



AWAKENINGS

Consciously Linking Humanity Through Presence, Dialogue & Collaboration

THE SNOWMASS CONFERENCE & THE HEART OF TRUE DIALOGUE

By Netanel Miles-Yepez

There is a common misconception of what inter-religious dialogue is supposed to be about. Often, assuming the subject to be “comparative religion,” the well-intentioned participants prepare in advance, looking for similarities and differences in their traditions, hoping to find arcane bits of information with which to make an impression on the other. But, this is to miss the point – albeit subtly. For the subject is not really “religion” at all, but a *relationship* based on dialogue. It is not that it is wrong to prepare for a dialogue, but that it is a mistake to think that a dialogue between, say, two representatives of different religious traditions is really about two religions, rather than the relationship of two individuals with different religious commitments. Though a subtle distinction, it was precisely this emphasis on relationship that made the dialogue of the Snowmass Inter religious Conference (usually, “the Snowmass Conference”) a unique and inspiring phenomenon in the world of religion for over twenty years.

The now-famous Snowmass Conference was originally the idea of Father Thomas Keating, one of the pioneers of interfaith dialogue in the Christian tradition and the co-founder of the highly influential Centering Prayer movement. Having resigned as abbot of St. Joseph’s Abbey (a Cistercian Monastery in Spencer, Massachusetts) in 1981,

Father Thomas took up residence at St. Benedict’s Monastery in Snowmass, Colorado. Officially retired, he began to devote his time to the dialogue work he loved.

In 1983, he was invited to participate in a series of Buddhist-Christian dialogues at the Naropa Institute in Boulder, Colorado that would ultimately change his whole approach to dialogue. During these sessions, Father Thomas noticed something interesting: “... I noticed that we, the dialoguers, weren’t speaking to one another so much as we were addressing the audience. But, on the two occasions when the conveners succeeded in bringing us together a day before the conference, we got on very well and actually got to talk to one another as peers, albeit all too briefly. So I asked myself, what would happen if the whole point was just to get together and talk, without an audience? And what if it was broader than just a Buddhist-Christian dialogue?”¹

The next year, after collecting a host of recommendations, he issued invitations to a select group of individuals. Among the

attendees of the first “Snowmass Conference” retreat at St. Benedict’s Monastery were: Thomas Keating, Pema Chodron, Douglas Steere, Gayatri Devi, Gerald Red Elk, Rami Shapiro, Bernie Glassman, and Bilal Hyde. It was as impressive a roster as any public inter-religious dialogue had ever had before, except that this dialogue was to take place far

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Shown are participants in the 1985 Snowmass Conference, held at La Crescenta, California. Photo: Roger La Borde, 1985.

from any cameras or eager spectators in an isolated little monastery in the Rocky Mountains.

Naturally, on the first day the group talked about the unique nature of this meeting. Everyone understood the significance of meeting in private, but many were still unsure of how to go about the dialogue in this atmosphere. What were they to talk about? And at what level of exchange were they expected to speak?

Father Thomas knew that if this was going to be successful, it would have to be based on intimacy. But this was a group of strangers. It was obvious that they needed to tell their stories to one another first; comparative religion would have to wait. "This was the reason we were disinclined to have any observers at the Snowmass Conference," Father Thomas told me, "because what was developing was a kind of friendship that enabled us to feel comfortable and safe enough to share, to disclose to each other, what our own spiritual journey was like ... You usually won't tell your secrets to somebody unless you're friends or until you know that person. So the idea of getting acquainted and being at ease in private was a primary goal."²

But, even if the space was safe enough in terms of privacy, there was still one question in the back of their minds: should the conversations be recorded? It was clear that this was an historic meeting and some wondered if they had an obligation to record the sessions.

When the question was raised, "Do we want to tape some of this?" Grandfather Gerald Red Elk said, "No, that would not be good, because then we would be hesitant about people back home hearing what we say. This is intimate stuff, and I think we should not share it outside the group. If the wisdom needs to be heard, it will be heard." That won the favor of everyone, and we've never taped a conference...³

Thus began one of the oldest and longest-running inter-religious dialogues in the world, and certainly one of the most unique. Over the years, word leaked out about this unusual cabal, and with it came many invitations to hold their dialogue in a public setting. On the occasions that they acquiesced (mostly in the early years), it was an unmitigated disappointment for all of them. The public loved it, but the members felt that something was missing. So they declined any further invitations and went back to what they loved best, an intimate dialogue among friends.

This they continued for 20 years, weathering changes in membership, sickness, deaths, and the increasing fame of some of their members. In 2004, acknowledging their 20th anniversary, they began to wonder if perhaps they had served their purpose and considered calling a close to the Snowmass Conference. But talk of "the end" seemed to give a new energy to the dialogue that year, and they took up an old question: should we not share something of what we have learned? For, by now there was an accumulated wis-

dom in the group. It was not that their answers were new, but that there were subtleties to them, real-world wisdom born of experience in the trenches of inter-religious dialogue. It is always the simple things that are the hardest to understand and do.

In the end, they decided that they would publish a few memories and a series of aphorisms on what had made their dialogue work over the years in a commemorative pamphlet. Since I was acquainted with four of the ten members, it was suggested that I help them to shape just such a document. I agreed without much deliberation. But, when I looked at their collection of "Points of Uniqueness," I immediately thought that their idea of a pamphlet was too humble; there was something here to be shared with a much wider audience in a small book.

