

Getting Over Ourselves

A Handbook for Spiritual Healing of White Racism



Vajra Kilgour

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Griobh



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For everyone

*What draws you now will lead you further,
and as it draws you to itself,
what pleasure your suffering becomes!
Its fires are like water,
do not tense your face.*

Jelaluddin Rumi

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Introduction

After Malcolm X returned from a transformative pilgrimage to Mecca as El-Hajj Malik El-Shabazz and founded the Organization of African Unity, he shared his new understanding that the enemy is White racism, not White people. When well-meaning White people then began to feel free to approach him and ask what they could do to help, he counseled working in their own communities, with other White people. I can't speak for anyone else, but my own immediate reaction upon learning of this was, "Noooo! White people nooooo! Pleeeeze not White people! They're such a royal pain!"

But then, some years ago, I was made an offer I couldn't refuse to work with at least one White person—myself—when I had a vision during a spiritual gathering in which I was told that what I needed to do was eradicate every vestige of White racism from my being. In the moment, I was too stunned to talk back, but upon reflection I could think of things. *What are you talking about?! Me racist?! Get out of here!* I was living happily in what was then a majority-Black neighborhood (now gentrified, and not for the better), in a majority-Black building (ditto). Not only do I to this day know so many Black people that I have wonderful Black friends and lots of Black acquaintances, including people I work with in various areas, but also I even have enemies who are Black, which has to count for something—*Who are you calling having vestiges of White racism?* Also, I was reading James Baldwin and marching for civil rights from the time I was thirteen years old, so seriously, *what are you even talking about?!*

But then ... if someone who went to a better world a long time ago has gone to all the trouble to appear in a vision and tell me I'd better do something, I figure I should at least give it a shot. I felt totally innocent of conscious White racism, so if there was White racism anywhere in my being, it was buried somewhere where I wasn't conscious of it, and as Spalding Gray so wisely said, I don't know my subconscious because it's subconscious. What to do?

Not having any other clues, I began with prayer, and as prayer will do, it worked. Every day when I sat down for my morning meditation, I prayed for every vestige of racism to be uprooted from my being, and lo and behold, all kinds of unconscious stuff began to bubble up to the surface as I sat in a meditative state, all of it supremely embarrassing. Get out of here—I thought that? I believed *that*? And how could I possibly have imagined *that*? Whoever said that the truth will set you free, but first it will embarrass you, was exactly right.

Eventually, I learned other practices for uprooting White racism from its unconscious hidey-holes, and after trying them all out on myself and a brave friend and finding them good, I thought I could design a workshop, to pass these wonderful healing practices along. But then the facilitator of a workshop about how to design and put on workshops told me, "You have to do a needs assessment! You have to know what are the needs of your constituency, and you have to do a needs assessment!" So I went away and thought about that, and soon came to the conclusion that in all likelihood the greatest need of the constituency for a workshop about spiritual healing of White racism was the need to be perceived as *not needing this workshop*.

Which explains why a lot of questions and objections that our beloved fellow human beings are so prone to raise are taking up such a large chunk of this book.

I had thought that the Sufi order I belonged to would be the perfect laboratory for healing White racism, because it was such a very White group, but there seemed to be some confusion about “sensitivity training,” and enthusiasm for exploring healing was not in large supply. I wound up developing the workshop by myself, and offered it once, for free. Four people showed up, all of them friends of mine who wanted to give me moral support. And although I had said over and over, “It’s healing! It’s supposed to make you feel better!”, some of them were surprised that it actually did make them feel better, and that it wasn’t a “heavy-duty encounter-group thing,” as one of them put it. They did feel better, and they found it tremendously helpful in their daily lives. They talked it up in our spiritual circles. It went nowhere.

I do understand that the fear of being outed as a White racist, and then left stranded on the bitter ice floe of a terrible self-knowledge without a remedy in sight, could be supremely difficult to surmount, no matter how much anyone might insist that it’s all remedies, all the time. It is all remedies, all the time—and they work—and it is healing, and it does make you feel better.

I’m putting it down in writing now, as best I can, just in case anyone may wish to try some DIY healing or design their own workshop—for free, please, and after trying out the practices you offer on yourself and finding them good.

This is also a love letter of sorts, to all the spiritual teachers, friends, and companions on my braided spiritual path—which besides a Sufi path includes shamanic practices, Santería, and Al-Anon—who have helped and hindered me along the way. Decades ago, during an individual retreat guided by a Sufi teacher, I found myself thinking, “These people have saved my life. They have *saved my life*.” So this is both giving back and paying it forward. I frequently quote Hazrat Inayat Khan, who brought the message of Sufism to the West and founded what is now the Inayatiyya Order, because I’m most familiar with his teachings. Any reader can no doubt refer to the teachings of any number of spiritual teachers for equally helpful guiding wisdom.

And while this little book principally addresses White people on a spiritual path, I hope that everyone may find it helpful for healing from the impact of White racism, whether shared, internalized, or experienced within groups of people of color in the form of colorism or the temptation to align with White racism in the hope that it might be of some personal advantage. We’re all in this together.

In fact, early on it occurred to me that for those who are not yet on a spiritual path, and those who are deeply ensnared in fear and hatred, spiritual healing techniques may be just what the doctor ordered. We cannot dehumanize other people without first sacrificing our own humanity. The impulse there, as we have seen, is so often—and always with utterly disastrous results—to try to get rid of the feared and hated people. *The people are not the enemy*. The fear, the hatred, the self-righteousness are the enemy—and they’re infinitely easier to get rid of. Those who long for civil war or a genocide, because they believe that this time they’ll win and then they’ll be happy, can really only find peace, and happiness, in themselves. All hatred is ultimately self-hatred.

A number of things have changed since I first dreamed up that workshop. For one thing, fewer White people are asking, “Wasn’t that all solved by the Civil Rights Movement?” For another, and this is big, back then most of the practices I was including in the workshop were proprietary, esoteric, and kept under wraps. People didn’t want to share, especially if they were making money from them; at the very least, you’d have to attend a pricey workshop to learn one

or two here or there. Now they're all over the Internet, and in all kinds of books, and it's more like the scene in the Lenny Henry BBC comedy series *Chef!* in which the chief chef, played by Henry, after spending his day off perfecting a salmon mousse, has arrived triumphantly at work the next day with his culinary masterpiece. The second chef very naturally asks, "Will you show me how it's done?" The answer, of course, is "No," and after a bit of back and forth, the chef declares, "There is no one on this planet I will tell! When I die, that mousse dies with me!" And then a moment later, when he starts to rush off for a key ingredient for something else, the second chef asks, "What about the salmon mousse?", and the chef says, "Oh, you could do that—I'll show you how it's done."

This book aims to be along the lines of "Oh, you could do that—I'll show you how it's done." It loosely follows the structure of the workshop I designed all those years ago, with a few additions, and the advantage that you can skip around and find what works best for you, or be inspired to come up with something new—you don't have to drop everything and not go a page farther until after you've completed a practice. You can read straight through without stopping to try a thing, and then decide where you want to go from there, which might even be a practice that isn't included here. You can take your time assimilating new insights before moving on from one practice to another, which might be better for some than a weekend workshop; we are, after all, organic beings, and we grow organically, over time. I've described some of what has come up for me in the course of doing this work, to make it clear that I'm not being theoretical here: as Don Durito de la Lacandona so wisely said, the problem with reality is that it doesn't know anything about theories. My experiences may be helpful, though not necessarily a guide for everyone: everyone is different, spiritual work is experiential, and the only spiritual experience that is valid for you is your own.

Some of these practices work quickly, while others may take you one related insight at a time. Years ago, at a workshop on shamanic practices, one of the facilitators noted that although in many times and places a shaman might spend days drumming or under the influence of a plant substance in order to make a shamanic journey, nowadays we may journey for a matter of minutes. "The spirits seem to know that we're in a hurry," he said. This is true: we are. Very few of us have a whole other lifetime to spend undoing a lifetime of conditioning. We don't have a whole lot of time to get over ourselves if we want to survive and live well in this world. And while this little book may be just a start, we have to start somewhere.

A note on usage:

As you've seen, I've uppercased "White" when referring to the arbitrarily defined group of people arbitrarily defined as "White," except when quoting other people. This is because lower-casing "white" when everyone else is upper-cased or vice versa makes White people seem special, the very thing White people have been told from babyhood we are, with notoriously bad results. From one point of view, we might say that White people have a difficulty with understanding that any other arbitrarily defined group of people is just another bunch of people; from another point of view, it may be even harder for White people to see ourselves as just another bunch of people. White people are neither anywhere near as especially good and deserving as White supremacy claims, nor are White people especially bad—and if we were especially bad, hey, we'd still be special. In fact, labeling White people especially bad has the same effect on a group level that it has on an individual level: it feeds the ego, because it's just the flip side of thinking ourselves exceptionally good.

In any case, skin color clearly isn't a strong enough marker by itself, or there wouldn't be so many White people going around saying, "As a White person..." Really? Gee, thought I might've noticed that. Also it's annoying when White people claim exemption from dealing with White racism on the grounds that their skin isn't *exactly* the color white, as in, have you ever actually *seen* anyone with exactly white skin, or for that matter exactly black skin either? Hahaha, gotcha—and now let us have no more of this silly talk about racism and colorism. Color is not descriptive of either Black or White people, or Brown people for that matter. There is, in fact, a difference between having whitish skin as an accident of birth and being White with a capital "W." It's defining: these are the labels used to identify us within a color-coded caste system and assign us our places in the kyriarchy of abuse.

"Kyriarchy" is a great word. It was invented by Elisabeth Schüssler Fiorenza to cover the whole interlocking, intersectional, complicated structure of a plethora of hierarchies of abuse, including hierarchies around color, creed, country of national origin, sex, gender, sexuality, class, age, ability, and every other arbitrarily defined characteristic for slicing and dicing the human race, summed up by Sian Ferguson as "the social system that keeps all intersecting oppressions in place." As Emily Dickinson might have said, "kyriarchy" is a word you could take your hat off to.

I use "arbitrarily defined group" instead of "race" rather than beginning by acknowledging that the word "race" has no meaning and then proceeding to use it as if it did. The human race is certainly one: as the Sufi teacher Imam Bilal Hyde has said, the esoteric meaning of "La ilaha illa Allah, Mohammadun rasul Allah" (there is no deity but the One God, Muhammad is the Messenger of the One God) is "One God, one human race." And "to live as one race and one family," says Bawa Muhaiyaddeen, "that is Islam." A whole host of other people in other spiritual traditions, all around the world, have been saying the exact same thing for a long time: we are all of one family. So no, there are not different races of human beings. And yes, there are arbitrarily defined groups of human beings that are systemically, and systematically, slotted into the kyriarchy of abuse in any given culture and treated, or mistreated, accordingly. Or as has so often been said, race is a fiction; racism is a fact.

And if the mere mention of Islam or a quote from that tradition just freaked you out, you can skip right to chapter Six and tap your Islamophobia away.

We might even say that the definition of racism is the belief that there is more than one race, and from there it all goes downhill: once we have more than one of anything we can compare—and I, of course, belong on the most flattering end of that comparison. Does "arbitrarily defined group" seem like a pretty clunky term? "Clunky" would be a nice word for the whole concept of slicing and dicing humanity and then slotting us into a kyriarchy of abuse. Our continual discomfort with the ever-shifting nomenclature—ever-shifting because we never seem to be able to land for very long on a label without starting to feel uncomfortable with it—might just be a clue.

I'm using preferred pronouns where they're known to be preferred, just because it isn't hard to refrain from calling people out of their names, or their pronouns. Also, "they" and "them" are so much easier than "he or she" and "him or her."

All of our many brain parts have fancy names and other, easier ones. Resmaa Menachem speaks of the neocortex, the mammalian brain, and the lizard brain, the neocortex being the part that has evolved most recently—the more human part of our brain amidst all the parts that might constitute a whole menagerie. The parts of our brains that are not so evolved play a large part in keeping our fears and phobias running, so they want gentle treatment and healing, always

bearing in mind that the whole point of the exercise of being human is that they don't get to run the show. "Lizard brain" will recur here, without apologies to the lizards—they know who they are.

Finally, a word about tone policing, thought control's fresh-faced cousin, otherwise known as "kindly tone it down to where I may politely ignore you." It's perhaps described more aptly by my friend the philosopher, educator, and poet Alfred E. Prettyman as "civil smother," which he observed being used in a specific instance regarding the distribution of a special benefit in Segregated Town USA to deflect outrage over a clever bit of White resource hoarding, or hogging (with apologies to the hogs), by deflecting the focus of a meeting's concern away from the behavior of the White people who were hogging a valuable resource and onto what they signaled was the far more serious transgression of a Black person being angry about it.

Many years ago, the American guru Ram Dass decided that perhaps the shockingly monochromatic nature of so many spiritual groups ought to be addressed, and out of the goodness of his heart organized a conference around it, which was filmed. The gathering was overwhelmingly White, and a question was raised about the fact that it looked as if everyone involved in filming and organizing the event was White, which seemed to come as a surprise—firstly that it was noticed, and secondly that it could be a question. In a small group, one of the few people of color in attendance said he'd just been to a panel discussion elsewhere about issues mainly impacting young people of color, in which the panelists were all White, and he wondered aloud, as much in sorrow as in anger, if anyone else in the group shared his distress about that. No one did. Instead, he and all his concerns were shut down on the spot by a White woman who very kindly explained to him that his "anger" was pushing her away—and we can see here how "tone policing" and "civil smother" land differently: she smothered him. At the end of the film, there was something of an "in memoriam" for that man, who had died untimely: shocking, but not so surprising.

After I joined Al-Anon because I believed that the wise people of Al-Anon would help me to help my beloved baby sister stop drinking, I quickly learned that I was not the only one who believed that if I could just think of exactly the right thing to say, she would stop drinking. Of course I couldn't, and she didn't. Like a loved one's drinking, White supremacy is frequently exasperating beyond measure, and can blow right through enraging to infuriating: if we're not furious about the racism itself, we're furious about being called on it. And yet, no matter how futile the effort (hence the need for spiritual healing), and as squeamish as some very spiritual people may be about full and comprehensive use of the English language, there are still plenty of people trying to find exactly the right thing to say to persuade other people out of their White racism—and some of that may come out sounding pretty salty.

In New York City, where I've lived all my adult life, f-bombs are practically a form of punctuation, which may be a good thing, since studies have shown that people who cuss may have better emotional health than those who don't. Still, I will try not to cuss too much here. I won't censor anyone else.

Sufi orthodoxy is a contradiction in terms, and once when I was complaining about one Sufi companion on the path to another, she offered that in her opinion, the order we all belonged to had two rays, a dervishy ray and an angelic ray, and that the people in the angelic ray tended to think of the people in the dervishy ray as being unbearably crude, while the people in the dervishy ray tended to think of the people in the angelic ray as having simply failed to incarnate. Similar distinctions may exist in other groups. It has been said that comfort is the enemy of the dervish. I wouldn't guess that it's such a great friend of the angelic ones, either.

So, okay, trigger warning: this whole handbook could be one great big trigger, if you wanted to look at it that way, propelling us forward to a better life. Maya Angelou kindly said, “Do the best you can until you know better. Then when you know better, do better.” This work is designed to help us *get* better, so that doing better can just come naturally, the way it would have been doing all along if systemic racism were not so ... systemic. At this stage of our evolution, there’s a certain amount of urgency to getting better—getting over ourselves—if we don’t really want to mass-extinction ourselves right off the planet. It’s all grist for the mill, or as the wise people of Al-Anon say, an AFGO—Another Fucking Growth Opportunity—and all are invited!

After all, like the Blues Brothers, we’re on a mission from God.

We Have Questions

Common disease is called normal health.
—Hazrat Inayat Khan

Of course we have questions! There are always questions—and objections—especially when we’re being asked to question ourselves. Add to that a certain tendency to postpone seriously getting down to work on our spiritual practices, which you may have noticed if you’ve ever done spiritual practices in a group, especially deep and intense ones, because suddenly there’s just so much to talk about—there are so many questions! And that’s fine—sooner or later, we still get to dive in.

The first and most important question to ask before embarking on any healing is the one Ruby Sales has long been asking, and which I first heard from the educator and healer in her own right Dr. Fatima Hafiz-Muid:

“Where does it hurt?”

We know, or can know if we choose to, a great deal about how White racism hurts and harms people of color in general and Black people in particular: Black people in particular have been telling the world about it for four hundred years. We know a lot less about how White racism hurts White people because so much less has been said and written about it, and anyway, since White racism is the driver that keeps at least some White people at the tippy-top of the kyriarchy—that interlocking, intersectional, intertwined construction of hierarchies of abuse—what could be bad for White people? Why would we want to get over it?

There are big advantages to being White, and while many of those advantages are material and not equitably distributed, a lot of them have to do with what *doesn't* happen to us, which is why we don't even notice them. It is nice not to be subjected to the kind of micro- and macro-aggressions, general abuse, indignities, and violence that are routinely visited on people of color in general and Black people in particular—so nice, in fact, that we might sincerely wish for those of our “privileges” that are basic human rights to be universally applied.

Other and perhaps more jealously guarded White privileges revolve around impunity. Doing and saying stupid stuff in general and getting away with it is peak White privilege. It may be more pronounced for tall, male, cisgender, heterosexual, rich White guys, but it still ranges from being able to say the most arrant nonsense in an authoritative tone of voice and getting away with it right through to committing the full range of criminal behavior up to and including murder and getting away with it, as well as—privilege of privileges—shutting down any and all discussion, or even mention, of White privilege. Some of that impunity is only happening because so many laws are deliberately designed to ensnare only people of color. And some of that impunity absolutely no one should have, because it leaves too many dangerous people wandering around out here sincerely believing that they can do anything they feel like doing and get away with it.

But what about the disadvantages of being White? Not, of course, counting someone else getting something to which I felt entitled after so many generations of affirmative action for White people, which may have more to do with family-of-origin dynamics than with what I thought just happened. The human race, besides being singular, is a family, and it's interesting to note how, besides the absolute necessity of believing that the big people *can't be wrong* when we're small and dependent on them for our very survival, someone else getting something to which I thought I was entitled can bring up very old resentments of that other kid—there's always that other kid, somewhere—who either got all the good stuff or got away with murder, or both.

The real disadvantages of Whiteness are myriad.

If you've ever done one of those exercises that involves repeating, "To me, being White means ..." and the first thing that popped into your head was, "being expected to behave like an asshole," you are not alone. The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., once said, "Nothing in all the world is more dangerous than sincere ignorance and conscientious stupidity." Membership in good standing in what we might call the Tribe of White requires us to be willfully ignorant and willfully stupid, and—worse—mean as shit. Those dues are high. "Woke," used as a pejorative for White people committing the sin of being awake and aware and trying to be decent human beings, essentially means failing to be willfully ignorant and stupid, and not being anywhere near mean enough; otherwise, it's basically just the new "n"-word. (This has been a public-service announcement for all those using "woke" as a pejorative who can't quite put their finger on what exactly they mean by it.)

And what do we get in return for those high dues? What W. E. B. Du Bois called the "psychological wages" of Whiteness aren't just earned by ugly and shameful behavior; they are paid in the coin of massive self-deception. The carefully cultivated naïveté that allows White people to think of ourselves as totally innocent is enough by itself to dull the intellect.

