[7]

In a very interesting and compelling way, Campbell links these traits in Perceval's character to the historical situation evident in twelfth century culture:

> a suspicion was already dawning in the Middle Ages; namely, that the biblical myth of Creation, Fall, and Redemption is historically untrue. Hence, there has now spread throughout the Christian world a desolating sense not only of no divinity within (*mythic dissociation)*, but also of no participation in divinity without *(social identification dissolved)*: and that, in short, is the mythological base of the Waste Land of the modern soul, or, as it is being called these days, our "alienation."[8]

> … it can be seen that the actual nuclear problem was already present, and recognized by many, at the very peak of that great period of burgeoning French cathedrals (1150–1250) … neither human love nor human reason could much longer support the imposed irrational ordeals of an imported mythic order, out of touch with every movement of the native mind, as well as heart, and held in force only by a reign of terror. The cathedral-building passion itself, it would seem, was but a compensatory, desperate screening effort to deny and nullify the increasingly obvious fact that the mighty image from Asia had begun to crack, and disintegrate.... [9]

Campbell's point here is that as the Grail legends were being written down, the church was sponsoring crusades and repressive acts of terror.

Creative artists and thinkers risked their lives if they veered too far from the "official" views and sanctions. Some undoubtedly acquiesced, but in doing so, they incurred soul stagnation and injury (the inner Waste Land – Anfortas' wound).

To become ultimately satisfied with an interpretation of this legend, it was necessary for me to ponder these points a long time. How do they relate to Anfortas' injury, to the despair and trials of Perceval, and to the healing of the Waste Land wound?

I will articulate my present understanding of the Grail Quest, acknowledging my debt to Joseph Campbell and others. The forest that Gramoflanz guards was enchanted by Clinschor, a magician who had adulterous relations with the wife of the King of Sicily. The King of Sicily castrated him. In his shame and his rage, Clinschor went to Persidia to learn the "dark arts." (W – Book XIII) Afterward he returned to Europe, intending to rob as many people as possible of their joy. He brought with him a magnificent magic pillar which he stole from a wealthy queen in the East and he erected it in a castle upon a mountain top. The people and forests all around this magic pillar became enchanted. The widow of the lord who used to rule these forests tried to bribe Clinchor's favour by giving him the wealthy treasure booth that Anfortas had recently given her as a love-gift. This pleased Clinchor so much that he made an agreement with Orgeleus: any knight who was brave enough to survive the ordeals of the castle of the magic pillar would be left in peace by Clinchor. This hero would also gain the castle and the hand of Orgeleus.

> Need we ask or tell what, or whom, the poet Wolfram might have had in mind when, about the year 1210, he was writing thus of a sterilizing magic brought upon Europe by the Near East by a life-despising castrate holding power over all spirits, good and bad? The King of Sicily at that moment was the infant Frederick II (1194–1250), crowned at Palermo 1198, who on the death of his mother six months later had become the ward of Innocent III (r.1198–1216), the mightiest pope of all time... This castrate's revenge against love was, for Wolfram, the source of the pall of death over the palace of life (the Castle of

> Marvels) and the palace of awe (the Castle of the Grail) ... The necromancer himself, Innocent, was employing the sign of the Cross to enforce the magic spell of his interdicts, by which kings were undone, cowed, and brought to hell. Such magic allied with duress (Clinschor with Gramoflanz, religion with secular power) was, in Wolfram's day and age, precisely the force to be undone.[11]

Did Wolfram see the wounds and the enchantments of this legend as symbolic parallels of the improper deeds committed by Pope Innocent III and other clerics of his age? Without being overly obvious about his criticism, Wolfram then went on to suggest a viable antidote for the religious problems of his day: that one can find God – the Grail – and redeem the belaboured kingdom of nature – society – if one is willing to be absolutely true to what the mystics call one's own inner voice.[12] As Campbell explains:

> According to this mythology there is no fixed law, no established knowledge of God, set up by prophet or by priest, that can stand against the revelation of a life lived with integrity in the spirit of its own brave truth.[13]

> God's initiative is represented in the inborn, sealed-in soul or "intelligible character" of the individual at birth; and the initiative, the freedom to act, must thereafter be one's own, guided not by what other people say, have done, or may tell one is God's will, but by one's own interior voice; for indeed ...it is in one's sealed-in soul, its hidden, God-given difference from all others, that "God's will" has been secreted … and it is to be found through action here in this mixed world, where nothing is foul, nothing pure, but all, like a magpie's plumage, mixed....[14]

Love, rather than force, is the redeeming power that Wolfram enshrines in this legend. He demonstrates the strong conviction through his hero, Perceval, that loyalty in service to love is the correct way to go about living one's life.[15] Loyalty in true love, joined with heroism in action, are how Wolfram's pictures the human way to perfection.[16] He believes that

we are supported by in our spiritual tasks ... "not by a supernatural grace dispensed by way of sacraments but by the natural grace of individual endowment and the worldly virtue of loyalty in love."[17]

Wolfram's other lesson, I believe, comes out in the legend through his use of the symbolic colour of green. In the Grail Castle, the Grail is borne into the hall on a rich and rare cloth of green; the Queen of the Grail is dressed in an opulent green dress, and for the evening Perceval himself is wearing the exquisitely embroidered cloak of green which belongs to her. In the realm of the Grail Castle, nature (the colour green) is highly honoured. No separation of nature and spirit has ever taken place here. This fact, I think, accounts for the mood of repose and sanctity that the reader encounters in this setting. Wolfram may be saying that the healing of the wound and the healing of the land can only take place in such an environment. In the Kingdom of the Grail, God is not separate from creature and creation, but robustly dwells within both.[18] This view of God or the Divine within creation and the creature seems to be as essential to the appreciation of this legend as the symbol of the Grail, the Waste Land, the family-man hero, and the Ailing King. In fact, its lesson may linger longer with the reader, as it has with me, and serve as a remarkable source of guidance.

Endnotes

[1] Chretien de Troyes, "The Story of the Grail (Perceval)" in *Arthurian Romances,* trans. W. Kibler (New York: Penguin Books, 1991). Chretien's ms is from c.1160-1180.

[2] See Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival and Titurel,* trans. Cyril Edwards (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006) or Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival,* trans. A. T. Hatto, (New York: Penguin Books, 1980). Wolfram's ms. is from c.1210–1217.

[3] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology,* (New York:Penguin, 1968), 390. See also Emma Jung and Marie-Louise von Franz, *The Grail Legend,* trans. Andrea Dykes, (Princeton University Press, 1970) and Robert A. Johnson, *The Fisher King and the Handless Maiden* (New York: Harper & Row, 1993) for Jungian interpretations of the Grail Quest.

[4] Campbell, *op.cit*. p. 388.

[5] Ibid, p. 397.

[6] Ibid, p. 392.

[7] Ibid, p. 564.

[8] Ibid, p. 394.

[9] Ibid, p. 395.

[10] Joseph Campbell, "Indian Reflections in the Castle of the Grail" in *The Celtic Consciousness,* ed. Robert O'Driscoll (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart and the Dolmen Press, 1981), 21.

[11] Joseph Campbell, *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology,* (New York: Penguin Books, 1991), 513.

[12] Ibid, p. 564.

[13] Ibid, p. 565.

[14] Ibid, p. 565.

[15] Ibid, p. 567.

[16] Iibid, p. 456.

[17] Ibid, p. 476.

[18] Ibid, pp. 393-395.

The Way of a Jewish Feminist

Devon Arianne Spier

The power of story is central to Judaism. Jewish people take on anecdotes from biblical and interpretive texts and struggle alongside these players in a sort of sacred drama. Judaism, for me, and for many others is exactly this, a walk with our ancestors, in a desert toward the Promised Land, toward peoplehood and G-d. In fact, Jews all over the world actually gather once a year to re-live the biblical exodus from Egypt this way by saying in our ceremonial meal "it was as if *I* walked from Egypt."

Thus, Jewish perspectives on women – even critical readings of women's contributions to Judaism – have been shaped by the centrality of these unifying myths, in which all Jews – across time and space – are part of a sacred drama of survival, of wandering, of becoming a Jewish people.

Yet it is these myths which pose a considerable challenge to re-locating women's voices in Judaism, for women's descriptions of their lives are noticeably absent from the biblical text. Instead, we find that the earliest references to women in the Hebrew Bible were actually written by male Jewish leaders at war with neighbouring peoples in Palestine.[1] Thus, how can women claim to have part in the biblical narrative, if their thoughts, feelings and experiences are absent from the biblical text to begin with?

Further, can women reclaim their history when the Torah used for ceremony, for learning, for spiritual stimulation, is a male-authored encounter with history?

These are questions I wrestle with as a Jewish woman in the post-modern period. But as my people have done for millennia, I draw inspiration from Jewish stories to guide and often reveal the complexity of Jewish identity and the meaningful contribution of women within this framework.

I will be sharing two of those stories today, one from an anonymous Yiddish storyteller in Europe and one from a post-modern Jewish writer and will then interweave each of these modernizing tales into how women

are reclaiming history, redefining leadership and responding to structural challenges to their power and voice within the Jewish community.

It has been my contention that modern encounters with secular structures and different cultures have opened up religious and cultural spaces for Jewish women to negotiate their relationships to their traditions and to author and develop ownership over their own Jewish stories. Women in leadership and scholarship are interpreted broadly here to include not only clergy and theologians, but also poets and activists who are making substantive contributions to the analysis of Jewish women's lives.

For Through Their Children, There Would Be Torah

First, I want to begin with a story of a small Jewish town on Simchat Torah, which will put the lives of Jewish women during the 1800s and 1900s into perspective.

Simchat Torah is the Jewish holiday that celebrates the conclusion of the annual cycle of public Torah readings. The story goes that a community in Poland was so poor that it could not afford its own Torah, the five Books of Moses, to celebrate on this day.[2] So when the time came during Simchat Torah to raise up the Torah scrolls to thank G-d for the five books, the people instead lifted up their children.[3] For through their children, there would be Torah, its lessons studied, lived out and remembered in the village.[4]

This story teaches that not only is the Torah a source of learning and wisdom that informs the lives of Jewish people but also that new customs and interpretations must arise to meet modern circumstances. It is for this reason that Jewish women would go on to take a role in the economic and religious life of their people in during the 1800s and 1900s, leading to a significant increase in women's poetical writing and scholarly output.

Although Jews were confined to a Pale of Settlement in czarist-ruled Europe, they were encouraged to assimilate and adopt the national identities of countries in central Europe.[5] Thus, Jewish women, who were traditionally the breadwinners and homemakers of their religious households, began to study secular matters in the 1800s.[6] They gained access to the Yiddish language and became the largest readers of modern Jewish fiction.[7] By the 1920s, a large body of women's Hebrew poetry

existed in Europe and Palestine.[8] Because women were unschooled in reading and writing Hebrew in their homes, these Hebrew poets wrote in ways that were "unburdened" by the traditions of religious schooling.[9] Themes of barrenness and isolation as a single women emerged here as the independence and self-awareness of Jewish women was recorded for the first time in history – bringing women's words proper into the Jewish literary universe.[10]

Still, it would take roughly half a century before women's Yiddish and Hebrew poetry would be considered part of the Jewish literary "canon." By this I mean that most editors of prominent Hebrew and Yiddish poetry volumes have been male and have considered including a woman only if she had familial connections to the editor.[11] Furthermore, most poems admitted to the canon have focused on biblical themes and motifs rather than the individual experience of the female poet.

Thus although Jewish female poets have reclaimed leadership and redefined their roles and relationships to their faith for nearly two hundred years, they are still stifled by the invisible and ever-present bonds of patriarchy that regulate the publication of their work and its reception in the Jewish mainstream.

The contribution of women in religious leadership in scholarship: 1970s

The story of Hebrew-Yiddish female poets – like the stories of most individual Jewish women – have recently become a part of the historical record, coinciding with the counter-culture of the 60s and the women's liberation movement of the early 70s, which has lead to greater interest in the individuality, personhood and agency of women. In the 1970s, the first woman was officially ordained by a Jewish religious body, and in the 1980s, the first feminist theological treatises were published and the first feminist wings of theological studies departments founded.[12]

Since the 1980s, we have seen substantial archival research and publication of Jewish female poets in campuses across the United States and Canada, as well as oral histories of female labour and suffrage activists who organized worker's meetings, unions and protest movements as early as the late 1800s.

We have also seen a rise in the publication and dissemination of women-centred writings and practices related to Judaism, from female-written prayer books for holidays, to new life cycle rituals celebrating women and girls, to an increased rate of female ordination. In the past ten years, we have seen the first ever publication of a Women's Commentary on the Torah and collections of sermons by women on weekly Torah portions.

Thus, women are telling their stories and sharing their journeys with others electronically and in print media, with wider audiences catching on to their messages and constantly reshaping the ways Jewish women live and experience religion. The Women of the Wall movement for women to pray with prayer shawls and Torah scrolls at the Wailing Wall in Jerusalem is a current example of what I call "living Torah," or documenting Jewish struggles and ways of life on the internet. The Women of the Wall Facebook group shows pictures of women being arrested for not abiding with the traditional religious norms on prayer at the Wailing Wall, which shows Jewish women around the world the challenge to religious freedom in Israel and the importance of Jewish women praying in ways that are meaningful to them.

