

# **Inviting the World to Transform**

## **Nourishing Social Justice Work with Contemplative Practice**

**A Research Report  
Prepared for the Ford Foundation  
By The Center for Contemplative Mind in Society**

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## Summary

The Contemplative Net Project, under the auspices of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society, is a multi-phase qualitative research study aimed at revealing and supporting the use of contemplative practices in organizations and programs.

As of June, 2002, the project has conducted in-depth interviews with 79 people across the United States. Of these 79, 40 are leaders in the field of integrating contemplative practices into social justice work. This report focuses on the themes and issues that were especially relevant to this group. The information is supplemented with quotes and stories from those working in other sectors.

## Key Findings

- For the great majority of interviewees, social justice work and contemplative practice are inseparably linked.
- Contemplative awareness helps to provide a balance to some of the inherent challenges of social justice work and contributes greatly to the effectiveness and sustainability of this work.
- While the benefits of contemplative practices for individuals have been well-documented, this study revealed a multitude of ways that practice in a group and organizational context has transformed the way people work and function as a group.
- The Contemplative Organization is emerging as a distinct entity that uses contemplative practices as both a technique and an organizing principle.
- Interviewees faced the challenge of offering contemplative practices in a secular setting in innovative ways, and place a premium on finding language and teaching approaches that make practices accessible to a wide audience.
- Research participants generally feel that they are part of a broader movement, but identified a need for this movement to be better defined and more inclusive.

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# I. Introduction

*“There is no way to peace;  
peace is the way.”*

A.J. Muste

The Contemplative Net Project is a program of the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. The Center’s mission is to integrate contemplative awareness into contemporary life in order to help create a more just, compassionate and reflective society. Other programs of the Center work to introduce and sustain contemplative practices in the legal, academic, and philanthropic communities, and with youth programs.

The Contemplative Net seeks to gather stories and information about the use of these practices across a wide range of professional sectors. With support from the Ford Foundation, one focus of the project has been on the role of contemplative awareness in social justice work.

The intersection of religion and social justice work has a long and inspiring history. Some of the more notable manifestations have been Martin Luther King, Jr.’s spiritual leadership of the civil rights movement; the Jewish principle of *tikkun olam* (repairing the world through social action); the Quakers and their work for peace and justice, especially during the efforts to abolish slavery; Mahatma Gandhi and the nonviolent struggle for Indian independence, rooted in the Hindu concept of *satyagraha* (“force born of truth”); Liberation Theology, grounded in Catholicism, addressing human rights issues in Latin America; the idea at the heart of Islam to build a community (*ummah*) based on the principles of peace and justice; and the socially engaged Buddhist movement in both Asia and the U.S.

But over the past decade, a new way of bringing the contemplative practices associated with these religious traditions into society has begun to take form. In settings as seemingly diverse as corporate boardrooms and prison cells, people with both faith-based and secular backgrounds are finding innovative ways to introduce these age-old practices to a new generation, in the context of working toward a more just and sustainable world. It is this way of working which the Contemplative Net Project seeks to explore, define, and support.

Our study had two unique characteristics:

- 1) While previous studies have focused primarily on sitting meditation practices, usually from Asian religious traditions, we looked at a much broader selection of contemplative practices. In fact, one of the goals of the study is to understand and generate a contemporary definition of contemplative practice.
- 2) The majority of research participants work in secular environments, rather than religious/spiritual settings. They are on the cutting edge of bringing traditionally spiritual values into secular settings, such as education, business, and law, and often grapple with issues of language and ethical context as they present contemplative practices in these sectors.

In Phase 1 of our research, we interviewed 79 people who are among this era’s leaders in bringing contemplative practices into their work. Some of the questions we explored with this group are:

- 1) Which secular institutions and programs are incorporating contemplative practices into their work?

- 2) What contemplative activities are being used? Are they taught within a moral or ethical framework based on a spiritual tradition?
- 3) What is each particular organization's/institution's history of integration of practice into their work?
- 4) What is the impact of contemplative practice on each sector?
- 5) What is changing? Personal? Institutional? Societal?

- 6) What are the obstacles to the integration of contemplative practices?
- 7) Is there a movement/cultural shift toward the integration of contemplative practices and/or contemplative values into the culture?

This report focuses on the themes that arose from these interviews, especially in relation to the research participants whose primary work is in the area of social justice issues.

## II. Methodology

A qualitative research approach was chosen as the most appropriate methodology for our study because of the nature of our inquiry:

- We are investigating a cultural phenomenon that involves complexity and change over a long period of time—a process well-suited to qualitative methodology.
- We were interested in choosing a method that would lend itself to a contemplative approach as we were doing the research. The open-ended questions offered participants a chance to reflect on their own journey with contemplative practice in social justice work. Interviewers also invited research participants to have a moment of silence in the middle of the interview.. most of them happily accepted the opportunity!

Specifically, we operated from a grounded theory approach (Glaser and Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory is explicitly emergent—the aim is to discover the theories implicit in the data rather than testing an hypothesis. This approach is revealing a picture of what is actually happening in America in regard to the use of contemplative practices in secular settings.

In the summer of 2001, a qualitative research design intended to explore the connection between inner transformation and social change was created under the direction of consultant Stephanie Clohesy, in collaboration with staff from the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society. Components of the design included the construction of a 49-question interview and a

working definition of “contemplative practice;” conducting the interviews; coding the interviews for themes and patterns; and qualitative analysis of these themes and patterns. The interview (semi-structured with open-ended questions) was designed to elicit information about each individual’s personal experience with contemplative practice as well as how it informed the work of their organization. (*See Appendix B for interview.*)

In preparation for implementing the design, interviewers were recruited, hired, and trained in qualitative interviewing skills, and the services of a transcriber were retained. We also developed an “approach packet” which was sent to interviewees; it included an introductory letter, a two-page fact sheet about the project, an informed consent card, and a brochure about the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society.

Participants who were known to the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society for their innovative work in this field were the first to be interviewed. We then used a snowball method of sampling, asking each participant for names of others to interview who were making similar efforts to integrate contemplative approach into their work.

From October 2001 through May 2002, we conducted interviews with 79 people across the United States (and one in Canada). The majority of the interviews were conducted on the telephone; several were done in person. Of the 79, 40 were identified as working in organizations committed to social justice and social change. For the purposes of this research study, we defined a social justice organization as one that “*explicitly recognizes (either in its mission statement or expressed by the interviewee) systemic issues that lead to social inequities and has*

*developed or is developing a strategy to address these issues.*” It should be noted that although 40 people were specifically identified as working within a social justice organization, a much larger number of interviewees spoke of the connection between their contemplative practice and a personal commitment to social change.

After the interviews were completed, they were transcribed, checked for accuracy, and entered into Atlas.ti qualitative analysis software (Muhr, 1997). In order to identify important patterns and themes that arose from the transcripts, a coding system based on grounded theory was developed. The codebook was revised and refined over time to reflect words and concepts actually used by the interviewees. All interviews were coded by Contemplative Net staff and consultants. The transcripts were analyzed to identify recurring themes and patterns, as well as aberrations of those patterns.

After each interview was completed, we sent the research participants a questionnaire designed to gather socio-demographic information about them. Fifty-one people (65%) returned the form to us. (See graphs on page 11.)

Each research participant was asked to send brochures and other information about their organization. The Contemplative Net staff developed a filing system to capture this information, which supplemented the data from the interviews. The Contemplative Net staff also initiated and continues to conduct an ongoing search of magazines, newspapers, websites, and professional journals to cull more stories and information about the use of contemplative practices in social justice work. This body of knowledge is in the process of being developed to serve as a

resource for both research participants and the general public.

On May 17, 2002, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society hosted a gathering in Northampton, Massachusetts, to present and discuss the preliminary research findings to the Ford Foundation and other guests. (The current report represents a more thorough qualitative analysis of the data from the interviews.) Greg Stanczak, from the University of Southern California’s Center for Religion and Civic Culture, was also invited to present his research on “Spirituality and Social Transformation in Mainstream American Religious Traditions.”

In the discussion that followed both presentations, representatives from the Ford Foundation stressed the importance of responding to the expressed needs of the research participants and discovering empowering ways to support their work. These observations, as well as feedback from the 79 interviews, have been incorporated into plans for the second phase of the project, which is evolving into a participatory action research model.

### III. Overview of Research Participants and Organizations

The 79 research participants represent a broad cross-section of individuals who are committed to bringing a contemplative awareness into their work (see list of interviewees in Appendix A). Our population sample represents only one segment of the organizations in the United States that are doing this kind of work. It is not intended to be an exhaustive or definitive list. It does, however, draw a picture of some of the leading figures in the movement and the large number of creative ways they apply a contemplative approach to their work.

The majority of the interviewees work within organizations that, to varying degrees, are supportive of their desire to work from a more contemplative approach. A smaller number of interviewees work within larger institutions that do not share this vision of work – within these institutions, their innovative ideas are at best ignored, or at worst, actively resisted. Several of the interviewees work primarily as consultants and are not affiliated with any one organization.

Some have been forging a contemplative approach to work for a long time, like Bernie Glassman, who created the Greyston Bakery 20 years ago as a way to explore the connection between Buddhist practice and community development. Others are bringing new energy into this field, like Angel Kyodo Williams who founded Urban Peace in New York City in November 2000 “to be a container in which to create, develop and support models of active social engagement that make our fundamental perspective on

the world as individuals as important as the solutions we create.”

Some are firmly rooted in established religious traditions. Father Thomas Keating, a Trappist monk in Kentucky, shared with us his life-long work to make Christian contemplative practices, including centering prayer, accessible to Christians in the twenty-first century. Simon Greer of Jews United for Justice told us about his organization’s work to integrate the spirit of Judaism into labor organizing. Others, like Peter Senge of the Society for Organizational Learning, are pioneering language and techniques that preserve the integrity of contemplative practices but translate them to secular audiences.

Some, like Angeles Arrien in California and Claudia Horwitz in North Carolina, work on a macro level, offering trainings to help social justice organizations understand how contemplative practices can increase the effectiveness of their work. Others are engaged in direct service work and changing the world one person at a time, like Carol Miller Lieber who introduces meditation techniques to high-school students to help them with concentration and conflict resolution.

The professional sectors represented in these interviews are: Art and Creativity, Business, Community Development, Economic Justice, Education, Environment, Gender Equity, Governance/Politics, Health and Healing, Law, Leadership, Media, Networking Organizations, Organizational Development, Prisons, Religious and Spiritual Communities, Sports, and Youth Programs. Because work on social justice issues could take place within any of these sectors, “social justice” was not considered a separate sector but

rather as a focus of the organization's work. For the purposes of this research study, we defined a social justice organization as one that *"explicitly recognizes (either in its mission statement or expressed by the interviewee) systemic issues that lead to social inequities and has developed or is developing a strategy to address these issues."*

The majority of the interviewees (59%) worked either in the Northeast U.S. or on the West Coast. Of the remainder, 11% were based in the Mid-Atlantic states, 8% in the Southern states, 13% in the Southwest, and 8% in the Midwest. In terms of age, of those who returned the socio-demographic questionnaires, 22% were between the ages of 20-40, 60% between the ages of 40-60, and 18% were 60 years or older. The majority of the participants were European American (81%); 10% identified themselves as African American; 5% as Asian American; 2% as Native American; and 2% as "other."

The graphs on the following pages give a quantitative overview of the socio-demographic characteristics of the interviewees.

It is important to notice who might not be included in our study. Despite our efforts to be inclusive, the grouping is heavily skewed toward Euro-Americans over 40 years of age, as seen in the following graphs. One of the limitations of a snowball sampling is that it tends to confine itself to circles of people who already know each other.

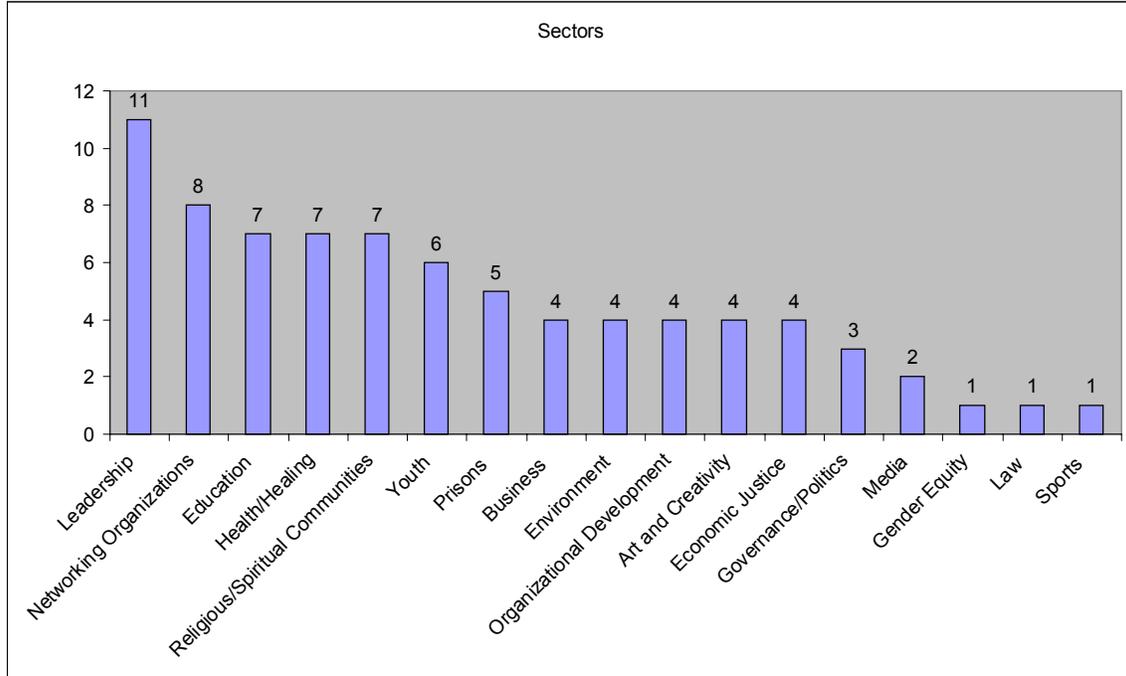
Also, while we tried to be inclusive in our definition of contemplative practices, inevitably, the definition will not resonate with everyone. Simply by using the word "contemplative," we may have inadvertently

limited our reach. As an example, one of our interviewees, Marcelle Martin, a member of the Religious Society of Friends, pointed out that, "[Contemplative] is not a word most Quakers use about themselves." She explained that the phrases *worship, centering, paying attention to the inner life* would be more familiar to Quakers.

