

*Shine:*  
*Weaving the Contemporary Web*

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*Can Love acknowledge the presence of Fear, it's accomplice Power and sidekick Greed, speak of Truth with them in hopes of relieving their grip, without adopting Power as a means to the end? Staking a claim to 'Yes' and trying to illustrate how. Will you join me?*

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## **What if...?**

What if you found yourself in a camp, such as a concentration camp or one for refugees? What if the camp were large enough that you could not always see the fences? What if it were so large it needed no fence at all? If you had one loaf of bread and your neighbor had none, would you share your loaf with them?

What if the guards gave you two loaves, would you sell one for two buttons off of your neighbor's shirt? If the guards were pleased with you and offered you a uniform, would you wear it? Would you enforce and follow the rules in hopes your children could wear the uniform too?

It is not a question of choosing sides  
because,  
despite the uniforms,  
we are all, pilgrims and refugees,  
here together.

It is only a question of choosing.

## Introduction

Tiny straight lines and tiny curved lines. These are the basic building blocks of one form of communication. If the writer arranges the arcs and lines in certain arrangements, they take shape as objects known as letters. If placed in a certain sequence the letters become symbols known as words. These words can be arranged in sequences to convey the description of a complex object or the notion of an idea. But the words are not the object or the idea. They are merely a representation.

For example, if I type m-o-o-n, and if you the reader are familiar with the English language, this assortment of lines holds a shared meaning for us. However, the arrangement is not the actuality of the object which circles over our heads. 'Moon' is merely a representation of something we have both experienced and likely in somewhat different ways.

As another example, sacred texts point towards the existence of the entity English-speaking religious persons, including Christians, know by the word G-o-d. The text itself, however, is not 'God.' This entity transcends all manner of written symbolism including religion itself. As the Buddhist expression states, "The finger points to the moon, but it is not the moon."

Because 'God's' presence is cited throughout the following text, an early word of introduction may be welcome here. God is not, in my limited experience, an entity separate and apart from you and I or the universe itself. 'God' infuses *and* surrounds everything; 'God' has set the universe in motion and

simultaneously holds it all together. 'God' is both a 'who' and a 'what.' I often refer to 'it,' for lack of a more appropriate pronoun, by different names including Source, Spirit, Life, and Love. These names partially represent my understanding of G-o-d. You may know the Ineffable One by other names and experiences as well. Even so, 'God' is unchanged. However, it occurs to me, after the experience of 'God', we are forever changed.

To know any reality with any intimate understanding, one must experience it directly. You must see the moon, smell or touch the rose, imbibe God's presence to know them. Words can hardly convey the actuality. To share in some representations of actuality, we must share some agreements about communication such as the language, the letters, and other mutual understandings (definitions) infused in them.

Overall, this book is about our shared agreements and the realities they construct. Many words, in modern history, have been spoken and written to construct an altered reality fundamentally disconnected from our essence as 'God' created it to be. Much of what we believe about human beings, those with whom we share the planet, and the web of Life as a whole, does not conform to God's Creation. In the pages that follow, I would like to offer to you the reader a close representation of a reality that is ever-present yet rarely imagined and hardly seen by some humans.

Because what is written is only a representation, without your participation, it is inherently incomplete and imprecise. I pledge to convey what I see with great

integrity. Will you offer the tolerance and patience to read with an open mind and allow for the possibility that you may see, touch, be touched by this representation of our shared reality as well?

I write because people who see the world as we do must. We write, speak, sing, dance, paint, build, and embody it. I for one do not believe in a separate realm of eternal torment known by the letters, h-e-l-l. But if such a place exists, a special corner is reserved for people who see the world as we see it and then remain silent.

Be forewarned: I do not privilege the comfort of my readers over and above the hardships of my brothers and sisters in this world. You will notice I try to eschew subtlety, nuance, and ambiguity, and thus the appearance of neutrality or fairness, and opt for candor instead. At times, I utilize satire to hold a mirror to the dis-ease of our current adulterated reality.

Due to the corruption of money and numerous false ideological myths, many human beings, particularly many so-called “white” Americans, disbelieve another reality is even possible much less readily available. We harmfully neglect ourselves, our families, and our neighbors by the unwillingness to see and teach more of the breadth and interdependence of our mutual relationships. Nothing described below is originally conceived by the narrator. Many good teachers have come before me. The world we see is ancient and has been experienced and described for millennia. It is still actively ongoing around us all of the time. It is easily observable if one knows what to look for.

Robin Wall Kimmerer writes, “In indigenous ways of knowing, we say that a thing cannot be understood until it is known by all four aspects of our being: mind, body, emotion, and spirit.” (Kimmerer, vii) There are many methods to convey what one sees. Written words, mathematical expressions, sounds, dance, and artistic images are among them. I could make an attempt to describe the altered reality, as well as our essence, empirically as this is the preferred method for anything considered factual in modern times. On another hand, I could opt to write a work of fiction or a collection of poems to reveal a deeper, non-empirical truth. I could utilize humor to entertain you while also being informative.

None of these methods, in my opinion, would be suitable to the task at hand nor genuine for the narrator’s personality. Rather, I would like to share with you the essays and poems that I have caught floating in the universe over the last two years and weave in descriptions of my experiences which led me to understand them as I do. If a kernel of truth resonates with your spirit, you may be inspired to pursue this truth further with curiosity and hope.

I also will not plead my case nor make an argument that my point of view is correct. Doing so instantly puts you in the position of choosing between a binary of agree or disagree. Then I must strive to present a convincing, irrefutable argument; and thus eliminate your participation. At which point, I can only ask for your acquiescence. Such a non-cooperative format is contrary to the nature of this book, its writer, and the world I hope to describe.

It is important to know to whom the writer is addressing these ideas and from where he comes. He writes to people somewhat similar to himself: light-skinned, born in the United States, English-speaking, raised in a middle class home. I have grown to become an ordained Christian pastor and a mental health therapist. I have been called as a healer, a shaman, a writer, teacher, and a farmer. You the reader are, like me, above the median in income, comfort, and security. You may feel pressured and stressed but on paper, and to your friends, neighbors, and co-workers, you appear successful by American measures. And yet, there may still be within you a gnawing anxiety, dissatisfaction, or something troubling you. Life feels precarious like you have to hurry to keep up or else! On the other hand, maybe life feels empty like you're always asking, "Is this all there is?!" You may see the troubles of the world, but since you believe you are a single, separate, discrete individual, you feel overwhelmed and powerless.

This book is not written for persons significantly different from us. I strongly feel it is not our place to tell others how to fix 'their' troubles. We have troubles enough of our own. I for one do not know the limited options 'they' have to choose from. Therefore, I cannot judge the choices 'they' have made nor suggest how 'they' should solve their troubles now. All we can do is address our troubles and responsibilities. At which time we will see, as Luis Alberto Urrea once said, "There is no 'they,' only us."

Many words have been written about the hardships of the less fortunate. For centuries, people

have speculated on the causes of those hardships. As a privileged class, we tend to ignore how the privileges of the few may have contributed to the sufferings of many. Too often we are afraid of the possibility that we might be culpable in the crimes of the past and present. It is also likely that we feel entitled to our comfort and therefore others must be entitled to their suffering. Few modern writers seem able or willing to offer a road map towards the liberation for everyone. Either persons lack an adequate imagination or such bold honesty would seem so far-fetched, so fantastic as to appear unrealistic, even insane.

As I eclipse the crest of middle age, I have lost the need for popularity and the approval of others. I have lost any sense of fear or shame that some may read my observations as unrealistic or insane. People are in different places of understanding along the Way. My learning, hopefully, is also incomplete. I would like to believe there is still much more for me to learn and see. This brings me great fascination, curiosity, and hope for Life.

Some readers might feel quite angry or dismissive about what follows. This disturbance is a good sign that their consciences are still awake, but they prefer not to listen. The judgment and harsh critiques of others will reveal their preference that you not listen. Others will be appreciative and will add to this work. Some will simply breathe a sigh of relief as they place the book on a shelf.

Since the unrest in the United States during the 1960's, we as citizens find ourselves in a moral vacuum and lack a unifying identity, values, and principles to

hold our democracy together. We are struggling to choose between the forces of creative destruction and stable creativity; between Power and Flow. What follows, I hope to be one contribution to a road map towards liberation and healing for all of Life. Other cartographers, including you, will need to make your own contributions to its development and evolution. Please receive the assemblage of lines and curves, of letters and words, of observations and ideas with an open heart. Please build upon the map with your own experiences, imagination, courage, compassion, and wisdom. I know you have it in you. Now, let's go.

## Together We Shall See

My talkative friend: “Yo, Let’s meet up!”

The quiet one: “*Cool! Where?*”

“How about 2017; in the month of April; on the 26<sup>th</sup> day and the eighth hour?”

*“Yo, you gotta be more precise than that.”*

“Yeah, you’re right. How about Earth, in the states known as ‘United’; in the one called North Carolina; in the city of Durham; on the street of Broad; at the building known as 1200; in the suite 103? That should be precise enough. If you find yourself there, and I do too, we’ll be near enough to see each other and choose what to do. Let’s make it memorable!”

*“Sounds good. If I don’t see you, then what?”*

“You’ll know I’m somewhere, or at least, strongly believe, but for the curve of the earth, it is true, I’ll be hard to see. If I am close enough, and you elevate high enough, you could see me. And but for the curve of the universe, and your ability to elevate still higher, you could also see if I were only a little fast/early or a little late/slow.

“Sometimes people ask me if the future is predetermined. The answer is ‘No.’ Too many choices remain. But if you elevate high enough, you could see all the choices that will be made. And, if you are open enough, just as you know where you have been, where you stand, and that more exists than you can physically see, you could also know what is beyond the curve of this planet and universe: There is nothing unknown, only unseen.

“For example, it is easy to see/know that the natural order of the universe, in spite of present choices on this planet at this time, is not one of fear, anger, and creative destruction. It is, has been, and will always remain one of shalom, love, light, curves, waves, and beauty; that is, stable creativity.

“Life will survive our destructiveness; with or without us. Fortunately, the arc of time is long, God is patient, and even we are loved. All those who concern themselves with sin and harmony could see, if we could elevate high enough, or open courageously enough, that what is true could also be real but for the choices we have made. Turn your gentle gaze and I will meet you there. Together, we shall see.”

## **The Rest of Winter**

In the beginning, the Earth was inhabited by anaerobic bacteria who exhaled oxygen into the atmosphere. They lived well and prospered. So well, in fact, the atmosphere became replete with oxygen and inhospitable to the inhabitants. They breathed no more. Fortunately, some organisms had mutated and found the oxygenated environment hospitable enough. They too prospered and evolved.

Ultimately, as it might turn out, these aerobic organisms filled the atmosphere with carbon dioxide and, like their bacterial forebears, could no longer breathe. Before they died, however, they developed fire-breathing, automated machines which found the new atmosphere not inhospitable. However, lacking imagination, adaptation, and the power to evolve, they too became extinct. The earth, and its atmosphere, finally rested.

In between, the aerobic organisms evolved into nomads, foragers, and hunter-gatherers. Like migratory birds, deer, and bison, they roamed from equator to pole and back in seasonal cycles. As they roamed, they noticed other beings upon the Land. Fire cleared brush to make room for seeds to sprout. Soil made a home for the Rooted Ones to stand. Wind carried the Winged Ones and Seeds to new perches. Water streamed downhill to gather itself for the Ones with Fins. Unlike the Foragers and Water, Fire was free to travel, with Wind's cooperation and within Water's limitations, in any direction it wished. It was not inhibited by darkness nor did it know the hardships of cold. Foragers realized,

if they could ensnare Fire, they would be very powerful.

One winter, some children were tracking Fire through a forest and noticed a smoldering ember weakly breathing. They found grass and fed the ember. Fire was revived and captured on a stick. Greatly admired, they shared an evening meal with their family in a warm and well-lit cave. Fire allowed them to be stationary for the rest of the winter. They discovered that animals, when cooked over fire, were delicious. As spring unfurled, the stationary Foragers discovered Seeds intentionally planted in Soil would yield abundant fruit in a small space. Fire became a great ally to clear the Land for fields large enough to yield fruit aplenty. Children did not die so early and Elders lived longer than in the past. Growing food rather than foraging required more effort but the predictability and opportunity to settle down pleased the Foragers.

One day the Growers, as foragers became known, noticed a child, named Warrior, had become a skilled hunter. Warrior was gifted with great eyesight, agility, and keen strength. If stationed at the margins of the fields, Warrior could defend them against intruders; those who approached on two legs and four. When they were foragers, the Growers felt Soil produced enough for everyone to share but now, ironically, in the concentrated abundance of agriculture, they feared scarcity. They came to believe they were the cause of the Land's fertility and their hard work deserved some insurance. With Fire in hand, Warrior withheld from intruders as much Fruit as Soil yielded thus doubling

production (a concept the Elders never imagined). And so, the violence of military power began.

Soon, however, Warrior became hungry and felt a fair share of food was not being given for his hard effort. With Fire in hand and hunger in his belly, little could stop Warrior from taking what was desired. One day, Grower noticed Warrior mesmerized by something shiny unearthed from the field. Shrewdly, Grower suggested Warrior keep the shiny metal named Silver. As Grower also coveted Silver, after a few days, a trade was suggested. From now on, in exchange for watching over the fields, Grower offered, Warrior could have half of the unearthed Silver. In return, Warrior would give one chunk of Silver back to Grower for a day's supply of food. Because of the strength to take anything desired, Warrior thought the bargain trivial and acquiesced. Grower now knew the produce could be protected from intruders within without physical force. Thus, ownership and the withholding of resources for a price, a more sophisticated form of violence known as commerce, was created.

Eventually, less Silver was being unearthed and Warrior again found his appetite unsatisfied. Warrior became restless. Noting the agitation, another child helped to calm Warrior but with neither food nor Silver. This child, known as Priest, helped Warrior to learn acceptance, discipline, frugality, and patience. Priest wondrously eased agitation in spite of deprivation in the midst of abundance. Warrior began to accept Grower's surplus of food and possession of more than half of the Silver as the natural order; from the fruit of ownership came the spoils of peace as it were. Grower

was exceedingly grateful for Priest's intervention and offered ten percent, a tithe of Silver, in order that Priest might also purchase food. Priest remembered a twin, Prophet, had earlier been killed as an intruder for being disruptive. With humility, Priest accepted the tithe and began to pay for what once had been given freely.

The Grower Peoples had still more children who did not die so early and Elders who lived longer than in seasons past. Due to their apparent success, the Grower People felt more and more entitled (a concept the Elders never imagined) to take more Land. Fire was used to destructively create larger fields and many creatures; bipeds, quadrupeds, and the Rooted Ones; were displaced. Certain Growers felt entitled to take, not only Land, but also, for sex, assault, abuse and labor, the bodies of children, women, and persons of varying complexions. The violence of taking and withholding became an accepted cultural phenomenon in both fields and homes. Silver was often used to soften the blows.

One, named Governor, witnessed the violence and shrewdly asked to maintain order through negotiations with intruders from outside as well as those colonized within. In addition, Governor, with a leer, offered to enforce the agreements; with Fire and Warrior's conscripted aid, if necessary. In exchange, Governor asked for a tremendous share of Silver. Sensing Governor's scheme could make them even more powerful, some Growers, who now distinguished themselves as Owners, acquiesced. Some of the peoples found the system rewarding and good; to change would

be unimaginable. This is, after all, “the greatest economic system ever!,” they would tell themselves.

Others were displeased by the taking, withholding, and enforcement. The world was no longer as it was meant to be.

Withholding the Earth’s produce for a price, then a profit, became institutionalized, and capitalism, ownership, and the spoils of wealth, war, and peace were unequally divided between owners, warriors, governors, and priests. The natural order for the provision of the Land to be universally shared among all of God’s Creation, whose origin is held in common, came to seem utopian and ridiculous to Owner, Governor, Warrior, and, most sadly of all, to Priest.

Fire was enslaved and held captive in electricity, batteries, bullets, and combustible engines. It was fed finite fossil fuels. Fire burned to light the darkness indoors; and out. Fire burned to warm people in winter; and burned to cool them in summer. It burned to cook food; and burned to keep it cold. Fire burned to transport everything in all directions near and far. Even Water could be pushed uphill. Worst of all, Fire was sparked in bullets large and small to destroy the Land and the creatures upon it. Such destruction seemed always at hand; sometimes done in the name of peace, preemptive protection, prosperity, and freedom. As Fire burned and Silver traded hands, multitudes suffered and died. Many among the Grower Peoples, now Elders themselves, noticed the troubles and tried to call people’s attention.

Stillness was no longer.

One wondered, who would listen.

## **You Are One Cell Within: The Vast Body of God**

Near the beginning, the primitive Brain was concerned with one simple question: “In the next moment, am I living or dying?” Because Life is compelling, good adjustments were made according to the answers.

Brain developed further, and began to ask a second question, “In the next moment, am I to be included or excluded?” Brain realized inclusion improved the chances of living and exclusion the chances of dying. Because Love is compelling, good adjustments were made according to the answers.

Brain developed further, and a third fundamental question arose, “In the next moment, am I to be free or constrained?” Brain realized freedom allowed expression and therefore identity, and therefore beauty, to develop. Human beings’ attempts to square these three fundamental questions have generated considerable challenges ever since.

Brain developed further still and began to experience sensations to detect the subtleties of living/dying, inclusion/exclusion, & freedom/constraint. These sensations are now known as emotions. The first two were likely Delight and Disgust. Over time, Delight and Disgust diversified into more nuanced sensations including desire / fear, serenity / anxiety, relief / anger, satisfaction / regret, pride / shame, contentment / guilt, & bliss / remorse. They attune to subtlety so Brain can use finer strokes to address the three fundamental questions.

Thoughts began to emerge to interpret the emotions experienced by Brain. These first thoughts were rudimentary and involuntary. Such thoughts still occur today. Some we acknowledge. Others we do not. It was likely during this stage when Brain’s fears began to come to odds with God’s hopes. Brain’s involuntary thoughts became more complex and persuasive. We became bold enough to believe Life and

Love could be controlled by our actions. At times, when emotions are felt too intensely, like a remnant or a fossil, Body still obeys Brain as if there were no intermediary.

Brain continued to develop and began to voluntarily discern new ways to respond to the three questions. Discernment would lead to decisions; and decisions to conscious behaviors. At all times, our behaviors are catalysts for interactions between the bodies we occupy, the living beings nearest to us and the environment around us.

Thus, a feedback loop completes itself. Behavior, driven by the original questions, creates an interaction with our own body, other living beings, and our shared environment, which then informs new responses to answers of the fundamental questions: “Does this bring life or death; love or rejection; freedom or constraint?” Round and round, we go. We literally feel the answers first, then our minds interpret the feelings, then we discern, decide, act, pause, then respond again. This repeats moment by moment *ad infinitum*. We are a series of interactions constantly changing, in big ways and small, to maintain a mutable form of homeostasis with Life and Love. Notice this. Then notice what happens next.

Prior to the first question, there existed One who transcends notions of time and space and pronouns. This One is known by many names including Life, Love, God, the Divine, Spirit, the Ineffable One. This all-encompassing Source surrounds us and binds us together in a universal point of origin. This One is the energy which set the universe into motion and simultaneously holds it all together. On planet Earth, the Divine seems to have one purpose: creative stability composed of light, sound, shape, and texture to generate more and more diverse, interconnected, mutually interdependent forms of Life and Beauty; miniature representations of the One who Is. We are, in our essence, a fractal of the Divine Spirit. We are living in a work of art

and seemingly trying to destroy our host before Life and Love can achieve God's vision for this Place. Why do we do so? Because, in ways large and small, we too often act to avoid the conditions of which we are most afraid, sometimes with withdrawal even unto neglect, and at other times with enforced conformity even unto violence, rather than to care for Life, which we love the most, with gentleness, reciprocity, courage, and trust.

Before that first question was asked, Brain knew it was One with the Infinite. Someday it will notice, it still is.

## Going Off The Grid

In the eighteenth century, scientists proposed that matter was neither created nor destroyed. It can be altered for good or ill, but not destroyed. In the twentieth century, physicists described matter as concentrations of energy of differing densities. By way of analogy, there is no material difference between ice and steam except the energy which holds the molecules in proximity to one another. Excluding solar, and the wind it generates, no new energy or material is being imported to our planet. Other than the occasional Mars rover or Voyager satellite, no material is leaving our planet. Gravity holds everything, including the atmosphere, in snug proximity to the surface of the planet. We live in a closed system.

In the year Columbus set sail, 350,000,000 human bodies were alive on the planet. When my body joined the ranks in 1970, that number had multiplied ten times to 3,500,000,000 people. Today, at the age of 46, I amount to half of who I used to be: an infinitesimal one of 7,000,000,000. Where did the material which comprises us come from? Mostly from the organic matter of extinguished plants and animals; decomposed in the soil; and sprouted into corn, soybeans, wheat and rice then fed to chickens, cows, pigs, and people.

What made such industrial-sized conversions of sun to plants to people possible? Extraordinary energy converted from oil, coal and natural gas. Fuel was burned to pump water to irrigate fields. It was burned to move equipment in harvest. It was burned to transport food to far-flung human consumers and to distribute water through municipal systems. It was burned to store food in refrigerators until still more would be burned to cook the food before it was brought into our bellies. We are, in our material essence, the solar energy sent to us and the fossil fuel we have mined. If

one considers the growth in numbers of human bodies, you might perceive the most successful, strongest, fittest species ever created. Or, you might recognize something like a cancer upon its host.

Lacking wakeful attention, such abrupt growth from 350 million to 7000 million bodies will be followed by a century-long, acute, painful decline. The planet's immune system will attempt to preserve itself and eradicate a cancer upon its surface. It will do so, it seems, by eroding the relationships among the cells of cancer. In other words, the cancer's destructive power will be turned against itself. If such self-destructive power reaches a tipping point, all of the cells will eventually be eradicated. Some cells, of the now 7 billion strong, will assault, abuse, and neglect other cells, some within their own homes, and limit the likelihood to raise healthy future cells. Some cells, such as those in Flint, Michigan will choose to poison the water system. Some cells, like those in Durham, Charlotte, Tulsa, Chicago, Cleveland, Ferguson, Charleston, and Baltimore, will justify the culling of small numbers of cells one at a time. To achieve larger quantities more efficiently, some cells will coordinate their killing as has been done in Germany, Hiroshima, Nagasaki, Vietnam, Rwanda, Serbia, Iraq, Sudan, and Syria. Some cells will justify the incarceration of many millions of others to remove them from the web of life. Unless a gentle gaze is turned upon the cells to cool down, love, heal, and be compassionate to the host and each other, Life's immune system will eventually eradicate that which threatens it. Energy and matter can be converted for good or for ill. We are what we consume and we are consuming ourselves.

In as much as we prefer hugs to hurting, it is possible that, rather than human beings, the industrial economic system under which we operate is malignant. Today's world economy, based on infinite growth, that is

‘unlimited conversion of matter into money’, from a finite environment, is inevitably self-destructive. In order to reach our species’ fullest expression as a life-giving, creative participant on this planet, we must come off the grid of the present economic system and re-join the web of life. We must slow our material and energy consumption, as well as the violence of taking and withholding this system entails, in order to avoid the tipping point of eradication. Today’s economic measures of mild unemployment, ever-growing gross national products, and increases in new home loans will one day no longer be good news. Life’s good news will be measured in the free exchange of our gifts, the equitable distribution of what is good among ALL of the planet’s inhabitants, and numerous moments of care, creativity, good work, laughter, play and rest.

