“If we take good care of ourselves, we help everyone. We stop being a source of suffering to the world, and we become a reservoir of joy and freshness.”
- Thich Nhat Hanh, How to Love

Dear CMind Friends,

Sawubona! We see you!

It feels like we are already breezing through the new year—it is already February.

It is during this shortest month of the year that the country lifts the historical achievements of Black Americans, which was no small feat when it was launched by Carter G. Woodson in 1926 as Negro History Week, and the celebration of Black excellence was not extended to a month-long celebration until 1976. The research tells us that February was chosen because it coincided with the birthdays of both Frederick Douglass and Abraham Lincoln. Woodson understood the African proverb that reads, “Until the lion learns how to write, every story will glorify the hunter.” While Woodson’s vision is still unfolding for Black Americans, I think we can all agree that the lion has truly learned how to write the story, interpret counter narratives, and expose the hunter without adopting the hunters’ ways.
This month, we hear from Dr. Veta Goler, a longtime and dear friend of our CMind community. Dr. Goler reminds us that any beauty we encounter in this world is only equivalent to the beauty we encounter within. She helps us, like Woodson did for Black Americans, to see ourselves in the light of truth, which reveals the beauty of who we are. She invites us to come alive in the beauty of wholeness, wrapped in the comforting embrace of self-love.

Dr. Goler, recalling the story of her friend suffering patiently through a health event, invokes our sister-friend Alice Walker and the ancestor June Jordan, who called each of us into the fullness of ourselves by reminding us “we are the ones that we have been waiting for.” Because my own words fail me, I lift up the words of Alice Walker from We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light in a Time of Darkness (2006):

*We live in a time of global enlightenment.* This alone should make us shout for joy.

It is as if ancient graves, hidden deep in the shadows of the psyche and the earth, are breaking open of their own accord. Unwilling to be silent any longer. Incapable of silence. No leader or people of any country will be safe from these upheavals that lead to exposure, no matter how much the news is managed or how long people’s grievances have been kept quiet. Human beings may well be unable to break free of the dictatorship of greed that spreads like a miasma over the world, but no longer will we be an inarticulate and ignorant humanity, confused by our enslavement to superior cruelty and weaponry. We will know at least a bit of the truth about what is going on, and that will set us free. Perhaps not free in the old way of thinking about freedom, as literal escape from enslavement in its various forms, but free in our understanding that our domination is not a comment on our worth. It is an awesome era in which to live.

We are living in an era of grand transformation, where we are being transformed—each of us—whether we agree or not. Thank you, Veta for helping us recognize the transformation, connect to the beauty within, and practice the responsibility of self-love.
The Dr. Oliver W. Hill, Jr. Contemplative Justice In Action Award and Faculty Fellowship

I did not have the pleasure of knowing Dr. Hill in this physical world, but I have had the opportunity to know him through stories and the legacy he leaves behind. I would certainly say that he was a brilliant man of calm transformative energy who utilized his giftedness and his spirit to unyieldingly pursue justice in every facet of his life. His fellow CMind board members and friends offered a virtual memorial in October 2021 to honor a man who exemplified the contemplative mind. I invite you to learn more about Dr. Hill by viewing the virtual memorial recording [here].

Today, the CMind Board of Directors is thrilled to launch the campaign for the Dr. Oliver W. Hill, Jr. Justice in Action Fund in support of the Dr. Oliver W. Hill, Jr. Contemplative Justice in Action Award and Faculty Fellowship that will annually recognize the efforts of a CMind community faculty member whose efforts in their scholarship, practice, and activism embody the intersectional embrace of social justice, radical love, and contemplative practice honoring Dr. Hill’s vision of “transforming higher education to reflect contemplative values.”

We hope to gain your support for this important initiative.

We invite you to learn more about Dr. Hill through the people who knew him best. We have included in this issue the words of Dr. Hill’s dear friend and colleague, Dr. Cheryl P. Talley, Professor of Psychology at Virginia State University. She writes, “His was a calm acceptance that always came with a genuine smile. ‘Things would turn out alright if your heart was right.’” Indeed, while it may seem like hell is empty and all the devils are here—all will be well. Prophetic hope whispers: truth triumphs and justice prevails even if their wheels turn too slowly.

