



# Spaceforsoul newsletter

## December 2018

### Seeking what unites us

*'Until there is peace between religions, there can be no peace in the world.'*

*Thich Nhat Hahn*

In the first week of November this year, the World Parliament of Religions met again for the 7<sup>th</sup> time in Toronto, Canada. The Parliament is the oldest, largest and most inclusive international gathering of people of all faiths and traditions. It first met as far back as 1893 and has become an important part of the worldwide interfaith movement. Its principal aim is to promote interfaith harmony and interdependence and to enable the world's religions to work together to create a just, peaceful and sustainable world.

Past speakers have included Nelson Mandela, the Dalai Lama, Archbishop Desmond Tutu, former American President Jimmy Carter, anthropologist Jane Goodall, Dr Arun Ghandi (grandson of Mahatma Ghandi), the American Jewish leader, Rabbi David Saperstein, theology professor Hans Kung and the British author and founder of the Charter for Compassion, Karen Armstrong.

### The emergence of interspirituality

In his book, 'The Mystic Heart', the Catholic monk, author and teacher, Wayne Teasdale, described his experience of the 1993 World Parliament in the following way:

'Something extraordinary happened during the Parliament's days. The divine showed up and opened

everyone, inspiring enthusiasm, mutual trust, receptivity, and a wonderful sense of joy, spontaneity, community, and urgency. We were not of one mind but of one heart... the spirit was tangibly present, prying hearts and minds open to receive the impulse of new vision. Community was born among the religions.'

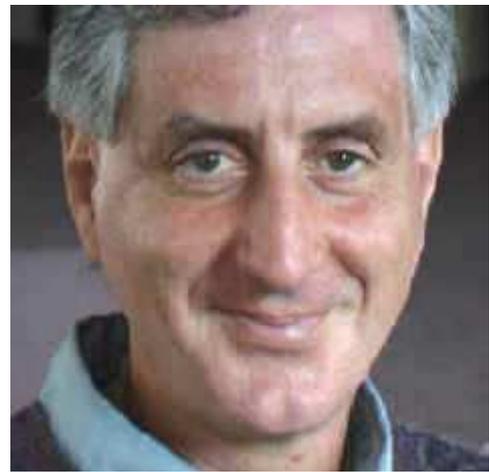
So powerful was this experience for Teasdale that he went on to become a passionate advocate for what he called 'interspirituality'. He came to recognise that interspirituality goes beyond traditional interfaith dialogue by encouraging 'a deeply fruitful openness to learning from one another'. He described this as 'an existential dialogue', one that involves seeking to understand another's religion 'from within' through sharing other people's experience of it.

Interspirituality is not, he said, about seeking to eradicate the wonderful diversity of religious expression to be found in the world's religions. It is not about trying to create some kind of 'homogenous superspirituality' or a completely new form of religious culture. It is instead about coming to recognise the essential interdependence of the world's religions. It is about valuing and being open to learn from the wisdom of traditions other than our own. It is about the sharing of our spiritual experience and practice with each other across traditions, the 'pooling of their treasures of the spirit' as Teasdale put it. And it is about working to create 'a deep evolving experience of community' between members of the world's religions based on our common humanity and our shared commitment to search for the truth.





## Progressive voices: Brother Wayne Teasdale



Wayne Teasdale, Catholic monk and mystic, writer, teacher and social activist, was born in 1945 in Connecticut, USA. Brought up in a Catholic family, he found his calling on a summer's evening in childhood while gazing at the beauty of the night sky and its infinite expanse of stars. This early mystical experience later led him to enrol in a Catholic college in Massachusetts where he met Father Thomas Keating. It was Keating, a Trappist monk, who first introduced him to the Christian contemplative tradition and the power of contemplative prayer to open up the mystical dimension of life.

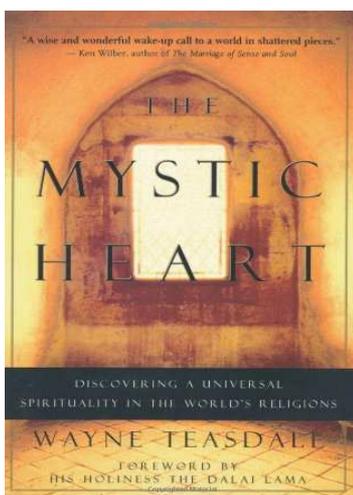
As he saw it, the beginning of his interspiritual journey began some years later when he started to correspond with Father Bede Griffiths, a Benedictine monk living in southern India. Griffiths was a leading thinker in the development of the dialogue between Christianity and Hinduism and Teasdale spent two years at his ashram in India learning the way of Christian 'sannyasa' (meaning 'renunciation'). This was a journey which eventually led him to take his vows as a monk and to dedicate himself to a life of simplicity and service.

