Something is missing and we all sense it.

Some of us know it consciously, we see it is missing, we name it, we mourn that it is not there.

Some of us know it intuitively, we sense that something’s missing but putting words to it is much harder for us.

And some of us only know it is missing unconsciously, and the missing of it manifests in our lives all kinds of, often unhealthy, ways.

But something is clearly missing and, in one way or another, we all know it.

In the past century, we have seen more change than nearly all of human history combined. I know people who picked cotton in fields as children, lived in houses without plumbing or electricity, whose primary mode of transportation was foot or horseback, and attended school in a one room building where the teacher was also the pastor of...
the local church. Life as such had much more in common with people who were born 3,000 years before them than it does with people who are born today. It was a simple life, a dangerous life, a hard life, but there was also much beauty and goodness in it.

In the past century, we have seen the industrial revolution transform the way we work, the technology revolution transform the way we communicate, the medical revolution transform the way we treat illness, the scientific revolution transform the way we understand the universe and the social revolution transform our concept of family. In the course of 100 years, we went from share croppers to space travelers, from having no phone to instant video calls around the globe, from common disease as death sentence to the decoding of DNA, from a Newtonian world to quantum physics, and from puritanical pietism to gay marriage. There is much to celebrate in each one of these revolutions and the many changes associated with them.

And still, something crucial is missing. And we all can feel it.

Especially now. Under the rally cry of protectionism and isolationism, an old, fear-based way of being has dug in its heels and reasserted itself with shocking force and cruelty. This old way of being asserts that some people are superior to others, that anything “other” is to be feared, that some people are more blessed than others by God, and that some ways of seeing and believing are not only invalid pathways to the divine but inherently evil.

Yet, in the face of all the hatred this old order contains, there is a new revolution in the waiting. And whether or not it is manifested into reality depends on you and me.

Alongside all these other major shifts in the way we live and conceive of life, the religious revolution has yet to come. For we continue to gather, to believe, and to self-identify in ways that still bear striking resemblance to the tribal religions of thousands of years ago.

There is much beauty and goodness in this way of life. As an Episcopal priest, I stand in awe each time I place the chasuble over my head prior to celebrating holy communion, remembering how it connects me to a young Middle Eastern boy named Samuel who wore a simple linen ephod as he served under the priest Eli millennia ago. As the veil is lifted off the elements on the altar, I am reminded of the curtain in the Temple and how my own faith tradition teaches that the simplest of things are among the holiest, that God can be present in a piece of bread or a drop of wine. The details may be different for you and for me, but our connections to the ancestors of our various faith traditions is something deep, and rich, and good.

But the way we organize ourselves around these deep truths is archaic and in desperate need of rethinking. We need religion that is re-imagined and revolutionized. We continue largely to gather only with those who think like us, who look like us. Who think like us, who look like us, who look like us.

“\What does it say that I, a white, straight Christian man who lives in Texas and wears cowboy boots, feels more in tune with a reiki practitioner, an African-American womanist, a Filipino beekeeper, a Latina social worker, a spiritual geneticist, a New York shaman, the first blind, female rabbi, and a black, queer trans man than I do with many in my own tradition?\”

(continued from page 1)
us, who increasingly are the same age as us, who adhere to our own narrow understandings of the divine, and thereby cut ourselves off from the rich tapestry of humanity and all the gifts that our differences hold for one another. This division exists not only between religions but within each of them as well. I feel I have entirely more in common with an enlightened Buddhist monk or a loving Muslim mystic than I do with certain arrogant and intransigent Christians.

I seek to live with and learn from those who are different from me in practice and even in faith, but who are my sisters and brothers in spirit.

This year, I was chosen by Spiritual Directors International as one of the “New Contemplatives” for 2019. One of the things this has allowed me to do a few times now is get on a monthly video conference with ten other New Contemplatives and our coordinator, Lizzie Salsich, and just begin to share something about who we are and our spiritual journeys. We are very diverse. We come from different places and different races. We have different ways of engaging our spirituality, and different ways of thinking about guiding others in their own spiritual journey and faith practices. However, there is, at least for me and I hope for them, a palpable sense of deep goodness, blessedness, and kinship in the time we spend together.

What does it say that I, a white, straight Christian man who lives in Texas and wears cowboy boots, feels more in tune with a reiki practitioner, an African-American womanist, a Filipino beekeeper, a Latina social worker, a spiritual geneticist, a New York shaman, the first blind, female rabbi, and a black, queer trans man than I do with many in my own tradition?

I think it means our understanding needs updated when it comes to what makes an effective form of religious expression.