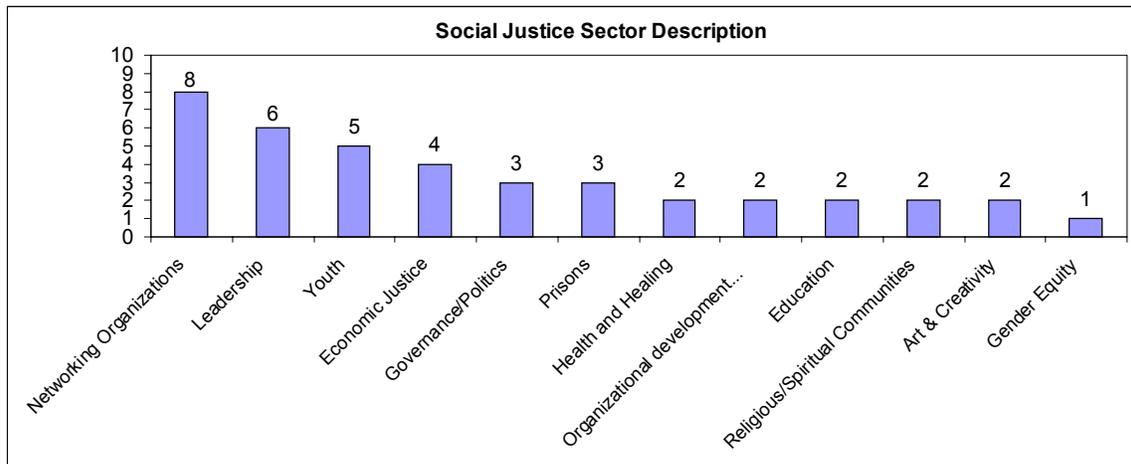
# Quantitative Overview of Research Participants

A total of 79 people were interviewed, working in 17 professional sectors (see sector definitions on page 14). Forty of the interviewees worked in organizations that focused on social justice issues.

**Graph 1: Primary Sector (N = 79)**



**Graph 2: Social Justice sector breakdown (N = 40)**



## **Sector Definitions**

**Art and Creativity:** Primary work focus is with creative process and artistic media.

**Business:** Primary work focus is in a for-profit business/corporate setting.

**Education:** Primary work focus is within the setting of established educational institutes (private and public), from grade school through graduate school.

**Environment:** Primary work focus is in organizations that address environmental/ecological issues.

**Health and Healing:** Primary work focus is within a health institute or on health issues, includes hospice work.

**Law:** Primary work focus is in legal institutes (including law schools).

**Leadership:** Primary work focus is with organizational leaders across different sectors, focusing on leadership training and skills.

**Media:** Primary work focus is in print, radio, television, or Internet journalism.

**Networking Organization:** Organization addresses multiple social justice issues; primary mission is to create and support a network of grassroots activist communities.

**Organizational Development/Support:** Works with nonprofit/activist/social justice organizations to enable them to do more effective and sustainable work.

**Prisons:** Primary work focus is inside prison setting and/or addresses related issues (i.e. families of incarcerated individuals, death penalty).

**Sports:** Primary work focus is in the field of sports, either in a professional or amateur capacity.

**Religious/Spiritual Community:** Primary work focus is based in a specific religious tradition/community.

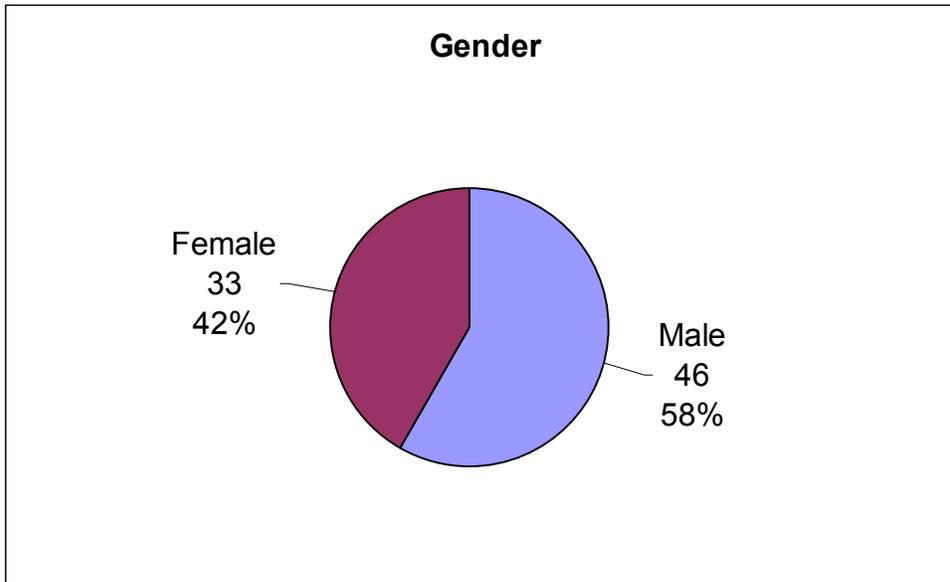
**Youth:** Primary work focus is with young people outside the context of a formal educational setting.

## **Social Justice organization definition**

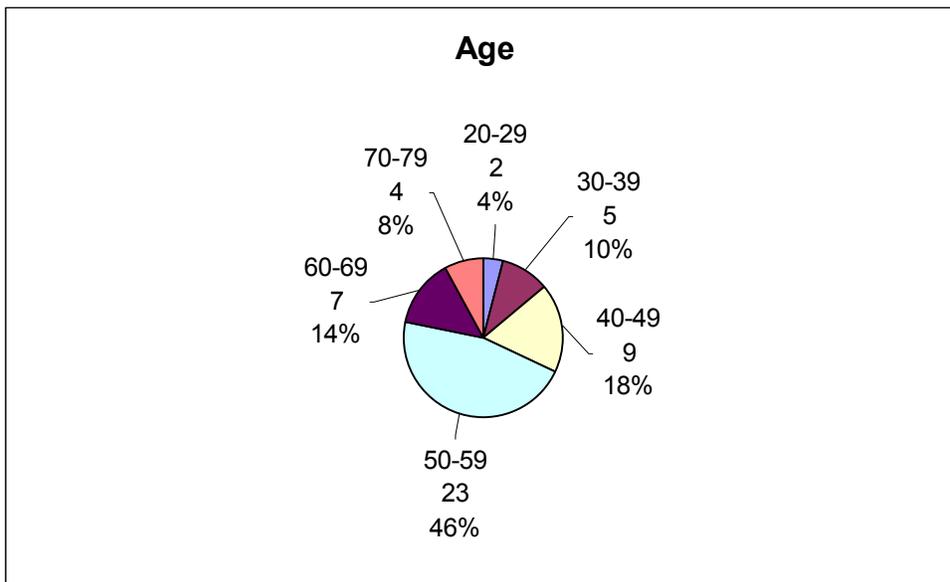
**Social Justice:** an organization that explicitly recognizes (either in its mission statement or expressed by the interviewee) systemic issues that lead to social inequities and has developed or is developing a strategy to address these issues.

*Note: When N ≠ 79, it is due to missing responses on the socio-demographic questionnaire.*

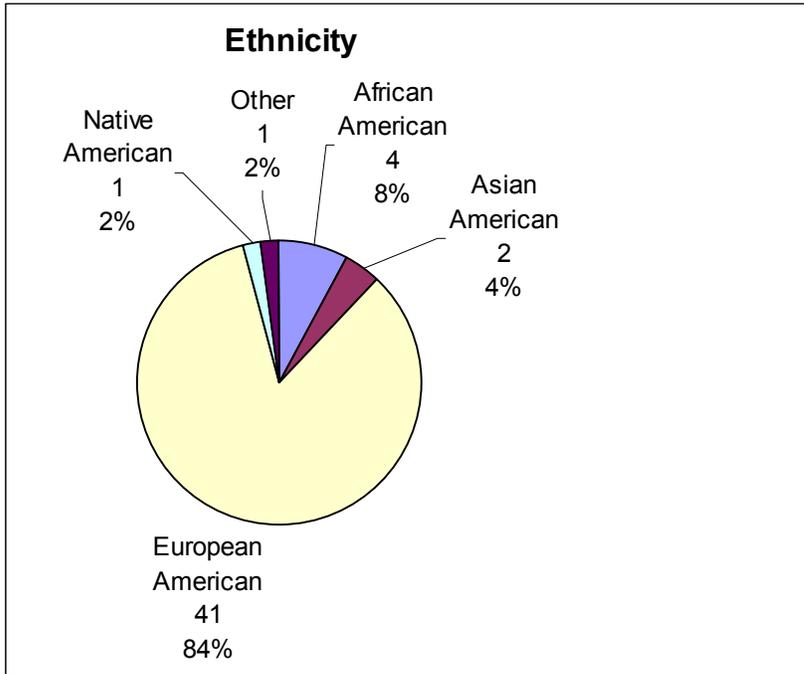
**Graph 3: Gender of interviewees (N = 79)**



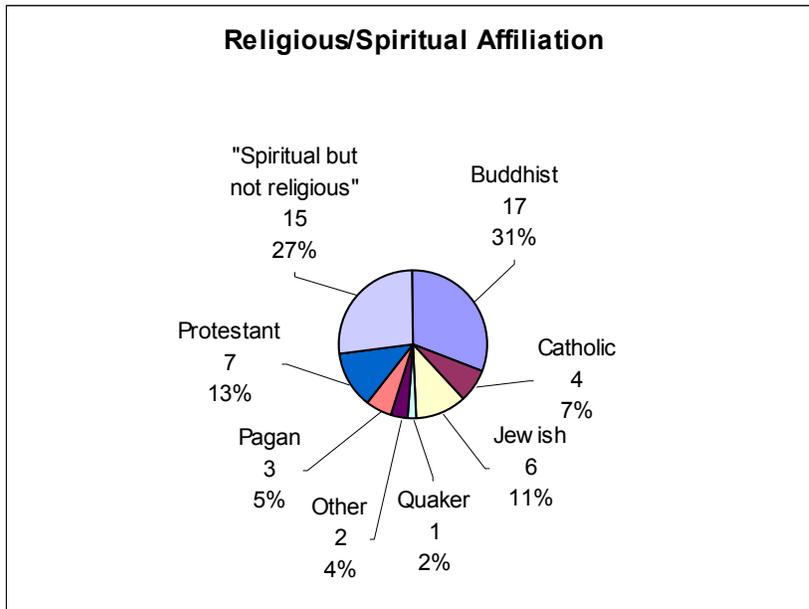
**Graph 4: Age of interviewees (N = 50)**



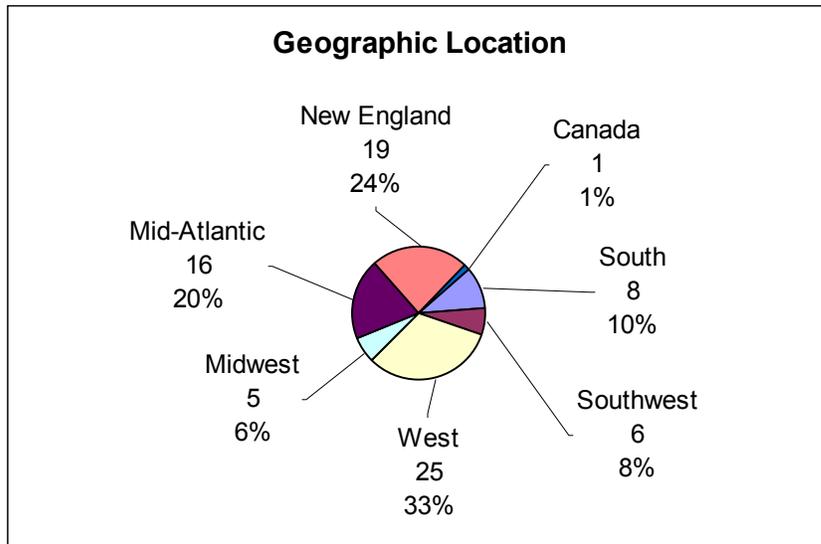
**Graph 5:** Primary ethnicity of interviewees (N = 49)



**Graph 6:** Primary religious or spiritual affiliation of interviewees (N = 55). Fourteen interviewees also listed a second religious affiliation.



**Graph 7: Geographic location of interviewees (N = 79)**



**States represented (participants in each state listed in parentheses)**

**Mid-Atlantic**

- District of Columbia (2)
- Maryland (3)
- New Jersey (1)
- New York (9)
- Pennsylvania (1)

**Midwest**

- Illinois (1)
- Michigan (2)
- Missouri (1)
- Ohio (1)

**New England**

- Connecticut (1)
- Maine (1)
- Massachusetts (14)
- New Hampshire (1)

**South**

- Georgia (1)
- Kentucky (1)
- North Carolina (4)
- South Carolina (1)
- Virginia (1)

**Southwest**

- Arizona (1)
- New Mexico (2)
- Oklahoma (1)
- Texas (1)

**West**

- California (12)
- Colorado (5)
- Oregon (1)
- Utah (2)
- Washington (5)

**Canada:** Nova Scotia

## Contemplation in Action: People

The 40 interviewees who focus on social justice issues bring contemplative awareness into their work in creative, innovative ways. This report will uncover some of the larger themes and patterns about their work, but for a close-up view, here are “snapshots” of five of the interviewees and their organizations.

**Leah Wise**, from Durham, North Carolina, is the co-founder and director of The Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network (REJN). REJN is a multicultural association of grassroots organizations of the working poor committed to economic and environmental justice. REJN’s Center for Transformation recognizes that the process of creating healthy communities is inseparable from the process of nurturing healthy community organizers. A team of wellness practitioners offer practices from culturally and spiritually diverse healing traditions to REJN members. Over the years, these practices have included storytelling, prayer, meditation, healing circles, massage, dance, drumming, and music.

**Reverend Douglas Tanner** is the president of the Faith and Politics Institute, based in Washington, D.C. The Institute is a non-partisan interfaith organization that strengthens national political leadership to face challenges of race, poverty, and violence. The Institute provides occasions for moral reflection and spiritual community to political leaders. Some of the Institute’s programs for the members of the House and Senate include weekly Reflection Groups and pilgrimages to historic civil rights sites in Alabama. The Institute encourages civility and respect as spiritual values essential to democracy.

**Pat Harbour** is the creator and director of Healing the Heart of Diversity (HHD), a professional leadership development program in Roanoke, Virginia. HHD provides diversity professionals with learning experiences that foster their inner capacity to lead and increase their effectiveness in the workplace and community. Using a process that includes contemplative practice, dialogue, and inquiry, HHD retreats support participants to delve into issues of diversity and have the experience of creating conditions that foster transformation and social change. Participants include corporate executives, university and public school administrators, and nonprofit officials.

**Soren Gordhamer** is the founder of The Lineage Project, based in New York City. The project offers awareness practices, such as yoga and meditation, to at-risk and incarcerated teens, primarily in juvenile halls and youth prisons. The project’s goal is to create a culture of conscious youth acting in positive ways to help themselves, their community, and their world.

