



Spiritual Activism:

Claiming the Poetry and Ideology of a Liberation Spirituality

convened by stone circles,
friends and allies
at the Garrison Institute
Garrison, New York
June 23–26, 2005

A Gathering Report



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
Beginnings	3
Current Realities	5
Gathering Together: Who Is “We?”	8
Lessons For Our Common Work	10
Moving Foward: Next Steps For The Road Ahead	20
Special Thanks	24
Appendix	25
Participant List.....	25
Agenda	27

INTRODUCTION



El activismo—it starts right here for me. I have to do it with the journey inward and then I have to apply it in my own family. And then I apply it within my comunidad, and then my global community—and with all of you as much as possible.

— *Albino Garcia*

Anyone who has organized or attended a diverse gathering of activists and leaders knows how beautiful, rejuvenating, compelling and challenging it can be. We come together, first, as an eclectic mix of identities, issues and visions. We tell bits of our story and we begin to know each other. Then we can explore what we hold dear that is common and wrestle with our differences.

This is what happened when stone circles invited 57 people to the Garrison Institute in June, 2005 for “Spiritual Activism: Claiming the Poetry and Ideology of a Liberation Spirituality.” The gathering made clear that our work in spiritual activism and liberation spirituality is developing in maturity and sophistication as time goes on. While the field is varied and vast, we are beginning to *see* each other, and as a result, we are beginning to understand what we share:

- a commitment to spiritual life and practice;
- a framework of applied liberation;
- an orientation towards movement building; and
- a desire for fundamental change in the world based on equity and justice.

The event did not occur in a vacuum but exists in the midst of multiple historical contexts – ancient and modern – and also in a continuum of relationships, programs and previous gatherings. Many of us began with our own inward journey of integrating spirituality and social change. Over the years we shared what we learned with our family, friends, community, and as much as we could, with our organizations, our extended networks of activists and the movements we are a part of. More recently, various gatherings have forged strong networks and illuminated possibilities for impact in the area of spirituality and social change. Now we are seeking to define who we are in a more powerful and cooperative way. We want to deepen our ability to powerfully transmit the teachings and wisdom of the integrated approach we have come to thrive on.

In the spirit of our collective learning and moving the work forward, this document weaves together various threads—the work of small groups, details of conversations, and various perspectives on the event. We recognize that this report will have particular significance for those involved in the gathering. We also believe it is relevant for a much broader audience; it was written with that intention. Specifically these pages contain valuable wisdom with regard to language, dynamics of oppression and process. You’ll find a set of common principles to consider, a preliminary list of strategies we are using and some thoughts for the road ahead. We hope this is a springboard for further dialogue, reflection and action; we look forward to the next steps on our collective journey.



There's a lot more to do but all the basic truths around how to do it have already been experienced by one or another of this greater family and are being communicated to us by each other. This longing for justice, for community, for healing is the same longing that has always motivated people doing this work.

— Mirabai Bush

*What will be different?
How do we know if what we're doing is spiritual activism?
How do we model something different?
How will it address the activist needs of today?*

— Kenny Bailey



I'm observing this community of people who want the world to be a better place. What I am suspending out there for us is that this has become part of our conversation, politically aware, historically aware, and now personally aware. It is heartwarming.

— Andre Carothers

BEGINNINGS

stone circles initiated the planning process by organizing the leadership, facilitation, design and logistics of the gathering.

- stone circles convened a stewardship group to act as a consulting body for the event. They assisted with the compilation of the participant list, worked with the facilitators around the design of the gathering, and played various leadership roles throughout the weekend. The stewardship group included Claudia Horwitz and Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey from stone circles; Simon Greer from the Jewish Funds for Justice, Rose Sackey-Milligan from the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, and angel Kyodo williams from the New Dharma Meditation Center for Urban Peace.
- The stewardship group invited two facilitators—Raquel Gutiérrez and Michael Regan—to design and facilitate the gathering.



Claudia, Jesse



Simon



Rose



angel



Raquel, Michael

- We also wanted to find out more about the people we were bringing together. So, we did hour-long interviews with almost all of the participants ahead of time. The wisdom gleaned from those interviews helped to lay the ground work for the gathering and has been woven through this report where appropriate.
- We created a seven-person documentation team to help capture the event through multiple mediums. This team included four scribes (Stosh Cotler, Melissa O'Neil, Rob Peagler, and Cynthia Suarez), two videographers (Bryan Donnell and Marie Morohoshi), and a photographer (J.J. Tiziou).



Melissa, Stosh, Cynthia



Rob



Bryan



Marie



J.J.

- Margie Hattori from the stone circles office coordinated much of the overall communication and logistics for the event with patience and grace. Bridgette Burge provided unfailing good humor and essential support in the role of event coordinator.

We began with three goals in mind:

1. Capture language; craft principles.

One of our main intentions was to leave with the seeds of a document that could be shared in a public forum where others could engage with it. This goal was affirmed before the gathering as many people mentioned the need to clarify language for ourselves and for broader social justice constituencies. The seeds of a coherent set of principles emerged from the gathering; deeper mining, analysis and synthesis lies ahead.

2. Map our strategies.

Other organizations have done important mapping of the individuals and organizations in this field. We wanted to turn our attention to developing a map of effective strategies and methodologies to set the stage for more widespread use and effective collaboration.

The gathering gave us a clearer – though certainly not comprehensive – understanding of what is working, what isn't, and where resources could be helpful in moving the work to the next level of impact.

3. Build community to move our work forward.

We wanted this gathering to regenerate our spirits, inspire our work and connect us more deeply. This level of engagement matters both for its intrinsic value and for the way it fosters greater impact. To that end, there were numerous opportunities for people to connect with each other, share the specifics of their successes and challenges, tell their stories, engage in rituals and practices, eat, walk, swim, and dance. There was a palpable energy as people found kindred spirits in space and time.