In every generation, Jews have used the gifts of the time to revision Torah, to make it resonate with a different set of social, cultural and political circumstances. Interpretation is not a departure from Jewish life but a reflection of it.

Still, there is much work to be done by Jewish women today. Many of the texts that women use in their religious lives, especially at the moment that they become Jewish women, are biblical, imbued with patriarchal themes and male brushstrokes that make it difficult to decipher women's palettes in the ancient world. Contemporary theologians have even wondered if women can be classified as Jews given that G-d instructed Jewish men not to go near women as the Jewish people prepared to receive the Torah in the Book of Exodus.

Answering a Question with a Question

As an aspiring Rabbi and female-identified Jew, I have not prepared a concession or a rebuttal to this assertion, but I do wish to close with a conversation that will assist you as you reflect on women and Judaism.

The story is told that Dear Abby was asked by a reader why Jews always answer a question with a question. Dear Abby jokingly but rather sagely replied, "How should they answer?"

So it is with questions that I leave you on this wintery day: That you may grapple with the roles and contributions of Jewish women in all generations, in all seasons. That you search out their stories and help them tell their own. That the great scroll women's lives may wrap our Torah in new meanings and miraculous growth in this and every age should be our prayer.

May this be our will and G-d's.

Endnotes

[1] Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess, eds., *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999), 3-4.

[2] Yael Splansky, "Announcing the Early Childhood Centre at Holy Blossom Temple: Our Living Torah Scrolls," last modified October, 2012, Holy Blossom Temple, http://www.holyblossom.org/2012/10/our-living-torah-scrolls/.

[3] Ibid.

[4] Ibid.

[5] See: Arnold M. Eisen, *Rethinking Modern Judaism: Ritual, Commandment, Community* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998).

[6] Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess, eds., *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999), 10.

[7] Ibid.

[8] Ibid., 10-11.

[9] Ibid., 11.

[10] See Ruth Finer Mintz, ed., *Modern Hebrew Poetry: A Bilingual Anthology* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1966).

[11] Shirley Kaufman, Galit Hasan-Rokem, and Tamar S. Hess, eds., *The Defiant Muse: Hebrew Feminist Poems from Antiquity to the Present* (New York: The Feminist Press at the City University of New York, 1999), 12.

[12] See Judith Plaskow, *Standing Again at Sinai: Judaism from a Feminist Perspective* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1991).

A Canadian Ismaili Way
LESSONS FROM MY FAITH

Rehanna Rajabai

Among the more famous words of wisdom attributed to Pythia, the Oracle of Delphi, are "All things in moderation" and "Know thyself." Though taken from Greek mythology, these idioms succinctly highlight some of the key principles of the Ismaili Way: balance and acceptance of the responsibility of human being. "All things in moderation" may have been a cry against the excess and decadence of the time, but when viewed instead as an endorsement for balance, it becomes a suitable mantra for the practice of a life that is conscious of both the spiritual (*Din*), and the material (*Dunya*) – a key element of the Ismaili *Tariqah*, or path. "Know thyself" may have been a warning to ensure humility – a reminder of the human position – or a call to remember the greatness that man can achieve – also a reminder of the human position. Balance and the pursuit of self-knowledge, along with the quest for knowledge in general, the remembrance of unity in creation, and the guardianship of social justice, are foundational to the Ismaili tradition in which I was brought up. In themselves, these are not unique aspirations. What is unique to the Ismaili tradition is the role of the *Imam* in guiding the Ismailis along this path.

The Shi'a Imami Nizari Ismailis make up approximately one percent of the world's Muslims today. Like all Shi'a Muslims, the Ismailis believe that Prophet Muhammad designated his cousin/son-in-law Hazrat Ali as *Imam*, as his successor as spiritual leader. In the Ismaili tradition, this hereditary succession continues to this day, with His Highness Shah Karim al-Husayni, better known as Aga Khan the IV, as the 49th *Imam* of the Ismailis. The guidance of the Imam in interpreting the Qu'ran and guiding the Ismaili congregation in both material and spiritual matters has helped illuminate a path for me that espouses Islamic ethics in a modern Canadian context.

I must clarify that my inquiry into my faith and into the religious tradition that holds it is that of a practitioner and not as an academic. It is neither as a scholar, nor theologian, nor missionary that I write this. My understanding of the Ismaili way stems from my own experience and provides only a limited interpretation of this rich tradition, strewn with my own personal biases. I hope, however, that any lack of historical and theological content is compensated for by the insight offered through the lens of one who has continuously tried to apply this interpretation to her daily life, with varying degrees of success.

I. Know Thyself: The role of the human being and social conscience in Islam

In Islam, human beings are given the title *ashraf al-makhluqat*, the noblest of the creation: a designation assigning responsibility, not superiority. As described in the Aga Khan Development Network Ethical Framework,[1] each generation of humankind is "ethic bound to leave behind a wholesome, sustainable social and physical environment." To *know thyself* is therefore a call to awareness of this duty of care both towards nature and also towards all of humankind. The holy *Qu'ran* calls for "kindness to parents, to kinfolk, to orphans, to those in need, to neighbours who are near, to neighbours who are strangers, the companions by your side, the wayfarers you meet, and those [indentured to you]."[2] Charity continues to be one of the founding principles of Islam, but always with the intent of preserving human dignity and working towards the self-sufficiency of the marginalized. The Aga Khan Development Network is the network of non-denominational development agencies, led by the Aga Khan, which strives to achieve this on a global scale. In society, individuals practice Islam and the Ismaili tradition by actively participating in the social conscience and way of Islam and the Ismaili tradition. It becomes a calling to actively participate in civil society and when possible to play an active role in democracy. In his 2004 speech at the annual conference of German ambassadors, His Highness the Aga Khan pointed out that "civil society makes an enormous contribution to social well being, filling the gaps between the government, the business sector, and the family." At the local level, the social conscience is practiced primarily through volunteerism,

which is not only encouraged, but expected of an Ismaili throughout his or her lifetime. The acquisition of skills and knowledge has always come with an expectation of using those skills and that knowledge not only towards one's own goals, but also to the benefit of the larger community.

II. Know Thyself: Dhikr, Meditation, and Mono-realism

While the call for self-knowledge is a reminder of earthly responsibilities towards humanity, it is also a reminder to seek awareness of oneself and of the relationship between oneself and God. The concept of *Tawhid,* of the unity of God, is central to all streams of Islam. The Ismaili tradition is an esoteric tradition within Islam which encompasses many elements of Sufism, the mystic spiritual path of Islam. My understanding of *Tawhid* or unity extends to the unity between creator and creation, between nature, the universe, and the whole of humankind. In his memoirs, Aga Khan III wrote:

> Once man has thus comprehended the essence of existence, there remains for him the duty, since he knows the absolute value of his own soul, of making for himself a direct path which will constantly lead his individual soul to and bind it with the universal Soul of which the Universe is, as much of it as we perceive with our limited visions, one of the infinite manifestations. Thus Islam's basic principle can only be defined as mono-realism and not as monotheism.[2]

To aspire to understand one's connection with the universal soul/God requires great contemplation. This focused contemplation is promoted (but is not obligatory) in the Ismaili tradition via meditation. The term *dhikr* is what Sufis use to refer to the remembrance of God. When interpreted in a mono-realistic sense, *dhikr* extends beyond invocation and supplication to become a remembrance of the unity between an individual soul and the universal soul. The *Qu'ran* states, "To Allah belong the East and the West, so whithersoever you turn, there will be the face of Allah."[3] Therefore, to contemplate nature's beauty is *dhikr*. To be mindful of the chain of effort that ultimately leads to food on your table is *dhikr.* The

creation of beauty is *dhikr*. The appreciation of beauty is *dhikr.* Service to humanity is *dhikr.* To love one another is *dhikr.* In its insistence to "know thyself," the Ismaili tradition highlights a path similar to Faridudin Attar's story of the *Conference of the Birds,* where ultimately the birds in search of enlightenment arrive at a lake only to see their own reflection.

III. Balance: Din and Dunya in Moderation

While there is only unity in God, and God is unity, the Ismaili tradition recognizes that dualities often exist in interpretations, in choices, and in obligations. The *Qu'ran* often speaks of lessers and greaters, of apparents and hiddens, of firsts and lasts. The guidance of the Aga Khan in recent years has oft referred to achieving balance between a person's spiritual obligations (*Din*) and material obligations (*Dunya*). The fact that the Ismaili Way calls for a balance between the spiritual and the material – rather than forsaking the material world in favour of the spiritual world – makes it a very socially relevant and liveable tradition. A comfortable life and happiness have always been fair pursuits, so long as one pursues them with dignity, and with consciousness of both *Din* and *Dunya.* The tendency for a balanced life extends to other dualities of interpretation: the hidden, *bateen*, meanings are to be sought out alongside the apparent, *zahir* meanings, and contemplation is incomplete without action. "Without social responsibility, religiosity is a show of conceit."[4] Islam and the Ismaili tradition within it are applied faiths, integrated within the daily living and overarching pursuits of the practitioner. The beautiful irony of the two Greek idioms is that the one is best applied to the other. All things in moderation: Balance your exoteric self-knowledge and material responsibilities with your esoteric self-knowledge and spiritual responsibilities.

IV. The Pursuit of Knowledge

The Aga Khan Development Network Ethical Framework explains that "The key to the nature of society that Islam espouses is an enlightened mind, symbolised in the *Quran's* metaphor of creation, including one's self, as an object of the rational quest." The pursuit of knowledge has therefore been encouraged in Islam since its beginnings. "Seek knowledge, even if it

be [as far away as] China," is an oft-repeated saying of Prophet Muhammad. The pursuit of a better understanding of the physical world, the spirit of inquiry in science, has always been encouraged in Islam. This pursuit of knowledge recognizes that to "know the creation is to understand the creator."[5] It also is an acknowledgement of the prized gift of the intellect. The Arabic translations of classical Greek texts enabled their preservation through the Dark Ages of Western culture. Alongside the responsibility to pursue knowledge, however, is the obligation to use one's knowledge in an ethical manner. "No honour is like knowledge, no attainment like humility" is a well-known maxim of Hazrat Ali.

V. The Ismaili Path Illuminated: The Guidance of the Imam

The ethics detailed above are what I have understood to be the fundamentals of the Ismaili path. As I mentioned, these ethical stances themselves are not unique to or the distinguishing feature of the Ismaili tradition; instead, they are rather universal. What is unique to the Ismaili tradition is that the application of these ethics in a modern context has been guided by the present *Imam*, the Aga Khan. When the first Ismailis immigrated to Canada from East Africa in the 1970s, the *Imam*'s guidance was clear: "Make Canada your home." We were encouraged to "grow roots, become settled, contribute to society, and believe in the country that believes in pluralism." When Ismaili ethics were pitted against typically Western social habits, the message was to "avoid damaging social habits" and "to preserve the intellect." And as the material success of that first wave of immigrants became a reality, the emphasis was on balance between one's material and spiritual obligations. As a young child in the late 1980s and 1990s, I recall emphasis on accessing the best possible education, so that we would be equipped to participate fully and succeed in a meritocratic world. The term meritocracy thus became part of the Ismaili household lexicon. And in the age of greater globalization, the key message was pluralism – the understanding, acceptance, and celebration of the strength that diversity brings to both society and the planet. Most recently, the theme has been on the role of civil society and the importance of building it, especially in the developing world. Moreover, the guidance is explicit in the advice that

whatever education and learning one has access to in the developed world should be put to use for the betterment of the remainder of humanity.

The pursuit of knowledge, self-knowledge, balance, ethical living, and the active application of a social conscience make up the fundamental ethics and ethos of the Ismaili path – the treading of which would be incomplete without the guidance of the Imam who illuminates this path in a changing world.

Endnotes

[1] http://www.iis.ac.uk/view_article.asp?ContentID=101094

[2] Aga Khan III, *Memoirs of Aga Khan* (London: Cassell, 1954), 175.

[3] Holy *Qu'ran*, 2:116.

[4] AKDN Ethical Framework.

[5] *Qu'ran* 45:4 – "Verily in the heavens and the Earth are signs for those who believe."

The Way of the Mystic

Nancy Cleaves

"Blessed are the pure in heart for they shall see God" (Beatitude – Jesus).

I believe we live in a time where the heart of the mystic in all of us is yearning to be awakened. Having been raised in a fundamental Christian circle, studying theology and eventually becoming a pastor, I had never heard of "mystics," but I was most certainly a seeker of the One who is Mystery. From the moment I surrendered to God at the age of 18, I sought to *know* this Being for myself. I searched the scriptures for a single focus and found the verse cited above. The words jumped off the page and into my heart. So I studied every scripture that had the word "pure" or "heart" in it. I came to the grand conclusion that if I cultivated true unconditional love for everyone, my heart would be purified and my eyes would eventually be opened. I prayed, fasted, studied, chose to do my best to become a lover and memorized whole passages of scripture. I paid special attention to those passages having anything to do with God being our "Dwelling Place or our Secret Place." My favourite passage came from the Psalms: "that I might dwell in the House of the Lord, to behold the beauty of the Lord and to meditate in His temple." (Ps. 21:4)

I believe I express myself best in poetry.