We make significant choices every day in our homes, at the gas station, at the grocery store, at the hospital, in government buildings, and in our board rooms and offices. We may yet experience a conversion to heal rather than to destruct. Being a product of Creation, our essence and energy is inherently good. In our spiritual essence, we are created in God’s image of benevolence, compassion, care, creativity, and beauty. In God’s sight, who we are is a delight. What is being done to God’s Creation, including us, has been less than delightful for five centuries. We have much to unlearn and much work to do. Please claim your identity as one infinitesimal, uniquely precious, glorious member of the Beloved Community and join the quiet revolution of the heart. Many millions already have. There is room for many more. Do not fear, you are not alone.

## **What Climate Change Deniers Don't Want Us To Know**

If we consider that humans are indeed causing atmospheric change, in order to save the lives of future ancestors, we would need to examine our consumption of energy. Such an examination would have to include our means of travel. That is, we would have to consider the movement of persons, food, and materials including the manufactured goods they become, by airplanes, automobiles, and ships. Such an inquiry would then require an examination of commerce and trade, particularly global trade. We'd then have to consider the financial industry that invests, lends, and profits from our methods of exchange. Hence, we would be forced to confront our relationships with money, and thus power, that is the ability to exert one's will upon another. In confronting our relationships with money and power, we'd have to confront the manufacture and use of weapons used to "protect" some and destroy others. Thus, we'd have to confront our relationships with Life and each other.

To do so would mean some people would lose their perceived right to exert their will upon the planet and the beings that live upon it. Some, for example, believe that to own, possess, take and withhold from others is a hard-earned, God-given right. The discovery that this belief is untrue, many persons hope will remain unknown. I can understand why.

Ultimately, acknowledging 'climate change' would mean to acknowledge an economic system dependent upon over-consumption and violence can not

be maintained forever. This economic system, which converts energy, earth, and knowledge, all gifts available freely from God, into money so that wealth and power can accumulate into fewer and fewer hands, is ultimately destructive. It does not enhance innovation but rather stifles it with one simple question, “Will it make money?” How many ideas die uselessly following such a question as this?

I respect people’s desire to deregulate government. If the so-called free-market were not hostile to the atmosphere, soil, water, and the living beings, including people, which depend upon them, government regulation would not be necessary. We rely on the government to hinder the destruction of the sources of Life because the free-market, private sector has proven itself only marginally concerned, at best, about the well-being of Life. Rather than depend on the government to regulate human behavior, or the so-called free-market to set the rules, we could, as one species among many, voluntarily organize and regulate ourselves around a different set of values.

In the economy of our origins, we consume only what is necessary, own little, and share all that we can. Within such an economy, what is also known as “God’s economy,” we would care for the atmosphere, soil, water, and other species, including ourselves, as if our lives, and theirs, depended upon each other. We would travel shorter distances, do so more slowly, and stay longer. We would harvest minimally and share food, knowledge, medicine, and protection with everyone. We would not live as if life were a straight line with beginning, middle, and end but rather as if we were one

part of a circle or a web. We would not be fearful of our finitude in death because we would recognize we are already at one with Infinity; created to participate in and perpetuate the dance of Life.

We must turn and act, first as individuals, then families, then as communities to consume and share as if we were living in unison with the atmosphere, water, soil, and other living creatures near us. Where we go our leaders will follow. Change begins slowly from within and spreads outward from there.

## The Seven Necessities

Over the last few years I have come to see that human beings need seven experiences each day in order to be well.

1. Breathe fresh, clean air
2. Eat fresh food from the soil of the earth and drink clean water
3. Be loved and protected (by persons, clothing, and homes)
4. Love others (be purposeful, know you are needed and belong here)
5. Be stressed (learn, be challenged, work, achieve, accomplish)
6. Play (express yourself, laugh, cry, explore, improvise)
7. Rest (be still, be quiet, sleep)

Most (1, 2, 7, & 5/6) occur in short, medium, long, and longer cycles. To be well, we must breathe in clean air every few seconds. We also must bring in good food and water every few hours. We must sleep once a day for several hours. Following our work, we must play and rest from our efforts every few days. Abide by these cycles and our bodies will be well.

Two of these (3 & 4) are necessary in cycles less fixed. However, for sound relationships with people and planet, these two are like mathematical constants. As a vibrant, organized communal species, a society, we are tasked with the following activities: to make good food and water available; to protect others from

harm; to heal those who are ill or injured; to clean and restore order; and to communicate, teach, learn, and manage with honest integrity our history, culture, relational norms, and the skills to accomplish our tasks. If we are not performing these broad functions, or supplying those who do, we are wasting energy.

To perform our tasks efficiently is not a measure of cost, speed, or quantity. Rather, a healthy efficiency would measure how little energy, and matter, is needed to accomplish our primary tasks. We consume energy from coal, oil, gas, electricity, and edible, solar calories. The less energy and matter we require in the benevolent performance of our primary tasks, the healthier we all will be. Because our units of measure of efficient performance are misplaced, our mutual health and security is dysfunctional as well. When our attention shifts to caring well for all of Life, rather than an untimely demise of the so-called ‘fittest,’ the peace, vitality, and security which has been freely given to All on this planet will finally be realized.

When I think of the future, I find myself pondering reincarnation. Sometimes I ask myself the question which others have wondered, “If I come back, what would I like to be?” At one time, I thought to return as a sea gull would be nice or a red-tailed hawk. I’ve considered coming back as a porpoise or a manta ray. Most recently, my preference, if given a choice, would be a wild, flowering, fruit-bearing tree.

The seed of a tree is able to synthesize sun, soil, and water into a perennial source of food, beauty, and shelter for others. The roots of the tree intermingle with the roots of others to create a matrix that is stable and

difficult to overturn. A tree patiently experiences the seasons of the year like human's experience the breath of life. A tree sings, communicates, and dances by way of the wind and prefers stillness to war and wasteful consumption. And when they die, as poet Marie Perle has written, they do so into usefulness.

Oddly, from a human perspective, trees seem to know something we do not: how to live well, care for others, and do so with little noise and few inputs. Humans may be the newest, youngest, most complex species on the earth, but I'm not sure that means we are necessarily the most highly-evolved. We have much to (un)learn, much work to do. Fortunately, many good teachers have come before us.

## **In Order to Form a More Perfect Union**

This I believe...

- *Human beings are intrinsically good.*

At birth, we are created as part of the web of Life with gifts for the good of all beings. If attention is paid to nurturing, teaching, and caring well for our young, and each other, this intrinsic beauty and goodness becomes self-evident.

However, as we develop, some lose their way. This is most often due to the effects of neglect or abuse. Whether it is the benign neglect of parents who are too distracted by their work or the willful neglect of parents who are too distracted by their play, to children, and adults, left to fend for themselves, neglect is neglect.

Also, whether abuse, such as shaming, yelling, slamming, or striking, is meant to teach a child to never make that decision again or is the unrestrained expression of an adult's rage or lust, to children, and adults, left to defend themselves, abuse is abuse. Abuse and neglect are both fearfully distressing and therefore harmful; most especially if perpetrated by an ostensible source of love, protection, and comfort.

We, adults and children, are shaped by the environment in which we live and by our responses to it. Fear, shame, anger, violence, and greed are not our natural states of being but we are driven to them by our present environment. At least temporarily, it seems many have lost their way and their intrinsic goodness refuses to shine.

- *Since the beginning of the industrial revolution and capitalism, human beings have made magnificent attempts to separate ourselves from the web of life.*

Humans are the only creatures on the planet who use anything which resembles money as a means to conduct exchanges. In fact, with regards to money, it seems most people hold fast to two social agreements: 1) to accumulate as much as we can and 2) to spend as much as we want; even to borrow what cannot be repaid for decades. Many of the hardships and sufferings of our planet and the beings upon it, including us, stem from humanity's relationship with money. We devote most of our work to the conversion of matter and energy into money regardless of the harm to other beings from the most expansive such as the atmosphere, soil, and water to the smallest who root, walk, fly, dance, and swim.

- *The ties between American democracy, racial and gender-based superiority, and capitalism are so entwined that most of "white" America, Democrat and Republican alike, appear too unwilling, overwhelmed, or unimaginative to disentangle the three.*

The United States of America (*pl.*) were created and united for the protection of private property (all taken from indigenous populations and ironically seen as crucial for liberty from despotism) by legislation and treaties and their enforcement through domestic police and international military power. Racism and sexism

were created and united to exclude power by the division of humanity who were subsequently treated like property. Capitalism was created and united with the first two for the accumulation of wealth (i.e. property) and power into the hands of a select minority of persons through the taking and withholding of property (resources, matter, energy) from others for ransom (i.e. profit).

Along the way, this select minority have, by fits and starts, allowed a share of their contrived superiority, wealth, and liberty to trickle down to integrate a buffer of hope and mythical patriotism that resembles religious idolatry. Here it should be noted a vast majority of white American Protestant churches have ceremoniously wed this three-part, unholy union of democracy, discrimination, and capitalism rather than to turn over of the tables on a den of thieves. This inter-generational, inter-institutional strategy has allowed a despotism of inequality and oppression to become normative and fester for well over two and half centuries.

For all of humanity to achieve its highest potential and rejoin the web of life, human beings must first individually, then collectively, disobey those two social agreements. We must begin to alter our relationship with money in the following ways: 1) strive for lower incomes most especially those who now earn above the median, 2) consume only as much matter and energy as you need rather to spend as much as you want; 3) sell and buy homes priced at or below the median; 4) freely share in useful, caring, protective, healing work; 5) teach our children to live in accord

with stable creativity rather than creative destruction; 6) say 'yes' to all persons who ask to serve; not only the 'best-qualified,' 7) say 'yes' to persons requesting service; not only those who can afford it; and 8) say 'no' to those who still crave profit from abuse and neglect: the taking and withholding from others.

Only then will the capitalist economy begin to revert to the economy of our origins; to God's economy. Only then will the intrinsic goodness within us begin to shine as God intended. Only then can a democracy based on freedom and equality for all follow suit. These ideas are not original in terms of being new. Rather, they are original in terms of being ancient. Nor are they quick or easy. All will come with uncomfortable experiences of both courage and sacrifice. And, all yield Life. Please put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart.

## **“What Will You Do With Your One Wild and Precious Life?” --Mary Oliver**

This essay is more personal, and slightly longer, than most. Recently someone in the community, in a type-written tirade, said some things to me which have had me thinking. The questions raised are meaningful for concerned persons of conscience. Questions such as, “What use are words?;” “What actions should be taken?;” “When and by whom?” and “What are you willing to sacrifice?”

This person expressed their thoughts, and those of many others, this way: “I’m trying to talk sense into you. You have become a brain-washed, thin-skinned, loud-mouth, do-nothing hypocrite! Do something that actually does good rather than what makes you feel good. Preaching behind a keyboard accomplishes absolutely nothing. What are you DOING? Offering your services for free is admirable but you talk about bigger issues. Shut up and do something that makes a difference. You make blanket statements and that’s not fair. Words accomplish nothing.”

In the gospels, Jesus asks the question, “Who are my family?” and states that prophets are never welcome in their hometown. Author Derrick Bell writes, “About the least dire fate for a prophet is that one preaches, and no one listens; that one risks all to speak the truth, and nobody cares.” I never imagined I would so palpably understand what they meant.

As a straight, white, Southern, Christian male, writing to other white Americans about the relationships between money, violence, power, race,

and gender is not a means to win popularity. In White America, loyalty to one's race, gender, and class, being faithful to the divisions, trumps all. Anything to the contrary might make one a brain-washed hypocrite, a traitor to their race. I write candidly, even if doing so generates anger, fear, shame, or disapproval, because when one sees the world as I see it, to remain silent is unconscionable. To write sympathetically prioritizes a reader's comfort over a subject's sufferings. Blanket statements are used because most attention spans are as long as a tweet. To be specific is either too overwhelming in detail or reduces to mere incidents troubles which are widespread, systemic, and normative in our society. Empirical evidence is avoided because statistics are widely distrusted, easily dismissed, and numb the heart even as they attempt to express the magnitude of the troubles we face.

Many of the troubles we face are existential, cultural and spiritual. To change such beliefs, one begins with observations, questions, and ideas often expressed with the non-violence of words. That is, through education, teaching, and yes, preaching. This requires one person willing to listen, learn, and share their discoveries and one willing to do likewise. Lacking either, little changes.

Words, however, are never enough. Eventually words must shape decisions, behaviors, actions, and interactions. A missionary to Haiti, Paul Farmer, reportedly said that the trouble with liberals is they think they can change the world without changing themselves. Two actions I have taken, beyond a mid-thirties career change and the willingness to lose the

approval of loved ones, have been given nicknames of 'the blindfold' and 'the birdhouse.'

After considerable listening and learning, I finally felt prepared to do something. (The order and timing of those three tasks is worth noting.) At first, I began to stand blindfolded with arms open beside a sign that read, "Saving the world one idea at a time. Will you trust me? I trust you. Hugs are free." I had little idea 'why' I was standing but I knew 'what' God had asked. I learned the 'why' through the foolish act of standing in silence blindfolded with arms open.

Now the sign reads, "Demonstrating LOVE>fear. Will you trust me? I trust you. Hugs are free. Blessings to you and all those you love." Fear has become such an animating force that many people now believe only violence can overcome violence. Rather than a source of strength and courage, Love, in their mind, seems trite and impotent. God, a name given to the animating force in my life, vehemently disagrees.

Soon thereafter, I followed God's next request. I began to tell my clients they could compensate me by making anonymous payments into a birdhouse mounted by my office door. (This is not 'free,' as my inquisitor stated, but it was an honest mistake.) No one is turned away because of money. Everyone does their best including me. As it turns out, the birdhouse works well for everyone.

In fact, the birdhouse works *too* well. Maybe this is a big surprise to some, but collectively, my clients choose to pay me *more* than I need. Therefore, I profit unnecessarily. As I have often written about the

economic violence of capitalism and profit-taking, my next action will be a 'tax holiday' at the end of the year.

After my clients have paid all I need to meet my expenses for 2018, for the remainder of the year, I will provide my services for free. I estimate this period will last for 10-13 weeks. By reducing my income and expenses, including the tax on income, each year I hope to make the 'tax holiday' longer. In God's economy, Creation is a gift to all beings. All are here to fulfill their responsibilities to the web of Life, share their gifts freely, and take only what is needed rather than all we desire. Whereas most Americans feel compelled to acquire as much as they can and spend as much as they want, regardless of the consequences to others, I strive to participate in this very ancient, and still operating, economic model known as God's economy or the economy of our origins.

Fourth, in the near future, I hope to situate my home and practice on a farm where children, parents, and teachers gather, learn, and play. In this context, I hope to participate in teaching the seven necessities so all beings can live well with Life and Love, aka 'God.' I appreciate your prayers that this vision, if it be God's wish, may become a reality.

My inquisitor is correct in one thing. White America will not regard me as one who 'makes a difference.' I do not hold political office, nor do I desire one. I have not organized thousands of people into a mass movement. I am not a pastor of a mega-church. I have not built a Fortune 500 corporation. I am not a wealthy, benevolent philanthropist. I have no celebrity cache. In my counseling practice, I hold 1100 sessions

each year with approximately 250 people. If a handful of people read a blog post I write, it's a pleasant surprise. It's hardly a wonder that no one invites me to speak or preach. The only authority I hold over anyone is myself. Yet, while I am on the planet, I hope to do my very best to faithfully live into the reality God has created for each and every one of us even if the sacrifices are more significant than the outcomes.

And, I am not alone. You are seen. Your intrinsic goodness shines forth. Do not be afraid. You are not alone either. We have much to unlearn, much work to do. Please, won't you put your shoulder to the plow and join this quiet revolution of the heart? Many have and there is room for many more.

**The Economy of Our Origins  
or  
God's Economy**

Own: As little as possible

Consume: Just enough

Give: All you can

Ask: Only for what you need

Demand: Nothing (especially if you have a lot already)

## **Why The Blindfold?**

*In the summer of 2016, I began silently standing blindfolded with open arms beside a cardboard sign that reads, “Demonstrating Love > Fear. Will you trust me? I trust you. Hugs are free. Blessings to you and those you love.” I have made this demonstration many times in many settings including in front of a hospital, a courthouse, a jail, a desecrated confederate monument, a gun show, and at two neighborhood sites where citizens were killed by the police. At one demonstration, a hugger asked me, “Why the blindfold?” When standing, I am in a zone that necessitates silence and therefore could not answer. Here is what I would have said if I could have done so.*

“Why the blindfold?” This is a question recently asked of me I could not answer in the moment. I hope you are the person who asked and have come here to find the answer. I was disappointed to not be able to say. When I get in a certain frame of mind, like when I’m wearing the blindfold, speaking more than a phrase draws me away from Center. The answer given below is a description of the blindfold rather than the person who wears it. You’ll have to be your own judge of him. I know him too well.

The first reason is simply about trust. The blindfold says to everyone, “I trust you. You could hurt me, but I know you likely will not.” I believe people are intrinsically good. I think some have lost their way. Most of us are searching for a connection with Love to ground us.

The second reason is to demonstrate Love unconditionally. While wearing the blindfold, I lose the ability to screen people. Your appearance, age, ability, gender, body shape, skin color, and so on matters not. If you are willing to come in for a hug, I am willing to hug you. You will not be judged or excluded.

The third reason is for courage. A thread of the American cultural narrative reads, “People are scary. Be alert always. Avoid ‘them’ if you can. And, if you cannot, hurt them before they hurt you.” A sheriff’s deputy tried to dissuade me once saying, “I can’t let you do this. It’s not safe!” But that is not so true and the best way to prove it is with a blindfold. The blindfold and cardboard sign stand in stark contrast to the violence of money, weapons, and fear.

The fourth and most important reason I do this is not for those who hug. I do it for those who will not. For those who read the sign and balk at the possibility, the act of wearing a blindfold while hugging strangers disrupts the thread of the narrative that says, “People are scary. Do not trust, do not touch, do not care, do not love ‘them.’” Because of my white maleness, and the violence of ancestors who look like me, I have a privilege of safety in the world not shared by all. This is painful and true. If I had different anatomy or skin tone, the degree of danger would greatly increase. The blindfold is one implement to create a world where that is no longer true. Some disruptions are helpful and necessary.

And lastly, the blindfold is worn because until someone does so, the rest of us cannot see that we don’t need the blindfold at all; only the courage to try.

## Why The Birdhouse?

In January, 2016, eighteen months ago, long enough to know results, a birdhouse was placed on the wall beside my office door. It was then I began to tell my clients they would determine their own fee for the counseling services I offered. When clients arrive for the first session, they are also told I do not need to know *how much*, or even *if*, they pay. Payments are to be deposited in the birdhouse. This may, at first, seem absurd.

Before I mounted the birdhouse, deep in my bones, I knew this was no absurdity. I had observed that only humans utilize anything which resembles money to conduct exchanges. All other living beings engage in trade without money. All that is needed, including wisdom, compassion, and courage, to support Life on this planet is freely provided to all by the sun, atmosphere, water, soil, and The Source of Life which infuses all things. Most of Creation is aware of this fact. Somehow, some humans have not yet noticed. Or, have long forgotten.

The economy we have adopted, the so-called free-market economy, on the other hand, stands in stark contradiction to that which is freely given. Humanity's access to food, healing, education, and protection is not limited by the poverty of some; but rather, by the widespread effort to withhold almost everything for a profitable ransom by almost everyone else. And in this context, we are also encouraged to consume as if there were no limits. Many, but not all, of those who live on the margins of society know of their belonging to God's

kingdom; and of their exclusion from God's gifts. Many, but not all, who live far from the margins hold a gentle belief in their open inclusiveness and a firm grip on a sense of earned superiority. Many have lost site of how our cultural and economic norms separate *all persons* from God's gratuity.

It is our economy that encourages the false myth that only the fittest survive. If one looks at the diversity of life and beauty on this planet it is extremely easy to see this belief is not shared by God. Life is not being winnowed to a final victor but is being expanded into a diverse, thriving wholeness. Our economy may encourage us to believe that humans are universally greedy and selfish; aggressively driven and hopelessly lazy, but the truth is we are, more hours than not, none of these and there is a birdhouse on my wall to prove it.

We are, generally speaking, good, trustworthy and responsible. In our essence, we all wish to be well, belong to a family, and express ourselves freely. Into the birdhouse persons give more than enough to meet my expenses. A few individuals surely take advantage of the opportunity with little injury to their conscience or to me. Most, however, care for me as generously as I care for them. I [post on my website](#) how much it costs me to live, how many clients I see, and how much they contribute to offer some guidance and feedback along the way. Rather than to earn six figures, I hope to someday live in an economy that finds such expressions absurd.

## Why the Tax Holiday?

We so often tend to ask the question, “Why?” long before the more natural initial question of “What?” is even proposed. So first you may want to know, “*What* is a tax holiday?” Beginning September 4, my clients will be told, for a period of time, our work together will be given freely. This tax holiday, as I have come to call it, derived its name in the following way.

In the spring of 2018, as I was completing my federal income taxes, I calculated that once again, besides the total cost of operating my business, taxes were, by far and away, my largest expense. That is to say, most of the money I spend goes to the state and federal government led by an illegitimate group of politicians whose values are not in alignment with my own. I tend to believe that they are also not in alignment with the majority of human beings, including most American citizens. Others know not what they do. Today’s political leadership seem driven by a lust for power, wealth, and destruction that is harmful to all people, including themselves, and the planet on which we all depend. Indeed, they demonstrate extreme cruelty towards parents and children born in neighboring countries. They deny the obvious truth, one known as ‘reality,’ in order to craft an alternative reality more suitable to their ends. They are hostile to a free and ethical press upon which our democracy, and a rational citizenry, depend. They threaten dissenters who call attention to matters of life and liberty, justice and equality, for all people. Much like Henry Thoreau, and many other conscientious objectors before and after, I

would like to be as non-cooperative with such persons as is possible. I will render unto Caesar what is Caesar's. All else is freely re-gifted to God's Creation including its children like you and I.

In the short term, I could twiddle my thumbs until November and vote for a newly gerrymandered politician rather than an incumbent, but since, in North Carolina, the legislative majority is pre-determined, I doubt that act would hold much significance. I could, on the other hand, take a more significant stance by speaking in the one language these politicians and their constituents seem to understand: money.

For three years, I have actively worked to lower my expenses to ease the stress and accessibility of health care for my clients. In April, 2018, I made the decision to decrease our expenses further by decreasing my monetary contribution to the government. However, to lower one's income taxes ethically and legally, (archaic as those concepts may seem), one must also lower their income. Therefore, I estimated the amount of income I would need to meet all of my financial obligations. Once that mark was achieved, I decided to refuse more income from my clients. As I like to say, the birdhouse will be closed while my practice continues to operate business as usual. Due to the generosity of my clients in the first three quarters of 2018, I estimate the tax holiday will last through most of the fourth quarter of 2018; hopefully all the way to the New Year.

In the longer term, the tax holiday is an effort to imagine, inspire, and demonstrate the true economy based on the free exchange of materials and energy,

rather than the present economic model where all things can be hoarded and ransomed for profit even unto borrowing decades of debt. It is one step towards a longer campaign to liberate us from this alternative economic reality which dissociates humans from healthy relationships with each other, the planet on which we depend, and the One who created Life and Love in the first place. All that is needed to care for each other is freely given to us and is meant to be freely shared by all.

