“Stories are the secret reservoir of values: change the stories individuals and nations live by and tell themselves, and you change the individuals and nations.”
— Ben Okri

Dear CMind Friends,

Sawubona! We see you!

The CMind team and Board have been hard at work implementing our sunsetting strategy and preparing for the administrative work that will follow our September 1 sunset.

I believe, in the words of Brené Brown, to be “clear is kind.” Equally, I echo the words of our Ancestor-poet Lucille Clifton when she declared for us, “Say it clear and it will be beautiful.” I am unsure if it will be beautiful; however, I can clearly state that I am exhausted.

As the leader of CMind at this point in the organization’s lifespan, I am acutely aware of the time, energy, grace, courage, and patience it requires to prepare a body, a being—organizations too have being—to release its energies back into the ether to live and generate and manifest differently. One is unable to estimate the amount of energy required to die well. It takes a community to release what is, to welcome what will become, and to hold in awe the precious new.
In addition to my work at CMind, we continue to live-in-the-world and its occurrences take a toll on who we are, collectively, as a human family. To be in this world, at this moment, doing our work, with and for communities who are in need of individual and collective healing while sitting with and in acceptance of our suffering is the perfect storm of a hopeful exhaustion. We know, and the physical world teaches us, that chaos precedes great transformation. So, perhaps, Spirit is preparing us for a metamorphosis the likes of which we have not seen—this is where hope meets the limits of my exhaustion and fuels my being toward an unknown yet radical becoming-new.

What if?

This month, our sister-friend Abegunde shares with us why she watches romantic comedies. In her explanation, she reminds us of the power of resting, sitting, grappling, and being still with/in questions. In her repetition of *What If*, Abegunde invokes for me and us all the power of questioning to enliven the imagination toward the necessary creation of the new.

*What if?*

My great-grandmother, Josephine Wells Robinson, would often respond to this question with “If *if* were a fifth, we’d all be drunk!” Her response was a constant reminder to not forget that we dwell in the present and what is at hand must be dealt with and not wished away. However, as Abegunde offers, *What if* is an invitation to move beyond and outside of ourselves to encounter the Other, to live the questions and live them now (in the words of Rilke); it is an invitation to actively co-create new narratives, new realities, and new collective futures.

On a deeply personal note, over the past few months and especially this month, I have asked “What if?” just about every day. I am sitting the complexity of the emanating imagining and I am exploring new possibilities and depths with each grand conjuring. Earlier this month, I celebrated my 39th birthday and tomorrow is the second anniversary of my mother’s unexpected ascension to the land of the Ancestors. She was too young to go, and my sister and I still very much need her here in the physical world. I have asked repeatedly and I am certain I will ask until my last breath, “What if she were still here with us? Would she be proud of the human being I am becoming? Would she take joy in the life I am endeavoring to build, and the commitment with which I approach my work in this world?” Then I smile, while I imagine her beholding me and smiling.
Much gratitude to our sister-friend Dr. Abegunde for sharing herself and her gift with the CMind community.

Finally, I want to offer a word of gratitude. Thank you—thank you all for your support, your silent prayers, your whispers of gratitude, and most importantly, for the continuation of CMind’s work through the blossoming of your work in the world and within your respective institutions. You have been planted in fertile ground to make this world beautiful; do your work and do it well.

Even while I question it, I am grateful of the great gift of leading CMind at this moment and the serious responsibility of ushering the energy of organization to the people and places where it is most needed to meet requirements of this moment in human history.

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)

29 July 2022

P.S. I hope to see you all at the final and 18th Annual Summer Session and the 2022 Arthur Zajonc Lecture on Contemplative Education, the final under CMind’s mantle!

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**Why I Watch Romantic Comedies**

Dr. Maria Hamilton Abegunde

Not too long ago I watched the romantic comedy *Marry Me* (2022, directed by Kat Coiro), featuring Jennifer Lopez as Kat Valdez and Owen Wilson as Charlie Gilbert. I like romantic comedies—“rom-coms”—because they are
not violent, are formulaic, are emotionally predictable, and have great production locations.