The Search for You

You are the Cosmic Thread
weaving all creation
into a tapestry of delight.
You are the stars
that shine,
and the darkness of night,
The waves of the ocean
and a drop of water

as it kisses the land.
You are the shore,
a comfort to walk,
and a pebble of sand.

You! You!
Oh how I searched for You!
My soul longed to know You.
I was consumed;
I was desperate.
I looked for You
As if You were somewhere,
in some place,
at some time,
a moment of true encounter.
All I found was confusion,
and unrest.
I loved You at my worst.
I loved You at my best.
Nothing!

Then,
Like a summer breeze,
a flash of lightning,
a Lover's tease,
a Dream awakening,
there You were,
everywhere,
every place,
every time.
You!

So yes, as the poem indicates, I never found the One for whom I searched but She found me! After twenty years of this seeking, serving, loving and being as devout as I could be, everything I loved came to a

grinding halt and even the little grinds blew away into the wind; marriage and ministry over, children acting out their pain, no sense of any identity and only tiny specks of glass from a broken heart remained under my feet. If I moved the wrong way, I felt I would fall into an abyss. I felt God couldn't find anything good in me to bless: I was an outcast. Yet, I did say to God in a serene moment, after one year of trying to keep my twins in a youth group and on the narrow path – to no avail – "Either there is something wrong with You and You are not who I think you are, or there is something wrong with me. Well, I see your Beauty everywhere, there is certainly nothing wrong with you. There must be something wrong with me. I have to leave this life as I know it, so that I can look at it and see what is wrong." And I did. I purposely didn't open a bible nor darken a church door, except by specific invitation, for what became a six year period.

Then, on October 8, 1998, at around 2:30 or 3:00 PM, as I was walking on my trail, I felt a ping of lightning on my heart. I began to weep and weep and said over and over "OK." In that instant, I was connected to everything and everything was alive and dancing in sacred beauty. God was everywhere and I was in a state of blissful peace. At first I thought I might go crazy, a good crazy mind you, but crazy nonetheless as I was not in control. Over time, the awareness settled and I was led across the path of the Aramaic scholar Neil Douglas-Klotz with his translations of the words of Jesus (who fits better when seen as a Middle Eastern mystic), the Sufis, the teachings of mystics in all religions and my own further studies in a doctorate program in California lead by Matthew Fox.

It has been almost fifteen years since that time. What a journey! As I reflect, I can honestly say that I am grateful for all the passages I read and the experiences I had. I see a common theme in all the stories I have read of the mystics: there is a deep hunger for God, disciplined choices, hardship and betrayal in one form or another, a sense of abandonment from God, great loss, deep emotional pain, and in time, the Great Invitation to Divine Intimacy, either gradually or, as in my case, in an instant.

All religions speak of the Divine as Unconditional Love. In retrospect, it seems clear now that if I wanted to experience the Beloved, my soul had to be transformed into unconditional love so that love could commune with Love. That would mean getting rid of fears, healing wounds, softening

pride, etc. It's not about achieving any measure of perfection in behavior or acquiring a great wealth of knowledge. It's about the pure intention of the heart. Our souls are like gardens – humility the cultivator, tears the water, and the seeds all forms of love. We dig out the stones of pride, weed away the distractions and attachments, fill in the holes of fear with fresh, fertile soil of peace and the Sun shines when and where It will. Just when you think you are ready to experience God there are storms, crop failures, more pruning, and on and on. It is a journey with no end, ever. I wrote down this quote a long time ago and am not sure of the source: "When God finds the heart thus thoroughly grounded and turned toward Him, the Godhead nakedly descends unto the pure, waiting soul drawing it up to its uncreated Essence." The Beloved is the One who decides when the soul is ready to be encountered. Every seeker I have spoken with says that the Beloved came by surprise, and once She did came the realization that God was there all the time, in the seeking. It is in the words of a wonderful poem by David Whyte an "Opening of Eyes."

The way of the mystic is the way of love, of seeking Truth, of surrendering moment by moment to the realm of Grace. Don't let me mislead you: there were and always are millions of times when you want to give up, scream in sheer agony, and even end it all. Some have done so and at such a loss. We come from the vast expanse of the Universe, as a seed of Beloved through the womb of humanity – we feel separate, alone and afraid. The only consolation is coming back to our true home, aware of our true identity, as one with the One in the all.

I would like to share one more important phase of my journey thus far. After ten years of listening, a lot of weeping, and my formal studies, I was led to write a book, *A Story to Live By*. It is the story of our soul's journey as expressed in the cosmic design of this Universe. Before writing this book, the Beloved's voice was so clear. Then after, there was a shift, which I believe is the reward of the mystical path. Again, let me express my heart through a poem.

Union

I always love to do what You tell me,
But now there is no telling.

For so long I followed
Your every whisper,
eagerly obeying Your command,
heeding Your wishes
Before You could speak them,
because I love to study
Your face;
I know by Your expressions – what
Your desires are
long before
they are voiced.

I just wanted to be
the best daughter
You ever had.
Remember?
As I surrendered
in that cold,
converted sunroom,
so terrified – alone,
fear and pain my constant companions.
But You came –
a ray of joy that
pierced my soul.
I knew it was You,
because it was to You I called
over and over in night's despair.

And now – all these years,
I have so many journals,
and travel logs plenty,
treasure chests full
of memories;
as we hunted in dark caves

and conquered mountains.
Our only weapon was Love,
And the reward was Grace.

But now,

I can't follow You any more,
Can I?
You – my Only Other;
my Thou; my Praise;
my Worship;
my Thirst; my Plenty.

I was sad somehow;
I knew we would never be the same;
I was losing the Only You I had known.
Like a maid in waiting,
I could be nothing but still.
A shroud of Mystery was unveiling,
each Breath a holy chill.

Softly, reverently,
I felt Your arms of Love
enfold me,
with strokes of attentive art,
As in sweet caress,
You carried me
over the threshold of my heart.

And there we remain,
always in my bedchamber
lying wait for each other,
always at my kitchen table
sharing counsel sweet,
always in my salon,

on my front porch,
in my garden.

You and I
living the vow we took
to be
One.

The reward of the mystical path is profound in every way – union with the Beloved. When I look at this poem, the last stanza looks like a chalice, sitting on a table (humanity) and under the words "to be one" from our Beloved. We are the chalice that we seek. The wine is the nectar of our Beloved! Blessings and peace to all.

The Market Lady is Dead

Emma Claire Bryant

I am spending the night in a musty and dusty big old Portuguese/Goan house in Margao where Judith Auntie's mother is dying. I am spending the night here to keep Judith company in her "lonely time." The old woman is on her back in a wooden bed with an IV drip hanging from a bamboo pole above her. She moans and furrows her brow every once and a while. Her heart and lungs are still working but that is about all.

People come in and out to visit and sit in the chairs beside her bed and chat with one another. They all speak in Konkani, which I don't understand. I know Hindi. The woman that is sitting in the rocking chair reminds me of some short, plump, warted, toad character from some old tv cartoon I can't quite remember.....and the other one has these teeth that stick straight out from her mouth and these sores on her face that she picks at.....sheesh, some real crazy characters.....

Judith is "normal" looking. Hubert, my landlord and Judith's husband, warned me that these two ladies practice black magic and have been using it on Judith. I giggled when he told me this but now that I see them, I think I believe him. He said they won't use it on me.

I have been reading my novel to the dying woman hoping that, if she can hear me, my not understood words might sound as musical as their Konkani does to my ears. Fleas are biting my ankles.

Auntie and I sleep on a mat on the floor beside the dying woman's bed. At 4:00 AM I wake up to pee. I look to see that the old woman is still breathing. Her chest is rising and falling rapidly. At 5:00 AM Auntie wakes me up "she stopped breathing." And it all begins.

Auntie calls out for the other family members in the house next door. She calls her husband Hubert on her mobile. I quickly fold up our mat bed. We close the door and I help two others clean and clothe the old lady. They are rough with her like they are with their children here. We rip a white sheet and we bind her feet together. Another goes around her head to keep

her mouth closed and still another around her hands to keep them folded on her chest.

The front room gets swept of cobwebs and dust. Plastic lace white curtains are hung.

Hubert has been on his mobile making all the arrangements. A plug-in fridge coffin with a glass top arrives in pieces and is assembled and plugged in. Everyone is standing around it bobbling their heads. Hubert tells me it is free and used instead of "injection" because the old woman won't be "put in ground" until tomorrow because "now it is too late na, no good time to put in ground, must be morning, then better, ya." I bobble.

Judith and Hubert's two daughters, Savia (16) and Swizel (14) called the old woman "*Bazaar My*" meaning "the market lady" in Konkani. They tell me it is because she always used to go to the market and bring them back sweets and toys. The two girls and Judith lived with the market lady up until five years ago when Hubert returned from his twenty years of working as a cook in Kuwait.

Eight a.m. and I'm in the back seat with the two girls. Hubert's mom is in her black sari in the front and Hubert is driving. We drive to Margao dressed up for the funeral. "Bazaar My" is now in a proper wooden coffin with plastic gold trim, resting on a table covered in a white sheet. Dusty wooden chairs line the perimeter of the room. Real three-foot tall candles are at each corner of the coffin. *Bazaar My* has been covered in a purple robe with gold trim, shiny black shoes, and white gloves. She has a rosary in her hands. I take my seat. A bus has been rented and has brought people from our neighbourhood in Colva to *Bazaar My's* house in Margao.

The room fills, with women mostly, and they start the rosary. The rhythmic sound of their voices.....each sits with folded hands around a small change purse, a handkerchief, and a rosary.....each has a cross tattooed on the meaty part below the thumb. The orange Christmas bulbs of the altar are on and flickering, giving the impression of candles. Some women wail. Judith Auntie cries with a hand on *Bazaar My's* cheek.

Six men carry the coffin down the street in a quiet procession to the church. Mass is held. On the walk back to the car, Hubert's mother (who speaks very little English) says to me: "Long, eh?" referring to the mass. I bobbled and said "yes, long." Then back in the car and off to the cemetery

for the burial. The hole is already dug. They drop the coffin in. We all throw a shovel's worth on top, and it's over.

She's sick. She dies. We dress. We cry. We bury. All in less than thirty-six hours.

P.S. My friend Lenny says the toad lady is from Thumbelina

The Market Lady's Empty House

Emma Claire Bryant

Judith Auntie has come here every Saturday for the last six years – ever since she moved to the Hubert's family home – to give her mom's house a once over. Sweep and mop the floor, water the garden and check in on her mom and the people who live in the labyrinth of rented row housing. Row houses are strips of ten-by-fourteen foot rooms. Whole families live in each of these rooms, sometimes as many as eight people. I live in one of these rooms at Hubert's family home in nearby Colva. The money from these rental units is the family's main source of income these days. They also have enough money banked that has come from "outside" – from Hubert's twenty years as a cook in Kuwait.

We arrive at the door, a door that has always been wide open, a door that Judith Auntie has always just walked through while calling out to her mom. Now that door is closed and locked. There is a little pile of hibiscus blossoms in front of that door. Judith produces a key and opens the rusty old lock on the front door. I hold my breath. My heart races. We enter. The house is dark and dusty and empty and quiet. My heart sinks, my brow furrows and my eyes well up. "This must break your heart a little, no?" I say to Judith. She turns around and looks at me. "Not a little, shattered!" I can see it in her eyes. "That's why I want you to come. To be with me, na." I bobble.

Now this is our routine. I go with her every Saturday morning for a couple of hours. Hubert drives us in his little car. There is a man who sleeps on the front porch of the house. When we arrive, he appears from the labyrinth of skinny pathways between the row housing, collects his bedroll and disappears to the back. I always feel the same when we unlock that door and enter the house. What a feeling. What a place. The way the light filters through the dusty skylights – where they have removed one

clay tile and replaced it with a piece of glass the same size (I have done this in my room). The empty wooden bed where *Bazaar My* died. We stand in the entrance to that room and Auntie always tells me, "I never forget that night. You were with me." And I bobble. That was moment in time so important to both of us, for such different reasons. But it will bond us forever. I was there with her.

Judith goes around opening the windows and then goes out the back door to check in on the people who live in the row houses out back. I go into the bedroom to change into my work clothes. The bedroom consists of two wooden beds pushed together with a blue tarp over them to protect the mattresses from the dust. There is a thick layer of dust on the tarp. There is an "almery" with a tacky flower print curtain hanging over one door and a spotted full length mirror on the other. Again, it is covered in a thick layer of dust. I change my clothes and check myself out in the mirror. I'm slimming down despite the large quantities of delicious deep-fried street food I eat. *Mirchi pakora* are my favorite (breaded, deep fried green chilies). I'm "becoming polled down" is what they tell me. Or maybe I am the same size and it's just that my eyes have adjusted to what is around me. *Moti* (fat) is what is desired among this class. The tourists have a hard time with this one: being told "looking fat!" along with a bobble, raised eyebrows, a frown of approval, and a thumbs up.

