

Foreword: Keep the Fire Burning

While in the middle of preaching a sermon one night in my early thirties, I suddenly stopped. I had not planned for the sermon to come to such an abrupt ending; I was simply too tired to continue. My subsequent unscheduled journey through the valley of burnout led me to the writings of Howard Thurman. The words and witness of Howard Thurman (a name you will discover is mentioned more than a few times in this volume) not only saved my life, but transformed it.

Through his contemplative manifestation in deed and word, I learned that I was no less precious to God than the work I did or the people I served. I discovered that leisure was as much of a blessing as labor and that solitude could not only be as sweet as engagement but sweeter, and always, always had a way of sweetening the engagement that followed.

I found Thurman's blending of spiritually appreciative personhood with social awareness and activism to be compelling and, even more importantly, livable. Moreover, I have come to understand that cherishing personhood is an act of social benevolence. Only as we are our best changed and changing selves, may we offer our best changed and changing selves.

Thurman's wisdom-blend of personhood and service led to another convergence affirmed by countless contemplatives, many of them poets. I speak of daring to intentionally behold the splendor of life amid the scorching of life.

Somehow, along the way of my becoming a savior of the world, I missed seeing that the world was not only something worth saving, but something worth savoring. They who take the time to savor the world are in better shape to save the world. It is through savoring life, alongside our cherished sisters and brothers with which we share life, that we are filled with the just right inspirations and motivations to honor the relentless procession of life amid all that would threaten life.

To seek to save life without savoring life is not only risking exhaustion, but risking missing an abiding awareness of the Source of life. Sensing the Source is now my first and continuing deed of each new day. Sensing the Source allows us to taste wholeness and touch wellness when we are facing the complete opposite in our efforts for social change. Such tasting and touching is the stuff contemplative social activists are made of. They fight for an uncertain social flourishing from a certain personal fulfillment. They are continually—often strangely and surprisingly—refueled. The sources of such fulfillment and refueling are all around us. Whatever opens the mind and softens the heart has God's fingerprints all over it.

This holy book of wondrous story and testimony will feed you with some of the nourishing blendings I have mentioned above, and much more. Take your time; eat and drink these sumptuous offerings with head and heart; and dare to engage your social calling

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and endeavors from a place of deep and endless fulfillment—lest the fire go out.

Kirk Byron Jones,
author of *Calling Forth New Life: Becoming Your Freshest, Finest,
and Fullest Self* and creator of “Yes to Grace” on Facebook

Introduction

THERESE TAYLOR-STINSON

Awareness Is a Hopeful Sign

Violence never really deals with the basic evil of the situation. Violence may murder the murderer, but it doesn't murder murder. Violence may murder the liar, but it doesn't murder lies; it doesn't establish truth. . . . Violence may go to the point of murdering the hater, but it doesn't murder hate. It may increase hate. It is always a descending spiral leading nowhere. This is the ultimate weakness of violence: It multiplies evil and violence in the universe. It doesn't solve any problems.

—Martin Luther King Jr.¹

1. Martin Luther King Jr., "Where Do We Go from Here?," Annual Report Delivered at the 11th Convention of the Southern Christian Leadership Conference, Atlanta, Georgia, August 16, 1967.

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As Dr. King reminds us, violence is not always physical, and the worst kinds of violence may be psychological. Racism is a form of violence that at times has been physical, but its most insidious expression is the unresolved trauma present in individuals and their families for generations. I believe this trauma has been, for centuries, unequally bestowed upon African Americans. I also believe that the years separating the legacy of slavery from its white descendants have left recent generations of whites with a cognitive dissonance that is also traumatizing.

On September 11, 2001, in New York City, terrorists flew two planes into the towers of the World Trade Center. The total number of people killed in those buildings and its surroundings were 2,606, as well as 125 more at the Pentagon in Washington, DC. Six thousand others were injured. Suddenly and unexpectedly, there was a new awareness in America that the devastation other nations have experienced—sometimes at the hand of our own country—was now possible on our own soil. The fear created on that heartbreaking day caused some to repress the truth of US culpability in the hatred some feel toward us. This “shadow,” in psychological terminology, demonizes “the other” without accepting responsibility for our own actions or allowing compassion for the experiences of the other.