Teasdale is perhaps best known for his coining of the term 'interspirituality' and for his passionate promotion of this deeper form of interfaith dialogue. He believed that humanity is entering a new age which he called 'the Interspiritual Age'. We are, he said, experiencing the dawning of a new form of human consciousness, one that is characterised by an increasing ecological awareness and sensitivity; a growing recognition of the interdependence of all forms of life and reality; a commitment to the ideal

of abandoning militant nationalism; a deepening sense of community between and among the world's religions; and an openness to the wider cosmos.

Teasdale was also, however, a committed social activist who campaigned on a number of social justice issues such as environmental responsibility, poverty and homelessness. He saw prophetic witness and action as one of the key elements of what he called 'global mysticism' - a universal spirituality that is sustained by mystical experience. He argued that, 'Authentic spirituality, when it is engaged with the world and the sufferings of the human community and other sentient species, is responsive to the sufferings of others, to the struggles of the poor, vulnerable, homeless, the unwanted and unloved of humanity. The person of mystical spirituality in our time is prophetically engaged with the world.'

Wayne Teasdale was undoubtedly 'a monk in the world' as the title of his autobiography proclaims and he left it a much wiser, richer world when he died in 2004. There is no question that he played a vital role in the ushering in of this interspiritual age.



### Extract from 'The Mystic Heart'...

*'Every one of us is a mystic. Whether we know it or not, whether we accept it or not, mystical experience is always there, inviting us on a journey of ultimate discovery. We have been given the gift of life in this perplexing world to become who we ultimately are: creatures of boundless love, caring, compassion, and wisdom. Existence is a summons to the eternal journey of the sage - the sage we all are, if only we could see.'*

Wayne Teasdale

# The latest news...



SpaceforSoul has a lively midweek book group that meets every 5 or 6 weeks. It is open to all and we don't just read books. We watch films, discuss articles and read poems too, usually on themes of faith and spirituality. The idea is to be able to reflect, exchange ideas and get to know each other in an environment where everyone's views are valued.

The next meeting is on **Wednesday 5th December at 7pm** in Stapleton. It will be a poetry evening so please bring a poem that resonates with you and share it - either your own or someone else's. We may even get creative and write something on the night - who knows!

For further details, please email Kate on [kate156@talktalk.net](mailto:kate156@talktalk.net) or Mandy on [amandaly44@virginmedia.com](mailto:amandaly44@virginmedia.com)

## Spaceforsoul online...

Spaceforsoul now has two websites and two Facebook pages! Our educational arm, the Centre for Spiritual Exploration and Accompaniment or CSEA, now has its own website at [www.csea.org.uk](http://www.csea.org.uk)

This new website is primarily focused on the range of educational and personal/spiritual growth opportunities which the CSEA offers but in addition, it offers a number of other resources including a much broader range of book recommendations and links to useful websites, blogs, podcasts and articles. It also features a focus on spiritual practices and will be housing the new blog we are launching in the New Year. As with the Spaceforsoul website, it is linked to its own Facebook page which you can find by following the Facebook link on the CSEA website.



The CSEA cover photo



## A date for your diary...

Come and celebrate with us at our Spaceforsoul AGM on Sunday 3<sup>rd</sup> February 2019 at the Old Library, Muller Road, Eastville, Bristol, BS5 6XP from 11.30 - 1.00 pm.

You don't have to attend our regular Sunday morning meetings to join us. Everyone who is interested in Spaceforsoul and our educational arm, the CSEA, is very welcome.

# Exploring spiritual practice



## The practice of rest

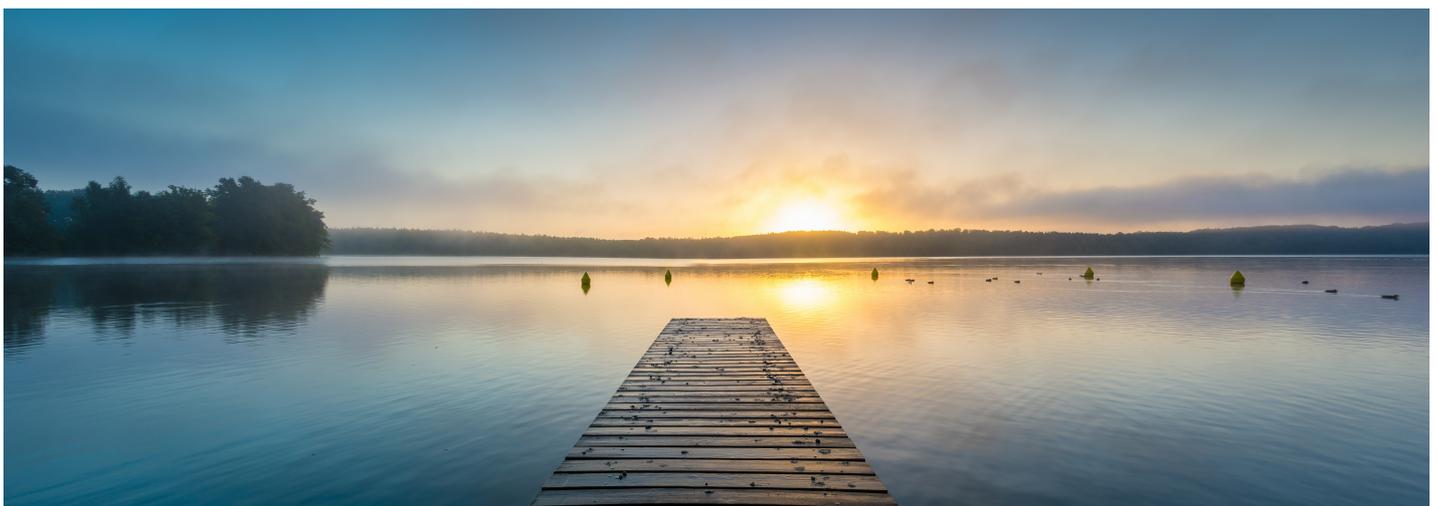
*'To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit oneself to too many projects... is to succumb to violence.'*