As we recently listened to Rev. Seifu Anil Singh-Molares, the Executive Director of SDI, describe a vision for this organization that is both connected with the depths of our tradition as spiritual directors but also increasingly defined by the breadth of our very diverse spiritual expressions, I sensed that I had found my tribe, my community for this next part of my journey. I’m relatively new to SDI and I’m sure that, like any other human gathering, it is full of challenges. But at least here sits a table of people who are committed to an authentic, inclusive, respectful, and loving way of being in the world. If that’s my new “church,” I welcome it.

The religious revolution is yet to come. But when it comes (must we still wonder if it comes?), it will change our way of life as surely as any of the other revolutions we’ve witnessed over the last century. As we continue to identify the commonalities of our faith expressions and celebrate them while also acknowledging our differences, and feeling blessed by those as well, we will form a new community and show others how to do the same.

This is the revolution our world still awaits. It is our responsibility and profound honor to be the ones to help usher it in. Let us not delay.

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Letting Go of Negativity

Spiritual Practice

By Imam Jamal Rahman

Neti Neti ~ Tauba Tauba

An excess of unpleasant feelings bruises the soul, especially if these feelings flow from what Sufis call negative imaginary scenarios in the landscape of our minds and hearts. If through our fertile imagination we continuously play out these negative scenarios internally, they manifest on some level of reality. The subconscious cannot distinguish between real and imagined scenarios, so it absorbs and reacts to the negativity as if it were real, triggering a downward spiral of depression and hopelessness. Thus, it is critical to become aware of these negative imaginary scenarios swirling in our minds and to intervene immediately. Sufis say, “Tauba! Tauba!” the moment they recognize this is happening. The word tauba implies the intention to turn to God for help. Buddhist practitioners reject the scenario altogether, saying, “Neti Neti” or “Not real! Not real!” The cyber savvy may bridge the two approaches, acknowledging the scenario but turning away from it by saying, “Cancel! Cancel!” or “Delete! Delete!” When used along with Sacred Naming, any of these spiritual interventions will break the pattern and, by the grace of God, allow space for beautiful patterns of thoughts and feelings to take root. Always remember to be compassionate with yourself during these spiritual interventions.

* Sacred Naming is to name yourself with compassion.

Sacred Naming

We talk to ourselves very often, and much of the talk is negative. Become aware of this internal conversation. Make it a practice to relate to yourself with affection and compassion. Think of a term of endearment which you like. You may want to go back into any period of time in your life, including the recent past, when you remember (continued on page 6)
being called or named by another person with sweetness, and with sacred, divine energy. This might have been a parent, grandparent, child, friend or loved one who addressed you in a sweet and sacred manner. It might be something such as “Brother Jamal,” or “Sweetheart,” or “Dearest….” Remember that precious moment of sacred naming, and repeat it to yourself often, in a tender tone, especially when you hear yourself speaking negatively to yourself or criticizing yourself. The use of this sacred name will inevitably change the course of your inner dialogue, and gradually it will soften and shift.

“Remember that precious moment or sacred naming, and repeat it to yourself often, in a tender tone, especially when you hear yourself speaking negatively to yourself or criticizing yourself.”

Imam Jamal Rahman is co-founder and Muslim Sufi minister at the Interfaith Community Sanctuary in Seattle. He is also adjunct faculty at Seattle University. He specializes in what he calls “spiritual direction in a circle” with groups. A popular speaker on Islam, Sufi spirituality, and interfaith relations, he has authored or co-authored seven books. Along with his Interfaith Amigos, he has been featured in the New York Times, CBS News, BBC and various NPR programs. This is how he explains the role of a spiritual teacher and companion in his tradition: “The teacher kindles the light; the oil is already in the lamp.”

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We are living in a world where we hear and read anger expressed often. I have learned from my teachers that what lies underneath anger or fear is almost always grief. Perhaps the surge of anger and fear in our world is unexpressed grief and despair.

Marshall Rosenberg, developer of Nonviolent Communication (NVC), taught that if we are in anger, we are not connected to the life energy within us. Anger and fear are gifts pointing us to what matters to us: for instance, a need for safety, inclusion or a world where everyone has enough to eat. So, after expressing our anger or fear, if we spend a few moments looking within, we will almost always find our grief. Once we are in grief or mourning, we are connected to life again, and to what matters to us - our deepest values.

Perhaps some of our collective anger is a result of having little societal support for experiencing our grief. It’s hard enough to grieve even with support. It’s very difficult to face grief alone. Thus, many people, lacking support to mourn, remain stuck in their anger or their fear.

