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## Notes from the Director

**The good we secure for ourselves is precarious and uncertain until it is secured for all of us and incorporated into our common life.**

~ Jane Addams

Among the core principles of OneLife Institute is a belief in the fundamental interdependence of all life and being. This worldview is shared by our guest author for this issue of the newsletter, Dr. Sharif Abdullah. His mission, and that of his organization, Commonway, is "to create a world that works for all, fostering inclusive, sustainable human societies on an ecologically viable planet." Sharif's work has taken him all over the globe – to countries in Asia, Africa, Europe, and the Americas. He spends part of every year in Sri Lanka, working with the Sarvodaya Shramadana Movement and its esteemed founder, Dr A.T. Ariyaratne.

### HOWARD THURMAN CLASSES

We are delighted to announce a new series of classes on the life and wisdom of Dr. Howard Thurman, coming in early 2011. On Sunday, January 16th (3-5PM) a special introductory workshop will feature excerpts from the video "Conversations with Howard Thurman." Then, beginning on Feb. 3rd, I will lead a ten-week class, meeting Thursday nights (7-10PM). Both the workshop and classes are hosted and co-sponsored by the East Bay Church in Oakland. For more, please visit our website.

### SPIRITUALITY & SOCIAL CHANGE

I will be teaching an Intersession course at Starr King School for the Ministry in

Berkeley, January 18-21 (1:30-6:30 PM each day). "Women, Spirituality & Social Change" is open to graduate students and motivated community learners.

### TRANSFORMATIVE VISIONS 2011

Join us on Saturday, March 12th at Studio One Art Center for Transformative Visions, our annual art, jazz, and spoken word event lifting up a vision of peace, justice, and possibility. There is still time to submit work for those who are interested. *Please contact us right away.* Details are on the web. We are also seeking volunteer support, as well as financial and in-kind donations. Contact us to learn more.

### SUPPORT GROUPS ENDING

For the past year, OneLife has held twice-monthly support groups with special outreach to activists, caregivers, and community workers. Despite the need many have expressed for this resource, turnout has consistently been very low. Therefore, we are discontinuing this offering and exploring other program configurations that might reach more people in need of personal and professional support. Please stay tuned.

### RETREATS RETURN TO HRC

Beginning in January our quarterly Spirit, Sound and Silence retreats will return to the Holy Redeemer Center. Treat yourself to a day of healing, renewal, and inspiration. Please see p.5 for details. We look forward to welcoming you.

In peace and gratitude,

*Liza*



*Ultimately, the invitation (and the challenge!) is to engage every moment and every element of life as part of our spiritual practice.*

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## The Practice of Being

By Liza J. Rankow, PhD

*Silence is the place from which speech is empowered...*

*Stillness is the place from which action is nourished...*

As we navigate the long nights of winter, and approach the turning of the year, I have been feeling the strong pull inward toward stillness and reflection. The cycle of the seasons mirrors the cycling of life: endings and beginnings, transitions and release making way for new growth and possibilities.

Taking time on a regular basis to enter the silence, to get off the treadmill of nonstop activity and consumerism, and commune with the Holy, is essential practice. It is a transformative act of radical resistance in a society that has made a god of materialism and lost the real meaning of life. We must allow ourselves to go deeper. To drop beneath the level of the “gerbil-wheel-mind” – the constant spinning and chatter that can become our mental habitat. Our wonderful minds are addicted to stimulation and activity, multitasking thought in a way that can become counterproductive.

Sometimes we just need to rest our minds. The breath can help here. Simply following the breath will naturally help us to slow down and allow the silence to grow in us, an oasis of stillness at our center. In this way we can be continually renewed. Whether we’re engaged in social justice work, community service, raising a family, or “just” dealing with the complexities of contemporary life, the key is to remain deeply mindful of our connection to our spiritual Source.

To really make it plain: take the analogy of a laptop computer (or other portable electronic device). We have to regularly plug it into a power source to recharge. If it gets too far from the source for too long it becomes useless. The potential is there, but it can’t be actualized. Merely being in proximity to a power source isn’t enough. It’s got to be plugged in. Now, when it’s fully charged it can do work in

places that would otherwise be inaccessible. But even still, it’s got to come back and regularly plug into source in order to fulfill all that it is capable of doing.

And it’s the same with us. Amazing capabilities. Awesome potential. But we’ve got to connect with Source. Regularly.

Rabbi Arthur Waskow of the Shalom Center in New York City talks about this balance as a spiral of Doing and Being in which the next stage of Doing would always be higher and deeper because a period of Being has preceded it; and in which we could bring a fuller, more whole self into Being because we had Done more of significance in the meantime. So both Doing and Being become more holy, more sacred, more *fruitful* because we have integrated them with intention as part of spiritual practice.

Ultimately, the invitation (and the challenge!) is to engage every moment and every element of life as part of our spiritual practice. And remember, it’s called “practice” for a reason. We’re not expected to be perfect. Musicians, athletes, doctors don’t just jump in on the night of the concert or the big game or the heart transplant. Practice is essential and ongoing. We fall down, we get up. We forget, and then we remember. With practice our sacred intention becomes our habitation. We forget less and less often, and “wake up” more quickly.