*Thomas Merton*

So wrote the 20<sup>th</sup> century Trappist monk, Thomas Merton, in a letter to a young friend. In Jane Vennard's book, 'Fully Awake and Truly Alive', she echoes Merton's challenge when she argues that, 'When rest is not an integral part of our activity in the world, we are at risk of our actions becoming harmful to others and to ourselves.' Challenging words. Vennard goes on to remind us of the Jewish call to the Sabbath rest based on the story of the seventh day of creation in the book of Genesis (Gen. 2.2). The ancient Jewish rabbis taught that that far from being inactive on this seventh day of creation, God created 'menuha' - tranquillity, serenity or restfulness. And so within the busyness of our everyday lives, we are called to build what Vennard calls 'a sanctuary of time'. Time not only to rest and refresh our bodies, but to let go of doing and striving for a while. Time to move more slowly that we might become more present to ourselves, the world and the Divine. Time to experience the deeper rest that flows from the experience of simply being.

Rest is not, however, something that is valued in Western culture. We drive ourselves until we drop. We push ourselves beyond our limits. We think of resting as wasting time, as being unproductive, as being lazy. We fail to listen to our bodies' cries of distress as we drain our inner reservoirs dry. We may feel guilty about resting or that we don't deserve it. We may see it as a chore and so come to it with a heavy heart. Or we may be afraid that if we stop doing, we will never get started again. We have lost the art of moving restfully through the world.

Vennard points out that the spiritual practice of rest challenges these deeply entrenched cultural attitudes and teaches us to learn to value and celebrate rest as a natural part of the rhythm of life. She reminds us that we are surrounded by the natural rhythms of growth, productivity and rest that we see everywhere in nature and that if we attend more closely to the ebb and flow of our own creative energy, we will see similar rhythms emerging. Rhythms that we need to pay more attention to. Emerging needs that we need to acknowledge and allow ourselves to meet rather than denying or suppressing them. And paradoxically, the more we can accept and embrace our need to rest, the more energised, creative and productive we will be as we seek re-engage with our work, refreshed, resourced and re-inspired.



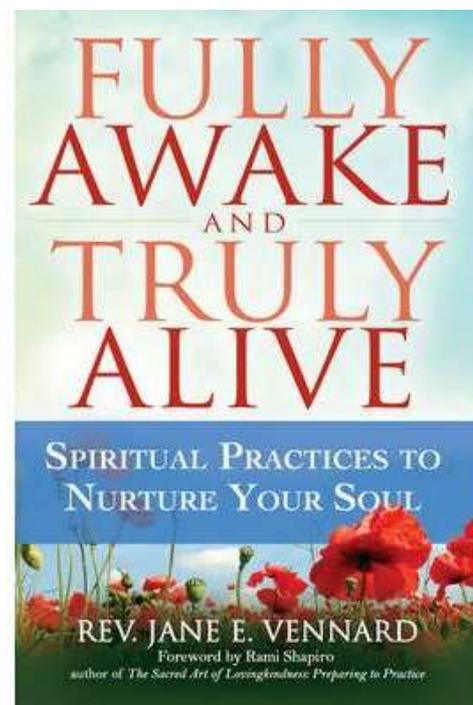
Vennard also points out that there are many different ways of resting and that what constitutes rest for one person may not do so for another. It may also be that we need different kinds of rest at different times and in different situations. Consequently, she does not offer any prescriptions as to how we should rest, urging us instead to be gentle and tender with ourselves as we learn to listen to what our body, mind and soul need.