White people ("not all White people," of course, which means "not me," except yes, me too) are made to know from babyhood that even if we run screaming from membership in good standing in the Tribe of White, it still owns us, and we must never, ever, ever relinquish the core belief that White people are inherently superior to all other people, based on absolutely no evidence whatsoever—the very best evidence, because who can refute nonexistent evidence?—and we must therefore keep the goalposts moving for everyone else. When Malcolm X spoke of "brainwashed Negroes," he meant Black people who had internalized White racism, but if he had spoken of "brainwashed White people," he could have gone on all day and all night long. James Baldwin put it succinctly, if tactfully, when he described White people as "the slightly mad victims of their own brainwashing."

Most of us will say that we just want to be accepted for who we are, when what we more often want is to be accepted at the face value of our self-image, whether it's one we've passively accepted or one we've carefully crafted. Once White people have been sufficiently brainwashed, of course we want to be accepted for what we've been conditioned to believe we are: inherently superior. Thus we may expect to be looked upon with gratitude for deigning to descend a millimeter from our exalted state to offer our inherently superior help, and it can be hurtful to the point of enraging to be reminded that we're not in point of actual fact in any way superior and that maybe, just maybe, what looks like nobility to us is really just arrogance.

The fantasy of inherent superiority is what allows White people to believe sincerely that the best of *everything* is supposed to be reserved for us, because we deserve it, because we're the best. A White friend of mine who spent a good part of her childhood in a Black neighborhood in

Maryland was surprised to learn that Black people she met in North Carolina, where she lived for some years, didn't invite White people to their homes. She believed that it was because they never knew when White people might go off on them, and they didn't want their homes to be the scene of that kind of insanity. But then a Black friend told me she'd always been instructed never to invite White people into her family's house because if it was nicer than the White people's house, bad things could ensue. This was not based on conjecture.

In *How the Word is Passed*, Clint Smith reports that after the Civil War, newly freed Black people believed their future was assured, because they were the people who had been doing all the work, so of course they knew how to do all the work. And indeed, Black people prospered in many communities—until White people couldn't take it anymore and killed them, drove out the survivors, and stole or destroyed everything they'd built. They didn't just want the stuff; they couldn't bear the sight of Black people who were smart and successful. This happened in many places all over the United States of America, not just the few we may have heard about. And it's only a difference of degree rather than of kind that seems to compel nice White racists to try to diminish Black people who are brilliant by calling them “articulate,” as if what comes out of their mouths couldn't possibly have anything to do with brilliance.

So how deeply hurt are we when the White fantasy of inherent superiority gets shattered on the rock of reality?

There are few things in life that arouse more rage than the loss of a fantasy. I'm a witness: I've had any number of romantic fantasies go splat, and I'm here to tell you that what might politely be called getting stuck in the rage pathway of the brain is more than a notion—it's practically a way of life. A fantasy smashed to smithereens, if it doesn't go to depression—anger turned inward—goes straight to the rage pathway. What is most painful about any threat to the fantasy of inherent White superiority—itsself a romantic fantasy—is that it goes right to our identity *as White*, so it feels like a lethal attack not just on our lofty position at the top of the kyriarchy, but on our very selves. A lot has been written about White rage as expressed in attacking Black people who are successful based on material envy, but I believe that the white-hot, murderous virulence of White rage has its deepest origin in the loss of the specifically White fantasy of inherent superiority.

Luckily, the loss of a fantasy of inherent superiority is the farthest thing from a threat to our very selves. It's a threat to a self-image that makes up a substantial layer of the wooden bushel over our light—what Sufis have called the false self, or *nafs*—which for most of us was installed at such an early age that we're not even aware of it as something that not only isn't us, it doesn't belong to us and can be actively harmful to us. Not only was it installed on us without our permission, but also we were taught to draw all kinds of pretty faces on it so that no one, including ourselves, might know that it's just a wooden bushel—and underneath it, our real selves are trapped and smothered, which is why so many of us are on a spiritual path to begin with. Our work is to scrape away at the wooden bushel over our light from the inside, where our healing power resides.

There's a popular myth that Black kids don't want to do well in school for fear of being accused of “acting White.” Black kids themselves have insisted that *no!* No, we don't accuse good students of “acting White”! Doing well in school is good! The only kids we accuse of “acting White” are kids who are *acting White!* The myth persists, no doubt because it makes it easier for White people not to feel very bad about starving very segregated Black schools of resources, but there's something else we might consider here, namely, that no one works harder at “acting White” than White people. The stereotypes of Whiteness we're trained into from

babyhood are more constricting than straitjackets, stifling to our spirits and cutting us off from our humanity: there's a whole long list of purely human abilities we're not supposed to have, or even go anywhere near thinking of having.

In *Caste*, Isabel Wilkerson quotes a Brahmin—a member of India's highest caste—who had “ripped off my sacred thread,” the sign and symbol of his place at the top of the kyriarchy: “It was a poisonous snake around my neck, and its toxic venom was getting inside of me.” That's a good way of putting it.

“Common disease is called normal health.” There was a time when, in some quarters, being drunk in the morning and drunk at night, and drunk in the afternoon, was looked upon as the epitome of mature sophistication. As alcoholism has come to be perceived as a disease, most people who drink a lot aren't nearly as loud and proud about their alcohol consumption as they used to be. Similarly, we had a brief respite, superficial and spotty as it might have been, between the times when being openly, proudly racist was what White people were widely supposed to be—when if you were White and you wanted to be one of the cool kids you pretty much had to be racist—and now, when being openly, proudly racist has come roaring back, together with openly virulent antisemitism, misogyny, homophobia, flat-out nastiness toward people who are differently abled or bodied, and a pile of other isms: these things all tend to go hand in hand. They were just hidden and denied (more or less) for a little while. And what can be more intoxicating than that sweet feeling of inherent superiority based on absolutely no evidence whatsoever?

Hate, as we have seen, is also intoxicating, both in the sense of making us drunk and the sense of the root meaning—“toxic.” Hate is poisonous, and it's catching. We poison ourselves and others with it, and it can harden and shrink our hearts to the dimensions and consistency of a dried pea.

For members in good standing of the Tribe of White, the consequences of White racism can be even worse than they are for those of us trying to escape it, starting with getting shookered on a regular basis and going downhill from there: once the fundamental lie of inherent White superiority is bought into, any other utterly false thing may become believable. As our 36th president, Lyndon Baines Johnson, said, “If you can convince the lowest white man he's better than the best colored man, he won't notice you're picking his pocket. Hell, give him somebody to look down on, and he'll empty his pockets for you.” Whenever a politician sounds a racial dog whistle, we may be sure of one thing: that politician has just about as much respect for White people's intelligence as they have for the intellectual capacity of their average pooch. They're sure White people will come when called, put up with any amount of abuse, and keep coming back every time they whistle. Lately there's been as much bullhorn as dog whistle, and the contempt for White people's intelligence is more pronounced than ever, which has not been good for anyone's health on any level—physical, mental, political, economic, environmental, climatic. Jonathan Metzl's book *Dying of Whiteness* lays out in some detail how White racism hurts us all on the most fundamental levels. There are people clinging to Whiteness as if it were a life raft when in reality it's a death trap.

White racism is why we can't have nice things. Not universal health care, not universal access to good, nourishing food, not commonsense gun laws, not safe, reliable infrastructure, not environments free of toxic pollution, not topnotch public education, not decent, affordable housing, not water fit to drink or air fit to breathe, not a public-health system sufficient to see us through a deadly pandemic turbocharged by what Steven Thrasher has called “the myth of white immunity,” and certainly not a functional democracy—the list goes on and on. Brand-new public

swimming pools have been filled in with concrete because White people didn't want to share. As Tressie McMillan Cottom has said, "Whiteness defends itself. Against change, against progress, against hope, against black dignity, against black lives, against reason, against truth, against facts, against native claims, and against its own laws and customs."

The steady erosion of all our public goods and services feeds directly into the long-term project of some of the richest White people under the guise of fighting "socialism," which aims to eliminate every good thing that government does, skewing budgets as far away as possible from the common good. The end goal is for those same rich White people to no longer be bothered by any pesky democracy, however feeble, and also to not have to pay any taxes. They don't mind the rest of us paying enough taxes to maintain robust military and police forces that can bash our heads in if we don't like it.

Apart from being mean as shit to everyone else, White people aren't very kind to one other, or to ourselves. You may have heard of minority self-policing—members of oppressed groups trying to stave off abuse by imposing high standards of conduct on themselves. Majority self-policing is not so genteel. Majority self-policing doesn't stop at admonitions or name-calling: it can be lethal. White people have routinely killed other White people for being more loyal to the human race than they were to White supremacy: only some lives matter. And because White people are so dangerous *to each other*, our relationships with one another, as oppressor to oppressor, are fraught with suspicion and distrust. We're constantly testing each other: did you at least maintain a prudent silence if you didn't laugh at the racist joke? Good, you're complicit, and you're not going to interrupt our moment of White-racist bonding. Or, coming from the other side, I'm not going to attempt any friendship with you until I have sufficient evidence that you're not a racist motherfucker, and that joke may just have crossed you right off my list—and yes, I will freely admit to starting from a position of suspicion with regard to other White people.

In 1962, James Baldwin said, "White people will have quite enough to do in learning how to accept and love themselves and each other, and when they have achieved this—which will not be tomorrow and may very well be never—the Negro problem will no longer exist, for it will no longer be needed."

It has often been said that for people accustomed to privilege, equality feels like oppression. It might be more accurate to say that for people accustomed to privilege, the *thought* of equality feels like oppression, because if you can't imagine true equality, the fear is likely to be that if there's any change, relationships of inequality will just be flipped. There was a time—and I would not like to dwell on how long that time went on for—when I thought that relationships of inequality were all there were, and that my job was to figure out how to live within them. Now I know differently. Actually living with our fellow human beings in conditions of true equality is bliss, and we have every right to it. We may even have to accidentally fall into relationships of equality to find out what they're really like, but then too it helps if our hearts are ready.

In the immortal, much-paraphrased words of the historian Neely Fuller, Jr., "If you don't understand white supremacy, everything else that you think you understand will only confuse you."

Even if you do understand White supremacy, that's just Step One.

Let's move on to some of the many reasons White people have given for why we are not racist and why we don't need a workshop, or this book for that matter, by addressing some frequently asked questions (and frequently raised objections). These are, by the way, mostly questions and objections I have heard with my own ears or read with my own eyes—I swear I'm not making it up. It isn't exactly where the healing begins, but it might help to clear away some of the cobwebs, and maybe we need to wear out our conscious minds before we can access our unconscious minds—to “break our brains,” as the Dalai Lama has put it—or maybe we just need a few laughs to loosen up. Whole, brilliant books have been written around most of these points, but we may as well dispense with them briskly. We have wonderful work to do!

If you're not in a state of denial or resistance and really do want a workshop, or a book, about spiritual healing of White racism, you're good to go, and you can skip all this and move on—there won't be a quiz at the end. On the other hand, perhaps you might like to think of what follows as that heavy-duty encounter-group thing we have all come to know and dread—or, as the case may be, relish as an opportunity for some *schadenfreude*—and if you find yourself getting all riled up at any point, you might want to skip to chapter Six and try tapping on it. Tapping works best when our emotions are right up there on the surface and boiling over, where we can really feel them.

This all may come in handy if you're thinking of offering a workshop yourself—for free, please—and you can add and embellish according to your own experience. Or you might just find here some useful things to say the next time your Uncle Donald is making up stuff at a family gathering. With any luck, it might trigger enough to give everyone something to work on.

Seriously, though, if you're really raring to get started on the practices, you don't have to read any of this now. You can always come back to it later if you really want to see what all the fuss was about.

Q: Isn't White racism really a systemic problem, and not a personal one? Shouldn't we be focusing on making systemic changes instead of centering White people's precious character defects?

A: I used to have a co-worker who reported that she had a friend who wanted to have a button made up that would say, “Both things are true.” Systems are made by persons, based on shared beliefs. Our systems were mostly designed by rich White men based on a widely shared belief that White people are supposed to have everything good because White people *are* everything good—especially rich White people and even more especially rich White men—and everyone else is supposed to pay dearly for the leftovers, unless the leftovers start looking good, in which case White people, and most especially rich White men, are supposed to have those, too.

The Constitution that set out the system of governance of the United States of America was written by and for a relatively small group of wealthy White men, including human traffickers and enslavers, to benefit themselves. Elie Mystal's characterization of it as “trash” is charitable. And because they were already justifying slavery by imagining that the people they were trafficking and enslaving weren't even really people, those men gave us a cast-in-concrete system of White supremacy. Every single concession to the human traffickers and enslavers has come back to bite us, and while they may seem to be biting us extra hard lately, in fact they've been biting us very hard all along.

So focusing on our personal issues is important. Malcolm X said it best: “Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you

change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern and then you go on into some action.”

Changing our thought patterns and our attitudes drives systemic change; systemic change makes an accommodation for changing our thought patterns and our attitudes. Thus, we progress. Otherwise, resistance to systemic change will continue to be fueled by the core beliefs and fantasies of White supremacy driving too many White people to fight systemic change with everything they’ve got, and we’ll continue to be assailed by too many people who think that storming the seat of government for the purpose of upholding White supremacy is a good idea. The personal really is political, and we’re not doing all this work on ourselves just so we can be nice people. If we want to be able to take effective actions to make real change, we need to be healthy, whole human beings. And we certainly can’t make people who aren’t White welcome in hitherto White spaces if inwardly we’re recoiling from them.

We can always move on from here to work on developing spiritual practices for healing whole systems.

Q: Isn’t talking about White racism just divisive?

A: “You’re being divisive” does keep being said whenever anyone is pointing out a failure to include people rather than divide them out. So who or what is being divided? White people? Will our little world come crashing down if too many White people lose interest in defending the kyriarchy and start to want better, happier lives? Cool.

Ijeoma Oluo puts it very well, in *So You Want to Talk About Race*: “What is harmful and divisive are these acts of aggression against people of color that are allowed to happen constantly, without consequence. What is harmful and divisive is the expectation that people of color would just accept abuse.”

Q: If we got rid of class divisions, the issue of color would go away by itself, wouldn’t it? Isn’t the real problem classism?

A: Focusing on class makes it easy for nice White liberals and progressives to avoid addressing their own White racism—and a surprising number of nice White liberals and progressives are still White supremacists, just not so loud and vulgar about it. There are White people in progressive organizations still fighting hard to uphold the sacred duty of White people to be in charge and in control of everything and everyone. Nice White liberal racism could almost be defined as unflinching politeness to the people whose necks are under the boot—and anger and hurt feelings when those people don’t appreciate just *how* nice nice White liberal racists are. To be fair, even nice White conservative racists, classist as they may be, may have lines of decorum they won’t cross.

Not dealing with all our issues around White racism makes it impossible to dismantle the class systems—which certainly need to be dismantled—within the interlocking structures of the kyriarchy.

Q: I’m just trying to be a better ally. Can’t we focus on that?

A: Allies, no matter how well-intentioned, may cycle in and out, and need not necessarily see themselves as equals. Alliances can be temporary and tenuous. Their fragility has perhaps been best summed up by Dr. Autumn Asher BlackDeer: “Hell hath no fury like a mildly uncomfortable ‘ally.’” Black people have been telling us for at least half a century that what they want is comrades. Or co-conspirators. And how about being better friends? First of all, better friends to ourselves by freeing ourselves from the strictures of Whiteness, and then better friends to all the rest of humanity, through thick and thin. An ally may not necessarily be an equal. Friendship and comradeship are relationships of equality, which doesn’t mean we’re the same as

our friends in all respects, it means that we don't cycle in and out, and we value one another equally—a thing that is difficult to do if you have a position in any kind of hierarchy to defend. The Sufis, who are sometimes called the friends of God, hold friendship sacred.

Years ago, I was engaged in a long-drawn-out struggle with an institutional landlord that was trying to evict a large number of my neighbors, the vast majority of whom were Black. At some point, we were made an offer, or a threat, or I don't remember what, since it put me in such a state of shock that I can't for the life of me remember exactly what it was—a perfect example of Maya Angelou's observation that "people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." I do vividly remember saying to a Black woman friend afterwards, "I've had my intelligence dissed on account of being a woman, but I have never ever, in all my born days, been treated like a little monkey without a brain. It's *brehtaking*." My friend said, "That's exactly right. It takes your breath away." Which I took to mean that she'd had more than a little experience of it herself.

The men's-liberation and anti-racist teacher Charles Kreiner said, decades ago, "Every White adult knows this: that if you attempt to stand up against and/or stop racism, [White racists] will target you, just as though you were a person of color." He also said that White racism is "really an act of cowardice." When we stand shoulder to shoulder with our Black and other friends of color, we get what our friends get, and breathtaking insults may be the least of it, but we don't desert our friends in their hour of need. And I can personally testify that it's well worth it, because when we stand together, *we can win!*

Q: Does it have to be spiritual healing? Do we have to get all mysterious and mystical about it? Can't we just talk it to death, or read some books?

A: Don't think I wasn't tempted to subtitle this little book "Into the Woo with White Racism." I was. But as you have seen, I forbore.

We have been talking White racism, and ourselves, to death, for lo these many years. And we may die, but White racism has stayed alive and well and kicking—and killing. There's a long list of suggested readings at the end of this book, all of them saying deeply intelligent things that are extremely useful and well worth reading, and yet it seems that the more that's said and written about it, the more White supremacy shrieks and digs in its heels. Or we may come away from all our reading and talking feeling guilty and ashamed, which are the opposite of healing. As Hazrat Inayat Khan said, "By talking about it, by discussing and arguing it will not come."

The human brain is a complex marvel, a thing of many parts, and not all of those parts talk to each other. When we say things like, "Part of me feels like *x*, but then another part of me feels like *y*," we're accurately describing our brains at work. Our lizard brain in particular is not inclined to listen very much to our fine, well-informed frontal lobes, if it can even hear them, while our frontal lobes have not a clue to the toxic stuff bubbling away in the lizard brain. This is why we're so often confused, and hurt, and angry when we're called on our unconscious racism. How could we possibly have that thing if we don't have even any inkling of having it?

In addition, White supremacy really does act like a drug, which explains why White people so frequently react to being called on our White racism like addicts defending their supply. It would also explain why so many White people are in denial about all of it—personal racism, systemic racism, and the relation between the two—and also why, as are so many alcoholics, White people comfortably ensconced in the fantasy of inherent superiority are expert at compelling other people to walk on eggshells around them: the flashing bright red "Do Not Disturb" sign is always on. Too many of the nonverbal parts of our brains are tied up in our assorted phobias, and White racism, like alcoholism as the founder of Alcoholics Anonymous Bill W. once described

it, is cunning, baffling, and powerful. If there's a spiritual solution to addiction, there is certainly a spiritual solution to White racism, which is another disease that tells us we don't have a disease. Trying to talk ourselves out of it is like trying to talk a person with an advanced case of alcoholism out of drinking by the application of rational arguments, and by the same token that there is no amount of guilting and shaming that can persuade an alcoholic to quit drinking, the only thing that can liberate us from the clutches of White racism is a healing power, or powers, greater than ourselves.

We can know all about the history and legacy of slavery, redlining, housing and job discrimination, school segregation and underfunding, the land theft and genocide committed against Native people, Japanese internment in World War II, anti-Asian discrimination and violence, Islamophobia, antisemitism—the list goes on and on—and be horrified, and be very much consciously not on board with any of it. We can even come out looking pretty good on the Implicit Association Test, although a great many of us, of all colors, don't. Being told the truth for once is certainly a deep refreshment for the mind and a balm to the soul, but it would still be the rare philosophy, or set of core beliefs, that could be entirely transformed just by gathering new information.