Such liberation will come when our addiction to money has been healed. Our addiction to money will be healed when it is less necessary. It will be less necessary when we receive what we need and strive to need less, rather than more, each year. To do so, some examples must be set by those courageously willing to demonstrate what is still possible under God's economy; or rather, the economy of our origins. Please, won't you also join us in a quiet revolution of the heart? Many have and there is room for many more.

## **The First Chapter**

One challenge of written communication is embedded in its form. We read from left to right, top to bottom, first page to last. The style imposes a preference for cause and effect, hierarchical, linear, order. Unfortunately, Life and learning do not conform to such an order. Sometimes pieces to a puzzle are given and we have no idea why that piece is even helpful. Sometimes the pieces were made generations before we were born. Sometimes we'd rather reject the pieces altogether like when a parent dies or a lover breaks our hearts. If I were to start at the beginning of my learning, wherever that may be, very quickly we would be sifting through seemingly insignificant pieces long before they came together as anything of interest. Since much of learning occurs in a non-hierarchical, non-linear way, I will jump into the middle and draw in puzzle pieces as needed.

When I began my counseling practice, 'accessibility' was the watchword. I wanted my office to be centrally located on a public transit route. The office needed to be easily accessible for persons who relied on chairs or walkers to move about. My hours of operation needed to be flexible and sufficient for the clients' needs. The fee needed to be affordable. However, as my practice progressed, I realized that even with all of these accommodations, many clients could make it into the waiting room, but could not afford to come into the office.

At the same time, some therapists expressed their consternation that my low fee made the profession

“look un-professional.” This need to look professional while pricing our service out of reach is one way clinicians segregate themselves away from persons with whom they’d rather not interact. They are not alone. Such segregation is considered normal, even encouraged, in America today.

I refer to this way of thinking, as unconscious or accidental as it may be, with the lines w-h-i-t-e, These letters represent a mindset rather than a person, a skin color, or a racial group. It is a way of being in the world that esteems appearance, wealth, and comfort. Frequently throughout these pages you will see the word ‘white’ used to represent this mindset. As I stated in the introduction, this book is addressed to readers who look a lot like the author and still believe as he once did.

I tried to resolve the dilemma of inaccessibility by becoming a Medicaid provider. Clients could pay a nominal co-pay and I would be reimbursed a sufficient amount designated by the state of North Carolina. It became quickly apparent, however, that a staff person would have to be hired to maintain compliance with the regulations. This completely defeated the purpose. The client would pay me \$3, Medicaid would pay me to pay a clerk to manage their regulations, and I would have to swallow the loss. I then became partially aware of what was meant by the term ‘systemic racism.’ The system made it onerous to care for others.

One morning in the fall of 2014, while taking a shower, a solution dropped into my mind. It did so with such clarity and absurdity that laughter spontaneously

burst from my lungs. I said aloud, seemingly to myself, “You’ve got to be kidding!,”

I was to hang a birdhouse inside of my office. In that birdhouse, my clients would deposit their payments. What made this laughably absurd was that I would tell my clients that they could choose their own fee. ‘God’ went so far as to say I would not need to know how much they chose or even if they paid. Yet, I knew in my bones, all was going to be well.

This system works for a few reasons. First, I live modestly and trust my clients unconditionally. Secondly, because ours is a very personal working relationship, our mutual well-being is not anonymous. Thirdly, it works because people are generally responsible, generous, trustworthy, and good.

My first piece of evidence that this third statement is true is you the reader. I ask you, “If given the choice, would you steal from someone who would freely give to you?” And then, “Are you so uniquely different from most human beings as to be an exception to the rule?” My second piece of evidence is this: “Of the people you know well, those with whom you are familiar, how many of them, though they have plenty, would take without giving?” None? A few, maybe? If they do exist, once they realize the truly unconditional nature of this fee structure, their conscience comes face to face with their behavior. Rather than to see themselves in their choices, they quickly stop coming and exclude themselves. Or if they wish to be included, they learn, adapt, and choose to pay.

For those ‘other persons,’ those whom you do not know, and still believe ‘they’ would take something

for nothing, how you feel about them says more about you than them. Because they are unknown, your perception is like a Rorschach test where you project your beliefs onto them.

This is how racism works, in its many shades and forms, including against someone's race, gender, class, faith, place of origin, ability, or orientation, and why self-imposed segregation, isolation, and separation is so harmful to our minds. In his account of the Montgomery bus boycott, Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. writes, "[People] often hate each other because they fear each other; they fear each other because they do not know each other; they do not know each other because they do not communicate; they cannot communicate because they are separated (King, 33). This is one more way this economy has corrupted our spirits: You and those you know are good. Everyone else, by the myth of capitalism, is selfish and dishonest.

As a result of the birdhouse, I have come to see that the economic system we have inherited and adopted has corrupted our perceptions of each other in many ways. For example, we are taught to believe that humans are greedy, lazy, and dishonest. People are not to be trusted. This economy says, "Rational people operate solely out of self-interest."

Only people in a competitive, zero-sum, transactional relationship operate solely out of self-interest. The birdhouse, on the other hand, has taught me that only when something is withheld can it also be stolen. My clients know I am not trying to take from them as much as the free-market (a misnomer if there ever was one) will bear, so they give me all I need.

By seeking a professional appearance and charging a high fee, we deny access, we segregate ourselves, through prices and profit. We deny ourselves the chance to serve, to know, and to care for others well. Indeed, one reason our interpersonal relationships are so challenged is because we hardly remember how to honor a non-transactional, unconditional relationship. We certainly do not emphasize the teaching of good relationship skills to our children nor expect such demonstrations from most adults.

We are all created equally beautiful and good. We all want to be cared for and to belong. However, it is true that there are some who have lost their way; many whose spirits have been forgotten. They do harm people for their own gain or benefit. There are just enough of these persons to almost convince us of the innate sinfulness of humanity. Indeed, many religious persons validate such a widespread and false notion. The transactional, competitive economy we are raised within encourages us to grow into this destructive behavior.

Fortunately, the ones who are lost remain a minority albeit a very visible one. I believe this is so because they are both harmful and an aberration. They stand out from the norm. And, because we must protect ourselves from harm, we notice them more easily and retain a strong memory of their presence.

The capitalist economy has not only distorted our perceptions of people, it has also distorted our relationship with the planet. Indeed, our use of money has created an alternative reality that attempts to separate us entirely from the web of Life. Many people

speak of the environment as if it were in competition with the economy. 'The environment vs. jobs' is a common frame of reference. The truth, however, is that the environment is the economy.

The environment is the network of materials and energy that living beings exchange in order to sustain Life. That is, what we think of as 'the environment' is the economy of our origins. It is God's economy.

Human beings are the only creature on the planet which use money to conduct exchanges. All others freely contribute to the web of life and receive what they need. We all live and we all die. Only in a monetized economy are many doomed to poverty while some are privileged with wealth. We live with the profound contradiction that all people are created equally but only the strongest are meant to survive.

Capitalism is a distorted system of exchange that tries to detach us from the Source of Life so that some can accumulate more than their fair share while others suffer without. This alternative economy we operate within depends on two unspoken social agreements. The first is to accumulate as much as you possibly can. The second is to spend as much as you want. Everything you need to survive can be withheld for a profitable ransom. Indeed, you, or your landlord must borrow decades worth of money in order to secure a home. Medical expenses, education, and personal, private transportation also often require extensive borrowing to secure your needs for healing, learning, and mobility.

One last thing that I learned from the birdhouse. Rather than strive to accumulate as much as you can by

withholding the means of another person's survival for a profitable ransom, we should be striving to earn and spend as close to zero dollars as possible while continuing to care for ourselves and our neighbors well. To escape the current alternative reality of capitalism, those who live above the median in income and assets, must voluntarily begin to reduce our incomes and offer our services for as little as possible rather than take as much as we can get.

Here it is important to stress the word 'voluntarily.' Until a majority of Americans have adopted new relationships with money, people, and planet, a minority of people must begin the process of living within a new paradigm. We must be willing to embody a lifestyle that is counter-cultural to the 'white' way. No progress will be made without sacrifice and no sacrifice will come unless it is voluntarily accepted. Otherwise, government-imposed changes through legislation would be labeled 'oppression.' As the people lead, democratic government, dependent on the people's consent, must follow. Otherwise, it will not be a democracy.

## **The Rock And The Water**

I went for a stroll through the woods one day  
and leaned back upon a tree  
whose shadow fully encompassed me.  
The wind sang from above with  
baritone branches and high soprano leaves;  
the swaying trunk moaned a solemn dirge  
A stream down the hill trickled in harmony.  
Light flickered through  
the trembling limbs and shimmering leaves  
and danced in unison with the rippling stream.  
Listening, I heard:

“In the universe  
exist two influences or energies.  
One is widely known as power.  
Its parallel, to you, is barely known.  
So much so, in English,  
it seems to lack a name its own.  
For now, let’s call it ‘flow.’”

Power corrects,  
‘Flow’ listens.

Power restricts choices.  
‘Flow’ diversifies to find consensus.

Power demands obedience,  
‘Flow’ yields with cooperation.

Power grabs with a closed fist,  
'Flow' pushes or pulls with fingertips  
and always an open hand.

Power is the straight edge and angles,  
'Flow' is all texture and curve.

Power needs one victor and many defeated,  
'Flow' enjoys the players and the game.

Power strives for narrow outcomes,  
'Flow' trusts the fundamental process.

Power is fear personified,  
'Flow' is courage to sit with time.

Power expects a return on investment,  
'Flow' loves unconditionally.

Power desires its self-interests met,  
'Flow' achieves a common good.

Power consumes all it can and then some,  
'Flow' takes in only what it needs.

Power is a knife and a fork,  
'Flow' is a bowl and spoon.

Power orders all towards chaos and entropy,  
'Flow' creates stability without end.”

The shadow circled round.  
Upon my face fell  
the warmth of other suns  
just as I heard her say,  
*"Your choices,  
each moment,  
each day."*

## Ten Minutes to Question God

Dear God,

The church which baptized and ordained me has offered me a wonderful gift. They have invited me to sit with You for 10 minutes to ask any question I like. I'm not sure how we should proceed. Shall I try to think of one profound question and then explain why I think it's worthy of You? Should I ask 10 good questions in 10 minutes? You may like the symmetry. Or, should I try to ask all I can, all I do not know? That, as you are aware, will take a while, but I suspect Your experience of time, and mine, are quite different. So, could we just begin there?

If eternity is time without end, is it also without beginning? If so, does that mean we are living into our eternity right now?

When it comes to creating the Kingdom of Heaven on earth, why do we so often prefer to wait rather than to begin?

Is it better to be dishonest, distort reality, and appease listeners or to speak truth even though it will make some uncomfortable?

As it applies to faith, wisdom, and attunement to You, is it better to be certain and never seem wrong or better to be uncertain and come to understand?

In the future, will we view the notion of original sin in the same way we now view the curse of Ham?

When you said we were created in your image, did you mean physically as seen by the eye or spiritually as seen by the heart? May we, please, begin to see ourselves in the same way you see us?

If we always do what people tell us we're supposed to do, what are the chances we will become the persons You created us to be?

When we profess that "all people are created equally but only the fittest survive," what do you feel?

What do you feel when we treat people as if their inequality and suffering is deserved, is part of the "natural order," is to be mitigated but not ended?

When it comes to our collective past and present sufferings, do you perceive us as more unaware, unwilling to change, or unwilling to become aware?

Are we really the only creature on the planet who uses anything like money to conduct exchanges?

Does this makes us a higher species or a lower one? When we use those terms, what do you feel?

How do you feel when we say it costs too much to help?

How do you feel when we label some as ‘citizens with rights’ and everyone else as a ‘foreigner without?’

If we were living within Your economy, the economy of our origins, what would be the difference in wages between the pastor of a church and the custodian; between the executive and the laborer?

If democracy be your will, and the majority rules, what of the diverse minority? What would you suggest if the majority were only a powerful plurality, a conforming coalition, or a mob?

When Jesus came to preach good news to the poor and release to the captives, to whom did he preach repentance? Did they listen then? How about now?

If the poor, the meek, the peacemakers, and the mourners know of their rightful place in the Kingdom, then who is to be liberated and saved?

Was Jesus’ last breath the most significant or all the ones that came before?

What is your preferred pronoun?

Do the air, soil, seed, and water need us as much as we need them? How about those who walk on two legs? Or, on four? How about the winged ones, the ones with fins, and the rooted ones too? Do they need us as much as we need them?

When the bees kiss the flowers and the flowers preen in the sun, when the birds sing like a choir and the leaves dance in the wind, when the rain throbs like a million drums and the rivers hum, are you totally blissed out? How about when our hearts sing and our bodies dance, play, and laugh?

Well, that is a gracious plenty. I am grateful for you, God, for all that you are and all you do for us. Without your blessing of Life and Love, this moment could never have occurred. You are the source of all that is beautiful and good. All that seems miraculous to us must seem so natural to You. I pray that my heart and mind are open to your answers and that I may faithfully and courageously pursue your will, hopes, and delights. Help me to see that what is true could also be real. It seems that many of my kin and neighbors have vastly different understandings of You. Please, use us all, me, my kin, and my neighbors as instruments of your liberation, peace, and healing. So may it be. Amen.

## **Communicable Ease**

Malevolent power will never voluntarily yield without violence and therefore cannot be peaceably defeated; an oxymoron in and of itself. Either it must be forcefully replaced, likely with a better-dressed version of itself, thirst to death, or be converted.

To perish by thirst, benevolent ones must attend to the sources of Malevolence's strength. Selfishness and greed, expressed in the currency of doctrinal rules of law and order, competition, wealth, and weaponry, satiates Malevolence's thirst. Benevolent ones could opt for a social agreement to consume only what is necessary and share God's gratuity freely. In doing so, Malevolence would be deprived of its strength and die of thirst.

To convert the heart of Malevolence, restore unity with Benevolence, and thus for all to experience the perpetuity of Life, benevolent ones must attend to the source of Malevolence's weakness. Until Malevolence has become so entrenched in its separateness as to be pathological, as having lost all connection to empathy, compassion, and interdependence with others, its conscience still rings. Whereas Malevolence comes to prefer power, certainty, control, and stark dichotomies such as black/white, rich/poor, & winning/losing, which oddly both generate and assuage its fear, the intrinsic, common values of creativity, life, love, welcome, security, courage, freedom, and equality will always prevail. Hearts broken open to emit these waters never perish.

When Malevolence hears the dissonance between the brain's left hemisphere and the heart's right atrium, a change, something like a sunrise, occurs. Malevolence must then consider, with courageous willingness, its nearly-blind grasp of certainty. Presently, Malevolence has lost sight of the trust that the scaffolding of Life holds "him" as well. For example, if Malevolence were at one with Life, the world's most formidable and destructive military would seem macabre and useless. To Malevolence, raised in a state of competition and inequality, hurting others is always an option and helping others always comes with a cost. To a Heart raised in a state of cooperation and equality, helping others is as easy and natural as flowing water. No experience of loss occurs because there is no experience of selfish possession to precede it.

Our defining metaphor of Life as a 'competition' may be a monstrous distortion, misguided propaganda. Death ought not to be considered as defeat for one and victory for another. In as much as death is so ubiquitous as to be universal, and clearly contributes to the emergence of new life, it may be evolutionarily advantageous to reconsider the metaphor chosen to describe our relationship with Life, and therefore death, as well.

As the most complex creature on the planet, we could stop competing for the podium upon which the evolutionary buck stops, and begin to cooperatively claim our responsibility to reach into and around the web of Life. Rather than to expedite death through creative destruction and over-consumption, we could

choose stable creativity. We could gently care for the elders of all species, including our own, to ensure a dignified death. We could discourage the hurried upbringing of children into premature adults and encourage a slower, seamless development that they may age into skilled and compassionate beings. Rather than to invest our adulthoods in the conversion of matter into money to tally a pixelated scorecard, we could devote our energy to freely provide food, shelter, security, rest, play, healing and understanding to all species, including our own.

To achieve these ends, benevolent ones must also recognize their own weakness. Currently, we divide ourselves along a strict categorization of male and female. Even those who daily live with the fluidity of gender try to demarcate themselves as one or the other. Regardless of our anatomy at birth, we are all human beings in varying degrees of masculine and feminine.

In a competitive world where persons are ascribed a status as objects for another's gratification, and thus targeted for subordination, they often begin to see themselves as potential prey. Gazes are averted. Kindness cues suspicion, approach fear, and touch terror. Or, disgust. For protection, we have evolved into a culture of consent where the default position is 'Interaction: Not allowed.' If permission is properly requested and unequivocally granted, then relationship, even in superficial passing, can proceed. I understand why this has happened. Indeed, from my teens through my thirties, I surely made a fair share of contributions

to the why. For this, I hope I am forgiven. But the what of what has happened concerns me deeply.

In a culture of consent, a woman's power is grounded in her isolation. A man's prudence is exercised in withholding attention and kindness from strangers until permission to do otherwise is granted. Opportunities for cooperation and unity are lost. Both male and female acquire a gnawing loneliness that resembles hunger; or thirst. Our primary motivations become the avoidance of rejection and the pursuit of some 'thing' to quench our thirst.

The question becomes, "What to do to change it?" To this question, I do not know a precise answer. I suspect there is not one but many. But this I know: When we no longer see each other as predator and prey, but as beings mutually sharing in God's gifts, the metaphors through which we view the world will become dramatically more clear.

## **A Thin Disguise**

Imagine a field; one so large it is bordered in two directions by oceans. In the two other directions, the field extends to the far ends of the earth. This land mass is known as Freedom. Or Anarchy. In their best and worst forms, they are hard to distinguish.

At birth, the inhabitants are naturally good. Because a small number grow to become lazy, mean, and greedy, an unscrupulous combination, borders were drawn on the field and on maps of paper. Stakes were driven into the ground and fences of barbed wire erected. Because the lazy, mean, and greedy ones are also persistent, fences were useless to keep the once-free and kind people safe. Besides, fences were never meant to keep people safe as much as the possessions some so cherished. Therefore, a buffer was created to separate and protect the once-free and kind inhabitants.

The buffer was crafted of constitutions, laws, and government. An acre of free-to-trade land was issued to every resident and homes were affordable to build without borrowing. The first fruits of the collective economy were equally divided among all people without exception. Thus, all persons had a predictable, nontaxable, livable income. Medicine and education were readily available. Soil, air, food, and water were clean and plentiful. People were responsible towards their own needs, and of their neighbors, and self-restrained in their consumption so no one had too little or too much.

If no lazy, mean, and greedy people (LMG's) had been raised within the buffer, nor able to penetrate

it from the outside, all would have remained stable and well. But because greed is persistent, the buffer was perpetually threatened. Once inside, because everyone wants to belong, they would don masks in order to look 'good.' They worked very hard at this thin disguise. They tried to convince others and themselves that what was false could be true. If Ignorance, Deceit, and Hypocrisy is present, Confusion, Fear, and Anxiety soon follow. If one sees smoke, look for fire.

Once they were given authority, they imposed masks on the once-free, kind, and safe people who then appeared 'bad.' This confused people further still. Once the disguised LMG's became numerous enough, and powerful enough, the buffer was expanded to squeeze the once-free, kind, and safe people into exile beyond the fences, or instead, put them into boxed cages within.

Eventually the buffer became so small even the LMG's hungered for Freedom. Or Anarchy. As I said, in various circumstances, they can be hard to distinguish. They pushed to expand the borders, and shrink the buffer, to the edges of the field and force the exiles into the oceans to drown. Eventually, they removed their masks and saw for themselves who they had become. By then, both knew, the end was near.

Some people inside the fences believe in The Apocalypse just as they believe American slaves were happy and well-treated, the Nazi Holocaust never happened, and that climate change is scientific mythology. They seem either to wish to call forth the end-times or to disbelieve the possibility altogether. Again, some things are hard to distinguish. In the past,

Christians used to love, and bless like kin, women, men, elders, children, the peaceful, the poor, lilies, sparrows, the meek, and the stranger just as the Christ loved them. The One so revered also invited the masked ones, the powerful, the rich, and the violent ones to relinquish oppression, lay down their arms, to release the captives, to bind up the wounded and broken-hearted, and rejoin the once-free, kind, and safe people. Many instead turned away. Many remain lost.

For the longevity of Life, Love and every being on the planet, please be aware. These are confusing times. Our social fabric is fraying. Notice who chooses power, deceit, profit, wealth, and physical violence as means to an end. Notice who chooses peace, courage, attention, self-restraint, mutual responsibility, and compassion instead. Notice who thinks they can be both at once. Then, make your own choices. I trust you to choose well because your Spirit is easily seen. Even from behind the masks, it shines. Please, won't you also put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart? Many have and there is room for many more.

## **Adam's First Words**

On the day I was born,  
there were no words.  
Only beings  
resplendent and serene  
and colors  
vibrant and bold  
and sounds  
in a melodious weave  
and shapes  
of curves and beauty.

This was Life!  
I stood in awe;  
of myself.

Then, maybe I ate something I shouldn't have.  
I don't remember how it happened exactly.  
Words began to spew.  
At first, just noisy sounds,  
but they took on definition and distinction;  
and distinction  
gave them power.

Then, the words formed into assemblages  
marching in horizontal lines  
from top left to bottom right  
ordered inescapably  
from beginning to end,  
of first to last,  
or worst to best.  
A hierarchy of preferences, privileges,  
and prejudice followed.

The first 'word' was: 'human'  
and I separated every 'one' like me from every 'thing' else.  
It seemed all was created for 'us.'  
And it was good!

Except, I had to share.  
So came the word 'man'  
and I separated from 'woman.'  
Their bodies became a duty  
I took for my own.  
And this too was good.  
For those who disagreed,  
a pejorative, 'queer,' was conceived.  
Clever of me.

Then came the word 'owner'  
and a deed of paper was wedged  
between 'the poor' and me.  
Their means to survive  
I entitled myself to withhold  
for another word, 'money.'

Then came the word 'citizen'  
and I separated those born near  
from those born far away.  
'Rights' were bequeathed to me  
but not to 'them.'

But still, it wasn't enough.  
Finally, I spoke the word 'white.'  
Suddenly, sinfully pure and falsely justified,  
I could bind and enslave flesh and land  
and for generations ignore the suffering  
of beings with whom I was once joined.

Now, it seemed, everything belonged to me.  
Indeed, was created *by* me  
All else had been separated and silenced  
into anonymity. Or, so I thought.

I had ‘freedom;’  
except there was no freedom  
next to the imprisoned.  
I had ‘equality;’  
except there was no equality  
next to the unequal.  
I had ‘security;’  
except there was no security  
next to the endangered.

And I, I had become so narrowly defined  
I no longer knew who I was created to be;  
only who I was supposed to be; or not  
‘I’ was erased, lost, or pretending.  
I felt sick in my gut.

But that was not the end. There is no end.  
For if words had the power  
to distinguish into extinction,  
The Word had power to coalesce into existence.  
This the prophets and poets well knew.  
I wondered, “Someday, would they remind me too?”

