



Seminary of the Street

Meet Us at the Corner of Love and Justice

May 3, 2010

Dear Nichola,

Have you noticed that sometimes "reconciliation" with someone after a conflict or estrangement feels like being restored to real, authentic communion with that person, and sometimes it feels like having given in, having compromised more than is comfortable because you wanted to stay in relationship? The verb "to reconcile" actually means both things: "to restore to communion" and "to cause to accept or become resigned."

As we launch the [West Oakland Reconciliation and Social Healing Project \(WORSHP\)](#), I've been thinking about the difference between those two definitions. When we say our goal is racial and economic reconciliation, what we really mean is "restoration to communion," but all too often, such projects end up in resignation, often thinly masking cynicism or despair. Conversations about racial and economic inequalities rarely end in restored communion and deepened relationship. One crucial reason for that is that "white" people and people with money have more power in our culture, and that means there is huge pressure on people of color and those with less money to give in, to appease, to "make nice" at the cost of authenticity. (This also still happens between men and women in contexts in which men have more power, or women have internalized the belief that they have less power.) The price for not resigning oneself to the point of view of the person or group with power could be anything from social ostracism to loss of job to extreme violence against one's self or one's family.

So, if this is true, is there any hope of true restoration of communion?

I believe that "with God all things are possible" (where "God" is known by many names, all referring to the Force for Healing and Transformation in the Universe). I also believe that the process is going to require the transformation of everyone involved. Participants in any true reconciliation project must first and foremost be reconciled to God and to God's deepest dream of a loving and just social world, including a loving and just economy.

Note: I do not claim to have access to the mind of God nor any comprehensive grasp of what that loving and justice social order looks like, but I do find shocking, delightful clues when I read the scriptures of various religious traditions, clues that I long to put into practice in my own life. What I have learned from that study is that reconciliation will become possible as we change our understanding of power, security, ownership and use of resources--in other words, of what it means to be really, fully, joyfully, authentically alive on this planet.

We've got a bunch of opportunities coming up for us to engage in community with these understandings. I hope to see you at an event soon!

Recovery from the Dominant Culture

Another way to express the failure of most reconciliation efforts is that they fail to challenge the tenets of the dominant culture, with its fundamental reliance on systems of oppression, exploitation, greed, and violence. At best, such efforts help us be a little nicer to each other on the surface while the underlying structural violence continues.

I wrote last month about our hopes to create a fellowship of people who are committed to recovering from the dominant culture and living into something else entirely, something like what Jesus may have meant by "the Kingdom of God."

A longer reflection on this project is posted at Tikkun Daily and is generating a fair amount of discussion there. Click [here \(http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2010/04/27/we-were-never-meant-to-survive/\)](http://www.tikkun.org/tikkundaily/2010/04/27/we-were-never-meant-to-survive/) to read that conversation.

Plan Ahead for One-Week Summer Intensive: Dissident Discipleship in the American Empire

**with Nichola Torbett through Pacific School of Religion's Summer Session
Monday, August 9 - Friday, August 13, 1:30-5:30pm**

I'm very excited to be teaching a summer session class at Pacific School of Religion in Berkeley this summer. (I've also got some pretty amazing guest speakers lined up for the week. Can't tell you the details yet, but it's pretty exciting.) Out-of-towners, this is a great opportunity to get a quick, intensive introduction to what we are doing. Here's the description:

Units: Audit (\$345)

1.5 Semester Hours (\$960)

2 Continuing Education Units (\$345)

Description: The term "spiritual activism" has become increasingly popular in recent years, but what does it mean? Does it designate anything other than engaging in secular activist practices as a faith community or as an interfaith coalition? Seminary of the Street contends that the missing element in spiritual activism as it is currently practiced is this: Spiritual activists need to seek the loving help of a Higher Power to free ourselves from the ways we are implicated in the very systems and structures we indict in our activism, thus participating in our own oppression and the oppression of countless others. So many of us hunger for more aliveness, more love, and deeper connections and yet find ourselves succumbing again and again, consciously and unconsciously, to the coercive demands and seductive compensations of the dominant culture. How can we cultivate our capacity, and the capacity of others in our communities, to be dissident, in other words, to resist participation in oppressive systems and instead develop an alternative way of living? In this class, we'll explore disciples and practices toward that end.