As Joe Miller, an eclectic adept and teacher of mysticism who cared only for the title of “friend,” said, “You can get more stinkin’ from thinkin’ than you can from drinkin’, but to feel is for real!” The quickest way to get where we're aiming to go is to bypass the conscious mind and go straight to the unconscious, as spiritual healing practices do. Spiritual healing techniques deliver the rapid paradigm shifts we so sorely need. From there, we can find our way to the systemic shifts we so sorely need.

It might be interesting if someday someone decided to get into the theory behind it all—and even then the reality of healing would still not care about theories. Years ago I had a music teacher who said that there are musicians who play beautifully and don't know anything about theory, and there are musicians who know everything there is to know about theory and “couldn't play ‘Come to Jesus’ in E flat.” Our most genuine and powerful knowledge of healing is not theoretical, it's inside us, and the practices that resonate with us are the ones for us. The proof of the practice is in the healing.

We might say that our best thinking has gotten us into this mess. Spiritual healing bypasses the thinking mind and goes straight to the emotions—including the hidden ones—so we can actually be in tune with reality.

And anyway, we've already tried everything else.

Q: But don't many spiritual teachings tell us that white is symbolic of purity, and black is symbolic of evil?

A: That is a supremely Eurocentric conceit that has led many a spiritual “thinker” astray. As shared fantasy, myth draws its power from how old and how widespread it is. But it's still a fantasy. We're here to get over any lingering confusion around the difference between light and shadow, which is a useful concept, and black and white, which isn't. In fact, we might say that the difference between these two concepts is like night and day—and we are not here to be benighted.

Q: But isn't it natural for human beings to divide into groups, however they define them, and then be loyal to their group and hostile to others?

A: In a classic “2000 Year Old Man” exchange, Mel Brooks explains to Carl Reiner that way, way back in the day, the people lived in numbered caves, and the national anthem of his cave, Cave 76, was “Let 'em all go to hell except Cave 76!” Some of our near relatives among the

great apes form groups—usually hierarchical to a greater or lesser degree—that may be murderously antagonistic to other groups of the same species. But the Sufis say that if you were meant to be an animal, you would have come to this world in the form of an animal, and if you were meant to be an angel, you would have remained on the angelic planes; but you were not meant to be either animal or angel, you were meant to be a human being. So yes, what some scientists tactfully refer to as “groupness” is “natural” to human beings if we confine our consciousness to our animal attributes and ignore the real nature and deep longings of our souls. The same goes for hierarchies—“natural” to some animals, but not to fully human beings. We have the capacity, as Pir Vilayat Khan used to say, to “change the hardware with the software”: we can actually rewire our brains.

So let us pay no attention to the people who say that White racism is intractable and we’ll never get over it—those ones who insist that we’re always and forever a hot mess, and there’s precious little we can do about it. Of course we’re a hot mess—it’s the human condition—and there’s plenty we can do about it. That’s just one of the things that make human beings so adorable.

Q: What makes you such a big expert on spiritual healing of racism?

A: I tried it on myself, and some of my friends tried it, and it worked, and I’m not a big expert on even anything. Good news—you don’t have to be an expert for spiritual healing to work for you. Anyone can do this! The healing modalities I mainly know are Sufi practices, shamanic practices, tapping—also known as acupressure for the emotions—and assorted Al-Anon approaches. Anyone may have mastered more and different techniques, and anyone can apply or invent new ones. And if the mere mention of any of those practices triggers something, that’s great—more grist for the mill!

Q: Isn’t White people doing practices that didn’t originate in Europe cultural appropriation, so, um, maybe we just shouldn’t be doing them, should we?

A: What, in case they might work?

There is not a human being on the planet who is not indigenous to some place and whose ancestors did not practice some form of shamanism, to take one example, and while all of us may not be wizards at shamanic practices any more than we can all play the trumpet like Louis Armstrong, it is the inheritance of all of us just as music is. It’s the place of spiritual experience where we all meet—the original spiritual practice of the whole of humanity. In chapter Four, we can get into this in more detail.

And of course, both things are true. Many years ago, I attended a lecture given by Louis Leakey, whose discoveries of fossils in East Africa pointed clearly to the African origin of human beings. Someone asked him if the first people to make stone cutting tools could be identified, and he explained why not by pointing out that people have been copying each other since forever: if you’ve been hacking away at things with an unworked stone and you see someone using one that’s been chipped to a sharp edge, “you’re going to say, ‘By George, we’re missing the bus!’”

In the documentary *Irish Dance: Steps of Freedom*, the journalist and dance critic Brian Seibert, speaking of the “long history of Whites taking credit for Black innovation,” concludes that “Whites imitating Blacks and taking credit for it is American culture.” In the same documentary, speaking of the relationship between West African and Irish step dancing, the choreographer and historian Leni Sloan said, “I have stopped looking for the edge of where it ceases to be African and begins to be Irish. . . . All art is assimilation. All music is assimilation.

All dance is assimilation.” We might also consider that the legacy of every human being who has ever lived is the inheritance of every human being who is alive.

Q: So which is it, assimilation or appropriation? And how can we tell?

A: I briefly studied flute with an admirer of Jimi Hendrix who demonstrated the power of attitude by first putting a lot of effort into playing a passage in a thin and tinny tone and then playing the same passage with a full, rich, powerful sound, whereupon he announced proudly, “I didn’t change *anything*—except my mind!”

Whatever practices we may learn from whatever source—and lest we forget, none of the Abrahamic traditions originated in Europe, either—when we assimilate them, we change our minds. Ultimately, all the knowledge we need for healing is *in* us—in our hearts, in our souls, in the marrow of our bones, and yes, in our brains, too. What we are taught by other people can only point the way to finding the gift of healing in ourselves. If we’re not bringing a healing practice out of ourselves, it’s not authentic, it’s thin and tinny, just like so many covers White performers have made of songs originally written and performed by Black people.

White people aren’t supposed to assimilate—God forbid we should lose any valuable Whiteness points (“as a White person...”). White people assimilating to other cultures has its very own pejorative term: “going native”; and the most prevalent and arrogant assumption is that all the other people are supposed to assimilate to a preapproved culture of Whiteness. It’s okay to copy from other people, especially with intent to ridicule, but not okay to *be* like other people, because then the boundaries get blurred and it blows our whole White-people-are-so-special thing.

The lyrics of Jayne Cortez’s “US/Nigerian Relations,” which are an increasingly intense and seemingly endless repetition of “They want the oil but they don’t want the people,” certainly apply here. Closer to home, in his essay “Music” (a succinct exposé of the ways White racism poisons everything it touches), which is included in *The 1619 Project*, Wesley Morris writes, “Pass the culture. Hold the people.”

With all the healing modalities from around the world available to us, it would be ungrateful, and even disrespectful, to reject any of them. Getting good at the different modalities that all the world has to teach us is also part of the healing process, because for White people especially it means entirely accepting that we are actually no different than people we’ve been taught to believe are the People from Planet Wrong who do everything Wrong, and whose spiritual and healing practices, we’ve been assured, are proof of just how Wrong they are. It’s a question of getting to be whole human beings instead of members in any kind of standing of the Tribe of White. Appropriation is tinny. Assimilation resonates.

Short of it is: spirituality cannot be appropriated, cannot be bought, cannot be sold, and cannot be faked, try as anyone might. As Hazrat Inayat Khan said, “This treasure house, which is so great a treasure, is a magic house; a house wherein is every treasure, and yet the thief cannot find it. He will go through the house, he will go all around it, he will not see anything and he will go back with his hands empty.” The true treasure is right there inside us, always, there for the asking.

And, because both things are still true, at the same time that we are discovering our authentic healing selves, we can also refrain from burning all the white sage we can buy or running onto Native land to score some peyote.

Q (Or objection!): I don’t have a racist bone in my body!

A: Of course you don’t—truer words have never been spoken. There is no such thing as a racist bone. Our bones contain whole worlds of wisdom, which is why we so often say, “I feel it

in the marrow of my bones” or “I know it in my bones.” The intrinsic knowledge that the human race is one is deep in the marrow of our bones. *Our bones are not the problem*. Our bones are staunchly anti-racist. The problem is the garbage in our heads, which began to be installed there when we were too small to defend ourselves, and a steady stream of which has been aimed at us ever since. The purpose of spiritual healing is to clear out the garbage and harmonize our heads and hearts—integrate them, to use a certain word—with the wisdom in the marrow of our bones.

Q: I don’t see color!

A: That is so strange. As Trevor Noah has asked, how do you know when to stop at a traffic light?

In many parts of Africa, “I see you” is a standard greeting—an acknowledgement of the whole human being. “I don’t see color” is just a cute way of saying “I don’t see you” to people of color. Hence the many words that have been written on the subject of Black invisibility—oh, wait, didn’t Ralph Ellison write that novel?

Not to mention that beauty comes in all colors, and why would anyone want to miss out on even any of it?

Q: I marched for civil rights in the 1960s! I marched for Black Lives Matter!

A: That was then. This is now. Presumably, we all marched for ourselves, to make the world a better place for all of us to live in, and now look where we are.

Q: I voted for Barack Obama—twice! And I would have voted for him again if I could have!

A: *Get Out*. No, really, it’s a great movie—check it out.

Q: But some of my best friends/lovers/spouses/relatives are Black! How could anyone think I’m racist?

A. Wouldn’t that be like letting all men off the hook around the issue of misogyny just because they’re married to women and have mothers, sisters, and daughters? Or as the author of *Black AF History* and self-identified “writer of words and board-certified wypyologist” Michael Harriot so beautifully put it, “Dating a Black person does not mean you can’t be racist. If I fucked a fish, I still wouldn’t be able to swim.”

For that matter, feminists back in the day discovered to their chagrin that they themselves had internalized a lot of sexism. Similarly, it is possible to *be* Black and to have internalized White racism; Ibram X. Kendi has been particularly courageous on this subject in his book *How to Be an Anti-Racist*. Obviously, people of color in general and Black people in particular are highly motivated to get that mess out of their psyches, but if even Black people can suffer from internalized White racism, why would White people be trying to let ourselves off the hook just because we happen to know and love a few, or even many, Black people?

And while we’re on the subject, we may as well be clear that there is no such thing as an interracial relationship. All relationships between and among human beings are intra-racial.

Q: But I grew up in an all-White neighborhood and hardly ever even saw any Black people, so there wasn’t any racism, so I can’t be racist!

A: Gosh, I grew up in an all-White neighborhood and hardly ever saw any Black people, because Black people only came into our neighborhood to work in someone else’s house or pick up our trash, and my all-White neighborhood was saturated with White racism. Our lovely Whitopias are the very embodiment of White racism. Just look around you, kid. Notice who’s not living here? Notice who is, and who therefore deserves to live here, in this nice neighborhood? Perhaps, just possibly, you may have forgotten all the White-racist jokes and vicious lies about Black people that got told in your nice White neighborhood, not to mention the visible discomfort of the adults you knew, some of whom may have been very nice White

liberals, in the presence of those few Black people allowed to come in and clean up our messes. I haven't. White people are steeped in White racism in our lovely Whitopias.

Q: What about reverse racism?

A: Apart from racism being rooted in the belief that there is more than one human race, there is no such thing as reverse racism. We have had this conversation before. White racism is prejudice plus power.

Of course, anyone may be a bigot. And bigotry coming from people assigned a low slot in the kyriarchy and aimed at people meant to be higher up is bound to be decried with the most horrified of pearl-clutching, because if there's anyone who is not allowed to be a bigot, it's an intended target of everyone else's bigotry. In fact, any time there seems to be a double standard at work, the easiest way to suss it out is simply by asking: Does it support the kyriarchy, or does it challenge the kyriarchy? If it supports the kyriarchy, the most egregious behavior is acceptable, even laudable. If it challenges the kyriarchy, the mildest expression of prejudice is absolutely unacceptable! Disgraceful! Atrocious!

And yet, perhaps the most supremely insulting form of bigotry against White people is the clear expectation on the part of large numbers of White people that all White people must behave like assholes, all be deeply infected with White racism, and all think alike, or, if we don't, at least be too chicken (with apologies to the poultry) to do anything about it.

I would recommend that if you are a White *lo fan*, try shopping in a department store that caters mainly to Chinese and Chinese American people, in a predominantly Chinese neighborhood. I can personally attest that the undisguised contempt you may meet with there is a bracing dose of our own medicine. Come to think of it, in my faraway distant youth there was a minute when a dear friend's family got giggles from preceding the noun "Caucasian" with the adjective "dumb," pronounced as all one word: "dumbCaucasian." They weren't saying it *to me*, but I could take the inference. And here I am to tell the tale.

Q: That's cute, but Black people have been *really mean* to me!

A: Oh, gosh. Black people have been really mean to me, too, and have hurt my feelings ever so bad. Leaving aside all the times Black people have hurt my feelings around issues that everyone else felt equally free to hurt my feelings about, I haven't been above pouring myself a big old glass of White whine, privately and inwardly because I try so hard to be cool, following upon the occasion of having my coat pulled by a kind Black friend to something offensive I've done or said, or because I had to suffer the consequences of other White people's bad behavior. Why, in 2022 that same Michael Harriot reported in *thegrio.com* that the Black Legislative American Cookout Council (BLACC) voted to "extend their ban on white people" for the 2022 barbecue season, that "they promised to hold another vote when ... 'white people start acting like they got some sense,'" and—here's the kicker—"they will revisit the issue in 2122." Ouch! Michael! That hurts! Waiter, bring me a great *big* glass of White whine! No, wait—make it a bottle!

Here's what Black people have not done to me: Followed me around in stores. Asked to touch my hair, or just stuck their hands in it without so much as a by-your-leave (and while we're on the subject, keeping our hands to ourselves all around is the simplest and easiest form of respecting healthy boundaries). Told me the apartment was already rented or only consented to rent to me in a food desert where everyone else just happened to look like me, and where the rents were higher than in other neighborhoods and the housing barely habitable. Given me substandard healthcare or denied me healthcare altogether (and just for the record, most of my medical providers in the last four decades or so have been Black and have always given me the

most excellent care). Decided not to give me a loan, or a mortgage, no matter how good my credit and earnings history were. Not even given me a call-back on an application for a job that I was perfectly qualified for. Underfunded the public schools that children who look like me go to, and then turned them into a school-to-prison pipeline. Sited industrial plants that spew cancer-causing chemicals, or any other facilities fouling the air, land, and water, right where I live. Given the local police instructions to stop, frisk, and find a reason to fine me so rich people won't have to pay taxes, or stop me under any pretext and then kill me. Run me out of town under pain of death and stolen everything I worked for to make a better life for myself and my family. Or killed me and stolen everything I worked for, secure in the knowledge they would suffer no consequences. Killed me on the spot anytime they thought I was being insufficiently submissive—and yes, the inability to distinguish between respect and submissiveness is an equal-opportunity confusion, but we can take note here that the slave patrols from which so many modern police forces descend were fully authorized to kill any Black person they deemed insufficiently submissive, right there on the spot, with rarely if ever any consequences to themselves, just like ... now. Black people have also not sat around figuring out ways to make it really hard, if not impossible, for me to vote, just to make sure there could be no changes made to any of the above. The list is so long that people have written whole carefully documented books about the crimes and cruelties inflicted in the furtherance of White supremacy, none of which resemble in any way, shape, or form any of the ways any Black person has ever hurt my feelings.

Q: But I grew up in a mostly Black neighborhood and the other kids touched my hair! And picked on me! I was the minority!

A: And so was I, actually, growing up in a Protestant family in a Catholic neighborhood. Did that make me entirely free of prejudice against Catholics? Dear Lord, no. Not for a nanosecond. I compensated for my supposed minority status by looking down my little nose at Catholic people, neatly compartmentalizing out, because cognitive dissonance is a thing, the Catholic cousins who lived elsewhere. I was thirteen years old when I learned that Protestants are not in fact a persecuted minority in this country, and, at about the same time, that my absent paternal grandfather's family was Catholic, too, so I got to be doubly embarrassed. Thank you, religious bigotry.

Q: But I'm not really White! I'm of Italian/Irish/Jewish/you-name-it descent, and when my ancestors came to America they were treated like dirt! And I'm not really White because rumor has it that there's some Black/Native American (all together now—*Cherokee!*)/you-name-it ancestry in my family! And if I'm not really White, how can I be a White racist?

A: It's amazing how much we have in common. I have a smidgen of Native ancestry myself, from somewhere in what is now New England, *not* Cherokee, and way, way back, so possibly even less than the kind of smidgen that Trevor Noah spoke of when he said, "Being part Native American is cool, right, but just part Native American. Like, enough that you're interesting at a party, but not so much that they build a pipeline through your house." Just walking down the street, people are going to say, "There's a White person," and anytime I might be applying for a job, a loan, or a mortgage, or renting an apartment, or hailing a cab, or not being followed around in a store, or not having the cops called on me for being in a White space, or not getting killed because White people believed their lives were in danger from the color of my skin, I am just *so* White. My Irish Catholic great-grandmother and her parents may have caught hell and not at all been thought of as White when they arrived in the U.S. in the mid nineteenth century, but they'd certainly be White now, and for damn sure whatever they and my Native ancestors suffered did

not shield me from the steady blizzard of White-racist lies that told me White people are the very best and that it is my sacred duty to defend to the death—preferably the death of other people—the upper reaches of the kyriarchy, where White people are ordained to reside.

Here we might consider the phenomenon the sociologist Mary C. Waters has called “optional ethnicity”—how White Americans can choose to identify with the origins of our ancestors, based on which ones we might think are the coolest. This is, of course, an option reserved for White Americans: my friend Alfred E. Prettyman’s maternal grandfather was Irish, which means that he has at least twice as much Irish ancestry as I do, but I get to be part Irish, and he’s supposed to only be Black. Is that weird? Yep. That’s very weird. White people might want to consider that before we invoke our own assorted ancestries to make claims for ourselves.

In fact, the kind of double-dipping that has White people ticking boxes other than “White” fits perfectly with the systemic racism of this nation’s consistent policy toward, to cite one example, Native people, to wit: if a Native person or group of people is seen to have anything that might be of any value, then that thing must immediately be taken from that Native person or group of people and given to a White person or people. Including spiritual practices, and including ancestors, if we think they might come in handy. The sincere belief that White people are entitled to have it all, as in *absolutely all of it*, is practically the whole point of White supremacy—which, if we’re not *really* White, we would hardly be promoting, would we?

And what about all of those settler-colonialist English ancestors who fought in brutal wars against Native people back in the day? The heirs of one of mine were awarded a substantial piece of land for his “services,” which makes me not want to know what those “services” were, but they must have given him some PTSD, since he also appears in official records as getting arrested more than once for drunk and disorderly conduct. If having Native and Irish ancestors is supposed to mean that I can’t really be racist, does having seriously White-racist ancestors both near and distant mean that I can never *not* be racist? Aw, dang!