Design

The gathering was held at the Garrison Institute in Garrison, New York. It began Thursday evening and ended midday Sunday. We structured a range of modalities: large group conversations based on guiding questions, small group dialogues, “home base” groups to allow for greater intimacy, and open space sessions. There were optional sessions in the morning to engage in spiritual practice from multiple traditions. Ritual and song were woven into openings and closings. The gathering also included a “Sacred Slam,” a series of artistic performances from music to poetry that explored the theme of spiritual activism.

A detailed agenda for the gathering can be found in appendix.

CURRENT REALITIES

In the pre-gathering interviews we asked people to identify (a) the ideas and influences that inform how they think about spiritual activism; (b) the specific scope of their work; and (c) their hopes for the gathering. As a result, the stewardship group and facilitators developed a clearer understanding of the realities folks are experiencing on multiple levels. We believe this offers an accurate snapshot of the challenges faced by the broader activist community with regard to:

- The suffering of the world
- The state of our movement
- The condition of our organizations
- Ourselves as agents of transformation



Our grounding in the suffering of the world



*Ritual allows us to live with the brokenness.
That is all there is, brokenness.
We can make things better, we damn well better,
but we can't make it whole.*

— Adam Seligman

Most of us come to our work in response to the brokenness and suffering we have experienced and witnessed in the face of injustice and inequity. Many participants named the importance of grounding ourselves in a deeper understanding of the constructs of race and realities of racism. These constructs include colonialism, the internalization of oppression, the manipulation of people of color in the media, the way oppression manifests in institutions, and the exclusion and silencing of the voices of people of color. We discussed the impact of racism on our movement and the critical need to include dismantling of racism as part of our work.

Many of us are also acutely aware of fundamentalism in organized religion and the current trends of religion in U. S. society. We acknowledge a historical moment in which we must act to stem the tide of intolerance, violence, and inequity. We also recognize that progressive people with a strong spiritual core have not had a powerful or effective presence at the national level. One of our challenges is to bring together the power that already exists within our organizations and the movement as a whole so that our voices can reach a greater audience.

Finally, we discussed the current culture of violence. We see how an imbalance in consciousness manifests in war, violence, and depression. There is a firm belief that significant changes in behavior can only happen when consciousness shifts, and we are intensely interested in the strategies that create such a shift.

The state of the movement(s) for social justice

The progressive left has a hard time organizing around anything. I hear one thing, you hear another and then we are off to the races.

— John Powell



There are many concerns about the state of progressive movements and the levels of fragmentation. Is the movement even happening? Is it only happening in a limited way? The 2004 presidential elections and George Lakoff's work on messaging in particular was raised by many in the interviews in reference to the need for the progressive movement to articulate a clear and powerful position. There is a strong desire to cultivate more intellectual capital for progressive organizing, to articulate a larger vision of progressive values, and to connect with a broader cross-section of people. In addition, the participants were drawn to the gathering—and to some extent, each other—by the shared conviction that movements for social change won't be truly and radically successful unless they are anchored in spiritual practice and principles.

How do we support the development of the progressive movement with strong racial justice leadership that is guided by a spiritual core?

— Taj James



The condition of our organizations



Even if organizations do want to enter into this kind of discussion, sometimes there are forces that prevent them from really making the deep change that's going to be necessary to go to the next level. Because, really, you have to put your organization on the line. What we had to do was risk dying. And we might still not make it! I think a lot of organizations are at a choice: Are we going to keep our organizations alive or are we gonna really try to do what needs to be done?

— Donna Bivens

There is a strong sense that social change organizations are imploding. Many organizations have struggled for survival only to discover that their infrastructure is exacerbating the effects of burnout in their staff or members. In order to sustain our work, we need to transform the culture of our organizations. We recognize the need to build from the inside out, that a healthy organization is the basis of everything we do. We value the tangible expressions of this—honesty, trust, stable leadership, transparent decision-making, and a contemplative culture that encourages reflection and intentionality in all aspects of our work. We recognize that social change organizations are trying to be more intentional about their infrastructure, and at the same time we understand that maintaining this intentionality is not always easy.

Ourselves as agents of transformation

What is it in us as people that allows us to value the pain enough to grow?

— Michele McDonald



We are united, in part, by the idea that there is a critical absence of spirit in the current culture of social activism. Too many activists and organizers engage in unhealthy lifestyles that reflect a lack of self care and self reflection. While the connections between healthy people and effective movements has become clearer in the past 5 or 10 years, many people feel their colleagues still don't see the benefit to—or believe in the possibility of—less work, periods of retreat, developed consciousness, mental spaciousness, and other aspects of healthy, balanced living. At the same time, younger organizers value the knowledge and wisdom of activists from previous generations, but are reluctant to inherit the legacy of burnout, exhaustion, and illness that pervades the movements they are coming to lead. Most of us have experienced firsthand the transformative power of combining the spiritual practices that sustain us with the work we do in the world. We want to share our experiences of embodying the change we seek with our colleagues and our organizations.



I want people to come to meetings, not because they're pissed off but because they love themselves and their community and want a better way.

— Neelam Pathikonda

GATHERING TOGETHER: WHO IS “WE?”

*What is spiritual activism to you and you and you and you?
Like in a tribal gathering—If you teach me about your
spirituality, then I will work to be less judgmental,
less confused.*

I want to go soul to soul here.

— Albino Garcia



Once a group forms in a particular time and place, it begins to think of itself and speak of itself as a “we.” This is inevitable and necessary for relationship-building and for moving pieces of work forward. At Garrison we formed a temporary community. We found places of agreement and disagreement, and we struggled to find language that simultaneously conveyed the perspective of the larger group while preserving the unique experiences and truths of our particular lives and communities. A common refrain throughout the gathering was the question, “Who is the ‘we’ you are talking about?”