So I interviewed all of the members to learn not *what* they had talked about, but *how* they had talked about it. What made it work? What were the bumps in the road? And how did they deal with them? As much as people may have wanted to hear the details of what was undoubtedly a wonderful discussion of religion (me included), this was not what people needed to hear (nor was it in the spirit of the group's original intention).

Thus, our book, *The Common Heart: An Experience of Inter religious Dialogue* (Lantern Books, 2006) is primarily a book *about* dialogue. I have reconstructed some of the notes from the first conference in it and give the Snowmass Conference "Points of Agreement," thoughts on "Spiritual Authority and Ethics," and "Points of Uniqueness." But, as wonderful as these pieces are, they are merely the byproduct of a profound relationship. The Snowmass Conference members learned to appreciate one another as individuals, and how different religions inform and enrich the experience of an individual, and this is what we can learn from them as we continue to explore the same territory.



Notes:

1. Miles-Yepez, Netanel (Editor). *The Common Heart: An Experience of Inter religious Dialogue*. New York: Lantern Books, 2006: p.3
2. Ibid., p.34
3. Ibid., p.16

Netanel Miles-Yepez was born in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1972. He studied History of Religions and Comparative Religion at Michigan State University. He is cofounder of the Desert Fellowship of the Message (with Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi) and a *murshid* ("guide") of the Sufi-Hasidic, Maimuni al-Badieh Order. He is the editor of *Wrapped in a Holy Flame: Teachings and Tales of the Hasidic Masters* (Jossey-Bass, 2003) and *The Common Heart: An Experience of Inter religious Dialogue* (Lantern Books, 2006).

From the Editors

Welcome to another issue of *Awakenings*! If you're previewing it on your computer at this time, take a quick scan through the pages and you'll be impressed by the depth and quality of the articles. If you have sent it straight to the printer, we recommend that you find a comfortable chair, warm up your favorite brew, call the cat or dog, and take your sweet time to savor the contents.

A triple-header awaits you, in terms of the themes carried out in this issue. "Awakening Through Networking and Dialogue" is explored through two unique approaches to dialogue, as described first in the lead article by Netanel Miles-Yepep (p.1) and also in *Awakening Cafe Magic* (p.8). Thea Levkowitz (p.9) illuminates "Awakening and Social Transformation" through her article on spiritual activism, and Margo Richardson (p.8) and Alia Whitney Johnson (p.5) approach the subject of "Awakening Youth" with descriptions of their work with young women. The qualities of creativity, inspiration and persistence—among others!—are quite evident in the writers of these articles. Their respective projects have "legs", not because of the concepts themselves—others may have had similar ideas—but because they chose to embody their ideas and ideals in down-to-earth action. Awakening needs boots on the ground if it is to become part of the fiber of this planet, and we're not just talking about shoes!

Himayat's conceptual guidance, to our way of thinking, helps us to navigate the pathways of our own awakenings. In this issue (p.4) he offers a compass and a map which support personal awakening in a way that brings us "more life". Also highlighted are three new members to the Board of Advisors. Their contributions in the general realm of awakening have been substantial, and we look forward to the support and wisdom they bring to further the goals of Universal Awakening.

What is waking up in you? What is waiting to be realized through your unique presence on the earth plane? What is happening around you that brings more vibrancy to your awakening spirit? We would love to hear from you, so please write and share some of what is going on. There are three of us who put this together: Peggy Baldwin in North Carolina (office@universal-awakening.org), and Mary & David Dohrmann in Oregon (starlight@peak.org). Write to any or all of us, and keep the dialogue going.

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P.O. Box 17578
Asheville, NC 28816
828.683.1219
office@universal-awakening.org

Visit UA on the Web:
<http://www.universal-awakening.org>

Founding President of UA
Himayat Inayati, Th.D.

Editorial Staff
Peggy Baldwin
office@universal-awakening.org

Mary & David Dohrmann
home@twinoakscenter.com

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Sharing *Awakenings*

A good way to introduce Universal Awakening to friends or newcomers to your group is to hand them a copy of *AWAKENINGS*. The articles and information included in each issue are wonderful starting points for group discussion, personal sharing, or helping a UA group define its purpose and agenda.

Duplication: This 12-page issue can be copied for \$.50-.75, black-and-white, on standard paper at most copy shops, directly from your PDF file. For a more professional look, FedEx Kinkos will print it double-sided on 11x17 heavier-weight paper for around a \$1.00 per issue. Or, just print out a few on your own printer in living color!

We would be interested in hearing about your experiences in sharing *AWAKENINGS* with others, or creative ideas that you come up with for its use. Write to us at: office@universal-awakening.org

UNIVERSAL AWAKENING!

By Himayat Inayati, M.S., Th.D.

I was asleep in the mineral kingdom.
I awoke in the vegetable kingdom.
I moved in the animal kingdom.
I became aware of myself in the human kingdom.
When have I ever become less through dying?
- Jelaluddin Rumi

The rendering above of the great Sufi poet Rumi's thought underscores that the totality of life has been and is in an awakening process. Of course the question might be: "Who or what is awakening through or as life?" Another question might be: "How does this awakening manifest?" Lastly we might wonder: "What can we do to collaborate with or support this process?" Whatever our questions, Rumi makes it clear that universal awakening is a central aspect of life, and not an organization of societies or individuals. So, let us be clear about what is primary and what is secondary to our effort.

