

centering social action in
contemplation (and
contemplation in social action)

brian d. mclaren

slides will be available at brianmclaren.net

five conversations.

1. silence

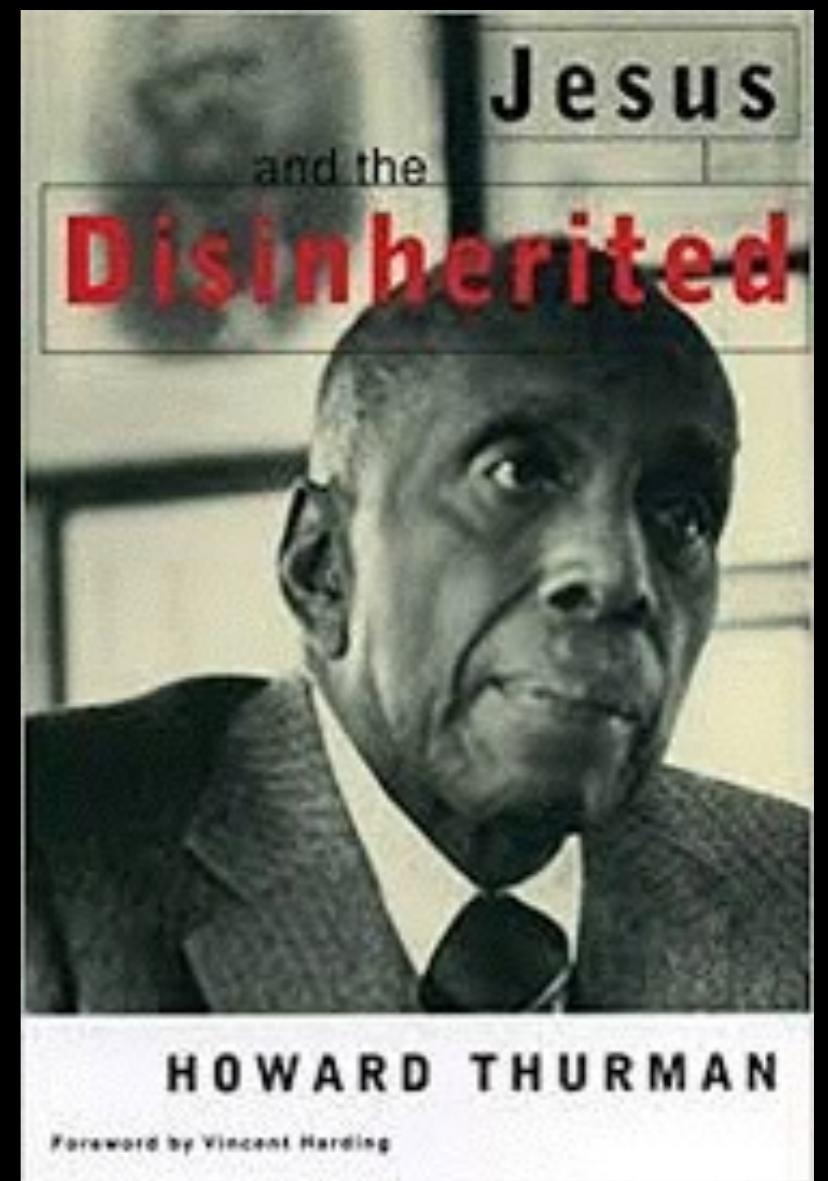
2. centering/descent

3. connection

4. focus

5. joy

my conversation
partner:



1. silence

The contemplative path seeks peace through deep inner stillness and silence. But ...

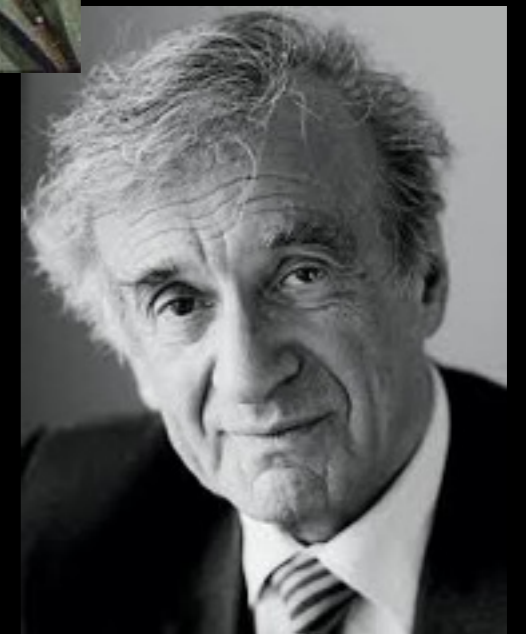
“Silence in the face of evil is itself evil. Not to speak is to speak. Not to act is to act.” - Dietrich Bonhoeffer



