



## Seminary of the Street

Meet Us at the Corner of Love and Justice

February 1, 2010

Dear Nichola,

Imagine a love that is dangerous, that presents a real and present danger to the status quo. This kind of love fosters real solidarity. It crosses lines to challenge who may love whom, and under what conditions. It sets us on fire for justice for everyone. That's the kind of love we are aiming to cultivate in the new "Love Your Neighbor As Yourself" laboratory that started last week.

During part of our first session, we explored what it might mean, first of all, to experience ourselves as beloved. We talked about the notion of "loving ourselves" and whether such a thing is really possible. My own sense is that we can't give away, even to ourselves, something we haven't first experienced. The love needs to come initially from something larger than ourselves and probably larger than any individual person. In twelve-step programs, participants speak of a "higher power," and people are free to define that for themselves. It can mean anything from "the people in this room" to "God." The important thing is that it embody serious, unabashed, unconditional love and the kind of forgiveness that transforms lives.

I believe that recognizing ourselves as deeply, unconditionally, and inescapably loved is, in and of itself, an act of dissidence in this culture.

We are taught to doubt and even loathe

ourselves, and for good reason. People who know themselves to be beloved and whole are so much less easily manipulated by the powers that be. No longer will we be coerced into playing by rules set up to maintain power and wealth in the hands of a few. No longer will we be co-opted into participation in unjust systems. No longer will we be duped into seeking power and prestige for ourselves, for we won't need external propping up. We will see ourselves as utterly sufficient and won't need to prove that we are better than anyone else. No longer will we compete with others for the trumped up rewards and consolations that are supposed to compensate for a lack of real life, real love, genuine joy, and authentic



feeling. Is it just my imagination, or would that bring the whole house of cards down?

We spent some time in class discussing when and how we experience a sense of being beloved. Here are some of our ideas. Feel free to try them at home! Feel free, as well, to send us practices that work for you, and we'll find a way to share them with others.

- Cultivate loving community and “chosen family” among those who are committed to embodying love and forgiveness.
- Meditate on interdependence. One participant mentioned that in her (non-US) culture and her family, she was not taught to think so much about an individual, separate self but to recognize that she was part of a larger, loving whole.
- Meditate on Psalm 139 (“O, Lord, you have searched me and known me...”).
- Pray by asking a loving God, as Jesus asked Peter, “Who do you say that I am?” Listen for the answer, and prepare to be awestruck.

In upcoming sessions, we'll be experimenting with ways to let this love flow through us and out into the world. We call what we're doing "loving outside the lines." We'll keep you posted on how it goes. Let me know if you'd like to be notified when we offer this laboratory again.

## **Cultivating Capacity for Challenging Racism**

**"Awakening Your Ally-Body: From White Racial Shame to Allyship," An Article by Vanissar Tarakali**

The journey to powerful and accountable racial justice allyship is actually a process of thawing out and healing from trauma. This is challenging because trauma is stored deeply in the body, and so the thawing-out-from-trauma journey unfolds in our bodies. It is deeply intimate and personal.

One of my allyship workshop participants who experienced this thawing process in her body came in with a vague fear connected with being a white racial justice ally. As she and the group brought compassionate attention to their sensations, she felt rage, helplessness and sadness emerge in her body underneath the fear. She directly experienced the devastating impact of systemic racism on her being--"like having a car accident on my front door step every day"--and felt how she had numbed herself for years to cope with this “disaster.”

Direct, bodily insights like these, while painful, support empowered allyship. After her thawing out experience, this participant felt more space and energy, and was able to identify the next steps she needed to take to be a conscious racial justice ally: “It’s empowering ...to be able to observe it happening...this new awareness... insert[s] more choice into what is an otherwise automatic numbing reaction.”

[Click here to read the full article.](#)

I'll be offering "Shame and White Allies Working for Racial Justice" on Saturday, February 13. Read on for details.

## **Workshop: Shame and White Allies Working for Racial Justice with Vanissar Tarakali**

Guilt and shame are common issues for white people seeking to acknowledge and address racism. White people's shame about racism often shows up as behaviors that reinforce racist dynamics, including denial, defensiveness, passivity and self-absorption, the calling out of which often serves to deepen shame and limit white people's receptivity. How can we respond compassionately to this shame without

condoning the resulting racist dynamics?