I would be remiss to not mention one of our great teachers in practice and the founder of Engaged Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh, who transcended this realm on January 22. I am reminded of his words in *No Death, No Fear*:

> You do not need to waste your time doing those things that are unnecessary and trifling. You do not have to be rich. You do not need to seek fame or power. What you need is freedom, solidity,
peace and joy. You need the time and energy to be able to share these things with others.

Thay, for many of us, was a metamorphic teacher who shifted our understanding of Buddhist practice, everyday living, and our responsibility of social justice activism.

Freedom. Solidity. Peace. Joy. These are my wishes for you everyday, but most especially during this Black History Month. We are living in a moment where everything must be reimagined and nothing taken for granted. Truth is unhiddenness. Joy is beauty. Freedom is self-love. Freedom and solidity are achieved only when we love ourselves and one another without conditions and with full presence.

We offer gratitude for the lives of Dr. Oliver W. Hill, Jr. and our beloved teacher Thich Nhat Hanh, may their memory and their wisdom be a blessing, and may their presence hover around us.

Be well.
Be still.
Trust in the infinite.
Remember our shared humanity.
Be community.
Be of good courage.

DRM

David W. Robinson-Morris, Ph.D.
Executive Director
The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind)

9 February 2022

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Beauty in the World is Beauty Within
Dr. Veta Goler
Just as I agreed to write this contribution to *The Reservoir* a dear friend entered the hospital, weak, dehydrated, confused. Moving back and forth between a regular hospital room and ICU over the last two weeks my friend has been scanned and stuck and turned and handled by all manner of medical personnel. I know that these are wonderful caregivers. Yet, it hasn’t always been clear to my friend what is going on. At times it has been scary. But I have witnessed deep, deep courage, a willingness to be vulnerable, kindness to all—including those who were causing pain—and an amazing ability for self-advocacy. My friend could take this all in and respond as they did because of decades of contemplative practice and their resulting self-knowledge.

I am in awe of my friend for their ability to hold everything they’re going through—the pain, the discomfort, the lack of privacy, the small victories, the many kindnesses, and the demonstrations of greater or lesser skill by those trying to find a vein. It is all part of the human experience. And holding it all—whether it’s in a hospital or navigating the world—is what we’re called to do right now.

My friend is a long-time meditator, a reflective person whose self-knowledge and self-love are deep. The world we’re living in today calls out for people who know themselves and love themselves because of their spiritual and/or contemplative practices.

As I think about what is going on in the world, it is clear to me that behind the resistances to logic, the refusal to demand truth, the inability to base decisions and actions on what makes sense, is deep-seated fear. Fear in our country continues to gain strength because so many people lack deep self-knowledge, the knowledge that comes from practiced inner exploration. And without this self-knowledge, self-love is lacking. The lack of self-love causes two main problems. Without self-love it is virtually impossible to love others—especially those seen as “other.” So, bigotry and oppression continue to grow. And without self-love, internalized oppression grows as well. But when we truly know ourselves and love who we really are, what others think or say about us matters little. We can disregard others’ erroneous notions. And we can accept others’ different perspectives. All of this requires personal work and strength.

I love the title of Alice Walker’s book, *We Are the Ones We Have Been Waiting For*, which is also the last line in the beautiful piece, *A Hopi Elder Speaks*. At
this moment in history, we can no longer wait for a charismatic leader to help us find our way through the challenges we face. We are each called to offer our gifts and skills in the ways our Inner Self is asking us to do. Each contribution is critical, no matter how small. My Inner Self is asking me to help others—especially Black women—to love themselves, so that they can counter oppressive forces and offer themselves to the world in the best ways they can. In moving about the world as free individuals, their presence brings about an energetic shift that erodes the foundations on which racism and other forms of oppression stand. Thus, dismantling their own internalized oppression, helps dismantle racism.

Two other powerful thoughts undergird my work. Amiri Baraka (when he was LeRoi Jones) said, “When the beautiful see themselves, they will love themselves.” So, I help others to see their own beauty and to love what they see. Howard Thurman said, “Don’t ask what the world needs, ask what makes you come alive and then go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.” I also help people to remember what brings their heart joy, and that this is a signal from their Inner Self.