**Carol Miller Lieber**, of Cambridge, Massachusetts, is the director of Partners in Learning, a project of Educators for Social Responsibility [ESR]. Partners in Learning is a middle and high school program that focuses on creating a safer, more welcoming, and respectful school environment where all students are encouraged to be successful. Carol offers contemplative practices in the form of “readiness strategies” that help students to improve their ability to concentrate and develop metacognitive skills. ESR’s mission is to make teaching social responsibility a core practice in education so that young people develop the convictions and skills needed to shape a safe, sustainable, democratic, and just world.

## **IV. Findings**

1. Defining Contemplative Practice
2. What Practices are Used?
3. The Relationship between Contemplative Awareness  
and Social Justice Work
4. The Impact of Contemplative Awareness on Social Justice Work
5. Contemplative Practice in a Group and Organizational Context
6. Teaching Contemplative Practices
7. The Broader Movement

# 1. DEFINING CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE

*I think about contemplative practice as whatever is the thing that gets me in touch with me, with the light in me.*

–Marian David, *Sustaining the Soul that Serves*

## KEY FINDINGS

- The majority of participants was generally enthusiastic about the working definition of contemplative practice created by the research team and perceived it as very broad and inclusive.
- The two most commonly mentioned amendments to the definition were:
  - inclusion of the communal aspect of contemplative practice
  - more emphasis on the active element of practice
- Some participants agreed that the definition should not include explicitly religious or spiritual terms; others felt that it was essential to name the spiritual dimension.

# 1. Defining Contemplative Practice

When we began our research, we constructed this working definition of contemplative practice:

*A practice designed to quiet the mind in the midst of the stress and distraction of everyday life in order to cultivate a personal capacity for deep concentration and insight.*

*Although usually practiced in silence, examples of contemplative practice include not only sitting in silence but also many forms of single-minded concentration, including meditation, contemplative prayer, mindful walking, focused experiences in nature, yoga and other contemplative physical or artistic practices. We also consider various kinds of ritual and ceremony designed to create sacred space and increase insight and awareness, such as council circle or vision quest, to be forms of contemplative practice.*

*Contemplative practice has the potential to bring different aspects of oneself into focus, to help develop personal goodness and compassion, and to awaken an awareness of the interconnectedness of all life.*

This definition was read to research participants near the beginning of the interview. Participants were then asked how their own definitions were similar to or different from the working definition.

The working definition was intended to establish a common language between the interviewers and the research participants. It

was also intended to be used as a launching point to find out how people actually define contemplative practice, so that we could capture the full spectrum of practices being used.

In developing this definition, our goal was to be as inclusive as possible without “watering down” the idea of contemplative practice. One of our intentions was to not alienate those who might feel excluded by the use of religious or spiritual terms.

Several of the participants shared our concern about religious or spiritual implications that might be embedded in the definition. Rachael Kessler, founder of Passageways, felt that the phrase “awareness of the interconnectedness of all life” could be interpreted as being based in a particular religious view and thus be offensive to people from other points of view. She said, “[Awareness of interconnectedness] is an experience that people may have through those tools that I offer—and they may not. And that is okay.”

On the other hand, some interviewees felt it was essential to name the spiritual dimension in a more explicit way and thought that phrases such as “higher self” or “synchronization of mind, body, and spirit” should be added. Corinne McLaughlin, founder of The Center for Visionary Leadership in Washington, D.C., said, “Contemplation always, to me, has a purpose of connecting us with the inner source of wisdom, the inner, deeper spiritual dimension.”

The majority was enthusiastic about the definition and felt it was similar to their own, but many suggested ways to expand on it. When asked how their definitions differed

from the working definition, two main themes arose:

- Inclusion of the communal aspect of contemplative practice
- More emphasis on the active element of contemplative practice

### **Contemplative Practice as a Communal Practice**

Often, contemplative practice is thought of as a solitary activity. A substantial amount of research has been conducted on the physiological and psychological benefits of meditation and other contemplative practices on individuals (Benson 1976, Murphy and Donovan 1996). But a large number of our interviewees described how they use contemplative practices in group settings. Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi, founder of the Spiritual Eldering Institute, said,

*Most of the time, when people do meditation, it's such a solitary thing and they're cut off from other people. But let us say a couple or two friends go into that space and they share with each other as these things are arising, and there is this kind of dialogue that comes out of deep spiritual intimacy, so it is meditative and it is contemplative, but it's also socializing. It creates a bond between people who can share such depth and integrity.*

Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi calls this “socialized meditation.”

### **Contemplative Practice as an Active Process**

A number of interviewees felt it was important to emphasize that contemplative practice involves not only “quieting the mind,” but also the more active process of

*Contemplative practice can happen when I do service—social change work is not separate from my meditation on the cushion.*

~ Diana Winston,  
Buddhist Peace Fellowship

being able to pay unswerving attention to the awareness that arises from that mind. Respondents who work in the social justice sector were especially apt to bring up this part of the definition. Joan Halifax, founder of the Upaya Foundation, said, “Compassionate action, if done in the right frame of mind and heart, *is* contemplative practice.”

Andre Carothers, founder and director of the Rockwood Leadership Program, spoke of his work as building a bridge between inner and outer work, of bringing a contemplative approach to tasks such as organizing a meeting, negotiating with a so-called “adversary,” or simply calling a colleague to discuss a program.

*Often activists don't see that connection. They see the movement into the inner dialogue as sort of a vacation or a different piece of work that's difficult for them to tie to their actual campaign work.*

Some of our interviewees were “thrown” by being asked to define contemplative practice as distinct from their social justice and activism work. Robert Gass, a consultant with many years of experience introducing social activists to contemplative work, said,

*Everything I know how to do and teach is designed to help me and everyone I work with be conscious in the middle of action, rather than stepping out of action.*

Many participants commented that, for them, contemplation and action were inseparably linked – one depends on the other. In fact, the journey of their work and lives has been to bridge the perceived division between the two. In many ways, those observations are at the heart of our findings.

### **Other comments on the definition**

Interviewees suggested several other aspects are important to include in the definition, including regularity and commitment to practice. Father Thomas Keating, of Contemplative Outreach, said “We would recommend that there be a practice that is daily, supported perhaps by other practices, like a vision quest.” Kazuaki Tanahashi, an

artist who works for peace and the environment, reminded us that contemplative practices are useful not only in the midst of “stress and distraction” but also in times of love and joy.

Almost all of the research participants noted that the intention with which a practice is done is the most important factor. Perhaps Nancy Eggert, of the Shalem Institute for Spiritual Formation, summed it up best:

*I don't think there is anything special about contemplative practice. It's being completely present and aware in the moment, whether you are at work or doing the laundry.. Getting the technique right is not important at all. In fact, it can be distracting... It's just that as human beings, I think we tend to need something to give us a little nudge, help us let go.*

## 2. What Practices Are Used?

*I grew up in the Jewish tradition and the Kabbalistic mystic tradition.*

*That's my main source. But I've also studied with elders from Christianity, Sufism, Hinduism, Buddhism, and Native Americans..*

*I've participated in sweat lodges, been present at sun dances, visited ashrama, and sat in zendos. This is how I learned that there is such a thing as generic spirituality, which is the same all over.*

*The only difference is whether you have it with curry or whether you have it with schmaltz.*

—Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi,  
The Spiritual Eldering Institute

### KEY FINDINGS

- Participants named a large number of contemplative practices used in their work, which are outlined in “The Tree of Contemplative Practices.”
- The common denominator for these practices was cultivating awareness and developing a stronger connection to one’s inner wisdom and or the divine/God.

## 2. What Practices Are Used?

When we asked people to tell us about the kinds of contemplative practices they use in their work, they described an amazing number of practices. Certainly, contemplative practice can take the form of a lone meditator sitting on a cushion in an empty, quiet room. But it can also manifest as a group of high-powered businessmen slicing tomatoes in preparation for a dinner together, or a group of social activists listening and speaking to each other in an intense, yet focused conversation.

Father Thomas Keating noted that “contemplative practices are quite varied and they emphasize different parts of the psyche.” Ed Sarath, of the University of Michigan, told us that “the particular value that each kind of contemplative discipline brings to the overall growth” of an organization and individual was important to explore and define.

### The Tree of Contemplative Practices

In our attempt to convey the breadth of practices that are used by the research participants in their work, we were inspired to use the image of a tree as a vehicle for organizing the information and to create a kind of “taxonomy” of practices. While the act of categorizing and dividing is to some extent an arbitrary one, even so, it might be helpful in understanding how different types of contemplative practices group together and relate to one another.

A tree is an organic, living being. Its trunk, branches, and leaves form an eco-system that embodies interconnection. The branches are

not any more or less important than the trunk, but all branches come from the trunk and the roots. In the same way, we see two factors forming the root of all contemplative practices: cultivating awareness and developing a stronger connection to one’s inner wisdom and/or the divine/God.

This root encompasses and transcends differences in the religious traditions from which the practices originate and allows room for new practices that are being created in secular contexts. As Peter Senge, of the Society of Organizational Learning, put it:

*Deep down, all of the contemplative traditions of the world, of which there are an extraordinary variety, stem from the same source.. Before there were all the religions of the last 3,000 years or so, there was a common religion that was shared by indigenous people all around the world in different ways, but it always involved a deep experience in nature.. becoming open to the influence of spirit or source, or whatever terms might have been used.*

The branches of the tree represent the different groupings of practices. As organizing principles, we used both the primary mode of practice used and the quality intended for cultivation. For example, Stillness Practices focus on quieting the mind and body in order to develop stillness and stability. Generative Practices come in many different forms (i.e. prayers, visualizations, chanting) but share the common intent of generating feelings of devotion and compassion. (See descriptions of each branch on page 31.)

Each of the branches has a number of leaves, which are the specific practices that fall under

that grouping. Just as on a tree, the leaves may fall to the ground, become compost and nurture the roots of the tree, and eventually take the form of leaves on other branches, in the same way, these contemplative practices inform one another and may often be combined. While this is a taxonomy, it is a rather fluid one!

The picture on the following page, **The Tree of Contemplative Practices**, illustrates these practices in graphic form. There are two important ideas to keep in mind when looking at the Tree:

- Intention is a critical factor. Many activities not included here (gardening, practicing a musical instrument, taking a bath) could be considered contemplative when done with the intent of cultivating awareness, attentiveness, sensitivity,

and a stronger connection to God/Spirit and/or one's inner wisdom.

- A practice can be on more than one branch, depending on the context. For example, chanting can be either a Generative or a Creative Process practice (or both).

*I was taking a walk and I was called to a tree because it was shaped like a tuning fork. On either side of the tuning fork there were all these branches going in different directions, even tiny ones through the top. But there was also this huge trunk and roots that reached deep into the earth. It really spoke to me and said, "This is what this work is all about."*

*All of this uniqueness and all these differences in the ways that these branches are going formed the tuning fork. It created this incredible harmony and music of life.*

*If we could communicate at the point of connection, which is essentially right in the middle of the tuning fork, all that other noise that often separates us would be in the background.*

~ Pat Harbour,  
Healing the Heart of Diversity

## Description of the “branches”

**Stillness Practices:** Practices that cultivate stillness, with the intention of quieting the mind, increasing awareness, and/or creating space for God/wisdom to come forward.

**Movement Practices:** Practices that emphasize movement of the body as a path to awareness and connection.

**Creation Process Practices:** Practices that emphasize artistic creative process rather than product.

**Relational Practices:** Practices that involve communicating either with others or oneself in a reflective process.

**Generative Practices:** “Generative: the ability to give birth, to bring into being, or to evoke.” Practices done with the intention of generating devotion to God/Spirit/the Divine, or evoking compassion, lovingkindness, etc.

**Ritual/Cyclical Practices:** Practices done either alone or in community to mark passages of time or milestones in a person’s life, to acknowledge and/or catalyze change.

**Activist Practice:** Work/activism *as* practice; “Compassionate action, if done in the right frame of mind and heart, is contemplative practice” (Joan Halifax).

## **Contemplation in Action: Practices**

Research participants shared many innovative interpretations of contemplative practices with us. Here are several:

### **Bearing Witness as contemplative practice**

The Peacemaker Community, founded by Bernie Glassman, is a multi-faith network of people and organizations practicing a vision of peace through study, spiritual practice, and social action. For the past six years, the community has organized The Bearing Witness retreat at Auschwitz/Birkenau in Poland, site of some of the largest concentration camps of the Holocaust.

At the retreat, Jews, Christians, Muslims, Hindus, and Buddhists gather to experience the overpowering anguish, sacredness, and healing power of this site. Each morning the assembly walks from Auschwitz to Birkenau, as did Auschwitz slave laborers years ago. Participants walk in quiet contemplation along the railroad tracks and around the extermination sites. Each day, religious services, representative of the various assembled traditions (including the Jewish practice of Kaddish) are offered. Each morning, participants break into small, facilitated council groups to share the intense emotions that arise from this experience and to consider the relevance to contemporary social justice issues.

### **Reflective practices in the classroom**

Through the Partnerships in Learning program, Carol Miller-Lieber helps teachers design practices that infuse reflection, silence, and focus in the high school classroom. One challenge for teachers is helping students make the transition from one space to

another, when the students may be coming into a classroom unsettled and “emotionally flooded.” Teachers have the students partner up and then check in with each other about the strongest emotion they have in that moment. The students talk about it, stop for a minute to reflect on it, then share with their partner one goal they have for how they want to be present during that next hour. This practice has improved their ability to concentrate in class.

### **Multimedia meditation**

At No Ordinary Time, Arrington Chambliss works with youth in urban areas to integrate contemplation and social action. Rather than bypassing the over-stimulation that mirrors everyday life for so many teens, contemplative practice at No Ordinary Time dives right into it. Their practices often combine music, art, journaling, and silence. At one gathering, the youth were asked to walk through a room filled with television and computer screens. As they did so, the screens came on one by one, showing scenes of violence, graphic sex, news clips of a school shooting, and other intense visuals. Then all the computers came on and loud music blared from speakers. Mentors in the room, each representing an influence in the kids’ life like a parent or a minister, began yelling out phrases like, “You need to get in school!” “You’re lazy.” The chaotic bombardment went on for a while and then abruptly stopped. The youth were then invited to do a journaling exercise and explore themes such as, “What creates your false self? What influences tell you who you should be?” This was followed by a period of silence, and then a chance for them to claim their “true identity” by making a statement about themselves.

### **3. THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE AND SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK**

*How do we attend to the landscape of our inner life while we are trying to put our hands on the wounds in the outer world?... [It's] not just contemplation for the sake of personal liberation, and it's not just social work for the fixing of the problems, but it is some sort of alchemical mix of both.*

—Wayne Muller, *Bread for the Journey*

#### **KEY FINDINGS**

- A large number of research participants felt that contemplative awareness is the root of social justice work.
- The “Hero’s Journey” is an archetypal journey of moving from contemplation to action.
- A strong relationship exists between contemplative practice and social justice work, but it is not a linear, causal one; the presence of other factors can optimize the transformative potential of contemplative practices.

