

# REALISTIC LIVING

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### REALISTIC LIVING

## Women and Patriarchy

finding our truth

by Joyce Marshall



What is the appropriate response of women to the horror of patriarchy? My first thought is that it is somewhere between vengeance and passivity.

To avoid getting caught in furious vengeful response to the disgusting behaviors women face in society generally and from particular men will require a great deal of personal work. In gross and subtle ways we are daily dismissed, undervalued, ignored, harassed, taken for granted. As Rebecca Solnit's book, *Men Explain Things to Me*, so graphically demonstrates, men regularly explain things to us that we already know, often things we ourselves told them earlier; we and/or our sisters/mothers/daughters are raped, beaten, and murdered; and we suffer from low expectations and low pay. Any woman without a large pool of fury isn't paying attention.

The "work" of dealing with this situation that I find most useful is some form of Byron Katie's inquiry process that encourages exploring all your beliefs about a person with whom you harbor strong feelings and judgments, being just as blatantly nasty as you feel, writing it down and preferably sharing it with a neutral friend. You note all your feelings that arise, feeling them to the full. You describe how you behave when you are in this particular belief that you are exploring. You imagine who you would be without this belief. Then you "turn it around." Basically this amounts to looking at the situation from a broader perspective. You examine how what is going on is explainable, given who the offending person is right now. You look at your own behaviors that are like those you are judging. What is interesting about doing this work is that it doesn't result in the opposite pole I mentioned above—passivity. It makes it possible to own up to your own "stuff" without indulging that of the other person. The principal beauty I find in the work of Katie is that

## Summer Programs: June 2016

In June of 2015 Joyce Marshall and Pat Webb facilitated a Contemplative Retreat for our annual Training School. We plan for them to facilitate our **Training School** again in June of 2016. This time the focus will be on a **feminist perspective for renewing religious practices**.

Our Training Schools not only deal with important content but use imaginative methods that maximize participation and build community among all those present. We sometimes call such events "spirit retreats." The essays in this journal are warm up for this annual spirit retreat.

Following the Training School will be a **Research Symposium Meeting** dealing with the vision, strategies, and implementaries of creating in history a viable and vital next Christian practice. Even if you are not practicing Christianity, or ever intend to, you can still profit from joining us in this effort and then use your learnings in creating whatever religious practice you prefer.

**So put the following dates on your calendar.** Let us know you are coming by the first of May.

The **Training School** is scheduled for **June 10-12, 2016** (Friday at 7pm until Sunday noon) and the **Research Symposium Meeting** follows on **June 12-14, 2016** (Sunday at 6:30pm until Tuesday at 9:00pm).

phrase she uses: "Loving What Is." Someone has said that what meditation is at bottom is a "Yes" to everything. So long as we are fighting our situation, believing "It shouldn't be this way" we cannot respond creatively. We are bound.

So, our first trap to avoid as women is that of hating our lives and hating men, getting caught in reactivity. The second trap to avoid is settling passively into the roles that patriarchy and particular men create for us. The work to do on this side of the coin I discovered years ago in ReEvaluation CoCounseling. I was impressed with their theories about oppression. They state clearly that men do oppress women, but that the system of oppression (patriarchy) hurts both men and women—just as racist oppression hurts both the oppressor and the oppressed. This is also true for the oppression of young people or elders, etc. ReEvaluation CoCounseling created many "commitments" for the various roles we play in the systems of oppression. Counseling with the commitments keeps us from getting caught in those roles by releasing the distress we carry psychologically. The Women's Commitment is: "I fiercely promise that from this moment on, I will never again settle for anything less than absolutely everything." The person counseling is encouraged to say this as proudly as possible, growl and laugh, and then add what that means for her personally, allowing laughter and tears to flow.

I met for years with a women's group and we had a number of processes we used to deal with the temptation to settle, to deal with what RC calls "internalized oppression." We practiced rigorously appreciating ourselves and our accomplishments. We also learned to lovingly and firmly insist that the men in our lives give up sexism in these specific ways:

1. Don't patronize us (telling us what we think, feel, or need) or condescend to us or speak for us.
2. Listen to what we say: don't interrupt or distract while we are speaking. Remember what we say. Notice when men are doing all the talking and allowing no space for the women present to "get a word in."
3. Give us credit for our ideas. Don't reproduce them as your own.
4. Give us information if we ask for it. Don't take over and do it for us.
5. Value and recognize us when we do good work and pay us for it.
6. Don't use our bodies for advertising.
7. Don't threaten violence to women and don't allow violence to women.
8. Don't touch us unawares, kiss or touch us sexually without permission. Don't make

assumptions about what we want. Ask us.

9. Treat women as equally valuable no matter how we look or how old we are.

10. Tell us how you feel; ask us what we think.

11. Ask us and listen to us about our lives.

As we move into religious practice, I see movement beyond patriarchy involving a more earthy Christianity: celebration of the earth's seasons, dance and play. I see affirmation of the stages of life. I see lighter emphasis on rationality and more on the heart and connection; more on the authority of the individual experience and less on the authority of the words of others. I see sitting in circles rather than in rows with a podium.

We will be exploring *a renewed Christianity and dismantling Patriarchy* next June at the Realistic Living Training School. I invite you to join us. Prepare now by doing the work suggested here and be ready to expand and deepen your experience of what it is to be religious.



## The Demise of Patriarchy

a continuing journey  
by Gene Marshall

The demise of patriarchy and the liberation of women and girls from the oppression of male-dominated cultures is a gigantic shift that is still underway in every culture on Earth. I am going to focus in this essay on the male—his rescue from his oppressive style of entitlement and his awakening to the task of ending the oppression of women.

### What is Patriarchy?

Most of us think we know the truth about women's oppression and men's entitlement, but the history and essence of patriarchy is still a study in progress. We do now know this: patriarchy is not something natural. It is an arbitrary set of cultural patterns. These patterns, however, are not abstract notions, but core commitments in the guts of our inherited humanity. These patterns are so deeply rooted that they issue in unconscious behaviors that have horrific consequences in the structures and styles of social life.

How did patriarchy come about? This is a controversial topic, but here is what I believe we are coming to know: patriarchal patterns began to take effect thousands of years ago, soon after the origin of civilization (which I define as the invention of the social pattern of hierarchy). Civilization and the first true city of Uruk arose together about 4500

BCE in a river valley of middle Iraq. In Uruk we see the first pyramids and the first “social pyramid”—the organization of society into classes of royalty, aristocracy, craftspersons, peasants, and slaves.

The earliest expressions of these “civilized” societies were not yet patriarchal. The civilizational pattern spread slowly at first, but by 3800 BCE a second great city, Ur, was thoroughly patriarchal.