For a syllabus click [here \(www.psr.edu/files_psr/TorbettDissidentDiscipleship2010.pdf\)](http://www.psr.edu/files_psr/TorbettDissidentDiscipleship2010.pdf).

To register, click [here](#) or visit www.psr.edu/summer.

"Alternatives to Gentrification" Reading Group

Tuesdays, May 4-25, 6-8pm

I am getting very excited about the launch of the "Alternatives to Gentrification" reading group this Tuesday. Another initiative of the [West Oakland Social Healing Project](#), the "Alternatives to Gentrification" this group will meet periodically over the coming months to learn about what gentrification is and how it happens, explore alternatives being pioneered in other places, and dream together about what might be possible here.

Join us in our new West Oakland home on Tuesdays, May 4-25, from 6-8pm. This Tuesday, we'll watch and discuss the award-winning documentary film *FLAG WARS*, which gives viewers a glimpse into the tensions that develop as white gay men move into an African-American neighborhood in Columbus, Ohio. The film provides an opportunity to discuss the intersections of homophobia, racism, and class. In the following three sessions, we'll discuss *THEM*, Nathan McCall's poignant, grimly funny novel about gentrification in an Atlanta neighborhood much like West Oakland. *Publisher's Weekly* calls the novel by McCall, an African-American former *Washington Post* journalist, "masterfully orchestrated and deeply disturbing" in its illustrations of the depth of the racial divide and the difficulty of building community in its face. While the novel isn't particularly hopeful, it gives us an opportunity to grapple with the seriousness of the issues we are facing and reflect on our motives for doing so. It's also just a really good read.

Bring your dinner and/or enjoy some snacks that we'll provide.

Tuesdays, May 4-25, 6-8pm

1724 Filbert St.

Freewill donation requested to help with cost of snacks.

RSVP by [emailing us](#), and we'll send you a reading schedule

Appreciative Inquiry Workshop at Starr King School for the Ministry **Sunday, May 9, 1-7pm**

Seminary of the Street "frequent flier" MarySue Foster is offering the following workshop as part of her masters' program at Starr King. It promises to be very good. Here is the description:

What could be better in your community? The schools? Neighborhood safety? Or more options for young people? How about just knowing your neighbors?

Appreciative Inquiry has been called "a positive revolution in change." AI is a powerful tool for organizing communities, enhancing work with diverse groups, articulating vision – in short, a way into the heart and soul. AI builds a safe place to explore divisive issues and to co-create exciting and inclusive futures. And, you can learn the basics in a few hours!

On Sunday, May 9 (Mother's Day), we will be gathering in North Berkeley for a free Appreciative Inquiry workshop: Discovering Partners, Generating Community, Connecting for Results.

Appreciative Inquiry is one of the most powerful and easily learned tools for inclusive collaboration. During the workshop you will learn the basic principles, compare and contrast Appreciative Inquiry with other methods of organizational development -- but mostly you will get a chance to use the process with other seminar participants. You will come away with greater confidence around how to engage others in your own dreams for the future – and how to tap into theirs.

If you want to see your community working better -- want to have healthy and vital neighborhoods -- want families to be strong and secure, this workshop will give you a solid beginning.

The workshop is for people who want to grow their leadership skills. Half the participants will be adults and half will be young people ages 14 to 23. Seminar is free if you are between 14 and 23 or if you bring someone between 14 and 23. If you are older or solo, we request a \$15 materials donation.

Join us on May 9? You will learn new skills and meet other people engaged in changing their communities.

