



## Seminary of the Street

**At the intersection between social change and personal transformation**

**June 6, 2009**

Dear Nichola,

We say that our mission at Seminary of the Street is to train cadres of spiritual warriors with the resilience, the unsentimental awareness, the skills, and the community support to struggle against the values of the dominant culture and cultivate an alternative way of being rooted in nonmarket values like love, kindness, generosity, tenderness, and wonder. Below you'll find a collection of resources aligned with that goal.

### Tenacious Love

Our movie recommendation of the month is *THE SOLOIST*, starring Jamie Foxx and Robert Downey, Jr. Based on a true story, this unusual Hollywood offering documents a relationship between *LA TIMES* columnist Steve Lopez and homeless, schizophrenic classical musician Nathaniel Ayers. While the successful but embittered Lopez initially views Ayers as nothing more than a great story idea--and attention is paid to the potential exploitation involved even in making this movie--he gradually comes to care about the man's welfare. What makes this film unusual is that it doesn't trump up the degree to which Lopez can help Ayers. He can't ultimately convince him to go on the medication that might make a more "normal" life possible for him, nor can he force him into a successful performance experience or even an apartment; instead, he is called to love Ayers as he is, and in so doing, to be *himself* transformed. This transformation is evident in the scenes from LA's skid row. I don't think I've ever seen a depiction of the suffering of homelessness, poverty, and addiction more overwhelming than this movie's first scene on Skid Row. Over time, though, the roiling chaos of those street scenes subsides, and we, through Lopez's eyes, begin to see human beings, individuals with their own unique humanity. And that makes us care not just about Ayers but about all those suffering in the way Ayers is. In typical fix-it-now liberal fashion, I found myself praying through the movie, asking for some guidance about what we are to do about the scourge of mental illness that accounts for so much homelessness. I feel as if the answer I got was to love people. Just love them. And then let that love transform me in a way that makes other solutions possible. That doesn't mean we shouldn't work toward better medication, more access to healthcare, more affordable and supportive housing, and so on, but it does suggest that relationship comes first, and that we can't advocate for policy as a substitute for genuine engagement.

### Practicing Interdependence in an Individualist Culture



Increasingly, science is confirming what religious traditions have set forth for centuries in their metaphors of tribe and body and even fields of emptiness: that we are not as separate from each other and the world around us as we like to think. Ecology, quantum physics, and system theories all demonstrate the ways in which life forms are interconnected and interdependent, not to mention that our greatest power for aliveness and transformation comes from connection with that greater whole. And yet individualism is embedded in the American psyche and fundamental to the way of life most of us have imbibed.

How do we begin to shift this gut-level assumption of separateness?

On June 13, Miki Kashtan will lead "Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty: Interdependence in the Face of Cultural Imperatives. The "Dancing in the Gap of Uncertainty" series uses the skills of Nonviolent Communication to explore the places where shame, guilt, fear, and anger block you from authentic living. As you become more conscious of your needs and habits, you might find yourself embracing vulnerability where previously you were afraid; experiencing more choice; increasing your willingness to rely on others for support and creating connections and community; taking responsibility for your actions and your life; and working for change where you want it with loving energy instead of anger. In this day-long workshop, we will focus on holding everyone's needs dear; learning to rely on others; risking our own significance; and shifting our use of power.

Saturday, June 13, 2009

9:30am-5pm

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St.

Visit [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) for information and to register. Those who live outside the Bay area will be able to take this workshop by telephone via NVC Academy:

<http://nvctraining.com/courses/telecourses/index.html>.

## **Economic Meltdown: Crisis or Opportunity?**

A couple months ago, as the seriousness of the economic crisis was becoming evident, Seminary of the Street board member Dave Belden said to me, "This is too good a crisis to waste." Many of us share Dave's sense that the current economic situation reveals cracks in runaway corporate capitalism that might signal an opening for something new. At the same time, we recognize that the crisis is creating tremendous suffering that is felt most acutely by those at the bottom of our socioeconomic system. (Jeremy, a disabled homeless man in my neighborhood, tells me "People just aren't giving change anymore.") How do we remediate immediate suffering as we build toward a new economy?

One of the first steps is to inform ourselves about what has really happened to the economy. If you are in the Bay area, join Seminary of the Street on Wednesday, June 24, at "Meltdown: A Popular Education Workshop from the Just Economics Collective." This workshop is designed for people with little or no financial or economics background and aims to give us enough information to develop our own opinions. Find details on our "Current Classes" page: <http://www.seminaryofthestreet.org/id4.html>.

There are also hundreds of resources online. One of my favorites is an article by David Korten in a recent issue of Tikkun magazine. Read it online at

<http://www.tikkun.org/article.php/Korten-economic-redesign-for-21st>.

What resources are you finding most exciting or inspiring in these times? Post them to our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=45655450887>) or email them to me, and I'll post them.