In the listening stillness we can Ask, Seek, Knock, inviting the revelation of our soul’s purpose. Rev. Michael Beckwith advises: “Keep your attention on that which is seeking to emerge through you and pray *from* that place.” And I would add, *live* from that place of emergence: *Who is Life (God, Creator, Spirit) calling you to be?* In *being* that person, the “doing” will become clear. Each of us must hone the gift we came to bring. To live the true meaning of our incarnation means to answer the call, to give our gifts – and our *sel/ves* – fully, for the blessing of all Lifekind. 🌍

## A Spirituality for Turbulent Times

By Sharif Abdullah, JD

About 2,500 years ago, before there was a Buddha, there was young Prince Gautama. His father gave him a life of sublime comfort and ease. All the pleasures of the kingdom were showered on the young prince.

Gautama's father went even further. He removed all traces of pain and suffering – including old age, illness, and death – from his son's sight. Unfortunately for the father, and to the great fortune of the world, he was unsuccessful: Prince Gautama came to experience all forms of suffering and transcended them, becoming the Buddha, the Enlightened One.

But what if his father had succeeded? What if he had constructed a world for his son where there simply was no suffering? What if young Gautama had never left the palace where only good things happened and where he was shielded from all negativity? And what if that shield had been extended to cover a whole society? What would that society have looked like?

It would probably have looked a lot like the regional shopping mall.

Those people, young and old, who are rejecting the “mall” life are seeking the same thing that Gautama sought: a life where deep joy and deep pain can be reconciled within the human heart; a place where life takes on a larger significance. In a multireligious ceremony I attended at Prague Castle, the Roman Catholic Archbishop of Prague said, “It is the purpose of religion to make us feel pain, to connect us with the suffering of the world.” Unless you can feel both joy and pain, your heart is undeveloped.

Our children want meaning and connection. What they get is the mall, a place where all conditions are rigidly controlled for maximum comfort. It is always 70 degrees, rain and snow are unknown, and never is heard a discouraging word (or if it is, wired and

uniformed security guards will quickly silence it). This world from which struggle and difficulty have been banished supports our lies and denials, removes us from personal responsibility (and therefore from personal power), and plunges us into a passivity that makes our hearts grow weak from disuse. In this world, we no longer know how to grieve, because grief has been rendered superfluous.

The opposite of the mall also exists. It's called Camden, New Jersey – the city where I grew up. The suffering that is denied in the mall simply piles up in Camden, and all the other waste-heaps of human misery found in urban areas around the world. Constant suffering without meaning, constant pain without context, are as inhuman and debilitating as no suffering at all.

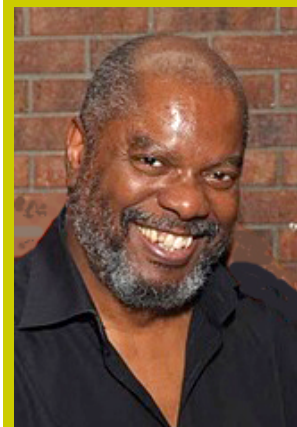
I hope and pray and work for a world that will be neither Camden nor the mall. I envision a world where our children have hearts that have been opened by experiences both of suffering and joy – experiences through which they have been guided by loving peers, adults, and elders.

Like joy and peace, tears, pain, and suffering are parts of the ensouling process. Without them, we inwardly wither and die.

Someone said that our “calling” is the place where our deepest joy intersects with the deepest needs of the Earth. I add a further definition: our calling is the place where our inner joy and our inner terror meet. Our calling is our place of both joy and sacrifice. What risk are the Earth and her families asking of us? I love speaking to groups, but I also experience a moment of terror every time I do so. Where is *your* terror? There lies the direction of your compassion.

The Chinese student who placed himself in front of the line of tanks trying to enter

(continued on p.4) → →



**Dr. Sharif Abdullah** is an author, consultant, and catalyst for inclusive social, cultural, and spiritual transformation. He is the founder and president of Commonway Institute and the originator of the Commons Café and the Common Society Movement. Sharif has criss-crossed the planet, taking his inclusivity work to over 30 different countries and close to 100 distinct cultures.

## Turbulent Times, continued

Tiananmen Square was fulfilling a calling. Defying a column of tanks with nothing but your body and a shopping bag is a deep response to the call to compassionate action. This man's actions were powerful precisely because they were nonviolent and nonthreatening. He did not deny the power of the tank commander to run him down; his action expressed the fact that power over his life was simply not as important to him as freedom from oppression.

The sense of calling led a handful of Black students in Greensboro, North Carolina, to sit down at a Woolworth's lunch counter in 1960 to order a Coke, defying the immoral system of American apartheid. A calling led Rosa Parks to defy that same apartheid in her own small but profound way – by simply sitting down in a bus. The calling led Mohandas Gandhi, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela, Václav Havel, and Aung San Suu Kyi to prison for the crime of believing that their nations could be more just than they were.