Sunday, May 9, 1-7pm

Starr King School for the Ministry, 2441 LeConte Avenue in Berkeley

\$15 donation, or bring a young person ages 14-23, in which case both registrations are free
To register: send an email to marysue@earthlink.net or call 510.356.6702.

Be a Resource in Your Community

with Miki Kashtan, cosponsored with Bay-Area Nonviolent Communication

Friday, May 21, 4:30-6:30pm

Would you like to learn how to become a resource in your neighborhood or community?

In this workshop you can learn basic skills in empathic listening that can support you in the following areas:

- * capacity to stay present in challenging situations
- * ability to reflect your understanding regardless of content
- * competence in checking for understanding of deeper meaning of what is shared
- * willingness to listen without trying to solve problems

Miki Kashtan, certified NVC trainer, is a founder of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication and the North America Leadership Program. Miki conducts organizational trainings, consults with private and public sector organizations and teaches NVC at workshops in the San Francisco Bay Area and around the country. Miki has been supporting global social change movements, including coaching of Peace Alliance members in their Department of Peace campaign, facilitation of the African Alliance for Peace summit in Ghana, and a global peace building and conflict transformation summit in Japan. She holds a Ph.D. in sociology from the University of California at Berkeley.

Continuing Education Units are available. For information, please go to:
http://www.baynvc.org/new_announcement_details.php?announcement_id=289

Note: Space is limited. Although this is a free event, we ask that you pre-register if at all possible. To register, contact BayNVC at (510) 433-0700 or register@baynvc.org. Donations accepted.

Friday, May 21, 4:30-6:30pm

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St.

Free, but RSVP requested

Call BayNVC at (510) 433-0700 or email register@baynvc.org

Undoing Oppression in the Body

with Victor Lee Lewis and Vanissar Tarakali

Saturday, May 22, 10am-5pm

This embodied workshop for both people of color and white people will explore the impact of trauma (personal, intimate, social) on our experiences of oppression, our participation in oppressive systems, and our efforts to free ourselves from both. Assuming that oppression traumatizes both targets and agents, we'll work with trauma and shame as they live in the bodymind, introducing concrete practices for engaging consciously with adaptations that keep oppression and privilege in place and discovering empowering alternatives.

Participants will spend time in both joint sessions and POC/white caucuses. People of color will explore ways to recover resilience in addressing racism and internalized racism. White allies will become conscious of automatic behaviors that interfere with efforts to undo racism and learn effective ways of working with them. People in both groups will become more resourceful in managing feelings of anger, fear, overwhelm, discouragement, "burnout" and stress in themselves and others.

This is a rare opportunity to learn from two pioneers in the field of social justice education. Victor Lee Lewis, MA, is a social justice educator/healer with more than 25 years of experience. Best known for his role in the groundbreaking film *The Color of Fear*, he is pioneering new ways to bring fast, deep and lasting emotional healing into social justice education. Vanissar Tarakali combines intimate and social trauma expertise, anti-oppression education, a Ph.D. in East-West psychology, and a deep understanding of the body's intuitive, energetic, survival and healing mechanisms to design embodied educational programs.

Saturday, May 22, 10am-5pm

Sliding scale: \$80-180; some financial aid available

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland

Email ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org to sign up.

Emotional First Aid for Love Warriors

with Vanissar Tarakali

Saturday, June 12, 10am-5pm

This "learn through the body" workshop offers practical tools to help community workers, therapists, activists and healers stay calm, focused and creative in the face of stress and vicarious trauma. We will practice simple techniques that you can apply right away for soothing, calming and centering yourself or another when one of you is triggered (anxious, panicking, angry, shutting down, etc). The focus will be on how to increase your internal sense of safety, options and spaciousness when you are triggered, so you can take care of yourself and connect better with others. This workshop will support anyone who is dealing with stress to stay more resilient, and help folks who work with individuals and communities who are dealing with past or current intimate or social trauma (oppression) be more effective.