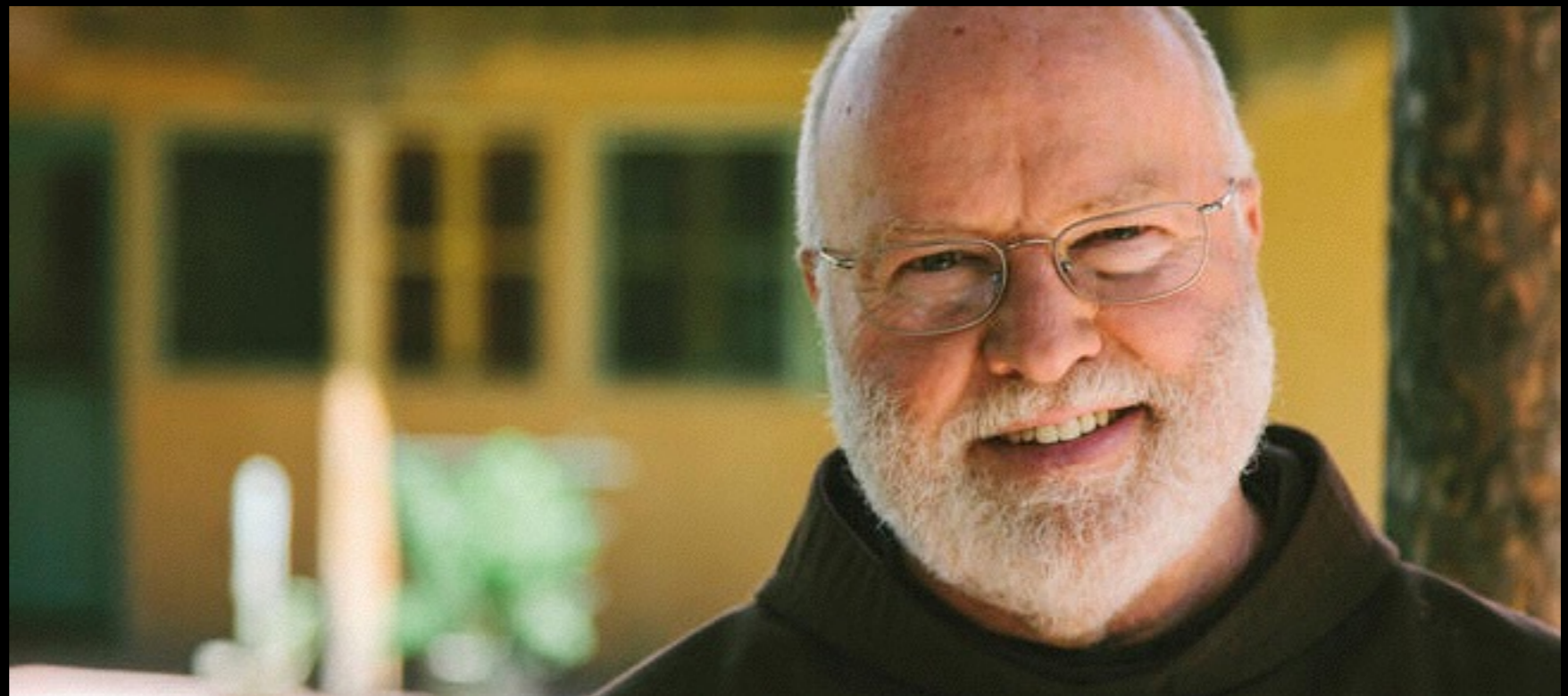
“In the end, we will remember not the words of our enemies, but the silence of our friends.” - Dr. King



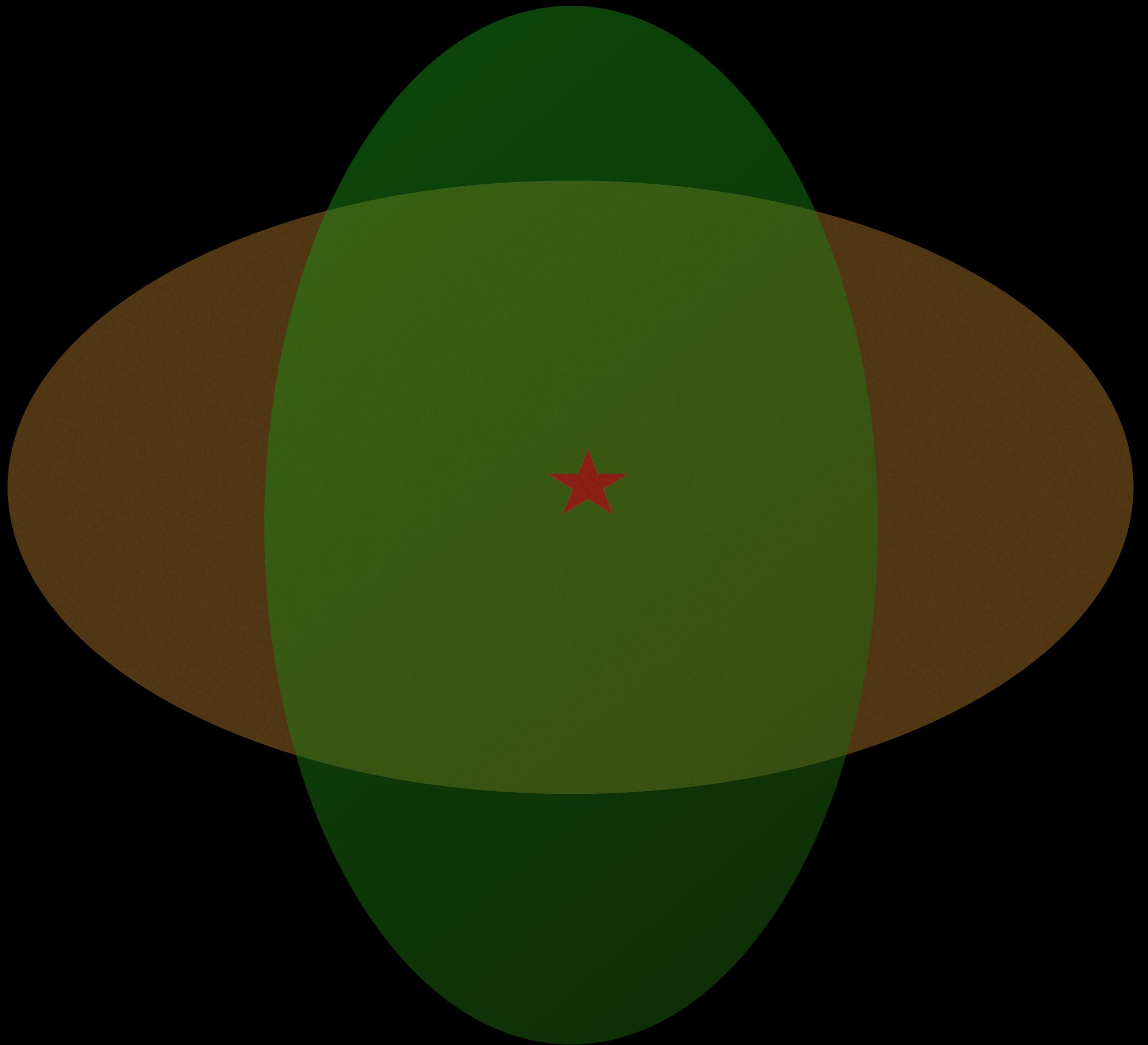
“Silence encourages the tormentor, never the tormented.” - Elie Weisel