Being an activist for an inclusive society is a spiritual discipline. We practice a different kind of spirituality: the spirituality of turbulent times. Working to alleviate unnecessary suffering is the way we practice our faith. We try not to act from anger or fear. We act because, in this life we have been given, we believe we can help make things better.

Acting out of our compassion to lessen suffering and improve the lives of others is the way we celebrate the Spirit. Knowing that each of our acts, however small, builds the vitality of the Web of Life brings us joy, satisfaction, and power.

In the Spirit-driven model, it doesn't matter whether a person is "successful" in changing the condition. While practical goals are important, the spiritual goal is to awaken the compassion that lies at the root of all change. "Success" doesn't mean I've saved an endangered species or cleaned up a toxic waste dump or fed hungry children. Success means awakening in myself a Spirit that can help make a better life for others. Success means I have acted in the world as though I were a part of it, not apart from it. Success means becoming conscious of and faithful to my values and to my soul.

Creating a society that works for all is a sacred act. Every spiritual, religious, and wisdom tradition leads us to the same conclusion: working for others is the highest form of spirituality. Our true values lie beyond empty posturing, political sloganeering, and campaign rhetoric. We are stronger than our fears and better than our limitations.

Sometimes being Spirit-driven means acting in the face of overwhelming odds. Confronted by the challenge, we cannot refrain from action. It is precisely our willingness to tackle the impossible that makes radical change possible. 🌍



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This article is extracted from Sharif Abdullah's book *Creating a World that Works for All* (1999). His other books include: *The Power of One: Authentic Leadership for Turbulent Times* (1991), and *Seven Seeds for a New Society* (2009).

To learn more about Sharif and his work, please visit: [www.commonway.org](http://www.commonway.org)

Beginning in January 2011, Sharif will begin a process of inquiry, research, practice, and training for a cadre of people who want to become Inclusive Activists. For more information, write to: [mail@commonway.org](mailto:mail@commonway.org)

## Sharing our Gifts

At OneLife we are committed to sharing our blessings not only through the services we provide, but also through donating a portion of our earned income to other nonprofit organizations whose work we believe in, as a gesture of affirmation, encouragement, and solidarity.

Our 2010 tithe recipients include: Restorative Justice for Oakland Youth (RJOY), East Bay Meditation Center, Women Organized to Respond to Life-Threatening Disease (WORLD), United Roots (formerly known as the Oakland Green Youth Arts and Media Center), and YES!/ The Center for Transformative Change. Please visit the Support page on our website to learn more about these organizations and past tithe recipients, and their outstanding work.

In this season of giving, we hope you will remember OneLife Institute in your end of the year charitable contributions. We rely on your support – through gifts of time, talent, prayers, participation, and financial resources. Because we are a

small organization every contribution, of any size, makes a difference, and allows us to sustain and expand our capacity to serve those most in need. Through our healing retreats, counseling and prayer support, classes, inspirational arts events, newsletter, website, and other resources we help to lift-up our community and our world.

OneLife Institute is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization and your donations are tax deductible to the full extent allowed by law. Gifts can be mailed to us at 6114 LaSalle Ave #759, Oakland, CA 94611 or made securely online through JustGive, using the link on our website. Automatic tithing (in any amount) can also be set up via JustGive. Or if you'd like to discuss in-kind donation of goods or services, we'd love to hear from you.

We extend our humble and heartfelt appreciation for your generosity. May the blessings that you share return to you magnified and multiplied. Namasté. 🌍

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## Spirit, Sound & Silence Retreat ~ Jan. 29, 2011

**Join us for a day of healing, renewal, and inspiration...**

- Replenish your soul in the gentle power of intentional silence
- Open to inner wisdom through a guided visioning process
- Walk the meditation labyrinth
- Savor the healing properties of sound and music
- Share in sacred community

**Saturday, Jan. 29th, 10:00AM - 4:00PM** (9:30AM arrival & registration)

**With featured musician:** Destiny Muhammad, "Harpist from the Hood"

**Retreat location:** Holy Redeemer Center, 8945 Golf Links Rd., Oakland, CA 94605 ~ This is a wheelchair accessible site.

**Tuition:** Sliding scale \$35- 100 (scholarships available ~ no one ever turned away for lack of funds) *RSVP requested for planning purposes.*



**Upcoming Retreats:**  
**Save the Dates!**

April 30, 2011

August 6, 2011

October 29, 2011



**OneLife Institute** is a nonprofit interfaith organization providing resources for the integration of spirituality and social action. Through classes, retreats, publications, events, counseling and consultation services, we seek to support and empower individuals and groups in personal healing and the creation of a just, compassionate, and sustainable world.

6114 LaSalle Ave. #759  
Oakland, CA 94611

Phone: 510-595-5598

Visit us on the web at:  
[www.onelifeinstitute.org](http://www.onelifeinstitute.org)

*“When it’s hard to love, love harder.”*

*~ Van Jones*

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*Spirituality & Social  
Transformation*