### 3. The Relationship Between Contemplative Practice and Social Justice Work

A number of themes arose when we asked people to share their ideas about the relationship between contemplative practice and social justice work.

#### **Contemplative awareness is the root of social justice work.**

Many of our participants offered this thought even though each used his or her unique wording. A large number of our interviewees spoke of finding inspiration in the lives and writings of Thomas Merton, Martin Luther King, Jr., and Mahatma Gandhi. Dr. Eugene Callender of the Christian Parish for Spiritual Renewal said,

*Contemplative practice is the seed of social justice, because social justice is rooted in the heart of God... It is through contemplative practice we get in touch with the rightness, the righteousness of human behavior.*

Some talked about the connection between inner peace and a just world. Ed Sarath, who created a curriculum for Jazz and Contemplative studies at the University of Michigan, said:

*We have to be transformed ourselves in order to invite the world into that transformation.*

~ Marcelle Martin,  
Religious Society of Friends

*Anything that happens on a collective scale is a reflection of what happens on an individual scale. The more individuals that are experiencing the qualities associated with practice—calm, compassion—the more just the society will be.*

Lorain Fox Davis of Rediscovery (an organization that works with youth) said it this way:

*Contemplative practice is a foundation of social change because change happens fundamentally when we get quiet, when we contact Spirit within. Out of that comes our truth, and then we can bring that truth out into the world for whatever sort of social justice that we are interested in participating in.. If we take the time to search for truth within, to surrender to the silence within, we gain the wisdom for service to the world.*

Pat Harbour, of Healing the Heart of Diversity, said,

*In social change, one of the reasons that I think we'll continue to have so much difficulty with violence, terrorism, racism, heterosexism, gender issues, all the ism's, classism, is because we have not been operating with each other at that space or connection of where we are all joined in some way. So I think that social change is not only benefited by contemplative practice, but I actually think it is at the core of sustaining change.*

#### **The "Hero's Journey:" Moving from contemplation to action**

Joseph Campbell charted the three stages of "The Hero's Journey:" Separation, Liminal period, and Reincorporation (Campbell 1949). In a similar way, many people we

spoke with described how their lives as activists had reached a crisis point, leading them to a period of inner contemplation, then back again to outward action. Lorin Hollander described it metaphorically like this:

*The hero's journey is about how, as the hero severs his connection with the outside world and turns inward, he begins a journey through a symbolic mythological realm and confronts the demonic elements. The hero always comes away with some gift or weapon which allows her to emerge back into the real world where she then can take a position in society.*

Because so many of the research participants spoke of this process as having three different phases, we have begun to see it as an archetypal journey. Robert Toth of the Thomas Merton Foundation told us about Christine Bochen's description of Thomas Merton's contemplative experience (Bochen, 2000), and it provided a good framework to describe this journey:

### **1) "Call to contemplation and internal search"**

The beginning of the journey is often triggered by an experience of "burnout" or frustration with social justice work. It may be accompanied by the need to withdraw from work for a period of time. The individual then has an experience with contemplative practice and/or spirituality that her them to, in Claudia Horwitz's words, "a very different sense of possibility and vision."

The story of Simon Greer, currently the director of New York Jobs With Justice, exemplifies this journey. After standing on the frontlines with the Solidarity movement in Poland, Simon was struck by a comment

from another seasoned organizer, who said, "The tragedy with all this is that even if we win, we'll lose." Simon realized that it would take more than changing the people in power to effect real transformation. This led him to a period of deep personal questioning, during which time he returned to a long-lost yoga practice and explored his relationship with Judaism.

### **2) "Call to compassion and outreach"**

After this period of separation and reflection (sometimes taken in the form of a sabbatical), the individual feels called to return to his work and carry this vision with him, thus bringing to life the phrase "compassion in action." This may be a time of exploration of new careers, or finding a different way to do one's current work.

Simon came out of his time of reflection and realized that

*These things [spiritual practice and social change] have to connect.. I don't want to do my work and.. leave it at the office when I go to yoga or when I go to synagogue. And I don't want to leave behind the feeling I have when I meditate or when I'm reading sacred text when I go to the office.*

### **3) "Call to unity"**

There is a desire to come together with others to effect change on a broader scale, to bring about a societal shift. The individual brings contemplative practices into their organization, or creates an organization that works from a contemplative approach, and begins to network with others doing similar work.

For Simon, this meant co-founding a new organization, Jews United for Justice, where he could create the space to introduce

contemplative practices and philosophy into the organization's work on economic justice issues. Later, in his work with Jobs With Justice, he shared these practices on a larger level at the organization's national conferences.

**There is a strong relationship between contemplative practice and social justice work, but it is not a linear, causal one.**

Contemplative practice may be a powerful vehicle for transformation, but it is not in and of itself "magic bullet" for change. Fleet Maull, of the Prison Dharma Network, noted that social change can be caused by a number of factors, including violence. He said,

*It's not so much that the contemplative practice itself is directly precipitating [social change]. It's more that the approach to that work that comes from someone who has a contemplative life is very different.*

The mechanistic worldview embedded in Western culture may contribute to viewing meditation or other contemplative practices as beneficial techniques which exist in a vacuum. Robert Forman said,

*A lot of people talk about contemplation as if it's like a machine that's magically going to give you something. The sense is that you put two coins in over here and out on the other end pops something. But the spiritual path and contemplation is not a cause and effect program like that.*

Angel Kyodo Williams reinforced this point when she told us,

*Westerners have a tendency to intellectualize things to the point that they believe they understand something,*

*but the depth isn't there. That's why we can have so many people practicing contemplative practices and meditation and still be assholes.*

A number of interviewees told us that contemplative practice alone is not enough to effect or sustain change; other factors in combination with contemplative practice optimize its potential to transform. Pat Harbour, of Healing the Heart of Diversity, said,

*The most important thing about our work is that it is not intended to stand alone. It is simply one piece of the mosaic of what needs to happen to bring about a cultural consciousness that will create a new paradigm that will allow us to live more effectively and work more effectively together.. This process can integrate with any other organization development and/or social change and/or cultural diversity training.*

Gary Cohen of Healthcare without Harm told us about two organizations that incorporated contemplative practice into their work. One was more explicit in embracing meditation than the other. But the one that was less explicit was actually more functional as a group because of the emotional maturity of the people involved. Gary said,

*On its own, contemplative practice is good, but insufficient to build a healthy community among political change organizations. When you have both [emotional maturity and contemplative practices], then you've really got a good thing going.*

Please see the table on the next page for a summary of factors that complement and optimize the use of contemplative practice.

**Factors that Complement and Optimize  
the Use of Contemplative Practice**

- “Being in a community that has a clear intention to serve” (Ostaseski)
- Emotional and political maturity of group (Cohen)
- Engagement with institutional and global suffering (Winston)
- Nurturing a sense of safety and confidentiality within the group (Santorelli)
- Complementary training in organizational development, diversity work (Harbour)
- Psychotherapy and other interpersonal work (Forman)

## 4. THE IMPACT OF CONTEMPLATIVE AWARENESS ON SOCIAL JUSTICE WORK

*Contemplative practice can assist people in creating together  
a living experience of a new paradigm of social justice  
out of which work can then flow, work that actually creates social justice  
rather than striving to create social justice while leaving a trail of social debris.*

—Robert Gass

### KEY FINDINGS

- The inherent challenges of social justice work can undermine its effectiveness and sustainability; contemplative awareness has the potential to serve as a countermeasure to these challenges.
- Contemplative practices, as used by the social activists we spoke with, contributed to their ability to
  - support deep, significant social change
  - sustain social activism
  - process emotions in a constructive way
  - bring the shadow to light
  - shift power dynamics and structures

## 4. The Impact of Contemplative Awareness on Social Justice Work

Our interviewees talked about the many challenges that social justice work presents. These challenges grouped together in the following way:

### *Level 1 (obvious)*

- Burnout
- Losing perspective of the long view of change
- Lack of funding and appreciation

### *Level 2 (more subtle but more insidious and potentially damaging)*

- Working from a place of righteousness and excessive anger
- Replicating one system of injustice with another
- Operating within larger cultural assumptions of busy-ness, materialism, product orientation, individualism

Robert Gass noted that many activists are exhausted because they operate out of a sense of crisis, partly driven by contracting against the despair they are afraid of feeling if they face suffering directly. And so, “They invest themselves with frantic action,” hoping to change this reality.

While the first level of challenges is readily apparent, the second level is more difficult to see. In fact, many participants commented that their own contemplative practice had helped them to be more aware of this second level and to seek ways to address them.

Repeatedly, our participants told us that they had personally experienced how social justice work rooted in contemplative awareness offers a countermeasure to these challenges, on both an individual and organizational level. They also talked about the ways that the use of contemplative practices contributed to the effectiveness of their work.

### **Support deep, significant social change**

Research participants who were veterans of social change movements reflected on the strengths and weaknesses of those movements. They had been part of “victories,” but often bittersweet ones. After standing on the frontlines with the Solidarity movement in Poland, Simon Greer was struck by a comment from another seasoned organizer, who said, “The tragedy with all this is that even if we win, we’ll lose.” Simon realized that it would take more than changing the people in power to effect real transformation. Wayne Muller, the founder of Bread for the Journey, elaborated on this concern and related his experience:

*People who do social justice without having gotten to the place beneath which fear and anger live just replace one bad structure with another bad structure, one fear-based structure with another fear-based structure. It's only the players who are different..*

*When people are out to change the world and they don't have a sense of spaciousness and quietude and ease in their bodies, they will begin to be seduced into wars and territory and turf and influence.. People who are trying to change the world for the better end up creating systems that are just like the systems they are trying to fix.*

The use of contemplative practices can support a shift from focusing on “getting and gathering and achieving,” as Soren Gordhamer put it, to developing a “quality of attention to our lives” and a reflective capacity to see ourselves in relation to others and society.

Peter Senge, the author of *The Fifth Discipline* and founder of the Society for Organizational Learning, has done extensive thinking on the nature of change. He told us,

*The first fundamental capability in deep change is the ability to become aware of your thought and suspend it, rather than thinking that what you see is reality..*

*Rarely do change processes fail because people don't have exciting ideas of what they want to change. It's often the case they do have lots of ideas, but they often fail because they have a very limited understanding of the reality which they're dealing with. We tend to project our assumptions and biases, histories and habitual ways of looking at the world, rather than have a capacity to begin to see or be aware of those habits of thought, to suspend them so we can actually see the world in more multi-faceted and complex ways.*

Contemplative practices, when used consistently and with the intention of raising awareness, contributed to the ability to understand patterns, both within oneself and in relation to others. These insights helped social justice activists to have a heightened awareness of when they might be falling into patterns that obstruct social change: unchecked anger, burnout, and re-creating institutionalized oppressions such as racism within their own organizations and movements.

Fleet Maull said,

*To get clarity into any system that is creating inherent suffering, that's creating oppression, you have to be able to step out of that system to see the system clearly. When you're in the midst of the system, you cannot really see how the system supports suffering, supports oppression. So, to do it, you have to find some way to step out of it. Well, that's what contemplative life is all about.*

Societal changes can motivate organizations to use contemplative practices in order to explore some of these deeper dimensions of change. Peter Forbes, of the Trust for Public Land (TPL), related the story of the TPL's campaign to save the last working farm in Billerica, Massachusetts. All the area around the farm had been swallowed up by development and “big-box” stores. This particular farm was to be bought and turned into a Walmart. TPL offered to help the farm owners and ended up in a two-year long battle with Walmart. Peter shared his “a-ha moment”:

*We spent \$3 million dollars buying the farm and \$200,000 in court fees, and we won, and we thought we were heroes.. I remember the night of the celebration, I read Walmart's annual report and found out that that year they had spend \$575 billion dollars buying other sites somewhere else.. I just realized that we cannot do our work this way, acre by acre and farm by farm, and somehow we had to change so that we would influence culture. So then I began to enter my own process of inquiry: How do we do land conservation in a way that changes the way people live and act?*

TPL now uses contemplative practice to support its shift from “a technical organization to an organization that creates social change.” Peter said,

*It wasn't until I entered a contemplative practice that I saw the connection between personal change and social change. And that connection enabled me to see that our work is really not just about buying acres but about trying to build connection between land and people. So I saw through the contemplative practice a different interpretation of why we do our work, and that interpretation has been embraced by lots of people.*

The introduction of contemplative practices into an organizational culture can lead to acknowledging the necessity for larger systems change, including change on a global level. Nancy Roof is co-convenor and one of a core group of eight people who founded the United Nations Spiritual Caucus. She said,

*We are trying to shape the new global civilization with spiritual values. The mission of the group is to support the spiritual principles of the United Nations and to initiate shared group silence at the UN, at all levels, in order to balance the outer action in which we are all involved. Regular meetings consist of 30 minutes of shared silence for meditation, prayer, and contemplation, followed by discussion of spiritual themes concerning current global affairs. We model and encourage the use of this process at international conferences as well as UN meetings.*

### **Sustaining social activism**

The word “sustainability” was used numerous times in interviewees’ responses to our questions. Those on the frontlines of social justice work face many challenges and

confront an enormous amount of suffering that can lead to a high rate of burnout, if left untended. Using contemplative practice as a method for nourishing oneself was, therefore, a high priority for many of our interviewees.

Robert Gass said that his mission in offering practices to environmental activists is “to help move the movement from a state of fear to connectedness, from burnout to sustainability, from inefficiency to effective performance, and from piecemeal efforts to systemic change.” Robert sometimes uses the image of “training for a marathon rather than a sprint, and training for a lifetime of social activism. I always.. talk about [the fact] that we can make peace with suffering.”

Being able to “have a sense of perspective, a sense of the long arc of social change of which [activists] are a part,” is a key element to sustainability, according to Andre Carothers. When this is achieved, activists

*have a connection with their inner purpose that can transcend the moment so that they can find the fuel and the energy to maximize the path of change. [The fact] that they have an inner dialogue, whether it be through personal awareness practice, contemplative discipline or yoga or prayer, lifts them out of the minute-by-minute challenges of the work and allows them to be in the work but not of the work.*

Several of the organizations we profiled are devoted to the mission of sustaining activists in their work. These include Sustaining the Soul That Serves (Marian David), an educational and training program that invites social justice leaders to explore meditation, journaling, nature, prayer, music, and other creative expressions as tools to nurture and sustain themselves; Vallecitos Mountain

Refuge (Grove Burnett), a retreat center in New Mexico that awards fellowships to outstanding nonprofit leaders for a ten-day retreat for personal and spiritual renewal; and Inside Passages (Kurt Hoelting), a program based in Washington state that provides environmental activists and others a chance to explore the spiritual roots of the environmental crisis through wilderness kayaking trips.