## **The Burden is Light**

Within organized nation-states, such as the United States, there are four means by which human beings protect ourselves and have our needs met for life, security, and freedom. A just democracy, as we still aspire to be, depends on a benevolent, trustworthy, well-informed, responsible population and universal suffrage to realize its fullest potential. The ongoing racism, sexism, and class privilege which excludes power and participation from many for the exclusive gain of a few is antithetical to a just democracy. In addition, such exclusivity places undue rewards and burdens on the few which they feel entitled to both idolize and resent.

The fourth, final, and least preferred method to protect ourselves and have our needs met is through violence. Violence comes in several forms including physical, economic, and verbal. Physical forms include the use of hands, weapons, and restraints to compel compliant behavior. Physical violence includes police and military weaponry, detention, deportation, and the banning of travel which deprives persons of their liberty.

Economic violence includes withholding the needs of another person for profitable ransom. It also includes claiming ownership and taking on indebtedness in order to consume material and energy beyond one's needs. The ubiquitous corruption to privilege some with lenience and favors while treating others with severity and deprivation encompasses both physical and economic forms of violence.

Verbal violence, particularly yelling and dishonesty, may seem the most benign but, in its own way, may be the most detrimental. Yelling communicates to the listener the meaninglessness of their needs, the imperative to submit, and the threat to lose all protections if they persist. It dehumanizes both the one expressing violence with words and the one receiving it.

Dishonesty deprives everyone so informed of the opportunity to make sound decisions based on a predictable future known as reality. When dishonesty becomes customary, fear, anxiety, paranoia, anger, and thus violence become normal and widespread. Insanity becomes epidemic.

Violence belongs to despotic and anarchic societies rather than to just democracies. A society so disoriented as to habitually lie, watch their children be killed, and destroy its host planet's vitality is willing, maybe committed, to destroy itself. A wise and discerning population will repent from its uses of violence, sequester those who persist, and show preference for the three methods described next.

The third method is governance through legislation. A population of people organized around a collectively agreed-upon political system accepts a reduction in individual freedoms for the benefit of universal protection. Good government is limited enough to allow residents a wide range of options, from one less-than-harmful extreme to another, and still be strong enough to protect everyone's civil and human rights from other people's harmful choices through equitable enforcement of agreed-upon constitutions and

laws. All responsible residents should select and oversee government officials who maintain this balance of limited strength and integrity.

This balance is best expressed in the phrases ‘freedom of’ and ‘freedom from.’ For one example, freedom *of* religion allows everyone to explore a wide variety of spiritual practices aware that learning and passing on diverse ideas and discoveries is healthy for all species including ours. Freedom *from* religion grants governments the right to protect everyone from the oppressive tendencies of religious beliefs. If a consenting community of faith does not permit certain forms of health care or marriage, a just government denies the freedom to impose those beliefs on neighbors. ‘We’ are kept free *from* the religious beliefs of some even if ‘they’ are in the majority and their dislike of people and their practices is vehement.

The second method is through contracts; essentially a one-to-one treaty between two people. Assuming both parties come into the agreement with equal power, equal skepticism, and equal willingness to fulfill the agreement, a fair contract is enforced by public recognition. Banning the right to enter into contracts is to deprive persons of their right to autonomy. This is yet another reason why banning marriage between same-sex couples, a sacred and legal covenant between two equals, is contrary to democracy and freedom.

The first method to protect and meet our needs, and the most fulfilling, is held in the word ‘Love.’ Our needs for life, security and freedom are best met by interpersonal relationships and a community of people

whose guiding influence and common understanding is the state of being known as 'Love.' In such a context, a society agrees to consume as little material and energy as they need and leave the rest to share with all other beings on the planet. In such a context, all persons voluntarily cooperate and freely care for themselves, their families, nearest neighbors, and neighboring communities to feed, protect, heal, teach, and restore order. No persons are disqualified based on ability, no person withholds their innate gifts from others, all attempt to achieve their fullest God-given potential, and to ensure their neighbors have an equal opportunity to do the same.

In such a context, everyone would have the opportunity to work, play, rest, and express themselves as they see fit in equal measure. Violence would be absurd and archaic, government enforcement almost unnecessary, and defaulted contracts rare and accidental. Because the violence of capitalism has so corrupted human beings, many people can no longer imagine such a world. Our natural state is not one of fear, greed, anger, violence, and self-destruction but it seems so to many today. God created us adequately powerful and self-limiting, responsible and compassionate, creative and free, just and merciful. This is what it means to be created in the image of God. One of Jesus' primary missions was to demonstrate the nearness of the embodied presence of our Creator in each and every one of us. We have much work to do, much to unlearn. Many good teachers have come before us and many are with us now. Please join a quiet revolution of the heart.

## **First, Do No Harm**

Let us consolidate all laws into one that reads simply, “No harm shall come to the planet, including its oceans and atmosphere, or the living beings who depend upon it, including human beings, by acts of commission or omission.”

Neither a dignified death nor an experience of fear, sadness, anger, or shame will constitute an occurrence of 'harm' but these may indicate a harm has been done. 'Harm' shall be defined as depriving the planet, or any one who depends on it, of safety, security, well-being, or longevity. Anyone can bring charges on their own behalf or on behalf of one without voice, agency, or recognition. Charges can be brought against any entity, public or private, individual or group, governmental or commercial. To bring a charge in bad faith, that is, bearing false witness, shall constitute an act of 'harm.' 'Bad faith' is to be determined *after* a verdict of innocence, or harmlessness, is issued.

One mandatory and universal sentence will be applied to all who have harmed another: cease the behavior and make reparations to the one effected and the loved ones who depend(ed) on them. Reparations shall neither be lenient nor severe but always sufficient. All such decisions would be made by persons who know the history of and have hopes for the future of the victim and the perpetrator.

Please put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart. The struggle continues and there is much to be done.

## **Are You of the Majority, Minority, or Free and Equal At Last?**

Let us declare Election Day a national holiday, a day of civic duty freed from commerce for all citizens. On that day each year, in addition to electing our representatives, let *all* citizens (yes, *all*) cast four votes. The first vote, as a sign of support for our chosen form of governance, would be to endorse the Constitution of the United States of America; consider it a pledge of allegiance, if you will. The second vote would likewise be for one's state constitution. If more than one-third of citizens disapprove of our democratic institutions enshrined in the federal and state constitutions, let a constitutional convention be held to address the changes necessary that we may be a cohesive, well-functioning civil society. Every generation would cast their vote and pledge their support for the government we co-operate within.

The third and fourth items on the annual ballot would ratify the legislative work of the federal and state governments for the year. Legislation duly passed by the legislative branch and signed by the executive branch would be put before the citizens for an up or down vote. A simple majority vote would ratify the work of our representatives and pass it into law; or, send them back to try again. To begin a legislative session, citizens would grant authority to representatives to represent them and then ratify the representatives' efforts to conclude. Our permission and approval would begin and end the yearly legislative cycle.

Currently, those we elect act as unequal entities in American democracy. Winners, known as the majority party, exercise the privilege to impose their will. Losers, known as the minority party, attack, obstruct, or plot for the next election cycle. When competition, victory, and defeat become the defining principles of a supposedly democratic society based on the values of freedom, liberty, equality, and justice for all, it is proper to reflect on the meanings and roles of the terms majority, minority, and equality.

The purpose of the so-called 'majority' is to stabilize us in the present. The majority is a conservative force (a course of action, not a party) meant to promote the common good, to slow our impulses, and to provide for continuity, stability, and predictable futures. The majority is like the rudder of a ship sailing in a dark night. Without a steady majority, democracy becomes fractious and disintegrates. However, if the so-called majority becomes zealous, and attempts to suppress the minority, demands for conformity, even uniformity and homogeneity, ensue. These demands are enforced through economic and physical coercion, detention, and deportation. Such power negates liberty; that is, the freedom from oppression. You will recognize the enemies of democracy by their craving for military and economic power.

The purpose of the so-called 'minority' is to oversee the protection of our individual freedoms, to ensure the pursuit of happiness and self-interest, and to promote our evolution into the future. The minority is a liberal force (again, a course of action, not a party)

responsible for pointing out our civic weak spots and advocating new solutions. The minority is like the wind in the sails of our ship and the light upon the bow. Without a vibrant minority, democracy becomes stagnant and dies into totalitarianism. However, if the so-called minority becomes zealous, instability, chaos, and anarchy ensue. Violence becomes a means to an end. Beware, some anarchists are better dressed than others. You will recognize them by their hatred of government.

Due to the modern connotations of these words, ‘majority’ as ‘superior winners’ and ‘minority’ as ‘inferior losers,’ I hope they will soon fall out of favor as repugnant descriptions. In the meantime, keep in mind, neither entity, majority or minority, are monoliths nor can they be subsumed one into the other and disappear. Equality can never equate to uniformity or homogeneity. Nor can anarchy provide the stability necessary for true freedom and equality to exist. We need both the stability of equality and a cooperative freedom in order to reach our highest potential. Sadly however, there are people in our country who consider domination, power, greed, and violence as legitimate means to achieve the end of freedom and equality.

A stable equality and cooperative freedom cannot be achieved in a society of competition, profit, debt, poverty, wealth, and the power differentials which follow. There *is* a natural inequality among beings who lack access to daily sunlight, fresh water, fertile soil, and cooperative relationships. *Unnatural* inequality occurs when adequate resources are over-consumed by some and competitively withheld, with weapons and

money, from everyone else. This inequality human beings call 'injustice.' Only those raised in a state of unnatural inequality would perceive sharing as loss and hoarding as success. In America, many, but not all, of our elders, children, women, persons of color (both American-born and those born elsewhere), same-sex partners, persons in material poverty, and persons with differing physical/cognitive abilities are equal only in their lack of access to security, resources, and rights as compared to a minority of people of privilege, power and wealth.

God freely gives all matter, energy, courage, compassion, and wisdom necessary for us to participate in the web of life. We are meant to share these gifts freely as well. Indeed, *you* are a gift meant to enhance Life and Love for all of God's Creation. If we are to be one nation, of equal citizenship, and inalienable human rights, indivisible, with liberty and justice for all, we must change some aspects of our culture. If we cannot cooperate in our freedom, share in our equality, and mutually uplift a stable majority and a vibrant minority, then we undermine our nation, our society, our communities, relationships, and the health of the planet and all those who depend on it, including us.

## **A State Among States: Exiled In America**

According to one reliable count, there are 6.1 million adults in America who have been disenfranchised from their right to vote for one particular reason. As a point of reference, Missouri has an equivalent number of people. They are the 18<sup>th</sup> largest of the United States. No small number. Imagine if the seventeen most populous states said to Missouri, “We are so *verrry* tough! To prove it, we have passed laws in hopes that you would break them. Now that you have, we change your name from ‘citizen’ to ‘felon’ and say to you, ‘You may not vote for or against those who pass and enforce these laws and who mete out your punishment.’” This is akin to being taxed without representation. You may remember there was a revolution fought over that once. But in America, we may be more willing to fight for our money than for our rights. We tend to treat human and civil rights as privileges that may be bestowed and rescinded like one’s popularity.

If Missouri were told, “The other 49 states can vote but you, you are ineligible,” what would the thirty-two less populous states have to say? What would you say if you were one still allowed to vote? If you primarily identify as an American citizen, you may be outraged at the suppression of Missouri’s vote knowing that you could be next. On the other hand, if you wish to be associated with the tough, ruling elite, Missouri’s exclusion would seem advantageous and you would likely celebrate and justify the elimination of Missouri’s rights.

I understand the logic of temporarily disallowing a vote to those who cannot stay within a certain degree of order, but when order becomes doctrinal and the law an instrument of privilege and oppression, one must ask, “Who is harming whom?” With our nation’s ongoing history of racial injustice, and the unequal treatment embedded in our justice system, we must turn our gaze to the “get tough” policies of those in power regardless of their party affiliation.

At present, within those states with the highest rates of disenfranchisement (Wyoming, Nevada, Arizona, Florida, Georgia, Alabama, Mississippi, Tennessee, Kentucky, and Virginia) the Republican party reaps the most benefit and is the most empowered to correct the problem. Of the 1,577 elected state and federal representatives including governors from those ten states, a super-majority of 1,039 are Republicans and 538 are Democrats.

Of course, another group with considerable potential to correct the problem includes the nearly 73 million citizens who opt out at the second barrier to universal suffrage and do not register themselves to vote. They are likely our country’s most popular third party; and though they are equal in number to California, Texas, and Missouri combined, they are also the least apparent.

In addition, there are approximately 74 million people disenfranchised due to the age requirement. Before you scoff at letting our young people vote, consider this: Some young are indeed unable to mark a ballot. Likewise, persons in the advanced stages of

Alzheimer's disease or dementia are also unable to vote but we do not disenfranchise all who are old enough to develop the diagnosis. Essentially, if a voter can check the ballot of their own volition, no other competency test is required. (We have a history of eliminating voting rights with such tests as well.) Besides, if those seeking election had to court the vote of our children, they would certainly be more kind and possibly more honest. And our children may be better treated as well. They do have the longest to live with today's decisions and often ask very good questions.

If the right to vote was cherished and protected by all, our nation would resemble the democracy it claims to be. Of the 323 million Americans, young and old, currently 146 million, or about 45%, remain eligible, registered, and of age to vote. That is to say that if an election were held today over half of American citizens would not be allowed to vote. Our current President, in the most recent election, received 62 million votes, 3 million *fewer* votes than "the runner-up." In other words, four out of five Americans did not, most of whom *could not*, choose the head of the executive branch of our federal government but we are all still expected to abide by his leadership, no matter how duplicitous and destructive his administration becomes; or risk the loss of our freedom and be deprived of our rights.

More and more our nation begins to resemble an oligarchy or an apartheid regime where a 20% minority can homogenize districts and eliminate voter eligibility in order to maintain their status at the expense of our Constitution and people. The only question now is

which party best coerces particular subsets of the minority still eligible to vote in order to be dubbed ‘the winner.’ In America, our trouble is less one of *voter* fraud and more of *defrauding* voters. When your name is called, how will you reply: as citizen and neighbor, one of the ruling elite, or one who stood quietly by?

## **Looks Like a Salamander To Me**

In North Carolina, we are embroiled in a debate about gerrymandered congressional districts. The state legislature, with the unwelcome guidance of federal courts, and unwise encouragement from some constituents, is trying to determine how we will portion representation.

Will we have one state with at-large voting (one person, one vote) where the top thirteen persons receiving votes will represent all North Carolinians in the U.S. Congress? This would be the most democratic, heterogeneous, least manipulable plan available.

If not, would we rather divide voting into thirteen districts? If so, the next question becomes what factor will determine where the lines are drawn.

Will districts be based on geography, equally-populated, and relatively compact so that regional neighbors vote together for “their” representative?

Or, will the districts be segregated on party affiliation so that half (or more) of the districts will likely vote Republican and half (or less) will likely vote Democrat?

Will the districts be segregated on race so that half (or more) of the districts will likely vote white and half (or less) will likely vote black?

Or, will we try something new such as segregating districts based on gender so that half (or more) will likely vote male and half (or less) will likely vote female?

Could the districts be segregated on wealth so that half (or more) will vote for the rich and half (or less) will be for the poor?

Could the districts be segregated on religion so that half (or more) will be for Christians and half (or less) will be for non-Christians?

Could the districts be segregated on home ownership so half (or more) will be for property owners and half (or less) will be for renters?

Could the districts be segregated on age so half (or more) will be for elders and half (or less) will be for youth?

Or, could districts be drawn around other arbitrary, capricious modes of segregation such as those with college degrees vs high school diplomas, dog lovers vs. cat lovers, Duke fans vs. Carolina fans, Ford vs. Chevy, etc.

Notice also how natural it is to see older, male, Christian, Republican, white, wealthy, home owners in the powerful majority and younger, female, non-Christian, Democrat, black, poor, renters in the powerless minority. This is what “democracy” in North Carolina has come to mean: legalized inequality. We do not have a democracy but a hypo-cracy: an apartheid system pretending to be a democracy, a minority ruling the majority.

If an election were held today, more than half of our neighbors would be automatically disqualified from voting due to age, registration, criminal records, and naturalization status. Gerrymandering goes one step further by privileging predetermined majorities. Those in the minority eventually yield their right to participate

knowing they are powerless in such a system. With gerrymandered districts, and the psychological disenfranchisement they breed, even fewer persons will participate in our government in the future.

If a politician obstructs progress towards universal suffrage and equality, they are not striving for democracy. Our current system is not a government by the people, for the people but by the politicians, for the politicians, and, most especially, for those they choose to privilege with their corrupt legislation (generally those who vote) and those they choose to punish with unjust laws (generally those who do not). Please put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart. Your help is greatly needed.

## Giving Unto Caesar in God's Economy

Here are some ideas for tax reform.

- *Every* citizen of the United States, by birth or naturalization, regardless of age, receives a universal income of \$29,000 annually, the current per-capita income, in direct payment from the federal government. A rate of change for the universal income would be pegged to rise or fall with the GDP. *Every citizen*, no exceptions. Exception is the proud instrument of the twins Corruption and Power.
- *Every* citizen, in addition to the universal income, would also receive the right to vote in their local, state, and federal elections. And again, *Every*, no exceptions.
- No politician could serve more than 8-12 years or 2-4 terms depending on their office and would have to wait the same length of time before returning. Judges, tasked to protect the rights of the disempowered, would be elected for life, to remain unswayed by the cyclical whims of a fickle electorate, but could be removed by them if merited. All citizens would be encouraged to stand for election to serve the process of democratic self-governance.
- Tax revenue is to be paid by *every* commercial entity in the U.S., from sole proprietorships to multi-national corporations, to local, state, federal and international (WTO, IMF, UN) governing bodies with a jurisdictional interest based on breadth of suppliers and customers. Corporate entities would be invoiced their fair and equitable share of the governing bodies budgets based on corporate revenue and the number of persons

employed. Rather than wages and taxes posted on the balance sheets of employees' paycheck stubs, tax revenue would be posted on commercial balance sheets and paid by the employer directly to governing bodies just as it is now.

- Surplus revenues contributed to the governing bodies would be used for the limited, responsible functions of government such as protecting our civil and human rights through oversight of safe and just interactions between neighbors, communities, trading partners, and the planet.
- All citizens are to negotiate with their employers for additional wages in exchange for the necessary tasks or specialized skills they offer to supplement the universal income. A reasonable maximum wage, pegged to the universal income and determined by voters, would be created to limit unscrupulous pay.
- Individuals would pay annual taxes directly to local and state governing bodies only on the surplus, unless the surplus be deposited for capital investment, between what they earn and what they spend. The tax rate would be a small percentage equivalent to a short term interest rate on the amount of funds taken out of circulation.
- Individuals would then pay taxes, once more, when they are deceased. After a proper burial and settlement of outstanding debts, if any, half of their assets would be bequeathed to their designated heirs and half to the commonwealth. The latter half would be distributed first among those whose net assets fall below the median due to intergenerational poverty, natural disasters, and illness. Citizens whose wealth falls below the median due to their poor choices will have to shore

up and rely on private, personal relationships rather than the general public for subsidy but their children will not have to bear their parent's poor choices or society's oppressive economic history.

- Vested pension and social security benefits would begin to be distributed immediately in a sound manner to designees or beneficiaries.
- This proposal leaves unresolved rights and benefits extended to immigrants who live and work in the United States. However, to that end, let it be said that if a person's rights are truly inalienable, and democracy is beneficent for all, it should be the American task to see to the expeditious actualization of one's rights, the extension of democracy, and the benefits of its economy to the people who desire it without exception.

To put the generosity, or lack thereof, of the universal income into perspective, notice this: I am a single homeowner with no spouse or children. I have no debt, no mortgage, nor rent. I do not have health insurance nor illness. I rarely eat out, do not eat meat, nor drink, smoke, use drugs, own a TV, shop, gamble, travel far, or play golf. I operate an inexpensive sole proprietorship, pay my taxes, live simply, and my expenses will be approximately \$30,000 this year. A universal income of \$29,000 per person would not cover most people's basic living expenses. That the average income in this country is insufficient to meet the most meager needs seems unjust; if not, criminal. The universal income, however, would give us all some bargaining power with employers and more economic security in our lives.

## **The Seeds of Our Corruption**

The next Civil War in the United States will be fought not between the North and the South, nor the urban and the rural. It will not be between elites and populists nor whites and persons of color. It will not be between Democrats and Republicans nor the far left and the far right. In many cases, there are as many allies as enemies, as many similarities as differences, between and within these divisions.

Unless our nation fractures along multiple fault lines, which seems quite likely today, the next great unpleasantness, as the last Civil War was called, will be between those who have access to “the best that money can buy,” including all its luxury and security, and those who barely have access to decent homes, clean environments, sound education, health care, and liberty. On one side will be a few people, coincidentally mostly male and mostly white, with legislative power and weapons. On the other, sheer numbers of women and men, persons of color and white, straight and gay, young and old, bipeds, quadripeds, those with wings, roots, and fins, and the soil, air, and water we all need to live.

Presently, what “white” America takes as kindness and favors is, in many cases, also known as corruption. When we give one entity monetary resources to express our preferential support we participate in the same corruption as the brokers in D.C., state capitals, and corporate boardrooms. Money has become such an omnipresent medium to express

“kindness & support” that we no longer recognize the seeds of corruption.

It may be hard to imagine another civil war in the United States. However, the next one is already occurring within our borders though one may not see it as such. There are no bombs dropped nor makeshift camps to inter enemies or refugees. There are no calls from our government for unity in the face of a national threat or rationing to support the troops. This because, as I said above, the government and the private sector, and their public constituencies, cooperate as agents in this long civil war. Rather than weapons of mass destruction, it is being fought with dollars; with new legislation on one hand and deregulation on the other; with law enforcement, prisons, and deportations; with rape, sexual harassment, and child abuse; with Russian bots, “fake” news, entertainment, and propaganda; with zealous patriotism and profit-taking; with voter suppression and court decisions which permit businesses to discriminate against people they dislike or disagree with, most especially those who cannot afford to pay the profiteer. Competition mocks cooperation. Private self-interest is privileged over the common good. A doctored majority rules to oppress minority rights. Though as inseparable as two sides of one coin, wealth is esteemed and poverty despised.

These are the battle lines of the most recent unpleasantness. This is of little surprise. The first American Revolution (1775-1783) was fought so colonial individuals could retain property stolen from indigenous persons and taxes demanded by the British Empire. The second American Revolution (1861-1865)

was fought so citizens could retain the right to enslave people as property and lazily increase wealth through torture and hard labor. The third American Revolution is being fought so a few individuals can accumulate unlimited wealth and power regardless of the damage done to our democracy and the people who comprise it.

In this new civil war, there are no sides; only accomplices. The economy we have inherited and adopted is our enemy. We are both its agents and its victims. Even those who appear victorious will be cannibalized. Homelessness, addiction, divorce, disability, lifestyle diseases, mass incarceration, school shootings, bloated government, gerrymandered elections, discord among family and neighbors, greed and fear are all symptomatic of the troubles. Let's call them the casualties of war.

Our strategy, one of conversion rather than destruction, is ancient. It is to defuse the weapon of choice; to disempower money. Still a free people, we have a wide range of options from which to choose. Choose wisely then act. For those earning above the median in income, please strive to earn less. In addition, all of us must invest our energy and more freely share our efforts to feed, house, heal, restore, and protect each other and then inspire and teach our young how to do the same. Please care well for our host home, Earth. It is a precious gift and should be treated delicately. We must consume less energy in our homes, on our roads, and in the products we purchase. Until we value our collective well-being more than the privileges of wealth and power, the great unpleasantness will only worsen. This is easily seen.