By “patriarchy” I mean applying the hierarchical idea of civilization to the relations between men and women. The societies of pre-civilization were not hierarchical or patriarchal, though many different patterns of male-female relations were tried. It is difficult to generalize about pre-civilization societies. Our records are meager, and the variety of these earliest societies was quite diverse. Also, the spread of hierarchy and patriarchy was complex. Some civilizations began as pre-patriarchal and were invaded by patriarchal groups. I am guessing that these invading groups were influenced by the dawn of patriarchal civilizations. Continuing research will confirm, I believe, that the beginnings of patriarchy took place in the cities of civilization, not in the rural back country. But however that may be, the most important truth for our contemporary discussion is *that human societies were not always patriarchal and future societies do not need to be patriarchal.*

Here is a quotation from Charlene Spretnak, an eminent scholar of ancient religious practices, that tells us something important about the time and nature of the origin of patriarchy:

Perhaps the earliest Paleolithic statues, dating from 25,000 B.C.L., are expressions of the female body as living microcosm of the larger experiences of cyclic change, birth, renewal, and nurture. In time these energies became embodied in the sacred presence of the Great Goddess, the encompassing matrix of female power. On her surface she produced food, into her womb she received the dead. Rituals in her honor took place in womb-like caves, often with vulva-like entrances and long, slippery corridors; both the cave entrances and grave sites were often painted with blood-like red ochre, a clay used as pigment. As society evolved, so did the powers of the Goddess. She was revered as the source of life, death, and rebirth; as the giver of the arts, divine wisdom, and just law, and as the protector of peace and the nurturer of growth. She was all forces, active and passive, creative and destructive, fierce and gentle.<sup>1</sup>

Before leaving this provocative quotation, I want to point out the similarities of the Great Goddess

with Yahweh in Old Testament texts. Yahweh also symbolized “all forces, active and passive, creative and destructive, fierce and gentle.” The name and the gender had changed, but the actual experience of Reality that was being pointed to by Yahweh was more similar to the Great Goddess than is often noted. Of course it made a big difference that the worship of Yahweh took place within patriarchal culture. His worship included no caves and slippery blood-lined corridors. He was, nevertheless, seen as our cosmic birth mother and our ever-nearby nurturing breast. He, like the Great Goddess, was a symbol for the Every-thing-ness in which all things coexist. The mother symbolism even occurs occasionally in speaking of him.

Nevertheless, in the patriarchal era much had changed in human affairs including the god-talk. Of these changes we must now repent. The religious change is far deeper than changing “God” to “Goddess” in our speech. It includes recognizing that giving a sex identity to Final Reality is a human custom, not a description of the Infinite Reality. The encountering Otherness to our consciousness is profoundly mysterious. To speak of Infinite Reality as male or female must be given up. Final Reality is the “I am that I am” that met Moses on the “Holy ground” by a burning bush. That no-name-name might be translated as “the IS in every is.”

In our Christian theologizing it is not necessary for us to reject the whole Bible because it came into being in patriarchal cultures. When the worship of Yahweh arose all the societies of the Iraq-to-Egypt fertile crescent were already patriarchal societies and had been so for at least a 1000 years. Some of these societies still worshiped goddesses, but that did not mean that they were not fully patriarchal. As Spretnak pointed out in the book just quoted, the goddesses of Greece in the classical Hellenic period were very different from the earlier goddesses and the Great Goddess practice. When the early tribes of Israel fought for land in Palestine and sought to preserve their Yahweh worship over against the gods and goddesses of the Canaanite culture, they were not fighting pre-patriarchal societies. They were fighting for themes once held by the Great Goddess practice, which themes were now clothed in male attire. These early tribes of our monotheistic heritage were indeed thoroughly patriarchal. They were living in a cultural world that knew nothing else but patriarchy. All of these fertile crescent peoples possessed extremely little memory of the Great Goddess cultures that had been destroyed centuries ago. Even today we quite often speak of “Mother” Nature, but this sentiment does not undo our patriarchal patterns.

<sup>1</sup> Spretnak, Charlene; *Lost Goddesses of Early Greece: A Collection of Pre-Hellenic Myths* (Beacon Press: 1992) page 19-20

We Christians of the 21st Century now face the obligation to repent of patriarchy on behalf of these Old and New Testament writers and former Christian theologians who were basically blind to the existence of patriarchy, which was to them as normal as flat-earth science. We need not dismiss our biblical and early Christian luminaries for living in their times. But we men and women living today face a fresh challenge: we must repent of this ancient blindness. Most astonishing of all to many contemporary thinkers, the prophetic spirit contained in these ancient writings are an aid to us in overcoming the patriarchal style of talk and living.

### Christian Theologizing Today

Christian theologizing today faces a huge challenge with regard to the fact that its theology and styles of life have existed in a patriarchal era from the time of Jesus until now. Even in the best Christian theology of the mid-20th Century, we see the hangover of patriarchal language usage. And most of that theology was not yet dealing with the full tragedy of the oppression of women. Furthermore, our culture's commonplace dismissal of women's experience is still not adequately addressed.

So it is a relevant question whether a future Christian theology and style of life can escape the patriarchal past and join the emerging post-patriarchal future. Though we can find many Christianity-practicing women and men who are moving away from the patriarchal styles of life and thought, it remains true that gleaning the non-patriarchal treasure from the patriarchal era of Christian origins remains a difficult task. Almost every passage of Scripture has patriarchal overtones, and sometimes it has explicit teachings about how to live within the patriarchal-style of life. The theologizing of a next Christianity needs to reject patriarchal culture no matter how unconscious it was to these Biblical writers. Nevertheless, we need not throw out the baby of the Christian revelation with the patriarchal bath water. This requires a careful method of Biblical interpretation, as well as a careful method of interpreting Christian writings.

Jesus, the prophets that preceded him, and the disciples that followed him all used male pronouns and names for God. They all adapted to a patriarchal world and they began no movement to end it. These same people believed in a flat earth. We can easily forgive Jesus and others for adapting to a flat-earth science, but it is harder for us to forgive them for adapting to patriarchal styles and thought patterns.

Jesus and Paul made many women disciples and gave them a breath of fresh air relative to their more conservative patriarchal surroundings, but the abolition of patriarchy was not on the ethical priority list of Paul or Jesus. The poor and the lepers got much more attention.

It is clarifying to notice that all those who built the ancient Christian tradition were immersed in patriarchy, much as they were immersed in flat-earth science. Patriarchy in the Iraq-to-Egypt fertile crescent of land predated every verse of Scripture by at least a thousand years. When the tribal migrations of which Abraham was supposed to be a member left the city of Ur (1800? BCE), that city was already a patriarchal society. Moses (1290? BCE) knew nothing but patriarchal societies and designed another one. King David (1000? BCE) knew nothing but patriarchal societies and had no impulse to change that. All the existing Old Testament texts were written later than David, though oral tradition and scraps of writing existed earlier. Similarly, the prophets and Jesus never saw or heard of a pre-patriarchal society. When the Old Testament prophets or the New Testament Paul encountered the worship of goddesses, these were not the Great Goddess or lesser goddesses of the pre-patriarchal era; these goddesses were aspects of thoroughly patriarchal societies. The prophets' fight with Canaanite culture was a fight with another patriarchal society. Similarly, Paul's theological discussions spanned Hebrew and Greek cultures both of which were thoroughly patriarchal cultures. We need to keep in mind that the fight to overcome the patriarchal style of culture is a very recent development. As H. Richard Niebuhr might say, "it is a new aspect of God's will."