If you asked a Sufi who or what Rumi is orienting us to in his immortal poetry, the answer would be easy, subtle, and undoubtedly misunderstood by many. The answer would be God, or the Beloved, or Reality. Volumes could be printed describing each of these three words/concepts! And after reading and meditating on these volumes each of us could only come up with his/her own understanding or realization— as it should be. I say "as it should be" because it is inherent to the evolutionary/ creative process of life that each element of life has been given the greatness and the privilege of offering its own contribution to this awakening process. I say "each element of life" because Rumi noted that all of life is involved in this awakening, not just humans.

But, we are humans, and as such it is important not only to understand and participate in the rest of life's *gloria*, but also to know and as fully as possible support universal awakening through identifying and supporting our personal awakening. To support us in this endeavor, I offer you the compass of "greater life" and the map of six fields of human existence: the physical, the emotional, the moral, the mental, the spiritual, and consciousness itself. Although these tools are not the territory of our personal pilgrimage toward the fulfillment of awakening, they do offer us a means of consciously applying our effort to the nurturance of this process. The compass orients us toward what is greater life. Greater can mean many things— more subtlety, more volume, more depth, more vertical or horizontal expansion, more integration, etc.; but whatever it means, the end results will be an activation and a realization of more life.

The map of six fields of human existence admittedly is an artifice. By that I mean, life is not truly six transparent overlays which, when we shoot a light through it, we get a hologram called us. Still, it can be useful to have a direction upon which to orient the light of our knowing self. The feedback can be quite illuminating, and ultimately it will nurture within us a greater accommodation for life, a deeper knowing of self, and a more complete appreciation of our part as well as the part of others in the process we are calling universal awakening.

*Himayat Inayati is the head of Universal Awakening and
can be reached at: himayat@mindspring.com*

Building Hope and Joy Through Beadwork

Emerge: A Tool For Transformation

By Alia Whitney Johnson

One of the purposes of Universal Awakening is to serve as an incubator for spirit-oriented service projects. Emerge and UA are new partners in service.

Thanks to the tremendous support of my community, I have had the privilege of traveling twice to Sri Lanka in the past year to work with some of the most inspirational, persevering and loving souls I have ever encountered. During both visits, I conducted beading workshops with girls age 10-18 who had been sexually abused and were young mothers as a result of rape or incest. But, rather than have you imagine these girls as victims, I want you to consider the tremendous strength it takes to stand up in a court room of individuals who condemn those who are pregnant and not married, and to tell your story, your truth. I want you to consider the strength it takes to give birth to your first baby at age 12 and to love and care for this baby despite the fact that you yourself haven't reached your teenage years. And, I want you to imagine the beauty of 22 girls living and working together to support each other as best they can. This is Ma-Sevana, the home I worked in, and these are the intensely strong girls I was so privileged to work with.

Through my two trips to Sri Lanka and much work in the US, I have developed a program called *Emerge* that supports these child mothers in creating and selling jewelry as a means of financial empowerment and personal transformation. The project aspires to develop confidence, creativity, self-respect, and autonomy in all girls involved in its program by opening what is often their first savings account and supporting an extremely therapeutic activity as part of the home's regular curriculum. The work is sold in a store in Sri Lanka and will be imported and sold in the United States. All profits are deposited in the girls' bank accounts for withdrawal at the age of 18, reinvested in the program itself to pay for shipping and provide supplies, or donated towards services to run Ma-Sevana, the home in which the girls live.

Emerge is about empowerment. The program conducts workshops that enable the girls to explore and express themselves through creativity and encourages them to feel comfortable in making their own decisions. *Emerge* encourages

each of the girls to believe in her own sense of beauty and self-worth, to take pride in her own ideas, and to feel comfortable with the process of sharing herself. Each piece of jewelry that the girls create is unique. *Emerge* works to cultivate in each artist a sense of pride and ownership for her jewelry pieces, by photographing and making portfolios of these images, and then encouraging the girls to share them with their peers in the home and with the outside world. The workshops also offer a reversal of the role the girls are used to playing with their teachers: they become leaders, teachers and mentors for each other—the backbone of the program itself. They train and advise each other, build community spirit through looking out for one another's children, and learn how to articulate their own ideas and suggestions.

Emerge has helped to develop positive relationships and community interaction within the home and, more importantly, has enabled each girl to develop a positive relationship with herself.



In addition to personal transformation, *Emerge* is about economic opportunity. The girls live in Ma-Sevana as a safe haven while their court trials are going on, often living there for six or even eight years. But, they are separated from all they once knew, including their education. Girls receive nontraditional education at Ma-Sevana, but most of them do not obtain

the skills needed to pass the tests that would qualify them for additional education or the workforce. Self-employment or *no* employment are their only options. As it stands now, the girls leave the home without any money, dependent on others' support to provide them with their basic needs. For this reason, *Emerge* works to give the girls tools that will help them overcome this challenge. *Emerge* will provide them with seed money to help them develop the life they hope to develop, whether that be by supporting them in keeping their baby, building their first house, starting their own business, or taking classes to build new skills. In addition to providing them with money ready for withdrawal at the age of 18, *Emerge* is working to bring workshops to Ma-Sevana on managing money, obtaining micro credit, and