Please put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart. God's economy, the economy of our origins, the beloved community, the garden of Eden, the Kingdom of Heaven, Shalom still exists. Your help is greatly needed to see this is not only true but also real. Blessings to you and to all those you love.

## **Twenty-six Cents: The Deal of a Lifetime**

“Hey man, have I got a deal for you. This is truly the deal of a lifetime,” said Slyly. “Listen, I’ve got a job that needs to be done. It will take you about four hours. I’m going to lend you the tools to finish it. I’m going to go play golf with my buddies, and when I come back, I’ll pay you for one hour of your work. If I am really pleased with the job you did, I’ll give you a 10% bonus AND I’ll give you another job to do after that one.

“Now, think about this,” Slyly continued. “if you keep steadily doing a good job and save that 10%, in fifty years you’ll be able to stop working and rest for the last ten, maybe fifteen, of your life. Hundreds of millions of people are taking us up on this deal so you better get on board while you can. My buddies on the golf course tell me everybody to whom they offer this deal are totally committed. You should be too.”

“Oh, I’m not so sure,” said Duped. “I don’t think that one hour of pay for four hours of work is really fair and it’ll never be enough to purchase a home for me and my family.”

“Don’t worry about that. One of my buddies will take care of you. Go down to the bank, tell him I sent you, and he will lend you all the money you need to buy that home. You won’t have to pay for it up front. You can use a portion of what I pay you to cover the loan in installments spread out over thirty years. The government will even let you write off the interest. It’s like free money. And, when it’s paid off, you can save that money along with the ten-percent I’m giving you.

Instead of ten years of rest, if you play your cards right, you'll get fifteen for sure. Think about that now: work for fifty years and you'll have enough money saved up to rest for at least fifteen."

"But, if you and I worked together," said Duped, "we could accomplish this job in two hours instead of four. We could divide the money in half too. We could both be playing golf this afternoon. Rather than work fifty years, we could work twenty-five together and both rest for twenty-five more."

"Now, you can't possibly think that's fair!," said Slyly. "I have all the money, all the work, and all the tools. Without me, you got nothing. I'm offering you to get in on the action. This is the best deal in town. You better take it while you can. You can only do without for so long."

"Well I suppose you're right about that. I'll take it for now and think on it while I work," said Duped. "What was the name of your friend at the bank?"

"Now, that's the spirit. I'll be back in four hours and give you everything you'll need. Congratulations! You're on the fast track now," said Slyly.

And so it begins.

Most of the pieces I write are based on my impression of the world we occupy. Many can argue that my impressions are subjective and therefore dubious. I experience the world, and interpret it, in a certain way. Another person may interpret their experience very differently. Neither of us can prove, because such things are not based on objective facts,

that one interpretation is more valid than another. One may so be but it can't be "proven." You have to see for yourself and make your own decisions.

This piece, however, is based on empirical data as well as experience. Over the last 32 months, I have been monitoring my income and expenses closely. I openly share this data on my website. Recently, I calculated how much of my expenses, over the last thirty-two months, were paid out to retain the privilege to earn income (taxes and operating expenses) and how much was paid out to meet my personal needs. For every \$1.00 earned, 26¢ goes to my food, shelter, utilities, transportation, and so on. That is to say, for every four hours of work, three are paid out to others so I can use one hour for myself.

"How is this possible?," you might ask. The short answer is because the few with enough wealth can afford not to work while the rest of us work four times as long as necessary to survive. Indeed, some persons draw an income for making decisions about the use of their capital which means those without capital have to work even longer.

My income has hovered very near the median for three consecutive years. For the 50% of Americans who earn less than I do, the ratios of how much they work for themselves and how much they work for others is even more skewed. A staunch capitalist will mitigate these numbers saying some of what I contribute in taxes is for the common good, including myself, which is true. They'd go so far as to say that they, those above the median in income, pay even more to government coffers which may, or may not, be true

or relevant. And, I would counter that some portion of the 26¢ goes to the farmer who grows my food, and some goes to the banker who purchased his equipment; a portion goes to the lineman who erected the poles and power lines, and some goes to the executive paid to ponder a strategic vision for profitability. Some of us pay through our effort and some pay through the luxury of ownership.

The con game is this: “paper with ink,” known as deeds of ownership and money, entitle some to take and withhold and then exercise power to make decisions of who works, who earns, in what ratios, and therefore who thrives, who lives, who survives, and who dies slowly in this economy. This is the nature of capitalism. The narrow difference between institutionalized communism and institutionalized capitalism is only in who has the power to make such decisions. In a truly rational economy, there are no such questions and therefore no such decisions to be made.

God’s economy, on the other hand, the economy of our origins, is fully functional and operational everyday. Rather than money, fear, greed, competition, separation, inequality, creative destruction, man-made laws, and the violence to enforce them, God’s economy is based on shared work, shared resources, self-interest paired with self-restraint, cooperation, Love, equality, freedom, and stable creativity.

Would you ask the person who works for minimum wage to work twenty-four hours to survive twelve so you can work for eight (or less) and thrive for twenty-four? For those with wealth, property, and incomes above the median, the power to choose is ours.

The con game can only be stopped by us. A tithe from your 26¢ will not end it. Please, put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart. Many have and there is room for many more.

## **Someone Recently Said...**

In speaking of our current troubles, someone recently said, "I think we are more silo-ed than ever." 'Silo-ed' is a metaphor but I'm not sure it's apt. In August, 2014, just four years ago, after Michael Brown was killed in Ferguson, I had no clue what several unnamed acquaintances, including family members, thought politically. Now I do. Thanks to social media and digital communication technology, it seems, rather than being more silo-ed, a more apt metaphor is we have all been thrust into a digital closet and locked in together. We are more aware and more integrated than ever before. Because it has happened so suddenly, we have not taken the time to acquaint ourselves and adapt.

It seems some in this vast closet care about other people, strangers even, and want to see that everyone is well. Some within the group blindly strive to accumulate wealth while they ask the government to embark on the Sisyphean task to disappear the poor. They very nicely make generous, philanthropic contributions towards the disappearance at hand. Others seem more clearly self-interested. They love the Flag and Constitution but dislike, and wish to disable, the government for which it stands; except when they dislike and distrust strangers even more, such as couples who wish to marry the person they choose, African-American men who exercise their Second Amendment rights, women and couples who must make the most difficult of health care decisions, families who fear home and immigrate to a new land, or liberals who participate in the democracy. Then they

empower "their" government to stop "those people;" with force if necessary. Others are so defeated and nihilistic that they don't even try anymore. They turn on the TV to watch the scrum unfold. Or not.

We've been thrust together so quickly that few seem to like the people we find ourselves locked in the closet with. The nice ones view the self-interested ones as mean. The self-interested ones view the nice ones as weak. The careless ones seem quietly complicit with evils of wealth and power. Many seem to think anyone who disagrees with them is brain-washed or stupid. If our nation were reduced to three groups you might say one loves power, one loves prosperity, and one just wants to be left alone. Fortunately, there remain many more groups from which to choose to belong. I still believe by far the largest of these is made of those who prioritize, more than money and power, the peace, freedom, and well-being of all people and the planet.

If we continue to treat each other with anger and cruelty hoping to compel 'those people' to come along to our way of thinking, we may, in the end, find ourselves fortunate enough to be silo-ed and re-segregated. We might find a cold peace in separation. In all likelihood, however, we will simply dis-integrate within the closet of our devolving society.

Our national identity is being challenged. The existential conflicts inherent in our democracy have come to the forefront once again as they did during the emergence of wealthy, white, male dominance, westward expansion, the abolition movement, the women's suffrage movement, and the First and Second Reconstructions. We cannot be driven to accumulate

wealth and expect others not to grow poor. We cannot act out with power and expect others not to retaliate. We have some serious social negotiations to attempt. Who are we to be? Rich? Powerful? Kind? Compassionate? Selfless? Each to his own? Responsible towards the common good? If freedom, fairness, equality, justice, and love are our guiding principles, then our government and our public enterprises must embody them. Which means WE must embody them in our decisions, in voting booths, places of business, places of worships and each human interaction. Every moment is another chance to choose well. We have once again come to the test.

We have much work to do, many wounds to heal. Please put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart. Many have and there is room for many more.

## **The Points of Our Departure: Time, Deeds, and Money**

What if the newest, most complex, destructive, messiest species are not the most advanced? What if the simplest, most elegant, well-developed, oldest species are also the wisest? Is it possible that the creatures who can directly convert sunlight, soil, and water into Life, or those who have symbiotic relationships with their hosts, have learned something that those dependent upon fossil fuels, meat, and high-tech manufacturing and military have yet to internalize? Are we the fittest creature on the planet simply because we have the ability to define the word?

Humans convert energy into work just as all living beings do. Unlike the rest, however, we depend on fossil fuels, animals, and plants to convert light into Life. Furthermore, our relationships with people and planet are hardly symbiotic. In some confused state of existence, humans went so far as to convert energy into work and then work into money. The effect has been to detach us from the web of life and from the Source of compassion, wisdom, Life, and Love. Indeed, this conversion has taken place so thoroughly that we now conflate the term ‘work’ with the phrase ‘making money’ so much so that if someone is ‘not earning income’ they are also ‘out of work’ or ‘unemployed.’

No one who is alive is out of work. To be alive is to be at work. Many do so responsibly, and generously, by offering their gifts for the well-being of themselves and others. Others are gainfully employed in, or retired from, the capitalist economy of converting

energy and matter into money. Though materially successful, as humans define it, many people contribute little to the web of life. Take those employed in retail who watch over well-decorated storage facilities ensuring that nothing leaves unless some money is left behind. Take those employed in the financial sector who invest their energy monitoring pixels to ensure accumulation in some accounts and staunch the flow from others. Such persons are not responsible and therefore not to blame. They do what we've been told to do: strive to be the best-qualified, most able-bodied, and maybe you will be offered a job so as to avoid starvation and homelessness.

Our Constitution was written on the premise that private ownership of property, including persons enslaved as such, what we now call 'assets' and 'human resources,' was the fundamental source of liberty. In other words, to our founders, land taken by force and fake treaties would become the fundamental source of freedom for...whom? Those with adequate money, weaponry and deceit to take what they desired but could not care for? Not an answer one would expect from faithful, civilized Christian believers.

Words were shaped into laws to define the concept of ownership, and its corollary 'theft,' to allow some to withhold property, assets, and resources until a profitable ransom was paid. Then more words were shaped into laws to define the concept of inheritance so excess property could be bequeathed to designated heirs. At one time, persons owned the space they occupied and the tools necessary to care for it. Now

deeds define the surplus and grant the right to hoard it from others.

Even time was enslaved as property. Once distinguished simply as day and night, morning and evening, time was divided into equal, measurable increments, known as minutes and hours, to be bought and sold. Once, time represented the location of the planet in the universe where you and I could meet. Now, you know the saying, “Time is money. Better hurry along. Chop, chop.”

What is one possible solution to this confused existence? First of all, we could turn away from the definitions of success, fitness, and efficiency written by those with appetites for MORE: more separation, more property, more assets, more weapons, more violence, and more deceit. We could instead begin to learn from every other living creature on the planet who pursue their self-interests with self-restraint. We could invest our energy into the care-full work that feeds, protects, heals, teaches, and restores order for ourselves and our neighbors. We could learn to play and rest more and to be sated by entertainment less. We could measure our efficient performance not in terms of how much and how fast but how well and how little energy and material was needed.

For those who earn above the median in income, please desist from striving to earn more and more. Aim to earn the median in income and accumulate no more than the median in assets. This would mean lowering incomes, selling homes for less than full market value, eliminating and avoiding debt, and sharing more freely

in the gifts that God has given to you and therefore to each and everyone of us.

We are a gift to Life and Life is a gift to us. That is symbiotic. When we begin to learn what our elders and teachers are trying to show us, much of humanity's sufferings and hardships will be greatly relieved; as will the suffering of the planet we depend upon. What humans define as 'the environment,' God, and every other being on the planet, define as 'the economy': the free exchange of materials and energy for the service of Life and Love.

Please join a quiet revolution of the heart. There is no organization nor obligations. No open enrollment. There are no membership dues. Membership is automatic and expansively inclusive. There are responsibilities, and yes, choices, some of which will, at first, feel like sacrifice. Such sacrifice is beneficent for Life and Love and therefore for all of us. Do not be afraid. You are not alone. Turn a gentle gaze and you will see us here living within the web of Life. Welcome.

## **What Racists Don't Want Us To Know**

To justify disparities between persons of color and whites across so many fields, one must, in one way, shape, or form, begin with the premise that one group is ontologically different from another; that 'these people' are generally superior, 'those people' generally inferior, and everyone gets what they deserve. This is one-half of the phenomenon of racism in our country. There is, in fact, far more similarity between the groups known as white and black than within them. There are criminally-minded persons among blacks and among whites. There are also intelligent people within each group, and productive people, and creative people, quiet people, loud people, kind people, greedy people, and irresponsible people, and on and on. But in comparisons of the two collective groups known as black and white, non-racists see they are ontologically equal.

The disparities are not due to the inherent superiority of one group over another. The difference, for example in the criminal justice field, is that the harm caused by European-Americans is more often overlooked, without arrests, prosecutions, or incarcerations. A few, more specific examples may be helpful. The lust and rage of some white men is often enacted upon the bodies of women and children with great harm and hardly a word spoken. The avarice of some individuals, and organizations of individuals, who profit off the misfortune of others, even to the point of bankrupting them, at the end of the fiscal year, will be celebrated while the impoverished one will be

forgotten. This is not to mention the legal harm caused to the atmosphere, water, and soil by our collective over-consumption of materials and energy.

On the other hand, if a person of color sells or consumes a substance unhealthy for their body or damages someone else's personal property, they will be robbed of years from their lives incarcerated in prison. That is if they are lucky enough to survive their initial encounter with the arresting officers. While our society condones some crimes, others are written into law and enforced to create the disparity of African-American criminality. This is the other half of the phenomenon of racism: the exercise of power to perpetuate racial disparities, injustice, and harm.

People use the outcomes of racism to justify the racial prejudices of superiority and inferiority and create an intractable loop. One significant reason why white America refuses to examine the role that racism plays in the disparate outcomes is quite simple to see. In the antebellum South, the wealth of southern plantation owners, and northern industrialists, was created by the uncompensated labor, meager rations, and torture of kidnapped and enslaved Africans and generations of their American-born children. Likewise, today's "plantation owners and industrialists" who acquire income above the median, accumulate wealth above the median, and have access to credit do so as a result of the impoverishment of others. If those incarcerated for drug and property crimes were gainfully employed and the income of 50% of American citizens was increased to \$52,000 annually, the current median income, from the current per-capita

income of \$29,000, those who now take home a greater distribution of the wealth, and borrow still more, would have to make do with less. What was true then remains true now: the wealth of a few is generated by the impoverishment of many. To acknowledge these political and economic realities would fundamentally alter the American identity.

We utilize the outcomes of racism to justify ourselves because to do otherwise would be to acknowledge that American democracy, and the capitalist economy it instituted, are a mock success, fraudulent, thus far. To acknowledge the inequity experienced by a majority of American-born citizens, especially those in material poverty, persons of color, women, children, Native Americans, LGBTQ persons, our elders, and the disabled, would be to acknowledge that our patriotic pride has been misplaced and our political and economic systems have failed in meeting our aspirations of freedom, equality, and justice for all.

We could continue to pretend; or we could decide that democracy, and the freedom, equality, and justice for which it stands, are more important than the truly false notion of white supremacy and all the ways we measure it in order to make it seem real. One equality we all hold in common, regardless of wealth, skin tone, or gender, is the harmful residue of racism. Some it effects from the outside in and some from the inside out but no one is left untouched.

## **A Response To Charlottesville, August, 2017**

The sentiments in the hearts of those men in Charlottesville are the same as those of the man, the history, and the statue they were there to defend. They are the same sentiments as those in the heart of the man who plowed his car into a crowd of people he did not know. They are the same as those who hate Sandra Bland and defend the police officers who killed her. They are the same as those who hate Obama and Obamacare though they have no better idea than the one he presented. They are the same as those who hated on the protesters in Ferguson rather than on the persons in local government who had hated on them for years before the unarmed Michael Brown was killed by the well-armed Darren Wilson. They are the same sentiments as those who defend Trump, his building of walls, banning of travel, recall of torture, and sending protesters out on stretchers. Oh, what would it be like to make America white again?

The white supremacists in Charlottesville, like those who wave the confederate flag in Hillsborough, NC, don't scare me half as much as the white supremacists who hide their hearts. But even more so are those who do not yet know they too are white supremacists. We have much work to do, much to learn, if we are ever to be the nation we wish to be.

## **Is it American Hyp-o-cracy or Just a Little White Lie?**

Growing up I recall hearing the question, “How could so many people allow the Holocaust to happen?” Lest we forget, the question presumes a small group perpetrated a massive atrocity while many people carried on quietly with their daily lives. For such a horrific event to occur, a critical mass of people must support and participate in the destruction, war, and extermination. And, the atrocity must begin small.

In such circumstances, a political leader, like Hitler, would campaign with rhetoric and promises to deport persons of one religious tradition. He would pledge to make a weak country great again. He would advocate for a national registry of his future victims. He would advocate the use of torture in order to normalize the heinous treatment of other human beings. Then, once elected, such a leader would implement a ban on travel to limit the movement of future victims. A critical mass of defenders and supporters would declare the ban is not based on religious belief but on nationalities which are too mysterious, unknowable, and scary. The leader would declare treaties with future enemies void. He would malign future victims, and stoke the fears of his base, by distributing false images of future victims perpetrating acts of violence. Detractors who stand up, speak out, or take a knee would be called "unpatriotic" and should be "terminated;" protesters laid out on stretchers. Defenders and supporters would describe local murders, such as those of three students of one religious tradition in Chapel Hill, NC, as “fortuitous.”

The leader would escalate tensions and provoke mass violence from those whom they hate and fear by relocating a national embassy into disputed territory. Eventually, a war would ensue, and the destruction of a people, and the nations they occupy, would seem justified, and thus, unstoppable.

In America, a critical mass of 62 million voters, about 1/6 of the population, have elected a leader capable of such decisions and behavior. He is the leader of one factious political party which controls a majority of state houses, governorships, election boards (I presume), and two of the three branches of the federal government. They are now nominating and approving judges to the judicial branch who are almost exclusively of the same party, white, male, I presume Christian, and in many cases unqualified as determined by the American Bar Association. The world's most indomitable military is at this leader's beck and call and legally must comply with his orders to extend his brand of despotism; let's call it American Hypocrisy. Otherwise, to defy military orders, as an act of conscience, would be a mutiny, a peaceful coup, and the end of American Democracy.

About a year ago, my brother pointed out to me that a genocide is currently happening and Syria is the hot spot. To date, an estimated 465,000 have been killed and 12 million Syrians are refugees inside and outside of the country. Now, the Saudis, Israelis, Americans, and Russians seem loosely allied against several predominantly Muslim nations and are poised, not to protect the lives of those threatened by the new Holocaust, but to participate in the extermination.

How could a Holocaust happen again? This is how it could happen. Sixty-two million voters allied behind one political leader, and his party, whose bellicose rhetoric and dangerous decisions dehumanize and violate the safety, security, and human rights of another group of people. Tensions escalate, war ensues, and millions of people are killed.

Islam is not the enemy. Fear, hatred, greed, and violence are our common enemy and its allies are pocketed around the globe including here. Many are wounded, ill, afraid, and raging. Their conversion and healing, rather than their destruction, are called for. They have lost touch with the inherent goodness God created within them. Friends, neighbors, and allies we've never met cannot help us because their grandparents, veterans of the 20th century struggles for peace and freedom, never had the chance to become parents. Peace is our obligation; freedom our opportunity.

Freedom is both the opportunity and the responsibility to make choices. Freedom is not the power to specify choices one can or should make. Freedom is government protection of a wide range of options and citizen's wise and careful choices: From violence to peace, from greed to generosity, from destruction to preservation. Freedom requires a wide tolerance for divergence; and peace a strict limit on harm.

As a free people, the choices are ours, not our government's nor its leaders, to make. As a free people, rather than those who would be ruled by despots, we live our values every day in ways large and small. Do

you try to earn more money than you need? Do you consume more matter and energy, and therefore spend more, than you must? Do you share your gifts and services generously or do you regretfully withhold them because your neighbors cannot afford them? Do you comfortably control the climate inside your home at the expense of the climate outdoors? Do you heap disdain on persons who seemingly deserve it or extend patience and understanding to those who may not? Do you punish people to coerce ‘better behavior’ or do you teach them why you believe such behavior would be more helpful in the future? Do you encourage political leaders to act with courageous restraint or with quick and stunning force? Are you afraid or are you secure? Are you courageous or are you violent?

Hypocrisy is the act of telling a lie in hopes that both speaker and listener will come to believe it to be true. It is one step removed from unconscious denial and another from conscious deceit. Which leads us to the perennial questions, “Who are we?” and “Who are we to become?”

## **Tradition is on Your Side**

If you are one of the 55% of Republicans who approve of President Trump's policy to separate parents from their children who walk up to our border, here is some context you will appreciate. Tradition, as they say, is on your side.

In the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, native American (that is, non-immigrant) children were separated from their parents and sent to boarding schools where they could become civilized like us white, Christian Americans.

In the 18<sup>th</sup> and 19<sup>th</sup> centuries, persons kidnapped from Africa, and their non-immigrant children born in this country, could be separated and sold to white Americans.

When the states of the South lost the right to buy and sell human beings as property, then they made it illegal to "loiter;" to be idle in public. Parents and children were again separated, detained in prisons, and leased out to white Americans.

At that time, if a parent or child allowed to stay in the community was deemed to be "gettin' out of line," then it was legal for white Americans, sometimes off-duty law enforcement officials like sheriffs and their deputies, to enter houses, separate them, torture, mutilate, burn and hang them as examples to other parents and children of what was allowed and not allowed in this country.

Later in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, state and local law enforcement officials legally used canines, water hoses,

and club-wielding officers on horseback to deter children from walking in public to dispute the ways they and their parents were being treated.

During the presidencies of Nixon, Reagan, and Clinton, many state and federal legislators created new drug and property crimes, and made existing penalties more severe, so that millions of parents and children could be deemed 'illegal' by law enforcement officials and judges; then separated and detained in prisons throughout the country. Indeed today, laws turn juveniles into adults for the sake of a harsh prosecution. Children who play with certain toys and parents who flee the police are legally shot and killed.

Though a multitude of white adults and parents have voluntarily abandoned or abused their children, I can scarcely recall a systematic, forcible separation of white parents from their children by government agents.

If you have supported the separation of parents and children at our border and yet you find yourself angered, ashamed, or otherwise disturbed by the comparisons made, that is a good sign your conscience is still intact. Listen to it. It is trying to awaken you to a hard truth. If you read this post and feel validated in your beliefs, then here is some bad news. Your spirit is lost. You should stop encouraging politicians to harm people and seek help to find what has been lost. You may one day welcome Spirit's return. We will all be grateful you did.