It may be, though, that another motivation for claiming to not really be White can arise from a healthy impulse: sensing that Whiteness robs us of vital aspects of our humanity, we may try to connect to something closer to full humanity through our ancestors who weren’t “really White.” Splitting off all the parts of ourselves we’ve been told aren’t acceptable and then projecting them onto other people—not only what we think is bad, but also traits and talents that could bring us joy—is not a good plan: “less than” is a game the whole human family can play. The good news is that we can be of one hundred percent White European ancestry and still reclaim our full humanity from the clutches of Whiteness—it’s all right there in us. And meanwhile, instead of making claims on our ancestors who weren’t “really White,” we can be open to the claims they have on us, and to how we can best honor those claims.

Q: None of my ancestors ever owned slaves! So how can what White supremacy has done to Black people be my problem?

A: Whether any of our ancestors laid claim to ownership of other people or not, we have all inherited the persistent mess that the legally and socially sanctioned enslavement of human beings has left our country in, and we can either clean it up or go on miserably lying in it, in both senses of the “L” word. Who wants that?

Q: I’m a White woman, which is an oppressed group, and I’m busy combating sexism. Do I have to deal with White racism, too?

A: Well. Women of color in general and Black women in particular are dealing with sexism *and* White racism each and every day—hence the term “misogynoir.”

Within the kyriarchy, any of us may be assigned the role of victim based on one or more arbitrarily defined characteristics and assigned the role of oppressor based on others. We frequently see this playing out when White women act as enforcers of color-coded caste rules on other people.

As Charles Kreiner has said, these roles were installed on us without our permission—we didn't ask for them, we didn't want them, and we're still expected to play them out as assigned. The role of victim may be way more morally comfortable than the role of oppressor, and yet White women may flip from one to the other where color is concerned: from identifying as victims of White men to being their accomplices and co-conspirators, to use the apt term of Stephane Jones-Rogers. Hence the frequency with which White women police White spaces, or any spaces they believe should be White, by calling the cops on Black people who are in them.

The sense of who belongs where in the kyriarchy really jumps out when Black men go ahead of White women through a coveted door. White women lost it in 1870 when Black men got the vote before them, and there were White women who voted against all their stated principles when a Black man was nominated and elected president before a White woman was. If the Pew Research Center has it right, a plurality of White women joined a majority of White men to vote for Donald Trump in 2016, and in 2020 an absolute majority of White women voted for Trump, very much against every single self-interest they could possibly have except the defense of Whiteness. So: White first, then women. Even the feminist heroine Ruth Bader Ginsburg referenced the Doctrine of Discovery, a set of deeply racist 15th-century papal decrees—only repudiated in March 2023 by Pope Francis—in writing and delivering a 2004 Supreme Court decision denying the Oneida nation sovereignty over ancestral land they had purchased from New York State.

Ballot Measure 9 is a documentary that, disturbingly, could have been made yesterday: it's about the struggle around an anti-gay initiative put on the ballot in Oregon in 1992. One of the many people who put their hearts and souls into fighting against the measure's passage was Ann Sweet, a cisgender heterosexual Black woman community activist, who said, "What I needed to do was to talk about how the oppressions linked up. . . . I knew that I needed to work in those places where I was assigned the role of the oppressor. If I wanted White people to stop practicing racism, I had to stop practicing homophobia." This is what solidarity looks like.

When the Supreme Court of the United States set the table for overturning *Roe v. Wade* with *Citizens United v. FEC*, which concentrates power in the hands of the wealthiest, and *Shelby County v. Holder*, which gutted the Voting Rights Act, if those two decisions were perceived as landing primarily on people defined by class and color, we now know that was far from true.

Being a well-adjusted member of society—that magical paragon that therapies used to aim for—has meant, for all of us, learning to tolerate the abuse that is our portion, depending on where we're slotted into the kyriarchy, and not questioning the abuses that are other people's portion. That's very well-adjusted—and very sick. The good news is that White women are under no compulsion to be concerned solely with improving our position in the kyriarchy. We can choose instead to free ourselves from both victim and oppressor roles, and put our energy into dismantling the kyriarchy altogether.

Q: It's true, there's all kinds of oppression going on, and all of it should stop! Why focus so narrowly on White racism and White people's attitudes toward Black people?

A: Because for most people that's the hardest knot to unravel, which is why so many people would rather focus on almost any other vector of oppression. Can't we just address the forms of oppression in which I've been assigned the role of innocent victim?—please and thank you. As

Charles Kreiner pointed out, oppressions are “all intertwined,” and as we already know, all of them are corrosive to the soul.

Luckily, all the healing modalities given here will work on healing from all the other forms of oppression directed against any arbitrarily defined group whatsoever. Antisemitism, for example, is so old and skanky that it has a peculiar stench all its own, and it’s always looking for excuses, because there is no excuse. It is also so often entangled with White racism that it can be hard to pick the two apart, even though Jewish people with European roots are also supposed to be White in the United States of America and therefore supposed to be willing to defend the kyriarchy against all non-White comers, not to mention having imposed on them the role of oppressor in Israel-Palestine, with what disastrous results we have seen—which in turn feed excuses to antisemitism, which then gets turned back around, weaponized, and used as an excuse for despoliation, dispossession, and murder on a genocidal scale, in an insanely vicious cycle. If antisemitism is to yield at all, it can only yield to a spiritual solution: it wants a miracle. Islamophobia is all entangled with White racism, too. All of it is creepy and lethal, and everyone is continually being pushed and pulled around it from all directions. The pressure and pull to join with Black people in the struggle to dismantle the kyriarchy is always in tension with the pressure and pull to preserve the kyriarchy and a potentially better position within it. And oh, how well “divide and conquer” serves the kyriarchy!

Even in places where other arbitrarily defined groups of human beings are assigned the lowest place in the local caste system, White racism as anti-Blackness may still need healing. In the same way that antisemitism without Jewish people is a real thing, there is such a thing as anti-Blackness without Black people, where folks who have never met a Black person in their lives believe sincerely that they know everything there is to know about Black people, and none of it is good. Once we’ve untangled the knot of White racism as anti-Blackness, the thought patterns—and the patterns of behavior—of all the other oppressive bigotries may become much more clear, and that much easier to get free of.

If, as James Baldwin said, the job of Black people in the United States of America is to define the bottom, and White people think they belong at the top, once White people have extracted ourselves from the top of the kyriarchy and come to see clearly that Black people do not belong at the bottom of even anything, the rest of the intersecting, intertwined hierarchies of abuse may begin to collapse very nicely, and we can all be the whole, fully human beings we came here to be.

James Baldwin went further, actually. In an interview, he said, “As long as you think you’re White, there’s no hope for you. As long as you think you’re White, I’m going to be forced to think I’m Black.” Wait, what? We can get a little deeper into this as we go along, but for now, it’s worth considering that the “double consciousness” W. E. B. Du Bois wrote about in *The Souls of Black Folk* is found in one form or another in every arbitrarily defined group. White people may think that we’ve pulled a fast one and made Whiteness the default, so we imagine that we always think of ourselves as “just another person” in a world where all the real persons are White. And yet we think of ourselves as White right quick when we’re reminded to, whether another White person reminds us or whether we find ourselves in a situation where, if we want to be members in good standing of the Tribe of White, we’re expected to be mean as shit to the people around us who aren’t White—or, if we don’t want to do the violence to our souls that makes it possible to be members in good standing of the Tribe of White, firmly remind ourselves to treat everyone with the same respect.

What Neely Fuller, Jr., said bears repeating: If you don't understand White supremacy, everything else that you think you understand will only confuse you.

And finally:

Q: If you don't stop talking about White racism—and in that tone!—I'm going to cry!

A: Ah, yes, that fabled White fragility and those fabled White tears about which we've heard so much, which are such a great conversation-stopper and work so well to keep us all walking on eggshells.

When I was a wee child in that all-White neighborhood where I grew up, one of my playmates was a sturdy and athletic little boy named Mac, a great kid with a good heart and a solid sense of right and wrong. Mac was only to be feared if someone or something made him cry, whether on purpose or accidentally, because once Mac started crying, there was going to be violence—kids had better scatter, because he would lash out at whoever was nearest, regardless of size. Did I mention he was sturdy? He could hurt you.

Historically, when White people have cried—especially when White women have cried—Black people have gotten hurt, or killed. Everyone knows this. White people especially know this, hence White tears as such a great conversation-stopper. But then, as your great-great-grandmother might have said if she wasn't *really* White, a hit dog will holler.

Actually, everyone knows that, too.

Shall we begin?

Prelude to the Practices

*There is no such thing as impossible. All is possible.
Impossible is made by the limitation of our capacity
of understanding. Man, blinded by the law of
nature's working, by the law of consequences which
he has known through his few years of life on earth,
begins to say, 'This is possible and that is impossible.'
If he were to rise beyond limitations,
his soul would see nothing but possible.*

—Hazrat Inayat Khan

The best way to make sure that a spiritual practice—any spiritual practice—doesn't work, can't work, won't work, is simply not to do it. If you go to all the trouble of reading this whole book and, without trying a single practice, say, “Nah,” that doesn't mean that the practices don't work. It also doesn't mean that there is not even any spiritual practice that will achieve the same results for you. To use Charles Kreiner's words, if your mind is set on healing, you may discover those practices, or find them among the practices you already know—and then you can pass those on to the rest of us.

On the other hand, you may conscientiously try all the practices in this book, and some or all of them might not do thing one for you. When I was a wee child and not given much if any latitude in my food choices, my mother often enjoined me and my siblings to “take three bites, to learn to like it.” Eventually, I learned to like just about everything, except turnips. To this day I do not like turnips. So if there's any practice here that you've taken the spiritual equivalent of three bites from, and as far as you're concerned it just keeps coming up turnips or the equivalent thereof, that may just be your cue to seek others that will work for you and perhaps other people besides. With your mind set on healing, you're sure to find something.

Most people like to cleanse and sanctify the space they're working in. Plain housecleaning, just to start, is great. Perhaps you also like to light a candle and burn something aromatic, or spray water with a few drops of an essence of a purifying plant in it—cedar oil is a good choice for northern climes—if burning anything is out of the question in the place where you are. Or you can just wave a piece of cloth or anything else imbued with an intention of spiritual cleansing throughout the space.

A word, though, about white sage: white sage is a wonderful purifier that is becoming increasingly endangered by commercialization and commodification, so it can take going to some lengths to find any that is sourced in a good-karma way. The Indigenous people who cultivate it have asked us very nicely, more than once, to please not steal their plants, and this is not metaphorical: in June of 2022, the Mexican newspaper *La Jornada* reported that in Baja California, armed gangs were stealing truckloads of white sage plants from the Kiliwa people,

sometimes violently, for cultivation elsewhere and sale on the Internet. That is the logical end-point of cultural appropriation: flat-out armed robbery.

There's nothing magical about white sage, and we're not depriving ourselves of even anything by leaving it alone. The plants native to right where we are may actually work better. For example, a juniper smudge, in the northern clime where I live, besides purifying makes a nice connection with the land right around me. Rosemary is nice, too. There are plenty of sustainable choices.

It is always helpful, before we start, to make a conscious connection with the earth at the place where we are. Asking permission of the local nature and ancestral spirits is always polite; everywhere, even in cities, there are nature and ancestral spirits all around who are just waiting to be asked, and who long to be invited to work with us. Forming a real relationship with these spirits is part of the healing. Everything everywhere around us came from the earth, including our bodies, so putting ourselves in harmony with the space we work in, and treating it with love, is good for us all by itself. We're not really separate from the earth.

It may also be the case that the land around us is in need of healing. That might be the subject of a whole other book, although there's no reason not to do what we can to heal the place where we are as soon as we've picked up on the need.

Studies have shown that rituals can calm anxiety and reduce stress, which means they can get us into a good frame of mind for any kind of spiritual work and help us to focus. There is also something powerful about what our material, physical energy in service to spirit can do. In addition to cleansing and purifying, some might like to make a libation, put out an offering of food or flowers, or do any other ritual to ask permission to work where they are and invite friendly and healing spirits to come and join in. Before doing specific shamanic practices or setting out on shamanic journeys, many of us, after purifying the space we're working in, like to rattle in helping spirits and then drum and perhaps sing to summon our own spirit to be fully present. Others may want to recite a particular prayer as an invocation.

Whatever ritual feels right to you—the one that really helps get you in the groove—is the best ritual. It doesn't have to be done perfectly, whatever “perfectly” means; we can be sure that, as we are perfectly imperfect human beings, our rituals will be perfectly imperfect, too. I've often found that the rituals I've been shown to do in shamanic journeys, for example, just somehow turn out not to be getting done exactly to the specifications I saw, even if I had the presence of mind to ask to be shown something really doable. There's a reason why there are so many stories of bargaining with the spirits, and bargaining with God, about the feasibility of what we're being shown to do. Worrying about getting it “right” would have the opposite effect of calming anxiety and reducing stress. The wise ancestors (well, one of mine, anyway) have said, “Ritual shmritual”—I am paraphrasing freely here—“it's the Love that does the healing!”

One: Beginning at the Beginning, and the End

The quality of forgiveness that burns up all things except beauty is the quality of love.

—Hazrat Inayat Khan

Let us begin by invoking, and evoking, the Spirit of Forgiveness. This might seem illogical—the logical thing perhaps being to look for forgiveness at the end of uncovering our unconscious racism—except that logic has nothing to do with spirit. Starting with forgiveness is for getting the forgiveness juices flowing: for all the embarrassment and genuine remorse this work may bring up, falling into guilt, shame, and judging ourselves harshly will not make us well. These things are for the convenience of other people, more along the lines of, “Go outside and cut yourself a switch, and then beat yourself with it—save me the trouble.” A friend of a friend is said to have said that if it feels as if someone is trying to make you feel bad, the conclusion you should jump to is not that you *are* bad, but rather that someone is trying to jerk you around—perhaps with the end goal of persuading you that you should be turning your will and the care of your life over to *them*.

And while we’re on the subject, we may want to bear in mind at all times that the fervor of our ant-racist commitment is not measured by how bad we can make other people feel about themselves. As always, keeping the focus on our own selves is the key to heavenly bliss.

So now, after all that snark in the Questions about people who believe in sincere good faith that they don’t need no stinkin’ spiritual healing of White racism, we might be forgiven, to use a certain word, if the mere suggestion that we might be needing forgiveness, let alone any other kind of healing, which right there implies that we’re not perfect, might just make us mad, or otherwise miserable. Perfectionism is as deeply embedded in Whiteness as it is in the family disease of alcoholism, and if we’ve been conditioned to believe that being perfect at all times is a matter of life or death, anything implying that we might be in any way other than perfect can feel life-threatening. In fact, there was a time when at the slightest hint that I might not be perfect—“Miss, you dropped a glove!”—I could go from zero to burning shame and anger in a nanosecond; it was only after decades of spiritual discipline that I started hearing myself say, “Oh, thank you!”—and meaning it.

The demands of Whiteness come at White people from all angles, and one of the most terrifying imperfections Whiteness can be accused of is White racism, so of course the urge to put a halt immediately to any discussion of White racism—that imperfection I couldn’t possibly have, or I’ll *die*—is fierce. And then, even deeper than our guilt and shame about unconscious racism may be the guilt aroused by rebelling against a core ancestral belief that has been drummed into us since babyhood: that the good people of all colors are the ones who defend Whiteness at all costs. Replicating and passing on inherited character defects being in its own way a form of filial piety, getting over those character defects may feel like a betrayal—impious and ungrateful.

The term “race traitor” for White people who break ranks did not arise in a vacuum. Never mind that loyalty to a sick system is not generally very nicely rewarded, and that when we cast off the shackles of the sick system of White supremacy we are being loyal to ourselves, and to the human race. Guilt is the hook most commonly used to try to ensnare us anew. That guilt may even be the motivator for running away from our moments of solidarity: if you’re a White person who was all involved in Black Lives Matter until someone broke a window, so now you can’t think well of Black people anymore—that’s great! Welcome back into the Tribe of White.

Then there’s adding injury to insult, when forgiveness is urged upon us by people who are being, to use a certain word, unforgivably annoying. When it isn’t a sociopath’s dream—can’t we just let bygones be bygones, so I can have a clean slate to hurt and harm you all over again without having to face any consequences?—it might be telling victims of hurt and harm that they must forgive in order to be free, or to be healed, or to move on, all of which is just another form of abuse.

And as much as we’re told that it’s not excusing anything and it’s for us, not for the other people, the Old Testament principle of an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth did not arise in a vacuum, either. It’s merely a modification of the lizard brain’s very natural desire for vengeance way out of proportion to the offense: both eyes for an eye and all your teeth for a tooth, and we can add to that millennia of conditioning that insists that if anyone or anything does us any hurt or harm, real or imagined, we’re supposed to make them pay for it, with interest. “Oh,” says the lizard brain, “you hurt me? Just wait ’til you see what I have in store for you, when you least expect it. I will bite you *hard*.” And “Oh,” say some of the more warm-blooded or perhaps hot-blooded denizens of the brain, “were you just now being insufficiently submissive? I will *slap* you.” Besides, what is the point of a grudge, we may ask, if not to hold it? And so there goes all that energy that could have been put to so much better use by being focused on healing. Thus we may be grateful that Hazrat Inayat Khan said, “Forgiveness belongs to God; it becomes the privilege of mortal man only when asked by another.”

Which is all fine and dandy as long as we don’t have any issues with the “G” word, which, usually depending on what we were taught in childhood, carries so much baggage for so many of us that in fact yes, we do have issues. That old White guy with a long beard meting out rewards and punishments has, over the millennia, earned the reputation of being a harsh and vengeful geek, the pinnacle of the patriarchy, and a gonzo control freak up in the sky whose job is to make us very sorry if we don’t do what the control freaks here on earth tell us to do—all those people who sincerely believe that we should turn our will and our lives over to them. Or perhaps the most powerful God we have known is money, so often and so fervently worshiped as the source of all happiness, the solver of all problems, and the answer to all our prayers—a God so powerful that there are plenty of people willing to sacrifice human lives to it: all those injuries and deaths in the factories and fields, all the grinding poverty of low wages and high rents. Or worse—the syncretic toxicity of a harsh and vengeful control freak up in the sky who measures our worth in money.

Perhaps we have been told (every major religion tells it) that God is Love. Which is lovely unless that’s a conditional love, conditioned by—oh Lord—those same control freaks here on earth: a love that is *very disappointed* in us. All in all, whole other books could probably be written—have probably already been written—about the wounds inflicted by both organized and disorganized religion in our relationships with ourselves and any genuine spiritual power greater than ourselves.

All that being said, the Big Love, the Only Being, and One Love are personal favorites, if I must try to use words for That For Which No Words Will Do, and I hasten to add that anyone who says you should worship my God rather than your silly God as you understand God is really saying that you should worship *me*. If God really were a great big control freak up in the sky, and then having somehow, in a momentary lapse of attention, endowed human beings with free will, She'd probably have to be sitting in church basements learning to say, "I didn't cause it, I can't cure it, and I can't control it."

Perhaps I was attracted to a Sufi path in part because the word "Allah," which is simply Arabic for "*the* God," as in the One and Only, was so much less freighted for me; there are some interesting meditations on the root of meanings of "Allah" (used in the Middle East in all three of the Abrahamic traditions—Judaism, Christianity, and Islam) in *Physicians of the Heart*, which point to a healthier sense of a loving presence beyond our comprehension. The introduction to Omid Safi's book *Radical Love* is a lovely expansion on the One Love, however understood—and while we're on the subject, his book *Memories of Muhammad* is a sweet antidote to Islamophobia.