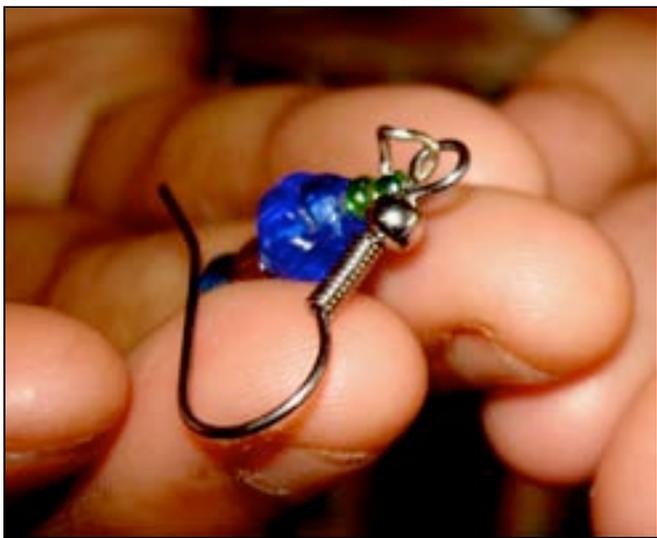
Beadwork, continued on Page 6

Beadwork, continued from Page 5

starting and running a small business in Sri Lanka.

On a personal level, *Emerge* has revealed to me the power of art as a mechanism for self-expression, as a tool for transformation, and a facilitator of empowerment. I now see art as a powerful tool that transcends social structure because it can be experienced and produced in some form by everyone. It knows no gender, no race, no religion, no country. It is experienced and created by all, illiterate and literate, rich and poor. It is a demonstration of our inevitable search for beauty, for freedom, for expression. People always ask me about the language barrier during my workshops. And, I have to say that during my time with these girls, art became a universal form of communication that surpassed both oral and written language in its ability to connect us.

Currently, *Emerge* is working on expanding its interactions with Ma-Sevana by partnering with a local women's professional business association. We are hoping to create a mentorship program in which these women nurture a sense of financial empowerment within the girls in an informal and fun setting, helping them to understand the implications of their money and developing a supportive relationship that



will empower the girls once they leave the home. We hope that these will be relationships that will help ease their transition from Ma-Sevana back to their home communities and also a valuable resource for those girls who choose to start their own business after leaving Ma-Sevana.

We also hope to facilitate field trips to connect the girls to the outside world, decreasing their sense of isolation; and we hope to bring part of the outside world to them through "Market Days" at Ma-Sevana, where the girls will exhibit their work for large donors. This mini-market will enable the girls to share their work, practice their communication skills, and learn about product-showcasing.

The past year has overflowed with unique and wonder-

ful opportunities, including a grant from the World Bank's Youth Innovation Fund to continue the project's development. I am constantly impressed by how the project has unfolded, gaining tremendous support from my surrounding community. Most recently, I am excited to say that *Emerge* became a program under Universal Awakening. I hope this connection will serve to broaden the *Emerge* community, evoking a dialogue that will support its development ever more fully. The goals of *Emerge* and UA are complementary, and it is tremendously exciting to be part of an organization that can support *Emerge* in its development while serving so many other communities in different ways at the same time.

As we move towards the end of the an amazing year, we are looking to gather more beads to send to Ma-Sevana and are hoping to have each girl sponsored by the end of the year. The sponsorship program provides each girl with personal supplies, therefore enabling an appreciation and ownership of the materials. Sponsorship provides extra support to the girl that simply can't be provided by the home. That is, it demonstrates individual support that is distinctive to each girl and reminds her that she is unique, special, and talented and that someone believes in her as an individual.

If you have any suggestions or questions about *Emerge* or would like to make a contribution or learn more about *Emerge's* sponsorship program, please do not hesitate to contact me. Together, we can build a beautiful future for these girls and many others.

Alia Whitney-Johnson is a student at MIT and can be reached at aliawj@gmail.com



If you walk on the path that is open in front of you ... without patiently waiting for the rest of creation — that is, if you achieve alone something very close to the Truth as compared to the present state of the world, what will happen? You perturb the whole; not only the harmony but the equilibrium of the whole will be upset, because a certain part of the creation will not be able to follow. and instead of a full realization of the Divine, you will have a tiny, local, infinitesimal realization, and nothing of the goal will be achieved ... Alone, you can attain your own perfection; you can become, infinite and perfect in your consciousness. Inner realization has no limits. But outer realization, on the contrary, is necessarily limited, and a minimum number of physical representatives is required for a general action to take place.

Satprem, quoting The Mother, in Sri Aurobindo, or the Adventure of Consciousness.

Visual Arts!

Art Awakens Youth to Their Beautiful Nature

Music!

Theater!

By Margot Richardson

Dance!

Question: How many total art credits students need to graduate from high school?

Answer: One. And that credit can also be fulfilled by taking a computer class, thereby bypassing the fine arts entirely.

Fortunately, many young people discover that engaging in the arts—painting, sculpting, dance, drama, music, and literary expression—can bring vibrancy, joy, and a genuine sense of belonging into their sometimes volatile and complicated lives. Art can illuminate their authentic experience, and offer ways to communicate, transform, and awaken to more life.

Now I'll share a sometimes-sad tale with you—the story of my own high school experience. Somehow, I found myself in eleventh grade feeling stranded socially, with few friends and no strong attachments to my academic subjects or my talents. Fortunately, I wandered into the art room, a safe haven of acceptance, colorful expression, and quiet joy. This is where I began to reengage my authentic inner life, to reawaken the happiness and freedom I had experienced as a child. Art became my best friend, my lifeline. I tentatively began to refer to myself as an artist. And I met new kinds of friends in that art room, where we entered into long conversations about things I hadn't yet found a place for—questions about culture and what is possible in life.