I borrow a pair of *chaaples* (flip flops) from the many that sit on the rack. I scrounge around for some sort of digging tool and clipper and head out to the garden. This is my duty. Judith does the floors inside and I do the garden. I search for some sticks to prop up the flowering plants that have fallen over. I can feel eyes on me. It's not uncomfortable for me; just part of being in India. Not too many white folks have been in these parts. But they all know who I am: Judith's right hand. I clean out years of garbage from the dirt in the garden – plastic bags, old combs, little glass nail polish bottles, cds, old worn-through, two-toned blue *chaaples* – and pile it into one side of the garden. There are about six to ten people leaning against the fence watching me work. I prune and trellis and water the twenty by ten foot garden. One of the watchers is a young Hindu girl. I can tell because she wears a *churidar* (pants with long shirt and scarf), a bindi, a gold nose ring and earrings. She has been REALLY watching. Then she runs around

the corner into the maze of paths. But she comes back with what looks like an oversized pillowcase. She begins to fill it with the pile of garbage I have made. She is helping me. And then one of the men who has been REALLY watching me says something in Konkani and points at himself and then at me in the garden. I bobble and he comes in to help too. He holds up overgrown plants while I tie up an old rubbery leaf and secure it to the stick I have put in the ground. "*Achaa*" he says with a bobble, meaning "good." I bobble back. Judith likes to tell me "You are very clever girl" (remember the r in "very" sounds more like a d). It is obvious to me through these peoples actions that *Bazaar My* was good to her people and they liked her and they miss her.

"Time is gone" Judith will call out. I quickly turn off the water and scurry inside, straight to the bathroom/shower/tap with a bucket and a drain in the floor surrounded by ¾ height walls. I wash my feet, hands, arms, face and chaaples, return to the bedroom and put on my street clothes, and take a quick check in the mirror. Looking hot, Grummie! I return my chaaples to the rack, close the wooden doors with their metal bolt latches, turn off the lights and meet Judith on the porch to hold up the electrical wire she can't reach that always gets in the way of the front door. The door is locked and we walk down the path onto the street. Judith likes to buy a couple of household items from the shop on the corner. It's her old corner store. I stand and watch and blink into the afternoon sun. She says, "Just go and sit down, I will get." I'm not sure where she is expecting me to sit until I turn around and see that Hubert is already there in his little car. Somewhere in the mix of blaring horns and traffic, he has rolled up right behind me. How did she know he was here? They have these routines, I am learning. But to me it feels like magic.....as there never seems to be any conversation or clocks involved. She just knows when the "time is gone."

Tomorrow, I'll go to the market in Margao with Judith Auntie to get supplies and then go to *Bazaar My's* house and follow our routine. Only this time, we are getting ready for the one-month anniversary of *Bazaar My's* death.

The Way of the Tibetan Book of the Dead
(AS OF AUGUST 2012…)

Val Lariviere

On May 8, 1996, my life changed. That day, my two friends Cerridwen and Mark drowned in a canoe accident on the Montreal River. In January they had gone ahead to set up a home in Elk Lake, Ontario, where I would follow and we three would build a business and set off on a path together. And then they died. This wasn't my first experience with death, but at that time it was most certainly the closest. I expected the world to stop while I gathered myself, but that is not what happened. My life went on. This existence was made up of versions of myself: one version wanted to follow them before they got too far away; another version wanted to go on although I lacked the skills to take the first step, and yet another self wanted to close my eyes and wish it all away.

My response to this rending took me back to university, to the study of religion in an attempt to find some answers to the larger questions of life. Over time, my focus revolved more and more around how the various religious traditions view death and what, if anything, lay beyond. Under the supervision of my professor, Dr. Darrol Bryant, I was given the opportunity to invest a large amount of time and energy into a single project. Perhaps predictably, I asked him if I could investigate something concerning death. Our initial conversations quickly turned toward Eastern thought, as these traditions include rich discussions on the topic of death. When Dr. Bryant suggested *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* something clicked deep within me and I clearly felt this was the teaching I needed to explore. And so began my very personal journey with this remarkable illuminating text.

From the beginning I experienced challenges working with this text. First, I did not read any of the original languages and so could not reference the writings in their original form. Second, as I am a Canadian who was

born into the Roman Catholic faith, I was unfamiliar with the cultural and religious milieu of the work. These roadblocks led to the notion that I might compare some of the major English translations of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* and see what emerged. I began to read and study in the attempt to release some small amount of understanding, however clumsy and confused that attempt might be. Every week or two I would meet with Dr. Bryant to talk, and it was in these informal chats that I became aware of a deepening of my experience of the reading. It was, I think, as close as I have ever come to what the Tibetans describe as transmitted insight. That was how it went for eight months – reading, sharing and talking and in the end, writing.

The central question of my exploration concerned what happens to human beings after death in the Tibetan tradition, and the implications of such an understanding. I began with a comparative analysis – sometimes line by line – of the three English translations (with commentaries) of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* that were popular at that time: the 1919 translation by Lama Kazi Dawa-Samdup with commentary and footnotes by W. Y. Evans-Wentz, the 1975 work by Francesca Fremantle and Chogyam Trungpa, and the 1994 text by Robert A. F. Thurman. I also included some relevant information from Sogyal Rinpoche's *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* to help unravel some of the basic ideas of this unusual and complex text. Finally, I made an attempt to suggest some possible implications of these teachings for both Western culture and individuals.

I will begin this re-visiting of my previous journey with *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* with a brief discussion of the foundational concepts of "*bardo*" and "liberation." Then I will proceed to describe the states of consciousness experienced during the death process as outlined in the texts. Finally, I will attempt to describe what this study meant to my personal search for the answer to the question of death and how it changed me.

According to tradition, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is a set of instructions on liberation through hearing composed by Padma Sambhava and written down by his wife in the eighth or ninth century of the Common Era. Padma Sambhava buried these texts in the hills of central Tibet where they were discovered in the fourteenth century by Karma-

Lingpa.[1] Tradition further holds that these detailed instructions, practical guidelines or process manuals are to be read to the deceased for the forty-nine days following his death to increase the potential for liberation or at the very least a better rebirth. The hope is that if the deceased has followed a spiritual practice in life, hearing the text read to him at death will encourage him to face any experience he may encounter at death or thereafter with a confidence born from rehearsal rather than a horror-filled fear of the unknown.

Sogyal Rinpoche writes that the actual name of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* is *Bardo Todrol Chenmo,* which he translates as "the Great Liberation through Hearing in the *Bardo*."[2] Liberation can be understood as enlightenment, understanding or awakening but these words alone may not contribute significantly to clarity in our Western understanding. Robert Thurman describes liberation as the dissolution of subjectivity and objectivity where all that remains is pure intelligence, our real nature.[3] One of the methods thought to invite enlightenment is on hearing a profound teaching such that "whoever comes into contact with this teaching … receives a sudden glimpse of enlightenment through the power of transmission."[4] It may be that liberation is beyond definition by words. My understanding of liberation from the Tibetan perspective increased significantly when it was approached through metaphor. For me, the most beneficial metaphors were those created by Francesca Fremantle who described liberation as being like removing dust from a mirror or like clouds dissolving to reveal a clear sky.[5] From within the worldview of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* the deceased must recognize his experiences as himself and not something external to himself, and if he would attain liberation he must maintain that recognition. In this way recognition is simultaneous with liberation.

The concept of *bardo* is perhaps even more difficult for the Western mind to grasp. Lama Anagarika Govinda describes the *bardos* as representing different states of consciousness of our life.[6] Chogyam Trungpa translates *bar* as "in between" and *do* as "island" or "mark"; an island between two things.[7] He describes *bardo* as "gap" and explains it as both the interval of suspension that occurs in life as well as in death. Robert Thurman refers to the *bardo* state as "the between." However, it was

Trungpa who made the *bardo* experience accessible for me by approaching it from a more psychological viewpoint. He states:

> There are bardo experiences happening to us all the time, experiences of paranoia and uncertainty in everyday life; it is like not being sure of our ground, not knowing quite what we have asked for or what we are getting into … they are not just psychedelic experiences or visions that appear after death.[8]

The notion of losing ground was immediately illuminating for me. I remember being very excited by this revelation in conversation with Dr. Bryant, as I was so easily able to tap into this feeling and the existential terror it suggested.

The term *bardo* might also reflect the temporal place where you have left what you know and have not yet arrived at what is next. The between, transitional, intermediate, interval or gap are all descriptions used to describe the *bardo* states. Another perhaps potentially valuable term not used by any of the authors and/or translators is "liminal" which is defined as "of or relating to a sensory threshold"[9] and is much used in descriptions of rites of passage. Victor Turner, whose work as a cultural anthropologist is often referred to as symbolic and interpretive anthropology, states, "[I]t is the liminal state which is both threatening and at the same time the only route to change."[10] This sounds startlingly similar to Trungpa's description of *bardo* experiences: "They are the heightened qualities of different types of ego and the possibility of getting off ego. That's when the bardo starts – the peak experience in which there is the possibility of losing the grip of ego and the possibility of being swallowed up in it."[11]

Evans-Wentz, Thurman and Trungpa each acknowledge six *bardos* or modes of consciousness: the *bardo* of this life, the *bardo* of dream, the *bardo* of meditation, the *bardo* of dying, the *bardo* of *dharmata* (or reality) and the *bardo* of becoming. The *bardo* of dreaming and "the *bardo* of meditation both take place within the *bardo* of this life."[12] Fremantle states, "All the instructions concerning the six *bardos* basically deal with allowing that gap to open by undermining our belief in the ordinary world that we take for granted, and then letting go into the space beyond."[13] Sogyal Rinpoche argues that the *bardo* of dreams corresponds to the *bardo*

of death, although the latter is much deeper. In this way, how your mind is in the dream state may give you an indication of how it will be at death.[14] In a similar way, our meditation practice can give us the skills to enter deeper and deeper states of consciousness where we can become adept at waking in unfamiliar circumstances with the awareness that these are simply creations of our own thoughts. So developing a meditation practice or skill with our dreams may allow us to experience these states of mind while still alive, enabling us to more easily recognize the Clear Light or the Luminosity at the moment of death and attain liberation.[15]

Using these concepts as our foundation, it is now possible to turn our attention to the text of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead*. The work is divided into three sections identified as three *bardos* based on the experiences of the deceased just prior to his death and for the forty-nine days afterward. The guide describes what the deceased experiences physically, mentally and emotionally. The *bardo* which dawns at the moment of death is called the *Chikhai Bardo* and is an extremely potent moment, powerful in itself when "all beings are as close as possible to their own highest enlightenment."[16] Our sources divide this *bardo* into two stages. Evans-Wentz calls the first stage the primary Clear Light seen at the moment of death[17] and notes that it is the penultimate moment to attain liberation. But this is not as easy as it may sound. At the moment of his death, the deceased is at the very least confused as he begins to experience the dissolution of his body. Often the literature describes the deceased as being in a swoon. Evans-Wentz communicates this experience as "losing equilibrium" and Trungpa likens the experience to a feeling of "uncertainty" when one is confronted by an unfamiliar reality. Personally, I have never experienced a greater terror then when I first considered the notion that "I" will no longer exist, that there will be no more me, no memories, no thoughts, nothing. Perhaps the most helpful picture of the experience comes again from Trungpa when he suggests that the deceased is overcome by a feeling of "losing one's ground" which builds "up to a point of fear of becoming insane, the point where there are possibilities of leaving the world of duality and going into a sort of woolly, fuzzy emptiness."[18] It is easy to understand that this fear of losing ground might cause the dying person to grasp at the life just lived, at what is familiar, rather than to recognize the Clear Light as himself. So

in the hope that he will hear and be awakened, the text is to be read to the deceased for three or four days as a way to remind him of his spiritual practice and keep his mind from wandering.

If the deceased has been unable to hold on to the Clear Light as himself, and achieve liberation, he will next experience the second stage of the *Chikkai Bardo* or the secondary Clear Light seen immediately after death. This state is less intense than the previous one although the deceased still may not know that he is dead. He is confused and may be reluctant to give up the notion of a subjective self. His consciousness will leave his body and float around the room and he will be able to see and hear his relatives although he may misinterpret his awareness of their grief as a state of continuing to be connected to them.[19] Here, the living who would assist the dying are again asked to remind the deceased to focus his mind on the teachings he has received in life by meditating on his tutelary deity or the "Great Compassionate Lord."[20]

At this point, if liberation has eluded the deceased, he awakens out of his swoon into the second or *Chonyid Bardo.* The inner and outer dissolutions are complete. The person now understands that he is dead and that he is in a *bardo* state but he remains under the delusion that he still has his flesh and blood body. The deceased may try to contact his relations and friends and may become frustrated when they do not respond or angry when they divide his belongings or talk about him. The text reminds those sitting with the deceased to continue to speak to him, to read the guidance to him and most importantly to advise him to turn away from the life he has left as there is no longer any possibility for his return to it.

