



*Global Peace Initiative  
of Women*

## Highlights of the 3rd GPIW Contemplative Alliance Gathering

The third gathering of the Contemplative Alliance, organized by GPIW, was held at the Asilomar Conference Grounds in Monterey, California, from the 11<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> of October 2010. The group comprised of 40 spiritual contemplatives from throughout the US, as well as Afghanistan, India and Pakistan. This meeting was designed to explore how to foster specific shifts in the collective mindset that will strengthen spiritual unity, help cultivate a new understanding of prosperity and national wellbeing, and bring a commitment to achieve a more balanced, sustainable and clean energy economy. We considered whether and how a contemplative culture might help envision and guide society to manifest such changes.

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We began by creating the 'spiritual container' for the gathering through shared spiritual practice, offering prayers, chants, and silent meditation for four hours. Later, Swami Veda Bharati guided meditation, asking us to gently return from meditation without breaking the flow of unified consciousness, reminding us that the silence and speech can be the same. This gathering, he said, can become the seed of a change in society and the seed of many such gatherings. We can meet in the chamber of silence even though we may not always be able to meet in the physical.



Barbara Cushing of Kalliopeia Foundation  
Dr. Mary-Faeth Chenery of GPIW Australia



Acharya Judy Lief of the Shambalah Tradition  
Kurt Johnson of InterSpiritual Dialogue

Contemplative practices such as meditation, yoga, and prayer are growing in the population broadly as well as in fields such as conflict resolution, law, education, and medicine. As Swami Veda told us, "in such a silence, an expression of divine oneness is experienced - not a unification of parts but a part of the unified field." "Through contemplative practices", Llewellyn Vaughan-Lee explained, "you create doorways to light, and you can bring this light out for yourself and for others." The nature of oneness or unity consciousness was emphasized as a phenomenon that maintains and treasures the rich diversity in human experience.



L to R: Dena Merriam, GPIW  
Benedictine Sr. Joan Chittister, Benetvision & Co-Chair, GPIW  
Swami Veda Bharati, Assoc. of Himalayan Yoga Meditation Sciences  
Sheikh Harun Faye, Fuqara International

Much in the world is presented to us as a duality - self/others, self/world, secular/sacred, transcendent/immanent. The reality is not a duality but a continuum - a continuum, for example, of the world soul: self--world soul. We do not have a relationship with the world; we are a part of this continuum. When we understand this, as we would not consider cutting off our own hand, we will not consider damaging the environment. At a broader cultural level, as we would not consider bulldozing the Louvre, we will not consider poisoning the atmosphere and the oceans or committing genocide.

Contemplation and action are of one piece, as Sister Joan Chittister explained. "Contemplation is the well; action is the distribution of the water. The fullness of the human being is both contemplation and action." Contemplation is a form of activism.

### **Key concerns**

Running across many topics was the theme of a need for new language, to describe key ideas such as unity, prosperity and sustainability in new ways the culture can hear.

Concern for the Earth was a deep and difficult thread at the gathering. Chris Peters of the Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development expressed the concern plainly: we have overreached our natural systems. Llewellyn and Anat Vaughan-Lee spoke of the sacred nature of Earth, of remembering the feminine, and of hearing the cry of the world soul. The state of the Earth is a reflection of the state of the inner. The world is

the world's practice. It is a spiritual responsibility at a time of global crisis to hear the prayer of the world. We can be present within our own hearts to keep open the gates of grace so that the prayer of the world can be answered."



**Speaker: Christopher Peters, Seventh Generation Fund for Indian Development  
Swami Atmarupananda, Spiritual Paths Institute & Ramakrishna Monastery**

Re-envisioning prosperity was a central focus. The need for a new understanding of wealth and wellbeing is clear, and spiritual traditions have much to offer about the balance between the spiritual and the material. The American Dream as currently imagined is out of reach and out of synch with global needs. We could phrase the American Dream in terms of the needs of spirit as well as body and mind. What are the needs of spirit? Beauty, peace, quiet, truth, enlightened mind.



**L to R: Rev. Barbara Mayer, CMH  
Barbara Sargent, Kalliopeia Foundation  
Speaker: Dr. Sakeena Yacoobi, Afghan Institute of Learning  
Linda Grdina, Fetzer Institute  
Jennifer Alia Wittman, Seven Pillars House of Wisdom**

The wellbeing of Afghanistan was also of deep concern. Dr. Sakena Yacoobi spoke of how the people of Afghanistan are a peace loving people who have had war imposed on them for 30 years. Every day they must anticipate that someone they know will be harmed. She spoke, too, of hope, describing a peace-building program held in India that GPIW organized last year for around 20 young Afghans. Afghan women are also becoming empowered, through education, trying to bring peace. Sakena pointed out that around the world, everyone has Afghanistan on their mind, but they forget it. She expressed deep foreboding about what will happen if foreign

suffer. She also noted that Afghanistan needs to be rebuilt through peace, not war, through education, health and infrastructure. She also invited us to share what we know how to teach with the people of Afghanistan; and to use our contemplative practices to help bring about peace there.

### **Contemplative actions**

Along the continuum of contemplation and action, many ideas surfaced to address the concerns. The spiritual traditions have much to offer: wisdom teachings that answer many of the pressing questions; techniques to manage the mind and emotions; practices for going within, such as yoga and meditation, which speak to many people today. Education and outreach can be significant contemplative actions. Educate parents about the natural ability of children to meditate and go within; encourage parents to meditate with their children. Give young people an experience of contemplation. Have conversations with young people about life purpose; through these, young people can pause and reconsider identity, and be helped to touch something authentic in themselves.

We can model, embody and reflect back those aspects of spiritual wisdom we seek to convey. "Remember that you may be the only Bible, Koran or Bhagavad Gita that someone ever reads." We can celebrate change, be positive and make what is positive better known, through our own communication and through the media. The Contemplative Alliance could become more active in the media, particularly online via a website. We can encourage the replacement of aggressive force with the force of creativity, and teach that when a stopping force is needed, it must be applied without fear and without anger. We can act on behalf of the Earth, encouraging changes in language and action, remembering the feminine, listening for the cry of the world soul.



**Speaker: Chika Matsumoto, Shinnyo-en, USA**

We should kindle "any spark that can interrupt the momentum of sleepwalking" - we are like midwives for this process. Encourage simple acts of service. We can be in the "we" space - knowing that what happens in Afghanistan happens in our country as well.

We must continue to do the background work through our contemplative practices, remembering that we can assist by our own development. We can pray for a new vision, to deepen our understanding, our practice. We can listen carefully, and see if



The Contemplative Alliance is an emerging spiritual voice, united by a shared commitment to contemplative practices. "There is a collective field among us being born - treat it gently." The Global Peace Initiative of Women will continue to host and collaborate with the Contemplative Alliance as it unfolds, and will integrate it with GPIW's international work. In conclusion, Dena Merriam summed up succinctly: "We take this as a sacred task, and it is evolving."



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