Three of us decided to travel to Europe the summer after we graduated, to explore the wonders of Paris and Amsterdam, the great museums, architecture, and bohemian cafes. As it turned out, I ended up traveling alone, making friends as I took a crash course in self-care and independent travel. Amidst mishaps and homesick calls to my worried parents, I had the soul-awakening experience of coming face to face with paintings so lovely, powerful, and mesmerizing that I knew I had been transformed for good.

Feeling stranded in adolescence, and then rescued by my connection to the arts, I felt a strong impetus to find a way to nourish the healthy spirits of girls as they crossed the threshold into their teen years. Last summer, I started a week-long program called **ILLUMINA! Girls Arts And Adventure Camp**. Seeking to combine my spiritual training in the Raphaelite work and my many years of teaching art to children, I sent out invitations to everyone I could think of, hoping for ten girls. Sure enough, ten girls showed up that first morning, all a little nervous. On the first day we worked with clay, for grounding. Some of the students kept to the cliques they had established before arriving at camp, leaving several girls on the outside. I hoped the spirit of creativity and trust I was establishing would allow them to open up and become an inclusive, cohesive group before the week was out.

Tuesday, they returned still clinging to their comfort

zones and cliques. That afternoon we took our first field trip, to dance in a beautiful chapel with my friend Christine Havens. This form of dance, called “The 5 Rhythms”, allows for free, creative movement, as well as connection to each other. The girls were still holding out, moving tentatively and seeking each other's approval. I kept holding my intention, focusing on my breath and my heart, and nursing an awful headache, when that song started playing—the one that always causes the tears stored in my heart to spill over the retaining walls. I stood there sobbing, discharging all the grief of my mother's passing from the winter past, while the girls looked on.

Christine and I debriefed the group afterwards, and I made sure to tell them that my tears had nothing to do with them, but were simply a letting go of stored emotions. I wondered what they would make of my outburst.

As usual, the thing which often transforms a group is unpredictable, heartfelt and messy. Wednesday morning, the girls arrived, formed a circle for our daily wisdom counsel, and—*voilà!*—they had become one group, ready to take on any adventure. For the rest of that sunny week, we painted, belly-danced, rock-climbed, and played together. By the time we were gathering up our towels from the beach Friday afternoon, I knew they had consciously awakened to each other, and I had had the honor of serving as a catalyst for them.

It is not the arts alone which greased the wheels of their bonding and growth. It was the magic of artistic freedom of expression, combined with affection for their authentic selves, admiration for their courage, and an atmosphere of trust, provided by myself and a wonderful circle of adults committed to seeing them thrive.

Margot Richardson—Artist, Educator, and Raphaelite Work Practitioner—can be reached at pearlwillson9@yahoo.com



Upcoming Podcast

The current podcast is a conversation with Roger Nelson, in which he speaks about the Global Consciousness Project (GCP) at Princeton University. Roger, who is a member of the UA Board of directors, was featured in the previous issue of Awakenings. Clicking on the link below takes you to the Audio Podcast page, which has a link for downloading this podcast.

http://www.universal-awakening.org/index.php?page=articles&display=704&from=0&category=01--Audio_Podcasts

Awakening Café Magic

By Juanita Brown and Karen Speerstra

At Dharma Drum Mountain Center in Taiwan, 150 young leaders from Europe, Africa, Asia and North America, along with Buddhist monks, nuns and a rabbi, sat on cushions arranged in groups of four, during several 30-minute rounds of intense conversation focused on compassionate action for today's times. They were engaged in what tens of thousands before them on six continents have now experienced: *a World Café*.

Like other World Café dialogues, this one embraced diversity, offered hospitality in a welcoming space and afforded participants a chance to listen, deeply, to one another around questions that matter.

The World Café process was introduced last year in the book by the same name: *The World Café: Shaping our Futures Through Conversations That Matter* (Berrett Koehler) by Juanita Brown and her colleagues. (Further information can be found at: www.theworldcafe.com)

World Café conversations embrace the assumption that people already have within them the wisdom and creativity to confront even the most difficult challenges. Cafés have, in fact, been held to tackle such key issues as peace in the Middle East, education in Scandinavia, sustainable development in Latin America, indigenous land rights in New Zealand, and corporate responsibility in the United States. No training or certification is required—only a commitment to use The World Café's seven guiding principles:

- 1. Clarify the Context:** Help people understand why they are there and what will be the focus, themes or areas of inquiry.
- 2. Create Hospitable Space:** Create a welcoming environment so people feel comfortable and safe.
- 3. Explore Questions that Matter:** Focus on questions that will invite inquiry and discovery rather than advocacy and advantage.
- 4. Encourage Everyone's Contribution:** Set up small table groups or conversation clusters of 3-5 to ensure that all voices are heard.
- 5. Connect Diverse Perspectives:** Create progressive rounds of conversation that enable members to move among tables and cross-pollinate ideas.
- 6. Listen Together for Insights and Deeper Questions:** Listen deeply to one another and notice what's emerging in the "middle of the table".
- 7. Harvest and Share Collective Discoveries:** Host a "Town Meeting" at the conclusion to share mutual learnings.

The World Café is "more than just talk". Members often access their collective wisdom in unexpected ways, and new possibilities for inspired action reveal themselves. As Ms. Brown puts it: "In a World Café at its best, magic happens."

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In many cases, your employer will match any funds you donate to UA and other nonprofit organizations through the United Way campaign. Your local United Way will notify Universal Awakening of your donation and make arrangements to send your collected donation to the UA office.