## THE SHARING SOLUTION: A Book by Attorneys Janelle Orsi and Emily Doskow

One simple response to the current economic crisis is to share resources with those around you. From cars and tools to housing and childcare, many people would like to share resources but don't know how--or where--to start. The Sharing Solution is a timely practical and legal guide that explains how to create and maintain successful sharing arrangements while addressing common concerns about liability, communication, and more. This book will help anyone share:



- Meals and food, through bulk buying clubs, meal-sharing arrangements, community gardens, neighborhood fruit harvests, and more
- Household goods, from tools and toys to appliances and exercise equipment
- Cars, by sharing a car with a neighbor, starting or joining a car-sharing group, carpooling, or ride-sharing
- Caregiving, whether for pets, children, older family members, or relatives with disabilities
- Business resources, such as office supplies, equipment, space, and even employees
- Housing, whether by sharing a house, retrofitting a home to accommodate two households, or joining a cohousing community

## Advocacy and Beyond: The Irresistible Revolution

Those of you who live in California are no doubt aware that the governor's budget proposal includes the virtual elimination of [CalWorks](#), the state's program providing support for families with children who are living in poverty. Here in Alameda County, the board of supervisors will vote next week to institute new reductions and limits on general assistance, the tiny subsidy that keeps thousands from being homeless. Please, please, if you are a resident of these areas, contact your legislators ( <http://www.legislature.ca.gov/port-zipsearch.html>) and/or supervisors (find your district here <http://www.acgov.org/map.htm> and the supervisor for that district here <http://www.acgov.org/board/>) and urge them to resist these measures.

And if you are hungry for an approach to the social catastrophe that goes beyond writing an occasional email to your representatives, that is more of a way of life, join us for a discussion of Shane Claiborne's book THE IRRESISTIBLE REVOLUTION: LIVING AS AN ORDINARY RADICAL. With some friends from college, Shane Claiborne co-founded The Simple Way, an intentional community in inner-city Philadelphia. Committed to loving their neighbors, they feed the hungry, house the homeless, befriend the lonely, and play lots of games with the neighborhood kids, while staging social actions that embody the possibility of a new and more loving way of life.

Read the book--you can order it from any local bookstore or get it online-- and then come talk about what we can do here in the Bay area to seed the revolution. If you don't get a chance to read it, come anyway. There will be plenty to talk about.

Facilitator: Nichola Torbett

Tuesdays, June 23-July 7, 7-9pm, followed by a film screening on July 14 at First Congregational Church of Oakland

Discussion FREE, but pre-registration requested; email [ntorbett@seminaryofthetreet.org](mailto:ntorbett@seminaryofthetreet.org)

Nomad Cafe, 6500 Shattuck Ave in Oakland

As usual, we'll also discuss the book online at our Facebook page (<http://www.facebook.com/home.php#/group.php?gid=45655450887>) so that those of you who can't be here in person can participate.

## Healing the Heart of Justice Workshops



Have you heard about the powerful new way of combining social justice and anti-oppression education with body-mind-spirit healing? Victor Lee Lewis, known for his role in the popular antiracism film *THE COLOR OF FEAR*, is pioneering this new approach right here at Seminary of the Street. Students learn social justice concepts while working to heal the underlying issues that make cross-cultural social justice collaboration so difficult. There will be several opportunities to participate in his seminars:

- NEW! Emerging and experienced white antiracist activists are invited to "Racial Justice and Racial Healing: White Allies Unlearning and Undoing Racism in Theory and Practice," Saturday, June 13, 9am-5pm. Click here for details (<http://www.seminaryofthestreet.org/id19.html>).
- NEW! Everyone is invited to the Liberation from Oppression workshop, Saturday, July 18 from 9am-5pm. Details coming soon!

Registration is on a sliding scale from \$80-160, and some work exchange is available.

More details on both workshops are available at [www.seminaryofthestreet.org](http://www.seminaryofthestreet.org). To register for any of these workshops, email [ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org).

## More Classes Online!

Visit <http://www.seminaryofthestreet.org/id4.html> for up-to-date information about current and upcoming offerings.

We hope to see you in class soon!

## We Need Your Support

We have a policy at Seminary of the Street that we won't turn people away for lack of funds. We offer a range of work exchange and discount opportunities to attend our classes and events. We also make a point of promoting the good work of other organizations, even though some would say it's not in our "best interests" to send potential donors to other good causes. We believe that life is not a zero sum game, and that "We all do better when we all do better," as the late Senator Paul Wellstone used to say.

We are currently facing a number of large expenses and really need your support to make this work possible. Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to Seminary of the Street, 329 41st St., Oakland, CA 94609. (One of those expenses involves getting a secure mechanism in place for people to make credit card donations through our website! For now, though, we are limited to old-fashioned checks.)

## Volunteer Opportunities

We can always use help with set-up and clean-up before and after our events, and we also have periodic

needs for office help.

We are also interested in finding a group of people who would be willing to work with us to create and invite the community to a "potluck communion" service in a public park once a month. Last November, Seminary of the Street, in collaboration with Urban Sanctuary and First Congregational Church of Oakland, held a potluck picnic in the park, to which we invited all comers, including homeless people in the park and business people on their lunch hours. We had music and much good conversation, and most people left with hugs. Several of us were powerfully moved by this experience and have been dreaming of organizing such a picnic monthly, or maybe organizing local faith communities to coordinate it on a rotating basis, as a way of moving people from a "distant charity" model to being in real, transformative relationship with people who are hungry and poverty-stricken. We need a couple more people with a fire in their bellies for this project in order to make it sustainable for us. Are you such a person? Email Nichola at [ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org) and rest assured that we will only move forward with this if there is a way of doing it without overstressing any volunteer.

## Wish list

Do you have something on the list below that you could donate to us? We'd be happy to provide you with a tax receipt for the value of the item.

Easel for presentations  
Digital camera  
LCD Projector

I hope you find these resources helpful. Your comments and suggestions are always appreciated, so send them our way.

Blessings,

Nichola Torbett  
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To unsubscribe, email [info@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:info@seminaryofthestreet.org) with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.  
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