Again there are two phases of the *Chonyid Bardo*: the appearance of the Mild or Peaceful Deities, which is thought to take place from day one to day seven, and the appearance of the Fierce or Wrathful Deities from day eight to day forty-nine. Originally, I explored and compared each day individually but some general observations may be made. The central notions are that everything the deceased may see or experience at this time is simply his mind arising before him in unfamiliar ways and a reminder not to succumb to fear or panic.[21] Initially, he will experience three phenomena: frightening sounds, bewildering lights and terrifying rays of lights. Following that, the symbolic visions of the Peaceful Deities

arise. Although it might seem that the presence of benevolent deities would be comforting, Trungpa insists the opposite is the case:

> This state of absolute peacefulness seems to be extremely frightening, and there is often the possibility that one's faith might be shaken by such a sudden glimpse of another dimension, where the concept of union is not applicable anymore.[22]

The descriptions of each vision are extremely complex, specific and detailed with layers of esoteric meaning. Familiarity with related teachings in life allow the deceased to use the coded visions as tools to aid him in the awareness that they are simply thought forms arising from the enlightened energy of his own mind. It is this recognition that will liberate him.[23]

If the deceased is not yet liberated, the experience of the Wrathful Deities will take place. The Wrathful Deities are represented by extremely detailed descriptions of their blood-drinking visages without the esoteric trappings present in the visions of the Peaceful Deities. And whereas the impulses of Peaceful Deities arose from the heart of the deceased, the awareness of the Wrathful Deities arises from the intellect and so the deceased can more clearly recognize his current state. The fear, terror and awe felt in the presence of Fierce Deities are of such intensity that recognition of them as embodiments of his intellect becomes increasingly difficult for him. But he need only recognize just a little and it is easier to become liberated because "with the arising of overwhelming fear the mind has no time to be distracted, and so it concentrates one-pointedly."[24]

Failing recognition, the deceased will wander further into the third or *Sidpa Bardo*, a much lower plane than the *Chonyid Bardo*.[25] Here, the deceased has come to the full knowledge that he does not have a body and develops an overpowering desire to have one. Thurman states that the deceased creates for himself a subtle energy body which is "driven by the swift wind of evolution, [his] mind is helpless and unstable, riding the horse of breath like a feather blown in the wind, spinning and fluttering."[26] He is unable to rest and his thoughts take on a desperate quality, with only the thought of acquiring a new body bringing him any relief. He reaches out to his relatives but they cannot hear him and this causes him to feel yet more pain. Here, the reader must try to orient the deceased to his current

state and remind him to focus his mind.

If he has not succeeded in achieving liberation, the deceased will next be presented with a judgement experience similar to that in many Western religions. Here, a vision in the form of a Good Genius (Evans-Wentz) or conscience (Trungpa) and the Evil Genius or conscience appear to count out pebbles representing the good deeds and bad deeds performed by the dead person during his life. If there is any disagreement, *Yama* the Lord of Death will consult the Mirror of *Karma* (Evans-Wentz) or Mirror of Evolution (Thurman) to decide on the veracity of the arguments presented. Sogyal Rinpoche highlights two important and necessary points that emerge in this judgement experience. First, that the judgement takes place in the mind of the deceased alone, whereby he is both the judge and the judged. Second, "that what really counts … is the motivation behind [the deceased's] every action, and there is no escaping the effects of [his] past actions, words, and thoughts, and the imprints and habits they have stamped with [him]."[27]

There are two distinct orientations in the *Sidpa Bardo*: the first is instruction for closing the womb-door and second, if that fails, for choosing a beneficial womb. The five methods that may be employed to close the womb-door and prevent re-birth involve both images to tempt the deceased as well as instructions to resist the temptation. As always, if the deceased can stabilize his mind, he will succeed in closing the womb-door. If, however, the deceased fails to close the womb door, then his rebirth is at hand. The danger arises in that in his passion to acquire a material body, the deceased could be lured into the lower realms for incarnation. The text takes great pains to remind the officiate that liberation is still possible in the *Sidpa Bardo* and for this reason the guide should persevere in his repetitions since even if the deceased is not liberated by one orientation, he may be liberated by another.

Each realm of potential rebirth is landmarked by particular signs and characteristics that the deceased may recognize. It is only in the human realm that conditions are favourable for spiritual advancement, but it requires such intense single pointed concentration to suppress the feeling of being pursued that the deceased may seek refuge anywhere without thought of how his choice will affect his future. To aid his focus, the

deceased is encouraged to take refuge in the Three Jewels and bow to the Lord of Compassion. He is further advised to balance his mind and give up all attachment to outcome and enter a supreme state of equilibrium.[28] Thurman illustrates it as follows:

> Here these most powerful Archetype Deities are invoked to provide a shock intervention, to slow the course of a between-being's rebirth; not at this time to attain liberation, but to find a brief respite to change course and choose a better rebirth. For a person with no experience of an Archetype deity, this is the moment to invoke … anything fierce and of overwhelming power, that still can be thought of as a benevolent protector by the person.[29]

And then the dead is reborn.

The Tibetan Book of the Dead provides an extremely detailed description of an after-death experience. Do I believe *Bardo Todrol Chenmo* is an accurate statement of what occurs as we die? No, I don't suppose I do. Am I now convinced that there is life after death? Again, no. But do I believe then that this text is without worth? A resounding no. I will now attempt to describe the avenues this text has taken my thought and the changes that the time I spent with these teachings has wrought in me.

If the *Bardo Thodol* is a true account of the human experience of death and dying, we are to accept the verity of life after death. If the experiences described in the text do in fact imply the existence of a consciousness able to exist independently from our physical bodies, it should impact on how we live. For instance, it would necessarily call into question our treatment of the dying and the dead. If the dying and the dead have a heightened sense of hearing, then what is said in their presence becomes more important. If the dying and the dead can see what is happening, then more attention must be paid to how we treat their bodies during and after death. And even beyond these rather pragmatic considerations are spiritual considerations for those of the medical community. Sogyal Rinpoche frames these considerations in the form of questions:

> How can you be a truly effective doctor when you do not have at least some understanding of the truth about death, or how

> really to care spiritually for your dying patient? How can you be a truly effective nurse if you have not begun to face your own fear of dying and have nothing to say to those who are dying when they ask you for guidance and wisdom?... Isn't it time now that the medical profession should understand that the search for truth about life and death and the practice of healing are inseparable?[30]

Issues such as resuscitation and euthanasia would become more complex as well.[31] From this new perspective, it would be infinitely more important to help the dying cope with everything that attends their death process – fear, pain, confusion – with love and compassion rather than strictly from the medical model of pain relief and euthanasia. Also, the definition of death itself would have to be enlarged beyond the termination of specific bodily functions to include the cessation of subtle levels of consciousness. Psychiatry and psychology might have to shift as well since in this new context the mind would be understood as having a separate existence from the body which could indicate a need for therapies to move away from physical treatments such a drugs or electric shock therapy, as these would be too limited to be useful.

Some of the more potent implications would exist at the personal level. For one thing, the preparations one might make for one's own death would swing from the material world (e.g. purchasing one's burial plot) to the non-material world (e.g. some type of preparatory spiritual practice). For another, if consciousness is independent of physical processes, an individual, while in the fullness of life, might seek to expand his knowledge of his own consciousness and change the emphasis in his life from the physical things to things of the mind or spirit. Practices such as meditation, dream work and visualization might take on a new significance to achieve both the good life and the good death. Concepts like knowledge and compassion might replace consumerism, materialism, and so forth in the life of the individual.

Following from this, the teachings of *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* could offer a revised attitude of compassion to our treatment of the dead. The text instructs us to support our dying with compassion both as they

die and after they are dead. We are to read to them, talk to them and not try to hang on to them. We are to try to create an experience for them that might lead to their enlightenment (however that is culturally or religiously envisioned). We are to think about them and what they need and above all what they want. But this requires more from us than we may have to give. This requires us to deal with, if not face, our fear of death.

Joan Halifax, a Buddhist roshi, anthropologist and ecologist, tells us that "death is repressed in Western culture" and I cannot but agree. It is not that we in the West are unfamiliar with death – we are assaulted continually by images of death in our media if not in our own experience. It is rather that we treat death as alien to us and respond to it with fear and loathing. We deny death because it signals some kind of cultural failure. At the very least we fear the knowledge that the world will at some point go on without us. Our response is to keep death separate from life. We have hospices and hospitals for the dying and funeral homes for the dead. We have specialists to deal with what we will not. And specialists, however good, remove us from the necessity of being personally responsible for our dying relatives, friends and selves. We have so far removed death from life that we do not view it as a rite of passage like puberty or marriage or as a profound transitional experience for which we can prepare. We approach death always as a beginner, always without skill. Perhaps it is here that *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* can offer us some assistance.

I am not suggesting that it is necessary to read the Tibetan text to the dying in the West, but I do think that there are teachings contained within this book which could easily be applied to the Western experience of dying to great benefit. First, the Tibetan text is, in essence, a guide and as such serves to prepare the dying for the experiences he will encounter. If we can extrapolate the experiences described in the text, then we can create the same sort of guide. Second, the Tibetan text states that remembering one's spiritual practice is the single most important tool with which to successfully navigate the after-death states. If we can bring to the mind of the deceased a recollection of his own spiritual beliefs and practices, it will also serve to ground him in what is familiar and give him a framework within which to move during the death experience. Third, the Tibetan text identifies for the deceased what he may be feeling and his state of mind,

offering instructions on how to cope with these feelings and mind-states. This kind of instruction cannot be anything but helpful to the dying and the dead since it not only normalizes the experience but also recommends strategies that may be helpful. Sogyal Rinpoche states:

> When we suddenly realize that our whole life, our whole reality, is disappearing, it is terrifying: We don't know what is happening to us, or where we are going. Nothing in our previous experience has prepared us for this … [O]ur anxiety will even heighten the experience of physical pain. If we have not taken care of our lives, or our actions have been harmful and negative, we will feel regret, guilt, and fear. So just to have a measure of familiarity with these teachings on the bardos will bring us some reassurance, inspiration, and hope, even though we may never have practices and realized them.[32]

The teachings of the *Bardol Thodol* serve as preparation for an unknown experience and as such may be of inestimable value. There is an advantage to being rehearsed for an after-death experience, even if there should be no such experience. This is so much more than we have currently in the West. Fourth, the dying cannot but benefit as compassion is placed at the centre of the death experience.

When I began the research for my original paper, I wasn't really expecting any kind of definitive answer as to what happens at and after death. My thinking in spiritual matters has always tended towards the idea of mystery or the notion that if I can understand it, it can't be true, since the spiritual is always "bigger" than I could possibly imagine. I did, however, discover some maps for the journey if not exactly truths to hang my hat on. I came away from this study taking death seriously. I have learned that it is not important to me what if anything occurs after death. It could be anything – the void, the land of milk and honey or rebirth as a hungry ghost. What is important is my attitude and I alone hold the power to create it. I have learned that death is not the worst thing that can happen to a person. It is much worse to live without compassion and cause suffering to others. Now for me, death can no longer be something from which I can turn away. If it is someone else's death I am to witness, I am

to stand my ground and remind my friend who he is. My goal is to always take my heading from a place of compassion. If it is my own death, I am to prepare by meditating and dream-work so that my fear and panic at death is lessened when my basic confidence in "I" is shattered at my death. And in a truly amazing way, the more I turn toward death, the more willing I am to launch myself into my own life. There is no time to waste. But above all – in both life and death – I must turn towards whatever experience is approaching and stand my ground. Fear alone will defeat me.

I have learned much from my time with this remarkable text, and I understand that my personal journey with this text must continue through my life, and if I am lucky, my death. I do wish that I had had some familiarity with this beautiful guide on that day in May, for all of our sakes. When my friends died, all I could do was stand guard at their coffins so very lost to them and to myself. I had nothing to offer them and no way to begin to heal myself. Now I believe it would have been different with *The Tibetan Book of the Dead,* for as the Fremantle and Trungpa translation ends, "Even if the buddhas of the past, present, and future were to search, they would not find a better teaching than this."[33] And with that I think I might agree.

Endnotes

[1] Robert A.F. Thurman, "Preface," *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (New York: Bantam Books, 1994), xix.

[2] Sogyal Rinpoche, *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying* (New York: HarperSanFrancisco, 1992), 102.

[3] Thurman, p. 48.

[4] Francesca Fremantle & Chogyam Trungpa, *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* (Boston: Shambhala, 1987), xi.

[5] Francesca Fremantle, *Luminous Emptiness* (Boston: Shambhala, 2001), 21.

[6] Lama Anagarika Govinda, "Introductory Foreword," *The Tibetan Book of the Dead* compiled and edited by W. Y. Evans-Wentz. London: Oxford University Press, 2000), lxi.

[7] Fremantle & Trungpa, p.1 0.

[8] Fremantle & Trungpa, pp. 1-2.