Marian David told us:

*If I could transmit a message to the whole world I would say "Be sure to secure your own oxygen mask before helping others." And that means.. find contemplative practices, spiritual practices so that you can sustain yourself in the work that you do. Because, if you're here in this world, then that means you have a divine purpose. And, if you're going to know what that purpose is, you're going to have to have some practices so that you can stay tuned into what else you might do.*

### **Processing emotions in a constructive way**

Another barrier to sustainable, effective social change is created when unprocessed emotions and excessive amounts of anger contribute to tension, both within individuals and in group dynamics. Simon Greer recalls when he became aware that he had come to a "place where I was doing the work out of anger and out of hate, not out of love or even compassion."

Kurt Hoelting said,

*Contemplative work is one of the key ingredients in creating an environment in which something else can emerge besides this kind of mutually self-destructive*

*adversarial climate that marks so much of good-intentioned social justice work.*

One of the most distinctive characteristics of contemplative practice is its experiential nature, which provides a different way of working with and relating to intense emotions. Fleet Maull said:

*If you're going to try to work with anger and understand anger.. you could study about anger, you could read about anger, you could try to observe anger in others. You could do all those types of things, but.. a contemplative approach to working with anger is to develop the ability to have the presence of mind to be fully present within a state of anger.. it's learning about things from the inside of the experience.*

Contemplative practice can be, as Rachael Kessler told us, part of the process of "learning to make friends with the full range of our emotions."

Practices such as insight meditation and centering allow an individual to become aware of emotions without having to act on them. George Mumford, who teaches meditation and mindfulness practices to people and organizations in the world of sports, offered an example of the kinds of questions that contemplative practice can facilitate: "When this emotion is present, how does it affect my ability to see reality, how is it affecting my ability to relate to other people?"

Pat Harbour said the use of contemplative practices with diversity trainers opens up a space for people to "experience our learning as whole. We learn not only through our thinking and analyzing and those behaviors, but we also learn through those intuitive

learnings, through our body and other sensory learnings.”

Judith Thompson told us that she emphasizes the “relational” and “heart-opening and compassion work” aspects of contemplative practice in her work with youth from war-torn countries. She tries to create a container that invites people to be authentic, vulnerable, and compassionate with each other. She notes that “It’s a rare thing that you find that in our culture.”

Many interviewees said contemplative practices helped them, their staff, and their clients to find a “center in the middle of the storm,” to have a stronger connection to their own wisdom and inner voice.

### **Bringing the shadow to light**

Contemplative practices, when used with an emphasis on awareness, may be especially effective in evoking the shadow side of both individuals and organizations. Issues that may have been obscured are brought out into the open to be dealt with. Rev. Douglas Tanner made a link between uncovering this shadow side and social justice efforts:

*Without contemplative practice, you can identify an enemy, you can identify something that needs change, and you can even identify some good things that need to happen, but your own ability to see clearly the steps that need to be taken is sorely limited if you are unaware of ways in which... your own shadows are playing into your interactions and your perceptions.*

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi said,

*We try to help people.. steer the direction where they send their intended mind. Very often this means also looking into such*

*places where we feel anxiety about going into the past, failures that we have had, relationships that didn't work out. But part of life review demands that we be able to look at these things too, so this means to be able to steer past the anxiety moments we have when we go into places that we'd rather like to be unconscious about. But then anxiety passes and with relief there is an increase in energy.*

The insights brought about by these practices may not always be comfortable. In fact, they have the potential to raise more anxiety than they relieve. Rabbi Schachter-Shalomi compares this process to the creation of a pearl inside an oyster — irritation is an essential part of the process!

Saki Santorelli echoed this thought when he noted that people participating in the University of Massachusetts Mindfulness-based Stress Reduction program would often get two weeks into the program and say, “I’ve got more stress now than before I started!” Saki explained,

*In the short term.. it is stressful to take the stress reduction program. In the long run it has the potential for tremendous reductions in a certain kind of suffering, or stress. It doesn't mean that the stress in our lives is gonna go away, but the way we face it.. might change radically.*

For individuals, the revelations that emerge from looking at previously unexamined beliefs can be life-changing. Arrington Chambliss, who works with youth in a program called No Ordinary Time, told about one man who was introduced to meditation and how it has affected his life:

*Before, he'd go through life just kind of walking along. Now he's really asking himself, 'What do I need to do about this*

*Palestine/Israel crisis?...I've got to be engaged... He can't numb out parts of him that want to feel overwhelmed, but instead has to face those parts of himself that want to move away from chaos or from conflict... I've seen it impact his leadership.. It has totally changed him.. He is taking risks that he didn't take before.*

### **Shifting power dynamics and structures**

Michael Lerner of Commonweal reminded us that “there is a long standing relationship between religion and power that goes back right to the beginning of human history,” and that “religions are deeply engaged with the power structures of their times.” While this is true, for many of our participants already concerned with existing structures of power, contemplative practices have helped them re-imagine their understanding of power, often as a power that is shared, not a “power over.” Angel Kyodo Williams of Urbanpeace said,

*Our sensibility is not “for or against.” It’s a sensibility that says human beings have the tendency to create structures that prolong their suffering, but they are still structures, and they are still just manifestations of forms. We’re not here to dismantle the people. We’re here to dismantle the forms.*

A number of interviewees focused their work on issues of systemic power and institutionalized oppression, including Adi Bemak at the Holyoke Youth Alliance, Rachel Rosner at Social Change Across Borders, Angel Kyodo Williams at Urbanpeace, Linda Stout at Spirit in Action, Pat Harbour at Healing the Heart of Diversity, and Arrington Chambliss at No Ordinary Time. Often, they used contemplative practices to explore these

issues with their constituents and also to support alliance building efforts.

Angel Kyodo Williams said that the use of community rituals helps people of different race, economic class, gender, who may never otherwise “see” each other to “find themselves in the same place, able to do the same activity together. There is a natural affinity that grows out of that.”

Several people used the metaphor of “fuel” to describe the key role that contemplative practice can play in social change, and its ability to leverage power. Marianne Williamson, founder of the Global Renaissance Alliance said:

*The fact that the Quakers had the hour of silence before they discussed abolition gave the spiritual fuel to the Abolitionist Movement. The fact that the women, Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton and those others sat in silence before they talked about Women Suffrage gave the spiritual fuel for the Women Suffrage Movement.. These movements were unbelievably outnumbered, not only in terms of people but in terms of extraordinary power, economic and material forces, absolutely entrenched and having no plans whatsoever to let go of slavery or male domination or institutionalized racism.*

## 5. CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICE IN A GROUP AND ORGANIZATIONAL CONTEXT

*I think there's a movement towards a spirituality that is not particularly religiously or institutionally based. I think there's a movement toward a holistic model, which incorporates all of the various faith-based organizations and groups as a piece of the model. The holistic model doesn't exclude the use of an organizational model, but it doesn't stop at that—it's trying to create a broader picture.*

—Bernie Glassman,  
founder of The Zen Peacemaker Order

### KEY FINDINGS

- Interviewees reported the benefits of group contemplative practice, including improved communication, greater sense of team and community, and recognition of interconnections and the desire to work across boundaries.
- “The Contemplative Organization” is emerging as a model of an organization that uses contemplative practices in all aspects of its work.
- Characteristics of the Contemplative Organization include:
  - incorporating contemplative practices into all aspects of work
  - embodying values
  - moving between cycles of action and reflection
  - working to balance process with product
  - using an organizational structure that reflects a contemplative approach
- The core challenge facing organizations that use contemplative practices is to help people understand more clearly what these practices are and how they benefit individuals and groups.

## 5. Contemplative Practice in a Group and Organizational Context

Numerous studies have reported the physiological and psychological benefits for individuals who use meditation and other contemplative practices (Benson 1976; Speca et al 2000. For comprehensive literature reviews of clinical studies, see Andresen 2000 and Murphy and Donovan 1996). Our interviews uncovered a lesser-documented phenomenon: the benefits that come to a group of people who take part in contemplative practices together. Pat Harbour told us,

*We give people an opportunity to use a contemplative practice for themselves as an individual, but to also be able to do that in community.. for building the connection and bonding in relationship in community through contemplative practice.. Contemplative practice allows the space and the opportunity to connect with one's higher Self at the core of one's being and at the point of connection with other beings that is in each of us.*

Group practices included Stillness Practices done in community, such as sitting meditation, and also Relational Practices such as council circle, Appreciative Inquiry, and engaged dialogue.

Three patterns emerged as consequences of group practice:

- Improved communication
- Greater sense of team and community
- Realizing interconnections; working across boundaries

### Improved communication

Almost every participant described improved communication as a by-product of the use of contemplative practices. Many interviewees stressed the importance of developing skills in “deep listening”—listening without blame or judgment. Contemplative techniques such as council circle directly supported this kind of listening. Lorain Fox Davis told us,

*Many kids in the Rediscovery Program grow up not knowing how to listen.. In council circle, the only one speaking will be the one who is holding the talking stick. There's a tremendous strength in talking circles whereby listening and not being able to interrupt we go deeper into our own selves. As each person goes deeper then the circle goes deeper and at some point when we are letting Spirit speak instead of personalities or egos, we gather in the center of that circle. That's where Spirit resides and there's a great power that comes out of that acknowledgment and out of that awareness.*

These practices and techniques also allowed for new ways to deal with conflict resolution between individuals and groups.

When difficult issues such as race and class arose, the use of contemplative practices brought more “breathing room” in the discussions and resulted in more productive conversations. Andre Carothers said,

*Race and class is a charged conversation in this country, and it tends to put people on both sides of the fence fairly quickly in an un-resourceful state in which they either feel defensive or attacked or misunderstood or otherwise judged or evaluated in what they do. And personal awareness practices, such as a*

*contemplative discipline.. contribute to making that conversation more useful and skillful, in the sense that people learn how to listen more openly and with less resistance. They learn to speak more clearly and compassionately and accurately from their heart. They also learn to keep to themselves their initial reaction, so whatever reactivity that they get into, [they can] turn around and effectively make their point, remain strong and clear, and not destroy the possibility of relationship in that moment.*

### **Greater sense of team and community**

According to many of our interviewees, groups doing contemplative practices together bonded much more powerfully and consequently worked toward their goals more effectively. Janine Sagert, who teaches corporate clients such as Dell Computer, IBM, and Motorola how to achieve optimal performance and well-being, begins meetings with her staff with a short meditation. She said, “[Contemplative practice] certainly clears away any petty issues that might be going on between us.. It reestablishes each one of us in our own joy, so it certainly makes meetings more efficient and focused.”

Contemplative practice can also serve as an “equalizer.” When people participate in retreats or other activities that incorporate contemplative practice, a shared sense of ownership can emerge. Rachel Rosner, of Social Change Across Borders, described how contemplative practices such as storytelling effect their group retreats:

*It puts people in a different space, in terms of how they relate to each other and how they feel about being there. I think what happens is that through telling personal stories and through getting to*

*know each other, hearing about each other’s work as well as life, it becomes the group’s retreat. It’s not our retreat.. We’re providing the setting.. but they are really creating the experience.*

These retreat experiences frequently carry over into the regular work setting. Robert Gass related an experience of working with an environmental organization that led coastal rainforest campaigns from Canada to Mexico. The group was having difficulty bonding as a team. But Robert said,

*It was beyond that. I felt like I had met a group of people who acted like they all had their own constituencies and were there to negotiate on behalf of their constituencies – their links were to the constituents, not to each other. There was no experience whatsoever of being a team.*

Robert and the group worked for more than two days on the organization’s mission and strategy. Finally, he said to them,

*“Look I don’t know what your standards are or how you want to be with each other. Maybe the way you are with each other here really is okay for you. For me it makes my heart hurt.. You treat each other kind of like tough allies who are from different countries. And maybe that’s okay for you but I just want to ask you – is this really what you want from with each other?”*

*And it was real quiet. No one said anything after that.*

In the remaining time together, the group did a number of exercises, including the contemplative practice of council circle. Robert said,

*We just sat there and talked in council circle for a couple of hours. Everyone got much more truthful. People talked about having come to this retreat literally with the imagery of "I went in my bomb shelter, locked the door, taped up all the windows and I was just waiting for this retreat to be over to go back to my work." They talked together. They got vulnerable together. They bonded as a team. We actually did a ritual in which they kind of put their chips in and said, "I'm here; I'm going to join this."*

*And that stuck. They had their ups and downs as an organization but in some fundamental way they came away with a commitment to interdependence that did not exist before.*

Some time after the retreat, Robert spoke to a person from the organization to see how things were going. The man said the organization had more than doubled in size since then. He went on to say, "Our retreat was a watershed event. We had a number of ways it could have gone; we went the right way - we went a good way and we'll never be the same."

Linda Stout told the story of a retreat for media professionals. The journalists went through a dramatic transformation after going through a contemplative group exercise and dialogue where they had a chance to talk about what gave their work meaning.

*There had been some really bad experiences among this group and they were really afraid to come together and they didn't want to share any of their information. They didn't want to talk about collaboration but after.. doing the visioning work, someone said, "Well, if some of us want to share ideas,*

*can we?" ... Every single person shared their ideas, and then at the end of that one of the people said, "You know, I feel like we have accomplished more here in these two days than we have in the past 17 years and I think we should talk about building a collaboration," and there was full consensus.. Not only did people make the agreement and make plans for what needed to happen over the next year to make it happen, they all stayed with it.*

### **Realizing interconnections; working across boundaries**

One of the impacts of practice mentioned most frequently by participants who practiced together was the realization that there is no "other." When people gained this understanding, there were led to a level of caring about others that extended in two directions: toward the people that the organization "helps" but also toward the people perceived as the "perpetrators" of social injustice. Marianne Williamson said, "We take very seriously the dictates of Gandhi and King, that we must learn *agape*, we must learn to love those we don't like, we must learn to love the oppressor."

Bernie Glassman, founder of the Peacemaker Community, used the metaphor of the body to explain how this works:

*If I thought my arms were not part of me but separate, then if one arm starts to bleed, it's possible that the other arm could walk away, saying "I don't want to get bloodied. I've got other things to do."*

*Once the transformation into the oneness of life, of that one body, happens, it's impossible for that other arm to walk away because it knows*

*that if it doesn't do anything, it's going to die, the whole body is going to die...[So the question is] "How do I nurture this one body? How do I keep on?" Not "How do I end all of the illnesses that are going to arise?" but "How do I prepare the one body to be in a more healthful situation so that it doesn't cause as much damage?" But it's never looked at as the other.*

Living in this "paradigm of interdependence," as Robert Gass calls it, leads to a broad view of social justice, a "deep caring." This "caring" offered social justice workers a sustaining vision to continue their work when the going got rough.