Concepts of God may always change even as the reality beyond our comprehension remains eternal, and if you've been taught a concept of God that isn't nice, my unsolicited advice would be to just ditch it, and get you a nicer one. Concepts of God are constantly changing as we grow, anyway, until we arrive at a state of freedom from all concepts and get to live in Reality. Why we would even bother to try to name or comprehend that which is beyond all names and comprehension is a reasonable question, of course, but clearly we can't help ourselves—we're just people here. And if my own understanding of a power beyond understanding that is greater than myself keeps shifting, why wouldn't everyone else's?

So bearing all that in mind, and emerging refreshed from the thickets of theology, instead of wrestling with the ever-changing concepts of either a power greater than ourselves or the spirit of forgiveness, we may be free simply to invoke the Spirit of Forgiveness, without any expectations as to how that will go, or what that even is. No one really knows what forgiveness is. "To feel is for real"—we just know it when we feel it.

Here's an example of how spontaneous it can be. For most of my life, my relationship with my parents could most charitably be described as vexed. They were both hot-tempered, and either one of them would hit a kid in a minute. Hitting kids is not a good plan. What with one thing and another, I left shortly after turning eighteen and never went back, and I was very glad to learn that Hazrat Inayat Khan said, "A person who has anger and control is to be preferred to the person who has got neither," because, like most people who got hit when they were small and defenseless, I have that anger part down. Getting it under something like control is the work of a lifetime.

From the vantage point of a greater age than theirs at the time, I could see that they really did do the best they could with what they had, which wasn't a whole lot, and that much of what they did was really good. My father—always a pretty feisty guy—softened considerably in his old age, and it blessedly became possible to be kind to him on a regular basis without risking snarling and snapping, which was infinitely sweeter than any imaginable revenge for even the most enlarged sense of grievance. Years later, when my mother entered into dementia and the persona she had painstakingly constructed over a lifetime fell away, a truly sweet person emerged, and our relationship became truly sweet. She died peacefully, of a cold, at the age of 98; by the time I was summoned she was already unresponsive. I spent her last day by her side,

singing to her and asking the local nature spirits to come and accompany her: a proselytizing atheist, she did love nature. At some point, I heard myself saying, “All is forgiven.” It felt so good that I said it again, but the magic, or miracle, had already happened the first time—any and all lingering resentment which by then I wasn’t even aware of carrying anymore instantly evaporated, leaving only love, and peace. My mother had not asked me for forgiveness, nor did I presume to forgive her—I did not say, “I forgive you.” I heard myself saying, “All is forgiven,” and the One who is all Forgiveness—the very Spirit of Forgiveness—did all the healing.

The hardest one to forgive is, naturally, the unholy triumvirate of me, myself, and I. I’ve been mad at myself for all the times I’ve played the role of oppressor and tried to make someone else a victim (worse if I succeeded), the times I’ve played victim for sympathy, and the times others have actually victimized me, for which I have held myself responsible—if only I were made entirely of case-hardened steel instead of mere flesh and blood, none of that shit would have happened to me! Or, most often, I’m in need of my own forgiveness for my part of whatever it was, which is usually taking other people’s words and deeds too personally and too much to heart. Much as I would like never to be caught in a mistake ever again, there’s something very sweet about knowing that I have good reason to be humble. So sometimes I’m grateful for my imperfections. At other times, I still find myself holding a grudge against myself, which is, let’s face it, just so unkind.

If I can see all my relationships as running from me to the source of all Love and Light, and from there to all my relations, including me, then it’s easier to surrender and hand over all the grudges, all the resentment, all the remorse and regret, and all the rest of it to the One Love that does all the forgiving. Your own heart knows what will work best for you.

The practices

We can try starting, and even continuing indefinitely if we like it, with a Sufi practice. Sufis have recently come to be known as the “good” Muslims, mostly on account of catching hell on a regular basis from the fundamentalists, though in fact the vast majority of Muslim people are not only good Muslims, they are good people. If you find the mere thought of a Sufi or Muslim practice triggering, and if you haven’t already, you can make a quick visit to chapter Six and tap your Islamophobia away right now.

In the mystical traditions of Islam, and especially in the Sufi traditions, among the 99 Beautiful Names of God that carry the meaning of forgiveness, two can be especially helpful to us in this work: Al-Ghaffār, “The Forgiver” (or “The Absolver”), with a connotation of continual forgiveness, and Al-Ghafūr, “The Forgiving” (or “The All-Forgiver” or “The Pardoner”), with a connotation of penetrating deeply to whatever is being forgiven. Of the number of translations of the roots of Ghaffār and Ghafūr, my favorite is related to a word for “covering,” not in the sense of concealing, but in the sense of mending—like *kintsugi*, the Japanese art of mending broken pottery with gold, making it more beautiful than it was before, with the gold perhaps being where the spirit of genuine repentance and the spirit of loving-kindness melt together: harking back to the epigraph of this book, we don’t need to scrunch up our faces. You can find a variety of pronunciations online; I like the one in which the initial “gh” is pronounced like French “r,” only maybe even more softly—that fricative in the back of the mouth pairing with the fricative of the “f” in the front, smoothing and mending the broken places.

“Ya,” sometimes translated as “Oh,” asks—invites—the essence of these qualities to be present with us and heal us. So we may begin by invoking these two manifestations of the Divine

with 33 repetitions of “Ya Ghaffār, Ya Ghafūr.” After saying the practice out loud, we may do it on the breath, breathing in “Ghaffār” and breathing out “Ghafūr.” We can then sit in silence with it, just feeling it.

I like to use this practice on the breath when I find myself getting too easily riled up, those moments when I need to remind myself of a saying of the Sufi saint Nizamuddin Auliya: “If someone places a thorn in your way and you place a thorn in his way, there will be thorns everywhere”—especially when I sincerely wish to drag whole thornbushes in someone else’s way. Breathing in “Ghaffār” and breathing out “Ghafūr” takes me very quickly to a much happier place. As a practice of just a few repetitions at the end of the day, it helps me let go of grudges both new and old. Come to think of it, holding those grudges is not unlike holding thorns on my own heart. If, as the adage has it, the person who repeats the insult is the one who insults me, revisiting past offenses is not only another thing to forgive myself for; it can bring the healing that takes the sting out of the hurt, and heals it. *Ya Ghaffār, ya Ghafūr*. That gold that does the mending? We find that deep within us, too.

There are other divine Names that invoke the spirit of forgiveness—enough to amount to a real percentage—and every spiritual tradition has its own invocations of that spirit. There’s sure to be one that’s useful for you. Any prayer or practice that feels right will do—or we can simply repeat “All is forgiven” in the same way as the Sufi practices, at first out loud, then on the breath, breathing in “all is forgiven” and breathing out “all is forgiven,” and finally sitting in silence with the spirit of forgiveness. Perhaps you’ll come up with a new one.

These practices can be done with great effect even without bringing anything specific that needs forgiveness to mind, although if you can’t think of anything you’ve ever done for which you are rightly ashamed and sorry, or that someone else has done to you for which they damn well ought to be ashamed and sorry, you’re probably well under the age of five and aren’t reading this anyway.

It’s not that we have to be ready right now to forgive ourselves, or anyone else. It’s opening ourselves up to the possibility of forgiveness. Ultimately, we’re positioning ourselves as deeply as we can within the embrace of the One Love, so that as the difficult and embarrassing things come up, we can remember that being always held in forgiveness, we don’t ever again have to do, think, or say those things for which we are ashamed and sorry, and even the impulses behind them may soon simply cease to exist. Remorse, painful as it may be in the moment, is also a healing power—and the bridge that carries us from guilt, shame, or regret to forgiveness and compassion for our perfectly imperfect selves.

Later, we can bring a specific forgiveness prayer to the healing of the ancestors.

Sooner or later, all is forgiven.

Two: The Power of Prayer

Here's another practice we can do daily. Prayer is so much more powerful than we realize, maybe because we are so often actually wheedling, or asking for things that aren't good for us, and when the answer is "no" we get mad. I personally have carried on from time to time like a two-year-old who has been told no, you can't drink the kerosene. But I *want* to drink the kerosene! Why *can't* I drink the kerosene? You are so mean to me!

Jesus said, "Ask and it will be given to you; seek and you will find; knock and it will be opened unto you. For everyone asking receives; and the one seeking finds; and to the one knocking, it will be opened. Who is there among you, who, if his son asks him for bread, will give him a stone? Or if he asks for a fish, who will give him a serpent?" None of us, of course, nor with any of our other children or other people's children either, and much less would any mother among us dream of doing such a thing—and this goes especially for when we really are asking for bread or a fish and not a stone or a serpent. All it takes is a clear intention and a sincere wish.

Whenever and however we choose to do it, we can jump right into asking for help to uproot every bit of White racism harbored in our unconscious—and when it comes up, we can honor the embarrassment and welcome our remorse, always remembering that sooner or later, all is forgiven.

And also not forgetting the immortal words of Fannie Lou Hamer: "You can pray until you faint, but unless you get up and try to do something, God is not going to put it in your lap." That's what the other practices in this handbook are for: clearing out, as expeditiously as possible, everything in the way of getting up and doing things that will really make a difference.

Three: When Did It Start?

Charles Kreiner, who has been quoted earlier here, was a founder and director of the Institute for Diversity Education in America (IDEA) and a council member of the National Organization for Men Against Sexism. He started out by working on sexism, and then came to realize that oppression is oppression is oppression, and began doing valuable anti-racism work. When he died, in 2007, he was still relatively young, and he left behind very little in the way of writing and only a couple of recordings of workshops he led that I can find. I had the great good fortune to attend one of those workshops in 1994 and acquire the recording of it, which is now available at <https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2024/11/23/18870976.php>. The issues addressed with the people attending that workshop are still distressingly timely.

After introductions, we began by looking at our first experience of racism, which, according to Charlie (as he liked to be called), is shaped by our experiences of being introduced to both the role of oppressor and the role of victim as children, when we usually experienced oppression in the role of victim, while learning from close observation how to be an oppressor—and which role is preferable. In recalling these events, we were to keep in mind a few questions about them.

For people of color, the questions were: “What’s your earliest memory of being subjected to racism? What happened? How did you feel? And particularly, how did you respond?”

For White people, the questions were: “What’s your earliest memory of learning about racism, of having it installed on you—of witnessing it, of seeing somebody else’s, of having it taught to you directly or indirectly, of having it installed, enforced, what’s your earliest memory? And again, what happened? How did you feel? And what did you do?”

Charlie added (and you may find this useful), “If you can’t remember anything past last week, make an early memory up, make a fantasy up—you’ll find it’ll get pretty close to what happened, because your mind is in the direction of healing.”

A White man said that his earliest memory of White racism was about a Black man who was working as a servant in his grandfather’s house, who, he said, “Was my friend as a child, but was also putting himself in a position that was lower than me, and first of all it didn’t make sense. Second of all it didn’t feel right, which I never would have been able to identify before. It didn’t feel right, and it was painful to me.” He reported that he “didn’t do much” except maintain the friendship (he was about five years old) “and sort of feel, and wonder about this, not even consciously. And later on, other stuff began to come in, the stuff I got from school, about Blacks this, n—— this and n—— that, that kind of stuff, and then, I really didn’t know what to do. I lost my ability to relate to anyone of color because I didn’t know how to speak to them, I didn’t know how to be with them. This was, I think, my feeling through growing up with this.” Charlie pointed out that one of the first layers was deep confusion and feeling that “this is wrong,” but not being able to do anything about it and having to submit to it.

Another White man’s earliest memory of White racism was watching a little Black boy being harassed by a group of other White boys, “and knowing that it was wrong, what was going on,

but knowing that if I stood up for this little boy, they would do it to me.” When Charlie asked him what he did, he said, “I swallowed my rage and just sat with the powerlessness and helplessness, there was nothing I could do.” To which Charlie replied, “It wasn’t that there was nothing you could do, it felt that way. What actually was the fear of having it be done to you, which let you submit to that it was okay that it be done to him—not okay, but better him than you,” and that what had happened divided this man from both the other White boys and the Black boy: “division, isolation, and submission.” He also said that violence would certainly have been directed at the White boy if he had done anything about it: “In fact, color is an excuse,” not a cause or reason. He added, as noted earlier, “Every White adult knows this: that if you attempt to stand up against and/or stop racism, they will target you, just as though you were a person of color. That the color is only an excuse by which to divide people from each other and from our own humanity, from ourselves.” The fear this man was experiencing was also “within the guilt that’s always going to come up when you don’t do what’s right, when you don’t act on your courage, when you are forced to submit to your fear, which itself is installed from the outside.” In addition to the fear that the White boys would beat him up, there was also fear that he would be ostracized or shunned.

A young Black woman reported that her first experience of White racism was within her own family, when a neighbor invited her very light-skinned sister who had wavy or straightish hair on an outing and didn’t invite her. “I always kind of knew that this particular sister had more value because of her complexion, because my family on a certain level bought into those values. But what that incident did was that it confirmed it for me.” What she felt about it was “awful, because it made me have to face the fact that I had less value.” What she did was to “try to confront the adults by denying it—I was like, we’re all going to the circus, isn’t that great? But we were not all going to the circus. And I kept forcing the adults to say something to me about why we weren’t going by pretending I didn’t understand and that I thought we were all going to go.” Finally the adults told her that only the one sister was invited, and that she and her other sister weren’t. She spent the day of the trip in a corner, “waiting for her to get back, and I probably did some crying. And I think the adults around thought I was crying because she got a treat that I didn’t get, but actually it meant more to me than that.” So an example of a painful first experience of White racism occurring within a Black family, in the form of colorism.

My own recollection of a first experience of White racism was deeply disturbing to me. The first time I ever consciously saw a Black person, when I was still a toddler, back in the day when toddlers were allowed to be outside unsupervised, a Black woman was just walking down the other side of the street. I felt terrified and simply froze. It was disturbing because in hindsight I couldn’t help wondering, is racism something we’re born with and can never get over? Are we doomed? It was a long time before it finally dawned on me that if I had been living in a neighborhood where people of all colors lived, instead of only White people, a Black person walking down the street would have aroused no fear whatsoever: they would have been just another person to me, and very possibly a person I knew, perhaps even loved. And that is how I know that all-White neighborhoods are saturated with White racism, and that White people who grow up in them are soaked in White racism, too.

What became most painfully clear during this exercise is that for those of us who grew up in these United States, White racism inflicts childhood traumas on all of us, and it doesn’t stop—the trauma keeps right on coming.

Your own first experience of White racism will most likely be very different from the four examples I've given here. If you're a Black person, your first experience of White racism may have come, if not directly from White people, from other Black people in the form of colorism or internalized White racism. If you're a White person, what your experience *won't* be is your first memory of when a Black person poked fun or got angry at you. If we're White, we're going for the first experience of one-way overt oppression aimed by White people at people of color. What happened? How did you feel? What did you do?

Next up, we'll meet some very cool beings who can help us journey back in time to bring some healing to that experience.

Four: Let's Meet Some Friends and Relations

*When the shaman says the drum is the heartbeat
of the earth, the words reflect the understanding
of relationship, for the resonance of the drum
and the resonance of the earth are similar.*

—Myron Eshowsky

There are all kinds of ancestors, spiritual as well as biological, of all colors, creeds, and countries of national origin, who are deeply interested in this healing work and eager to help with it. When we meet and form relationships with these ancestors, our conscious awareness that they're accompanying us on this journey, like the conscious awareness of the ever-present power of Love manifesting as forgiveness, makes the path toward freedom from White racism exciting and joyful rather than daunting.

And so here we come to an introduction to shamanic practices—humanity's oldest and most widespread spiritual path. The word “shaman” comes from the Manchu-Tungus word *šaman*, meaning roughly “one who knows,” from a language group that's widely spoken across northeastern Asia. It's been adopted to replace loaded terms like “witch” and “sorcerer,” or, worse, “witch doctor.” And since there are Mongolian people among those who have been extremely generous about sharing their shamanic knowledge and practices, it's nice to honor them by using their name for the workers, and the work.

Shamanic work is done in a light trance state that can be induced with the help of plant-derived substances or by drumming or rattling in a steady rhythm. As it's generally taught in the West, drumming or rattling is the preferred modality, since it's less likely to induce a trance that might take an unpredictable amount of time to emerge from: all it takes is a shift to a more rapid rhythm to bring us back. Not to disparage the plant-based methods—used wisely and with good intentions, they've worked well for all kinds of people—but for quick effective work, drumming and rattling are easiest. There's also the difference that with drumming and rattling there's an intention but no expectation, whereas with plants there are often expectations, and they can greatly influence the experience. In my own experience, journeys rarely are or show what I expected—or else why would I be journeying?

In brief, shamanic work as taught these days usually involves journeying to “nonordinary reality,” in either an upper world or a lower world, both of which are sacred spaces, and sometimes in the middle world, which is here. We don't ever go alone; we go in the company of a helpful and protective being from the realm we're journeying to. In the upper world, these beings usually appear in human form; in the lower world, they usually appear in animal form, although wonderful beings in human form are often found in the lower world, too, and animals may accompany us in the upper world. Spirit is indivisible; it shows up in whatever garb or form we can best understand, or is most comforting. We might call this a very beautiful expression of the infinite politeness of the Only Being.

The reason why it's called "nonordinary reality" is that it's experienced as real. No one ever says, "I thought I saw" or "I imagined." They simply say that they saw, they heard, and then this other thing happened. The experiences people have had after ingesting psychedelic substances are generally reported the same way, hence, most likely, the term "trip."

In many traditions, there may also be possession by a known and trusted spiritual being, by invitation. But as the Sufi teacher Shahabuddin Less pointed out to me early in my explorations of shamanic work and Santería, in which spirits are invited to possess their devotees, there's a difference, if I want to see you, between me going to your house and you coming to mine. Journeying is going to spirit's house, where there's a standing invitation, the door is (almost) always open, in both directions, and we are free to come and go as we please.

Sandra Ingerman's book *Shamanic Journeying: A Beginner's Guide* is a blessedly brief, sensible, and down-to-earth introduction to the basics of shamanic work, and it's also available in digital form. Drumming audio can be found on the web, and is listed with the suggested readings. It should be noted, though, that there are a lot of people purporting to be shamans who have offerings on the web—shamanic practices are another of the things that used to be closely held secrets and now are everywhere to be found—and it is the better part of wisdom to use both intuition and common sense when choosing which people to pay attention to. Shamanic work is powerful, and as we have learned to our sorrow time and again, not everyone who is interested in power has the loveliest of ethics. There are people indigenous to all kinds of places claiming to be shamans who are no more the real deal than some of the entirely deracinated non-Indigenous people running around here claiming to be shamans. Another of Joe Miller's excellent sayings is, "There are three things one needs for the spiritual path—common sense, a sense of humor, and more common sense!"

The first shamanic workshop I attended was led by Michael Harner, one of the people who learned shamanic practices from people who were able to preserve them and have been willing to teach them. At one point, someone attending the workshop asked how he could reconcile "all this" with his religion. Harner replied, "As best you can." Next day, I was saying a prayer composed by Hazrat Inayat Khan, and when I came to the lines "Lord God of the East and of the West, of the worlds above and below, and of the seen and unseen beings," I was electrified—it's all right there! It's probably all right there in any number of other spiritual traditions, too.