Jesus, Paul, the Buddha, and so on dealt with the very deep matters of human existence even though patriarchy was neglected. And these depth dealings had some small effects on the patriarchal malaise. Paul, for example, adapted to patriarchy as well as to the institution of slavery, but he counted women among his most important constituency, he defended them from their abusive husbands, and he asked for better relationships between slaves and their owners. His ethics adapted to his times. As the builders of a next Christianity, we also need to adapt to our times. Slavery has been abolished, though its aftermath is still being unraveled. Women's liberation has begun, though its completion is far from over. We Christian theologizers are now called to a thoroughgoing liberation of women and a complete honoring of racial diversity. Strange as it may seem, Paul, in fighting for circumcision not to be required of male Gentile Christians, was a pioneer in the honoring of



diversity. Some contemporary feminist Christians have extended Paul's emphasis on universality to women's issues.

### Contemporary Male Christians

Seeing this slight impetus toward feminism in the Christian and monotheistic past is only the beginning of unraveling the patriarchal attitudes in male Christians. It is important to see that nothing in the Christian past justifies a continuation of patriarchy. And, there is nothing in the Christian past that tells us everything that we need to discover about moving beyond our embedded patriarchal psyches and social practices. We are discovering fresh expressions of humanness. And as we do so, our earlier training will rise to obstruct this direction in which, yes, Holy Spirit is leading us.

We males have been trained by our culture to mistrust emotions and conform to the military patterns needed to defend our civilization from the adjacent civilizations. We have been trained to trust our left-brain thinking skills more than our right-brain emotional intuitions. We tend to cling to the most recent organizations of our finite minds and bully these ideas into action, rather than maintain a perpetual openness to every new aspect of Reality that comes our way. Such unrealistic living is not limited to males, but males have been allowed to get away with it for thousands of years. We males are pampered children in hundreds of ways that tend to escape our notice. We allow our sense of entitlement to continue, so it continues. This half-conscious continuation is a profound malaise that our Christian religious practices can, and hopefully will, help us counter.

Further, we need to notice how seriously patriarchy still remains in our general societies. Here is an illuminating quote from Rebecca Solnit that illuminates how blind we tend to be to the destructive nature of the patriarchal residue in male psyches:

(and we still haven't really talked about the fact that, of the sixty-two mass shootings in the United States in three decades, only one was by a woman, because when you say *lone gunman*, everyone talks about loners and guns but not about men—and by the way, nearly two-thirds of all women killed by guns are killed by their partner or ex-partner).

What's love got to do with it, asked Tina Turner, whose ex-husband Ike once said, "Yeah I hit her, but I didn't hit her more than the average guy beats his wife." A woman is beaten every nine seconds in this country. Just to be clear: not nine minutes, but nine seconds. It's the number-one cause of injury to American women; of the two

million injured annually more than half a million of those injuries require medical attention while about 145,000 require overnight hospitalizations, according to the Center for Disease Control, and you don't want to know about the dentistry needed afterward. Spouses are also the leading cause of death for pregnant women in the United States.<sup>2</sup>

We would be wise to take in these horrific facts about the behavior of members of the male-gender. We would also be wise to notice in males who would never injure a woman, the more subtle bullying speech and dismissive behaviors that we males quite commonly perform without even noticing how far removed we are from loving these woman neighbors, perhaps not even fully noticing their presence.

There is a recovery from patriarchy needed in every male psyche, and the core of this recovery-process is stopping to notice the residual thoughts in our heads that have never been fully challenged, sidelined, and replaced. This needs to be part of our Spirit nurture and of our analysis of sin in the human species. We men can stop being pampered children in this regard. We can grow up into the full stature of loving our own selves and loving others of whatever gender. This will take something more from us men than trying harder. It will take our sitting down for periods of inquiry, preferably with fellow males who are recovering, and sorting through the tangled threads that have become our superego patterns, collected from our deep cultural past. For most of my life I have believed that my vocation mattered more than my wife's, or that what I had to say is always important enough to interrupt any woman who happens to be speaking. Such unconscious behaviors can hide a readiness to be violent when countered or opposed.

Because the habits of patriarchy are so subtle, deeply established, and so unconscious in most men, we men are going to have to listen carefully to our women writers and companions in order to learn what aspects of our behavior are actually oppressive. Men are also going to have to help one another.

The key awareness we men need to hold on to is that the completion of this exodus will not be easy or immediate. We will need to be open to continuing this journey for the rest of our lives. Trust in forgiveness will be required, but forgiveness means a fresh start, not an excuse. This post-patriarchal future is a journey into ever greater realism, and it affects every aspect of our lives.

<sup>2</sup> Solnit, Rebecca; *Men Explain Things to Me* (Haymarket Books, Chicago, Illinois: 2014) page 29



## Small Group Meetings

nurture means  
by Joyce Marshall

As Gene and Alan and I were putting together the Realistic Living annual report, it occurred to me that the small group meetings we have had regularly for decades may be our most important contribution. The designs of these meetings have been developed by the groups themselves over the years—our weekly circle (CRC), our weekly Spirit Group, and our quarterly Bioregional meeting. Each has a certain format, and I've been reminded recently how each has served its members and guests.

### Christian Resurgence Circle

Our CRC meets weekly at the Marshall home. Gene's sons visited our circle when they were here this past summer. They are part of small groups in their own communities and are sensitive to group dynamics. Their appreciation of our particular group process reminded me of its gifts. Our circle began in Dallas in 1984 and has morphed into its present form through the years. Based on the three-fold worship service of Confession, Word, and Dedication, we begin with lighting three candles with our modern wording of the invocation song, In the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost (to tune of Ghost Riders in the Sky). "In the name of the Infinite, the Final Mystery; In the name of those who live in truth and equanimity; In the name of the wind of freedom as it blows through me; Amen, Amen. Alleluia, Alleluia! In the name of the silence, the word, and liberty."

After this opening we move in free-form dance to music selected by the Guide for the evening. (We all take turns with the leadership roles: Guide, Bible Conversation Leader, and Study Leader.) Then the Guide gives a short context for a period of Silence which ends with the bell. The context is not something to think about, but an invitation to rest in being, in presence, in this moment. After the silence we sing a song from our song book, after which the Guide asks our question of Confession which is some form of "When have you denied the life given you, saying to yourself, 'It should be different.?' " Using a talking stick, no one interrupts the speaker. After all have spoken, the Guide offers an Absolution. For example: "The fact is, your life, just as it appears, is not only

livable, but the perfect place for your unique manifestation of love."

Then there is a period of celebration of births, deaths, and significant events in our personal lives and the world at large. After that, the Bible Leader reads a Bible selection and leads an art form conversation on it. We are presently reading a Psalm (using my paraphrases of the Psalms). The conversation questions are: 1. What words, phrases did you hear? 2. How would you put the message of this psalm in your own words? 3. How does this psalm address you personally?

After a short break we return for the evening's study which is either on Christian theology, social ethics, spirit life, or interreligious dialogue. (Recent studies for our group have been: a relook at Saul Alinski's *Rules for Radicals*; Gene's theological essays, *Christians, Who Are We?*; the Buddhist book, *Listening to the Heart*, by Kittisaro and Thanissara; and the Reza Aslan book about Islam, *No God But God*.) The nature of the study is to note key insights in the material, explore their meaning, and then "ground" the insights in our own experience, so that we are not having abstract exchanges, but are exploring our lives in relation to spirit understandings and happenings in the world.