We are a group whose lives and work is rich and wide ranging.

- We are activists, organizers, spiritual teachers, artists, funders, and clergy.
- We come from many nations and ethnic backgrounds.
- We practice eastern, western and indigenous spiritual traditions—Buddhism, Christianity, Judaism, Sufism, Yoruba, Yoga, Native American and those that are hard to define in explicit terminology.
- We come from the cities, the towns, the desert and the mountains.
- We explore consciousness through meditation, nonviolence, worship, yoga, psychotherapy, prayer, metaphysics, torah and bible study, and ceremony.
- We are younger, older, and in the middle stages of life.
- We have very different ways of describing our inner lives. We speak of awareness, love, the transcendent, non-duality, mountain consciousness, and personal mastery.

In addition to all these lines of difference that were crossed throughout the weekend, there were numerous points of common understanding and motivation.



*I didn't come here to join a movement. I came for fellowship. I need
spirituality to deal with what my dad did to my mom, so that I don't do it
to my wife and my children. Spirituality kept me off drugs for 20 years.
Out of prison. I have to bring learning back to my brothers.
They're going to say, "What did you bring?"*

— Nane Alejandrez

We have roots in historical and ancestral lineages.

We come with a reverence for ancestors—our own particular forebears and for all who came before us. We desire the wisdom and stories of our elders and our history, and we fear for the future of our children and grandchildren. We are midwives and grief counselors to our past and the present, steeped in the experiences of sorrow and joy. We struggle with the gaps and untapped potential in our intergenerational connections. Our elders are concerned that the baton is being dropped at the last handoff, that their work for justice and equality is not being carried on by the next generation. While younger activists acknowledge the work their elders have done, they see a baton that looks beat up and tired—a way of engaging in the work which is physically and spiritually draining. Elders want their fatigue from years of struggle to be understood and held with greater respect.

We are grounded in liberation struggles.



I come from many generations of spiritual activism, thirteen generations of Quakers. I didn't have access to higher education. I carried all that into adulthood. A calling brought me out of this, working to give voice for those of us who don't have a voice.

— Linda Stout

We have ties to many struggles for liberation and independence around the globe—through the lands of our birth, through personal experience and family history, through work, through solidarity. We have been at Tiananmen Square, helped to oust the U.S. Navy base from Vieques, Puerto Rico, trained yoga teachers in Ghana, marched in the Civil Rights Movement, rebuilt mosques in Bosnia, offered safe-haven to gang members in California, and led gender reconciliation work in South Africa.

We are grounded in the histories of the United States, Africa, Latin America, Asia and Europe. We've been influenced by forces and agents of liberation throughout history, from Gandhi to Marx, women's liberation and the American Indian Movement. We're moved by the Exodus Story, the Bhagavad Gita, Nelson Mandela's life, Joanna Macy's deep ecology work, and the mysteries of our spirit guides who have many names.

LESSONS FOR OUR COMMON WORK

When stone circles began organizing this gathering, we set out with expectations of some very tangible outcomes—a written manifesto and a map of strategies. In retrospect these were ambitious goals given the large size and short duration of the event. Given the challenges of harnessing collective wisdom and finding places of congruence across so many lines of difference, we did not emerge with the written documents we’d hoped for. What we did get, however, was a more nuanced understanding of the field, including a sharper image of its guiding principles, common fault lines and likely pitfalls, the richness of the practitioners and strategies, and its vast potential for real transformation.



I. Find Language that Works: *Spiritual Activism* and *Liberation Spirituality*

There are many definitions of activism. To some of us it is life and death; to some it is good work...there are degrees which point to major differences. We need to do the definitional work so it is clear. No judgment, just clarity. Does our spiritual practice lead to collective, collaborative liberation?

— Esmeralda Simmons



The title of the gathering was “Spiritual Activism: Claiming the Poetry and Ideology of a Liberation Spirituality.” From the beginning, there was palpable energy around the idea and meaning of *liberation spirituality*. Many participants expressed—both in the pre-gathering interviews and during the gathering—that this was the phrase that drew them in, the piece that felt real and compelling. For many, the concept of liberation spirituality encompasses a radical political perspective, an analysis of oppression, and strategic momentum that the phrase *spiritual activism* might not elicit as clearly.



*I don't love the term *spiritual activism*, but I do love the term *liberation spirituality*. We need strategies for addressing oppression through spirit. One's commitment to spirit brings forth good work. It takes presence and courage to name what is going on in the moment. I want us to show up, name things, honor our connectedness. But there are obstructions to our unity.*

— Alta Starr

The resonance of *liberation spirituality* among the participants was significant in terms of language, politics, identity and strategy. The group discerned the need to articulate principles and strategies that respond to suffering and oppression from a base of spirit and the possibility

of liberation. *Spiritual activism* may point us toward doing good, making the world a better place, and the possibility of transcendence. *Liberation spirituality* connects with the vastness of the change we are trying to achieve in this world—the revolutionary ideals, visions, and underpinnings that guide our work in the world. It also links us to a more global, historically rooted and soulful perspective. Decidedly *not* U.S.-centric, it draws inspiration from the movement, method, and vision of liberation theology that transformed innumerable communities in Central and South America.

Many peoples' connection to the heart and soul of *liberation spirituality* was a significant development at the gathering. From that inspired beginning, the participants explored the principles and strategies of liberation spirituality, discussed later in the report.

I think what we're hoping for in this gathering is something that says "No, just because God told you to do something that encouraged you to wipe out 3000 people—that doesn't get to fall under the category of 'spiritual activism.' That doesn't fit the criteria."