Only in America, if moderate voices prevail, could Trump soon achieve something like a two for one special. Not only might he get a border wall in

exchange for no longer separating parents and children, we, our nation, might gain the right to detain parents and children together. If so, then citizens with minor children, if either are charged and prosecuted, could be imprisoned together 'for the well-being of the child.' In fact, whole families could be kept intact while incarcerated to stress 'family values.' The shame of this administration's culture is that they feel they can do absolutely anything unless a judge tells them to stop. And then, if they can defy or shame the judge, they will.

Portions of our country have lost any sense of decency and humane care for each other. We have entered another period in our history of uncivilized cruelty with 62 million Americans cheering it on. Fortunately, you'll always have the right to carry a weapon to protect yourself but if you happen to be an African-American who exercises that right, you might be killed for it and at least 62 million people will shrug. Please, put a shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart. Many have, including me, and there is room for many more.

## **A Sign Post Along the Way**

Someone recently said to me, "I think our troubles have to do with all these people playing identity politics."

One piece of knowledge he neglects to note is that this country has been playing identity politics from its beginning. The unspoken identity we came to always assume was white, male, wealthy, husbands, fathers, and leaders. What was good for them was assumed to be good for all. And, if not, what did it matter? As stated in the Supreme Court's infamous Dred Scott decision (c. 1857), [they] "had no rights any white man was bound to respect." Although this decision applied to persons of African descent, it could as easily have applied to women of any heritage as well as native-born non-Europeans.

What has changed in recent times is that some people no longer pretend to be 'color-blind;' which is another way of saying, no longer see everything in varying shades of 'white.'

Many people's experience of the law, government, and society have been radically different over the course of our history and into our present. The experiences of persons of native or African descent have been very different from persons of European descent. The experiences of immigrants from the South and East have been very different from immigrants of the Western world. Nor have the experiences of women been equal to those of white, wealthy men.

By creating then accepting 'inequality' as a part of some natural order in a nation founded on the

principle that all persons are created equally and entitled to certain inalienable rights, we have also created an inherent schism in our national identity; that is, a contradiction, hypocrisy, or a lie. In doing so, we have impoverished, spiritually and materially, many persons living within our nation's borders. Some more so than others. As white people contort themselves to reconcile this irreconcilable schism, they corrupt their own spirits while causing great harm to the lives and bodies of many men, women, children, and others who share this planet with us.

When we are no longer blind to the fact that we enjoy individual freedoms as we ensure the common good, that our unity is strongest as we honor our diversity, then our national identity will finally be at one with itself.

## **To Provide for the Common Defense**

Recently I shared an observation which read, “One reason why gun rights advocates advocate as they do is because they have more in common with school shooters than the children and adults who are being killed. And, they intend to keep it that way.” Both parties buy guns, own guns, fire guns, love guns and are still alive. In the minds of gun owners’, regardless of the consequences, these commonalities will never change. In a healthy democracy, gun owners would lead in rectifying the dangers of guns in our communities. Instead most expend their energy to resist the ideas of non-gun owners whose sole stake in the matter are their lives and those of our children.

Two related observations come to mind. One is, though the NRA would never admit it, they need the Nikolas Cruz’s, Adam Lanza’s, Dylann Roof’s, Devin Kelley’s, Jared Loughner’s, Omar Mateen’s, and Stephen Paddock’s to come into our schools, churches, shopping malls, clubs, and concerts and begin shooting people they have never met or known. These men initiate the fear the NRA needs in order to breed the other fear that you will not have a gun in the time of your greatest need. Indeed, these fears are being amplified at every opportunity. The power of the leadership of the NRA is rooted in these fears. You can be sure that such power is not going to waste. I may be wrong, but I suspect many are gaining considerable rewards from investments in weapons manufacturers, military contracts, or other forms of government spending. This would be a redistribution of taxpayer

wealth to those who work for and invest in the fear and destruction of others.

A second observation is that the fear from which they profit is rooted in white supremacy. For example, when several hundred black men are deprived each year of their inalienable rights to liberty or life by being stopped or killed by an agent of the state for exercising their constitutional right to carry a weapon, what do you hear from the NRA? Crickets! But if several hundred white people were actively detained or killed by agents of the state for having a gun on their person or in their vehicle without so much as a trial, the NRA would lose their minds with rage & noise. It would be as if “Obama and Hillary were coming together again to take away not only your guns and Second Amendment but your life and freedom as well.” Fortunately for the NRA, the police, and gun owners who are white, this conundrum is not likely to arise. In addition, notice what they say when the several hundred killed are unarmed children and adults.

Good people are being brainwashed. A small population of persons are amping up the fear of our society and doing little to stop its fundamental causes for their own gains in power, money, and influence. We treat old symptoms by creating new ones such as trying to stop school shooters with armed teachers. Next we’ll be lowering the age for concealed carry to arm students as well. "If a person is mature enough to drive a car, can't they also carry a weapon especially if it means protecting their classmates?"

Our children need to know they are loved and safe. Our parents need to know they can provide well

for their children. We all need purposeful jobs to care well for our neighbors and the planet which sustains us. We all need to know we are physically and economically secure and free. We all need to remain educated and well-informed. We all need to trust that truth is told and our decisions to respond are grounded in a predictable future. We all need equal opportunities to participate in rule-making and governance. We all need to rest, to play, and to heal. We also need far less dishonesty, rage, fear, weapons (of all shapes and sizes), useless work, video games, opioids, and alcohol to be manufactured, distributed, and received. Such actions should be taken voluntarily by a free and responsible citizenry rather than to be hindered or imposed by a state or federal government.

By intensifying the fear, insecurity, and chaos, politicians, capitalists, lobbyists, and their constituencies are collapsing our democratic experiment so that power in laws, weapons, and money can accumulate into fewer and fewer hands. Those hands will likely resemble militaristic, wealthy, straight, white, able-bodied family men and the rest of us will go along obediently, be detained, deported, banned from entry, or killed. We are on a very bad path. Our churches have been coopted by fear & comfort, by debt & prosperity, and idolatry of the flag. They have failed to teach that 'love is more powerful than fear,' that 'we are good, courageous, and wise beings,' and that 'only peace can end violence.' Everyone's cooperation is needed. There is much work to do. Please, put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart.

## **Do All Lives Matter?**

Conspiracy is another form of cooperation: a group of people with a common understanding working to achieve a common goal with or without collusion. Then, the question becomes, “Is the goal for good or ill and who decides?”

I finally understand the logic of the NRA leadership and their constituencies. We all have a constitutional right to own fire arms without restriction on lethality. This right to universal access to lethal weapons is precious and, some say, will never be given up. In America, only our money and property may be more precious than the weapons we use to protect them. Due to universal access, some people have access to weapons who see fit to shoot children and adults as they attend schools, churches, shopping malls, concerts, and clubs. This is, of course, unfortunate. But guns are, after all, inanimate objects. They do not kill people; only people kill people.

After the teachers are armed, then their students, if the killings continue, the mentally ill can be euthanized. At first, only after a shooting occurs; then preemptively beforehand. Fortunately, because our prisons are already set up to do the job, this transition will be seamless. In fact, our prisons already store many mentally ill persons in boxed cages biding their time along with many persons of healthy minds as well. Some sold substances on the black market rather than to manufacture cigarettes, alcohol, or pharmaceuticals for the white market. Some damaged other people’s belongings which, in America, is cause to lose years

from your life. Some thought it acceptable to hurt other people's bodies. Who can imagine from where that idea came? If all the "bad people" could be clumped into one country, one state, or one prison camp, rather than the precision of capital punishment, they could be sodomized with the more blunt weapon of war. You see, it's true, it's not guns that kill people. Only people kill people. Some are just sophisticated enough to not get their hands dirty. Their hope is that killing, as an option, along with imprisonment, poverty, child abuse, and rape, will always remain an option.

## All According to Plan

Some of you may have heard of the killing of Jordan Edwards by Officer Roy Oliver in Texas. You may also have heard Oliver was terminated, then arrested. Some persons will draw on the *incident* of the termination and arrest as proof that the *system* works. I would argue that in the exceptional circumstance of Jordan Edwards' death, the exception of Oliver's termination and arrest indicates only the opposite is true. The details below are based on my research into my home state's criminal justice system. I presume state law, and culture, in Texas is, in the main, similar to that of North Carolina.

First, had the officer either told the truth, or had no video been available to indicate he had blatantly lied, rather than be terminated and arrested, he would likely be on desk duty or leave while the SBI investigated the incident. Because such inquiries are dubbed '*criminal investigations*' and '*personnel matters*,' the public has no access to the findings of an officer's more typical exoneration. That is to say, we have no way to oversee the legality or illegality of how our government enforces laws through the use of force.

Because the officer was wearing a badge on one shoulder while he mounted his AR-15 to the other and pulled the trigger, he is free on bail awaiting trial. This because a judge, who is part of the same system, felt that the officer was simply doing his job when he killed Edwards. Therefore, bail should be set at a rate affordable on an officer's salary. To detain him with other inmates would certainly jeopardize his safety and

to keep him in solitary confinement for his safety would be unbecoming and inhumane. So, he waits for trial at home.

Worse yet, we are only discussing the most egregious case of a 15 year old, nervous, unarmed boy in the passenger seat of a vehicle trying to leave a party before the police arrive and fire a rifle at his head to stop him from getting home. We are not discussing the incidents when an officer's weapon is drawn and persons are compelled to comply with an order to lie face down on the ground. We are not discussing the incidents when a knee or shin is placed upon their neck to keep them there. We are not discussing the incidents when an officer runs their hands over a person's body and rummages through their pockets to see what they may find. We are not discussing the incidents when someone is only injured by an officer's use of physical force or a weapon, or when medical attention is denied, because documentation of an injury would be grounds for a lawsuit. We are not discussing the incidents when the police pay an informant to set someone up to be arrested. We are not discussing that, in Durham for example, the ratio of persons white to black is 13:10, but the 2016 arrest rate was 10:52. Based on the amount of harm being done by people to other people, property, and the planet, it seems unlikely that slightly less than half of the population, all of whom are of a certain complexion, is causing more than five times the total harm.

Our laws are written and enforced in such a manner to intentionally interrupt the lives of black, brown, and poor persons whomever they may be.

Because we view the system of racism as a series of unfortunate, discrete incidents, and because we view the exceptional incidents to scapegoat an officer as proof the system is not broken, police, judges, investigators, and district attorneys conspire by hook or crook, with a wink and a nod, to abide by the laws and policies to maintain the system as is. Some inside, I assume, find it quite unpleasant. Others certainly less so. Our criminal justice system is, by unspoken design, meant to interrupt, through harassment, detention, poverty, and death, the lives of certain citizens in our community. In this regard, those who point to the termination and arrest of Officer Oliver are correct, the system is not broken. It is working just as designed.

Another somewhat disappointing aspect are the uninterrupted lives of white teenagers who scurry away from the party and go on to lead comfortable, quiet, prosperous lives; while others, in the shadowed margins of our communities, suffer with barely a moment's hesitation from their uninterrupted neighbors.

## **Stand in the Gap**

A court room is a dispassionate place; stark and quiet. Benches are divided down the middle with friends of the victim on one side and loved ones of the accused on the other like a wedding in a somber mood. It is quite a contrast to the dramatic unfolding of people's lives. I was in Superior Court room 7A in Durham County recently to sit with a family whose son had been murdered. The accused was to appear for an early administrative hearing. We sat on the east side of the room while we waited for the lunchtime adjournment to conclude.

Seeing our case was not the first on the docket, I moved to the west side of the room. Just in front of me was a young woman wearing a tank top revealing a tattooed memorial between her shoulder blades for someone else who had died too young. Held in her arm was a fussy one year old child with big brown eyes and even bigger curls. They were there to support a young man in his early 20's who was to plea guilty for possession and sell of a Schedule II narcotic. In this case, cocaine. If he gambled against the 2:1 odds of a jury's guilty verdict, he faced four years of incarceration. To avoid becoming one of every nine African-American men already imprisoned in this country, he had conceded to plea guilty. Informed the prosecution had successfully bargained a plea, the judge asked the questions to cover every caveat of the young man's understanding of what he was about to do. Each question was answered quickly and certainly with one exception. To the question, "Are you pleading

guilty freely and voluntarily, because you are in fact guilty?" the defendant whispered to his counsel, then, to the judge, he said, "Yes."

Under the circumstances, his plea seemed neither free nor voluntary. It was only the least worst option available. The degree of his innocence or guilt will never be heard. The only emotion expressed was the quietly lowered gaze of the judge. Seemingly powerless, clearly disappointed in what was about to happen, he sentenced the young man to the prosecution's bargain: 18 months supervised probation with a suspended sentence for the jail time. If, and it is a big *IF*, he avoids arrest, he'll also avoid prison. He was able to walk out of the courtroom with his beloved, a one-year old child, and a felony conviction.

With the conviction, he was relieved of his right to vote in the democracy which sentenced him and the opportunity to work in the economy. As an African-American man with a conviction and no GED (which he was sentenced to earn), he is more likely to go to jail than to find an employer who will hire him. That sentence of impoverishment will outlast the 18 months supervised probation and disenfranchisement of his vote. Indeed, because arrest records are rarely expunged, his sentence of destitution will outlast his baby's adolescence. His child was also sentenced to the visceral experience of involuntary impoverishment.

What is even more saddening was how this came about. The police did not interrupt the young man in a drug transaction. Instead, an officer paid an informant to lure the young man into selling a large quantity of cocaine. The mission being unsuccessful,

the informant instead gave \$20 cash and received enough cocaine for one high. I imagine the young man trusted the informant or he would have sold him nothing and thus avoided the betrayal. I also imagine he wished to appease the informant so as to end the requests for what he could not or would not sell. If this operation had taken place within the moral system of a kindergarten playground, the gloating boys who set up another for trouble would have been severely reprimanded. But this isn't kindergarten. Someone in the police department planned and initiated the crime so this young man would be coerced into submission and impoverishment. The prosecution played their part. The judge banged the gavel. One more down.

Knowing no more of the situation than we do, we can assume the young man engaged in an unlawful activity but the method of his arrest is, mildly stated, distasteful. His life was not taken. No tax payer money has gone for his incarceration. No one missed work for jury duty. The state incurred no net cost in the operation. (To heap humiliation upon betrayal, the young man was sentenced to pay restitution to the state for the costs of his arrest including the informant's fee.) The young man is free, if you wish, but he has been sentenced to a lifetime of quiet destitution. If his family can stay together, another big *IF*, they will all share in his sentence. What the young man would have done with \$20 from the sale of the cocaine, I don't know. Maybe he would have purchased formula for his baby or a small gift for the mother.

As I said, this isn't kindergarten. Some will gloat in their success but no one will be reprimanded

because almost no one outside of his neighborhood will even notice this happened. Let there be no mistake, however, the father of that one-year old child was targeted and preyed upon by our neighbors.

I wonder what would I do if the young man was my brother. Would I dare sit? On which side? Some in our country pray to “stand in the gap,” between the powers of oppression and the children of God. May we be willing to stand in the gap and turn our gaze upon such powers. Let us all see that the ways of our government, economy and culture have diminished the chance of this young man, his child, and many others like them to learn, play, work, love, be a family and live a long, healthy life. The divine nature, the inherent goodness, of those who live outside of his neighborhood including the judge, the prosecutor, the police, and the informant is diminished when one of God’s children is targeted and preyed upon as this young man has been.

## **The Lynching of Frank Clark**

It is a Tuesday, two days before Thanksgiving, a little after 12:00 noon. It is a sunny, mild autumn day. A man stands by a dumpster. He steps away as a woman exits her apartment and deposits her trash. He returns to where he stood, then turns again and walks away. In the meantime, a police officer sees the man, thinks him unfamiliar, and stops his car. He rolls down the window, exits, and loses sight of the unfamiliar man. Spurned, he radios four co-workers nearby.

The man walks one block and turns the corner unaware it will be the last time he does so. Another officer, one of the co-workers who was radioed, pulls up slowly. The officer rolls down the window. The unfamiliar man approaches. They talk. The officer parks, gets out of the car, and they carry on the conversation. The officer reassures the man he is not under arrest nor being detained. There is nothing to worry about; they are only talking. After a few minutes, the officer asks, "Do you mind hanging around until the first officer comes over? He wanted to see you." The man says neither 'yes' nor 'no' but acknowledges he knows the officer who had not recognized him earlier. The second officer leans against his car. Both men wait.

Soon, the first officer comes over and speaks to the man. The officer raises his voice. Loudly he asks if the man tried to avoid him. He asks the man if he feels nervous. The man begins to tremble. The officer wants to put his hands on the man's body to pat him down. The officer notes some resistance; the man's arms are not soft enough, not held high enough. A struggle to

gain compliance ensues. The second officer comes to intervene. He stumbles and falls. The loud officer backs away from the melee and draws his weapon. The nervous man turns to flee. He is shot from behind and killed.

The SBI conducts an exoneration. An ad is run to seek witnesses. The officers are interviewed. They report the man swung a fist when the pat down became aggressive. They report he was holding his pants up like there might be a gun in his waistband. It might have discharged but there was some uncertainty. They report while the man standing struggled with the officer on the ground, he simultaneously pointed a weapon at the spurned officer. They report while he was fleeing, he simultaneously turned and fired the weapon. After the spurned officer fired six shots at the man's back and landed two, the second officer was examined for injury. It was determined he was not shot, but had twisted his knee. Then they turned their attention to the man to see if he was dying or dead. EMS was called. Near the body, a gun was found. No witnesses came forward so no one else was interviewed. A report was generated and sent to the district attorney who determined no laws had been broken.

The police department conducted an internal investigation to determine if departmental policies were followed. It was determined no policies were violated and no disciplinary action was needed. Other than the 1,071 word press release (which this 786 word piece is based on) written by the Police Department, the public can know no more information about the circumstances of why a neighbor was killed by our local public

servants. Because such incidents are dubbed ‘criminal investigations,’ state law allows the information to be withheld. Because the internal investigation could have resulted in disciplinary action, they are considered ‘personnel matters’ and thus also unavailable for public oversight.

What we do know is a man named Frank Clark, whose offense was to be unfamiliar and whose suspicious behavior was to feel nervous, was killed, and though no harm was being done, there is, in the eyes of some, absolutely nothing wrong about what was done.

At the beginning of the 20th century, in the United States of America, when men of African descent were legally lynched by men of European descent, it was said such violence was necessary to protect the “law-abiding community.” The reason often given was something like, “The n\*\*\*\*r was gettin’ outta line.” At the beginning of the 21st century we translate that as, “The suspect was non-compliant.” The means, including who is allowed to perform the killings, have evolved but the justifications and outcomes have hardly changed.

Please, turn a gentle gaze upon the sources of our suffering as well as their effects. To be allowed to live is not the same as to be free. What we neglect, if indeed we were ever truly free, will surely be lost.

## **Address to Durham City Council August 10, 2017**

My name is Rob Womack. I live at [REDACTED] Ave. I am an ordained minister and licensed counselor who operates a private practice caring for adults and couples on Broad St. I was born at Watts Hospital in Durham in 1970. Except for two four year stints to attend college and graduate school, I have lived here all of my life. I have only three minutes for which I am allowed to speak. I plan to be succinct. Much that could be said must be omitted. I will email these comments to the City Council, City Manager, and Chief of Police afterward.

I have four requests. The first is simply that you will lend me your ear for the next 150 seconds. The second is that you would advocate for and implement a policy to allow citizens, upon a simple written request to the local District Attorney's office, to review the complete SBI documentation of the investigation of officer-involved shootings. My third request is that you advocate for and implement a policy to allow citizens, upon request in writing or in person, to review the Durham Police Department's reports on officer use of force. At this time, the public is denied access to this information completely.

When law enforcement personnel are given wide discretion in the use of force, free citizens, concerned about the protection of their civil and human rights, must maintain oversight of law enforcement personnel's use of power. Currently, that oversight is denied to us. As we all know, presently, if an officer feels fear, or perceives a citizen lacks sufficient

compliance to their wishes, they have the right to use force, even unto death, to gain compliance and ease their fear. This is merely a milder, modern translation of the same logic used to justify legal lynchings a century ago. Officers may threaten, injure, or kill a citizen with barely a worry about indictment, prosecution, or punishment. If law enforcement are free to kill, then we are only allowed to live. This is not freedom to life and liberty as I know it to be defined.

My fourth and final request. I would like for you to implement a policy that the local police department compile and widely publicize the following nine statistics with an aim towards reducing them as near to zero as possible: the number of officer-initiated interactions with residents; the number of times an officer places their hands on a person to search them or to gain compliance; the number of times a citizen is detained by the police for more than one hour; the number of times an officer draws a weapon while engaging a resident; the number of times it is used; the number of times a resident requests medical attention; the number of times medical attention is offered; the number of injuries that result from interactions with the police; and the number of deaths that result as well. As these statistics decline, we will know that the police feel more safe, and we will feel more safe as well.

That is all I have to say. Thank you for complying with my first request. I hope you will see it in our mutual interests as free citizens of a vibrant democracy to consider the last three as well. Your help is greatly needed. Thank you again. Many blessings to you all and to all those you love.

## **The Last Chapter**

In the spring of 2013, Marcia Owen, executive director of the Religious Coalition for Non-Violent Durham asked me to serve as a circle keeper for a healing circle. She was gathering together mothers whose children had been murdered in Durham. I was to be the licensed professional, the trauma expert, to help women who were overcome by traumatic grief. Little did I know what was about to happen to me.

My graduate school professors had instructed me on mental health aspects of trauma and grief. Bonnie, Wilma, Joclyn, Carrie, Annette, Marion, and tragically too many others to name became my teachers in Love, forgiveness, resurrection, and courage. Yes, one of those two programs has been more important to me than the other. You're about to know which one and why.

At one point during the years we met, everyone decided they wanted to erect a memorial for all of the children who had died of violence in Durham. We imagined a park with large pieces of public art that would rightly honor the sacredness of each person whose Life had been shortened. To develop support, I took the responsibility to meet with community leaders who could help site, design, and raise funds for the project.

Two of those persons were Aidil Ortiz and Veronica Terry. We met at the Beyu Caffe for lunch. While giving my pitch for the project, Aidil stopped me in mid-sentence and said something that would alter my life from that moment forward. She said, with prophetic

emphasis, “Rob, we don’t need people who look like *you* coming into *our* neighborhoods telling us what *we* need to do to fix *our* troubles. *We know what we need to do!* What we need from people like you is to turn your gaze onto *your own people* and see what *you* can do back there.”

When she reached that final sentence I realized Spirit was speaking through her. Everything else in the restaurant in that moment disappeared. There was only the three of us at a single table surrounded by nothingness. I leaned in, closed my mouth, and literally grasped for more. Later, I would imagine how this must have caught Aidil off-guard. She easily could have expected me to become all defensive or apologetic. That would be typical “white” behavior. Yet, in that moment, we saw each other. She spoke. I listened. Listening and learning would become my favorite pastime over the next few years. It is still today though I have graduated to writing and demonstrating as well.

She did not need to say much more. When I turned to see what she had pointed me towards, I was startled from my sleep. At one time I believed, like most white people, the letters r-a-c-e were a short-hand category for all the troubles black people face. But race, and its progenitor racism, are not, as they were once referred to, a Negro problem. They have long been and remain a white problem. Persons of color and women suffer the most visibly, though not exclusively, from the dis-ease of whiteness. Racism, that is white superiority, particularly white male superiority, so clouds the way white people see the world that we’re not even aware of how it defines us. It keeps us ignorant and afraid. To

rationalize the contradictions we craft for ourselves, between what we value and what we allow, we contort ourselves into ways of being that truly harm our spirits. We are almost oblivious to the ways money, power, and what we define as ‘superior’ harm others and ourselves.