Carl Jung wrote, “Everyone carries a shadow, and the less it is embodied in the individual’s conscious life, the blacker and denser it is.”² One’s shadow is not exclusively one’s bad characteristics. It can also be denial of one’s good characteristics—like the ability to

2. Carl Jung, “Psychology and Religion,” *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, vol. 11, *Psychology and Religion: West and East*, ed. and trans. by Gerhard Adler and R. F. C. Hall (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1975), 131.

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love or forgive. Whatever characteristics we deny in ourselves, we project on “the other.” The other can become victim to our negative projections or our admiration.

The shooting of unarmed black men by law enforcement officers and lone vigilantes ambushing churches has exposed the lie of a “post-racial” America. The polarization, violence, and controversies make it seem like there is no turning from our human condition. But there is hope: in this divisive time, we can provide safe spaces for all races and ethnicities to heal from centuries of white supremacy and devaluing the lives of others. It will require less focus on rhetoric and more on creative ways to build relationships across racial lines. It will require a racial awareness that exposes the lie and causes those of good will to examine their souls, seeing racism as a spiritual issue that begins the process of change.

Racism is certainly part of the American shadow, suppressed and repressed from our consciousness through structural and systemic means for over four hundred years, but that shadow is cast globally among all people of color. It is a violent shadow that aligns with America’s overall violent history evident in the militarization toward black communities on its own soil. Statistics show that overall violence in America has declined; however, we are more violent than other affluent countries, and incidents of mass violence in the United States have increased. Our awareness of violence has increased, and we are more fearful. However, awareness of violence may be a hopeful sign, as we make more conscious decisions about its existence.

Only greater awareness and the spiritual growth that comes with that awareness can overcome the shadow behavior. With the

murder of our sons and daughters and higher rates of incarceration, our family life is disrupted for generations. We are aware of these trends, attempting to mitigate the damage and even escape from the environment ourselves through education, assimilation, and surrender to the dominant culture. But assimilation is painful and difficult, separating us from our own culture and identity.

It may take time to awaken to the violence of racism imbedded deeply in our structures and systems. We are not aware of the many ways racism manifests in our culture and society. It may take a while to break a bad habit. Awareness is a hopeful sign we're headed in the right direction. Awareness brings us to making conscious choices about how we behave.

We must move toward awaking to the shadow of racism and becoming more mindful about how we behave toward "the other."

Contemplation and Justice

We are both connected and separate. We dwell in both, but we are not meant to stay in either. Separateness allows us to become aware and deepen; then, we are called to remain in that deepened place as we enter the connectedness of the universe.

The dilemma is to know when to remain separate and aware of oneself and when to integrate that more deepened self with the flow and connectedness of the universe.

I think about how the truth of the words I wrote above at a Spiritual Directors International Educational Event on April 16,

2015, in Louisville, Kentucky, lives in the Spiritual Directors of Color Network. In some ways, our Network has separated from the larger group of contemplatives in order to share our common experience more deeply and arise more awakened and aware of who we are and what our contributions to the larger contemplative community are. Then, in that more deepened and awakened state, we are called into the Oneness of the Universe.

We hope that the essays you will read in this anthology from spiritual directors of color will pull you aside to more fully consider these themes of “contemplation and justice.” Though we are people across the African diaspora, as well as Asian and Semite, you will also witness the diversity of our group in our approaches, writing styles, experiences, thoughts, cultures, faith traditions, and passions around this theme.

At an annual Gerald May Seminar, hosted by the Shalem Institute, Jack Finley, psychologist, author, mystic, and former monk, defined contemplation as paying attention, “to reflect on one’s awareness of the present moment.” He said that “the mystic is known by the quality of their empathy, integrity, by the authenticity of your presence with each. . . . You cannot express the beauty of yourself and hide at the same time.”³ With that in mind, the members of the Spiritual Directors of Color Network attempt to apply a balm on the trauma of racism and other acts of injustice; to separate ourselves from spiritual disease, which would render us powerless; to awaken our senses to issues of justice, so that perhaps

3. James Finley, “Turning to Thomas Merton as Our Guide in Contemplative Living,” Shalem Institute’s Tenth Annual Gerald May Seminar, Friday Lecture, April 24, 2015.

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one day we can enter into God's dream of Oneness that manifests itself in diverse forms to sustain the life of the whole.

We are not hiding. We are grieved but hopeful. We want to express the beauty of ourselves in ways that are healing. We are attempting to do the work that is necessary to be true to our calling as spiritual directors—to listen, to ask questions, to pray deeply, and to be an instrument for healing, for change, and for true unity with all its diversity in our broken world.