The evening closes with prayers of concern offered up for ourselves and the world, ending with the bell, the dousing of the candles, and a repeat of the opening song.

These simple rituals, honest sharing, singing, and expanding our thinking with existential questions serve to deepen our lives and our relationships with one another.

### Spirit Group

Two events reminded me this month of the importance of our weekly Wednesday evening Spirit Group. A couple that attends the group brought their 30-year-old son on two occasions. He was home prior to leaving the country to begin a new job. He clearly found the group helpful at this time of new beginnings in his life. Also, Alan was conversing with a friend from New York City on the phone and mentioned Spirit Group. When asked to describe what that was, Alan said, "It's just some Qi Gong and Tai Chi and sitting meditation and then we each take turns sharing our strengths and struggles." The friend, who is involved in spirit practices from Afro-Caribbean culture, was clearly impressed with this simple format.

Spirit Group began five years ago when Alan decided to do an Ignatian retreat process and asked me to be his listener. We meet at Alan's home (the Realistic Living guest house which we call the Green House). We begin with this invocation: "We

gather to be aware of this one body, this one moment, this one lifetime." Then we do about 15 minutes of Qi Gong and Tai Chi with appropriate music. Following this, we do about 15 minutes of sitting meditation, closing with a form of the Buddhist lovingkindness prayer: "May all beings be safe from inner and outer harm; May all beings be free from mental anguish; May all beings be physically strong, healthy, and vital; May all beings experience love, joy, wonder, and wisdom in this life, just as it is."

We then move to couches and chairs and open the sharing portion of the evening with this invocation: "We gather to examine our lives, sharing our strengths and struggles, and listening without self-recrimination to the witness of our spirit comrades." Each person gets equal time with a timer. Our responses to one another are short, mostly take the form of what we heard, possibly asking questions, and rarely making a suggestion. We close the two-hour session with: "We acknowledge that we are accepted just as we are by Life itself. We accept our acceptance and commit to living henceforth in freedom, trust, and compassion."

The opening half of this meeting settles us from the activities of the midweek work day and allows us to rest into simply being. Then the period of sharing our lives comes from a more reflective place of seeing our lives from a broader more open perspective. Most important perhaps, is the ability to reflect without fear of being analyzed or judged.

## Bioregional Seasonal Gathering

After attending the first continental bioregional congress in 1984, Gene and I began organizing bioregionally in Texas. The local manifestation has now morphed into a quarterly gathering of folks in the Blackland and Oakwoods Prairie to celebrate Equinoxes and Solstices on a Saturday from noon to 4pm. If weather allows we always meet outside. The format involves seven leadership roles which people happily volunteer for at the prior meeting.

As we stand outside, the leader of the opening circle contexts the particular season and leads a sharing. This fall, we were led in a reflection of our gratitude for the abundance of the season as we faced each of the four directions and the center. The pot luck always features a fascinating variety of wholesome dishes. The facilitator leads a song and guides us through the agenda. In our recent meeting the person giving the bioregional review told about small groups across the country who are experimenting in intentional community and

sustainable living. A discussion followed on personal experiences in communal living and visits to such communities.

The co-counseling leader pairs us off for a talk and listen process. Recently, the topic was "When have you felt abandoned?" Creative play can be moving to music, a group story, or small group "babbling" (talking spontaneously on a topic). For instance, in groups of three we once talked for a minute each on learning to swim, learning to ride a bicycle, or learning to drive. Then someone reads a story they have selected and whoever wishes reads a poem, either their own or a published poet. The host (meeting places vary from home to home) has a hands-on project they need help with (planting or mulching a garden, painting a fence, etc.).

Last year one of our meetings was a weekend trip to Native American Seed on the Llano River in the Texas Hill Country near Junction. Be sure to visit their website ([www.seedsource.com](http://www.seedsource.com)). The Nieman family are long time bioregional friends and have created a remarkable center which includes a working native seed farm, rain water harvesting, and beautiful housing spaces for retreats or conferences. They are inspiring people who do inspiring work.

What reminded me of the importance of this regular bioregional meeting is my observation of how the folks who come from Dallas, Denton, and other areas too far from Bonham to attend our weekly CRC or Spirit Group are clearly nurtured by this quarterly gathering. And those of us who do attend the other meetings benefit from the connection with nature and one another in this particular format.

I offer these reflections to encourage you to continue or to begin experimenting with small group meetings. I also want to underline the importance of this experimentation. The practice of Buddhism involves taking refuge in the Buddha (the one who knows), the Dharma (the teachings or the way things are) and the Sangha (the community of friends on the path). *Friends on the Path* is the title of Thich Nhat Hanh's 2002 book in which he claims that Sangha-building is the most important practice—the most important action—of the twenty-first century. He suggests that the next Buddha may not take the form of an individual, but that the Sangha may be the body of the Buddha. Jesus says, "Where two or three are gathered in my essence, that is my body." Thich Nhat Hanh says you can recognize a true Sangha by the qualities of awareness, understanding, acceptance, harmony, and love. Jesus says, "By their fruits you shall know them."

## Nurture and Action

On Christian Community  
by Gene Marshall



Ethics from a Christian point of view *includes everyone*, every person on earth, every animal, every tree, every plant, every geographical feature, of planet Earth and beyond.

What this means is that Christians must do two very different things; (1) Nurture themselves as Christians and (2) Care for the entire Earth, beginning with a local piece of Earth geography—a *parish* of responsibility.

### The Nurture of Communicating the Good News

The Christian proclamation or announcement of “gospel”—“Good News from Eternity” can be worded very simply as “God loves you.” The difficulty with that summary is that almost no one knows what that means in terms of their own experience of living. Almost no one in your parish of responsibility knows what the word “God” is pointing to. The word “love” is equally cryptic. Even the word “you” has so many false meanings for people that the entire phrase can mean the very opposite of the Christian Good News. I will illustrate the problem with regard to using the word “God.” Often in an English translation of the Old Testament we see the phrase “the Lord your God.” Most people assume that both “Lord” and “God” have the same meaning and that this meaning is “a Person-like existing being in a universe next door.” But consider this version of the third of the ten commandments in Exodus 20:7

*You shalt not take the name of Yahweh, your Elohim, in vain.*

This can be understood thus:

*You shall not superficially disregard the reputation of the Final Mysterious Reality, your God-devotion.*

“Yahweh” does not point to a literal, person-like Giant in some other realm. That is a story, a form of poetic expression. The Reality that the word “Yahweh” points to is not *a being*, but *the Ground* of all that has being. If the word “universe” means “all that exists,” then Yahweh does not exist. For Yahweh is not part of the universe, but the Creator of the universe. Using metaphorical talk, we can say that Yahweh is the “Why” there is a universe. And this “Why” is utterly unknown to human beings. So Yahweh is beyond existence, Yahweh is the Absolutely Mysterious All-powerfulness that is

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the origin of all that does exist. Each being that does exist has a beginning and an end. This cannot be said of Yahweh. Furthermore, each being that does exist is both limited and supported by this Absolutely Mysterious “Why” that cannot be said “to exist.”