Please inform the UA office of your donation...and **thanks for your support of Universal Awakening!**

office@universal-awakening.org

UA Gifting for the Holiday Season

Support Someone Special: This holiday season, join with others to create an oasis of awakening and support someone special throughout the year! When you are a monthly contributor to UA, you can arrange for someone special to be a full participant of UA Interweave and to also receive a personal meditation in the mail each month. The meditation card will acknowledge that the gift is from you and will be something that can be placed on the refrigerator or desk as an awakening reminder. Support Someone Special is available for an additional \$5 or more monthly or an annual donation of \$60 or more.

The Support Someone Special program can only be processed at our office. Please fill out and submit the Support Someone Special Form on the web site (link below) to our office via fax, telephone, or US mail. Checks to UA or credit cards are accepted. All credit cards will be processed by Light of the Mountains Bookstore. (Fax number: 828-683-1219; mailing address shown in column at left.)

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ALCHEMICAL RETREAT

A Model for Awakening and Sustaining Spiritual Activism

By Thea Levkovitz, Rev. Cheraga

*A speech delivered May 20, 2006, at the Spiritual Activism Conference,
All Souls Unitarian Church,, Washington, D.C.*

In nearly all religious traditions there is a process known as a retreat. For example, in Judaism it comes each week as Shabbat. In Sufism, it is the Alchemical Retreat. For some it occurs naturally in the wild places in nature. Our human prophets have always gone to the wilderness. They have sought solitude and immersion in the sacred nature.

Whatever the form, the purpose is the same: to find renewal, to reconnect with that which sustains our deepest longing for purpose and identity, and to find new ways of being in the world. I would like to talk with you this evening about the Alchemical Retreat as a Model for Awakening and Sustaining Spiritual Activism.

There are three stages to this retreat process and I will briefly outline each. As we journey through these stages, I encourage you to recognize the ways in which we have traveled together these four days of the Spiritual Activism Conference on our own Alchemical Retreat.

Two vital components of this first stage are the preparation for the journey, whether inner or outer, and the setting of boundaries. We take off time from work, turn off our cell phones, check the maps, pack our backpacks, load the canoe, kneel, bow our heads, chant, bake the Challah, light the candles, close our eyes.

Our rich traditions provide us with guidance on the setting of boundaries for creating sacred space for our journey. The weekly practice of the Jewish Shabbat and the Christian Sabbath are examples. So are the practices of Sufi Zikr, Buddhist meditation, prayer, chanting, spiritual dances of native people. We intentionally discontinue our normal activities to make room for the presence of the Other.

We can remind ourselves that it is an act of God to set boundaries in our daily interactions with the people in our lives. In Arabic, one of the ninety-nine names, or attributes, of God is *Halim*. It means forbearance. More accurately, it means to allow others to realize the consequences of their actions. Out of love, out of divine generosity, we set boundaries around our own egos, to allow for the becoming of the sacred Other. In the Zohar, the writings of the Kaballah, we find a similar ideal in the words *Tzim Tzum*—the attribute of Divine Restraint. God so loves us that He/She restrains and withdraws that love to allow us to individuate, to become.

I find this a particularly helpful practice now while living with my nearly 16-year-old son, Jess—a son who no longer conforms to my language, my music, my sometimes too-se-date ideals. His wildness requires me to hold back. His impatience is the energy of an evolution that is out of my hands. How could I dare to harness his exuberant and untamed expansion into the wild of his own soul?

As a country we have at times exhibited the qualities of *Halim* and *Tzim Tzum* (although not lately) when we have

protected rivers, forests, wilderness. These are places in which we have willingly agreed to limit our own activities and let the powers of nature prevail. We do not seek to control what happens. In fact, we must toss out the idea that either God or nature is to be maintained in some sort of human idealized stasis. The supreme act of love, God, parenthood is to bind our own actions to set free the potentiality of what could become. Boundaries are necessary to liberate the unrestrained Otherness of the land, our souls, our children and the future.

So, like entering the wilderness, as we enter into the retreat we provide barriers to protect a sacred space, to limit our own engagement in the normal ways of being—to allow the liberation of something new, revolutionary, evolutionary.

Stage two of an Alchemical Retreat is a dangerous place. We are far outside of our comfort zone. This is where we lose our bearings. We are in the wilderness and have receded far even from the boundaries we have made. We could die. The Prophet Mohammed tells us to die before death, admonishing us to die to our limited daily lives and awaken into the sacred.

Yet we seek wilderness and retreat precisely because it is dangerous. It is for the potential of the encounter of the sacred Other that we risk all. The Other is something wild with claws that materialize from tangled bushes. The Other is a tipped kayak that soaks your last pair of dry socks and reminds you that you are far from shore. If we wanted safety we would go to a mall, not to the wilderness—and certainly not to a conference on spiritual activism.

There are no words for this landscape but I know you have been there. We go intentionally, not knowing what will happen, holding our breath in expectation. For what? For what could be. We will return changed. We already are.

Tonight we stand in the third stage of the Alchemical Retreat, at the close of Shabbat, the end of the conference. We have left behind who we thought we were. We are not certain of who we have become.

We grapple with reentry—the merging of wild soul, the newly discovered—into this world. It is a messy place to be. Our duffels are packed for the return, everything is damp with salty ocean mist and our hair is tangled with spruce needles. Our float plane waits. We stand poised between two worlds, neither here nor there. Yet it is this interface which interests us, for it is in the intermingling of this world and that, from which the new will arise, unexpected and unpredictable.