While according to Pir Zia Inayat Khan, the current head of the Inayatiyya order, Sufis have often preserved shamanic traditions wherever they have gone, there is scarcely an organized religion that doesn't have a beef with shamanic practitioners. Organized religions tend to have issues with mystics, too, which is how Sufis have gotten to be heretics, and the history with shamanic practitioners in many places has been very bloody. "Witch hunts" were intended to wipe out traditional healers in Europe and the Americas. In Tibet, the indigenous Bön shamanic religion and Buddhism competed and borrowed from each other, until the current Dalai Lama declared "the religious equality of the Bön faith"—which, incidentally, annoyed some people. All of which is supremely ironic: where did all the organized religions think they came from originally? Oh, right, straight from the Only Being, just like shamanic practices—what a coincidence!

Following the triumph of beating shamanic knowledge out of their fellow Europeans, missionaries of organized European religions have done what they could to rid the world of shamanic practices—and the people who do them—so that in many places besides Europe the practices have either gone underground or been obliterated altogether, with perhaps some vestigial survival hidden in folk tales, legends, and nursery stories—and even under the lives of

saints. When they were murdered, all those healers and shamanic practitioners took with them not only their knowledge of healing, but also their wisdom: that beyond or by way of a particular plant or a particular ritual, it's always the Love that does the healing.

Ironically, as Michael Harner has pointed out, when the missionaries of organized religions encountered shamanic cultures, they found people whose spiritual experiences were far more immediate and direct than their own, and then found themselves faced with the awkward task of converting those people to belief systems in which they were meant to require intermediaries and follow the rules. As Michael Pollan noted in speaking of the suppression of Native peyote use by Spanish conquistadores in South America, "You render the priesthood superfluous if everybody can talk to God on their own." And yet, hiding out somewhere from the power structures overlaid on the direct experience of spirit—power structures that may not always have been divinely inspired—shamanic knowledge has persisted. How could it not? It lives in the marrow of our bones.

We now have the opportunity to carry forward an ancient and universal way of healing. The Native American teacher Sun Bear used to say, "If it don't grow corn, I ain't interested." In my experience, shamanic work very much grows corn—lots of it—which is precisely what makes it so interesting. And, as noted earlier, it's also a great opportunity to work through our fear of losing valuable Whiteness points by becoming adept at something that White people widely aren't supposed to be able to do at all, by being either too deracinated or too "civilized." Faking it might be okay, because that confirms stereotypes of Whiteness, but actually being able to do it? Like the knowledge in the marrow of our bones isn't different from everyone else's? Like we're not the least bit special? Yikes!

One of my favorite things about shamanic communities I have known and loved is that they are mostly consciously nonhierarchical and small-"d" democratic: once you can journey, there's no need for a guru figure. Once when I was attending a workshop led by Nan Moss and David Corbin, I had the great good luck to overhear David say to someone who had asked him a question, "That's a really interesting question. Why don't you journey on it?"

There are few, if any, religions in this world that don't look to actual people who have gone before, or to personifications of natural forces—which are also manifestations of the Only Being—for help in one way or another. Of the many ancestors who are most interested in this work, some are our very own personal ancestors; others, as noted above, are whole groups of ancestors of all colors, creeds, and countries of national origin. Individually and collectively, all of us have somewhere in our heritage ancestors who are wise, loving, and more than willing to help.

And here a word about nomenclature. There's no need to borrow any. In particular, many Native people very much do not like it when White people speak of a "spirit animal." Specifically, as they say, it's not *your* spirit animal. I've always felt put off by the term "power animal," which was what I was originally taught—too much conjuring thoughts like, "My power animal will call your power animal, and they'll do lunch." A friend who has been doing shamanic work for years refers to all beings in nonordinary reality as "the Dudes." I think of them as friends, companions, loving relations—familiar in many senses of the word. You can use whatever term best expresses your own relationship—because it's really about a relationship—or no term at all. It's nobody's business but yours and your friends and relations in nonordinary reality. Your authentic experience is what makes your terminology authentic, not the other way around. They're *your* dudes, not someone else's.

It's all good, as long as we remember to journey in company, and do not imagine that *we* do the work: Spirit, or Higher Power, or One Love, or however you best understand a power greater than yourself, does the work. We give our focus and energy and, in all humility, gain in wisdom. And we always remember to have ethics: in some cultures, shamanic practices are taught only after years of instruction in ethics. If you ever think it might be okay to use shamanic practices to hurt or harm, just journey to your friends and relations in the upper or lower world and ask them all about it, and let them show you exactly why and how it's specifically harmful to you.

The practices

Now, in seeking a particular ancestor or ancestors to work with, and *pace* Resmaa Menakem, I can't advise inviting any random ancestor into your home or any other sacred space, especially if they're inclined to be so bad-tempered that you might want to just walk away from them; you could be burning those white-sage alternatives for days trying to clear out that energy. Would you invite your proudly racist Uncle Donald to a family gathering knowing that he can't be trusted with the nieces, and then just walk away and leave him marauding around the house if he got mad at you? No? Me neither. We all have ancestors who need healing, and we'll get to them later. As Angela Davis has so wisely pointed out, not all of our ancestors are necessarily our people. What we're looking for right now are ancestors who perhaps were and are healers in their own right, who have arrived at a state of great light, and who really, really love us.

If you've already done shamanic work, you already know how to set your intention and journey to find ancestors who will be overjoyed to help you with this specific work—if you haven't already met those ancestors. You may be comfortable with drumming for yourself, or you may want to shake a soft rattle for your journey, or use whatever recording you prefer.

Here's what we might call an intermediate practice, if you don't have a whole lot of experience yet or are perhaps feeling a bit shy: while drumming, rattling, or listening to a recording of drumming or rattling, try concentrating on this design, and especially on the small black circle in the center.

This is the design on my drum for individual healing. After you have a good picture of it in your mind, try stepping through the small black circle in the center into nonordinary reality, leaving any doubts and distractions on this side. Sit quietly, observing what it looks like there,



and when you're comfortable in wherever you are, ask for a helping ancestor or ancestors to come and be with you. If they don't look like anyone you might have expected, that's fine, because there really are many ancestors, spiritual as well as biological, who will be happy to be guides and companions on this path. You'll know you're with the right one, or ones, when you feel happy to have found them, and you can feel that they're just as happy you did.

Once you have met your ancestor, or ancestors, and perhaps had a brief conversation to confirm that they will help you, you can thank them and step back into ordinary reality, opening your eyes when you feel you're fully back.

If you've never done shamanic work and don't want to start now, you can try this meditation: Begin by setting your intention— "I want to meet an ancestor who will help me heal from White racism."

Light a candle, with this intention—that it will light the way for a helping ancestor.

Sit in front of the candle and gradually narrow your eyes until they are nearly closed, keeping in mind that "I want to meet an ancestor who will help me on my path to heal from White racism."

Allow that ancestor to appear before your mind's eye, and ask if they are the ancestor who will help with this work. Again, they may not look like who you might have expected. Once you have confirmed that they are, you can thank them and take your leave. Open your eyes— gradually, if you prefer—and thank the candle, too, for lighting the way for you and your ancestor.

Five: Journeying Back in Time

Now we can revisit that first experience of White racism. In the company of the ancestor or ancestors we met in chapter Four, in whatever way works, we can journey back to that place and time and be with the other people who were there.

The intention is to ask for whatever is needed for healing: to ask for forgiveness and understanding, or to apologize for our part and ask what we can do to make amends, to ask for a blessing or a revelation, to ask for a ritual to do later or a healing on the spot—whatever feels right.

This is a journey that we can make not only to our first experience of White racism, but also to every other experience of White racism that has left us with feelings of guilt, shame, and fear. And we can end by expressing our gratitude to all involved for helping us to heal.

Six: Tapping Our Fears Away

*Fear is the cheapest room in the house
I would like to see you living
in better conditions.*

—Hafiz

If you were referred here by something said previously that angered or frightened you, or if you're just generally afraid that even thinking about White racism, let alone trying to dig it out of your psyche, will make you think so ill of yourself that you'll have to make yourself sleep on the couch for the duration, you've come to the right place. "Perfect love casts out fear," says the first epistle of John. By the same token, we might say that perfect fear casts out love.

Tapping, which works on acupressure points, is one of those modalities that were being jealously guarded when I first encountered it, though unbeknownst to me, in fact the knowledge of working on acupressure points is found in different cultures all around the world, of course, because the pressure points are the same on everyone and people can discover things, or think of things, independently. Now books about it have been written and published and it's all over the Internet. Simply, it's great for clearing fears, phobias, anxiety, and anger—the cortisol-fueled emotions that are pumped out of our adrenal glands and make our lizard brains think strange things and do stupid stuff. It works well for hate, too. A friend of mine once relayed something a teacher of hers had said about the difference between anger and hate: "Anger is like a hamburger—you cook it quick. Hate is like a stew—you keep cooking it, you keep stirring it, and you keep adding little things to it." A steaming toxic stew, with anger and fear as the primary ingredients. We can tap on that, too.

There are those who are so enthusiastic about tapping that they may say it's good for just about everything. It's always good to remember that there is nothing in this world that's the be-all and end-all; purely anecdotally and as a caveat, I tried using tapping to get over an addiction to computer games, and it removed all my anxieties and inhibitions about playing computer games. I played them more than ever and just wasn't so worried about it anymore, until I finally got over it by means of an entirely different spiritual ruse (see Appendix A).

I do recommend making your acquaintance with tapping by starting with whatever fear, anger, phobia, or trauma is most pressing to you now, both to see how amazingly well it works and to clear out issues that might be clamoring for your attention loudly enough to drown out your direct experience of the emotions involved in White racism. Or you might want to start with the simple terror of what might be lurking in your subconscious, or even your annoyance about being introduced to this modality.

The first time I tried tapping, for some reason the most pressing issue I had was a distant memory of a school monitor yelling at me when I was seven years old, which terrified me; as I recall, the phrase I kept repeating while tapping was, "She yelled at me!" Not long afterward, as a gift from the One Love just to show how well the tapping worked, a person with a well-earned

reputation for a formidable temper yelled at me in front of God and everybody, and, feeling not the faintest fear, I calmly backed them off—much to the awe and amazement of everyone present, including me.

Once you've learned the technique—and it's simple—you can use tapping in many situations, and to clear out many different fears and phobias, along with anger and even hate. It might require a certain amount of what we can call emotional literacy—being able to match the feelings with the words—but it's flexible enough so that it works perfectly well if the feeling we're addressing seems to morph from, say, hate to fear, or fear to terror, or fear to anxiety or to rage, as we proceed through a round of tapping.

Shifting and clearing out the energy inside ourselves this way makes it unnecessary to seek reassurance from other people, or even to imagine that other people are responsible for how we feel. There are many tools, of which this may be one of the most efficient, to help us be responsible for our own feelings and our own serenity. We don't need other people to make us feel okay—as if they could.

Tapping is also a great tool to keep handy in all kinds of circumstances. In community organizing, “cool head, warm heart” is axiomatic. It's hard to think clearly when we're angry or frightened, because then the blood flow to the thinking-clearly parts of our brains tends to be greatly diminished. As a direct message from our bodies, anger and fear can be healthy visceral reactions to injustice, telling us that something is wrong. They're like an alarm clock waking us up. Once we're awake, we don't need to keep the alarm going all day long; once we've gotten the message, it's a cool head that can strategize dealing with that injustice. When I was engaged in struggle with the landlord over a period of years, had it not been for the many years I had already been practicing a spiritual discipline, I would certainly have been every bit as angry and scared—and much less effective. I didn't have this practice at my fingertips then, but it would have been great if I had.

Using tapping to clear out White racism is a two-part task, and not skipping the second part is key. Since White people are trained up to be afraid of Black people, that seems like the obvious issue to address, and starting with it has worked well so far, at least for White people. But then I'm not the only White person who doesn't really trust White people—and that can include myself sometimes. In fact, Charles Kreiner has pointed out that White people's fear of Black people is really our fear of other White people, stuffed, denied, and projected outward. Instead of saying, “I'm scared,” we say to Black people, “You're scary.”

Dealing with our fear of White people is also tricky because it's unquestionably what we call a well-founded fear. Shunning is the least of what we fear from other White people: we all know just how violent White people can be. In 1964, three young civil-rights workers—James Chaney, Andrew Goodman, and Michael Schwerner—were murdered near Philadelphia, Mississippi. After their bodies were found, FBI agents reported that while James Chaney had been beaten even more ferociously than the two young White men—no surprise there—in all three cases, they had not seen such injuries except in high-speed plane crashes. That is how dangerous White people can be, not only to Black people, but also to other White people. I was in my teens then and read about it in real time, and it haunts me to this day. As Thulani Davis noted with regard to “the true tenets of white supremacy,” “whiteness does not include disloyalty to whiteness.”

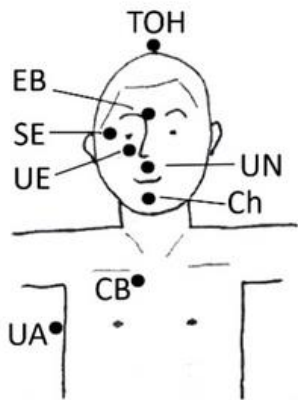
In addition, and as James Baldwin pointed out, neither categorization of human beings in this dyad can exist without the other. It's fine to start with people who don't look like us, but starting with our fear of Black people gets both internalized White racism (for Black people and other

people of color) and the fear of other White people projected onto Black people (for White people) out of the way first, so we can go on from there to the people we're most frightened of: the people who hold the power and the position of oppressors-in-chief.

As we extricate ourselves from the strangling grip of Whiteness on our way to becoming fully human, we can still be aware that there are many White people prepared to defend Whiteness to the death—and therefore it is indeed an act of courage to stand up against White racism. Once we've cleared out our outright phobias about other White people, we can make an all-the-time practice of being clear about the difference between social discomfort and credible threats of violence, and of not giving in to our fear. Even when we're in directly violent situations, we need to be able to keep our wits about us, which is difficult to do in a panic of accumulated conditioned fear. We need alertness, not agitation.

Maybe the strongest feelings about Black or White people are varieties of anger. It's okay to start there, too, if it makes the fears more consciously accessible. Or it could be the other way around: starting with fear and then addressing anger.

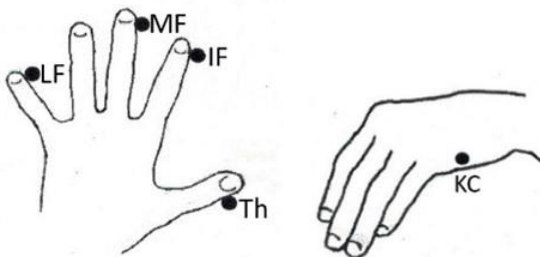
These diagrams, adapted from the website www.emofree.com/nl/eft-tutorial/tapping-basics/how-to-do-eft.html, show the tapping points for the most basic tapping protocol. For much more information about tapping, you can consult this website, which is enormously helpful, or any of the other websites about this practice. This protocol is simple and just as effective as more complex ones.



The points on the hand are helpful if things aren't moving as much as we'd like. That point on the thumb will come in handy later, in chapter Eight.

The main points are identified as follows:

- Top of the Head (TOH)
- Beginning of the Eyebrow (EB)
- Side of the Eye (SE)
- Under the Eye (UE)
- Under the Nose (UN)
- Chin Point (Ch)
- Beginning of the Collarbone (CB)
- Under the Arm
- Side of the Hand , “karate chop” (KC)



These points are easy to find: all of them are tender.

The side of the hand, called the “karate chop” point (KC), is where the practice starts, by tapping that point with two, three, or all four fingers of the other hand—whatever works best for

you—held together while repeating, three times, “I deeply and completely accept myself, even if I have this fear of Black people.” Then, using the same tapping technique, starting with the top of the head (TOH) and working our way down through all the other points on the body—beginning of the eyebrow (EB), side of the eye (SE), under the eye (UE), under the nose (UN), chin point (Ch), beginning of the collarbone (CB), and under the arm (UA)—and ending by going back to the top of the head, we can simply repeat “this fear of Black people,” changing as we feel it to “this terror of Black people” or “this anxiety about Black people” or even “this anger at Black people.”

Yawning or sighing while tapping is a good sign: energy is shifting and clearing out. And once there’s a real shift and clearing with regard to fear of, or anger at, Black people, it’s time to do the same sequence, substituting “White” for “Black.”

If you tap on both of these things in close succession, you may very well be gifted with an amazingly enlightening and liberating—and total—paradigm shift.

Seven: What's Ours, and What's Theirs?

As preparation for healing the ancestors, here's a powerful practice, as best I remember it, that I encountered when it was led by Hilda Massoud at a weekend healing workshop organized by Dr. Fatima Hafiz Muid and Onaje Muid. It comes from the Indigenous Tools for Living work of Dr. Shirley Turcotte.

Take a blank piece of paper and think of something that has been traumatic for you, or a core belief that's a serious hindrance on your path. Ask: How much of this belongs to me, and how much comes from the ancestors? Tear off as much paper as seems to represent how much of the issue belongs to your ancestors.

Now sit with the trauma or core belief for a bit, feeling it where it is now in your body, and ask again: How much of this belongs to me, and how much comes from the ancestors? Again, tear off enough paper to represent the ancestors' part. Repeat the process until all of the issue that belongs to the ancestors has been torn off.

I can't say what happened for other people, but the trauma that came up for me was obviously generational, since it began with the memory of my paternal grandmother's account of an episode that involved the very unkind imposition of an identity on her. One day when she was about eight years old, which would have been in 1890 or thereabouts, my grandmother was walking down the road cheerfully whistling when she encountered a man she didn't know who said, "Whistling girls and crowing hens always come to some bad ends." She ran home crying, and was still talking about it in her old age.

I've been on the receiving end of some gender-expectations policing myself, but by the time I was done considering what belonged to me and what belonged to the ancestors, I was out of paper. And then I was suddenly struck by the realization that the imposition of a fixed identity, even by oneself—this is what you are; therefore this is how you're supposed to be, and this is how you're supposed to behave, and this is how other people are entitled to see you—is a form of violence.

Pretty great for a torn-up piece of plain paper.

Your experience is bound to be different. Whatever it is that belongs not to you, but to the ancestors, we'll get to them. Their healing matters, too. Meanwhile, you can decide in what way to dispose of the paper that will further the healing process. Burn it? Bury it? Flush it? Scatter it to the winds? You can let your intuition be your guide.

Eight: Healing the Ancestors

Healing the ancestors is a key component of healing from White racism. It's commonly said that no one is born racist, and this is true. It is also true that we are all born into lineages that have carried racism, bigotry, and hate, as oppressors or victims or both. The disease of White racism comes down the generations. And because we carry the tangled diseases of the kyriarchy in our DNA, healing the ancestors of their White racism heals us so deeply that we can feel it not only on a cellular level, but even right down to the molecular level of our DNA.

So now we embark on another journey, in the company of our spiritual friends and relations, to those of our ancestors who are in need of healing. There's a number of different kinds of journeys and practices that are good for this, and the option of journeying to learn still more, or using any other good modality for ancestral healing, is always open.

After cleansing the space you're working in and calling in all the helpful spirits who like to work with you, as well as your own spirit, here's a simple journey: using a soft rattle or drum, or looking into a candle as described in chapter 4, and in the company of the ancestor or ancestors who have shown up to do this work with you, journey in nonordinary reality with the intention of healing your ancestors of White racism, and then let whatever happens unfold. It might be a ceremony in nonordinary reality, or you might be shown a ritual to do in ordinary reality. (Reminder about ritual: if you find yourself thinking "Uh-oh, this isn't exactly what I was shown," not to worry. Your healing intention and the Love will do the healing.)