In the phrase “the Lord your God” or “Yahweh your Elohim,” the word “Elohim” means your “God-devotion.” Everyone has some sort of “Elohim” or “God-devotion.” There are millions of “Elohim” in the sense of devotions that are selected by human beings to be their ultimate concerns. The first commandment does not deny that these many devotions play a role in human life. That first commandment says that realistically living before the Fullness of Reality demands that no finite and passing devotion shall be given importance above the one devotion to this Absolutely Mysterious, All-powerfulness of Final Reality. Devotion to Yahweh means devotion to the “Why” of all existing beings, all processes, fields of force, particles, consciousness, events, encounters, and capacities of response to those encounters. In other words, “God loves you” means simply this: “Complete realism is the best case scenario for human living.” The first commandment is: “Be realistic, lest Final Reality track you down and upend your taken-for-granted misdirection.”

“God loves you” means that being tracked down by Final Reality is good news; it is the grace of being restored to your best-case scenario for a human life. It is good news because it is best for you to give up your unrealism and embrace Final Reality as your God-devotion. Furthermore, this Final Reality is like a loving parent who is glad to see you return home, who forgives all your stupid being away, and is preparing a joyous feast for your life.

This is the Christian proclamation, an announcement of Good News—the end of the old eon of Satanic bondage and the dawn in your life of the new eon of the Reign of Yahweh—which includes liberty, compassion for all, and trust in the goodness of all that is happening to you.

### The Action of Creating Vision for a Renewed Earth.

“Without vision the people perish” is an important expression for understanding the depth of Christian service. Social change begins with the given situation, not with imposing our last best ideas on the given situation. We affirm *what is!* We start with *what is* in order to realistically move toward something better. We view *what is* from the perspective of a vision of what might be. Every real situation is not only an inheritance from the past,

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but a vast potential of real possibilities for the future. We actually have a better view of *what is* when we see *what is* from the perspective of what might be. Creating a future vision is the first step in thoroughgoing compassion for our place and our planet.

Creating vision for the whole planet cannot be done alone. And it need not be done alone. Data has already been collected. Essays and books have already been written. And all our acquaintances have parts of this puzzle already well articulated. Creating a vision for the renewed Earth within our own circle of Christian radicals is mainly a task of pulling together into a workable simplicity what is already known, or can easily be known.

During the four years that preceded 2011, I and four Christian friends pulled together a book of basic planetary vision entitled *The Road from Empire to Eco-Democracy*. Part One of that book described ten wake-up calls to civilized sleepers. These ten topics of needed vision have endured for decades and will persist for many more decades. While changes in the details of these topics are constantly happening, and will continue to happen, these ten topics remain a valid illustration of what I mean by “a vision of a renewed Earth.”

1. **The Primacy of the Ecological Crisis** in which it is made clear that the natural Earth precedes in importance the survival of any human corporation or government.

2. **The Undermining of Democracy** in which we note that the vast pools of individual and corporate wealth have reversed our democratic revolutions and moved toward oligarchy.

3. **The End of the Fossil-Fuel Economy** in which it is made clear that the climate crisis is the most serious of all human emergencies and must be dealt with promptly.

4. **The Population Plight** in which it is noted that more human beings are a handicap rather than a need—that such neglect of responsibility is an obsolete practice.

5. **The Continuing Drag of Patriarchy** in which we notice that the world-wide liberation of women and girls is still far from complete.

6. **The Enduring Curse of Racism** in which it is pointed out that the depth of this exodus from irrational violence is also grossly incomplete.

7. **The Death Throes of Theocracy** in which we see that the tyranny of religious sectarian groups upon whole cultures is a dying form that needs to be buried and never rise again.

8. **The Obsolescence of War** in which we explain why all-out military means can no longer be used to settle our conflicts without untenable damage to all the parties involved. The last-resort

use of military means can now be limited to stopping all-out warfare, genocide, and crimes against humanity.

9. **The Tyranny of the Banking Oligarchy** in which we notice that the control of money policies must to be taken away from those who possess the most money, or make money with money.

10. **The Horror of Poverty** in which it is made plain that poverty is completely unnecessary and a sign of failure of the entire civilization mode of social organization.

The work of pulling together such an inclusive vision and applying it to our local places is crucial for our motivation to act. Such vision does not, however, tell us what our specific actions need to be. We cannot simply do our vision. For our local action, further considerations are necessary. Vision is a direction, a motivation, an orientation for our lives. What we actually do today, tomorrow, next month, next year, next decade requires more detailed thinking. Finally, effective local action is not something to be done alone. It means organizing people to do things together. It means finding, motivating, organizing, and nurturing groups of people who sustain structures of action.

## The Ultimate Reality

a review of  
educational videos  
by Alan Richard



*Journey #2 - The Ultimate Reality*  
Content by Interior Mythos Journey Team  
Videography by Maryellen Greulich  
These videos are available at:  
[http://interiormythos.com/video\\_type/journey-2-the-ultimate-reality/](http://interiormythos.com/video_type/journey-2-the-ultimate-reality/)

*The Ultimate Reality* is the second video series produced by Interior Mythos Journeys and streaming on their website as part of its Life Journeys curriculum. *The Ultimate Reality* is divided into three “stations,” entitled *Free Fall*, *The Great Practice*, and *Knowing the Unknowable*. All of the video presentations use three techniques: (1) voice-overs with brief and extended quotes from mystics, philosophers, theologians, coaches, and psychologists accompanied by appropriate video footage, (2) videotaped interviews, and (3) excerpts from lectures or presentations. Some of the presentations also use animated segments. The content of the first “station” focuses on the “end of the world as we know it” and the beginning of a decentered world without layers or horizons. This presentation ends with a moving segment on the

Pale Blue Dot photograph of the planet Earth taken from the Voyager 1 space probe, which sandwiches Carl Sagan's 1994 reflections between two key moments from Michael May's lecture on it. The content of the second "station" is the link between everyday practices of excellence and contemplative practice. It intersperses interview footage with a young tennis player, a triathlete, a yoga instructor, a writer, and a furniture maker with quotations from Shunryu Suzuki and other contemplatives. It ends by suggesting that the "Great Practice" behind all practices is living in reality. The six video presentations comprising the final "station" all address what "living in reality" means. These presentations include content that will be familiar to veterans of the Ecumenical Institute and RS-1. They make extensive use of the faces, voices, and thought of Jack Gilles and Gene Marshall. There is also plenty here, including a kind of music video of a song called "You're Still Gonna Die" that is fresh, funny, and scary all at the same time.

The content is thoughtfully developed, and in sequence makes a persuasive case for developing a new way of doing the "Great Practice" with a new mythology that can communicate the aim of this practice in our new horizonless, decentered world. It draws on the RS-1 tradition but also other strands of contemporary thought that address our profound humanness. Quite apart from the content, the videography, editing, music, and sound demonstrate care, attention to quality, and a profound artistic sensibility. The juxtaposition of Gene's voice reading from his work and the video artistry is quite effective. The website itself is visually stunning and well-crafted. Although the series stands on its own as an art form, it would also work well as a part of a self-study or group study program.