Here again, sacred nature can guide us and help us understand the process of reentry, if not the outcome. On land it is the place between ecotypes where forest and shoreline meet, where tree line gives way to tundra; here in the interactions among species, the in-between places of transition of one to

Retreat, continued on Page 10

of one to the Other, is where evolution, diversity and experimentation occur. Plants and animals caught between worlds, displaced just slightly from their middle range, exposed to new pressures and influences, will diverge into unique variations. If we reflect on the intricacies of the interactions of flowers and their pollinators, we see each co-evolving into mutual relationship. The complexity and beauty of these interactions are their own universe. Suffice it to say, each influences the other so that their intimate relationships result in the explosion of colors, fragrance and sweet nectar we know as flowers and the buzzing, chirping and swooping we experience as bees, bats and hummingbirds. This is where we have arrived—at the interface of evolution, where the confusion of the like and unlike produce the astonishing.

I want to make one divergence from our journey here. It is to say this: Nature is not metaphor! It is a living, breathing being. Each of its inhabitants is sacred to itself. Mountains are sacred, rivers are sacred, and animals are sacred. We must stop talking about the Earth as if its “resources” are ours to distribute, either unjustly or justly, without regard to its inherent sanctity. We must return to it! Continually! Just as the Prophets have done throughout the ages. What did they know about wilderness and wild nature that we have forgotten? Let wild Earth teach us about how to walk humbly in this world. And I implore you, listen to the ancient wisdom of our indigenous family whose bodies still carry that wisdom in an intimacy lost to most of us. Their insight is a pathway to redeem our spiritual disconnection from nature.

How do we use the awakening of our spiritual journeys to act with consequence? I’m sorry to say after we have come so far in our journey, that I am not sure how it actually works. But I do know that it does. So do you or you would not be here. Occasionally, I envision a time of peace when I will understand. But I do not count on it, nor do I wait. In all our imperfection, we must act. Perhaps that is the way of Spiritual Activism—that there is no possible reconciliation between worlds. Instead, it is a new kind of wilderness where we bounce between the inner and outer landscapes and see what happens.

You too have been moving between worlds. You have talked, danced, chanted, prayed, lobbied, written letters to the paper, signed petitions, voted, walked door-to-door, cried, pleaded and laughed. You have been ridiculed, had your funding cut, and have been challenged daily on your idealism. You have done so with courage because often you have done it alone. The Sufi Master, Hazrat Inayat Khan, asked “Where are the 10,000 workers?” I look out tonight and I see the ranks of those workers growing. You are not alone anymore.

“Who am I to be standing here this evening?” I say, “I am you.” Next year you will be here. You will be standing on the bema of your synagogues, the dais of your churches and mosques, at the microphone at your political caucuses, your garden clubs, and in your schools. You will stand on the edge of the wilderness. Do not wait to be asked. Do not wait for your ministers and rabbis, political parties and environmental organizations. Do not wait for the new leaders to arise. You are the leaders. You are the right people. Believe that everything you have done has brought you to this place, this time. The world is crying out for what you know. With each step you take, the wilderness is rushing to greet you.

God
Disguised as a myriad things and
Playing a game
of Tag
Has kissed you and said,
“You’re it —
I mean you’re Really IT!”
Now it does not matter
What you believe or feel
For something wonderful,
Major-league Wonderful
Is someday going
to
Happen.

Hafiz of Shiraz – 14th Century Poet

There is another of the ninety-nine names of God. It is *Fattaah*. It means, “The Opener of the Way.” We breathe “*Ya Fattaah*” and we say it out loud. *Fattaah* is the whale of the ninety-nine names. It dives to the depths and leaps into the air. It is the hope and the prayer for submersion into the unmanifest and breaching into the manifest:

Ya Fattaah! Ya Fattaah! Ya Fattaah!

It is our job as spiritual activists to enter into the wilderness, to do our spiritual practices with passion, commitment and authenticity, to placate our wariness, to risk our identities, our ideas, our concepts—to risk everything, to die before death for the potential of the unfoldment of the future. Then, equally death-defying, it is our job to come back, to link watery worlds with the expanse of sky, to breathe between worlds. We breathe in spirit, we breathe out action. We breathe with the whales linking the unseen with the seen in ways as yet unknown.

Let us breathe it together. Inhale Spirit—exhale Action. Inhale Spirit—exhale Action. Inhale Spirit—exhale Action.

Good night, and remember, “God has Kissed you—you’re It!”

Halima Thea Levkovitz is an ordained Interfaith Minister with the Sufi Order International, and has worked as an environmental policy analyst, outreach director and served on the board of directors for national environmental organizations in the Pacific Northwest and Alaska. She is the co-founder of Environmental Leaders Retreats with Inside Passages, and currently she serves as a consultant for the environmental working group for the Network of Spiritual Progressives.



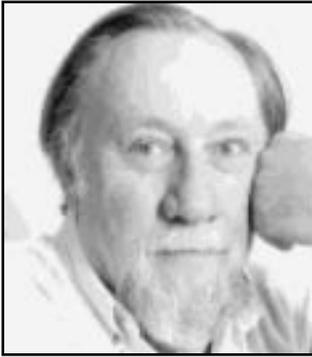
Volunteer Needs

Universal Awakening needs volunteers to help with **web site links**. We are organizing a committee to review organizations who are resonant with the mission of UA and contact them about reciprocal web site links. **You need no prior experience with the technology of web site linkage**, because it is available in an easy-to-use format on the web site. We would like to hear from people willing to contact a small number of organizations (5-15) about reciprocal linkage, then follow up with the organization until the linkage is accomplished.