— *angel Kyodo williams*



II. Engage Dynamics of Oppression Up Front

We (re)learned the need to address the dynamics of race, privilege, power, and oppression explicitly and up front. Throughout most of the conversations, the group reminded itself of the need to investigate the role of oppression both now and historically. Not doing this explicitly and early on inhibited us from more fully realizing the stated goals of the gathering.



This conversation is happening in the United States and the United States is a race-based society. The conversation cannot happen without having an understanding and an analysis of what has happened to us that has been threatening, jeopardizing our humanity. So when we talk about spiritual activism we are talking about an intent to bring humans together again to repair, to re-member—to put members together—where racism has separated us.

— *María I. Reinat Pumarejo*

Authentic work necessitates a wide diversity of perspectives and experiences around race, ethnicity, age, geography, methodology, gender, and sexual identity. Consequently, the need for ongoing self-awareness cannot be overstated. The complexity of our identities generates a complicated relationship to power and privilege. The separation created by racism and other forms of oppression must be bridged.

Whiteness and the impact of white privilege must be engaged in a consistent and genuine way.

While many white activists have done work around dismantling racism, there is still much more to be done. Engaging those who may not be aware of their position of privilege is one of the initial challenges; doing so with the insight and flexibility to meet the varying levels of understanding in a group is another. We cannot assume the level of sophistication, understanding, sensitivity, or analysis in any group.



As a white person, I want to support the naming process. There are benefits and costs of white privilege. I've done white privilege workshops and it still happens. I appreciate the naming. I want to hear stories in our differences.

— Maia Duerr

In a group like this one, with a range of both existing and emerging relationships, engaging deeply around issues of race and oppression offered a vital opportunity to develop greater safety, set boundaries, and establish norms. The group responded to blunders in language and thinking with integrity and challenge, offering insight into the group process as the gathering unfolded.

Like anything that encourages self-awareness, this work must reflect a depth of analysis, reflection, and honesty to be effective; it must build on work done before. If it always feels like we're starting from scratch, we risk spending years simply marching in place. The practice and teachings about how we (a) honor our experience, (b) name mistakes and forgive, and (c) allow the process to move forward is one of the concrete lessons regarding the nature of liberation spirituality. And, we still have much to learn about this dance.

In the anti-oppression work that María and I do, we talk about the process of transformation—to name it, to bring some understanding, then critical analysis, then respond to it. But people get tripped up, and instead of responding, we react, as people, as oppressed or privileged people. We are in a unique position. Like Goenka's teachings—get past the reaction, which is what all spiritual practice is geared toward.

— Raul Quiñones-Rosado



What is required, individually and collectively, in the planning, in the preparation, and in the moment to move the work forward even when human dynamics of oppression, in all forms, appear at a gathering?

— Raquel Gutiérrez

III. Uncover Common Principles



To humbly and authentically pursue freedom and justice in the world and to work courageously for that is the difference between spiritual practice and a spiritual activist. And what we're talking about here are individual and organizational and community level techniques that help cultivate this set of principles as well as the courageous action to implement them.

— Simon Greer

What anchors us in this work? What are the truths that structure the work that we are doing in the world? To answer these questions, participants worked to more concretely and coherently define our principles, values and visions. We laid the groundwork for a coherent set of principles and marked the next piece of work that needs to be done to move us forward. We offer these principles as an incomplete but powerful rendering and urge future gatherings to expand and develop them.

* Interconnectivity and interdependence

We believe in the importance of community, not just the “I” or one individual taking on the world. It is through our connections with others that we come to realize our potential as human beings. We understand that our own freedom is dependent upon the freedom of others—that the web of interdependence in which we live necessitates great care and deep responsibility in our actions. As we live with awareness of our interconnectivity, we move our personal needs out of the center of the universe and guard against the path of individualism and disengagement. And we develop new structures, institutions and organizations that reflect this.

Part of this work is holding it in an interrelational larger community. If I try to hold this work by myself, I can't do it. I feel overwhelmed. Of course, one could say that anything the "I" tries to do by itself, it can't do—it gets overwhelmed. How could I believe I could change the world? Well, I don't have to because I'm in this work with others, with God. And in some ways I guess I feel that it is through this work that humane beings are called into being. For me the work and the practice are the same, and to be separated from the work is to be separated from God, from others, from one's self.

— john powell



* Practice

We believe in spiritual practice as something that sublimates the ego—something we do in spite of our “selves.” Through practice we discover the true reality of impermanence and the inevitability of change. We can and must develop the capacity to be responsive rather than reactive, and develop our ability to rest in the unknown. We have a fervent belief in the

possibility of liberation. We are motivated by the dissolution of ego, the essence of the mystical path, a larger presence of spirit or God.



As a spiritual activist, I truly see the interconnectedness. Without that element, that connection, it is like running on a treadmill. Without my daily spiritual practice, I couldn't bring the patience, the fearlessness, to the work, I couldn't see the larger picture.

— Krishna Kaur

* Anti-oppression

We make a commitment to a dynamic analysis of systems of oppression and systems of power, to grow and genuinely transcend oppression, including racism, sexism, heterosexism, and other forms. We are committed to the authentic inclusion and leadership of all people. This also means identifying the blocks to our interconnectedness and strategies that foster inclusive leadership and healthy systems.

Is a principle for us a principle of collective power? You know, this is not all about individual transformation and transcendence. It is about responsible embracing of power, authority, and governance.

— Alta Starr



* Movement-building for social change

We are committed to creating a world that works for all. We believe in the inherent value of all beings, the need for real equity and justice. This involves the responsible use of power, effective governance, functioning democratic ideals, cultural parity and a restructuring of the economic landscape. In response, we are creating communities, organizations and institutions that address the roots of suffering. We see these entities as building blocks of a stronger movement for social change.

* Embodiment



The greatest spiritual leaders and mystics have never just stayed in the cave if you look throughout history. They've always come back into the world in some form of service.