White people think in terms of incidents rather than contexts. We view the world through the eyes of individuals separate from their relationships. The mothers in the healing circle taught me that the circumstances of an event are rarely as clean cut as white people would like to think. Their children’s lives never fully developed, and thus our understanding will never develop either, because their lives were interrupted by the violence of poverty.

For example, I once thought that unless someone were killed in a mass shooting, like at a school, they were probably somewhat responsible for the killing. A young black male killed in the neighborhood was likely to be living a risky lifestyle, involved with drugs or gangs, asking for trouble. In the news reports of the children who are killed, we are told of the “suspicious” behavior, prior criminal records, the drugs, the arguments, the guns, then silence. We do not hear of any life-giving information such as their aspirations, hopes, plans, disappointments, sacrifices, loves, joys, or anything else to avoid dehumanizing them. Our imaginations fill in the blanks. What follows is also a Rorschach test that says more about us than the children killed.

Likewise, in white America the storyline says, “Poor people are poor because they are irresponsible and lazy.” The truth is to be poor in America is very

hard work. One is always scratching and clawing to make a way out of no way.

Many of the women I met were caring for their children, their grandchildren, the children of family and neighbors, parents, aunts, and uncles. Some were unable to get a job because their bodies were no longer able to compete for the status of 'best qualified.' Therefore they were forever relegated to a subsistence lifestyle reliant on meager government funding. Many were poor because they were relegated to certain low-pay jobs. If they were deemed 'qualified,' employers would accept them into certain jobs and ignored them for others.

The way we qualify and disqualify persons for work, and therefore income, is so skewed, and in such a color-blind fashion, we do not notice a system which conflates work with income, and income with survival, literally disqualifies people from Life. Even though the harm it causes is plainly seen, we so deceive ourselves as to believe this system is actually fair. Except, of course, when someone who doesn't look like us is offered a job and our privilege of entitlement is thwarted. Then, we believe we were discriminated against but in reverse which somehow makes us angrier than the more straight-forward variety.

The children's fathers fare no better in the white economy. For centuries, many, but not all, men of African descent, unable to qualify for a living wage job, have helplessly watched their wives and children suffer. Sometimes the pain is too much to bear and they flee. We may lionize the mothers for staying put and criticize

the fathers for running, but despair will make one do irrational acts.

Many times the fathers had no choice but to leave because the retributive justice system took them away without regard to the needs of their children. This is not to absolve all men as faultless, nor to make all mom's heroic, but it is to say there is more to the story than we allow ourselves to discover.

The stories we tell ourselves also neglect to mention the loved ones who live on after the violence has been committed; the mothers, fathers, grandparents, siblings, cousins, and friends. Each and every one was wounded, some mortally, by the bullet that earlier struck their loved one. I learned that we, white people, too easily take violence, both physical and economic, for granted. We act as if each incident of violence, such as an eviction, arrest, or murder, is just and finite. Our stories absolve us of thinking any further.

By remaining ignorant of the context, believing that only people who live violently die violently, or only lazy people become poor, we culturally segregate ourselves from the reality of our neighbor's lives. We create an atmosphere of fear around entire communities of people. At best, we feel pity for those trapped in the violence of inter-generational poverty. To be poor, socially immobile, in America brings on despair. And despair, at times, will bring on irrational acts including violence. Wealth and poverty in America reflect the widespread willingness to take and withhold the means to survive which makes violence seem absolutely normative; even encouraged as 'The American Way.'

On the day Frank Clark was killed, he was causing no trouble whatsoever. The officer who killed him instigated the interaction which led to his death. The contradictions white America crafts for itself will not allow us to see that, in America, all lives do not matter. Trying to pretend they do twists us into something unrecognizable.

A few months after Frank Clark was killed, I went to the neighborhood and found the spot where he died. Around the base of the tree were crosses, silk flowers, stuffed animals, hand written signs of love and mourning. As I approached the tree, I saw two young men walking by and I asked them, "Hey, y'all think it will be ok for me to stand here for a few minutes?" One said, "Yeah?! What you up to?" White persons in their neighborhood, I assume, are rare visitors. As I knelt beside a cardboard sign to wrap a blindfold around my eyes, I replied, "I'm just going to stand here for a while." The cardboard sign read, "To the loved ones of Frank Clark: Will you trust me? I trust you. Hugs are free. / To the police: Notice what happens when you use a blindfold instead of a gun to ease your fear. / Blessings to you and all those you love."

I stood blindfolded beside the sign with my arms open for over an hour. I received many hugs that day from men, women, and children. One young boy, maybe four or five years old, came in for multiple hugs. Some stood nearby and debated out loud with friends about whether to come in for a hug. Many people blessed me, thanked me, and wondered out loud about a white guy who would go into McDougall Terrace to do

something like this. Some whispered in my ear, “You are doing a good thing!”

I do it for the young children who need to know the world is not altogether violent and scary. I do it for adults who have lost sight that love is stronger than fear. I do it for those who have come to believe that only violence can overcome violence. Many people think the blindfolded hugs is an unsafe act but actually it is quite beautiful. You should try it sometime and see for yourself.

## **You Say, ‘An Eye For An Eye’ but I Say,**

Forgiveness is not a gift you give to another.  
The anger, fear, distrust, or despair you feel  
is a wound of the spirit which can long outlast  
material wounds to body or belongings.

Forgiveness is a gesture one gives to self  
to be free of future toxicity  
still resonating from past events.

To the past-perpetrator, the victim-survivor owes  
nothing.  
Much has already been taken.

Reconciliation is the gift you can offer;  
you are free to choose.

Forgiveness is not a gift you give to another.

The past-perpetrator must also become aware,  
accept the harm caused, forgive themselves  
from remorse and shame,  
then bind the wounds of the person, family, and  
community  
to whom the victim-survivor and past-perpetrator  
once belonged.

Everyone was injured by a dis-integrating choice.

Forgiveness is an act of liberation  
one gives to themselves.

Reconciliation is an act of restoration  
one may choose to receive.

Punishment only perpetuates  
the stonings of the past.

## **Once Was Enough: Why I Refused to Surrender Jesus to Certain Christians and Became an Ordained Minister Instead**

At the time of my ordination, I did not know why. Now I see that if Jesus were to come again, and find himself in the United States of America, if he spoke about peace, poverty, and power as he did in first century Palestine, if numerous Americans were inspired to actually embody his teachings, unless he held three forms of valid photo identification, then I strongly believe many nominal Christians would have him silenced. Again. Once, in my opinion, was enough.

Those of us baptized in the name of Jesus could instead demonstrate that the Kingdom, as the prophet of Nazareth described it, is not only true but also real. As the new Roman Empire known as America, and the values for which it has come to stand, consumes itself and collapses, some set of organizing principles will fill the void. Before that occurs, let us lay new corner stones based on the ancient principles of Creativity, Love, Peace, Freedom, Mercy, Cooperation, Courage, Trust, and Care. In doing so, we may avoid the collapse altogether. Otherwise, we will find, though already so widespread as to seem normative, even more disorganized forms of deception, corruption and violence, both physical and economic, will fill the void to determine our interactions with each other and the planet.

The malignant principles of inequality, greed, power, domination, fearfulness, exclusivity, and selfish disregard, which many live by, are ultimately

destructive to individuals, families, communities, and cultures. There is much for us to (un)learn, much work to do. Please turn your gentle gaze towards the sources of our sufferings as well as their effects. Please, put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart.

## **Play the Get Out of Jail Free Card**

“I think the issue is not about race, but about class.” How many times have you heard this said? A million? Lately I’ve been wondering why this idea is so often used, it seems, to evade conversations on race, racial disparities, white privilege, and white supremacy. Presently I’m reading Gunnar Myrdal’s *“An American Dilemma: The Negro Problem and Modern Democracy.”* Myrdal is a Swedish economist, sociologist, and historian who published this text in 1944. It is an epic work which must have taken years to complete. In a section describing upper-class African-American feelings towards their lower class brethren, Myrdal points out that, at the time, many held class as more determinative of outcomes than race. In that moment, I realized why so many Anglo-Americans might agree.

If the differences in outcomes between white Americans and black Americans were based on race, because we cannot escape our whiteness anymore than they can escape their blackness, the other inescapable fact is that we, as white Americans, might be at least partially responsible for racial disparities.

However, if disparities are based on class rather than race, then that would be a different story entirely.

One of my early memories as a child is of the time I described my grandmother’s best friend as “rich.” This best friend was a widow whose husband had started a very successful chain of restaurants. My grandmother quickly corrected me, “We say, ‘She is financially well-off. Not rich.’” I learned it is impolite

to say, and therefore somewhat embarrassing to be, 'rich.' Recently, in a Sunday school class at my church, a classmate described a friend who has lived a life of leisure yet insistently self-identifies as 'upper middle class.' In the same way that upper-class African-Americans preferred to not be seen as 'black,' I suspect something similar holds true for poor people who prefer to be classed as 'lower middle' or 'working class.' In the Sunday school class, I could not lay my thumb on why there is such a draw towards being 'middle class' in this country and away from being considered 'rich' or 'poor.' But as I said, in reading Myrdal's work, I suddenly realized why white, middle-class people might feel as they do.

The reason white people want racial disparities to be about class rather than race is because if it is about class, then it is an issue of rich and poor rather than white and black. If I disguise myself anywhere in the 'middle', then I can feel absolved of responsibility because I appear neither rich nor poor. If there is a class issue, then it is someone else's problem. If, on the other hand, it is a race issue, in America, we cannot not-be-white and therefore cannot not-be-responsible. To self-identify as white and middle class is to get out of jail for free. We give a hand out, wipe our hands, and carry on being not-rich while other people suffer.

Another question I hope to come to understand in the future is, "Do we as white people emphasize our experience of poverty in our younger years to depress our experience of wealth in our later years?" Thus to balance the scales and cement our status as 'middle class.' Or, "Do we emphasize a narrative of upward

mobility to demonstrate that if we can do it, anyone can and if someone cannot, then it must be their own fault?" Thus, to ascend above reproach.

## On Personal Responsibility

Many people in our country, particularly those who self-identify with a conservative ilk, hold aloft the phrase, ‘personal responsibility,’ as both cause and cure for the hardships of others. Embedded in this shield of responsibility is the instruction that if persons would behave well, that is conform with the mainstream, majority, dominant culture, then they too would be successful; unless, of course, such culture dislikes where they were born, the color of their skin, their religious tradition, their sexual orientation, the way they speak, dress, or walk, or their gender identity (meaning they either act like a man or keep to their proper place if they do not). This is not to mention the ease with which one’s age or abilities often disqualify them from being a valued citizen and human being as well. In all such cases, persons are told to accept their unfortunate lot in life and not whine about it. Such whining grates on the ears of the successful. The logic, of course, implies that if a person is suffering, it is simply due to their own irresponsibility or their unwillingness to succeed.

Ironically, also embedded in that same shield, is the notion that if someone is suffering, ‘*I*’ have no responsibility for *their* well-being. ‘Each to his own,’ is one expression and ‘We look after our own’ is another. Thus, those of this ilk also say, “I am absolved of all responsibility for the hardships of my neighbors even if my behavior, culture, or decisions play a role, even if my wealth is dependent upon their poverty, if I *feel*

successful enough, then I can choose to ignore my role in their plight.”

Say what you will about the poor who must hustle seven days a week to find jobs, keep jobs, find rides, share rides, buy groceries, care for the children, pay the bills, then the rent, making something out of nothing, only to start over and do it again next month; month after month. Those who are hurting, and their neighbors, know all too well what they need to do. But they are only half of the equation. For those of wealth and privilege to tell others how to behave and then to feign irresponsibility is, in my estimation, the height of callous hypocrisy.

Be responsible. Please, turn a gentle gaze towards the sources of our suffering as well as the effects. From there you will see we are all, of every ilk, even the so-called successful, harmed by the need to accumulate, and withhold, in order to purchase our survival. Please join a quiet revolution of the heart. Your help is greatly needed too.

## **Of You I Ask**

God,  
of you I ask  
two things:

Give me neither poverty  
nor riches.

Lest in the abundance  
I hoard  
a fear of scarcity  
and spite your gratuity

or in my hunger  
fear myself seen as  
unworthy.

*A rendition of Proverbs 30:7-9*

## **America's Open Letter to the Poor**

Dear Poor Person,

I would like to refer to you by name but since there are so many of you, and you are so hard to tell apart, allow me to address you generally. You can call me Mr. White but most people know me by my nickname, "America." Your vociferous cries of injustice have been heard. We would like you to know that we are all playing on the same uneven field. Please ignore the fact that we are on the higher end of the slope and you are down below. This is irrelevant. It is equally sloped for all of us. I'm so sorry your father probably left you because he couldn't bear to listen so helplessly as you cried from hunger and cold while he struggled to find one minimum wage job. I'm sorry he got so angry and went to prison. At least he's still alive. I'm sorry your mother had to work two or three jobs so she'd have a choice between feeding you, paying a utility bill, the rent, or the car payment but not all four. It is hard here for all of us.

I can't tell you the number of times my children have eaten their meals without me or have been fast asleep when I came home from work. Some mornings I must leave before they wake. Some weeks I travel and they miss me for days on end. My ex- and I still argue all the time. It is so hard paying for everything; our homes, health care, cars, the kids' private school, mother's assisted living, and on and on. We work constantly just to keep up. This economy can be brutal.

The difference between you and me is I made a few better decisions and worked a lot harder than you

and your parents. True, it is easier for us to get accepted to schools and universities, to find jobs, get promotions, buy homes, and borrow money. I acknowledge that. We do tend to accept people who look like us, talk like us, dress like us, and think like us more easily. It is unfortunate that you are a minority living in America where the majority rules. At least for now there's affirmative action, right? I am bitter that some of you get a few tokens because of your skin color or gender but it could be worse. It is fortunate you fight amongst yourselves. It's hard enough as it is to withhold from you all of our advantages. We lie awake at night thinking that one day you might notice that you could overwhelm us if we were to ever let our guard down.

As much as you resent the injustice of your poverty, I resent that I have to work so many extra hours to pay taxes to support you and your children. My brother is among the liberals who hurt you more than they help. They give you a safety net that weighs you down and slows your descent so it doesn't hurt quite so much when you crash. I think it makes them feel better. I prefer the conservatives' approach to just rip off the band aid. It's quicker and cheaper. Don't beat around the bush; "Sink or swim," as they say. You and your neighbors are such an expensive drag on our economy. Some days, I think we would be better off if you all would slide off the slope altogether or go back to where you, or your great-great grandparents, came from. The field might level out a bit for the rest of us and my ascent might be easier. I know that sounds like economic genocide, but I can't help it. The thought does cross my mind.

I'm writing to you, of course, because I do wish you to be more successful. This is why we reward for merit. Merit is truly the greatest method of self-determination to achieve the American Dream. You know the expression, "We judge based on the content of one's character rather than the color of their skin." Please ignore that we only measure what we value, reward what we measure, and punish those who don't measure up. What we value is efficiency, performance, wealth, power, and outcomes rather than, for example, useful work, joyful play, adequate rest, healthy relationships, hospitality, compassion, and generosity. Because we need to be considered a 'success,' we play to the metrics. This is our most discreet way of normalizing corruption. It might seem like we are picking winners and losers but if you would just conform to our ways, I'm convinced you'd be a winner too. Of course, you would likely need to be twice as good as us to overcome the deficits of how you dress, talk, think, and act, but if we felt comfortable with you, we'd welcome the diversity.

As brutal as this economy is on our kids and us, on your kids and you, we'll never change it. Not only do we lack the imagination to do so, but the one thing my brother and I love more than success is to feel superior to somebody, anybody else. I hope this letter is helpful towards your future prosperity. Thank you for listening.

Sincerely,  
"America"

## **Poor Person's Reply to "America"**

Dear Mr. White,

My teacher said if I finished my homework, I could reply to your letter for extra credit. My parents, like you, are still at work. You may not know them by name but they have been working for you for centuries. My father now works in the deli at the grocery store where you stop late in the evenings to pick up dinner for your children. On weekends, he cleans the dormitory at the University where your oldest son goes to school. My mother flags traffic for the crew repaving the road in front of your neighborhood. You waved at her this morning when she told you it was safe to go. On weekends, she works as a cashier at your favorite take-out restaurant. She's the one who knows your order by heart.

You don't notice them but that's probably for the best. Invisibility keeps them safe. Every day at work they fear someone who looks like you will come in and take them away. I worry too for me and my baby brother. Because where we were born is not where we live, the man on the TV calls us 'illegal aliens' or 'refugees.' Protecting your borders, he says, is more important than protecting people like me. I'm sorry you are so afraid of us. Five times a day I pray you will not live in fear forever.

Despite your prejudices, no one in my family has been incarcerated. Not yet, but I know some who have. My neighbor's son, who used to help me with my homework, was arrested and has been gone a long time. He thought himself an entrepreneur but was denied a

loan so he sold things you cannot. Apparently this makes him 'illegal' too. He had hoped to sell the same things as you but because he's poor like us, the bank denied his request. I imagine you were quite relieved.

You were right when you wrote some things are easier for you. Life has not always been so easy for us. Over the centuries, your ancestors have taken our land for plunder. They kidnapped us from our homeland, branded us with hot irons, and enslaved us to the land and indentured us to the factories they built. Our soil, air, and water have been spoiled by those factories and our bodies sickened. Our wives, mothers, sisters, and daughters have been raped so your ancestors could feel virile and satiated. When our husbands, fathers, brothers, and sons tried to protect them, free themselves, or flee, they were whipped, returned, castrated, and lynched. At one time, you made it illegal for us to learn to read. Now you want to close the public school where I learn. When you grow wary of our presence, your fear frightens us away. If we stay, your terror barges into our homes, imprisons us, deports us, or worse. When you start a war, we are sent to die a noble death. All of which has been judged legal; even necessary.

For the wealth these acts generated, and was bequeathed to you, generation after generation, no reparations have been made. Nothing is bequeathed to us except less of the same. For this we are supposed to be grateful. As you believe they should, government policies favor the so-called majority: able-bodied family men who look like you. But the true majority also includes women, persons of color, the rural poor,

children, elders, the disabled, etc who are segregated out as less fortunate minorities. You may disagree but politicians, most of whom look like you, are well-known to look after their own first and others only next.

In addition, your above-average income raises the price of everything so that our below-average incomes are inadequate to purchase the land, homes, medicine, transportation, electricity, and food we need. Recurringly, we must take short loans at high interest, a modern form of indentured servitude, while you take home incomes so extraordinary we stand aghast at what you are willing to take and willing to withhold.

We have planted, harvested, preserved, prepared, and served the food you have eaten. We have built and repaired the homes where you sleep and the buildings where you work. We have carved out roads, transported people and goods, handled bags, carried away your garbage, taught your children, bathed your feeble parents, protected your neighborhoods and this nation from danger. We have played music and games for your entertainment. This brutal economy you so love, and would never change, devalues our bodies, our work, our wages, and our existence. We survive in this world one day at a time through the hard work of taking care of you and those you love.

And yet, you disapprove of the decisions we make. Remember, Mr. White, our options are not the same as yours. Some options we do not pursue knowing, as you say, you will not approve of how we look, think, dress, talk, or act. If we have hope, and seek your acceptance, we are usually disappointed by your routine denial. If you offer us the good choice you

wish we'd make, often we can not pay for it. On the rare occasion you grant affordable access to a school, a job, a loan, a home, a doctor, a grocery store, it is only in such small numbers so as not to threaten your status, comfort, or power to limit our choices. We make the wisest decisions possible with the money and opportunity we have.

You do not see us or our humanity as equal with you because you think nearly every thing, including us, exists to be possessed and consumed. There are two different kinds of poverty in this world, Mr. White. Your poverty is one of spirit which twists and distorts all you see and believe of yourself, of us, and God's Creation. There are also two kinds of wealth. Ours is not denominated in dollars. It is found in the sharing of Life and Love with all of God's Creation freely and equally. This wealth is denominated in trust, courage, compassion, and the wisdom to live cooperatively rather than competitively. Our form of wealth will redeem you but your wealth ultimately destroys everything including you. This was Jesus' penultimate lesson.

His first was that in God's Kingdom there are no margins. We all belong to its center; including you. Please, "America," put your shoulder to the plow and join us in a quiet revolution of the heart. Many have and there is room for many more. Even you.

Sincerely,  
Your Neighbor  
God's Beloved

## **Seven Easy Steps to Create Mass Poverty**

Perform them in any order you wish. The evidence is in. Outcomes are guaranteed.

1) Establish a minimum wage that is less than half of a livable wage. This legalizes the opportunity for people to work twenty-four hours in order to only survive for twelve.

2) Establish no maximum wage so persons can accumulate money to live well for twenty-four hours while working eight or less. Thus follows the luxury to retire for decades while others work double time.

3) Conflate money with work and re-label it 'employment.' Then hire only the 'best qualified,' disqualify the 'disabled,' and terminate at will.

4) Legalize the withholding of all goods and services from any person who cannot afford the price an owner dictates.

5) Release goods and services only when a profitable ransom is paid; sometimes with interest.

6) Restrict currency so there is never a time when everyone who wants to work can; to always keep the wages of those who do low; and to ensure the difference between an owner's cost and price never loses value.

7) Institutionalize a mantra such as ‘increase shareholder value’ regardless of the consequences to the non-shareholders of the world

Watch and see what happens.

## **How The Whiteness of America is Like the Flatness of the Earth**

In America, we like to think in dualities such as us/them, white/black, straight/gay, male/female, liberal/conservative. Such dualities are false. There is as much diversity within these groups as between them. As we reconsider what it means to be free and equal, a more complex, and possibly helpful, frame would be to note the divisional hierarchy our culture and economy establishes. We are a nation of owners, rulers, happy slaves, unhappy slaves, and home-grown exiles.

Owners are those who let their money work for them either in the form of equities or equipment. They hold paper which says they have a right to live well and prosper off of the work of others. Rulers are those who earn a living in the making of decisions and the limiting of choices. Throughout history, it has been difficult to tell if Rulers grow wealthy first through ownership, then by making (unethical) decisions profitable, or vice versa. Happy Slaves are obedient with hopes to become an owner or ruler someday as well. They acquire enough 'rights' to property, comfort, luxury, and authority to keep them stimulated. We tend to identify them as "White America" though their worldview is more consistent than their skin tones. Unhappy Slaves are those who know they will never migrate to owner, ruler, or happy but feel compelled to participate in the system nonetheless. What alternative do they have? We tend to think of them as "Black America" though their worldview is also more consistent than their skin tones. Exiles are those who see the cultural and economic

system critically and attempt to participate cooperatively as little as possible. Owners, Rulers, and Happy Slaves discredit Exiles as radicals, dangerous to law and order, even treasonous. Which is true if you prefer the present order.

James Baldwin once wrote that the reason people hold so steadfast to their anger is because, if they ever let it go, they'd have to face their pain. I think Happy Slaves experience a similar phenomenon. If they ever let go of their happiness, they'd have to face their fear and vulnerability. They too would see the unpleasantness of their captivity. They would notice more similarities, and fewer differences, between themselves and the rest of humanity, especially the unhappy ones and the exiles, as well as the other creatures who live here with us.