The most important part of our name - Center for Action and Contemplation - is AND.



How can action AND
contemplation be wisely
integrated?





Contemplative practices [can be described as] a protective membrane [to hold] the community in safety during the crisis of overt communal oppression and individual angst.

- Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable* (200)

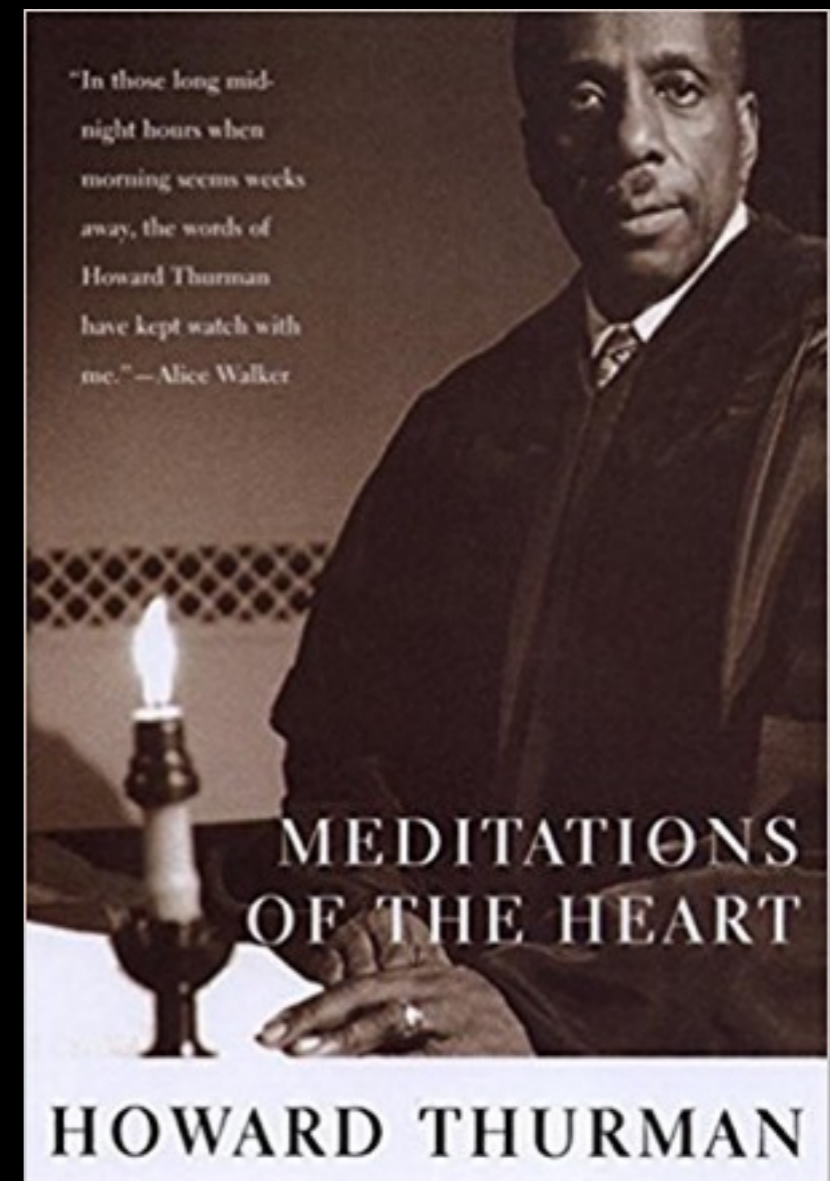


In groups of two or three ...

How do you integrate action and contemplation in your life?

Are you satisfied with this integration, and if not, what kind of change are you hoping for?

1. silence
2. centering down



How good it is to center down!

To sit quietly and see one's self pass by!

The streets of our minds seethe with endless traffic;

Our spirits resound with clashings, with noisy silences,

While something deep within hungers and thirsts for the

still moment and the resting lull.

With full intensity we seek, ere the quiet passes, a fresh sense of order in our living;

A direction, a strong sure purpose that will structure our confusion

and bring meaning to our chaos.

We look at ourselves in this waiting moment – the kinds of people we are.

The questions persist: what are we doing with our lives?–

what are the motives that order our days?

What is the end of our doings? Where are we trying to go?

Where do we put the emphasis and where are our values focused?

For what end do we make sacrifices?

Where is my treasure and what do I love most in life?

What do I hate most in life and to what am I true?

Over and over the questions beat in upon the waiting moment.