Diana Winston of the Buddhist Peace Fellowship (BPF) told us about a vigil held at the Los Alamos laboratory in New Mexico, where nuclear weapons are developed. For several days, the group sat on meditation cushions on a tarp at the facility's parking lot to protest the proliferation of nuclear weapons. At lunchtime, they went to the cafeteria, ate lunch with the lab workers, and listened to their stories. Diana said,

*It was incredible, because what happened for me certainly was I got to hear the other side. All of my ideas like, "You are evil because you are making nuclear weapons" began to dissolve some because I heard how concerned people were to protect America, and how frightened they were for their family if they didn't have a job. I didn't agree with them, but the barriers broke down. To me, that is true Buddhist social change work. How can we understand and love the "other" people? It is not easy.*

Seeing these interconnections also motivated people to widen the circle to whom they

provide services, and to effect change on a larger level. Fleet Maull, of the Prison Dharma Network, said,

*Our whole approach is to try to create a circle in which we can invite all the players.. and bring people into a more uplifted vision of the whole thing. So, I'm just as keen on working with correctional guards and correctional professionals and prison lobbyists and people who are invested in making money in this industry.. Those are the people I would love to teach meditation to and get in council with. I'd much rather do that than be preaching to the choir.*

## The Contemplative Organization

As we have seen, research participants offer contemplative practices to their clients and constituents, both in an individual and group context. But we also learned that a number of interviewees have brought these practices into their own workplaces, sharing them with co-workers and thereby infusing their organizations with a more contemplative flavor.

Just as Peter Senge (1994) has identified and defined the Learning Organization, our interviews have revealed that there is a constellation of elements that form a type of workplace that we call a Contemplative Organization.

A Contemplative Organization uses contemplative practices in the services it offers its constituents, but also as an organizing principle for the workplace. It is different from a faith-based organization in that it does not always explicitly acknowledge or insist that its employees identify with a specific religious tradition. The phrase

“secular spirituality” has also been used to describe this phenomenon, but in a Contemplative Organization, the term “spirituality” may not even be used.

We are just beginning to develop this idea of a Contemplative Organization, and it exists more as a concept than it does in reality. To the extent that Contemplative Organizations do exist, they are in different stages of development or “ripeness.” Also, there can be a great deal of difference between stated values and everyday reality. Rachael Kessler of Passageways told us that while her goal is to bring practices into the Passageways workplace,

*it is still hard for me. There is a certain space I get into when I'm in an organizational, work mode. When I'm training, it is totally there. There is something that happens to those instincts [to bring in a contemplative space].. they shut down when I am in a meeting setting or a work setting. That is a challenge.*

Of the organizations we profiled, the Greyston Foundation is probably the most well-developed example of a Contemplative Organization. Greyston, which provides comprehensive social services in Yonkers, NY, was founded in 1982 as an experiment in exploring the connections between Buddhist teachings and social change. Charles Lief, president of Greyston, summarized the elements that are part of the culture of a Contemplative Organization:

*How does an organization that professes to be built upon core spiritual values or values of engaged social action actually manifest? How is it any different from an organization that doesn't make that kind of overt statement?.. We spend time and we spend money on encouraging personal*

*spiritual exploration. So we are an organization that finds it acceptable within the work day for people to explore their own contemplative practice.. Institutional norms here are things like working with the Native American practice of council as a way of conducting meetings, and having periods of meditation or silence before and after we start events.. We do encourage people to figure out ways of integrating their own spiritual practice into the work that they are doing, and are fairly flexible about helping people do that kind of work.*

### **Characteristics of the Contemplative Organization**

As our research participants described how their organizations function, a number of characteristics emerged. The Contemplative Organization strives to

- Incorporate contemplative practices into all aspects of work
- Embody its values
- Move between cycles of action and reflection
- Balances process with product
- Have an organizational structure that reflects a contemplative philosophy

### **Incorporates contemplative practices into all aspects of work**

In the Contemplative Organization, this means more than just an annual staff retreat. There are explicit efforts to structure the work day and environment to offer opportunities for staff to practice, both alone and together. Some of these include:

- beginning meetings with silence
- use of reflective dialogue in meetings
- permission to take “contemplative breaks” during the day

- creation of a special space in the office for prayer, meditation, and/or quiet
- use of contemplative group techniques like Appreciative Inquiry and council circle to conduct strategic planning for the organization

### **Embodies its values**

In the Contemplative Organization, values and mission statements are not forgotten documents, but are engaged through an ongoing process of reflection and action. Contemplative practices are often used in strategic planning processes to help an organization connect with its values. Some participants pointed out that this very process of exploring values together is in itself a contemplative practice.

Claudia Horwitz described the process of using “reflective practice” with an organization called the North Carolina Public Allies, a national apprenticeship program for young people who want to work in social change organizations.

*I started by doing very short 15-30 minute reflection sessions at the beginning of their weekly staff meetings, and then developing a set of core values for the organization, for how they would connect and work together as a staff.*

*From that we started to develop a series of practices and rituals that brought those values to life. In particular, we restructured the way they ran their staff meetings as well as the way they looked at their year-long calendar. They have very specific things that happen at very specific times that they weren't preparing for. They weren't able to move through those*

*in the way they wanted to in terms of keeping their relationships intact with each other and all of them staying at their best.*

*... They took over the reflection work at staff meetings... They used these core values pretty continuously on lots of things. If they had hit a road block in their work, they would go back to that. If they were trying to prepare for some upcoming event, or they knew they were going through a really hectic time, they would pull them out and think very strategically about what they wanted the next few weeks to look like. So [the values] were applied in some very concrete and strategic ways.*

*I think it really changed the way they operated with each other. It created this level of humanity and positive interaction that wasn't there before at quite the same level, and it actually enabled them to do more and better work with fewer staff people.*

One of the challenges of social justice work is sustaining people in their work, both individually and as an organization. Contemplative practice in the workplace helped people to have a deeper sense of connection to an organization’s mission and values. Thea Levkovitz, of The Wilderness Society, said:

*I love [our organization's] mission of protecting our wildest places, because these landscapes stir the soul and the imagination. They provide us refuge, respite, and wisdom while offering us a way to understand our role in the greater life of things. But it is also an organization that truly is working to recognize the wildness of our individual hearts as well... So we not only build more*

*and better constituencies, although that is certainly part of it, we are deepening the message of environmental protection to something that is meaningful, purposeful, and long-lasting.*

By creating a space for people to bring their “spiritual” selves into their work, staff were also able to share their passions and how their work is related to their larger purpose in life.

As the individual begins to find a deeper sense of connection to his or her *own* values, sometimes he or she discovers that those values are not in alignment with the organization’s values. Grove Burnett, of the Vallecitos Mountain Refuge, described seeing this process take place in retreats:

*There’s a power in the contemplative experience of our retreats that is transformative on a personal and a professional level. And the transformations have to do with really recognizing some essential fundamental needs that are not being met in people’s personal lives—of taking care of themselves, of acting from a deeper place of vision and insight and core values, spiritual understanding..*

*I say this as a joke sometimes, but it’s actually true—people come to Vallecitos and go home and quit their jobs (laughs). I mean, it happens, actually not that infrequently.. What it means is that they’ve had such a deep experience that they realize that they’re at a place in their lives where they need to move on.. [to] the next stage of their work in their lives that they’re supposed to be doing.. or in a setting and with an organization where those values are more congruent and they feel they’re acting from those values and*

*that place of understanding and wisdom more than they were in their previous job.*

### **Moves between cycles of action and reflection**

Contemplative Organizations place equal emphasis on doing “inner” and “outer” work, of moving back and forth between cycles of action and reflection. Wayne Muller, of the Institute for Engaged Spirituality and Bread for the Journey, spoke of helping people to live in the “membrane” between the inner and the outer world in order to effect transformation. Many other people described a similar concept and spoke of the necessity of viewing action and reflection as going “hand in hand.”

Claudia Horwitz told us that in her work with nonprofit organizations,

*We’re attempting to address an individual’s need for balance and healthy living.. but we’re not doing it in an isolated way. We’re trying to do it very*

*I think it’s contemplative practice when groups of folks who are working for a common cause come together and explicitly consider how to manifest those values on a day to day basis. That can happen through contemplative practice and, in a sense, it’s a form of contemplative practice.*

~ Claudia Horwitz,  
stone circles

*much in the context of a larger world that needs each of us to be present and participatory in its fabric.. We're looking at that link between inner health and outer health, an individual's real drive for integrity and for balance and for connection as well as the more communal and global situations in which they find themselves.*

Wayne Muller said,

*When Jesus said, "The poor you will always have with you," I think what he was saying was the work of service is never done. Even Jesus would disappear from time to time without giving his disciples any notice or telling them where he was going, or taking a pager, or moving the little "Jesus-in" button to "Jesus-out." He would just leave and the disciples would freak out because he didn't wait until everybody was healed, and the blind could all see, and the lame could all walk. He would just leave because he felt that rhythm, the heartbeat of the world in his body, where there is a time for every purpose under Heaven. There is a time for our good and necessary work and there is a time to step back, rest, and be quiet, and let the dust of our actions settle so that we can see where we are.*

### **Organizational structure reflects contemplative philosophy**

If contemplative practice contributes to the capacity to listen to others on a one-to-one basis, it also carries the potential to help listen on a larger level, to pay closer attention to the needs of clients and society. When this kind of listening becomes part of the organizational culture, the organization becomes more flexible in order to best respond to those needs. This pattern shows up both in the way Contemplative

Organizations are created and how they operate.

Frank Ostaseski told the story of the beginning of the Zen Hospice Center, during the height of the AIDS epidemic in San Francisco in the late 1980s:

*Whenever one of these patients were sick, we would sometimes bring them back to the Zen Center and then we would just take care of them. I would go down to the dining room and find monks and practitioners and say, "Come upstairs. I'm going to teach you how to take care of someone who is dying." It was a self-organizing group. I think this was the kind of quality of flexibility and receptivity which characterized the early days, and that I think to a large extent still exists.*

Even as the structure of the Zen Hospice Project became more formalized, it still held that spontaneous quality, which carried over into other settings. When the organization helped establish a hospice unit at the county hospital, it was given a basement in the back of the hospital. Frank described the atmosphere at the hospital as "very conservative, very traditional." Hospice workers brought in supplies to make a garden outside the unit and brought in nurses, doctors, and attendants to help out. Frank said, "When people have their hands in the dirt, the hierarchy tends to break down, and this was how we started to form a kind of interdisciplinary team when we began it." In the ensuing years, "We've seen contemplative practice influence this large institutional setting and help it to become a place of compassion."

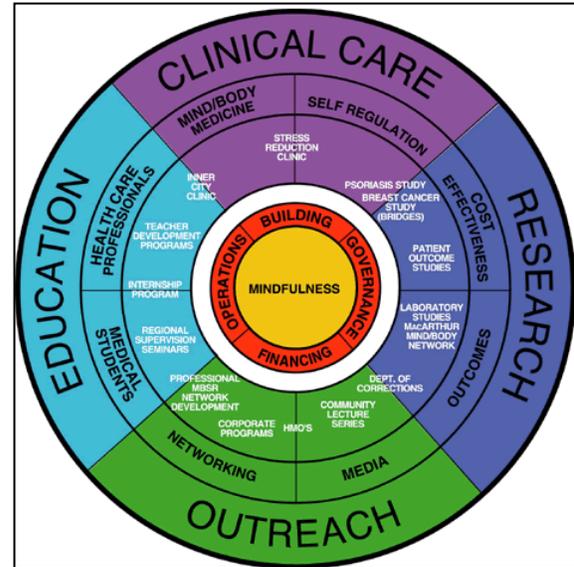
David Cooperider, a professor at the Weatherhead School of Management at Case

Western Reserve, told us how the practice of Appreciative Inquiry (AI) transformed the way one Brazilian company worked and organized itself.

*They shut down their factory and brought a thousand people together for four days to reinvent and strategically envision the future together, from every level. [They] also brought in customers. And as they did that, they deepened their awareness of their relationship to society, and the next step was to redefine their whole contribution to society. They changed their whole product line away from foods that created obesity and contributed to obesity in Brazil to foods that are based on what they found was their core capability, which was.. the ability to create health.*

*As they did that, they then changed their structures from a hierarchy to self-organizing teams, created a consciousness of all the information for everybody so everybody has access to all information and financial data.*

The organizational structure of a Contemplative Organization is sometimes visualized in a circular form rather than as a hierarchy or flowchart. One model mentioned several times by participants was that of a *mandala*, a Sanskrit word meaning “circle” or “whole.” When Bernie Glassman founded the Greyston Foundation, he envisioned it as a “circle of life” that would integrate a full range of services to address community and individual challenges. The website for the Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society notes that its organizational mandala “allows us to remember the fluid interconnectedness of the various aspects of our work and to visualize the seamless wholeness of our individual and collective endeavors” (see illustration).



Organizational mandala from The Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Healthcare, and Society

Some organizations, like the Greyston Foundation, experiment with a more flattened hierarchy. Charles Lief said, “It is an opportunity for folks to feel that they are in an organization where their own set of experiences, insights, and issues can actually be welcomed and heard.” He noted, though, that not everybody is comfortable with this arrangement: “There are certainly people that only relate well in a much more vertically hierarchical organization.”

### Balances process with product

Contemplative Organizations tend to place a high value on the process with which they work, with a level of non-attachment to outcome that might be considered quite unusual in other kinds of organizations. Participants repeatedly told us that the way in which they worked toward their goals was equally as, and sometimes more, important than the achievement of the goal.