This means I don’t have to follow a plotline and can cry or laugh as needed. At the end of a busy or difficult week, the rom-com means I can watch something without critiquing it, and dream of a vacation.

_Marry Me_ has no beautiful production locations. It is filmed in and around New York city and state. While I miss the East Coast, watching a movie about New York is not the same as watching one about New Zealand or wine country (anywhere).

Why, then, am I telling you about it? Because Charlie is a math teacher who prepares his students for difficult equations by telling them: “If you sit in the question, the answer will find you.” When Kat asks Charlie’s daughter Lou if this is true, Lou responds (I paraphrase): “I don’t know. I can’t sit long enough.”

And that, amazing beings, made the movie worth watching. The statements resonated with me because in my religious and spiritual tradition, I have been taught that one must learn how to ask a question in order to get an answer. That is, take time to contemplate what is before me, or emerging within me, in order to see all of its possible iterations and intersections, not just the ones that pertain to me or my life.

Charlie is a mathematician, someone solving for “x” or “y” whether or not the answer is known. And, while the problem to be solved is the question, sometimes one must rephrase the question to make visible what it obscures. That is, one must not assume that what is before them—question and answer—is the only way. We are each, after all, one of billions of beings in the universe.

Over the past two years, I have asked myself many questions, all leading back to one: _If the world experienced an ELE_ (extinction level event such as an asteroid), _is this really how we would treat each other, after centuries of what I call extinction level encounters_ (e.g., The Transatlantic Slave Trade, Genocide of First Nations peoples, the Holocaust, and, and, and, …)?

Sitting in the question resulted in answers that included neighbors bringing me homemade bread and me hosting small meals for friends. These loving
acts made it possible for me to refuse the narrative that the only outcome to our growing dis/connection with each other was destruction.

But, these last few weeks have reminded me that I must ask the question, What If? It is one I ask often, especially after the killing of Breonna Taylor, Philando Castile, and George Floyd. And, when my beloved forgets to tell me he will be late coming home.

What If? tells us that nothing is permanent. Yet, it invites us to consider someone and something other than ourselves; to consider that what we believe is true or real may not be the case for others. What If? invites us to think that at any moment our lives could change without our permission or because of our choices.

The irony of Marry Me is that Kat, Charlie, and Chloe don’t get what they need or want by being still. When they are presented with a question, Kat and Charlie jump into the unknown and Chloe dances. That is, they ask what if?

They choose to live in that question until they arrive at the meaning of all rom-coms: love through an understanding of self, the release of long-held beliefs about identity and the world, the healing of past harms, and acceptance of others without judgment or demands that they change to meet our needs and perspectives.

Yes, I watch rom-coms to de-stress and to savor beautiful locations. But, I am also curious: I did not grow up with fairytales and do not believe in them (though the Grimms make them real in a way I understand).

All I know is that this moment in the world requires new narratives. What better way to begin them than with stories about impossible loves and courageous choices that end not happily-ever-after, but with gratitude and happiness for the hard choices we make to love and care for ourselves and others.

Dr. Maria Hamilton Abegunde is a memory keeper, ancestral priest, poet, and full spectrum doula. Her creative works and research are grounded in African-centered contemplative and ritual practices that center joy and love to heal inter-generational trauma. Dr. Abegunde is
The Question = The Answer = ?

By Dr. Maria Hamilton Abegunde

Needed: journal, pen, pencil, drawing materials; 30-60 minutes; a quiet place; your favorite music or sounds; a comfortable sitting space; a timer.

The questions that are very present for me in the movie, but that are not articulated are: What is the question you need to ask and why? Can you sit long enough to allow it to surface? Do you need to move (instead of sit) for the question to be activated? Can you sit or be still or move long enough in or with the question to let the answer find you? Are you sure that you want the answer? When you receive it, are you willing to untether yourself, to free yourself, from what made the question necessary in the first place?