As we listen, floating up through all the jangling echoes of our turbulence,

there is a sound of another kind—

A deeper note which only the stillness of the heart makes clear.

It moves directly to the core of our being.

Our questions are answered.

Our spirits refreshed, and we move back into the
traffic of our daily round

With the peace of the Eternal in our step.

How good it is to center down!

centering down

Centering **down** implies
descent ... below the
superficial, beneath
appearances, to the

depths

of self-discovery/examination.

In the path of descent ... we see from underneath.

We under-stand.

We interrogate our virtues and explore our shadows, individually and as communities.

We doubt our certainties and attend to our doubts, because we cease underestimating our power to be wrong.

Our us/them dualisms and antagonisms are unified into us/us compassion.

We begin to see “their” kindness and insight, and our violence and blindness.

We see their abuses of power ... and ours.

We see how we are part of the problem/sickness/threat ... and we experience deep repentance.

We realize we must **be/embody/
incarnate** the change we seek, from
underneath, from the bottom-up, not
just argue or vote for it from the top-
down:

Peace-making ... peace-being

Justice-seeking ... justice-being (use of power)

Economic justice ... poverty of spirit, non-grasping

Outer ecology ... inner ecology

Centering down can no longer be seen as a matter of “spiritual affluence” or a “religious luxury product” for the “contemplative class” - but as a matter of survival for the human species and the planetary ecosystem it threatens.

“The choice is no longer violence or nonviolence; it’s nonviolence or non-existence.” - Dr. King (night before he was murdered)



In groups of two or three ...

How might this practice of centering down enrich our work for social, political, economic, and environmental justice and peace?

1. silence

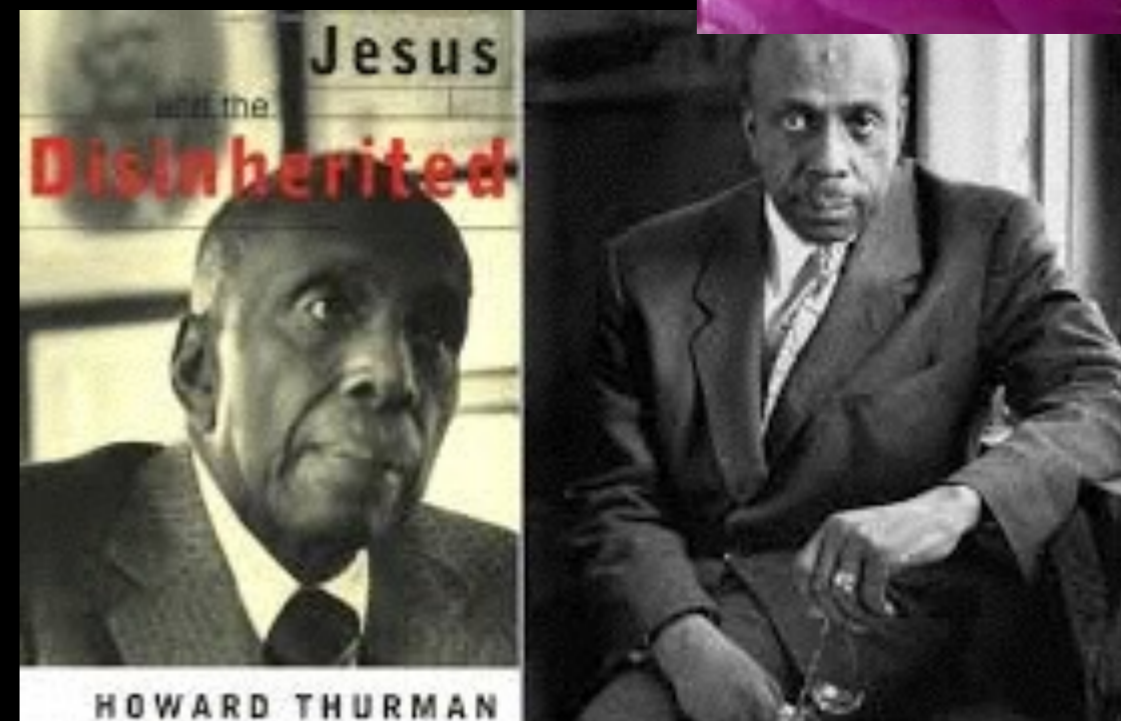
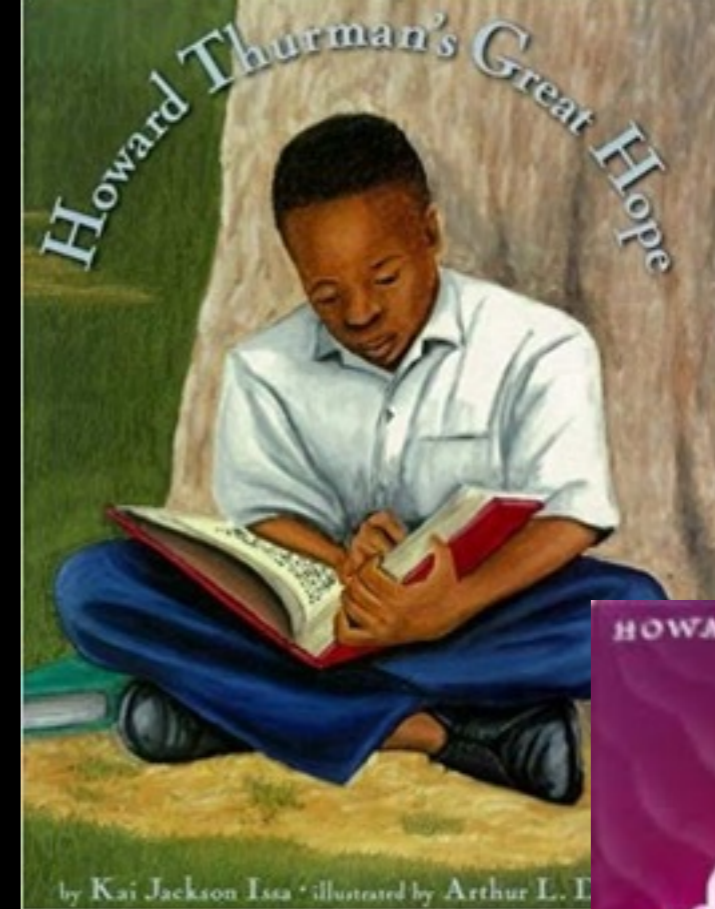
2. centering down