I invite you to engage in a multi-faceted practice to connect with your own beauty and self-love. I call this exercise the Beauty Experience. Too often in our society, beauty is considered the province of artists or something to be considered for regular people after “essential” needs are met. I maintain that beauty and love are essential to all of us. And as I imagine the world I want to see and the change I want to be, beauty and love are high on my list. May we all come to know that recognizing and honoring our own beauty and self-love are important responsibilities of ours. And may you and your beauty shine forth in the world.

Veta Goler, Ph.D., recently retired after 33 years at Spelman College where she taught dance history and served in several administrative roles. Holding an MFA in dance and a Ph.D. in African American studies, she had a successful career as a modern dance artist — performing and choreographing nationally and internationally — and as a dance historian, focusing her research on contemporary African American modern
dance artists, particularly women choreographers. Her work also explores the intersection of dance and spirituality in popular culture, and spirituality and contemplative practices in education and the workplace. She is a Courage & Renewal facilitator, facilitating Circle of Trust® retreats and workshops, and serves as chair of the CCR Board of Directors.

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**Beauty Experience Practice**

By Dr. Veta Goler

In retreats, I ask folks to take about an hour to engage in the various parts, but feel free to shorten things as works for you. Here is the Beauty Experience.

**A. Work with the Acronym BEAUTY (20 minutes)**

*Be* drawn to an object in nature, in your home, or elsewhere; let an object select you.

*Explore* the object; look at it, smell it, touch it, hold it, experience it however you’re moved.

*Allow* yourself to be with it longer than you might feel comfortable—a good 10 minutes or more of exploring it.

*Understand*—identify—one to three core things about it that make it beautiful to you.

*Take* notes in your journal about your exploration and understanding.

*Yummy!* As much as possible, delight in this experience.

**B. Create a Heart-Object Portrait (30 minutes)**
• Gather paper and colored pencils or markers or pens or crayons or pastels or paints for this exercise.

• Look at your notes and contemplate your BEAUTY experience.

• What are one to three core things that characterize the beauty of your object?

• List them.

• Draw a heart on a clean sheet of paper.

• Using your list of what's beautiful about the object you explored as inspiration and guidance, fill your heart with more hearts, shapes, lines, colors, and/or words that relate to the object.

• You cannot possibly do this wrong.

• This exercise isn't about making a great drawing, it's about giving yourself to the process of creation—as a process. It doesn't matter what it looks like in the end. It matters that you're engaged with it during the process.

• Take about 30 minutes to engage in this process.

C. Heart Self-Portrait (10 minutes)

• Look at your Heart-Object Portrait.

• Notice how it captures what is beautiful about your object—even if it's just a color or a word.

• This could be the word or words that inspired your creation, or perhaps something else arose in you about its beauty. Hold whatever it is in your mind.

• Know that you could not recognize your object's beauty if it wasn’t also already within you—whether in seed form or fully developed.

• Now, take a deep breath or two and repeat: the beauty in my object is really the beauty in me, the beauty in my object is really the beauty in me, the beauty in my object is really the beauty in me.

• Take another deep breath.

• Look at your Heart-Object Portrait again.
• Recognize that it is really your Heart Self-Portrait. It is a portrait of your own beauty.

• Somewhere on your paper, write your name, Self-Portrait, and the date.

• Make some notes in your journal about your experience.

• Enjoy!

A Tribute to Oliver Hill
Dr. Cheryl Talley

Oliver Hill was my friend and my mentor. Actually, he is still my mentor. I now occupy the lab space in which he worked at Virginia State University. So, every day I am reminded of the shoes I aspire to fill. That aspiration is truly what drives me. I witnessed and benefited from his open door, open lab, and open home policy. I marveled at his willingness to devote his career to the work even though he could have gained more fame and fortune somewhere else. I respected his commitment to the K-16 model of educational reform.

The K-16 model was the brainchild of Dave Dennis, founder and director of the Southern Initiative Algebra Project. Dr. Hill was a primary driver behind SIAP’s work in Petersburg. He was there to celebrate the resounding success after SIAP’s first four years when the school district could claim, for the first time, four accredited elementary schools out of the five. He was there when the new superintendent gutted the program and he saw the trend revert back to having one accredited elementary school where it remained until the accreditation standards changed. Even with that disappointment Oliver never wavered in his commitment to the cause.