Please find a quiet place and comfortable space in which to sit or move for 30-60 minutes.
When you are settled, bring your attention to your breath. Pay attention to its flow as you inhale and exhale deeply three times.

If you are able, take a moment to close your eyes and be still. If you have chosen to move, this may mean you stop walking or dancing. Pay attention to how your breath has changed, the sounds around you, the way your body may be swaying; your heartbeat.

Take three deep breaths and return to sitting or moving.

Allow yourself to review and contemplate what has been present and emerging for you over the past week. This may appear to you in the form of images, conversations, actions. Don’t censure them. Allow them to rise to the top of your awareness, and allow them to flow away from your awareness.

Take three deep breaths when you are ready to stop this.

At the end of your last breath, pay attention to what remains. Look at it in your mind, turn it around, place it upside down, on its side, turn it inside out – see it as you would see a prism, noting as many different aspects of what (or who) is before you as possible.

Take three deep breaths and return to being still when you have finished looking.

Before proceeding, reread the questions that I have offered: What is the question you need to ask and why? Can you sit long enough to allow it to surface? Do you need to move (instead of sit) for the question to be activated? Can you sit or be still or move long enough in or with the question to let the answer find you? Are you sure that you want the answer? When you receive it, are you willing to untether yourself, to free yourself, from what made the question necessary in the first place?

Take three deep breaths when you are finished.

Now, imagine that you are in dialogue with who or what is before you. Let this question be your guide to all the other questions and others that are not here: What is the question I need to ask and why?
Sit, move, and write or draw as long as you want, but to make sure that you remain conscious of what you are doing (especially if you are alone), please set a timer (something soothing) for at least 15 minutes to give yourself time to respond to the question as fully as you wish, without censuring.

When the timer rings, stop and take three deep breaths. At this point, you may choose to read what you have written, view what you have drawn, and stop; or you may set the timer to continue for another 10 minutes.

When the timer stops the second time, review what you have done and consider the question: What do I need to do now with what I have or know?

Make a note to yourself of how you would like to move forward: do you need assistance with this? If so, from whom or what?

Take three deep breaths, give gratitude to the space that has been holding you, any support you have received, and to yourself.

Commit to returning to what you have done in 48 hours and continue the process.
Register Today

VIRTUAL - all live broadcasts
**Monday, August 1 - Wednesday, August 3, 2022**

$300. ACMHE members receive a $50 discount: [join or renew here](#)

Past attendees have referred to our annual Summer Sessions as their “yearly tune-up”: a chance for personal reflection, community, and self-care, combined with professional development. This online event offers a rich offering of plenary presentations, practice, discussion, and small-group work. Newcomers to contemplative pedagogy are welcome. Participants will receive recordings of the whole-group sessions. [Learn more about the 2022 Summer Session.](#)  

"I leave feeling more full, more affirmed, more skillful as a human being and educator/instigator of positive change."

- past Summer Session participant
Rooting Deep for Global Change

Join us on Wednesday, August 3rd, 2022
7 - 8:30pm ET

How can we serve our communities and honor long-standing traditions of sustainability? How can we address and heal trauma in the midst of the often traumatic impact of the climate crisis? How can we learn from struggles for sovereignty to advance a new climate reality? How can we spread knowledge, skills, and information rooted in traditional wisdom while creating more humane and ecologically just standards for climate solutions?
We will discuss the importance of exploring these questions so that we forge and fortify networks rooted in a shared power, as opposed to an unchangeable fate.

The Arthur Zajonc Lecture Series on Contemplative Education presents lectures on contemplative pedagogy, epistemology, and learning. The series honors Arthur Zajonc—Professor Emeritus of Physics at Amherst College, former director of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, and former president of the Mind & Life Institute—and his groundbreaking work in the field as a distinguished thought leader and committed teacher by creating space for eminent scholars and educators to share their insights and experience in integrating contemplative practices and perspectives into higher education across the disciplines.