— Will Keepin

We recognize that a spiritual journey begins with gaining knowledge of spiritual beliefs, but it is not enough. Deepening our spiritual practice and our social principles to better serve the world is the vital bedrock of our individual and organizational lives. We believe that action without reflection can lead to decisions based on fear, anger, and misperception. Reflection without action can lead to complacency, inertia, and acquiescence. This is as true for individuals as it is for groups. Our consistent embodiment of spiritual consciousness while

acting in the service of social transformation enlivens the bridge between the worlds of contemplative practice and social action. It is a clear demonstration of our values.

* The present moment

We work to accept “what is” and act in the present to change the future. Aiming for the ideal of not being attached to the outcomes of our actions, we move forward with the faith that our grounding in the present moment encourages our actions and decisions to lead to good results, even if we don’t yet know what they will be. It opens us to uncertainty and truth simultaneously and gives us flexibility to hold tension as it arises.

Though we may not struggle against this moment we can put in place the things that will create a different reality tomorrow.

— Krishna Kaur



* Love

What we strive to embody has a name and a power—love. In the recollection of our connectedness we bring together the broken pieces of ourselves and move toward wholeness. Love is the source of our commitment to pursue the work of justice, and when we draw upon it we find the strength to face our adversaries and overcome our obstacles, even when the work is difficult.



I want to find ways to help people experience freedom and responsibility. They're both sides of the same coin, healing myself and others. I want to leave a legacy of service. I want to allow my broken heart to grow bigger and softer.

— Paco Lugovina

* Unity and difference

A crucial question facing the liberation spirituality movement is how to hold the dynamic tension between unity and difference. Our ability to hold a diversity of conflicting perspectives while recognizing the common links of our humanity and our vision is essential to our growth as individuals and the impact of our work. We are confident that we can remain grounded in and deepen our understanding of our own traditions as we cultivate respect for and responsibly receive the blessings of many different cultural expressions of spirituality.



Spirituality in every tradition is about recognizing unity. The communities we come from are different; our lives are different. How do we honor the image of God in everyone and stop all suffering? I need to grow and I can't grow in my little world. We don't know what is true about someone else until we know them.

— Rachel Cowan

* Healing and Self Care

We make a commitment to the integration of all aspects of well being: body, mind, spirit and emotion. The choices we make about sustainability – what we eat, how we care for our bodies, how we feed our spirits, and how to balance work and rest – have a deep impact on our health and our work. In a similar vein, when we work to heal from our personal experience of oppression and other wounds, we lend strength and insight to the collective healing of our communities, movements, and the world. In addition, we recognize that the requirement to attend to our personal spiritual needs and aspirations is a fundamental responsibility.



The way liberation spirituality has been working in the community is about self care. Folks have been talking about this. Rituals, sabbaticals, naps, vacations, eating, exercising. It's also about calling each other on our shit. Telling our peers, "You don't look good and I want you to be here. You're shortening your time here by how you're treating yourself." I'm still going to tell the truth.

– Omisade Burney-Scott

* Accountability

We are responsible for our actions and our analysis, and we are open to being held accountable because we know it is the only way we will move forward. We also commit to holding others accountable, especially those we consider allies.

IV. Acknowledge Dynamic Tensions

I've been a community organizer for a long time. I feel that work is about healing. I came to it from a place of anger. I was tired of seeing women, like my mother, cutting themselves at the knees to fit in. But when I became a Buddhist I was told I couldn't be angry. I said, "Don't tell me I can't be angry. I worked too hard to be angry to not be angry." Organizations fall apart because we couldn't hold our contradictions, our own process.

– Neelam Pathikonda

The capacity to skillfully hold seemingly competing perspectives in our hearts and minds is a basic quality of spiritual maturity. Here are just a couple of examples of the primary dynamic tensions that surfaced during the gathering. They offer insight into our group dynamics as well as direction for strategic exploration.

Do we focus more on healthy process or vibrant outcome?

Amongst all the variety of differences among us, there is an unresolved dynamic tension between two different but complementary approaches to our work. In a very general way, one approach could be described as more outcome-driven, where process is primarily a tool for achieving outcomes, and the focus is on building community through shared work. The other

approach might be described as one more oriented towards process, where community is built through story, healing, and ritual, and the experience is the primary outcome.

We all seek a balance of process and product in our work and movements. What that balance actually looks like spans the spectrum of ways of being in this world. We each inhabit a place on this spectrum and sometimes find it challenging to work with others who live in a different part of the spectrum because it often involves a difference in worldviews. At Garrison, individuals from both of these perspectives experienced frustration and later articulated their regret that there was no clear way to express their dissatisfaction in the group. These two groups needed different things from the gathering and never quite came to understand or value each other in a full way. Our willingness to address this in the spirit of awakened inquiry is at the crux of our ability to collectively move forward in a way that has greater impact. Do we feel enough sense of common interest and vision to create a container that keeps its integrity amidst the forces of our very real differences? Can we more fully integrate the whole spectrum and pay close attention to how we value perspectives different from our own? And what spiritual wisdom can we engage more fully to explore this?

Is this a movement or a container for a movement?

There was a provocative question about whether *liberation spirituality* or *spiritual activism* is a movement in and of itself or a way to build a strong container for social justice work on multiple fronts. Some see it is as its own movement, others as a stage for transformation, a method to help our movements become more effective and sustainable. Some of our work is developing leadership for current progressive movements for change while some is about creating a new movement framework altogether.

*We need to lift these voices up, for ourselves and the world at large.
Movement: I'm not sure this is a movement. The Civil Rights
Movement was a movement. Spiritual activism was a way to do it. The
Service Learning Movement was a movement. It went from the
margins to the center. We may be more like a thousand flowers
blooming. We're not thinking like a movement.*

— David Sawyer



V. Name Strategies that Work

Halfway through the gathering, the facilitators divided us into “open space” groups, affinities that were names and self-selected by the participants. stone circles recognized later that these groups reveal a cluster of primary strategies now currently in use in the work of liberation spirituality and spiritual activism. This provided us with an initial look at a strategy map that needs to be realized in more detail. The organizations mentioned below as examples of each strategy are just a beginning; we need more stories of programs, and actions that illustrate the power of these strategies.