3. connection

(unitive insight/non-dual seeing)

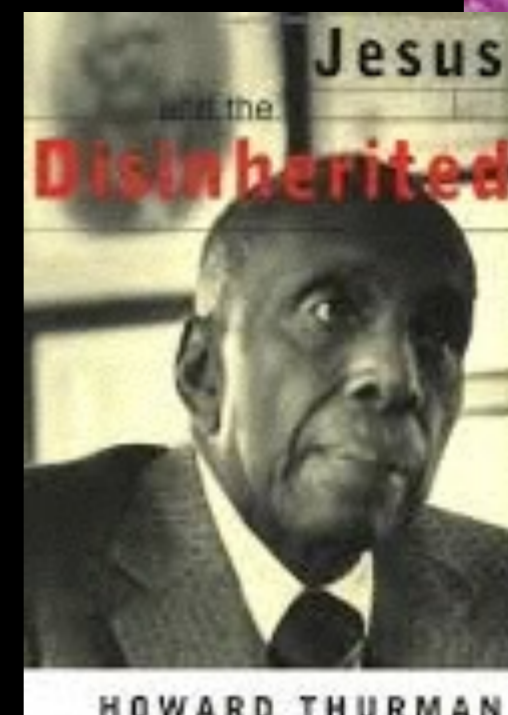
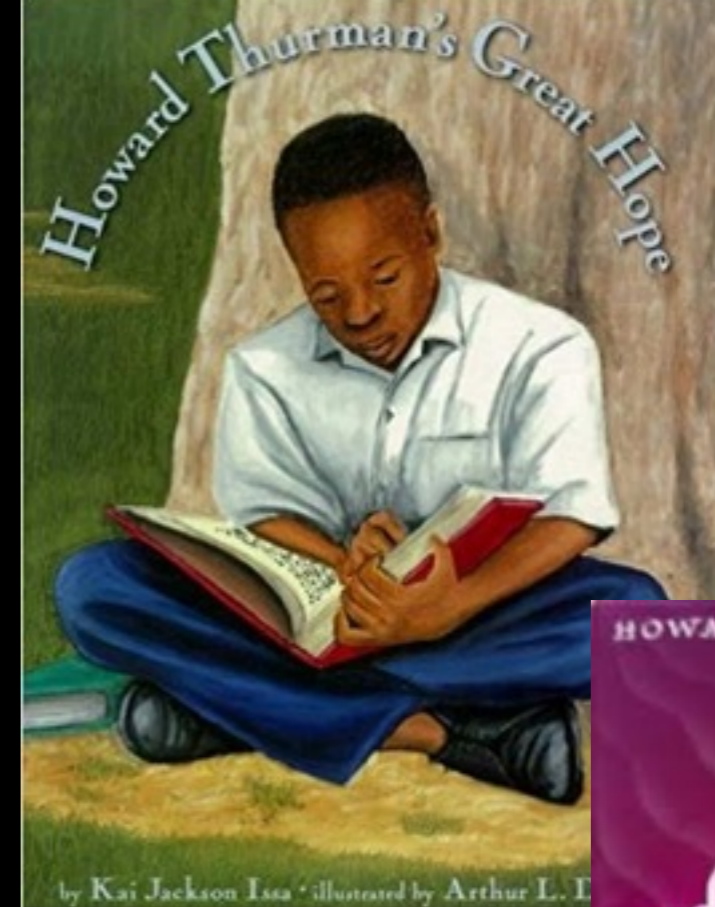
“...[A] strange necessity has been laid upon me to devote my life to the central concern that transcends the walls that divide and would achieve in literal fact what is experienced as literal truth: human life is one and all [persons] are members of one another. And this insight is spiritual and it is the hard core of religious experience.”

— Howard Thurman, *The Luminous Darkness*



It is my belief that in the Presence of God there is neither male nor female, white nor black, Gentile or Jew, Protestant nor Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, nor Moslem, but a human spirit stripped to the literal substances of itself before God.

Wherever man has this sense of the Eternal in his spirit, he hunts for it in his home, in his work, among his friends, in his pleasures and in all the levels of his function. It is my simple faith that this is the kind of universe that sustains that kind of adventure, and what we see dimly now in the churning confusion and chaos of our tempestuous times will some day be the common experience of all the children of men everywhere.



Now if I hear **the sound of the genuine** in me, and if you hear the sound of the genuine in you, it is possible for me to go down in me and come up in you. So that when I look at myself through your eyes having made that pilgrimage, I see in me what you see in me and the wall that separates and divides will disappear and we will become one because **the sound of the genuine** makes the same music.

the same song
by andy gullahorn

from Beyond the Frame

andygullahorn.com

the sound of
the genuine teaches us to listen for the same song
in all our hearts.