## ART ON THE HUMANNESS SCALE

reviews by Joyce Marshall

### FICTION



*Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant*

Ballentine, 1982

*A Spool of Blue Thread*

Knopf, 2015

both by Anne Tyler

This summer I reread six of Anne Tyler's novels in as many days. I'd spent months reading nonfiction and was needing a break from that and also needing a time of healing from the stress of family members' physical issues and lots of doctor visits. Tyler, who won the Pulitzer prize for *Breathing*

*Lessons* in 1988, seems to have observed many families first hand, taking notes on their complicated relationships and adding Tyler's own ability to sense each person's inner thinking. *The Accidental Tourist* was a 1985 movie. I'm surprised that more of her twenty novels have not been made into movies.

My husband Gene and I read aloud *Dinner at the Homesick Restaurant* recently. Of the Tyler novels I have read, this one is my favorite. I read that it was also Tyler's favorite until she wrote *A Spool of Blue Thread* this year. I just finished reading *Spool*, and I place it second to *Homesick*. Quick summaries: *Homesick* is about a family whose father deserts it early on, leaving Pearl to raise Jenny, Cody, and Ezra alone. Ezra later owns a restaurant in which he keeps trying to reunite the family for a dinner, but on each occasion there is a resentful explosion and people stomp off, never eating his fine meal. *Spool* centers around a house built by the family patriarch, a master builder, and the secrets of the generations who live there.

All of Tyler's books are set in Baltimore, the home she shared with her husband Taghi Modarressi, an Iranian-born child psychiatrist and author, until his death in 1997. At 74, she is currently working on a recasting of Shakespeare's *Taming of the Shrew* which she finds totally misogynistic. I look forward to her version.

*Mamaew*

by Susan Dodd

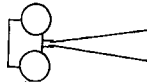
Viking, 1988

This piece of historical fiction is a masterful telling of the story of the mother of the James brothers—Jesse and Frank. What a woman! Nearly six feet tall, a strong, rebellious, blunt-talking survivor, I didn't much like Zerelda. That is, until about a third through the book. Pregnant, she is imprisoned along with two of her children, five and two, by Union soldiers as a Confederate spy because of the actions of her older sons. When she is released after two weeks of horrendous conditions, I realized I had fallen in love. She experiences many circumstances I can hardly imagine and which continue year after year. Just a few: her husband is hung almost to death, her arm is blown off by a Pinkerton bombing of their house, Jesse is shot almost to death when trying to surrender to Union soldiers after Lee's surrender. Yet Zerelda Cole James Samuel holds on to her love and integrity with a courage that leaves me in awe. I also come away from this story with a more nuanced sense of the American Civil War. Maybe no one would call Jesse and Frank James heroes, but I have a better understanding of how they came to be outlaws.

*In This House of Brede*  
by Rumer Godden  
Viking Press, 1969

This is one of the finest novels I have read. When I finished it I wanted to begin at the beginning and read it again. It is a book that changes the reader. The story is of life in a Benedictine Abbey in England from 1954 to the late 60s. If you have been to a lengthy intensive Buddhist retreat, imagine it continuing for the rest of your life with the addition of responsibility of ongoing community life with the same people. Godden doesn't avoid either the challenges or the wonders of such a life as we meet upclose and personal about half a dozen of the women who have chosen to live according to the 1500-year-old Benedictine Rule in a 130-year-old foundation. Although I was raised Protestant, I recall thinking at age 13 that the life of a nun had a drawing power. I found it impressive to observe the Mother Abbess and her council discussing the best way to bring the 90 women of the community to true adulthood as they dealt with the ongoing daily work of the monastery: gardening and animal care, cooking, weaving, liturgy, study, visitors, financial sustainability, and at one point, taking on four Japanese postulants to prepare for and set up an abbey in Japan. They are tough minded, yet loving—no trace of sentimentality. Godden was herself an oblate and the story is based on women she knew.

## MOVIES



**Ricki and the Flash.** I loved this film—the music, Streep, and all the other actors! The script has real conversations between members of a family with a history of major upsets. Probably most families never have such honest conversations. And probably most stories of this nature don't turn out as well, but I see it as a myth of possibility. It is possible for people to be honest, for families to see that there are no villains, and for them to just give in and love one another. My husband and I cried, cheered, and stood up and danced there in the theater. (OK, OK. It was a matinee showing at our small town and there were only two others there a few rows in front of us.)

**Tangerines.** This Estonia nominee for the best foreign language 2015 Oscar is a winner in my book. A real classic, the film has essentially four characters, with half a dozen others that briefly pass through. The film takes place in 1992 during the Georgian and Abkhazian conflict. Many Estonians lived in the area, but most returned to their homeland during the war. Two Estonian

men, Ivo and Margus, remained to harvest the season's crop of tangerines and got caught in the crossfire. After a skirmish, Ivo nurses two wounded men, one on either side of the conflict, in his home. A regular Gandhi, it is a pleasure to watch him handle their mutual belligerence and the tense situations when more soldiers show up. I haven't seen a better anti-war film.

**Citizenfour,** Laura Poitras' 2014 film about NSA whistleblower, Edward Snowden, presents a young, smart, good-humored guy who is incredibly courageous. He tells of his early passion about the positive potential of the internet and his growing alarm at its use by the U.S. government to spy on its own citizens with no limits or controls.

His well-planned revelations are revealed in a hotel room in Hong Kong to The Guardian journalists Glenn Greenwald and Ewan MacAskill under the watchful eye of Poitras' camera. The film also spends time with William Binney, a government intelligence analyst who turned whistleblower to protest abuses he saw taking place in the government's actions after 9/11. As a result, Binney was raided by FBI agents who stormed into his house with guns drawn showing the lie in the claim—made by President Obama and others in the government and media—that everything would have been fine if Snowden had gone through “proper channels” to make his revelations to the American public. We also see Director of National Intelligence James Clapper and Director of the National Security Agency (NSA) Keith Alexander both lying to Congress—presumably under oath—about the extent of the government's spying on American citizens. Poitras was placed on a secret government watch list and thereafter stopped and searched dozens of times as she tried to enter the U.S. This harassment prompted her to move to Berlin. Greenwald lives in Brazil. His partner was detained for hours in a London airport. Snowden remains in asylum in Moscow where his partner has joined him. You owe it to yourself and to your country to see this historic film.

**History of the Eagles** is a 2013 Showtime documentary on the 70s rock band that is now available on two DVD discs. The group disbanded in 1980, reunited in 1994, made a couple more recordings and just completed a sell-out world tour in July of this year. Having been an Eagles fan (their vocal harmonies are the best in my book) I enjoyed their history and particularly their reunion, in which their talent is no less and their wisdom increased. The film is well made and includes many performances and interviews with the members.

**Nicholas Nickleby.** I really enjoyed the 1977 BBC 6-part, 5-hour-plus adaptation of this Charles Dickens book. Many minor characters were given a chance to shine by fine British character actors. There was an intentional overplaying that poked fun at certain characters, and yet their humanity came through so that I was genuinely touched by each one. I thought the director handled the interplay of the tragic and the comic with a deft hand.