We need to look at the difference between the art and the science. The science is the technique that anyone can do. The art is the effectiveness that you are able to bring to that community or audiences that you do it in. So there may be some things that technically speaking, anyone could apply. The effectiveness of the technique will depend on their relationship, how well they're able to really communicate their technique, who they are personally—that's the art and it's just going to be different for everyone.

— Krishna Kaur

Integrating spiritual principles into organizing work:

Organizations like Jobs with Justice, Spirit in Action and Tools for Change are bringing spiritual practices and wisdom directly into political actions and organizing for social change.

Training:

The Rockwood Leadership Program, Satyana Institute, stone circles and the Women's Theological Center have developed curricula, methodologies, and training that build spiritual leadership and hone the artfulness of using effective techniques.

Circles and healing work:

Spirit in Action, Spirit in Motion, No Ordinary Time, Institute for Latino Empowerment, and others are convening circles of activists for reflection, connection, healing and strategy. These might include one-on-one healing work from traditional practices, storytelling and experiential ways of building relationships.

Tradition-based and practice-based teaching/organizing:

The Buddhist Peace Fellowship and Center for Contemplative Mind in Society are drawing on their core traditions, as facilitators, teachers or guides, to help foster inner awakening, offer inspiration and teach how to integrate contemplative values into organizations and professions. They draw on spiritual wisdom, practices, ceremony, and a network of practitioners.

Prophetic voice and visioning:

As the field continues to develop, those of us working for social change must find ways to bring out our truest voice—our own and those of our communities—and articulate the visions of what is possible.

Organization and network building:

As we grow in strength and numbers, we need better ways to connect and communicate. Integrative Activism is working to develop sophisticated yet accessible online tools to connect this community.



*Last night, listening to strategies, core values, the dharma group
– it seems we have some very powerful seeds in our hands to
move forward. I hope our strategies truly move forward to
be imbedded in poetry.*

– Rev. H. Gutiérrez Ryûmon Baldoquín

VI. Refine Models of Collective Leadership

From the beginning, stone circles intended to create and use a collective leadership model for this gathering. We created a stewardship group to provide consultation and leadership with the participant list, program design, and facilitation. The process leading up to the gathering was highly effective. The stewards met regularly over the phone for several months, providing valuable assistance and helping to make decisions about the group composition and the weekend's structure. Our hope was that this collectively-held leadership would continue through the gathering and in the follow-up work. However, stone circles as the convening organization did not pay enough attention to delineating specific roles for the stewards and to how leadership would function during the gathering. This inhibited a more effective and robust response to the needs of the gathering as the weekend unfolded.

MOVING FOWARD: NEXT STEPS FOR THE ROAD AHEAD

Transformation begins with resistance: when you confront power with loving truth. But resistance begins with celebration...

— Arrington Chambliss



We have accomplished a great deal so far and we are all well aware of how much work is still necessary to create the world we long to live in. Ongoing attention and collaboration on multiple levels will allow us to move forward with efficacy and authenticity. It is our hope that members of this nascent community can begin to support each other in our exploration of where our outward callings and our inner callings meet. Holding each other with respect, compassion, and a rigorous sense of accountability to ourselves and to the world will allow this work to flourish. We offer the following next steps as key places for engagement on the road ahead.

* **Develop a collective vision/theory of change**

What is the movement's theory of change? Does it get us where we want to go? What is the vision of the movement? If we are successful in what we do, how does a society function? Who are the forces of change that will bring the movement into being? Where is the seamless integration of political perspectives and spiritual perspectives? What is the grand strategy of [the] movement? Is it individual transformation where person by person, we will make a better world? Or is it institution by institution—trying to effect the policies that decide, frankly, who lives and who dies in this country?

— Ng'ethe Maina



These and other powerful questions highlighted the critical need to forge a coherent vision and analysis of the change we seek and how we want it to happen. We need to illustrate how we want power to operate in this society and what will be different if we gain the power and influence we seek. We need to define the “we” in a way that speaks to the richness of our differences while allowing for the possibility of common values and goals.



*What's our vision for how we want power to operate?
How we want people to be engaged in the process of self-governance?*

— Taj James

✧ Share a map of strategies for practical, daily application



I don't want to put [the work] out in the "invisible realm." I want to put it out in the organizational, like, on-Monday-morning-what-will-we-do-in-the-office realm!

— Simon Greer

We have made progress on defining a strong philosophical foundation for liberation spirituality and clearly have more to do. We have also tested and refined practical applications—programs, trainings, rituals and frameworks that embody and activate these principles and theories. The next phase of this work needs to focus on the strategies. This includes understanding our various design processes, illuminating the specifics of implementation, telling the stories of particular organizations and projects and analyzing their effect on overall movement-building.

✧ Organize funders and funding

The funding relationship is a codependent one, with shadows and flaws. How do we make it more aligned with what the organization wants to do and be?

— Tom Callanan



One key challenge for nonprofit organizations is finding funds that allows us to sustain our work for the change we are seeking in the world. In this growing field of spirituality and social change, a small number of funders – primarily foundations – are also showing up as partners in the conversation. This is a positive and much-needed dynamic, given that the relationship between philanthropic organizations and nonprofits has traditionally been fraught with an imbalance of power.