UA Welcomes Three New Members To Its Board of Advisors

Universal Awakening is pleased to welcome Allan Combs, Elmer Green and Netanel Miles-Yepetz to its Board of Advisors. The Board is comprised of individuals who have made distinctive contributions in their respective fields which relate in a meaningful way to the goals of Universal Awakening. For more complete information on these individuals and for all the members of the Board of Advisors, go to:

http://www.universal-awakening.org/index.php?page=bio&category=02--Board_of_Advisors



Allan Combs, Ph.D.

Allan Combs is a Professor of Transformative Studies at the California Institute of Integral Studies. His background is in consciousness studies, neuropsychology, and systems science. He currently holds appointments at the Saybrook Graduate School and the Assisi Conferences, and is Professor Emeritus at the University of North Carolina-Asheville. In addition, he is past Director of the Integral Studies program leading to an MA in Conscious Evolution at the Graduate Institute of Connecticut.

Allan is author of over fifty articles, chapters, and books on consciousness and the brain. Professor Combs collaborated with Ken Wilber, to create the “Wilber-Combs Matrix”, described by Combs as a “periodic table of consciousness”.



Elmer Green, Ph.D.

Along with wife and colleague, Alyce Green (deceased), Dr. Green has authored many scientific papers and wrote the book, *Beyond Biofeedback*. He is a member of several professional societies and advisory boards. For 20 years, he and Alyce lectured and conducted workshops on the Theory and Practice of Biofeedback Training for Psychophysiological Self-Regulation, in the United States, Canada, Great Britain, Holland, Australia, the Philippines, India, and the Soviet Union.

Dr. Green's past research, combining the disciplines of Autogenic Training and Biofeedback Training, includes physiological studies of yogis in India in 1974. Dr. Green's most current research includes a study of psychophysics and psychophysiology during a form of Tibetan meditation. In this work, Dr. Green and his colleagues discovered anomalous electric-field effects in and around the bodies of well-known healers.



Netanel Miles-Yepetz

Netanel Miles-Yepetz was born in Battle Creek, Michigan in 1972, and is descended from a Sefardi family of crypto-Jews (*anusim*, “forced” converts) tracing their ancestry from Mexico all the way back to medieval Portugal and Spain. He studied History of Religions at Michigan State University and Contemplative Religion at Naropa University, specializing in non-dual philosophies and comparative religion.

Unsatisfied with academics alone, Netanel moved to Boulder, Colorado to become reacquainted with his family's lost tradition of Judaism, and to study Hasidism and Sufism under Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi's personal guidance. Today, he is the cofounder of the Desert Fellowship of the Message with Reb Zalman. He serves as an ordained *murshid* (guide) of the Maimuniyya *tariqat*, fusing the Sufi and Hasidic principles of spirituality espoused by Rabbi Avraham Maimuni in 13th century Egypt with the teachings of the Ba'al Shem Tov and Hazrat Inayat Khan.

Photo: Don Murray, 2004 Netanel is currently the Executive Director of the Reb Zalman Legacy Project, an advisor to the Spiritual Paths Foundation and the Spiritual Paths Institute. He is the author and editor of three books: *The Way of Contemplation and Meditation* (Spiritual Paths Publishing, 2002), *Wrapped in a Holy Flame: Teachings and Tales of the Hasidic Masters* (Jossey-Bass, 2003), and *The Common Heart: An Experience of Inter religious Dialogue* (Lantern Books, 2006).

Netanel Miles-Yepetz lives with his wife, Jennifer, in Boulder, Colorado. See his article on pp. 1-2 of this issue.

Universal Awakening Calendar

This is a partial listing of Universal Awakening events. If you do not see information for your area, please check the contact names and email addresses below for local UA chapters. You can also check the UA web site for calendar updates at www.universal-awakening.org/index.php?page=calendar
Contact the UA office for more information on events or to schedule an event in your area.

Phone: 828.683.1219 ✉ Email: office@universal-awakening.org

Events

Contacts

THE SACRED AS A MATRIX FOR SOCIAL TRANSFORMATION With Himayat Inayati

- Dec. 2-3, Radisson Beach Hotel
Corpus Christi, Texas, US

A two-day intensive that beckons us to awaken to the sacred within ourselves and others.
For Information & Registration, contact
office@universal-awakening.org



SACRED DIALOGUE – SACRED RELATIONSHIP A Retreat with Himayat Inayati Ibis Institute - Hagen, Germany

- Nov. 9 - Introduction to UA
- Nov. 10-12 - Retreat

For Information & Registration, contact
Wahaba Bergemann: wahaba@web.de



IBIS INSTITUTE Hagen, Germany

- Cultural Market, Dec. 2
- Inter religious Forum (Semimonthly)

Contact Ibis for times and locations
info@institut-ibis.de

GERMANY

Wahaba Bergemann: info@institut-ibis.de

NEW ZEALAND

Mary Dwen: papuamaru@ihug.co.nz



UNITED STATES

Ohio

Joan Leppla: jleppla@neo.rr.com

Texas

Diane Weiner: RavaniRah@aol.com

Washington

Margot Richardson: pearlwillson9@yahoo.com

Rhode Island

Jurate Calise: juratec@cox.net
Maryann O'Halloran: ma-ohalloran@cox.net

North Carolina

Peggy Baldwin: peggy@loydartists.com