[9] *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary*. *Tenth Edition* (Massachusetts: Merriam Webster,

Incorporated, 1997), 675.

[10] *The Oxford Dictionary of World Religions*, ed., John Bowker. (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 818.

[11] Chogyam Trungpa, *Transcending Madness* (Boston: Shambhala, 1992), 132.

[12] Fremantle, p. 58.

[13] Fremantle, p. 69.

[14] Rinpoche, pp. 107-108.

[15] Rinpoche, pp. 106-107.

[16] Thurman, p. 253.

[17] Evans-Wentz, p. 89.

[18] Freemantle & Trungpa, pp. 3-4.

[19] Thurman, p. 127.

[20] Evans-Wentz, pp. 98-99.

[21] Fremantle & Trungpa, p. 41.

[22] Fremantle & Trungpa, p. 13.

[23] Fremantle&Trungpa, pp. xvii-xix.

[24] Fremantle & Trungpa, p. 57.

[25] Evans-Wentz, p. 151.

[26] Thurman, p. 172.

[27] Rinpoche, p. 292.

[28] Fremantle & Trungpa, pp. 91-92.

[29] Thurman, p. 190.

[30] Rinpoche, p. 357.

[31] Rinpooche, pp. 371-375. Here Sogyal Rinpoche reviews these issues from a Buddhist perspective.

[32] Rinpoche, p. 246.

On the Way to Creating a New Story Together

Susan Kennel Harrison

"...the world can only appear monochromatic [flat]
to those who persist in interpreting what they experience
through the lens of a single cultural paradigm..their own.." [1]
—Wade Davis

How do we see the religious "other?" How do our scriptures, our leaders, ourselves present the "other?" What stories do we chose to tell ourselves? I want to explore these questions beginning with how the Christian scriptures have portrayed the Jews and then how that portrayal was taken up by the early Church Fathers and throughout Christian history. And then by opening out to relations with Muslims, I will outline the way to a new story.

We all "know the feeling" of having stories told about us but not recognizing ourselves in the descriptions. It has happened to me[2] and I am sure it has happened to you.

I lead an interfaith dialogue practice called Scriptural Reasoning. This is a practice of scripture study that brings together Muslims, Christians and Jews to study the Qur'an, Hebrew Bible and New Testament (2nd Testament) together.[3] What do you think happens when we read and study together the Gospel of Matthew? For example, Matt.27:1-2 states that "the chief priests and elders came to the decision to put Jesus to death. They bound him, led him away and handed him over to Pilate, the governor." Does Judaism today – what is known as rabbinical Judaism – recognize itself in any of that description? Would the Jews around my scriptural reasoning table recognize themselves in this story? It was not until I began studying the 2nd Testament together with Jews that I became aware that

the depiction of who the Jews are that I received in my scripture was unrecognizable to those Jews who I met at the study table.

Then in Matthew 27:18 the text tells us that Pilate "knew it was out of envy that they [the chief priests and elders of the people] had handed Jesus over to him." The narrator paints a picture of Pilate, a Roman official, recognizing Jesus' innocence – it even tells us that his wife had a dream and warned Pilate about Jesus' innocence – making it all the more certain that we know the conviction and consequent crucifixion of Jesus is the fault of the chief priests and elders and the *whole* Jewish people. Pilate is presented as trying to convince the Jews of Jesus' innocence but in order to avoid a riot he goes along with "their" demand to crucify Jesus. He tells the crowd "I am innocent of his blood." Then we read that "all the people" say "His blood be on us and on our children." This verse haunts Christian–Jewish history until now. Do you think the Canadian Jews around our mutual study table recognize themselves in this story?

Here is our dilemma as Christians: we look to these texts for guidance about how to relate to people of other faiths and we find a whole people, the Jewish people, slandered and misrepresented. What do we do?

Modern Biblical scholars have demonstrated that the Christian Gospels emerged in a *polemical* context. The Gospel of Matthew was written decades after Jesus' time, sometime after the Temple in Jerusalem has been destroyed by the occupying Roman power. Christians, eager to spread the Good News among the Gentiles, could not afford to have the Roman Empire see them as trouble makers. They were reluctant to say that Rome crucified Jesus.

Moreover, the Jesus movement saw themselves in open conflict with their Jewish co-religionists – those who accepted Jesus as Messiah, and those who did not. And, at the same time, they were gaining more and more Gentile converts thanks to Paul's missionary efforts.

Rosemary Radform Ruether sees this as *sibling* rivalry:

> …Church and Synagogue, like the two brothers of Rebekah's womb, were born with the younger holding on to the heel of the elder – and claiming to be the rightful heir. [Genesis 25. 23] "and the Lord said to Rebecca: 'two nations are in your womb, and two

> peoples born of you shall be divided.'" The Church, elaborating its self-understanding between the second and fifth centuries, and Judaism, codifying its oral Torah into the Talmud in the same period, stand as parallel but mutually exclusive answers to the same question of how Hebrew national faith finds its way into a post-national future.[4]

Yet Christians to this day still tell a story that says "the early Church confronted an obsolete and sterile Judaism, [a Judaism] which had lost its spiritual power." According to Gregory Baum, "Christian theologians use the traditional language about Jesus and his Church, the true Israel, without asking themselves to what extent this language suppresses a living people and excludes from the face of God other religious traditions..." [5]

The new movement, which eventually became known as Christianity, tended to justify itself by portraying the Jews in negative light. Christians today need to recognize that the portrayal of Judaism in Scripture and the ongoing story that Christianity has told about the Jews for most of the past 2000 years has reduced their understanding of Judaism to the 'Old Testament' and elevated the Christian 'New Testament' and Christianity to its universal and spiritual fulfillment."[6] This is wrong and dangerous.

Without awareness of the polemics within our own scriptures, without awareness of how Christians have historically used these texts to justify violence towards others, *specifically* because they were not Christians, we will continue to do violence. We need to learn from this the imperative to learn directly from what people of other faiths believe, and how they understand themselves.

I have briefly described how antipathy towards the Jew became a part of the Christian canon and Christian identity right from its earliest beginnings. We see how easily it came about in Christian history that the Jews were labeled *accursed* because they were understood as having rejected the Messiah, and they become accused of killing the divine (*deicide).*[7]

This antipathy towards the Jews continued in the writings of many of the early Church Fathers. Justin the Martyr (100-165), a convert to Christianity, wrote a "Dialogue With Trypho," a Jew, in which he asserted that "We (Christians) are the true spiritual Israel and the descendents

of Judah, Jacob, Issac, and Abraham." Ironically, Justin is called Martyr because he was killed during one of the outbreaks of Roman persecution of the Christians. Later, Augustine (354-430), often regarded as the Father of Western Christianity, set the tone for Christian attitudes towards the Jews. Living in a time when Christianity had become the official religion of the Roman Empire, Christians debated about whether Jews should be "killed, forcibly converted, or driven into exile."[8] Augustine opposed the killing of Jews. He rather thought that they should live among Christians so everyone could see their "contemptible state" and realize "the truth of Christianity."

Christians also opposed the Muslims after they emerged in the 600s. But when the Muslims ruled Spain (711-1492) there was a time, especially in Andalusia, when Muslims, Jews, and Christians found common ground and learned from one another. The great Thomas Aquinas (1225-1274), a medieval Christian theologian, often quoted the Muslim philosopher Avicenna (ibn Sina, 980-1037) and the Jewish thinker, Maimonides (1135-1204). But in 1492 when Isabel and Ferdinand regained Spain from the Muslims, the Jews were given the choice of either converting to Christianity or being expelled from Spain. This choice came a little later for the Muslims.

Already in Medieval Europe under Christian rule, the Jews were increasingly ghettoized. In 1555, the Pope Paul IV issued a decree "requiring Jews to live in a certain section of a city with only one entrance" and "wearing distinctive clothing." This ghettoization continued until the French Revolution gave the Jews rights of citizenship. But this did not do away with anti-Jewish sentiment. .

When Adolf Hitler rose to power 2000 years of anti-Semitism unleashed a murderous policy against the Jews, a policy which many of Europe's Christian leaders approved and to which many others acquiesced. Christians were already used to Jews being deprived of respect and dignity and of their rights to private life, so it was easy to move into depriving them of life itself.

Jews throughout Christian history were portrayed as a people who are "*Blasphemous* since they [are accused of] secretly know[ing] the truth of Christianity and yet publicly denying it," as we saw in the Gospel of

Matthew. They were also characterized as contemptible in their "perfidy," a term that means a breach of trust or treason or deceitfulness. It is important to know this word because from the early centuries of the Roman Catholic Church until 1958 the official liturgy for Holy Thursday always had the Christian community praying for the *'pro perfidies Judaies'or* perfidious Jews. This was only changed under Pope John XXIII at the Second Vatican Council (1962-65) when the Church finally repudiated anti-Semitism and sought to establish new relations with the Jewish world.[9]

As I said before, it was only *after* the Holocaust that some Christians began to realize the burden that Christianity bears for the demonizing and inhuman path that began in the Christian scriptures and ended in the Holocaust/*Shoah*. Rosemary Radford Reuther reminds us that "the good news of Christianity has consistently been a bad news for Jews and that the essential credibility of Christianity, as well as its legitimate continuance, depends on changing that reality." [10]

The "danger of the single story" says Chimanda Adichie
is when you "show a people as one thing,
as only one thing, over and over again,
and that is what they become…"[11]

As a new university graduate I moved to Jerusalem to study biblical Hebrew and geography. I learned a great deal about the varieties of Jews within rabbinic Judaism but I also came to know the Palestinian Arab community who were Muslims and Christians. I worshipped with them in a church in the old city of Jerusalem. Up until this time I had heard about Islam, had read a little bit about it – primarily through missionary accounts – but I had only personally known one Muslim. In Jerusalem there were many mixed messages about Muslims and Arabs, and the religious issues were often conflated with political and cultural differences as well. I remember on one occasion when our biblical geography class set out on a field trip that was going to take us into Bethlehem, to what at the time was called the West Bank. My Christian classmate was nervous about going to Bethlehem, not because there were check points to pass through, but because she had heard that Arabs had tails! I was appalled. Not only

were the Arabs we were going to meet in Bethlehem fellow Christians, but they are human beings, just like us. Where did she get such an idea I wondered?

What stories do we perpetuate about religious others? What stories do we silently let other people tell about people and their religions? What emails do we forward that perpetuate negative stereotypes of other people's faith, or quote their scriptures out of context? What news items do we uncritically consume? Each time we use a single story to justify our own viewpoints about other peoples' religions, we are "still telling this story today" the way the gospel of Matthew portrayed the Jews.

Too often our notions of other peoples' religions are caught up in politics and culture. Too often we let media define for us what others believe and what they stand for. Too often we fail to let "the other" speak for themselves, to be known to us as friends first before we form opinions of their faith, and their cultures. In friendships we know how to agree to disagree: we don't need to demonize in order to hold to our own opinions, convictions, and lived behaviors. If only we understood our role as Christians to follow Jesus, and not to relate to others as masters of the truth, but rather as friends. This might help us fashion a responsible ethic towards those of other religions?

Historical awareness shows us the danger of how we speak about one another, and the danger of not challenging when others speak wrongly about "the other". Followers of Jesus are called to love God by loving neighbor, self and even the enemy. Discipleship to Jesus expects that we relate to others through an ethic of love.

In the West, it took the horrors of the holocaust for Christians to wake up to how our attitudes and theologies of the religious others can justify, and numb us, to do unspeakable violence to other human beings. The real danger is when we name other people "lost," "against God," or name their religion "from the devil." We need to be on guard against the war-mongering rhetoric against Muslims so prevalent in mainstream media, and also the messages in much Christian media that condemns people of other faiths.

An important "rule" in interfaith dialogue is that when we speak about "the others," that we describe them and what they believe in a way

in which they will recognize themselves. Better yet, we need to arrange dialogue and encounter in such a way that we are expected and allowed to speak only for ourselves and let the others define themselves.

Jesus gave the commandment to love one another. I think *this* is the Christian starting point for our approach to our global and local neighbors. What does *love* look like? It is curious, patient, respectful. Love compels us to do unto others as we would want done to us. It is slow to anger and quick to forgive, it forbears, it advocates. Love feeds the hungry, clothes the naked and comforts the hurting. it is vulnerable. Love does not presume to have all the answers, it seeks to listen and understand. Love communicates, relates and cares about what is important to the other. Love perseveres. Love of neighbor as well as love of enemy includes coming to know them as *people*; learning about them, their religions, cultures, politics in order to understand what and how they believe, then seeking ways to partner together, to serve the common good, or fundamentally, to be reconciled.

As I prepared this essay I shared it with some Jewish friends to understand how it might be heard by them. I did not anticipate the responses it engendered. Several people reported that they could not read through the essay in one sitting because it generated so much pain for them. Their parents had raised them on stories of why they were "other" and not like "them" and stories that reinforced messages of why "they" hate "us." As one person put it so well, reading about "the seed of hatred with whose genesis I had not been previously acquainted" solicited "tears and heat in my chest of old stories carried mostly for generations past." When I read their responses it brought me to my own upbringing as a Mennonite, a community that had historically intentionally tried to live "separate from the world" including other kinds of Christians. It was a common part of my upbringing, indeed an ongoing rhetoric in my tradition, to be suspicious of "those" Christians (Reform and Catholic) because "they" were dangerous to "us" [never mind the persecution of Anabaptists in the European Reformation was over 500 years ago!].