How can we shift the power differential and create a partnership with funders? We discussed the possibility of reframing philanthropy as an opportunity for everyone, at all levels of society, to engage in funding to support our communities. In addition, many of our organizations are currently dependent on foundations and grant makers whose assets are often built on industries or practices that may not be in alignment with our core values. We recognized the need to identify the conditions currently limiting our capacity to change and where we have room to maneuver. Funders and nonprofits need to find and explore our common ground, what partnership is based on, and be honest about understanding the power differences.

Not-for-profit and philanthropy are very different worlds. Foundations and fundraisers need to figure out what their core needs are. There is this concept of scarcity. Funding gets in the way of collaboration. We should appreciate the abundance instead of focusing on the scarcity.

— Thomasina Williams



✧ Harvest historical lessons



We have so many shoulders that we stand on and we're all sort of aware of it. I think it would really serve this movement if somebody took on the task of pondering and writing a history of what we've learned in the decades that have come before us and what's relevant to this moment.

— Tara Brown

We need to understand more fully the lessons of past struggles and movements for liberation as well as our own spiritual teachings. Members of the group at Garrison have this wisdom but it is not collectively held. We need to know what has worked in the past, what hasn't, and why, so that we can more effectively create the changes we seek in the present historical moment. We will move forward in a powerful way if we are grounded in our spiritual traditions and informed by a broad and rigorous historical perspective.

Strengthen technology to support our work

Technological groundwork has already been laid to help connect practitioners, illuminate developments in the field and deepen this work. Integrative Activism has launched a website that seeks to actively network individuals and organizations, and provide outlets for collaboration. stone circles is partnering with urbanPEACE to launch a site to inform and inspire based on how the work of spiritual activism and liberation spirituality is growing and evolving. These and other outlets can be strengthened to provide forums for intellectual leadership, community-building and organizing. Continued development of online resources will also help direct newcomers towards various programs and outlets for participation.

✧ Design with more nonverbal and contemplative space



How do we crack this? If we were looking at a particular situation, how would our practice inform that? Our beliefs? Our spirituality? I want to complicate my own understanding of being a Christian.

— Kenny Bailey

We need designs that truly fuse together the experience of the sacred (engendered through a number of practices and rituals) with the strategies to move work forward. This includes more emphasis on nonverbal modes of engagement to help the group connect internally and with each other: art, music, movement, time in nature and more communal rituals and practices. It also means creating more mechanisms that stimulate deeper awareness of what is happening directly in the moment, and more spaces where that can be articulated.

Finding practices that can be held collectively is a tricky endeavor. We all are rooted in our particularities and while we seek to continue learning we are rightfully cautious not to undermine the integrity of our own spiritual grounding or disrespect another person's tradition through half-hearted participation. Practices like silence are held as sacred by many traditions and have the possibility to be shared by all.

*** Aim towards synthesis**

Heterogeneity offers the rich gift of different perspectives, experiences, and knowledge as well as a generative experience. It can also lead to an inevitable splitting along various lines of difference. Given the many layers and levels of difference at this gathering (and in the progressive movement as a whole) we see now that conflict was inevitable. The more homogeneity in a group, the easier it often seems to find and maintain agreement and an apparent sense of unity. Without these explicit commonalities, creating a sense of unity in a heterogeneous group requires more effort, patience and awareness.

Aiming for synthesis on a variety of levels will support this effort. Future gatherings will benefit from more rigorous framing of each day's work to allow participants to locate their role and contributions in the unfolding process; weaving major threads together throughout the gathering will allow everyone to make connections with the larger implications of the group's work. This can have a real impact on the final outcomes.

SPECIAL THANKS

The Garrison gathering would not have been possible without the generous support of the following partners:

Stewardship Group

Claudia Horwitz and Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey, stone circles
Simon Greer, Jewish Funds for Justice
Rose Sackey-Milligan, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society
angel Kyodo Williams, New Dharma Meditation Center for Urban Peace

Facilitators

Raquel Gutiérrez and Michael Regan

Funding Partners

Nathan Cummings Foundation
Ford Foundation
Hidden Leaf Foundation

stone circles Board of Directors

Omisade Burney-Scott
Meredith Emmett
Diane Gregorio
David Sawyer
Marian Urquilla

Garrison Institute

Gathering Scribes

Stosh Cotler
Melissa O'Neil
Rob Peagler
Cynthia Suarez

Photographer

J.J. Tiziou, www.jjtiziou.net

Report Writing and Design

Claudia Horwitz
Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey
Rob Peagler
with valuable help from Margie Hattori, Omisade Burney-Scott and Marian Urquilla

APPENDIX

PARTICIPANT LIST

William Aal, Principal Associate, Tools for Change, Seattle WA
Daniel “Nane” Alejandrez, Executive Director, Santa Cruz Barrios Unidos, Santa Cruz CA
Rachel Bagby, Artist and Composer, Philadelphia PA
Kenneth Bailey, Co-founder, Design Studio for Social Intervention, Boston MA
Rev. H. Ryûmon Gutiérrez Baldoquín, Soto Zen Priest, Consultant and Trainer, San Francisco CA
Terrice Bassler Koga, Director of Education Program Support, Open Society Institute; Ljubljana, Slovenia and Sacramento CA
Donna Bivens, Co-Director, Women’s Theological Center, Boston MA
Tara Brown, Director, Hidden Leaf Foundation, Occidental CA
Bridgette Burge, Consultant, Knightdale NC (event coordinator)
Omisade Burney-Scott, Consultant, Ananse Consulting, Durham NC
Mirabai Bush, Executive Director, Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, Northampton MA
Tom Callanan, Program Officer, Fetzer Foundation, Kalamazoo MI
Andre Carothers, Executive Director, Rockwood Leadership Program, Berkeley CA
Rev. Arrington Chambliss, Assistant Rector, St. Andrew’s Episcopal Church, Marblehead MA
Lisa Charley, Spirit in Motion Fellow, Movement Strategy Center, Oakland CA
Stosh Cotler, Training and Leadership Project Director, Jewish Funds for Justice, New York NY (documentation team)
Rabbi Rachel Cowan, Director, Institute for Jewish Spirituality, New York NY
Bryan Donnell, Director of Photography, Los Angeles CA (documentation team)
Maia Duerr, Executive Director, Buddhist Peace Fellowship, Berkeley CA
Albino Garcia, Jr., Executive Director, La Plazita Institute, Albuquerque NM
Simon Greer, Executive Director, Jewish Funds for Justice, New York NY (stewardship group)
Raquel Gutiérrez, Consultant, Tempe AZ (facilitator)
Kaliya Hamlin, Co-Founder, Integrative Activism, Berkeley CA
Claudia Horwitz, Director, stone circles, Durham NC (stewardship group)
Taj James, Director, Movement Strategy Center, Oakland CA
Krishna Kaur, Founder, Your Own Greatness Affirmed (Y.O.G.A. Inc.), Los Angeles CA
Will Keepin, Executive Director, Satyana Institute, Clinton WA