Meg Wheatley said that one of the great learnings for her and the staff at the Berkana

Institute has been to live “in that constant state of finding out that things do happen, resources become available, and none of it’s according to our plans or projections.” When Berkana started, she had the sense that they had three years to “turn the world” around and get into as many communities as they could. She said,

*I don't know if we're going to save the world anymore, but we've certainly been tempered to slow down and just work with the people who appear, who present themselves.. Whether it does all come to pass in time enough to correct this destructive path we're on as a planet, as a nation, I don't know any longer. I'm not hopeful, but I've given up needing to be hopeful in order to do the work.*

Michael Lerner said of his organization,

*We see Commonweal not as an institution, but as an instrument of human service, as a platform for some useful work. The difference is that in an institution, everybody is busy trying to pump it up. An instrument you use while it is worthwhile and if it gets worn out, you just lay it down..it just is something you use until it is worn out and then you recycle it or put it down and throw it away. So Commonweal is just here for as long as it is useful.*

Thea Levkovitz of The Wilderness Society said,

*Are we trying to change behavior or are we trying to change people's minds, their hearts? I would say that we're not trying to change anything. My approach is that we're trying to awaken what's already present. It's presumptuous to think we can change people's hearts and minds. However, we can provide opportunities*

*for them to make a step toward that change.*

Paradoxically, paying primary attention to the process may support the “product.” Kazuaki Tanahashi told us that meditative practice often emphasizes “non-gaining” and “non-attaining,” and that meditation simply for the sake of meditation and creating art for the sake of exploration is vital. He said, “Ironically, this nurtures one’s creation of art enormously. The practice of non-doing unfolds doing.” Nancy Eggert related that when staff at the Shalem Institute gather three times a day for contemplative practice, it is

*a time to be completely non-utilitarian, to do something absolutely useless. It's not to help us work better. It's not to build teamwork. It's just to be in the presence of the One who loves us.*

### **Voluntary vs mandatory?**

Are staff or participants required to take part in group contemplative practices? The answer from our research participants was yes.. and no. Charles Lief said that the practices used at Greyston are mandatory, in the sense that everyone is expected to observe silence during the moments of quiet at a meeting’s start – but they are also voluntary in that nobody is told *how* they should be using those moments. For example, if managers feel that a council circle process is the most productive form for a meeting to deal with “thorny issues,” people are expected to be present for it but they can choose to not speak. Charles said,

*They are engaged in the sense that we are paying them to sit in the room, but how they interact is still a very personal [choice], and I think we are fairly*

*nonjudgmental about it (although I'm not sure we are always nonjudgmental).*

## **Organizational Challenges**

In the process of implementing a contemplative approach into their work, organizations face a number of challenges. The core challenge is helping the general public, the foundation world, and activists themselves to better understand the nature of contemplative practice and the qualitative difference in the impact of work done from this approach.

### **Staying true to contemplative values in the midst of a non-contemplative culture**

On the largest level, organizations have to deal with the reality that American culture undervalues the essential elements of contemplative awareness: slowing down, quieting the mind, introspection, *not* always taking action. This same undervaluing goes on within organizations as well. Claudia Horwitz of stone circles told us:

*Ultimately, one of the greatest challenges is: How do you shift culture inside an institution or an organization that is already very rooted in a certain way of doing things or a certain set of norms? People can get very frustrated trying to do this in an organizational or institutional context.*

Arrington Chambliss observed that American culture is “busy, crazy, and seductive.” People need “ways and practices to connect with themselves and with one another and with their community” in order to counteract the forces that “keep us feeling disconnected from our humanity and our goodness.”

In her organization, No Ordinary Time, she feels the challenge is

*keeping it real, keeping integrity in our work and not letting the task run the organization but letting the relationships run the organization. I think the contemplative practice clears that away.. Where I get crazy sometimes is feeling like I have 15 things to do, so I won't really connect with somebody, so I won't spend the time to connect with someone that I'm working with, and that's critical to our success. It's changing the way we do business, and I think that's hard because the culture.. teaches us a different way. But I feel like that's what we're trying to do and so we're constantly going against the wave or the grain.*

### **Belief that religion and spirituality is a private matter**

Interviewees said many people told them that religion and spirituality were beneficial to their lives, but they thought of them, in Ed Sarath's words, as a “different kind of compartment” from their work lives. Often, the most visible example of making one's spiritual beliefs public comes from people with a fundamentalist religious orientation, so sharing one's beliefs is sometimes equated with proselytizing.

One key to overcoming resistance was having people in leadership roles take part in contemplative practices, thus modeling it for the rest of the organization. At the Trust for Public Land, a critical turning point came when the leader of the organization participated in the practices. Peter Forbes said,

*Our president has been to every single retreat by his own choice, so that has a huge effect on people to see our*

*president taking a week out of every year. It personalizes it and professionalizes it. He's the first one on the [yoga] mat every morning. That has a huge impact.*

### **Resistance and suspicion**

Interviewees encountered a good deal of resistance and suspicion from people who have misconceptions about contemplative practices, and meditation in particular. Even though Christianity has a long history of contemplative practices, Father Thomas Keating pointed out that many of these practices have been lost and Christians are often unfamiliar with them. They may think of contemplative practices as too “Eastern” or strange, or something reserved only for monastics. The old adage that “an idle mind is the devil’s playground” also feeds into the notion held by some Christians that meditation is the “work of the devil.”

Sometimes suspicion turns into outright hostility. Marcelle Martin, a Quaker, told a story about holding a peace vigil near the Liberty Bell in Philadelphia shortly after September 11, 2001. As she and other members of the Religious Society of Friends stood in quiet prayer, she heard one father tell his children that “it’s because of people like this that September 11 happened.”

Resistance is a challenge especially germane to those who work in education and are mandated to keep religion or spirituality separate from their work. Linda Stout told of a woman in one of the Spirit in Action circles who is a counselor in a public school. Though she can’t bring in anything that seems to carry religious connotations, she does light a candle when she meets with students and asks them to think about what their intention is for the meeting.

### **Time**

Because of the distinction so often made between spiritual life and work life, contemplative practices may be seen as extraneous to “real work.” This is true of both the general public and social activists. For many activists, the idea of doing “inner work” is seen as taking up time that could be better spent doing the “front line” work. Phrases that our interviewees heard from activists they worked with included, “We don’t have time for this,” and “We just need to get to the work at hand.”

Finding the time to practice together as an organization is also a challenge. Many interviewees told us that their staff is often so busy that it is difficult to come together for meditation. Saki Santorelli said, “Lots to do’ is always the challenge, because [practice] requires stopping, on purpose, and saying there are lots of things to do, but for the moment, we’ve got to bracket it because this is also important. And that’s not easy.”

### **Funding**

Nearly everyone spoke of the challenge of having enough financial resources to build the infrastructure of their organizations so that staff could do their work in a more mindful way. Many interviewees said that their organizations have grown, sometimes “too quickly.” There has been a significant increase in demand for this kind of work, especially since September 11, but the resources haven’t increased and staffing is often stretched to the limit. This was related to the challenge of “not enough time,” and the increased pressure to do more work with less people often made it seem even more difficult to find time to come together for contemplative practice.

Opportunities for funding are limited. Even with efforts to secularize contemplative practices, the use of these practices is often still considered “religious,” which may exclude organizations from eligibility for certain grants. There is also a kind of Catch-22: many programs are chronically underfunded and need to raise more money, but they don’t have enough money to hire a professional grantwriter, and the current staff is usually too busy to address fundraising.

The kind of change that a contemplative approach helps to support tends to be profound but subtle, and takes a longer time to manifest. Because of this, it can be difficult to convince funders to make a long-term investment in shifting the culture and creating sustainable change. Some organizations have also had difficulty getting money once they begin to more explicitly incorporate contemplative practices into their work (Leah Wise, of the Southeast Regional Economic Justice). In these cases, funders sometimes have the mistaken impression that the organization’s focus is peripheral to social justice work.

## Media

The media can play a crucial role in conveying the story of contemplative practices integrated into secular society. When effectively told, these stories can generate much interest and support for this kind of work. However, many journalists are unfamiliar with religious and spiritual topics in general, and contemplative practices in particular. Corinne McLaughlin related an article in the *Washington Post* that described Christian groups who sat in circles to pray and share with one another as “New Age,” a description that deeply upset participants, who felt it was inaccurate.

Some of the research participants thought that the media also has a responsibility to convey the complexity of issues that many social justice organizations deal with—a responsibility that it hasn’t met. Fleet Maull notes that the “demonization” of prisoners has been a core message of the media. There is also a certain depth of conversation that has been lacking. Marianne Williamson said,

*Often there’s a shallow conversation in the media or TV, at the movies, in the school.. this is a deep conversation that we’re trying to allow to emerge.. Societally and culturally, that is a big challenge to get on the media to have this conversation.*

Daniel Goleman (1994) ventured that a “contemplative journalism” would be

*a completely open, spacious inquiry into a state of affairs, free of prior commitment to any point of view.. Such a deeply reflective look at events could produce a very different version of “news.” The contemplative journalist might notice key relationships and changes that are typically beneath our everyday threshold for perception.*

Some interviewees worked directly with these challenges by building relationships with the press in order to provide them with accurate information about meditation and other contemplative practices. Corinne McLaughlin said, “There’s a lot of work we need to do to take the time to form these relationships, even before they’re thinking of doing a story, to just educate them about all of this.”

Over the past few years, there have been several efforts to support media professionals. At Spirit in Action, a network of media activists was started to educate and support

these professionals. In 1998, the Center for Contemplative Mind in Society developed a retreat with the Fetzer Institute for 25 members of the mainstream media, including the *New York Times*, the *Wall Street Journal*, the major networks, and others, to reflect on the relationship between their inner lives and their craft. Joan Konner, Professor and Dean Emerita at Columbia Graduate School of Journalism, said of the meeting:

*How do we keep from being discouraged by a journalism that even for the best is becoming in some dominant stories the amoral equivalent of war? The message of this four-day weekend pointed a direction – by connecting our inner selves with our outer work, by returning to our origins, our passions, and our ideals, to creative, constructive participation in our lives and times, including the search for answers to these many questions.*

### **Organizational development issues**

In addition to challenges that were related to the use of contemplative practices, organizations faced development issues including growth, power dynamics, and diversity. While these issues don't at first seem to have much to do with contemplative practices, interviewees often considered their implications from a framework of contemplative awareness and interconnection. Cathy Howell, who works with the AFL-CIO, pondered,

*How do you build a multi-racial organization that truly has power sharing between white folks and people of color, men and women, that also holds white people and men in it? Because so often when organizations become heavily female, or heavily folks of color, the white people or the men bail out and go do their own thing, or just don't see it as*

*"theirs"... How do we build something that is truly multi-racial, multi-age, gay/straight.. immigrant/native.. How do you really do that in a way that people all feel some ownership of the organization?*

Organizations sometimes found themselves dealing with the paradox of success: growth can lead to a whole new set of challenges. Simon Greer, of Jobs with Justice, said,

*There are more critiques to give, people start to notice more, and also more tension within about what are the internal contradictions to how we organize this work, and more struggles around power and decision-making internally.*

Research participants in organizations that are in this stage grappled with how to build an infrastructure that could support growth in a mindful way.

## 6. TEACHING CONTEMPLATIVE PRACTICES

*People understand the words differently.  
There are so many trigger words in this.  
And so this has been part our efforts -  
to strive to help people get at the essence of spirituality  
without the trappings of religion.*

—Leah Wise, Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network

### KEY FINDINGS

- Research participants stressed the importance of making contemplative practices accessible to a wide audience and “meeting people where they’re at.”
- Language is strategically used to enable practices to be introduced into sectors such as education and business.
- Contemplative practice may be viewed along a spectrum: On one end it is useful as a technique for improving physical and emotional well-being; on the other it has the potential to be a vehicle of change and transformation.
- A trend was identified toward not explicitly naming the religious or ethical frameworks, but rather cultivating an environment in which people could discover their own ethical values, as these values emerged through contemplative practice.
- A number of organizations met the challenge of teaching in secular settings by creating their own ethical guidelines.

## 6. Teaching Contemplative Practices

What kinds of issues arise when contemplative practices are introduced into a work setting? How are these practices actually used with the organization's customers, constituents, and employees? Are they taught in the context of the religious or ethical traditions from which they originated? How are ethical implications addressed, if they are? This section looks at how research participants have dealt with these questions.

### **"Meeting People Where They're At"**

In the process of teaching contemplative practices to their constituents, interviewees stressed the importance of "meeting people where they're at." They pay great attention to the language and framework in which practices are presented to make them accessible to as many as possible. There was a strong commitment to being non-judgmental and respectful about diverse approaches to spirituality (and to non-spirituality).

Interviewees are eminently flexible when it comes to choosing the appropriate practice for the appropriate setting. Gary Cohen, of Healthcare Without Harm, said that he is especially sensitive to how different groups respond to practices that focus on silence: "Some people don't do silence. There are different cultural issues that come up, and you've just got to be sensitive to those things." Linda Stout, from Spirit in Action, said,

*What we try to create in our circles is that everyone brings in spirit in the way that they understand it.. We had a couple of circles that were very much more contemplative and used meditation. For*

*some people, that was a put-off, particularly when you start bringing in a lot of people of color and low-income people who may have different experiences of the way they practice spirit. We're trying to figure out how you create a space that allows for all the different ways of coming in or connecting to be present.*

Many interviewees were clear that it was more important for people to be touched by the heart of contemplative practice than it was for them to "get it right." Soren Gordhamer of the Lineage Project offered this story about a young man who attended a class for inmates:

*A guy named Michael was in for a gang-related murder and used to come to the classes. But during the yoga, he would never really do the yoga very much. During the meditation, he would just kind of look around. He wasn't very involved. But afterwards he gave me a big hug and always thanked me.*

*Over the weeks I started to get frustrated with him. Like, "Why do you show up to class if you're not interested in practicing?" And then one day it hit me: he didn't come for the meditation or the yoga—he came for the hug.*

*... If you never formally sit and close your eyes and meditate, but [if] you're creating a space that supports people where compassion can come forward and where they feel accepted, that is actually more the central issue, and really maybe the heart of contemplative practice.*

Interviewees often described using ceremonies or rituals in group settings, but these were

freely adapted and many times created spontaneously by the participants to allow people to honor their own traditions and cultural roots.

### Language

A number of research studies and essays have explored the difference between the words “religion” and “spirituality” (Fetzer Institute/National Institute of Aging 1999, p. 2), with the general distinction that spirituality is the more all-encompassing and less excluding term.

One of the most striking findings of our interviews is that a number of interviewees find even the term “spiritual” to be constraining in certain sectors and settings. Linda Stout, of Spirit in Action, told about an exercise she did with a group of media professionals:

*We did a lot of attention and focus on what I would call spirit, even though we didn't use the word. [We asked] people to bring in an item that had meaning, that was representative of what inspired them to do this work. So even though we didn't use the word 'spirit,' we have had people each telling their personal source of inspiration.. It was absolutely astounding, breathtaking what happened with this group of people..*

Robert Gass said the language he uses

*is probably more in the world of simply being human beings rather than the world of spirituality. In fact, I make a great effort to use very everyday commonsense language, which is why I continually have people at the end of these say, “You know for ten years or twenty years, I've been totally turned off to do anything spiritual.” And all of a sudden I get - “This helps our life so much.” I'm deeply*

*committed to a spiritual path, but I'm not wedded to the words of spirituality. It's the thing itself.. it's not the words.*

Interviewees made strategic decisions to use different words or terms to help them to bring the practices into the sector in which they worked. These phrases functioned like code words, allowing entry into settings where there might be resistance to contemplative practices. For example, Rachael Kessler, working in education, uses the phrase “strategies for learning readiness” rather than “contemplative practices” to describe the practices she teaches her students to increase their ability to concentrate, pay attention, and listen. To make these practices more palatable in the business sector, Joe D'Arrigo uses the term “writing exercises” rather than “journaling” and “stretching” rather than “yoga.” A number of interviewees used the word “tools” rather than “contemplative practices.”