The workshop will include:

- * how trauma due to violence and oppression shows up in the body
- * reflection on situations that trigger us
- * practice noticing--early on--when you are getting triggered.
- * verbal interventions
- * breathing techniques
- * energy healing
- * somatic containment practices
- * being an ally for another

About the instructor: Vanissar Tarakali, Ph.D. is a teacher and healer who has provided energywork to beings for pain, stress relief and life transitions for over 27 years. She creates compassionate spaces within which pain, stress, trauma, oppression, transitions and spiritual concerns can be witnessed and transformed. Inspired by her sexual abuse recovery and spiritual emergence process, she is dedicated to healing intimate and social oppression and cultivating allyship. She has studied Reiki, polarity, chakra balancing, and meditation, and is an ongoing student of Tibetan Buddhism, intuitive reading with Phyllis Pay, and somatics and trauma with Staci Haines and Denise Benson.

Saturday, June 12, 10am-5pm

Sliding scale: \$80-180; some financial aid available

First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland

Email ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org to sign up.

Your Donations Make Possible....

As many of you know from experience, we are committed to making our offerings accessible to those who want them, regardless of their ability to pay. We have a generous financial assistance policy that is only possible because of the generosity of those who donate to our 501(c)(3). We are now beginning to see people who have benefitted from our scholarships make donations as they become able. The circle of generosity is so gratifying. Can you be a part of it?

In addition, we are taking on a number of new projects this year, including the [West Oakland Social Healing Project](#).

For the first time, we are considering hiring a paid staff person, to support this and other efforts. (Many of you probably didn't know that this has been an entirely volunteer-run organization.) We are so gratified at the response we have received and at the opportunity to be of service. In order to move to the next level, we really need your financial support.

Please consider sending a tax-deductible donation to Seminary of the Street, 1724 Filbert St., Oakland, CA 94607.

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.

Do you go to a lot of coffee houses, libraries, and other community spaces with bulletin boards? Would you be willing to help us post flyers about upcoming events? Reply to this email for details.

One of the best ways for people of relative privilege to unlearn racism and classism is to take on a low-level service-oriented volunteer opportunity with an organization led by people of color and low-income people. Seminary of the Street is currently developing a partnership with Causa Justa: Just Cause through which we organize white folks and others of privilege, especially those living in West Oakland, to do this kind of volunteer work. Particular needs include giving their members rides to meetings, answering phones, and helping with mailings. Seminary of the Street is hoping to be able to provide ongoing emotional, spiritual, and somatic support for people who volunteer through us, working together to deal with the feelings and reactions that come up in us. [Email us](#) if you are interested in this project.

More volunteer opportunities are coming soon.

Wish list

Many thanks to Erica Britton for donating a canopy that we'll be using at events and street fairs!

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.

Presentation easel for flip chart paper

Granola bars, seasonal fruit, or other good snack foods, both for our public programs and for those who come to our door hungry

Finding "Seminary of the Street-Like" Offerings in Other Places

We often get emails from folks in other parts of the country, lamenting that they can't attend our classes. For this reason, we are starting to compile a list of places where similar kinds of things are happening. Here is the beginning of that list. If you know of other places, please [send them to us](#) for consideration.

[Tierra Nueva/The People's Seminary](#) in Burlington, WA
[Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries](#) in Southern California
[The Servant Leadership School](#) in Washington, DC
[The Alternative Seminary](#) in Philadelphia, PA
[City Seminary of New York](#) in New York City, NY
[Word and World](#) (traveling)

Also, we are willing to take some of our offerings on the road if you can organize a group large enough to raise enough money to cover travel costs and pay our instructors. Please [contact me](#) for more information.

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

Blessings,

Nichola Torbett
Founding Director, Seminary of the Street

**This mark indicates classes cosponsored by First Congregational Church of Oakland. Members and pledging friends may attend classes so marked without paying tuition (though donations are welcome).

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www.seminaryofthestreet.org * 510-225-8561 * 1724 Filbert Street, Oakland, CA 94607