On February 13, Vanissar Tarakali will offer a workshop that brings theory and embodied practice together to explore white people's automatic, shame-coping behaviors, and offers insights into why certain racist behaviors are so entrenched, even in well-intentioned white people.

This workshop, which draws on over a decade of research into the psychology of how white people unlearn racism, will benefit white allies seeking to strengthen mutual support and compassion for everyone working to transform racism. People of color who would like to recognize when racial shame is motivating white behavior are also welcome to attend. This workshop will help everyone recognize when white racial shame is operating and offer options and antidotes to support white allyship and accountability.

You can learn more about Vanissar's background and work by visiting her website:  
<http://www.vanissar.com/>.

**Saturday, February 13, 10am-5pm**  
**Sliding Scale: \$80-180; limited financial assistance available**  
**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St. in Oakland**  
Email our [registration desk](#) to sign up.

## **Free Workshop: Be a Resource in Your Community** **with Miki Kashtan of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication**

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

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

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

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

Continuing Education Units are available.

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

**Friday, February 5, 2010; 4:30-6:30pm**  
**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland**  
See [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) for more information

## Contemplative Practices for Lent

with Michelle Murrain

Lent is a time when Christians look deeply at ourselves, work to change the rhythms of our lives to slow down, look closely, examine our hearts, and dig deeply into what it means to be people of God and followers of Jesus.

Contemplative practice can be an important part of our Lenten process. These two 1/2 day workshops are designed to introduce you to a variety of methods of Christian contemplative practice, from centering prayer, to lectio divina, to praying the hours and others. These workshops will be primarily experiential, with lots of time for practice and small group discussion.

**Saturdays March 6 and 20, 2010; 1-5pm**

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

**\*\*Sliding scale \$15-30 per workshop**

Email [our registration desk](#) to sign up

## FREE Workshop: Empathy in the Workplace

with Miki Kashtan of Bay Area Nonviolent Communication

Would you like to increase effectiveness and connection in your organization?

Are you tired of difficult conversations and strenuous meetings and would like some manageability in your work life?

In this workshop we plan on exploring some basic principles related to empathic communication in the workplace. We are particularly hopeful that groups and organizations that may not have a training budget will send some key individuals to this event.

The focus of this workshop is to provide an initial exposure to the following principles and practices and to the inquiry about how to bring them into the workplace:

- \* presence, even in the face of difficulty
- \* clarity of purpose when making decisions or running meetings
- \* attention to both parties' needs in a conflict
- \* providing feedback without criticism

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**Friday, March 26, 2010; 12-2pm**  
**First Congregational Church of Oakland, 2501 Harrison St in Oakland**  
See [www.baynvc.org](http://www.baynvc.org) for more information.

## 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....

We are taking on a number of new projects this year, including the [West Oakland Social Healing Project](#) I mentioned in my last email to you--a project to support low-income residents and residents of color in West Oakland to maintain a say in what happens in their neighborhood by educating newer residents about gentrification and organizing them to do low-level service work (such as childcare, for example) for organizations led by their lower-income neighbors.

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, 329 41st St., Oakland, CA 94609.

## 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.

We are also interested in finding a group of people who would be willing to work with us to create and invite the community to a "potluck communion" service in a public park once a month. Last November, Seminary of the Street, in collaboration with Urban Sanctuary and First Congregational Church of

Oakland, held a potluck picnic in the park, to which we invited all comers, including homeless people in the park and business people on their lunch hours. We had music and much good conversation, and most people left with hugs. Several of us were powerfully moved by this experience and have been dreaming of organizing such a picnic monthly, or maybe organizing local faith communities to coordinate it on a rotating basis, as a way of moving people from a "distant charity" model to being in real, transformative relationship with people who are hungry and poverty-stricken. We need a couple more people with a fire in their bellies for this project in order to make it sustainable for us. Are you such a person? Email Nichola at [ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:ntorbett@seminaryofthestreet.org) and rest assured that we will only move forward with this if there is a way of doing it without overstressing any volunteer.

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

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](#)

To unsubscribe, email [info@seminaryofthestreet.org](mailto:info@seminaryofthestreet.org) with "unsubscribe" in the subject line.  
www.seminaryofthestreet.org \* 510-225-8561 \* 329 41st St., Oakland, CA 94609