This ability to remain unperturbed is a rare commodity, but especially at an HBCU where having a federally funded research program means learning how to become an administrator while keeping your regular job of teaching, advising and serving. Yet, even with that, Oliver was peaceful. Too peaceful, I thought once, when the new vice-president shut down the
research foundation that had taken years to establish. The new VP wasn’t even willing to let our grants end but forced us to have NSF move them. Still, the program officer did more complaining than Oliver did. His was a calm acceptance that always came with a genuine smile. “Things would turn out alright if your heart was right.”

That kind of optimism seems like a lot to ask in this post-Covid world. Petersburg didn’t have a remote learning plan. It was developed once remote instruction was mandated by the governor. At that time, we learned that only 50% of homes had reliable internet and many without computers/laptops. A few miles up the road, in a different zip code every student was issued an iPad. The expected end-result of this kind of educational resource disparity is what Oliver believed could be overcome through community, public school, and HBCUs working together. He had a vision of all of the academic interventions on campus that worked with the public schools coordinating with one another. He saw the possibility of a seamless transition for public school students to be connected with VSU programming from elementary school, through the Trojan Steps, GIRLS and GROWS; to the Educational Talent Search programs in middle school; to Upward Bound and Project Knowledge in high school. While under-resourced school districts and under-resourced HBCU’s both serve students that are often under-prepared, Oliver believed that working together with community partners, school personnel, and the University would make us all stronger.

Of course, Oliver Hill didn’t live to see the world post-Covid. He passed before the January 6 insurrection attempt. Yet, I believe that even if he had witnessed these things, he would greet the circumstance with his genuine smile, his right heart and deep faith that things will turn out alright. As I said, those shoes are hard to fill: committed but unperturbed, focused yet undaunted, full of faith no matter the circumstances. Had I not known someone like Oliver, I’d think it impossible but since I did know him and respect him and considered him a dear friend, I’ll continue to aspire to do the work and try my very best to keep my heart right.

Cheryl Talley, Ph.D., examines factors that lead to lasting behavioral change, specifically those related to high academic achievement. In published studies and projects funded by the National Science Foundation, Dr. Talley and her colleagues have sought to reveal the
role that affective factors such as academic identity and emotional regulation play in student success. With her training in affective neuroscience, Dr. Talley utilizes various cognitive strategies, including mindfulness training to help students develop strong academic identities and associated behaviors. Dr. Talley received her Ph.D. and Master's Degrees in Psychobiology from the University of Virginia.

Donate to the Dr. Oliver W. Hill, Jr. Justice in Action Fund

CONTEMPLATIVEMIND.ORG/HILLAWARD
Ubuntu: I Am Because We Are

In this Lion’s Roar article, executive director Dr. David Robinson-Morris explores the African philosophy of ubuntu and its connections to Buddhism with Pamela Ayo Yetunde, Rehena Harilall, Nobantu Mpotulo, and Yao Obiora Dibia. Read the article here.
The Association for Contemplative Mind in Higher Education (ACMHE) is a professional academic association for all who bring contemplative practices and perspectives into their work in higher education. Member benefits include fee discounts for ACMHE and CMind events, access to the Journal of Contemplative Inquiry, a member directory, forum, webinar archive, and more.

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Contemplative Practitioners in Higher Education:
Showing Up in our Fullness

What does it mean to be a contemplative practitioner attentive to issues of power, racism, and marginalization in higher education today? How has your contemplative practice impacted your work as a teacher, scholar, leader, community activist? How does your practice sustain you? How do you navigate non life-affirming structures and harmful environments while seeking to transform them?

Proposals are requested for personal narratives + practice-descriptions that arise from the experiences of people from all identity categories for consideration to be included in the upcoming book Contemplative Practitioners in Higher Education: Showing Up in our Fullness.

Learn more here.
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development of racial, social, economic, and environmental justice and the advancement of human flourishing. CMind's mission is to positively and progressively transform society through diverse contemplative practices.