



## Seminary of the Street

Meet Us at the Corner of Love and Justice

April 13, 2010

Dear Nichola,

With the coming of spring, we celebrate the resurgence of life and the possibility of newness breaking into the old, the drab, the seemingly lifeless. So many of us are longing for something different—a life with more joy, more love, more meaning, and more justice in it.

This longing, I think, fuels the self-help market. We so earnestly want to believe that if we take the right seminar, read the right book, or even discover the right way to organize our closets, we will become new and improved versions of ourselves. It reminds me of the affirmation I once saw on someone's refrigerator: "Every day in every way, I'm getting better and better."

Today I'm wondering whether our longings might actually be better served by abandoning the hope of transcending ourselves and dropping back down into the muck of our real lives, greeting our old familiar demons with some friendly acceptance. This is what the Buddhists call *maitri*, or unconditional friendliness. (You can read a wonderful article on this topic by Pema Chödrön [here](#).) Maybe by getting friendlier with our own confused and imperfect selves, we could manage to be friendlier to the other embattled souls around us. Maybe, in the words of poet W. H. Auden, we could "love [our] crooked neighbor with [our own] crooked heart."

So as you read through the spiritual formation opportunities below, maybe try reading them, not as opportunities to improve yourself, but as opportunities to go deeper, in community, into what it means to be human and to live with passion, love and gusto in this very human, imperfect world. We'd love to have you join us in the muck, and we promise to strive for gentleness toward you and toward ourselves.

### **Trauma and Social Justice: A FREE Talk and Q and A about the body/brain role in community-building and social justice work with Vanissar Tarakali, Ph.D., Embodied Educator for Healing and Social Justice Monday, April 19, 7pm**

All of us have, at one time or another, been the targets of oppression or violence, even if only as children in a society where children have little say about the circumstances of their lives. Vanissar Tarakali, Ph.D., teaches about the impact of this oppression and violence on the body and about practical ways to heal from intimate and social trauma and free up creativity and energy for racial justice allyship and social change work.

Many people have asked for a way to learn more about Vanissar's offerings without committing to a full-day workshop, so we are delighted to be offering this introductory talk at no cost. Come find out about this exciting new approach to social healing work!

**Monday, April 19**

**7pm**

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

**Free; donations gratefully accepted**

**[Email us](#) to RSVP**

## **How Oppression Shows Up in the Body**

**Saturday, April 24, 10am-5pm**

In this "learn through the body" workshop we will bring presence and attention to how oppression shows up in the body. Through awareness practices, simple movements, reflection and discussion we will explore how humans survive the trauma of oppression (racism, sexism, classism, ableism, homo/transphobia, etc). Such insight is a powerful foundation for facing and healing the legacies of trauma and oppression that both targets and agents of oppression carry in our bodies.

Participants will take away practical tools that support awareness and open up creative ways of engaging personal and collective healing and social justice,

Topics include: oppression as social trauma; how internalized dominance and internalized oppression show up in the body; ancestral legacies of oppression and resistance; thawing out from numbness, denial and dissociation; working with powerlessness, shame and isolation; owning/recycling your privilege; self-care and boundaries; grounding; trusting your intuition; finding your voice and your power.

*Vanissar Tarakali, Ph.D. is a healer and teacher who designs embodied healing oppression and allyship trainings and interventions for individuals and groups. She is passionate about supporting folks with privilege to unlearn oppression and use their privilege for social justice. The former Healing Oppression Project co-lead at Community United Against Violence (CUAV), Vanissar studies Generative Somatics with Staci Haines and Denise Benson, and intuitive reading with Phyllis Pay. [www.vanissar.com](http://www.vanissar.com)*

**Saturday, April 24**

**10am-5pm**

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

**Sliding Scale: \$80-180; some financial assistance available**

**[Email us](#) to register.**

## **West Oakland Social Healing Project**

This year, Seminary of the Street is launching the West Oakland Social Healing Project, a place-based racial and economic justice initiative to explore whether it is possible to heal painful divides in the historic but rapidly gentrifying West Oakland neighborhoods. Read more, including some initial ways for you to get involved, [here](#). (We are deliberately moving slowly, building partnerships with neighborhood organizations and long-time residents. There will be more opportunities for involvement soon.)

## **Urge Wells Fargo to Reinvest in Communities**

**Tuesday, April 27**

**Noon**

As part of the West Oakland Social Healing Project, we have forged a partnership with [Causa Justa: Just Cause](#), a multi-racial, grassroots organization building community leadership to achieve justice for low-income Bay area residents in West Oakland and beyond. That organization is part of a coalition of tenants and homeowners facing foreclosure, community organizations, and faith and labor organizations

who are jointly organizing a march and demonstration during the Wells Fargo Shareholders' Meeting in San Francisco on Tuesday, April 27. If you can, please show your solidarity by joining us there. [Email me](#) if you'd like to meet up with others from Seminary of the Street for the march.

**What:** March and Rally at Wells Fargo shareholder meeting

**When:** Tuesday, April 27th

**Where:** March: Meet @ Justin Herman Plaza, SF @ 12pm

**Rally:** 465 California Street, SF @ 12:30pm

Read more [here](#).

## "Alternatives to Gentrification" Reading Group

**Tuesdays, May 4-25, 6-8pm**

Another initiative of the West Oakland Social Healing Project, the "Alternatives to Gentrification" Reading Group will meet periodically over the coming months to learn about what gentrification is and how it happens, explore alternatives being pioneered in other places, and dream together about what might be possible here.

Join us in our new West Oakland home on Tuesdays, May 4-25, from 6-8pm, to discuss *THEM*, Nathan McCall's poignant, grimly funny novel about gentrification in an Atlanta neighborhood much like West Oakland. *Publisher's Weekly* calls the novel by McCall, an African-American former *Washington Post* journalist, "masterfully orchestrated and deeply disturbing" in its illustrations of the depth of the racial divide and the difficulty of building community in its face. While the novel isn't particularly hopeful, it gives us an opportunity to grapple with the seriousness of the issues we are facing and reflect on our motives for doing so. It's also just a really good read.

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

**Tuesdays, May 4-25, 6-8pm**

**1724 Filbert St.**

**Freewill donation requested to help with cost of snacks.**

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

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

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

[Tierra Nueva/The People's Seminary](#) in Burlington, WA

[Bartimaeus Cooperative Ministries](#) in Southern California

[The Servant Leadership School](#) in Washington, DC

[The Alternative Seminary](#) in Philadelphia, PA

[City Seminary of New York](#) in New York City, NY

[Word and World](#) (traveling)

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

## Your Donations Make Possible....

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

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

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

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

## Volunteer Opportunities

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

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

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

More volunteer opportunities are coming soon.

## Wish list

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

Presentation easel for flip chart paper

Canopy for tabling at festivals and street fairs

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

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

Blessings,

Nichola Torbett  
Founding Director, Seminary of the Street

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

[Seminary of the Street Website](#) | [Email Us](#)

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