Spiritual directors have a special role to play in this predicament: the role of inviting our spiritual directees into the tender mourning of looking at the world with clear and loving eyes and allowing themselves to feel grief for what is true that they wish were not. Together, it is possible to hold the grief gently, both feeling it and at the same time feeling compassion for it.

When I find myself in anger, if I act out of that energy (and anger does mobilize energy), whatever I do is less likely to be connected to God’s call to me, and thus less effective in changing what has made me angry. However, if I take the time to see what I want so badly that I am furious, and I then let myself grieve the fact that what I want so deeply just is not true — i.e. let myself accept with compassion what is true, though it makes me cry — then my heart will soften. From there, I can connect with God’s will for me. Then I can be much more effective in working to change what is so awful.

How could this unfold in a spiritual direction session? If a spiritual directee comes to us expressing anger, we might first invite her to rail at God, to direct her anger at the One who created our world. We might then ask her what she wishes were true. When the directee is able to express what she wants — that she also acknowledges is not true - , we can help her find the deep value that she longs for. We can help her begin to have self-compassion for how incredibly hard it is to be without this value that matters so deeply.

For example, we can hold a space for someone we companion to dwell on how deeply he wants love and belonging, or a sense of worthiness, or greater freedom, or meaning, or well-being for himself, or for someone he loves, or for all people. We can invite him to direct compassion toward himself, encouraging him to hold tenderly his own sadness. Self-compassion is an essential component of mourning, and spiritual directors can provide support for mourning by holding empathetic presence while the directee directs...
compassion toward his own heart.

We might also help him leaven the grief with gratitude for past and future experiences of this need being met.

As we model this empathetic space for mourning, we may also encourage directees to do the same for others, by seeking out friends with whom they can exchange time set aside specifically for listening to one another and giving the gift of compassionate presence to one another’s sadness and celebrations.

As we support our spiritual directees to tend to their grief in this way, their ability to hear the voice of their soul is likely to become stronger. If they are angry, until they do this work, they are not tending to the weeping soul; they are trying to protect it by changing the world with their anger. Unfortunately, this rarely works.

Expressing our anger clearly in a safe way is important, and allows the energy to move, but it takes self-compassion and mourning to tend to the soul. This helps us to stop resisting and begin accepting what is actually true. It is so much easier — sometimes it is only possible — to do this in the compassionate presence of another person.

Mourning, acceptance and the self-compassion can lead to clarity and bring us into a space of love. From there, any action we take to change the situation will be more effective because it is rooted in the invincible power of love.

Pamela Winthrop Lauer is a spiritual director and a teacher of Nonviolent Communication in St. Paul, Minnesota, U.S.A. She adds this note: “I have been learning with Miki Kashtan on a weekly basis for over a year now, and most of the ideas I am presenting here are profoundly shaped by Miki’s work and the work of the founder of Nonviolent Communication, Marshall Rosenberg. However, they are my take on my teachers’ work. If you would like to learn more about their ideas directly, I recommend reading Miki’s blog, The Fearless Heart, or any of her books, as well as books by Marshall Rosenberg.” Pam can be reached at wpdj@usfamily.net.
### Rainbow of Love

**LOVE CARES**
You feel tender concern for the beloved’s well-being—emotional, physical, and spiritual. You feel that their joy is your joy, their sorrow your sorrow. You want to take care of them. And because everyone loves to be needed, care includes the desire and willingness to be cared for and healed by the beloved.

**LOVE APPRECIATES**
You feel, see, and respond to all that is good and beautiful in the beloved. You offer your heartfelt joy and respect in response to who they are. And you desire them.

**LOVE UNDERSTANDS**
Love reaches to understand the heart and soul, the hopes, desires, and fears of the beloved. You want to know, hear, and understand your loved ones entirely.

**LOVE IS DEVOTED**
Love is unselfish devotion, commitment to the true well-being and happiness of the beloved. In love, you give yourself for the joy, benefit, and fulfillment of the beloved.

**LOVE RECOGNIZES**
You see the true self—the Divine nature—of the beloved. Their Divine beauty. Their heart and feeling. Their sensitivity and goodness. Their unique and exquisite beauty. And you recognize their power to heal and uplift you.

**LOVE WANTS TO LIBERATE**
Love wants to help the beloved find relief from their suffering—including the pain that results from thoughts and behaviors that make them feel unhappy, limited, less-than-Godly, less like themselves.