During graduate studies I became involved in ecumenical dialogue and I came to know Catholic and Reformed Christians personally. I discovered our shared humanity and mutual desire to learn about and serve God. Through a Mennonite-Catholic dialogue called *Bridgefolk*[12] I

came to reject seeing "them" primarily through the stories of the *Martyrs Mirror*[13] and came to let Catholic people have their own self-definition and see their story with its own integrity. We are creating a new story together – healing memories and moving into a mutual future'

W*e are creating the story* that will be told tomorrow. How we learn to live side by side with people of varying faiths and the cultures from which they come, how we learn to negotiate living together *with* our differences will shape the future stories that are told.[14] Not only can we seek out and "consume" positive stories about "the other," refuse to perpetuate the single story, but we can be co-creators of the next story that will be told.

Endnotes

[1] Wade Davis *The Wayfinders: Why Ancient Wisdom Matters in the Modern World*. 2009 CBC Massey lectures. http://www.cbc.ca/ideas/episodes/massey-lectures/2009/11/02/massey-lectures-2009-the-wayfinders-why-ancient-wisdom-matters-in-the-modern-world/

[2] This happens across traditions. Recently I was looking at a textbook designed as an Introduction to Christianity. I was pleasantly surprised to see that there was a chapter about Anabaptism in it. As a Mennonite I was shocked when it portrayed the Anabaptists as a violent movement of radical extremists – people who violently took over the town of Münster in Germany in their zeal to usher in the Day of Judgment. This is an example of someone telling a story about my faith tradition and I could not recognize myself in their narrative.

[3] I prefer to refer to the New Testament as the 2nd Testament to avoid perpetuating a name that develops in the context of Jewish-Christian polemics. The designation "New" Testament comes from Irenaeus at the end of the second century and is taken to imply an abrogation of God's covenant in the "Old" Testament. It leads to a super-secessionist understanding of scripture and Jewish-Christian relations.

[4] See Rosemary Radford Reuther, *Faith and Fratricide*: *The Theological Roots of Anti-Semitism* (New York: The Seabury Press, 1974), p. 62.

[5] See Reuther, *op.cit*. p. 22 where the noted Catholic theologian Gregory Baum is quoted.

[6] See Reuther, pp. 62-63

[7] See Ronald H. Miller, "Judaism: Siblings in Strife" *Christian Approaches to Other Faiths*, ed. Paul Hedges (London: SCM Press, 2008), p. 181.

[8] Miller, ibid., p. 182.

[9] See John C. Merkle, "The God of Israel and Christian Worship" in *Seeing Judaism Anew:*

Christianity's Sacred Obligation ed. Mary C. Boys (London: Roman & Littlefield Publishers) 2005: 177-186.

[10] During the second Vatican Council on 28 October 1965 2000 bishops voted on the declaration on the relationship of the Church to non-Christian religions. In this document we can see an awareness of Christian responsibility for Jewish suffering. For a contemporary view of the Jewish people, see Phan, Peter "Jesus as the Universal Savior in the Light of God's Eternal Covenant with the Jewish People: A Roman Catholic Perspective" in *Seeing Judaism Anew: Christianity's Sacred Obligation* ed. Mary C. Boys (London: Roman & Littlefield Publishers, 2005), pp. 127-137.

[11] YouTube video "The Danger of the Single Story." http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=D9Ihs241zeg

[12] This is a movement of sacramentally oriented Mennonites and Peace oriented Catholics who meet regularly. See www.bridgefolk.net.

[13] This is a large Dutch book that originates in 1660. The book memorializes and glorifies the deaths of Christians beginning with the apostles and especially focuses on the deaths of Anabaptists between 1524 and 1660. The Full text can be found at http://www.homecomers.org/mirror/index.htm.

[14] What kind of story ought a *Christian* community tell about their neighbors of other faiths? Might it include stories of when *they* get it "right" too? Stories of how *they* love their neighbor, the way Jesus used the Samaritan to illustrate the righteousness he was calling people to? Not long ago on the CBC radio there was a documentary of a village of Muslims who sheltered many Jews and kept them alive. There is also the story of the Khiva Muslim village that sheltered Mennonites in Uzbekistan (see Ratliff). See also the DVD *Waging Peace* (2011 MennoMedia) or *The Pastor & the Imam* DVD available through Initiatives of Change or the positive news sources available through the online *Search for Common Ground* news service, or the book *Peace be Upon You: Fourteen Centuries of Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Conflict and Cooperation* (New York: Vintage Books) 2007 by Zachary Karabell. Positive stories abound that we can discover and cultivate to counteract the negative images that our media continually bombards us with.

Way of the Eco-Chaplain

Lauren van Ham

The way of the Eco-Chaplain? Like so many paths, this is one I'm discovering one step at a time. The best way for me to share it with you is to tell you a bit of my own story. Thomas Berry, the late Passionist priest and eco-theologian, said, "It's all a question of story. We are in trouble just now because we do not have a good story. We are in between stories. The Old Story – the account of how the world came to be and how we fit into it – is not functioning properly, and we have not learned the New Story."

Today…

- Just under 61% of workers in the developing world still live on less than $4 a day[1]
- Indigenous cultures are in decline all over the world[2]
- 200 species go extinct *every day* -- 1000 times the normal rate[3]
- At this moment, around the world, humans are fighting 9 major wars (1000+ fatalities/yr) and 25 other conflicts (<1000 fatalities/yr)[4]

As you are reading this, I wonder how many of you feel, in myriad ways and at various levels, our system-wide story breakdown? I do.

And this experience of story breakdown is where my eco-chaplain story began….and where my invitation to all of us still lives.

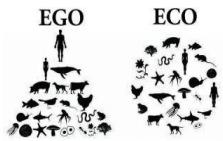
When I was a child, my family and I camped each summer in Rocky Mountain National Park, where I would take classes in their Junior Ranger program. We listened to tree trunks using stethoscopes, and we learned how Native Nations lived off the land. We were taught that if you love nature and if you protect and conserve her, a circle of reciprocity will ceaselessly sustain you.

This message was strangely reinforced by my favorite movie of all times, *Mary Poppins*. I love how Mary Poppins finds magic in the mundane. I also love her fastidious tendencies. Since realizing just how amuck things have run, I've wished badly I could snap my fingers and – just like the toys in Jane and Michael's nursery – have the environment return to a lush, forested, healthy planet. In Mary Poppin's world, it's fine to use what's around you and to play with vigor, so long as you put everything back… each article in its right place.

In 2006, I served as the Executive Director for Green Sangha, a Bay area initiative that sought to implement "a mindful practice for awakened action." Earlier, I'd implemented, starting from nothing, an environmental action team at the hospital where I'd been a chaplain for nine years, and still, in the world around me, nothing was being returned to its right place. It was in the safe womb of a session with my spiritual director that I let it out: "I want to be an 'Eco-Chaplain.'" She didn't laugh. Then I said, "Well, what does that even mean?"

It then came to me that a chaplain resolves to look for the divine and to create sacred space in the complexity of hospitals, war zones, prisons, and in my case, even Fortune 500 companies. (I'll get to this in a moment). I realized that Chaplains are often also asked to find words for the unsavory parts of a story. In what may appear to be a profane and God-less context, a chaplain's call is to bear witness to the light, to bring truth, and to boldly claim, "Here, too. No matter how horrid, the Source of our Breath – the divine – abides in this place, too." *So what, exactly, does an eco-Chaplain do?* Here I want to return to the importance of story. We've been hearing that we need to save the planet. But the more accurate challenge is that we need to save life.

The "Eco" in eco-Chaplain is less and less about the ecology of our planet and evermore urgently about the ecology of ourselves and our inter-dependent relationships with our fellow species[5]. We need to move from an ego-consciousness to an eco-consciousness.



With or without her natural resources, this third rock from the sun will continue spinning in our solar system, exquisitely held in the Milky Way galaxy – one galaxy in a TRILLION others. *How amazing is that?* And right now, on planet earth, it's one species, one tiny genus in the mammal family - the humans! - whose current behaviors and choices, whose systems and policies, are creating system-wide suicide. My invitation to every person, therefore, is that we start telling and begin living the accurate, important and helpful stories that present themselves to us in our everyday life.

So, what is the "Way" of this eco-Chaplain? As I said, I've been making it up as I go, but I'm discovering that my work is to teach, to tend, to re-construct a life-sustaining story. Like any act of midwifery, this labor is wrought with joy and pain, and demands lots of patience. It requires steady, sustained spiritual practice, and (this is important) it's really only going to work if we all share in the reconstruction of our stories and the New Story of how the world came to be and our place in it.

I'm going to highlight a three-fold practice that I've found to be helpful as I tend my plot, and the ever-thickening plot of our time. The practices are somewhat cyclical, and I share them with you to encourage your own eco-chaplain practices:

Practice One

This is a Love story! Build Intimacy.

Recall Thomas Berry: "The account of our world and how we fit into it isn't functioning properly." Perhaps humans and the planet need a good marriage counselor. Have we fallen out of love? Or simply taken for granted all that our lover, so selflessly, offers?

Not surprisingly, just before claiming my call as an eco-Chaplain, I went through a dark time. Our fossil-fuel-dependent-single-use-sweat-shop-made culture had me feeling desperate, judgmental and grief-ridden. It was an undesirable litany of feelings for a minister. I knew blame was pointless and staying mad felt miserable, so I took refuge in what I love: rocks, trees, and the smells of nature. Have you ever noticed how defended and defensive we can be in the face of love? It takes work to soften up our defenses so that we can respond to the love that is being offered. Consider the last time you consciously brought yourself to be with the person, the

job, the pet, the place you so desperately did not want to lose! I thought about that and I began to ride my bike so I could climb the hills and sweat and breathe Mother Earth's renewing/loving presence, a theology or love of the earth. Slowly, moving from my love, I was able to see how my grief could become my teacher.

This awareness became the impetus to forge intimacy with the people of corporate America – the previous target of my outrage and blame. Joining a sustainability firm in San Francisco, I was given the opportunity to partner with multi-national companies engaged in sustainability efforts. Meeting the employees at each site, hearing their stories and supporting their efforts for change, both personally and in the workplace was exciting, and humbling. Love dissolves boundaries and brings us into intimacy with what is, so that even when we encounter that which seems opposite to love, we may seek to love it, too.

Practice Two

We're all protagonists in this story. Begin again. Tell it like it is!

A few weeks ago, I attended a dharma talk given by a climate scientist. His message was firm, bleak, and in a Buddhist-sort-of-way, very inviting. I was moved and curious about what listeners would ask in the Q&A. But no one asked questions! Instead, individuals did what I've found often happens in talks about climate change: people spoke somewhat apologetically and defensively about what they are doing personally. There were voices that said, "I turn out my lights and drive a Prius." I felt simultaneous impatience and compassion: "Your Prius is NOT enough!" I wanted to scream. And then the voice in my heart said, "And neither is your bike, Lauren."

This is an example of system-wide story breakdown. Don't get me wrong. The "Going Green" movement of 2007 began an important chapter in the story. Reusable water bottles, the ban on plastic bags, recycled paper products and innovations in e-waste recycling, are useful, even important, baby steps. But it is not enough. Changing our consumer practices does matter, but it only addresses a TEENY piece of our dysfunctional story.

Here's the unsavory part. Our growth economy model is broken! The symptoms of its disease are evident *everywhere*. I want a safer, saner way to consume what I need without hurting myself and future generations.

Listening to my peers talk in Berkeley that night, thankfully, reminded me (again) of my restlessness. *Are you restless?*

The task before us is monumental, and our continual invitation is to begin again. Become intimate with what is at hand – the relationships, the feelings, all of it. Then, tell it like it is. Reinventing our economy and other systems will take advisors, visionaries, career counselors, bereavement specialists, and lots and lots of chaplains! We're the ones who begin again and again and tell it like it is, saying "I know this is scary and SO disappointing. I believe that slowly, carefully, we can transform ourselves, our practices, and our policies to address climate change. Together we can point the way; in our efforts we will learn things of value. Will you stay in this with me?"

Would you like to try it? Really, read it again, and this time aloud, and consider how you can say something to this effect the next time you're engaging in the tough conversations about the changes we need to make in order to save life on our planet:

Practice Three

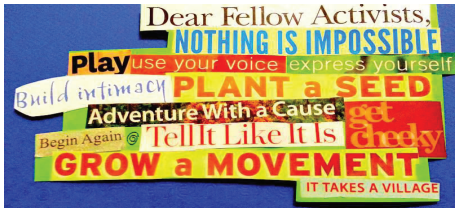
Play! Use your voice. Express yourself!