There's a mother who is idling
in the elementary school pick up line – singing ooh
And a woman wearing a bright orange safety vest
blowing a whistle in time – singing ooh
And there's a man across the street
at his front window lifting the blinds
To see the kids filing out with their
backpacks dragging behind – singing ooh

There's a couple staring into each other's eyes over their
glasses of water – singing ooh
And a short order cook heading back to the grill
to flip their burgers over – singing ooh
There's the woman with a missing front
tooth and a crooked smile
Counting the cash in her apron getting
ready for closing time – singing ooh

They're all singing, they're all singing, they're all singing
The same song
There's a single father waiting for his kids to arrive
for their monthly visit – singing ooh
And a woman walking around the gate
picking up the trash and abandoned papers – singing ooh
And a man in a camouflage jacket is holding his wife
He's trying to convince her that it won't be their
last goodbye - Ooh

They're all singing the same song ...

They're all singing the same song ...

Maybe you came with a sad melody ringing in your heart -
Maybe your notes are like flickers of hope trying to light the
dark - Ooh

Oh and I bring stories of my own from a broken life

But if we dare to open up to each other I think we'll find

We're all singing, We're all singing, We're all singing

The same song

Contemplative practice helps us see with a non-dual mind and heart ... which changes the way we work for social, political, economic, and environmental justice.

the work of social justice often requires us to see people in 4 categories:

oppressors

bystanders

oppressed

allies

is there a way for us to hold all four groups in an embrace of nondiscriminatory love?

In groups of two or three ...

How can we hold oppressor,
bystander, oppressed, and ally
in a non-dual, non-
discriminatory love?

1.silence

2.centering down

3.connection/non-dual mind.

4.focus

"In those long mid-
night hours when
morning seems weeks
away, the words of
Howard Thurman
have kept watch with
me." — Alice Walker