Ian Koebner, Director, Sacred Slam, Holyoke MA

Reverent Pacogenkoji Lugovina, Dharma Holder, Zen Peacemaker Order, Bronx NY

Ng'ethe Maina, Director of Training and Education, Jobs with Justice NY, New York NY

Michele McDonald, Teacher, Insight Meditation Society and Vipassana Hawaii;
Barre MA and Honolulu HI

Marie Morohoshi, Communications Steward, New Dharma Meditation Center for
Urban Peace, Oakland CA (documentation team)

Melissa O'Neil, Activist, Tulsa OK (documentation team)

Neelam Pathikonda, Organizing Director, Silicon Valley Toxics Coalition, Oakland CA

Rob Peagler, Co-founder, Design Studio for Social Intervention, Boston MA
(documentation team)

john A. powell, Director of Kirwan Institute for the Study of Race and Ethnicity,
Ohio State University, Columbus OH

Raúl Quiñones-Rosado, Co-Director, Institute for Latino Empowerment, Caguas, Puerto Rico

Michael Regan, Consultant and Facilitator, Taos NM (facilitator)

María I. Reinat-Pumarejo, Co-Director, Institute for Latino Empowerment,
Caguas, Puerto Rico

David Rome, Senior Vice President, Planning, Greyston Foundation, Yonkers NY;
Senior Vice President of Programs, Garrison Institute, Garrison NY

Rose Sackey-Milligan, Social Justice Program Director, Center for Contemplative Mind
in Society, Northampton MA (stewardship group)

David Sawyer, Consultant and Executive Coach, Context, Portland OR

Adam Seligman, Professor of Religion, Boston University, Boston MA

Esmeralda Simmons, Founder, Center for Law and Social Justice, Brooklyn NY

Rabbi Felicia Sol, Rabbi, B'nai Jeshurun Congregation, New York NY

Alta Starr, Program Officer, Ford Foundation, New York NY
(previously with the New World Foundation)

Linda Stout, Executive Director, Spirit in Action, Belchertown MA

Cynthia Suarez, Training Director, Northeast Action, Jamaica Plain MA
(documentation team)

Jacques Jean (J.J.) Tiziou, Photographer, Philadelphia PA (documentation team)

Jesse Maceo Vega-Frey, Program Consultant, stone circles, Holyoke MA
(stewardship group)

Omar Wasow, Executive Director, BlackPlanet.com, Brooklyn NY

angel Kyodo williams, Spiritual Director, New Dharma Meditation Center for Urban Peace,
Oakland CA (stewardship group)

Thomasina Williams, Program Officer, Governance and Civil Society, Ford Foundation,
New York NY

AGENDA

Thursday, June 23

Building the Container through Ceremony and Storytelling

- 3:00–6:00 Registration and Settling In
- 6:00 Introductory Dinner
Welcome and Opening: *Why are we here?*
- 8:00 Recognizing the Power of Context:
This Place, Our History
This will include a ritual invoking and honoring the work of people whose shoulders we stand upon, invoking their guidance for the group's work.
- 9:00 Group Practice: "Home Base" Groups: *Who are you?*
- 9:45 Housekeeping and Closing Circle



Friday, June 24

Creating a Frame of Reference: Clarifying Our Principles, Mapping Our Strategies

- 6:00–8:00 Sunrise Practice (optional)
- 7:30–9:00 Breakfast
- 9:00 Making Connections; Participating in Collective Wisdom
How will we work together?
- 10:00 Break
- 10:30 Defining Our Principles
A "fishbowl" conversation, initiated by a small group of catalysts
Small group dialogues.
What principles guide our work and how do we convey them to the broader world?
- 12:30–2:30 Lunch
- 2:30–4:30 Interactive Strategy Mapping
Presentation of initial strategy map and reactions from the group.
Small group dialogues: *What are we doing? What is working and what is not?*
- 4:30 Break
- 6:00 Dinner and Shabbat Ritual
- 8:00 Sacred Slam

Saturday, June 25

Creating Space for Innovation to Move the Work Forward

6:00–8:00	Sunrise Practice
7:30	Breakfast
9:00	Opening Ritual and Group Check-in
10:00	Innovation Circles: An Invitation to Collaborative Action <i>How can we advance this work? What is resonating with you?</i>
12:30	Lunch
2:30	Building Our Community
4:00	Innovation Circles: Round II
6:00	Dinner
8:00	Evening Circle

Sunday, June 24

Moving Forward: Intention, Action and Commitments

6:00–7:30	Sunrise Practice
7:30–8:30	Breakfast
8:30	Morning Ritual
9:00	Moving Forward: <i>What work do I want to help move forward?</i>
11:00	Break
11:30	Next Steps and Closing Ceremony: Our Way Forward Declaring our way forward with intention, commitment and action.