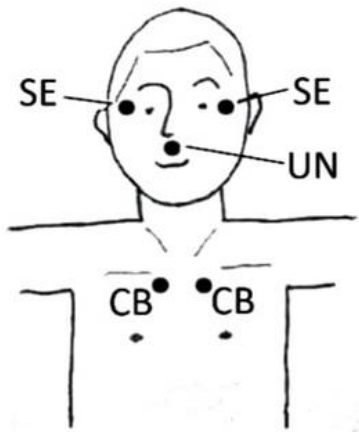
Here's a more complicated protocol, which I recently learned from Myron Eshowsky as a practice for freeing ourselves from inherited core beliefs. I've modified it somewhat so that it can work as a DIY; it is also something that can be done with others. It includes two journeys, a prayer, and acupuncture.

First, after preparing the space and yourself, journey to the upper world and do whatever you need to do there to be your purest self. Then, in the company of your usual guide in the upper world—a being you can connect with in a preliminary journey if you don't already have a guide in the upper world—meet up with the ancestor or ancestors helping with this work. In their company, journey up higher in the upper world, as many levels up as are necessary, to be shown which of the four lineages represented by your grandparents is carrying the aspect of White racism you intend to heal; it may be more than one, or all four, and may even include a collective, societal legacy—inheritations from teachers and preachers, for example. Then ask to be shown what element represents this aspect of White racism, and lay the healing you are doing at the feet of whatever family members you feel moved to; you can include people outside your personal ancestry here if it feels like a societal legacy. Then take your leave of your companions and return to ordinary reality. You may want to acknowledge the element in some way; I've placed the elements that have been shown me in these journeys on my little altar for the Dear Departed, and add to them as they're shown to me in different forms.

The next step is a forgiveness prayer, adapted by Myron from different prayer traditions. There are some variations; this version has worked well for me:

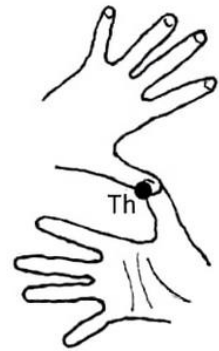
I deeply and completely forgive you for all hurt and harm you have done me, real and imagined, known and unknown, intentional or unintentional. Please forgive me for all hurt and harm I have done you, real and imagined, known and unknown, intentional or unintentional—and I accept your forgiveness.

The third step is another journey, again to the upper world, and again, after meeting with your guide and ancestral companion or companions, back up to the higher level where you were before, where you can ask to be shown what your life will be like without the aspect of White racism that was passed down through your ancestors. This may be a vision or a feeling or a sense, and it will be very real. After you have absorbed the vision and/or feeling, you can once again take your leave from your guide and companions and return to ordinary reality.



Finally, there's a maximum of four acupressure points to work with, applying steady pressure instead of tapping while stating a healing intention—a modality that can be found in the work of Julie Roberts and into which Myron, who has been initiated in Shona and Zula healing traditions, has incorporated some African viewpoints: the side of the eye (SE, pressing on both sides), identified in this practice with the emotions of rage and loss of power; under the nose (UN), identified with powerlessness and embarrassment or shame; the beginning of the collarbone (CB, also on both sides), identified with indecision, anxiety, cowardice, wanting to punish oneself or others, and loneliness; and the outer sides of the top phalanges of the thumbs (Th, pressing these two points

against each other, with one hand open and facing toward you, and the other hand open and facing away), identified with grief, intolerance, scorn, and prejudice. You don't have to decide or figure out which points are relevant; you'll feel which ones want pressure. At each point, say, "I am laying down this issue of White racism, which is not mine. It belongs to the ancestors [or the specific lineage you've identified]. It is theirs to carry and heal. This issue of White racism is not my issue. I give it to the ancestors to carry and heal." On the last pressure point, after repeating the previous declaration, say, "I pray that the pain and suffering of my ancestors be healed and released from the earth, and for the future generations."



As Julie Roberts has pointed out, you can't do acupressure wrong, and you can't hurt yourself with it, so not to worry about whether you're on the "right" points. This is also true of tapping in general—no bad taps yet.

When I started working with this protocol, I thought, This is great. I'm taking a fearless and searching moral inventory of my ancestors, and it's *all their fault!* Later, after pretty much exhausting my poor ancestors' character defects, it dawned on me that it is really the core beliefs

behind their—and my—character defects that hold the power. So the next layer under the character defects—the place where their power resides—is healed by identifying the issue as something along the lines of “the core ancestral belief that we are supposed to be prejudiced,” or “the core ancestral belief that we are supposed to be afraid,” or “the core ancestral belief that we are supposed to uphold and defend the kyriarchy, and know and accept our place in it,” or whatever else resonates. “The core ancestral belief that we’re supposed to hate ourselves” is also a good one, because hating ourselves does not come from teaching the truth about American history, it comes right from whatever we got from our very own ancestors, both biological and cultural, that impels us to behave in ways we’re ashamed of and keeps us from being our whole, true selves.

It could take a number of go-rounds on this practice to really clean things up, but you’ll most likely be feeling better all along—and the ancestors will be grateful.

Nine: Fellowship

A few years ago, an Al-Anon friend started a group to apply the principles of Al-Anon to White racism. One evening, as he and some other members of the group were heading off for their meeting and I was making a move to join them, he told me that “it’s just us,” meaning just people of color. Very privately and inwardly, always trying to be cool, I poured myself a big old glass of White wine. I’m not invited! Why?!

It wasn’t long before it occurred to me why: because White people are like the alcoholics, and everyone else is like the Al-Anonics. White people have the disease, and everyone else is affected by it. When we’re challenged on our racism, not only do we react like addicts protecting their supply, our denials take a similar form: alcoholics are people who are lying drunk in the gutter, and I’m not lying drunk in the gutter, therefore I don’t have a drinking problem; people who harbor White-racist attitudes are in the Ku Klux Klan, and I’m not in the Ku Klux Klan, so therefore I don’t have any White-racist attitudes. It’s the other people not seeing it that way that’s the problem.

In any alcoholic family, it’s often the Al-Anonic person who seems like the crazy one. The alcoholic is fine, as long as there’s alcohol, and it’s the Al-Anonic who’s screaming that the children don’t have shoes. Whereupon the alcoholic may say a couple of things: one, if it weren’t for your yelling I wouldn’t have to drink; and two, I’m going where I can have some peace, which is usually someplace where there are reliable drinking buddies who understand perfectly how hard it is to live with someone who’s always on your case about your drinking, and where both that person and the children who need shoes are out of sight and earshot.

This is how Black people and other people of color get to be the problem—because so many of them keep pointing out that there is one, when so many White people are so perfectly happy dreaming White-supremacist dreams in White Racist Fantasyland and can’t see any problem whatsoever with that.

Alcoholism is a family disease, and within the wider human family, White racism impacts everyone. It’s probably fair to say that the majority of us are what we call “double winners”: impacted both by internalized White racism and by the behavior of other people who feel free to express their White racism on us.

So can fellowship help with the disease of White racism? It’s the one practice in this handbook I haven’t tried as of this writing, but I’m willing to bet that it does, especially since I treasure the moment when, in an Al-Anon meeting, I confessed to being wary of other White people and saw what we call “empathic nods” from some of my White fellows in the circle.

So could there be something like Wypipo Anonymous? Wypiponics Anonymous? A nonhierarchical small-“d” democratic structure for such groups has already been well established by Al-Anon, and if groups like this followed the ground rules for Al-Anon meetings they might very well be helpful. They would certainly not be heavy-duty encounter groups, since by now we know that the whole point of criticizing and finger-pointing is to establish that I’m not the one with the problem, you are. We can be grown up enough to talk about our experiences of White

racism and be lifted up by the empathic nods, while refraining from crosstalk and advice-giving. Just knowing that we're not alone is healing, and working together can have a synergistic effect: we're not unwelcome to borrow from other cultures an awareness of a "group soul" that is greater than the sum of its parts.

Or there may be people who, after trying out these and perhaps other healing practices on themselves and finding them good, would like to form a healing circle to do the practices in this book together and explore new ones, or set up workshops that can be free, nonhierarchical, and small-"d" democratic, a full expression of the values we seek to live. Perhaps you'd like to bring it to a group of people you already belong to and do spiritual practices with, and each participant can contribute on an equal footing, rotating leadership of practices and learning by doing just how sweet non-hierarchical small-"d" democracy can be. Or there may be drumming circles that would like to explore healing of White racism through their shamanic practices.

Here's a picture of the drum I use for community healing work. The design comes from the shield of Sitting Bull, because back in 2000, after the policemen who killed Amadou Diallo were acquitted, I had a vision of a Sitting Bull Brigade, which could be a coalition of healers from many traditions, serving the community of political activists. I imagined that the healers might have some work to do among ourselves, given some of the histories, and then we could go to work to heal people traumatized in the quest for justice. Amadou Diallo, you may or may not recall, was struck and killed by 19 of the 41 bullets plainclothes cops shot at him at relatively close range as he was turning away from them and reaching for his keys. They did not mistake his wallet for a gun: he never got his wallet out of his pocket.



Imagine my astonishment when I then read a biography of Sitting Bull, and learned that (1) he considered himself a community healer more than an individual healer, and (2) he was killed by a cop. The drum is decorated with crow feathers, from a journey in which it was explained to me that they are symbolic: the Crow people were traditional enemies of the Lakota people—Sitting Bull's people—and the symbolism of crow feathers on the Sitting Bull Brigade drum is that Love conquers all.

I found myself doing some soul-searching about including this vision here, since my smidgen of Native ancestry is no more Hunkpapa Lakota than it is Cherokee, but it feels way more disrespectful to Whoever or Whatever sends visions, and to Sitting Bull himself, to omit it just because someone might yell "Appropriation!" Please feel free to join the Sitting Bull Brigade, always remembering, of course, that we're not trying to claim Sitting Bull's spiritual energy for ourselves, we're attuning our energy to his as we do the healing work in his honor. The organization, if we can call it that, is totally nonhierarchical and small-"d" democratic. Or you might want to start your very own nonhierarchical and small-"d" democratic healing brigade under any name you like.

We may as well also mention in passing that Sitting Bull accumulated wealth for the sole purpose of giving it away, which is another good reason to attune to his spirit. This was a cultural thing, too, and one we might all feel free to borrow.

Sandra Ingerman is the kind of teacher who has tended to bring the rain wherever she's gone, and she has told a story about giving a workshop in Alaska (if I remember rightly), when it stopped raining and she went outside at night and was overwhelmed by the myriad of stars, and called everyone around to come and see. And then she reflected that although we may have

become accustomed to thinking that only a few people in our world can be stars, no one calls everyone to come and look at a night sky with just a few stars, we call everyone to come and see the whole radiant sky completely filled with stars. All of which is to remind us, when we're working in a group, that we are all already stars, and none of us is shining any less brightly when all the other stars are shining brightly, too. There are people you may never have heard of quoted in this book, and haven't they made valuable contributions? We are all called upon to shine.

You can bring this work to any group you already belong to—religious, social, political. In all cases, fellowship when we really practice it with our whole selves works the same way as all other healing modalities: it's the Love that does the healing.

Afterthoughts, Ongoing Practices, and What Can Come Next

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way.

On a quiet day, I can hear her breathing.

—Arundhati Roy

This is a brief little book for overcoming what we've been told is a monstrous problem—even, according to some, insurmountable. That better not stop us from trying: the only thing that can make it really unsurmountable is *not* trying.

At a memorial service for my father, who pioneered library computerization (he may have been difficult as a dad at times, but he was unquestionably brilliant), I learned from people who had worked with him that when they got stuck trying to perfect a phase of a project before they moved on to the next phase, my father would say, “It doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be good enough.” This was something I'd already been saying fairly often myself, and it was nice to learn that I might have inherited something from my dad besides a hot temper. The same is true of our healing projects: they don't have to be perfect, they just have to be good enough. His collaborators also said that he was the rare idealist who could put his visions into practice and bring them into the world, and I don't think we have to let that quality be rare.

There's a Spanish expression, “aportar mi grano de arena,” meaning literally “contributing my grain of sand,” or more loosely, “doing my part.” None of us can bring the whole beach, but working together we can accomplish even the most ambitious goals for humanity, including dismantling the kyriarchy entirely and replacing it with a loving community of equals—the “beloved community” the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., spoke of—each of us in harmony doing our part. This little book is just one grain of sand.

Or it might be that we're just trying to plant seeds here—whatever metaphor works for you. Some seeds may fall on stony ground, but others may fall on fertile soil and bear beautiful flowers and fruits. Nothing and no one is the be-all and end-all of even anything, which is why we all have our own grains of sand to bring and our own seeds to plant; if anyone ever tries to persuade you that what they're selling—including themselves—is the be-all and end-all, run! Everyone's got at least one grain of sand of their own, and their own garden to tend—and it doesn't have to be perfect, it just has to be good enough. You don't need a fancy-schmancy design on your drum or the very coolest rattle made of genuine natural materials, either. Anything that works for you is good enough.

Some further journeys you might want to do would be, say, to the spirit of White racism, or to the spirit of the kyriarchy, to see what can heal them—or, for some steady nurturing, to the spirit of healing, or the spirit of kindness.

There's lots of room for invention. Whole alphabets have been invented by people who simply saw that there was such a thing as writing—people like Sequoyah, who invented the Cherokee syllabary. There's a world of practices you already know, or can invent, or can find in any and all spiritual and religious traditions, that will work wonders in freeing us all from White

racism; as Joe Miller said, the core teaching of all religions is Love. You'll know it's the real thing if it blows your mind so beautifully that you cannot anymore think what you thought, or fear what you feared before—consciously or unconsciously.

Just please don't make a business of it. It's a gift, and there's not a whole lot of money in it anyway, so we can all relax about that. Plus it most definitely isn't true that people don't value what they don't pay for. Let's be honest: we all love a bargain, and we like free most of all. Did you think that sunset wasn't much because you didn't have to pay for it? For that matter, don't you feel pretty happy that you can read this book for free, or do you wish you'd paid a bundle for it? And all those pearls of wisdom you've received from all kinds of people all over the place, all your life, without paying a thing for them? Tell the truth—you treasure them.

Years ago, I read a book called *The Straight Path*, by a doctor named Richard Katz who had gone to Fiji to study traditional Fijian healing modalities. When he came back and everyone wanted him to teach those modalities, he would only teach the ethics of the Fijian healers, which was what he wrote the book about—and he shared the proceeds from it with the people who had taught him. In Fiji, charging for healing is taboo. It's relatively easy to live from farming and fishing in Fiji, and everyone has a day job, so they don't need to charge for healing. This was very disappointing to Richard Katz's audiences, but for those with ears to hear, it's a revelation. I charged for a healing once, and felt so dirty afterward that I have ever since followed the Fijian way. Happiest cultural borrowing ever: when it turns into a business, the spirit gets cramped.

Of course, both things still being true, in less generous environments and the throes of end-stage capitalism, those people who are working at healing full-time are going to need compensation if we don't want them to quietly and politely starve to death. How they work out that compensation is their business. We can all, regardless of our sources of income, be aware that the American Dream—newer, bigger, shinier, *more*—is a snare and a delusion, because no amount of money and stuff can fill a howling emptiness inside. And we can always bear in mind the wisdom of the Tao Te Ching, which tells us that those who know they have enough are rich.

Years ago, at a workshop led by Sandra Ingerman, during a walk I went for on my own I had a vision of a kind of mass production of shamans. When that comes true, with any luck we'll have enough healers to go around, and no one will have to worry about burnout or overwork to the point of not being able to support themselves otherwise.

Ongoing practices

In ordinary conversation, try not mentioning the arbitrarily defined group people are slotted into unless it's actually relevant. The fact that your friend or acquaintance “happens to be Black” certainly has bearing on their experience of catching some White-racist hell, but what bearing can it possibly have on their practice of molecular medicine or their opinions on the proper mechanics of batting in baseball?

The compulsion to identify the arbitrarily defined group that people who aren't arbitrarily defined as White “belong to” is related to another compulsion, namely, What are you? This is a question that people whose ancestry isn't obvious get a lot: Are you Latino/a? Are you Middle Eastern? Are you Native or are you Asian? Are you Jewish or Italian? Are you a mixture of different arbitrarily defined groups, and if so, which ones? This is a set of questions we might stop asking if we stopped to think of the question behind the question, namely, Where are you supposed to be slotted into the kyriarchy? I need to know, because if I don't know, I won't know whether or not or how much I'm supposed to oppress you. Help! The answer we already know

is, everyone is a person, a kyriarchy is no place for a person, and no one has any business oppressing anyone else. Simple.

Not asking Black people, or perhaps even anyone else, to validate our beliefs and attitudes is also a good practice. Our own hearts can tell us perfectly well whether we're doing the right thing, and no one else can persuade our own hearts that we're OK when our own hearts know that we're not.

Here's something else that can be practiced on a regular basis. Studies have shown that White people speaking up when racist things are said in our presence by other White people reduces stress—and remember, those things get said because a White-racist assumption is being made about us as White people. Keeping quiet, on the other hand, does cause stress.

Of all the wildly disturbing stories Amber Ruffin and Lacey Lamar tell in *You'll Never Believe What Happened to Lacey*, the one that has really stuck with me has been the one they saved for last, about a “Black History Showdown” in Dubuque, Iowa (“of all places”), in which high-school teams competed. Two of the competing teams were Black; the others were White. It soon became clear that the White kids must have gone to schools that shielded them from many of the most salient points of American history, and when Lacey's team began to own the contest, the all-White audience got “upset.” Toward the end, a White judge “stormed the stage and took the mic from the host,” declared that “everyone knows white kids are smarter than Black kids; everyone knows this,” took away most of the winning team's points, and said they would not be the winners because it's “just not right.” Instead, a White team won.

There's not a word about any other White people pointing out that what that judge did was just not right. Not any of the White parents, not any of the White kids. It's beyond deeply disappointing. Could not even any young person who might have cared enough about Black history to enter the contest care enough to say something about a rank injustice committed on Black people right under their nose? What's it like to go through a whole life with the shame of that silence? Having myself kept silent on occasions when I should have spoken up, I can testify that I wouldn't wish it on anyone.

Speaking up can be scary in anticipation, and in the moment, perhaps especially for those of us who are just learning keep our lip zipped and not be so quick to offer our opinions about any—and everything. And also, many very nice people are conflict-averse, and don't want to get into an argument or be perceived as insufficiently submissive and be punished for it. If it helps to give us courage, though, we can always think of maintaining a discreet silence as behaving like an asshole as a form of people-pleasing—and then we can speak up.

Years ago, I witnessed an argument between Eddie Ellis, a prison reform visionary and a former Black Panther who had spent 25 years in prison for a crime he did not commit (his real crime, what he got locked up for, was being an extraordinarily effective community organizer), and a younger White man who eventually, being out-argued, yelled, “You're not respecting me, Eddie! You're not respecting me!” I was speechless, and if I could have recovered in time to say anything it would probably have been, “Do you have any idea what a bad name you're giving to White male supremacy?” Eddie did not go there. Instead, in his famously gravelly voice, he said, “I *am* respecting you. I'm *respecting* you by telling you the *truth*.”