MEDITATIONS
OF THE HEART

HOWARD THURMAN

HOWARD THURMAN

Jesus
and the
Disinherited

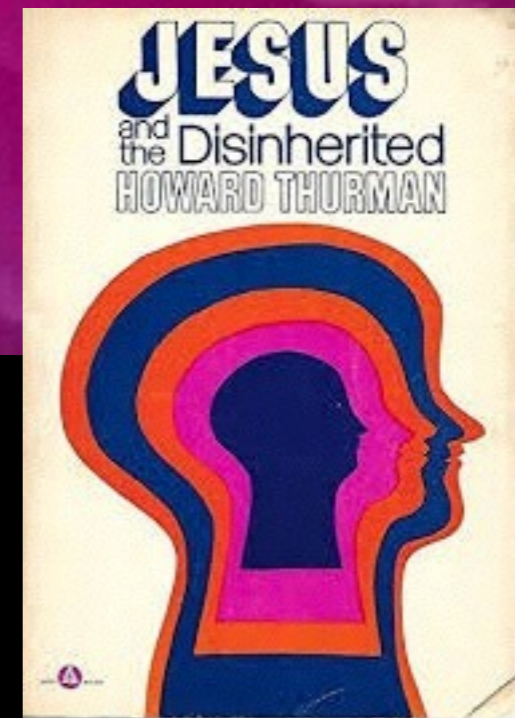
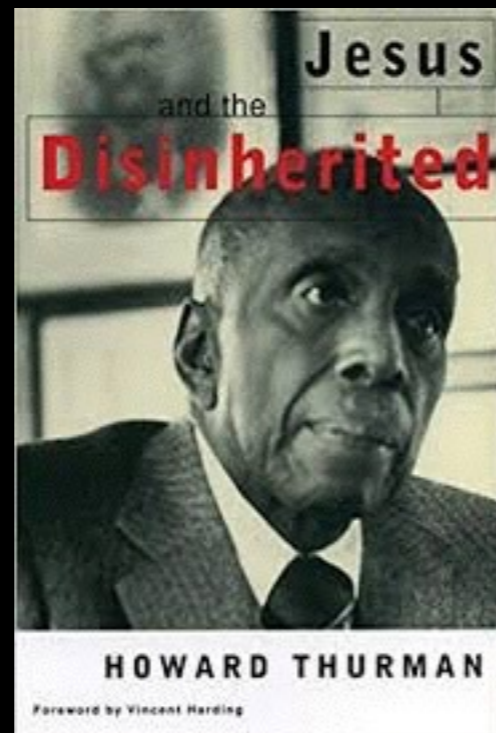
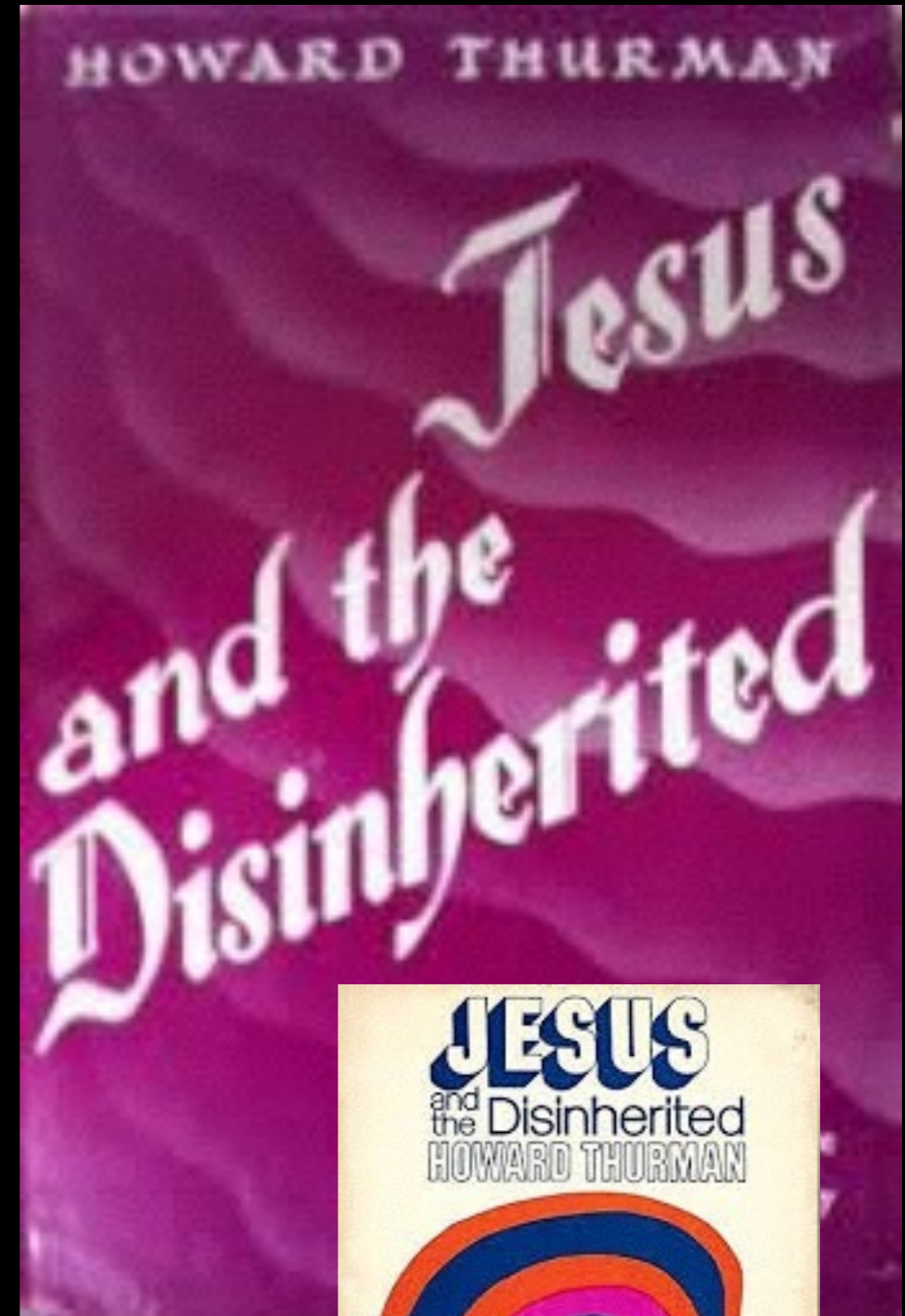
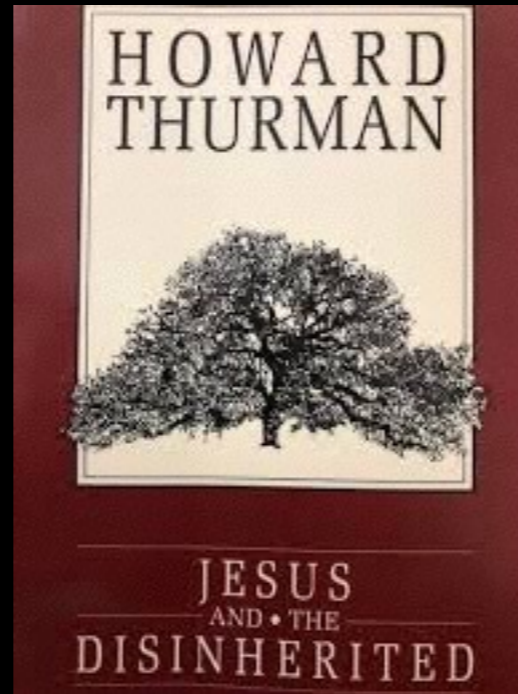
Jesus' message to the insecure
and oppressed men of today

Fear

Deception

Hate

Love



Fear - do not fear those who can
destroy the body.

Deception - let your yes be yes.

Hate - you have heard it said ...
hate your enemy, but I say ...

Love - love your enemies.

Social, political, economic, and environmental injustice depend on fear, deception, and hate to remain in force.

They are subverted by the presence of revolutionary love.