**McFarland USA** is based on the true story of coach Jim White (who is white) leading an all-Latino cross-country running team in a small California town to a state championship. Director Niki Caro does as well with this story as she did with the 2002 film, **Whale Rider**, made in her native New Zealand. Kevin Costner is fine as the coach and the Latino actors, plus many members of the McFarland community where it was filmed, make it a moving story. The film combines the satisfaction of the underdog making good against the odds and a closeup visit with the warm Latin culture of those who work dusk to dark in the fields of California providing us with fresh food. An added bonus is a great soundtrack.

**Smoke.** This 1995 film is one fine creation that will continue to last as an inspiring art form. Anchored by Harvey Keitel as a the owner of a corner cigar shop in Brooklyn and William Hurt as a grieving writer who visits the shop for his smokes, it weaves in the lives of others who show up there (and includes Stockard Channing, Forest Whitaker, and Ashley Judd). Sometimes the camera quietly moves in for very close shots going from Keitel's to Hurt's face as they converse. These guys, at the top of their game, are mesmerizing. Some of the stories involved are two men who lose their wives, the estrangement of a father and son, and a mother trying to save her daughter from drug addiction. The script and the acting are pure artistry.

**Two Days, One Night** is a Belgian film in French with English subtitles. Marion Cotillard got an Oscar nomination for her role. The plot involves Cotillard (playing Sandra Bya) going from door to door trying to save her job at a solar-panel factory. Her bosses have set up a terrible situation, asking her co-workers to vote between her job and a bonus for them. It's pretty dismal at times, but, amazingly, the film works, revealing humanity at its worst and best. Each door that opens to Sandra reveals a family with their own issues and the possibility of big life changes in making the decision to vote for her job or their bonus.

## RECOMMENDED READING

reviews by Joyce Marshall

### NONFICTION BOOKS



*One Foot in Front of the Other  
A Widow's Journey*  
by Cynthia P. Anderson  
Summit Books, 2015

This book is a page-turner that reads like a good novel. Clinical social worker Anderson open-heartedly shares the story of suddenly losing her psychiatrist husband of 35 years and how she experienced the following twelve years of working through his loss. Her story is not unusual, but it is fascinating in its honest, well-narrated detail. She grows in wisdom and teaches us specific lessons. For instance, when she finally begins dating she learns that the important question is not how you feel about the other person, but how you feel about yourself when with that person. Another lesson she learns is how she has idealized her husband. To move on with her life she has to remove him from the pedestal. Overall, the effect of reading her story was like walking through those years with her. I was left in a state of great tenderness toward the loved ones in my own life, alert to the fact that any of them could be gone the next moment. That is a fine lesson I hope I don't forget.

*The Wise Heart  
A Guide to the Universal Teachings  
of Buddhist Psychology*  
by Jack Kornfield  
Bantam, 2008

I found this book by one of the key Westerners who brought Buddhism to America to be excellent. Some years ago I attended a month long retreat at Spirit Rock Center with Kornfield as the lead teacher. He combines fine clarity with a folksy ability to tell his personal stories and those of his and his colleagues' students so that all he says is grounded in a moving and meaningful way. He not only has a PhD in psychology, he also spent many years in Asia as a monk in training with the best of teachers of the Buddhist tradition. I highly recommend this book.

*Nothing Holy About It  
The Zen of Being Just Who You Are*  
by Tim Burkett  
Shambhala, 2015

Burkett was a student of Shunryu Suzuki, whose book, *Beginner's Mind*, was my introduction to



Buddhism and meditation back in the 70s. I reread that book in conjunction with reading Burkett's memories of being with Suzuki, a double treat. You just can't really get the teaching of those Asian gurus without the stories of how it was to live in their presence. For instance, Burkett mentioned to Suzuki that he wanted to be a priest. The response: "Okay . . . but you seem to favor zazen (meditation) over cleaning the floor. You'll never be a priest as long as you favor zazen over cleaning." (A man after my own heart!) Buddhists make a big deal about transmission from teacher to student. I was moved by Burkett's comments on that subject. Here is a sample: "I can't say that I understand what transmission is, even though I have now given transmission to several individuals myself. But I do have a feeling of Suzuki's continual presence, whether I am healthy or sick, mad, happy, or sad. I don't mean that I think about him—I rarely do—or that I hear him or see him, although he does appear in my dreams once or twice a year. It's more like he is in my cells and bloodstream. Maybe that is what transmission is all about—but I am not at all sure."

*Beyond Theology*  
by Alan Watts  
Vintage Books, 1973

This book was written in 1964 yet it feels like it was written yesterday. Watts is looking at Christianity from the perspective of the Taoist, Confucian, Hindu and Buddhist traditions. The crucial doctrine in Hinduism asserts the ultimate identity of oneself and the Godhead—not the ego self, not the personal soul, but the spirit, the ground of being. At the mythic level Hinduism asserts that all experience is God's and the universe is conceived as God's game of hide-and-seek with himself. This contrasts sharply with the Hebrew/Christian view which emphasizes the difference between the Creator and the creature, between good and evil.

Watts points to the need for a natural history of theology, studying the development of religious ideas and practices as a phenomenon of life, not asking whether it is true or false. So in this book he deals with religion "almost naively, at its mythic, imagistic, anthropomorphic level." He sees more danger of idolatry when we think of God as Necessary Being or as the organic Pattern of the Universe than when we think of God as the Old Gentleman upon the golden throne, or as the many-armed and many-faced Dancer who is playing as the world.

He appreciates the playfulness of Hinduism and sees the seriousness of Christianity as a weakness.

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The religious exercises of Jews and Christians are largely verbal. Instinct, passion, and nature become servants of reason, intellect and grace and result in the tendency to try to change and control oneself and events, tempting us to play God. Then we lose our ability to trust our hunches and opt for the reasoned course which leaves us always with the nagging suspicion that we haven't reasoned enough, laying the foundation for anxiety and guilt. In fact, Jesus advocates the opposite. Watts regrets that the Christian religion "might never realize its potential of blossoming into the most joyously exuberant, swinging, colorful and liberated religion there ever was." In his thinking, this could come about "if Christians understood the way in which their religion works—as a system designed to explode into the realization of being one Self with God as Jesus said in John 17. "

*Buddhist Women on the Edge*  
*Contemporary Perspectives from the Western Frontier*  
Edited by Marianne Dresser  
North Atlantic Books, 1996

Marianne Dresser brings together 30 women who are reshaping Buddhism's patriarchal structures as the tradition is assimilated into the West. They include writers, nuns, scholars, priests—even a martial arts master and a private investigator. Most of them bring decades of experience in Buddhism, and they address various issues that face women, not only in Buddhism, but any religious tradition. This book makes it clear that it does not help to pretend that no harm exists in the mistreatment of women, and that the root of much of that mistreatment lies in the religious traditions themselves. The title of one essay speaks a clear message for women: Bowing, Not Scraping. There is a fine commentary on romantic love and how it has become a religion in Western culture. Another author addresses the issue of compassion and what constitutes true "helping." One essay is about the need for women to have confidence and how that involves "living with pride and humility in equal proportion."

My favorite piece is called, "Unlearning Silence: A Further Feminist Revaluation of Buddhist Practice." The author, Marilyn Senf, pulls no punches in pointing out the sexism in Buddhism and in the Buddha himself. I like this quote: "It is interesting, to say the least, that it has usually been easier for many Buddhists to empathize with the suffering of ants or mosquitoes than with the plight of women! But for an amazingly long time, and even now, women have themselves been more easily inhibited than these creatures from impressing their human needs upon the sangha."