**LOVE IS LOYAL**
Love commits to doing right by the beloved, providing steady, ongoing support, standing up for them when they need it, defending their goodness against any untrue thought that we or anyone else might have about them. Love means being true to the beloved.

**LOVE IS DIVINE**
God is love. When love moves, God moves. When you move with love, God moves with you. To love is to respond to all that lives as a healing flow of energy and compassion.

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Power of Parable
By Jess Andrews

Fresh out of the SDI webinar series on Henri Nouwen, I am preparing a workshop on prayer for a youth event. Ideas are sprouting abundantly, but if I am honest, most are probably too heady and academic for a gaggle of teens on a Friday night. I choose to pause for ten minutes of centering prayer. As I allow my fluttering thoughts to alight in the silence, I imagine myself resting in a divine embrace. As I return to my project, the direction is clear: use a parable.

Parables have been used by countless great spiritual teachers: Henri Nouwen, Jesus, Rumi. They are found across faiths and cultures throughout history. A parable is a metaphorical story, always pointing to something beyond itself.

Here are the five powers of parable, as I see them:

Connect head and heart

Henri Nouwen is known for being a deep thinker yet, at the same time, powerfully able to connect at the heart level. I think a parable is similar -- it provides a meeting place for our analytical minds and our affective hearts.

“To pray is to descend with the mind into the heart, and there to stand before the face of the Lord, ever-present, all-seeing, within you.” ~ Theophan the Recluse

Use the material to illuminate the mysterious

The imagination can be a powerful doorway to the soul and a helpful tool in prayer. By using an easily imagined story with
concrete details, we can sometimes find a vantage point that illuminates something transcendent, difficult to conceptualize, or previously hidden. “This was my method of prayer; as I could not make reflections with my understanding, I contrived to picture Christ within me.” ~ Teresa of Ávila

Support meaning making

Viktor Frankl, holocaust survivor, psychiatrist and author of Man’s Search for Meaning, held that our primary human longing is to discover meaning in life. In our current day, we find a close link between anxiety and meaninglessness. Paul Tillich, 20th century theologian, suggested that anxiety manifests differently in each era. In The Courage to Be he wrote, “At the end of ancient civilization ontic anxiety [threat of extinction] is predominant, at the end of the Middle Ages moral anxiety, and at the end of the modern period spiritual anxiety.”

So, anxiety is not new, but its character has morphed. In present times, it is hitting us at even younger ages and is clothed in emptiness and meaninglessness. A parable can provide a stepping stone in the mire. When we are touched by the profound meaning in a simple parable, it gives us hope that perhaps deep meaning can be mined from our own stories.

Provide opportunity to participate

By the very act of participating, we change. We hear a parable, engage with it, connect it to something from our life or memory bank. The process is the journey. Often just participating in this process is enough to learn our next right step.

“The soul will bring forth Person if God laughs into her and she laughs back to him.” ~ Meister Eckhart

Change our minds to spur us outward

A parable can provide a launch pad for a mental shift. Research has shown that we are more likely to change our minds when our brains are in “story mode” than in “fact mode.” Sometimes we need to do the deep spiritual work of releasing a tightly held “certainty.” It’s no coincidence that the Greek word for repent in the Bible means to change your mind. When we change our minds in the direction of inviting more compassion for ourselves or others, our inward focus will naturally expand outward toward the collective good.

Parables are fun, simple and approachable but they pack a mighty punch. Do you know a compelling parable? Don’t just keep it, pass it on.

Jess Dell Andrews is a Canadian mother, mountain biker and Christ-centered contemplative. She has a background in healthcare and parachurch ministry but is pursuing graduate studies for a career shift into spiritual care. She is passionate about community, presence and holistic soul care that integrates mind, body, spirit and creation. She tries not to spend too much of her time on Instagram @jessdellandrews or blogging. She says: “I am not a certified spiritual director/companion but it is something that seems to occur organically in my life. I am discerning next steps in my studies right now and am trying figure out how to get formal training as a spiritual director while completing a theology/spiritual care Masters.”

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Avoiding the Value Trap -  
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The 5 Layers of Human Experience

By Dr. Preeta M. Banjeree

As a New Contemplative, I am enjoying walking a path of innovation and creativity. Fortunately, I am blessed to have access to the amazing people and resources at SDI. Each spurs reflection that allows me to better embrace my own presence and self-awareness. For example, when reading the beautiful SDI Resource called “Portrait of a Spiritual Director,” I read that a spiritual director “recognizes varied states in directees, including mental, emotional, physical, spiritual states; noticing shifts in spiritual movements, affective moods, cognitive states; naming personal triggers, hooks, wounds.”