One way Happy Slaves protect themselves from awareness, to give them the benefit of the doubt, is through the ignorance of certainty. Otherwise, if aware, they have chosen to look away. Each individual, Happy Slaves will say, is solely responsible for their own well-being and everyone gets what they deserve. This could be called autonomy or freedom from community. If some are unhappy, the Happy Slaves reason, and thus are suffering, it is because they, the Unhappy Slaves, are too lazy or too stupid for their own good. The futility some experience in our culture and economy has no resonance in the Happy Slaves' reality. Many of them live with a delusion they are unwilling to examine. In a zero-sum culture of inequality, imaginations can be frightfully limited.

The difficulty to alter the delusion is deeply entrenched as freedom fighters over the centuries have realized. Another aspect of human beings is noteworthy here. All we believe to be true is self-validating. That is, we believe what we believe is true, because if we knew something else were correct, we would not believe what we believe. Meaning, we would change our minds. In a word, learn.

Sometimes it seems we never do. This because we judge almost everything in dualistic categories of 'right,' in accordance with 'my belief,' and 'wrong,' not in accordance with 'my belief.' What we believe to be right, we retain. What we consider wrong, we ignore. Without awareness of this facet of our present culture, our ability to listen, to understand, to change our minds when necessary, to learn, evolve, and therefore survive, has become stunted.

An example might be helpful. If all of your life you were told the earth was flat, everything written by other people like you said the same, all you could see confirmed it, you would be absolutely certain the earth was flat. Then, one day a group of radicals came to say, "Actually, the earth is a sphere," you might want to burn them at the stake for heresy or treason. It happens. White America's staunch belief in self-reliance and denial of the relationships between money, power, racial and sexual divisions, and economic and physical violence is our modern version of the belief that the earth is flat. As a result, many suffer in isolated forms of captivity while believing that capitalism is the greatest economic system ever, way better than the only other alternative ever, communism, even better than a

third alternative once known, now forgotten but never extinct, known as God's economy or the economy of our origins.

We are not born sinful but we are raised in a sinful economy. Males are not more powerful nor whites more superior or deserving. We do not suffer and die because we are unfit nor survive because we are the most fit. We are all born. We all die. Our 'rights' to Life and Love are inalienable, self-evident, inseparable, and equal. Our needs to survive are segregated from us by paper and ink, stripped from the earth, and withheld from us for profit. This economy depends on the exploitation of bodies and planet and fear. It depends on our obedience to the unwritten social agreements to consume as much as we want and to accumulate as much as we can. Its destruction, thus far, outpaces our learning as well as our imagination.

Our spirits, like the rest of God's creation, are naturally good. We all yearn to breathe, eat, love, work, play, heal, and rest. If we would see the way money has corrupted our understanding of the planet and of each other, if we could soothe our fear of scarcity and the appetites it generates, then we could courageously relieve the suffering of many while protecting the well-being of all. This is the natural order of Life on this planet. We have so much to unlearn, so much work to do. Please, put your shoulder to the plow and join a quiet revolution of the heart.

## **Do Not Adopt the Oppressor's Weapons**

When they say "Fight!"  
we will dance.

When they say, "Kill!"  
we will heal.

When they say, "Disgusting!"  
we will show beauty.

When they say, "QUIET!"  
we will sing.

When they say "Work!"  
we will rest.

When they say, "Get rich!"  
we will seek less.

When they say, "Buy!"  
we will share.

When they say, "Borrow money!"  
we will barter time.

When they say, "Sell!"  
we will give.

When they say, "Go home!,"  
we will plant a garden.

When they say, “Shun them!”  
we will build houses together.

When they say, “Fear them!”  
we will open our arms.

When they say, “Die!”  
we will live.

When they say, “Surrender!”  
we will be a mountain.

When they say, “Peace?”  
we will be a lake.

When they say, “Thank you!”  
we will say, “You are welcome.”

When they say, “Forgive us?”  
we will say, “Of Course.”

## **Good News: It Could Happen Here**

On the day of my birth, my parents began a period of mandatory civil service. During those early seasons, they learned my language, how to listen, and how to respond well. I learned from them the security of a caring presence and the power of self-efficacy. Together we learned gratitude and reciprocity. These intangible lessons were the foundation for all of my interactions and relationships for the rest of my seasons on earth.

Before I saw two orbits of the sun, I was able to release the parent who was not feeding me to return to service with other adults for short periods each day. The parent who fed me and I joined other parents and young ones so that we may begin to learn the colors, shapes, sounds, movements, letters, and numbers which were the building blocks of the language of my parents and neighbors. In the years to come, these building blocks would be arranged in more and more complex patterns to convey our history, social agreements, culture, and thus, our identity. This knowledge was like finding a long lost friend, once wounded, now reconciled.

After I had seen the earth orbit the sun a few more times, I felt comfortable to separate from the parent who had fed me. For longer periods each day, they joined the other adults to serve the well-being of parents, the very young, the elders, and all those in-between. To this day, collectively, they nurture the earth's provision of fruits, vegetables, grains, legumes, and clean water. They prepare materials for homes and clothing and aid in protection from foul weather and

marauders. Just as they nurture the earth, they also heal those who are ailing; including the marauders. They teach our ways of doing and being, the ways to think critically and to explore new ideas creatively. The young ones witness and participate in all the above activities to learn the ways of Life and Love. These lessons have laid the foundation for the healthy development of the place I call Home.

Between the high hills to the east and west that shape the basin which gathers our water into reservoirs, all exchanges of service and materials are given freely. With care and cooperation, the earth often yields surpluses which can be traded with people on the either side of the high hills. Some persons like to travel and transport the surpluses over the hills. The elders who have lived our history, along with the young whose history is still to come, who gather to oversee our social contract within the basin, and to aid in the resolution of disputes, also negotiate treaties of protection and trade with our neighbors.

Though I miss my home, I am grateful to be here with you. Though you disbelieve that my home and our neighbors could thrive as we do, I assure you, you could do the same. At one time, the social contract of my grandparents was much more like your own. In those seasons, persons all agreed that money was the most necessary component for survival. Back then, everyone agreed to earn and accumulate as much money as possible and to spend even more. Many, with federal coercion, borrowed large sums that could not be repaid in half of a lifetime. Housing, medical care, education, food, and even clean water were made

unattainable for many of my grandparent's generation. Even the atmosphere was being harmed.

Fortunately, many began to see what was happening. At first they noticed humans were the only beings on the planet which used money as a means of exchange and that the source of many human troubles could be traced to their relationship with money. They noticed the illness of conflating work, competition, and money wounded their bodies and their spirits. They noticed that food which was manufactured was unfit for them and the methods of its production and distribution were unhealthy for all living beings. They noticed when goods and services could be held for ransom, they could also be stolen. They noticed many children were being harmed, neglected and abused. They sensed they were not living in accord with Life and Love; with Creator and Creation.

Persons of my grandparent's generation began to stop cooperating with the old social contract that coerced people to earn, spend, and accumulate as much money as they possibly could. They began to spend less and to offer their gifts freely as they chose to earn *less* income. They found radical ways to free themselves from the burden of their debts. They placed more emphasis on caring well for their children; for the soil, water, air, and light; and for each other. As the tipping point approached, relationships amongst people of the old ways and new were at their most unstable.

Those who wished to preserve the old social contract punished those who were not cooperative. They utilized all forms of physical and economic violence and appeasements to maintain the old order.

For many years the relationships among people and the other beings upon the planet were very difficult. Many suffered. Many more began to care passionately. A new social contract aligned with the economy of our origins was about to be (re)born.

Inevitably, Love proved more powerful than fear. In the seasons which followed, debts appeared as unnecessary forms of economic imprisonment and were forgiven. Those imprisoned for drug and property crimes were freed and those who had caused physical harm to others were hospitalized to be treated with care. It is amazing now, but at one time, it seemed logical to badly hurt those who had previously hurt others.

The disruptions and instability were like labor pains. What was at one time good news became bad news. What was at one time bad news became good when God's vision for Life became not only true but also real. We were delayed a long time in noticing that the Garden of Eden, the Kingdom of Heaven, the Beloved Community had been among us all along. Fortunately, once people saw the contrast between the old social contract and the new, the Great Turning could not be halted. It could happen here too. In God's time, it already has. Please, join in the quiet revolution of the heart.

## **The Dawn of Jubilee**

The quiet revolution of the heart carries on as, first, an individual, then collective, spiritual conversion. There will be no means nor desire to hide it. Like a lamp on a stand or a city upon a hill, those who choose will radiate. The revolution will be noticed not by confrontational protests or victorious chants but by the courage of tenderness, by dance, music, and laughter. The revolution will not take place upon fields of battle, in halls of government or corporate boardrooms. Those places will remain populated by a stalwart group of lonely, bewildered men and women, abandoned for the release and gathering of jubilee and banquets. The revolution will not be known by the current order of overwhelming power and competitive control but by the stillness of a refuge free of aggression. We will breathe the freedom to live into our unique identities. Our inherent goodness will be seen and touched. We will know the very ancient, sacred and enduring way of peace which subdues fear; love which heals hate; trust which quells suspicion and care which sustains us all through birth, life and dying. Much of Creation has been groaning for such freedom to Be.

Human beings have come to believe the following ontological falsehoods: we are born sinners, selfish, unmotivated except by profit, insecure if not for wealth, and only the fittest are fit to survive. We have considerable unlearning to do. On the one hand, we have an existential need for purpose and meaning that motivates us to work and serve. The urge to discover and create, long stifled by a culture which (badly)

dictates how people are supposed to behave, and punishes those who don't assimilate, is immense. On the other hand, we are the only species on the planet which uses money as a means of exchange and our survival seems dependent upon it. Indeed, we have made it so. The transfer of food is not cheap and water hardly free; not to mention housing, clothes and health care. Only respiration remains free, for the time being, as we seem determined to destroy the atmosphere until it can be monetized too. Reduce supply, increase demand, and we'll all wear O<sub>2</sub> cannulas.

The hierarchies of power and obstacles to access established by the license to possess, and thus withhold, create significant hardships for many species, most especially humans, to survive. The bait of the competitive drive to join the fray is persuasive for rich and poor, powerful and protester, alike. Again, it seems *we must have it to survive!* We privilege and deceive ourselves of our great success as others suffer. Our jubilee will be the release from this compulsive anxiety that one must *earn* the right to live: to eat, play, learn, love, heal and even to die with dignity.

In spite of it all, we are very much alive and therefore the evidence is clear that resources are freely given for us all to remain so. We can trust in this Truth just as we trust in gravity to hold us fast. The current twisted order, as comforting as it seems, of insecurity, militarism, fear, hatred, anger, violence, greed, consumption, productivity, entitlement, and coerced conformity has one short term outcome which resembles mass suicide. We are born to play, learn, work, love, belong, and live a long, healthy life. The

revolution begins within. Please let your Light and the inherent goodness in all to shine.

**‘My Experience of God’**

**or**

**‘A Statement of Faith’**

I do not choose  
what or where,  
nor even who.

In the silence, if I listen closely,  
I will even be given the how.  
The choice remains when,  
and therefore if.

I often find myself asking, “Are you *sure*?”  
To which God replies  
with those three simple phrases  
God so often chooses,  
“Yes. I AM. Do not be afraid.”

You’d think God would grow tired of the repetition.

When the Prophet cries, “How *long*?”  
God could at least shrug and say,  
“I’ve said a lot already. You tell me.”

## From the Marrow Of Your Heart

Three teacher-students sit upon the ground; their shadows as long as the earth's horizon as it ascends to eclipse the sun. The buzz of day descends into the chirp of night. A camp fire burns. The one most at ease, with head lowered, says, "Not one tittle nor yod would be overturned, not one iota. God's Truth has been, and always will be. Though humans have the recipe; they have forgotten the ingredients; and yet still believe they will taste the banquet someday."

The youthful one hungers, "But what is this Truth?! What *are* the ingredients?"

The first one replies, "You know: Love God with all your bodily strength and motion, with all your mental acuity, from the marrow of your heart to the stardust of your soul. Love your neighbor equally with yourself. Indeed, love the one who considers you an enemy. Bless those who persecute you as well as those who love you. Give as God has given to you: freely and without condition. Neither own nor withhold from others. Receive what you need and give as is given to you."

The cheerful one, Rabbi Hillel, stands on one leg and grins, "Everything else is commentary."

The youthful one again, "Where can we find these ingredients?"

The one most at ease replies, "They are always within you. The wind and waters murmur and sing of Life, Love, God every day but our ears are not attuned. Listen to the mystics, the poets, the prophets, the lilies

and the sparrows. They will translate all there is to know.”

And thus, quietly, the beauty of darkness rose to rest.

## **Conclusion**

What shall be said to conclude this text which hasn't been said already? Maybe a few words about the author's beginning, and thus hopefully a connection with you the reader, before our courageous work of liberation continues.

The person who has transcribed these essays and poems, and lived the experiences to comprehend them, is not unique. Because he was small relative to other children, he was often picked on by family and bullies alike. From the age of seven years until the age of forty-three (and a half) he was neither completely well nor fully alive. Before he was old enough to have discovered alcohol and romantic desire, he was at times as angry as any bully especially to the people who would have loved him the most. Most of the time, he was as sad as a lonely, frightened child. I suspect bullies go through similar cycles. But I'm no expert; only personally experienced.

In my teens and early adulthood, alcohol and hormones came on the scene. I learned in very difficult ways what was expected of "men" in this culture and intuitively knew how different was my temperament from that tiny, rigid box. But I tried very hard to contort myself into it. I consumed alcohol to excess from an early age. Sometimes I pursued women, both those who were kind to me and those who were not, as if my life depended on them. At other times, I avoided them, both those who could love me and those who never would, as if I were completely unlovable. Either way, I was perpetually lonely and always confused as to why. I

made many decisions over those thirty-six years for which I remain greatly embarrassed. For those troubled years, I have paid a price. To those in whom I generated fear, pain, or repulsion, I hope you have released the feelings, if not the memories, I caused. Along with my ancestors and teachers, this book is dedicated to you.

Beginning at the age of thirty-two, I became aware of God's work in my life. Prior to that, only God knows the blessings and lessons poured into me though they must be numerous. It was in my thirty-second cycle around the sun, during the darkness of the first of two broken hearts, when a word was laid upon my chest. It had heft, weight, and density. The word was  
s-h-a-m-a-n.

I did not know what the word meant but I did know it was my mission to find its definition. 'Shaman,' as I have come to understand it, is a compassionate servant walking with others through the cycles of dying, birth, and life. Over these last sixteen years of working to fulfill that description, many events, large and small, and many teachers, have propelled me towards something which resembles redemption, resurrection, Life, and Love. With deep gratitude, I can say my soul has been found and it is well.

One of the most significant events in God's work in my life took place in January, 2014. It was then I danced for the first time. That evening was literally the single most healing experience of my life. At least, thus far. In the years which followed, dancing lit an area of my brain which had not been lit before. In the context of dance, I learned of trust, courage, freedom, and unconditional love. I became like a wide-eyed

child, filled with awe, who sees the world, like Christmas lights or shooting stars, for the very first time. There is indeed much suffering we must face in the world; and so much beauty and compassion as well.

As a result of the neurological changes from dance, I feel as if I am no longer the same person described above. I am becoming the person God created me to be rather than the 'man' people thought I was supposed to be. After two major heartbreaks, and the death of my father, space was created for God to crack me open to see and feel what was, at one time, beyond my comprehension. I can speak of what is written here in the third person because much of what is written here I know to be wiser than myself. I truly feel as if these essays and poems have been floating around in the universe. I just happened to be the one who found them and transcribed them.

My life has not always been easy. And, on numerous occasions I have made it quite difficult on the people around me. For this I am deeply regretful. But my life has also been blessed in innumerable ways and I hope to have many trips around the sun to share those blessings with others. I hope you'll join me. The world we inhabit is very beautiful if you know what to look for. Trust me when I say, "You are not alone. You are deeply loved. Do not be afraid. Life and Love, aka God, needs you as much as you need them. They will love you as much as you allow." Please, won't you join in a quiet revolution of the heart? Many have and there is room for many, many more. Blessings to you and to all those you love. Shalom.

## **Appendix**

*A friend asked me some time ago, “What should we do?!” I’ve been thinking on that question ever since. As persons who have acquired or been ascribed privilege, our instinct is to jump in, objectify and fix “the problem.” It is a remnant of our left-brain, colonizing, missionary mentality. First of all, I believe this is the wrong question. If you want to reach a good answer, you have to start with the proper question. A more apt question is “Who are we to be?” Our goals and solutions have been skewed for so long, we need to let ourselves be held accountable to new constituencies particularly those of color, femininity, and reciprocity. The help most needed from and for persons of privilege is healing the dis-ease of white superiority. We have much to (un)learn; much work to do on behalf of Life and Love. We of the Beloved Community have been living as a colonized people and our freedom, indeed the freedom of all Creation, is overdue. With the caveat in mind, I offer these suggestions to join an ongoing quiet revolution of the heart.*

### **Snow Days: A Quiet Revolution of the Heart**

This pamphlet is meant to reorient us in the direction of healing people and planet from the afflictions of fear, greed, selfishness, poverty, power, entitlement, & violence. To begin the process of healing, our relationship with money must change. The legality to take and withhold from others as well as the

force needed to sustain the present order are at the heart of much of what ails Life on this planet.

Not surprisingly, the necessary changes begin as an internal, personal, spiritual practice. The change of heart necessary to recognize the worthiness of all Life, and our shared struggle, must take place voluntarily. Though incomplete and imperfect, with people's participation, these ideas will evolve and develop. If done deliberately, we will heal from the troubles which have been imposed upon us and adopted by us. These are early steps in a long commitment to a quiet revolution of the heart.

Though in the long run we will all benefit from their adoption, these ideas are written for a certain audience; in particular those closer to or exceeding the medians in income (locally \$57,000) and wealth/net worth (nationally \$68,000). As there will be resistance, commitment assumes some experience of unwelcome sacrifice. Have courage: You are alive, loved, and well-provided for.

1. First of all, there are no instructions. No absolute certainties. No us or them. No win or lose. No white or black. No male or female. No straight or gay. Such strict dualities are false. The world contains more ambiguity than we have made space for. Therefore, use your imagination. Be creative. Play. Explore mystery. Discover awe. Learn. Spend time with family, friends, neighbors, your children. Love them as much you are able and as much as they allow. Be easy on everyone especially yourself. Plant a garden. Share a meal. Sit

down. Enjoy it. This is one period of your eternity known as Life.

2. Create networks of encouragement, support and accountability made of persons who live or work in close proximity. Be inclusive of all willing persons. Support each other by providing services as freely as possible, especially to the most vulnerable, and receive services and care from those who likewise commit to these goals. Hold each other accountable by sharing information about one's progress. If you or others go slowly, resist the urge to be impatient and exclude. Treat each other with grace. Collectively encourage each person's unique identity. Encourage eating well, healthy movement, singing, and laughter. Gather often. Share in each others grief and celebrations. Create wider and wider refuges free of aggression, exclusivity, and greed; first internally, then locally and finally globally.

3. Adopt a snow day. One day each week, commit to neither spend nor earn nor frequent a location where spending or earning occur. One day each week, do not participate in commerce including television. We are the only species on the planet which uses money as a means of exchange. In fact, it has become a means of our survival. Let's relieve our dependence on money and reconnect to the true source of Life.

4. As often as possible, buy used and buy locally even if it costs a little more. Limit the number of gallons of gas burned, kilowatt hours of electricity used, & the purchase of material possessions. Rather than strive to accumulate more, consume just enough. Possess and withhold less. Share and trade more.

5. Make your monetary budget as small as possible while still taking exquisite care of the bodies and spirits with whom you are interdependent including your own.
6. Aggressively eliminate your debts.
7. Decline raises in pay. Request cuts in pay equal to your reduced budget or the pay rate of co-workers who earn less than you. Offer your services for as little as you possibly can.
8. In your workplace, seek a flat wage; equally divide wages and benefits with all co-workers regardless of the ways we have defined a person's superiority and inferiority including our own.
9. If a person asks to work alongside you (i.e. applies for a job) and a consensus accepts the equal division of wages, do not turn the applicant down. Accept them. Do not "hire" a machine to work unless *every* person is employed or *no* person is willing. Terminations should be very rare and decided by co-workers rather than a constant threat exercised by one person of power.
10. Divest savings from the stock market and U.S. Treasuries
11. Invest savings in local bonds and a local credit union whose mission is to make loans to marginalized persons for social entrepreneurship and affordable homes. Privilege the sale and construction of housing priced below the median (app. \$170,000 in Durham) including your own home.
12. Explore ways to reduce our dependency on insurance (health, home owner's, life, etc) as it is simply a means to insure against the catastrophic loss of wealth. Create relationships of trust and concern

with neighbors before we become ill, before our home needs repair, and before our survivors need support.

13. Encourage the passage of Congressman John Conyers' bill to study the case for reparations. Designate the full amount you have inherited to be bequeathed to a trust fund for reparations benefits in the event such a milestone can be reached.

14. Urgent structural reform is needed in the following areas:

- Retool the military to serve the protection and preservation of people and planet rather than their destruction. Next, we can begin the disarmament of police and citizens.
- Reform of our law enforcement, judicial and prison systems. Rather than a system that terrorizes (e.g. raids & searches), kidnaps (arrests), holds hostage (incarcerates), dehumanizes (e.g. solitary confinement) and tortures (e.g. executions), create a restorative justice system to sequester and care for people when they harm others. A “jury of one’s peers” should no longer mean a group of anonymous strangers. Rather, decisions (formerly *sentences & verdicts*) should be made by persons who know the history and have hopes for the future of the defendant. These include the victim, victim’s family, neighbors of the defendant, and the defendant’s family.
- In our educational system, implement formats and assessments to advance multiple forms of intelligence including creativity, self-expression, critical discernment, and care. Ensure arts and humanities

curricula are available to everyone. Nurture rather than punish children who are disruptive. Punishment coerces external conformity to make adults more comfortable but harms all children's sense of safety. Love them all especially those who hurt.

- Healing should be accessible to everyone regardless of purchasing power or profitability. Create more vivifying, less industrialized forms of care for our children and elders.
- More proximate production (small-scale farming/gardens) of what God provides (food) and less of what humans manufacture to feed us. Waste less in fields, distribution, stores and homes.
- Political reform including the elimination of gerrymandering, voter disenfranchisement, and the role of money in campaigns and governance. Emphasize local governance, direct representation and consensus decision-making. As our culture heals, deemphasize Federal regulation. Universal suffrage should be implemented. Heterogeneous voting districts could be drawn around a shared resource such as water supply, agricultural district, or community hospital.

15. If you are not already serving in the fields of farming, healing, teaching/learning, or protection, consider a change of vocation. A few examples: farming includes growing, transport, preparation of food and water, such as plumbers, as well as the clean up after it is consumed including morticians. Healing includes environmental restoration, veterinarians, psychotherapists, aides, physicians, and nurses; doulas, midwives, and hospice care; clergy, spiritual guides,

massage therapists and exercise instructors.

Teaching/learning includes teachers, students, artists, journalists, and facilitators of communication.

Protection includes carpenters, tailors, and those who respond to human aggression or natural disaster.

16. Encourage families, neighbors, employers, religious institutions, and governments to pursue similar goals.



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