### An invitation to practice

1. Spend time exploring your own attitudes to rest and the messages you have received about resting from your family, culture and spiritual tradition. Consider how these might be inhibiting your ability to practice rest.
2. Over a period of several weeks, make a note of the amount of time you spend resting (including being asleep) and what you do during those times. Identify those activities that are particularly restful for you and reflect on how they impact on you physically, mentally and spiritually.
4. Make a commitment to yourself to begin honouring and celebrating the practice of rest and to make it more of a priority in your life, no matter how busy you may be. Reflect on what that means for you in practice.
5. If you recognise that you are not resting often enough or for long enough each week, commit yourself to gradually increasing the amount of rest you allow yourself to have over a period of time. An ideal to aim for over time would be one day (or the equivalent of one day) a week.

Do this in small steps and try to avoid setting yourself unrealistic goals. Be very gentle with yourself if you are unable to meet them.

6. Experiment with different kinds of restful activities that you may have not experienced before.



### Many ways of resting...

- taking a nap
- relaxing the body
- sitting quietly doing nothing
- soaking in a warm bath
- having a massage
- walking slowly and mindfully in nature
- pottering in the garden
- reading a good book or poetry
- journaling
- listening to calming music or ambient noise
- being creative - drawing, painting, knitting, sewing, playing an instrument etc.
- doing crossword puzzles
- spending time with a good friend
- engaging in breathing practices or meditative/contemplative forms of prayer
- practising yoga or Tai chi
- and any others that work for you...

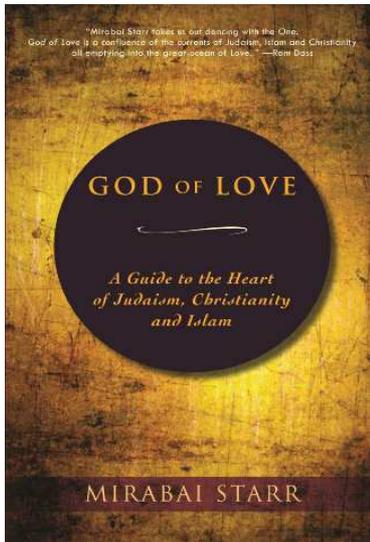
*An extract from 'For one who is exhausted'*

*'You have been forced to enter empty time.  
The desire that drove you has relinquished.  
There is nothing else to do now but rest  
And patiently learn to receive the self  
You have forsaken in the race of days...'*

*Be excessively gentle with yourself...  
Gradually you will return to yourself,  
Having learnt a new respect for your heart  
And the joy that dwells deep within slow time.'*

*John O'Donohue*

# Resources for the journey...



**Mirabai Starr (2012)** 'God of Love: A guide to the heart of Judaism, Christianity and Islam.' Monkfish Book Publishing

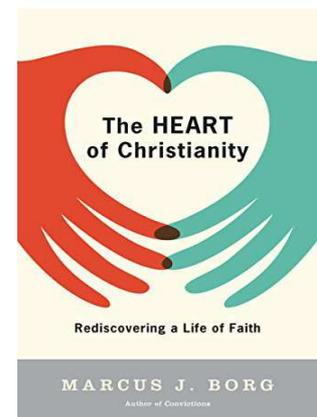
A deeply personal and passionate exploration of the shared wisdom of the three Abrahamic faiths, drawing on essential teachings, on stories of their prophets, saints and spiritual masters, on sacred texts and poetic voices and on what she has learnt from her own spiritual experiences.

She helps us to identify and focus on those teachings and practices that unite rather than divide the three religions and introduces an interspiritual perspective that sees the Divine in all paths.

Beautifully written as her books always are, this book speaks to and nourishes the soul and draws us deeper into Love.

**Marcus Borg (2003)** The Heart of Christianity: Rediscovering a life of faith. HarperSanFrancisco

This book contains a helpful chapter entitled 'Heart and Home: Being Christian in an age of pluralism.' It explores religious pluralism from a progressive Christian perspective, looks at a number of different ways of seeing religions and explores the key similarities and differences between the world religions.



## Other books

**Wayne Teasdale (1999)** 'The Mystic Heart: Discovering a universal spirituality in the world's religions.' New World Library

**Kurt Johnsons and David Ord (2013)** 'The Coming Interspiritual Age.' Namaste Publishing

## Internet resources

**The Interfaith Observer** <http://www.theinterfaithobserver.org>

A free independent digital publication for those interested in advancing interfaith understanding and cooperation. Seeks to promote diversity, inclusivity, and respectful relationships within and among religious and spiritual traditions.

**'Interspiritual Wisdom'**: a Spirituality and Practice e-course at [www.spiritualityandpractice.com](http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com)

An online retreat led by a number of interspirituality pioneers from different religious traditions.

## Music

**Beth Nielsen Chapman** 'Prism' A collection of spiritual songs drawn from a number of sources and traditions.