The statement resonated deeply for me as this type of recognition comes with a healthy understanding that we are more than our body – we are spiritual beings having a human experience. In fact, in the Hindu faith tradition we give the human experience five layers or “koshas.”

The first is the physical layer - Annamaya Kosha. This is the most tangible layer. We, as spiritual directors, can try to acknowledge all parts of our corporeal body more often.

Here’s a question and an invitation for you all to explore: Can we use all our senses to scan our entire body from tip of the toes to crown of the head, deep into our organs, to the inhale and exhale of our breath?

The second is the energy layer - Pranamaya Kosha. We, as spiritual directors, can become sensitive to the vibrations within and around us.

An invitation: Can we notice the way we feel when we enter a room and what we leave in the room solely with our presence?

The third layer is the mental layer - Manomaya Kosha. We, as spiritual directors, can examine how we create meaning out of the world we inhabit.

An invitation: Can we relax the powerful mental structures formed by the beliefs, opinions, and assumptions absorbed from family, friends, culture, academic studies and quickly release thoughts, images, perceptions as they bubble up?

The fourth layer is the wisdom layer - Vijnanamaya Kosha. We, as spiritual directors, can strengthen our intuition and awareness by allowing ourselves to become engrossed in deep contemplation.

An invitation: Can we simply observe and witness our subtle awareness, responsible for our insights, when faced with personal or professional problems?

The fifth layer is the bliss layer - Anandamaya Kosha. We are all born to be blissful, separated by the smallest amount from the universal Self, filled with natural ecstasy, dynamism, and goodness.

An invitation: can we start to pinpoint where is bliss in our life, in every essence from pure ecstasy to simple contentment?

In my own life, I have been working diligently to develop my own 5 layers of human experience, often in the context of a dynamic life. As I wrote recently: “Someone might wonder how a Wharton Ph.D. who taught business school for 8 years and then ran a consulting team (continued on page 13)
for 5 years would become a spiritual director. The process of becoming a mother is fully and deeply transformational. While each time pregnancy and labor were extremely difficult, the process of growth and nurturing presented an opportunity to step into ‘I AM.’ “ The combination of parenthood, yoga, reiki, Ayurveda and other disciplines I have studied, alongside my academic and business experiences, have helped me illustrate the idea that we can find depth and meaning by following our heart even if it leads in different directions. In fact, my book *Life as a Mix Master* is a choose-your-own-adventure through the 7 major energetic centers or “chakras” of our bodies using the metaphor of music and creating our life’s soundtracks.

As in the creation of our life’s soundtracks, each choice we make as spiritual directors requires that we are fully self-aware and aligned to take meaningful action. Here, I would like to propose a principle akin to the financial principle of “avoiding value traps”. A value trap is a company that appears cheap because of a large fall in its valuation, but which is actually still expensive relative to intrinsic value. The opposite can also be true - that one invests in something expensive assuming high value. As Warren Buffet said, “price is what you pay, value what you get”.

Applied to life, our time can often be caught in value traps. Relationships, activities, time-spends that become important because we perceive them to be urgent. This is a routine we learn as kids, the stakes are presented to be high by parents, teacher and friends so we force ourselves to perform, regardless of whether the goals and actions are relevant to us or not.

As a vegetarian, I can state firmly: One man’s meat is another man’s poison. Let us decide for ourselves what makes the most meaning on our paths. Leaning into the 5 Hindu layers of human experience is an excellent way towards authentic discernment.

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**Preeta M. Banerjee, PhD** is an SDI New Contemplative and will be one of the presenters for the SDI Conference Retreat March 19-22, 2019. She is a spiritual companion who draws on a broad and deep range of experience, having spent 20 years in academia, coaching and consulting as an advocate, educator, researcher and author. She is a strong voice for combining spirituality, creativity, innovation, entrepreneurship and social change. Her daily practice comes from yoga, Let Your Yoga Dance, meditation, Kirtan, reiki and crystal healing as well as being an Ayurveda and a black-belt Tae Kwon Do practitioner. She draws inspiration from a number of spiritual traditions and looks forward to curating contemplative spaces for the Mystic Soul Project. Currently, co-founder and partner at WhiteLeaf Advisors LLC, she previously led a team at Deloitte and was a business school professor at Brandeis and University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign. She has a PhD in Strategic Management from the Wharton School and BS in Computational Biology and Business from Carnegie Mellon.

To read more about the Pancha Kosha or 5 layers of human experience, please refer to the *Taittiriya Upanishad*.
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