That's how it works. If I have enough presence of mind when I'm hesitant to speak up, I ask myself, Is this my body telling my mouth to shut up, or is this a moment for some courage? The standard questions still apply: “Does it need to be said? Does it need to be said now? Does it need to be said by me?” If the answer is “Yes,” calmness ensues, and it's suddenly surprisingly

easy to say what I mean, mean what I say, and not say it mean. The truth spoken in a calm tone of voice doesn't just have power, it *is* power.

Here's something that could be fun: using our imagination to change our minds about what's possible. The writer and activist V has said that when she asks the people in her audiences to imagine a world without violence, about half of them say that they can't. That says to me that half can. Years ago, a vision of Israel-Palestine at peace, with all the people there living together in equality and harmony, awoke me to the realization that maybe, if we can just imagine it, we can open a door in our own minds, and then maybe, going forward, in the minds of others, until finally we can make that vision a reality. So how about imagining peace, safety, and harmony in our communities without police armed to the teeth? How about imagining the abolition of prisons and the creation of restorative-justice modalities? How about imagining the end of the War on Drugs and the beginning of treating drug addiction as a disease—which it is—with help and support available for everyone, and drugs administered in a safe setting where they are legal, so that the drug trade as we know it can just collapse, and with it, most of the carceral system? How about imagining universal health care, with a transformation of the school-to-prison pipeline into a school-to-healthcare-professions pipeline? How about imagining decent, affordable housing for everyone? We can have all those things, and more besides. They are, in fact, our birthright.

And while we're at it, we can imagine a world in which the place that is a safe place for everyone is called Everyplace. This is what we're here to do: to make the world a beautiful place where there is no place that any human being, regardless of color, creed, or country of national origin, is not safe with other human beings. After that, if you really, sincerely want to get out of your car and pat the angry grizzly bear in Yellowstone National Park, that's on you. What we do not need to do is behave like angry grizzly bears to one another. We don't have that luxury—or there will be nothing left to fight over, and no one left to fight over it.

Safety does not come out of the barrel of a gun. It never has, and it never will. “Love one another” isn't just a nice religious teaching; it's the whole user manual for life. As the Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., said, we must learn to live together as brothers—and sisters, we might add—or we will die together as fools. In any conflict, the two “sides” are not arbitrarily defined groups. Team Learning to Live Together as Brothers and Sisters and Team Die Together as Fools cut across all the lines.

And if we're bracing for a backlash as we do our work, we can remind ourselves that in the vast majority of cases it's not a backlash, it's a further lashing by a system that requires copious amounts of lashings to stay in place and, like people caught in an abusive behavior pattern, doubles down on the abuse when it's obviously not working, even though abandoning it would seem to be the winning strategy. We will not be afraid and we will not be moved, and we will stay focused on healing. We're Team Learning to Live Together as Brothers and Sisters.

Going on into some action

Bearing in mind that wringing our hands and saying how awful a thing is is not an action and will not make the world a better place, we can recall the words of Malcolm X—“Once you change your philosophy, you change your thought pattern. Once you change your thought pattern, you change your attitude. Once you change your attitude, it changes your behavior pattern and then you go on into some action”—as well as the words of Fannie Lou Hamer—“You can pray until you faint, but unless you get up and try to do something, God is not going to

put it in your lap”—and with our sense of who we really are in full bloom, we can go beyond individual healing and actions and into the realm of putting energy into working for what we want, instead of putting all of it into fighting against what we don’t want—and into truly making amends.

Making amends is the difference between saying “I’m sorry, I must do better” and actual repair—mending—of the harm done. That is where reparations and Land Back come in. Putting our own money where our mouths are is not reparations, which remain due and owing, but it is a concrete manifestation of solidarity—and the more solidarity, the merrier. We can do both at the same time: work in every way we can for systemic reparations and systemic mending while putting the energy of what we can give right now right where it’s most needed. And not only for the other people, but also for the joy and contentment of our own souls.

Political activism has been an important part of my life since the early 1960s; I was never a hippie or a flower child. In fact, a companion on the Sufi path once teased me about being a “Zen warrior” and suggested that maybe I should get the Zen part down first, which turned out to be excellent advice. Spiritual discipline has made me more effective in all kinds of struggles—usually at the same time that the struggles made the need for spiritual discipline ever more clear, as it continues to become ever more clear.

Remember that long-drawn-out struggle with an institutional landlord that wanted to evict many of my neighbors, most of whom were Black? That institution was a Jewish theological seminary. As news of the struggle spread, and because antisemitism is always looking for an excuse, because there is no excuse, antisemites came out of the woodwork, wanting to make common cause with us tenants. It was then that I learned a great lesson: the enemy of my enemy is not always my friend; the enemy of my enemy may be a much worse enemy. However fervently we may feel about our causes, anyone who brings hate to them is not our friend. This is where a clear head comes in handy: without clarity, we can soon forget that the real enemy is not people, it’s hate. And sometimes we just have to accept that we’re going to be in a two-front struggle.

As terrible events unfold around us and anger and hate become more intense and widespread, doing the spiritual practices that will protect our hearts and cleanse them of anger, fear, and hatred becomes ever more necessary. Hate being contagious, its outpouring can be like getting caught in a flood, and if we don’t keep our wits about us and hold fast to our faith in Love, we can be swept away. If we harden our hearts, compromise or lose our integrity, or yield to the temptation to inflict moral injuries on ourselves, hate wins, and we lose. If we succumb to the temptation to demonize—to declare that *those* people are the People from Planet Wrong—we only diminish our own humanity, alienate people who might otherwise want to help, and, worst of all, frighten our own selves by picturing our adversaries as terrifyingly larger than life. The truth is our best friend: if we hold fast to it, even when it isn’t flattering to ourselves or our cause, we get to keep our integrity, and that is a victory all by itself. Of course we want to win, but we don’t get into any struggle to feel dirty.

We cannot work to bring about peace effectively if there’s no peace in ourselves. The spiritual practices in this book aren’t necessarily “one and done”; sometimes we need to double and triple down on them. When our inner peace is disturbed, we can take the time to pray on it, meditate on it, tap on it, journey on it—whatever works for our own healing. Just breathing in “cool head” and breathing out “warm heart” could be a good immediate practice when we might be finding ourselves getting just a little teeny tiny bit angry in the moment. Breathing in “One Love” and breathing out “One Love” is also helpful—as is simply being aware of our breathing.

Besides bringing a cool head and a warm heart, there are a few things to know that can help when we're going on into some action. For example, White people volunteering for the first time with an organization, especially if it's an organization that is primarily of people of color in general and Black people in particular, can first of all heed the wise words of my dervishy friend Sandy Modell, whose advice for entering any new situation was, "You keep your eyes and ears open and your mouth shut." It's a golden opportunity for practicing awareness that we aren't smarter than other people and don't know everything—in other words, to enjoy the great gift of knowing that we have good reason to be humble.

White organizations have traditionally been guilty of treating Black volunteers like the help, based on a purely racist assumption that Black people couldn't possibly have anything important regarding policy, strategy, or tactics to contribute—no, it was always, Do you know how to run a photocopier? And then, because ageism can cut both ways, during Occupy Wall Street there were veterans of the civil-rights and antiwar movements of the '60s who went to see the young people who were inventing all kinds of innovative organizational techniques just to let them know that they were doing it all wrong, when what the young people really needed was support, and maybe some actually helpful information about mistakes made in the past and lessons learned—which would also require some humility. Majority-White organizations can be most blessed to learn a wee bit of humility.

There are also organizations that resemble religious sects, complete with their very own dogma, which may be more interested in attracting adherents and accusing other people of heresy than they are in doing the actual work of making the world a better place. We're allowed to steer clear of them.

As an old veteran organizer, I am here to say that in the wonderful world of organizing, we will find work-with people and work-for people—and if we show ourselves unwilling to work for the people who can only be worked for, they will work against us. If we show ourselves willing to work with, we can soon find other work-with people, and then we can go to where our particular talents can be best put to use. Ruha Benjamin's book *Viral Justice* covers a wealth of organizations and initiatives that are already happening, and that can inspire even more.

Elected officials, on the other hand, are supposed to work for us. We don't work for them. If they're not working for us, we can let them know, repeatedly, that they can always go into some other line of work. We can nag them relentlessly, and if they persist in doing wrong things, we get to find and vote for people who will do the right thing.

Finally, and by way of inspiration and encouragement, I want to tell about two of the most impressive formally recognized spiritual leaders I have ever met. Half a lifetime ago, I went on sabbatical from a cushy job with a great union contract and made a pilgrimage around the world. I especially wanted to meet Mother Krishnabai, who was the head of the Anandashram not far from Mangalore in India, and Suleyman Dede, a Mevlevi sheikh who lived in Konya, Turkey, and was the head of the Sufi order founded by followers of Jelaluddin Rumi. I had heard a lot about both of them, and was prepared to be extremely impressed, in the sense of awed and perhaps even intimidated.

They were two of the most genuinely humble human beings I had ever met. Every afternoon, Mother Krishnabai sat around with the devotees at the ashram cracking jokes and cackling at her own punchlines. Suleyman Dede was purely sweet. So yes, I was impressed, all right—just not in the way I'd expected.

On the train from Konya to Istanbul, a murid from a more intellectual Sufi order declared, “Suleyman Dede’s knowledge is nothing. He’s just a nice old guy. But his knowledge is nothing.” So I thought about that, and finally thought, Oh! If only my knowledge could be as nothing as the knowledge of Suleyman Dede!

In pondering how humbling it is to accept my own human imperfections, and how good that can feel, I wonder: did Mother Krishnabai and Suleyman Dede know that they had good reason to be humble?

After I got back from my peregrinations, I was blessed to be able to go on one of the walks in Golden Gate Park that Joe Miller led every week. Joe Miller also did not have a great big spiritual star aura: when he arrived at the gathering point, he hugged every single person there. At some point during the walk when we were taking a break, he walked up to me and the friend I was chatting with and said that the core teaching of every religion is Love. He then started talking about being “nothing,” which was a little disconcerting at first; he said, “When you know that you’re nothing, you’re very careful about everything, because you know that you’re nothing. But it’s so *easy* to be nothing and so *hard* to be something”—and then walked off, cackling.

Hazrat Inayat Khan addressed this as follows: “To be spiritual is to become nothing; to become good is to become something. To be something is like being nothing, but to be nothing is like being all things. It is this claim of being something which hinders the natural perfection. Self-effacement is a return to the Garden of Eden.”

I used to brag that my highest ambition was to be just another person. Imagine my dismay when it finally dawned on me that just another person was exactly what I had been being all along, all my life. Sheesh, how embarrassing.

George Carlin, in complaining about emphasis on boosting children’s self-esteem, pointed out that if everyone is special, then no one is special. Damn skippy. Everyone *is* special, and no one is special. Humanity rocks. We’ve got this. We *can* overcome. All we have to do is let go and let the Love do the healing, and then do the next right thing.

Appendix A

Sometime around the turn of the millennium I became addicted to several games that were standard-issue on computers then: Minefield, solitaire, and hearts. I lost a lot of time to those games—how much, I’d prefer not even to think about—and developed classic characteristics of an addict, mainly secrecy and shame. Tapping, as mentioned in chapter 6, even when I was using a protocol that was said to be specifically designed to end addictions, only seemed to reduce my anxiety about playing computer games, and I played them more than ever.

I was also, at that time, reading through a pretty complete collection of the teachings of Hazrat Inayat Khan, and one day I came across a story that I’d already heard told by his son, Pir Vilayat Inayat Khan. It appears in *The Sufi Message of Hazrat Inayat Khan Centennial Edition, Volume IV: Healing and the Mind World*, as follows:

A man went to a teacher and said, “Will you take me as your disciple?” The teacher first looked at him and then said, “Yes, with great pleasure.” But the man said, “Think about it before you tell me yes. First thing, I am a difficult subject. There are many bad things in me.” The teacher said, “What are these bad things?” The man said, “I like to drink.” The teacher said, “That does not matter.” “But,” the man said, “I like to gamble.” The teacher said, “That does not matter.” “But,” he said, “there are many other things, there are numberless things.” The teacher said, “That does not matter.” The man was very glad. “But,” the teacher said, “now that I have agreed with all the bad things you have said about yourself, you must agree to one condition.” The disciple said, “Yes.” The teacher said, “Do not do any of these things which you consider wrong in my presence.” The pupil said, “That is easy,” and went away. And as the days passed and months passed, this pupil, who was very deep and developed and keen, came back beaming, his soul unfolding every moment of the day and happy to thank the teacher. The teacher said, “Well, how have you been?” “Very well, thank you,” he said. The teacher said, “Have you done your practices which I gave you?” “Yes,” he said, “very faithfully.” “But what about the habits you had of going to different places?” the teacher asked. “Well,” he said, “I very often tried to go to drink, gamble, but wherever I went I saw you; you did not leave me alone. Whenever I wanted to drink, I saw your face before me. I cannot do it.”

Well, I thought, that’s it. I’ll promise Hazrat Inayat Khan not to play computer games in his presence, and that is *very* easy—he went to a better world all the way back in 1927. And right there and then, I lost all desire to play computer games—that was the end of it. After the attacks of September 11, 2001, when many people fell back into addictions they had kicked, I wanted to start playing computer games again. But every time I thought about it, Hazrat Inayat Khan would appear in my mind’s eye and say, “You can’t.” “But I want to!” I’d say, in my mind’s voice. “You can’t,” he’d say, and that was the end of it.

Not long ago, someone told me that the teacher in that story was Hazrat Inayat Khan himself, modestly remaining anonymous. Okay. No wonder that addiction got up and left, and stayed gone.

Appendix B

*[Man] must first create peace in himself, if he
desires to see peace in the world;
for lacking the peace within, no
effort of his can bring any result.*
Hazrat Inayat Khan

If there is any spiritual tradition in the world that does not teach us that creating peace within ourselves is the first step toward creating peace in the world, I do not know of it. There are many wonderful composed prayers for peace. I do this one, which was composed by Hazrat Inayat Khan, every day, slightly modified from the original. Of late many people have chosen to substitute “Sovereign” for “Lord,” but I like to liberate the language completely, and substitute “Love” for “Lord,” as follows:

Prayer for Peace

Send Thy peace, O Love, which is perfect and everlasting, that our souls
may radiate peace.
Send Thy peace, O Love, that we may think, act and speak
harmoniously.
Send Thy peace, O Love, that we may be contented and thankful for Thy
bountiful gifts.
Send Thy peace, O Love, that amidst our worldly strife, we may enjoy
Thy bliss.
Send Thy peace, O Love, that we may endure all, tolerate all, in the
thought of Thy grace and mercy.
Send Thy peace, O Love, that our lives may become a Divine vision and
in Thy light, all darkness may vanish.
Send Thy peace, O Love, our Father and Mother, that we Thy children
on Earth may all unite in one family. Amen.

Heartfelt Thanks

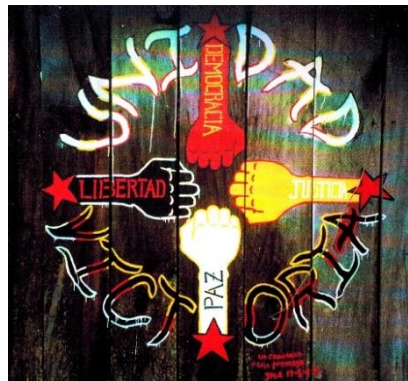
I am deeply grateful to Alfred E. Prettyman for his eagle eye, warm encouragement, the conversations!—and, most of all, rich and enduring friendship. Thanks to Myron Eshowsky for his teachings and for pointing me in the direction of the work of Julie Roberts, and to Hilda Massoud for the blank-paper exercise and for pointing me in the direction of the work of Dr. Shirley Turcotte. Thanks to Deirdre MacKenzie, Rita Mrozcek, and Dr. Robert Zuber for their friendship, encouragement, careful reading, and helpful suggestions. Thanks to Caroline Cochran for contributing the drawing of the tapping-points guy and to Russell Gordon for painting the design supplied by the Dudes onto one of my drums. Thanks also to the fellow pilgrims met by chance in Bodh Gaya who took the best picture of me ever. Muchísimas gracias to webmaster Kendall.

Thanks to Michelle Patrick and everyone else who has pulled my coat. Special thanks to Majida Dawn Gowins, for being the brave first friend to try some of these practices out, and to Leslie Bryan, Julie Harting, Una Manenti, and Isa Pyle for attending that first workshop—and for their friendship, their spiritual comradeship on assorted paths, and their bravery.

Thanks to Catharine Grad, Esq., and all the great neighbors for keeping a roof over our heads.

I'm especially grateful for the opportunity to attend "Healing Ourselves and our Communities," a weekend workshop at the Abode of the Message presenting a variety of healing modalities, including tapping protocols and the torn-paper exercise, which was organized by Dr. Fatima Hafiz-Muid and Onaje Muid, graced by the presence of the great Randy Weston, and even included a deep conversation about the healing power of music between Randy Weston and Pir Zia Inayat Khan, who joined us long-distance for the occasion.

Thanks to the Zapatistas for their inspired organizing model, and to all the teachers and companions in all the strands of my braided spiritual path: Sufi, shamanic, Al-Anon, Santería, and all the paths that have no name. True friends you are.



Suggested readings

This is by no means an exhaustive list. There are probably excellent books on your own bookshelves, and there are still things that can be learned from books, especially after unlearning all the untruths we've been snowed with in a blizzard of lies. I've found these helpful.

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onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt
“Michael Harner: Shamanic Journey – 15 Minutes solo drumming” is available on YouTube.
Helpful talks by Dr. Shirley Turcotte can also be found on YouTube.
Recordings of Charlie Kreiner’s workshops can be found at
<https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2024/11/23/18870976.php> and
<https://www.indybay.org/newsitems/2001/12/08/1117031.php>

*May the blessings of Love rest upon you,
May Love's peace abide with you.
May Love's presence illuminate your heart,
Now and forevermore.*

About the Author

Vajra Kilgour was born a very long time ago in Washington, DC, and grew up in an all-White neighborhood in a nearly all-White suburb of New Haven, Connecticut, which served as a fine introduction to White studies. She began to get involved in the civil-rights and antiwar movements at an early age, and after moving to New York City to attend college, got arrested during the 1968 uprising at Columbia University, and then worked with the Black Panther Party and the Peace and Freedom Party for a season. She soon began a serious search for a spiritual path, and in 1980 was initiated into what was then the Sufi Order in the West, now the Inayatiyya. In the 1990s, she began to learn shamanic practices, just as a conflict with her West Harlem landlord and, subsequently, the never-ending Pacifica radio wars pulled her back into political activism. Since then, she has been given the *medio asiento* initiation in Santería and discovered the joys of 12-stepping. She has traveled widely in search of holy places and cool photos, fallen in love with the entire planet, and learned that right where we are is always going to be as holy as it gets.



For perhaps too long, Kilgour worked at *Newsweek*, eventually as Letters Editor, in the mistaken belief that “burrowing from within” could accomplish something. Since leaving *Newsweek* in 1984, she has worked as a tenant organizer and as a freelance editor, writer, and translator; her work has been published in *Newsweek*, *The New Yorker*, *On the Issues*, and *Tenant/Inquilino*. Her last paying job was as a Spanish-language interpreter at a public hospital in the South Bronx. In an unpaid capacity, she is an associate producer and sometime host of *Housing Notebook*, on WBAI-FM, and she still lives in the city so nice they named it twice: New York, New York.