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She notes that much more is needed than just adding women to the power structures when the practice itself is “absolutely loaded with gendered issues and assumptions.” I can identify with Senf’s comment that she struggles to “find an honest place for herself within this tradition.” I see this problem in all religious traditions.

### reviews by Gene Marshall

*A Fighting Chance*  
by Elizabeth Warren  
Metropolitan Books, 2014

This autobiographical and political commentary reads like a novel. I broke down in tears over her unlikely victories; I felt her struggles and fears and deep compassion. I marvel at her courage to face unbelievable oppositions and still keep enough cool to say briefly and effectively whatever might be needed. This is also a feminist story. Elizabeth has worked in a strongly male world of high finance without being intimidated and without losing her poise and charm as a representative of her gender. And she is indeed a fighter for you and me and speaks about everyone having a fighting chance from someone who had to fight hard to realize her fighting chances. Elizabeth Warren has long been a member of my meditative council, but reading this book has moved her to the front row of advisors that I revere. Read this book. Take your time, it is worth a month of visits.

*The Enigma of Consciousness*  
*A Philosophy of Profound Humanness and Religion*  
by Gene W. Marshall  
iUniverse, 2015

In July of this year my long writing and publishing task for *The Enigma of Consciousness* finally reached completion. The book is about a fundamental redefinition of religion, not just the Christian religion, but why any sort of religion appears among the social processes of human societies.

This work is also an inquiry into the foundations of consciousness with special attention to wonder or awe and how to understand and share wonder experiences. It is written for the general reader of religious content, yet it probes the edge of paradigm shifts in the most academic circles. It is a controversial book, but also a practical outline of directions for both solitary and small group practice of a vital religion.

This beautiful 276-page 7.5 X 9.25 inch book, with many helpful charts, spells out important perspectives with full illustrations and careful definitions of the human approaches to truth, consciousness, wonder, and religion.

The nature of good religion is indicated by this story of a student who asked his meditation teacher if meditation causes enlightenment. “No,” said the teacher, “enlightenment is an accident, but meditation makes one more accident prone.” If “religion” is defined as any practice that opens us to the enlightenment of wonder, then good religion is any practice that makes us more accident prone to the gift of wonder-filled living. Because wonder is foundational in human existence, every long-standing human society has come up with some form of wonder-filled religion. This also explains why religion appears as one of the down-to-Earth social processes in human society along with education, economic systems, and sewage disposal.

This book is available from iUniverse in both paperback and e-book. Bargain copies and sets of books can also be secured directly from the author.

For a reduced price, postage-free copy send a \$25 check to: Gene Marshall; 3578 N. State Highway 78; Bonham, Texas 75418

Also, see my new author’s page on Amazon: [amazon.com/author/gene-marshall](http://amazon.com/author/gene-marshall)

### Words of Endorsements for this Book

With clarity and abundant insights, Gene Marshall proposes ways by which we can move beyond old forms to those that would enable us to manifest qualities of “profound humanness.” He has given us a roadmap constructed of vital possibilities, which are urgently needed in this time of multiple crises when the status quo simply will not do.

—Charlene Spretnak: *author of Relational Reality, The Resurgence of the Real, and States of Grace; Ojai, CA*

The truth of reality is a mystery—in Gene Marshall’s language, “an almighty unknown”—but reality is ever-present to our consciousness. To know what is known, or to make reality real, these are the profundities that Marshall systematically and thoughtfully probes in an analysis that rings as earnest and true as the author who penned it.

—Dr. Jeffrey W. Robbins: *Professor and Chair of Religion and Philosophy; Lebanon Valley College; Annville, PA*

Gene Marshall coaxes the reader beyond the limiting enclosure of the personality-centered self and ego mind and into the realm of authentic personal interior experience. The author lifts the fog created by the pesky self-serving human mind regarding the interior life, and provides a path of clarity into depth states of being.

—Michael D. May: *Teacher, Group Discussion Leader, Curriculum Editor for Interior Mythos Journeys; Bloomington, IN*

Dear Friends of Realistic Living,

For over 30 years Realistic Living has fostered a movement in Christian resurgence, religious rediscovery, & planetary well-being. Our primary focus in 2015-16 is leadership training and providing that leadership with easy-to-use materials for fostering a fresh and vital Christian presence in local places across the continent. We see this Christian presence participating in an interreligious dialogue that leads to a common social awakening of our profound humanness and to an appropriate transformation of the social life of our intensely troubled planet. We also see this renewed Christian presence as an innovative weekly religious practice for awakening and nurturing solitary revolutionaries in profound humanness—that is, in the “new Adam and Eve” of a healed and healing humanity referred to in our ancient code-book as “the body of Christ.”

It may seem that such a purpose is too big for a small organization hidden away in the outskirts of a small town in rural Texas. And this is true; nevertheless, we propose to continue promoting this large purpose for every small place on the planet. In a deep social transformation, small places are where everything begins. One, two, five, twelve living persons flow together into ever-larger rivers of change.

In order to continue this work, we need your support.

- You can begin by simply sending us names and addresses of people who would welcome a complimentary copy of this journal and consider joining our constituency.
- You can read our books, use our manuals and teach our carefully constructed courses.
- You can organize and provide nurture to continuing groups of explorers.
- You can attend our annual schools and planning meetings.
- And perhaps you can complete the financial challenge of one of our members. He agreed to increase his contributions by \$2000 if we can find 8 others who will increase their giving by \$1000. We have now found all but one of those eight. Are you the one?

Sincerely,

Gene, Joyce, and Alan,  
Faculty of Realistic Living

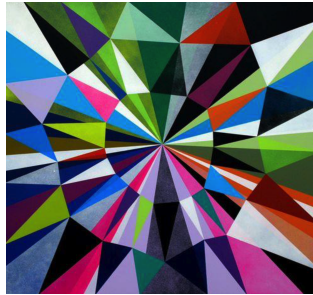


# Realistic Living

*is contemporary language for "Holy Spirit."*

Check out our newly revised web site: [RealisticLiving.org](http://RealisticLiving.org).

Also, check out our  
Facebook page:



[facebook.com/realisticliving](https://facebook.com/realisticliving).

To continue on this mailing list, we request a yearly contribution of \$20 or more (a tax-deductible donation within the United States).

OR

Make an arrangement with your bank to become a **Supporting Member** with \$10 or more per month. More than ever Realistic Living needs a steady income to expand our work, our faculty, and continue long-term.

The *Utne Reader* outlined these **principles for the art of philanthropy**:

- Support really good people who have a total commitment to doing good in the world and who are willing to put their asses on the line to do it.
- Seek out originality and imagination.
- Support unpopular truths.
- Fund players with a long view.
- Support people no one else is supporting.
- Support people whose work is their passion in life, not a day job.
- Fund those attacking root causes and trying to change the system.
- Trust what inspires you.

In terms of such principles, we are willing for you to evaluate our work for its appropriate place in your benevolent budget.

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Permit No. 100

**Or Current Resident**