Our reconstructed story is rooted in regenerative humility. "Regenerate," as defined in the Merriam-Webster dictionary, appears in a couple of ways: 1) *in biology;* to grow again after being lost, damaged, etc.**,** and 2) to change radically and for the better[6].

Contrary to the rhythms and patterns popularly employed in our culture, we are not on and off switches. With care and practice, we can find a source that comes from a third place -- a place that's regenerative. It's the place where the inner prophet and inner mystic live. Regenerative humility puts less of my interest on changing the world, and more of my attention on how the world changes me. It keeps me curious, and forces intimacy. With life's stakes so high and the enormity of our crisis so deadening, re-generativity frees each of us to move and act without any guarantee of success! Whenever possible, we may as well express ourselves and have fun, right?

Consider Mary Poppins. Mr. Banks takes Jane and Michael to the bank to open their first savings accounts. On the way, the children ask if

they can give their money to a beggar woman and their father promptly dismisses the idea. When the bank teller grabs the coins from Michael's hand, he protests loudly, turning the bank into a scene not unlike Jesus over-turning tables in the Temple. Michael is a prophet, for his town and for his family. His behavior shocks the system and thaws his father's seduction. In a mystical moment, abandoning all hope of defending his livelihood, Mr. Banks tells a joke in the Executive Board room. The very elderly bank president literally dies from laughter. Reconnected with intimacy, Mr. Banks does what any smart, mammalian father would do for his young – he takes them kite-flying.



My friends, we are mammals, human mammals who create[7]. Our lives depends on it. What we create is part of the story we're reconstructing. I have no clue how this story ends; what I do know is that I'm not the only Eco-Chaplain. There are lots of us, prophets and mystics. And the Divine is ready for each one of our co-creative acts to set the story back on course.

I hope you will find these practices useful, as I have. And if you do, use them. I also hope you'll share what you learn with me because remember, this is really only going to work if we all share our stories as we work for a new story for our planet.

Endnotes

[1] http://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/pdf/Goal_1_fs.pdf

[2] http://amazonaid.org/indigenous-people-population-decline/

[3] http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2010/08/17/un-environment-programme-_n_684562.html

[4] http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_ongoing_armed_conflicts

[5] Graphic courtesy Google Images

[6] http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/regenerate

[7] Image courtesy L. Van Ham, *Vision Board*, 2014

Holumba Haven

Pamela O'Rourke

As I peck away at my thoughts
and this journal
on a rickety table under towering trees
on a mountainside
the rooster with a hobble also pecks away
at bugs
and seeds
four guinea hens almost close enough to touch
comically move together as if attached by a pull string

We are all looking for
seeds of nourishment
seeds of life

Voices of Women Contributors

Pamela O'Rourke is an innovative and creative teacher, mother, and friend. She was a student of mine in Religion & Culture, but discovered her vocation as a teacher of the aged. Pamela initiated classes on a wide range of topics at retirement centers in the KW area. She has travelled with me to India on several occasions and produced the most poetic diaries of our ventures in dialogue with the religions and cultures of India.

Judith Maclean Miller, teacher, colleague, and friend, Judith taught English at Renison University College, Waterloo, Ontario, from the early 1970s until 2011. She is an expert in Canadian literature and the short story. Her many publications include *Reading/Writing Canada: Short Fiction & Non Fiction* and *The Art of Alice Munro*, the 2013 recipient for the Nobel Prize in Literature. She established *Stonegarden Studios* that publishes the work of local artists (paintings/woodcuts/drawings) and writers. She founded the Studies in Islam program at the University of Waterloo.

Casey Clifford Rock is a friend, yoga teacher, divinity student, mother and writer. She has a MLS from the University of Toronto, an M.Div. from St. Michaels, and is a Certified Kripalu Yoga Instructor. She worked as a librarian/researcher for CBC for more than a decade and raised three boys, before establishing her own Yoga Centre. Her "Voices from the Mat" appeared in *Reclaiming the Body in Christian Spirituality*.

Mary Pat Fisher is the prolific author of the widely used world religions textbook, *Living Religions*, now in its eighth edition. She has also authored *The Art of Seeing*, *Color*, and *Women in Religion*. Mary has been a resident at Gobind Sadan (House of God) for decades after becoming a follower of the Sikh teacher, Baba Versa Singh (1934–2007) in the late 1970s. Gobind Sadan has become a vibrant inter-religious community in India attracting people from across the world.

Alice Bloch has been dancing all her life. She holds a doctorate from Temple University where she did a dissertation on Isadore Duncan and Vaslav Nijinsky and an M.A. in choreography from UCLA. Her focus has been "Duncan Dance" and she has performed at major colleges and universities across the USA and in Europe. Together with Fatemeh Keshavarz, Alice created "The Watching Heart: A Journey in Peace." I came to know Alice after 2000. She has lived in St. Louis for much of her life and contributed to dance through her teaching, workshops, and performances.

Kendra Smith holds a doctorate in psychology. She happened upon a book on Buddhism when she was fifteen, and committed to it. In 1957, traveling with her husband, Huston Smith, she had her initial experience with meditation, first in Burma (Myanmar), then in Japan. It became an on-going aspect of her practice. In addition to raising three daughters, she worked as a therapist, explored various therapeutic modalities and supported Tibetan Buddhist families. She is a gifted writer and a friend for more than thirty years.

Idrisa Pandit is the Director of the Studies in Islam program at the University of Waterloo. She was educated at the University of Kashmir and the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign (Ph.D.) and has been active in interfaith activities in the USA and Canada. She was instrumental in creating the multi-faith chaplaincy at Wellesly College in Massachusetts. She is also the founder of Muslim Social Services in Kitchener, Ontario. She has become a valued colleague and friend.

Holly Pearce is a pioneering figure in Jewish Cultural Studies. After study at Dalhousie University and McMaster University, she received her doctorate from the Wilfrid Laurier University/University of Waterloo (WLU/UW) program on Religious Diversity in North America. Her study explored Jewish/Gentile romance in the movies. She was my student in her first graduate course. She is a gifted young scholar with a wonderful sense of humor. She is currently a CAS (Contract Academic Staff) at Wilfrid Laurier University. She is the author of the award winning "As Goyish as Green Jell-o? Jack Benny and the Construction of Jewish Identity in America."

Siobhan Chandler is a graduate of the same WLU/UW doctoral program in Religious Diversity in North America as Holly Pearce. Her doctoral dissertation was entitled "The Social Ethic of Religiously Unaffiliated Spirituality" and explored the "spiritual but not religious phenomenon." She taught courses at Wilfrid Laurier University and the University of Waterloo before returning to British Columbia. She is working for the BC Cancer Agency, while holding a Fellowship at the Centre for Studies of Religion and Society at Victoria University.

Amber Westfall was a student at the University of Waterloo who travelled on the first Study Term Abroad that I led in 2000. We spent three months in India encountering "the living religious traditions of India" from the Tibetan Buddhists in Dharamsala to the Hindus in Madurai as well as Muslims, Sikhs, Jains, and Thomas Christians. Emma Claire Bryant and Cara L. Pelletier-Thompson were part of that same group. Her poem "In a Rickshaw" was part of the journal she kept during our travels. She is now an urban homesteader in Ottawa and runs *The Wild Garden.*

Ursula King is Professor Emerita of Theology and Religious Studies at the University of Bristol in England. She has also been a visiting Professor in Norway and the USA, and lectured around the world. Educated in Germany, France, India, and the UK, she is widely known for her studies in women's spirituality and feminism, Hinduism, and Teilhard de Chardin. Her publications include *The Search for Spirituality: our global search for a spiritual life* and *Spirit of Fire: the Life and Vision of Teilhard de Chardin*. She became a colleague and friend in the early 1980s when we met at interfaith events.

Anne Innis Dagg is a distinguished zoologist, author, feminist, and teacher. Educated at the University of Toronto (M.A. in Genetics) and the University of Waterloo (Ph.D. in Animal Behavior) she has taught in several universities and since 1978 she has been the Academic Advisor for the Independent Studies Program at the University of Waterloo. She has published twenty volumes including *The Giraffe: Its Biology, Behaviour*

& Ecology, *The Camel: Its Biology, Behavious & Ecology*, and *Animal Friendship.* She has been a colleague for more than forty years.

Susan Hodges Bryant writer, editor, teacher, mom, beloved wife and environmental activist, was educated at St. Michael's and the University of Toronto. She taught English at Renison University College for twenty-five years, had a writing business, *WordsWork*, with a colleague, and has been working to restore the Canagagigue Creek since 1989. She contributed the text for *This Water, This Soil* and countless hours to environmental committees in the township of Woolich and water committees for the Region of Waterloo. For her efforts on behalf of the environment, she was inducted into the Waterloo County Hall of Fame in 2014.

Joyce Gladwell, writer, counselor, mother and friend. Born in Jamaica, she studied at London University where she met and married Graham Gladwell. She wrote her moving memoir *Brown Skin/White Masters* before coming to Canada. While raising a family of three boys, Joyce gathered a group of women and over the next decades initiated many changes in Elmira, Ontario where she lives. Further schooling led to her becoming the Director of Elmira's Interfaith Counseling Centre. She has been a friend for more than twenty-five years.

Cara Pellitier-Thompson graduated from the University of Waterloo with degrees in Anthropology and Religious Studies. She went with me to India for the 2000 Study Term Abroad. She was a gifted, bubbly student. She lives in Ottawa and is married to a musician and guitar maker. She is now the Project Co-ordinator of Human Health Therapeutics at the National Research Council Canada.

Chris Hale is a doctoral student at the University of Sydney in Australia. We met at a lecture on Buddhism in Beijing where she was studying with Tu Wei Ming, the world's leading New Confucian scholar at Peking University. When I learned of her long-standing interest in the Yejing (I Ching) I invited her to contribute to this project

Kathleen Jay attended first course on the Religious Quest when I began teaching at Renison University College in 1973. She went on to do an M. A. in Religion and Culture at Wilfrid Laurier University. She has taught in the USA and Canada and raised two beautiful daughters. Her long-standing passion has been the Grail Quest.

Devon Spier is a graduate of the University of Waterloo where she received a Bachelor of Arts in Religious Studies and Peace and Conflict Studies. An outstanding student, the YMCA honoured Devon for her peace-making activities. She is currently the Program Director for the House of Friendship in Kitchener, Ontario. She is active in her Synagogue and continues to share stories of Jewish women's contributions to their communities as a writer and hopes to continue this as a Rabbi in years to come.

Susan Kennel Harrison is an educator, consultant, chaplain and an interreligious dialogue facilitator. She has been involved in Muslim Christian dialogue for more than twenty-five years. I met her in relation to the remarkable dialogue that has been going on between Shi'a Muslims and Mennonite Christians since the 1990s. She was an editor, along with myself, for On Spirituality, a 2011 publication from those meetings. She is currently completing her doctoral studies at the University of Toronto where she has led a "scriptural reasoning" program for Jews, Christians and Muslims for several years.

Rehana Rajabali graduated from the University of Waterloo with a degree in Engineering. While she was an engineering student she participated in a Summer Institute in Prague, Czech Republic in 2005. She was an outstanding member of my course on Interreligious Dialogue: the Abrahamic Traditions and an articulate voice for her own Muslim tradition as we visited Jewish, Christian, and Muslim sites in Prague. She served as an Urban Development Engineer for the City of Calgary before pursuing an M.A. in Urban Design Studies at the University of Toronto. She received her P.Eng. in 2012. She is also a member of the Ismaili Arts Council for the Prairies.

Nancy (Farishta Nuri) Cleaves is an author, spiritual guide, and workshop facilitator. Educated at Wilfrid Laurier University, she has a doctorate in Creation Spirituality from Matthew Fox's Wisdom University in California. She is the author of *A Story to Live By*, a journey into cosmic spirituality. She lives in Kitchener, Ontario.

Emma Claire Bryant is my Christmas daughter. She headed for British Columbia after high school, studied at Capilano College and became a tree planter for several years before returning to Ontario to work in Community Shared Agriculture. She was four when our family went on sabbatical to India and over the past several years she has spent part of each year in India, learned Hindi, volunteering on a farm and helping the neighborhood children with their lessons. India has become her second home.

Val Lariviere has a M.A. in Religion and Culture and now works as a Costume and Prop Warehouse Assistant at the Stratford Shakespeare Festival in Stratford, Ontarion and as a support worker with Community Living Stratford. She raised two sons before returning to the university to complete her studies. She did a wonderful study of the *Tibetan Book of the Dead* for her Senior Honors paper with me in the 1990s. She has taught university courses in religion and film. She is a dear friend and brought her skills and insight to being my co-editor for *Ways of the Spirit: Voices of Women*.

Lauren Van Ham is an Eco-Chaplain, Dean of Interfaith Studies at the Chaplaincy Institute in Berkeley, California, Chair of Fair Trade Berkeley, and a Buddhist. I met Lauren at a BIG I Conference in Scottsdale, Arizona in 2014 where she was ordained an Eco-Chaplain. She has been active in the interfaith world for many years and sought to engage the corporate world in environmental issues. She is pioneering a new way in contemporary spirituality.