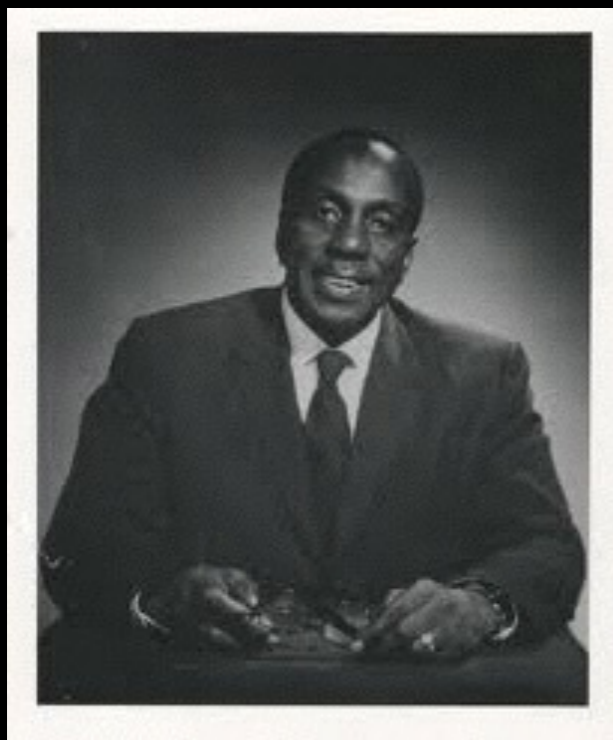
In groups of 2 or 3 -

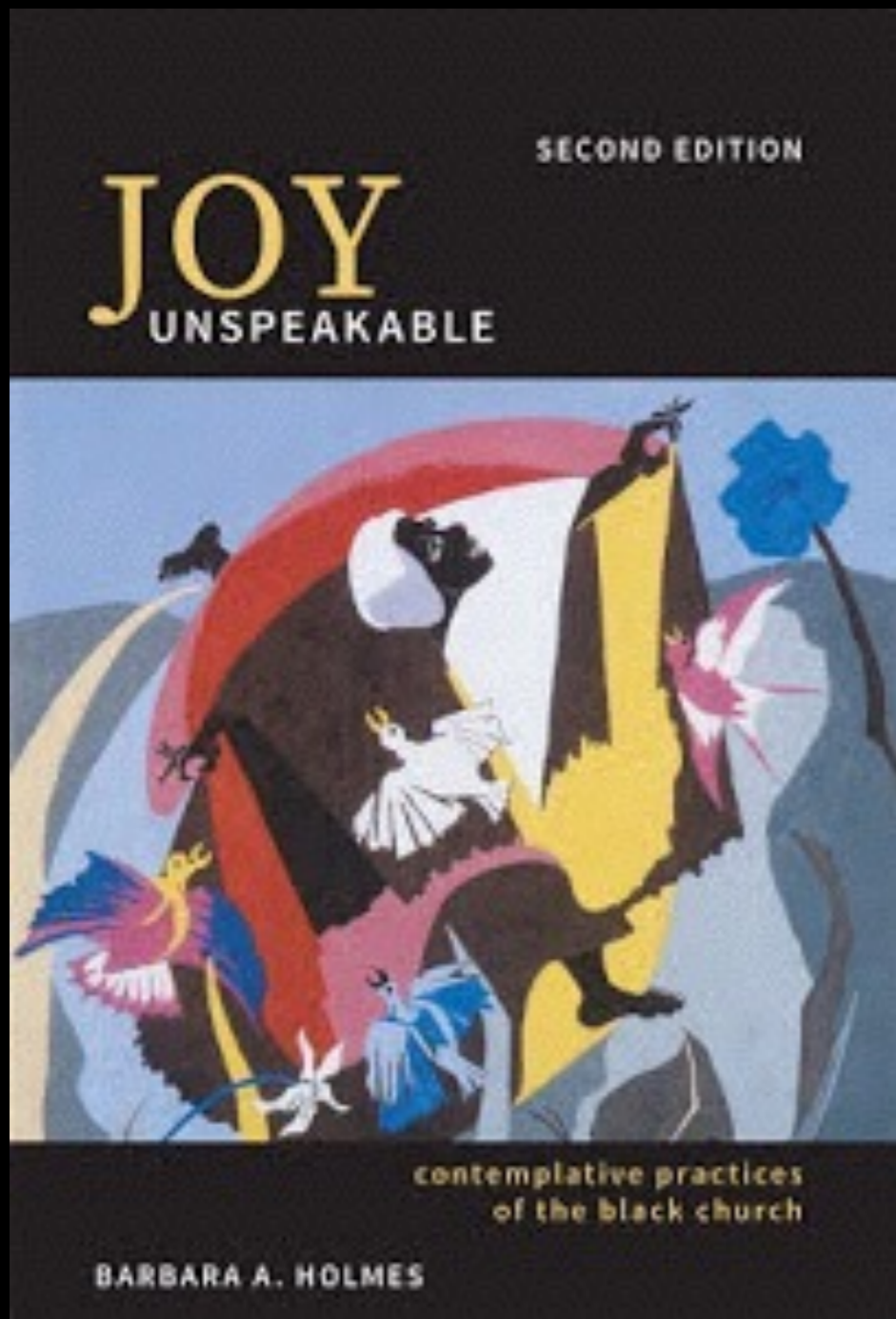
How might an intense focus on
fear, deception, hate, or love
(choose one) enhance
contemplative practice - and
our work for justice and peace?

- 1.silence
- 2.centering down
- 3.connection
- 4.focus
- 5.joy/aliveness

“Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive and then go do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

- Howard Thurman (attributed)





“Coming alive” in joy is necessary in the face of injustice and rebuilding.

“The joy of the Lord is your strength,” the Scriptures say.

Joy unspeakable
erupts when you least expect it,
when the burden is greatest,
when the hope is gone
after the bullets fly.
it rises
on the crest of impossibility,
it sways to the rhythm
of steadfast hearts,
and celebrates what we cannot see....





Joy Unspeakable

is not silent,

it moans, hums, and bends

to the rhythm of a dancing
universe.

It is a fractal of transcendent
hope,

a hologram of God's heart,

a black hole of unknowing...

For the tap dancing, boogie woogie,
rap/rock/blues griots
who also hear God,
joy unspeakable is
that space/time/joy continuum thing
that dares us to play and pray
in the interstices of life,
it is the belief that the phrase
“the art of living”
means exactly what it says.

Joy Unspeakable
is
both FIRE AND CLOUD,
the unlikely merger of
trance and high tech lives
ecstatic songs and a jazz
repertoire
Joy unspeakable is
a symphony of incongruities
of faces aglow and hearts
on fire
and the wonder of surviving together.

In groups of two or three ...

share an experience where you found joy
in social action or in contemplation - or
both together.

five conversations.

1. silence

2. centering down

3. connection

4. focus

5. joy

the same song

by Andy Gullahorn, from Beyond the Frame

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social activism and the path of descent

I will post these slides on my website
next week -
brianmclaren.net