The series continues Arthur’s work in building the education needed for a society based on compassion, inclusion, care for each other and the earth, and respect for the interconnection of all life.

**2022 Lecturer: Colette Pichon Battle, Esq**

Colette Pichon Battle, Esq is a generational native of Bayou Liberty, Louisiana. As Vision & Initiatives Partner at Taproot Earth, she develops programming focused on equitable disaster recovery, global migration, community economic development, climate justice, and energy democracy.

Colette worked with local communities, national funders, and elected officials in the post-Katrina and post-Deepwater Horizon disaster recovery. She was a lead coordinator for Gulf South Rising 2015, a regional initiative around climate justice and just transition in the South. In 2015 Colette was selected as an Echoing Green Climate Fellow, in 2016 she was named a White House Champion of Change for Climate Equity, and in 2018 Kenyon College awarded her an Honorary Doctorate. In 2019, Colette was named an Obama Fellow for her work with Black and Native communities on the frontline of climate change and she gave a TED Talk, “Climate change will displace millions. Here’s how we prepare.”

In 2021, Colette was appointed a Margaret Burroughs Community Fellow. In addition to developing advocacy initiatives that intersect with race, systems of power, and ecology, Colette directs Taproot Earth’s legal services in immigration and disaster law.

Among her many engagements, she serves on the board of the US Climate Action Network and leads the Red, Black & Green New Deal—the climate
initiative of the Movement for Black Lives. In March 2022, Colette sat in conversation with Krista Tippett and was featured on the podcast, On Being.

CMind in the Community

Watch this Science & Wisdom LIVE with CMind's Dr. David Robinson-Morris alongside Deb Dana and Rob Preece as they discuss trauma and the possibility of transformation and healing.
Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research: A Free International Online Conference

August 16 - 18, 2022
Learn More & Register

A message from the conference planning committee, led by Dr. Ashwani Kumar:

Dear Colleagues, Students, and Friends,

We would like to invite you to a free international online conference, Engaging with Meditative Inquiry in Teaching, Learning, and Research, August 16th to 18th 2022. The conference will feature a diverse group of scholars, teachers, practitioners, and artists from around the world, offering presentations and discussions on the topic of meditative inquiry. Following this link will take you to our conference webpage where you will find links to program details, speaker biographies, and our registration page. You may explore the website to find information about meditative inquiry itself: https://meditativeinquiry.wixsite.com/ashwanikumar/conference

You are also invited to the celebratory finale of our online conference, an in-person Cultural Evening at Mount Saint Vincent University in Halifax, Nova Scotia, on August 18 (6 to 8:30 PM), featuring live performances and a dinner reception. There is no cost to attend this event, but registration is limited.
To register for these events, please follow this link: https://meditativeinquiry.wixsite.com/ashwanikumar/register

We have attached the conference poster for you to share with colleagues, students, and friends. Feel free to post it on social media platforms to help spread the word as widely as possible.

If you have any questions or comments regarding any of the above, please reply to meditativeinquiry@gmail.com.

Many thanks,

The Conference Team

Ashwani Kumar, PhD
Associate Professor
Faculty of Education
Mount Saint Vincent University

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. ACMHE members are creating opportunities for integrative, inclusive, and transformative teaching and learning.

Join ACMHE Today

Browse the ACMHE Community Event Calendar

Are you a new reader? Welcome!

*The Reservoir* is a newsletter from [CMind](https://www.contemplativemind.org), The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. We intend this newsletter as a moment of respite in your busy day.

[Click Here to Subscribe to The Reservoir](https://www.contemplativemind.org)

We love your feedback! What do you think?

Submit Feedback

The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society (CMind) is a global community of contemplative practitioners whose goal is the ongoing 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.

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