A number of the organizations included in our study are grounded in a multifaith approach. These organizations have made numerous efforts to adapt their language so that people of different faith traditions would feel comfortable doing contemplative practices together. Pat Harbour told us that she chose the name of her organization, Healing the Heart of Diversity, in response to this challenge because she realized that what was really being healed was the heart. Other organizations have similarly turned to more “heart-based” language to convey spiritual and contemplative principles.

Eugene Callender told us that when he attends political and activist meetings,

*I never use the name of God in those meetings. But if I can talk in terms of love and wisdom and understanding and*

*make a contribution and move this thing along in a healthy way, God is using me. That is the result of staying in the flow. The contemplative mind is the mind that is in the flow.*

A number of the interviewees had no hesitation in using language rooted in a religious and spiritual context. Meg Wheatley said,

*As the world has grown more accepting of even speaking the words of spirit, soul, love, wholeness, that's created more room for us. And then also I have to say that as I get older, I'm just clearer about what's important and so I can become the voice for it rather than having to wait for someone's approval of it.*

### **Ethical/Religious context**

We were interested in finding out if research participants provided any religious, cultural, or ethical context when they taught contemplative practices.

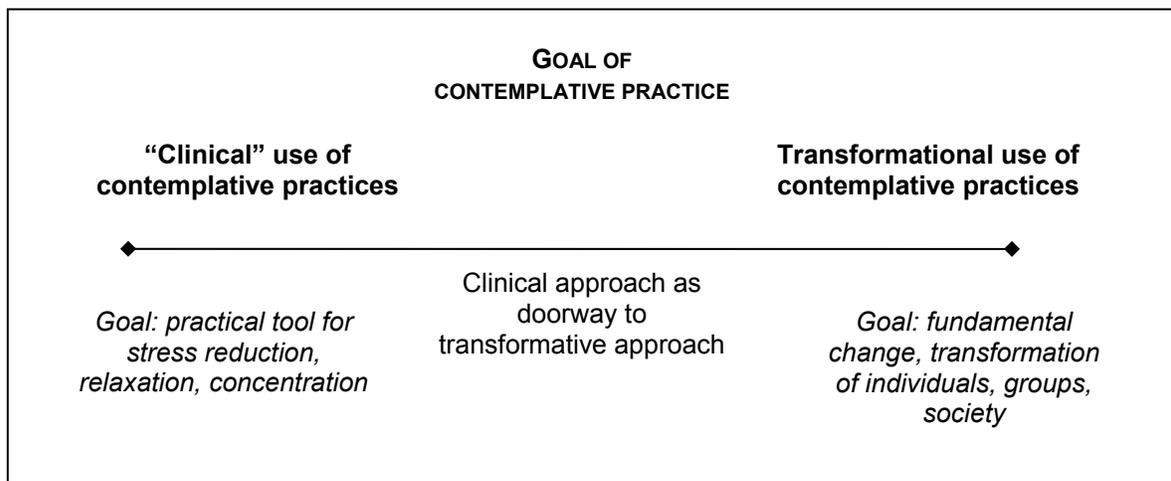
We found almost as many answers to this as we had interviewees. Their answers were related to their viewpoint about the primary function of contemplative practices and the goals they were working toward (see graph below.). At one end of the scale, contemplative practice is seen primarily as a

practical tool or technique that can aid in stress reduction and enhance relaxation. On the other end, contemplative practice is seen as having the potential to be part of a process of fundamental change and transformation.

Some of our interviewees described the left end of the scale as the “clinical” use of contemplative practice. Very few of the research participants fall exclusively on this end. One who does is Dr. Herbert Benson, author of the seminal book *The Relaxation Response* and founder of the Mind/Body Medical Institute, where contemplative practice is literally used as a clinical intervention. Dr. Benson’s work focuses solely on the physiological benefits that are brought about through contemplative practices. Dr. Benson said, “Eliciting the relaxation response is the cornerstone of the institute.. We are looking at these fundamental aspects of different contemplative practices and utilizing them for health and well-being.”

At the other end of the scale, interviewees made it clear that they saw contemplative practices as far more than a technique. Father Pat Eastman, of the Monos Foundation, said,

*Contemplative practice is much more than just what you might do 30 minutes a*



*day. It's a whole orientation of one's whole life.. We can't have a commitment to nonviolent practice in prayer and then be violent or oriented to violence in the rest of [our] life, so the ethical implications that flow from the practice certainly are things that I will indicate.*

Grove Burnett, of Vallecitos, said he sees contemplative practices as

*a vehicle to look at some of the deeper, really spiritual and religious questions, and moral questions and ethical questions. What is the moral foundation of our work? Is anger appropriate as a tool for change?... There is a deeper level of practice in contemplative awareness and meditation below stress reduction, balance, and it has to do with freedom and liberation and a deeper understanding of our reality and our lives and our relationship to the world.*

Where people fall on the scale is a good indicator of how explicit they will be in naming spiritual or religious traditions from which contemplative practices originate or providing an ethical framework when teaching these practices.

Those who see contemplative practices as useful primarily in the clinical sense usually do not provide any ethical or religious framework. For them, the highest priority is for clients to feel comfortable learning the technique and they do not want to create “boundaries” or “walls” that would inhibit people from participating or that make them feel like they’re being “preached to.”

Those who see contemplative practice as a transformative vehicle are usually explicit in naming the spiritual or religious roots of

these practices and in providing some ethical context for the teachings.

For those who work within the Religious/Spiritual Communities sector and have an audience that is already part of a certain faith tradition, it's a natural choice to teach practices within the context of that tradition (i.e., Father Thomas Keating offering centering prayer along with other Christian teachings).

But a number of other interviewees working in secular settings also felt very strongly that a moral/ethical framework should be included and, in fact, had reservations about teaching contemplative practices *without* it. Gary Cohen of Healthcare Without Harm said,

*You can get people, very important people in varying positions of great power, learning how to meditate or learning contemplative practice. But if it's not linked to issues of justice and ecology, then there's a disconnect.. the question is, can the change be translated into organizational life, social life?*

Some who decided to include the religious/ethical background did so because they placed importance on giving credit to the people or tradition from where a practice came, so as not to be, in Wayne Muller's words, “spiritually imperialist.”

### **Contemplative Practice as a Doorway to Transformation**

Only a few of the research participants subscribed exclusively to the “clinical” philosophy. A larger number fell on the “transformative” end of the scale. But the majority of the interviewees cluster in the mid-range of the scale. They frequently talk about introducing contemplative practices in

a “clinical” context, but keeping open the possibility that the practices can serve as an entry or doorway to transformation. These teachers skillfully navigate between explicit and implicit references to ethics and spirituality, depending on the needs of their audience.

Robert Gass takes a pragmatic approach:

*I don't teach [contemplative practice] from an ethical standpoint, I teach it from a practical standpoint.. [people] come towards it not out of any ethical reason or desire to be a spiritual seeker. They come because if they've been around, they know that they can't continue working this way, they have to find a better way of doing activism.. it's very practical.*

Some, like Grove Burnett, began teaching from the clinical approach, but then took a leap and began to introduce an ethical dimension in the teachings. We asked if he encountered any resistance. Grove replied,

*The resistance was within me, because I was afraid that it would come across too dogmatic or.. too religious. But to the contrary, as with all of us, there is inside that deeper longing to address those questions. So instead of resistance, we've found people who go, "Oh, wow, that's amazing, what does that mean? What do you mean by freedom, liberation?" And that might lead to a discussion of it from the Buddhist context, or as Thomas Merton talks about it.*

### **Emergent ethical frameworks**

Perhaps the most interesting finding was a trend toward not explicitly naming the religious traditions from which practices originated or the ethical framework that accompanies them, but rather cultivating an

environment in which people could discover and articulate their own ethical values, as those values emerged from doing the practices.

Especially in secular settings, organizations often deal with diverse groups, ranging the spectrum of ethnicity, race, and religion (and non-religion). When this is the case, more neutral ways of presenting practices are chosen in an effort to create, as Claudia Horwitz said, “the space and the field for people to bring their own origins.” Claudia gave us some examples:

*If I'm going to be doing a workshop for a group of service providers who are doing work around child abuse in North Carolina, I know that a very large percentage of them are going to be Christian. In that case.. I might use Christian scripture and I would also draw something specifically from Judaism, to give voice to the margin. Then I would also explicitly try to introduce them to meditation and I would say a little bit about Buddhism, because I think it might be something new for a lot of people. In other settings where I know that it's going to be a very diverse group with respect to ethnic, spiritual, religious, and even geographic background.. then I tend to choose things that are a little more neutral like silence and writing.*

Some interviewees explained that while they may not explicitly name religious or ethical principles in their teaching, they do focus on the elements of mindfulness and awareness in relation to the person's daily experience. They encourage the person into an ongoing conversation about what that dynamic is like, how it might be changing the person's view on their emotions, anger, goals, etc.

This approach changes the locus of control from an external set of rules to a more internally directed sense of ethics. One of the best examples of this philosophy is embodied by the University of Massachusetts' Center for Mindfulness in Medicine, Health Care and Society. The Center teaches patients mindfulness-based practices to reduce stress. But often, something more happens. Saki Santorelli said:

*My own experience is that via the practice, people begin to touch the ethical dimension of practice.. people often report that the practice itself leads them into seeing themselves so much more clearly that their capacity to understand other human beings, to be less reactive, to be less judgmental, to be more patient or tolerant, to be more compassionate, seems to arise out of the directness of experience rather than some pre-established coda.*

### **Creating new ethical guidelines**

Organizations that place importance on accessibility to people from different faith traditions (or no religious affiliation) but still want to offer ethical framework sometimes create their own ethical code or principles. Leah Wise, of the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network, said, "We have developed our own moral and ethical principles and values.. as a team, we created a kind of medicine wheel that was how we understood the integration of what each person brought."

*I believe that character and action, right behavior, [and] the will to do no harm emerge from compassion. Compassion emerges from experiences of being deeply connected to other people, especially to people who are profoundly different from you that you would have otherwise shut out in some way. So a lot of our work is about creating that loop.*

~ Rachael Kessler,  
Passageways

These principles may originally have been based in a certain religious tradition but the organization has re-worded them in such a way that they do not explicitly refer to that tradition. Alternately, the principles might be synthesized from a number of faith traditions and cultures (i.e., Arrien's four-fold path). These principles become the guiding focus of the organization and the context within which contemplative practices are presented (see table of examples on next page).

## The New Secular Ethical Guidelines

### **Greyston Mandala** (Charles Lief)

#### *Three Generic Spiritual Attitudes*

- *Deep attention* that dissolves preconceptions in order to see situations as they truly are
- *Exchanging self and others* as a way to bear witness to the suffering and pain of others while offering the benefit of one's own health and strength
- *Compassionate action* as a skillful way to relieve suffering and promote growth

### **Foundation for Cross-Cultural Education and Research** (Angeles Arrien)

#### *The Four-fold Way*

- Show up, be visible and empower others through example and intention
- Pay attention to what has heart and meaning and to access the human resource of love
- Tell the truth without blame or judgment
- Be open to outcome rather than attached to outcome

### **Peacemaker Community** (Bernie Glassman)

#### *Three Tenets*

1. Not-knowing, thereby giving up fixed ideas about ourselves and the universe
2. Bearing witness to the joy and suffering of the world
3. Loving action toward ourselves and others

#### *Four Commitments*

1. I commit myself to a culture of nonviolence and reverence for life
2. I commit myself to a culture of solidarity and a just economic order
3. I commit myself to a culture of tolerance and a life based on truthfulness
4. I commit myself to a culture of equal rights and partnership between men and women

## 7. THE BROADER MOVEMENT

*There is a huge global movement towards fostering meaning, character development, and the reclamation of the authentic self through deep connection to the unseen world and silence. I call it a “quiet big movement,” and I think just after September 11, we can see how, collectively, that power can light the world.*

—Angeles Arrien, Foundation for Cross-Cultural Education & Research

### KEY FINDINGS:

- The majority of participants agree that they are part of a broader movement to integrate contemplative practice into societal transformation.
- Many sense increasing “spiritual hunger” in the U.S., especially after the events of September 11, 2001.
- A number of participants said that while they recognize the signs of change in popular culture, they don’t see change in their daily work and they feel isolated.
- Research participants engage in networking to increase the effectiveness of their work and receive support.
- Participants noted a disparity in access to contemplative practices between economic classes and racial groups.

## 7. The Broader Movement

A number of our interviewees talked about the larger shift happening in society; some referred to Paul Ray's study (1996) and his use of the term "Cultural Creatives." Others set the historical context much further back in history; Lorain Fox Davis noted that for many centuries, Native peoples have prophesied a time when the earth would be poisoned and people would finally begin to return to the teachings on the web of life.

Marianne Williamson, founder of the Global Renaissance Alliance, gave a more recent historical context:

*In the United States over the last 30 years, there has been, in my mind, a very unfortunate separation of the sensibility of spirit and the sensibility of politics. The 1960s was the last time we really thought of using politics as a container for our higher philosophical ideals.. Contemplatives [are now realizing] that we do need to address human suffering and that nothing, particularly spiritual practice, is ever a justification for ignoring it.. Political activists are realizing that there is an inner dimension to the problems.. In the last year, we feel that the spiritual/political conversation in the United States has really begun to mature.*

Angeles Arrien used the phrase "the quiet big movement" to describe what she saw as the growing momentum toward integrating spirit and action. The majority of the people we spoke with enthusiastically agreed that there is a broader movement and that they feel part of it. Other metaphors that were used were "the snowball effect" (Fred Rooney) and "hundredth monkey syndrome" (Marian David, Sue Turley).

The events of September 11, 2001 were also mentioned as a wake-up bell and a catalyst for bringing contemplative practices into the forefront of our society. Ed Sarath said,

*As events have forced us to wake up a little bit, I think these kinds of practices will be increasingly regarded as something that's critical to leadership, progress, and even survival. I feel a kinship and an affinity with practitioners, as we are all part of a movement.*

Meg Wheatley told us,

*Increasingly, [I] believe that you can't survive these days without contemplative practice and more and more people actually know that and I speak about it often. When I'm speaking about leadership, I will just encourage the audience to, whatever your form of finding peace is, just to make sure that you really focus on that as your way of being able to deal with this world. People are so much more ready to hear that now than ever before.. it's actually been one of the gifts of September 11th, the opening to the really deep questions of life.*

But several interviewees commented that their understanding of the movement was more intellectual than personal, and used words like "alone" and "isolated" to describe how they felt in relation to their efforts to bring contemplative practice into work. Some, like Leah Wise of the Southeast Regional Economic Justice Network, have felt their organization's ability to survive threatened because some funders didn't "see us as relevant anymore" when they brought spirituality into their social justice work.





















































