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Edited by Laszlo Zsolnai and Bernadette Flanagan

Increasingly, it is being recognized that spirituality, defined here as "a multiform search for a transcendent meaning of life that connects them to all living beings and brings them in touch with God or 'Ultimate Reality,'" is an aspect of almost every sphere of social life. It appears in humanity's dealings with nature, home and community, healing, economics and business, knowledge, and education. *The Routledge International Handbook of Spirituality in Society and the Professions* is a stimulating collection that summarizes the most important issues, frameworks, discussions, and problems relating to spiritually inspired activities in different fields of social life.

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Laszlo Zsolnai is Professor and Director of the Business Ethics Center at the Corvinus University of Budapest, Hungary, and President of the European SPES Institute in Leuven, Belgium. He is the author of several books on the links between spirituality, business, ethics, and management.

Bernadette Flanagan is Professor of Spirituality at the Spirituality Institute for Research and Education in Dublin, Ireland, which engages with the Waterford Institute of Technology in the delivery of MA and PhD studies in spirituality. She has consulted with organizations both in Ireland and internationally on dimensions of spiritual education, spiritual care, and spiritual practice.

SPIRITUALITY

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SPIRITUALITY AND SOCIAL ACTIVISM

Alastair McIntosh and Matt Carmichael

An unexercised life, one that has never been tested by demanding circumstances such as suffering or exertion, may never feel the need to explore this realm. It may even recoil from it, because such a worldview challenges materialistic values and affronts the ego's narcissism. In contrast, the person whose activism or other pressing circumstances causes them to lead an exercised way of life may discover hitherto unsuspected realms of inner experience. These involve the gifts (or "charisms") of discernment, direction, energy and serendipity that can deepen activism. The opening of such gifts is exercising in itself. Spiritual emergence can provoke psychological emergencies because, as the unconscious opens, it may escape the ego's control (Cardena, Lynn and Krippner 2000; Friedman and Hartelius 2013; Grof and Grof 1989).

The central issue of spiritual activism is this. How can our work for social, environmental, religious and other life-affirming change be not just effective, but guided and sustained from the deepest levels of being that give life? Each of us must dig from where we stand. We may not have much to dig with, we may have just a spade, we may have just the smallest teaspoon, but we can dig channels into which the subsequent flow of wider political process might flow (Figure 36.1). As such, spiritual consciousness may precede political expression, as in the examples of Gandhi with India's rise to independence, black civil rights in America or Scottish land reform.

In this essay, we sketch an outline based upon our co-authored study, *Spiritual Activism: Leadership as Service* (McIntosh and Carmichael 2015). We attempt (i) to summarize the context and history of the field; (ii) outline key principles and insights; (iii) provide a case study of the Sioux oil pipeline protest at Standing Rock; and (iv) point to nonviolence as the pivotal emergent dynamic of spiritual activism.

Context and history of spiritual activism

Activism is the expression of agency. To act is to engage with life, and so, to become more fully alive. Agency is power, and power can be either power over others, power with them or power from within. It is with the latter two forms of relationship that spiritual activism is concerned. For both, the term "empowerment" applies and means "power into" or "power from within".

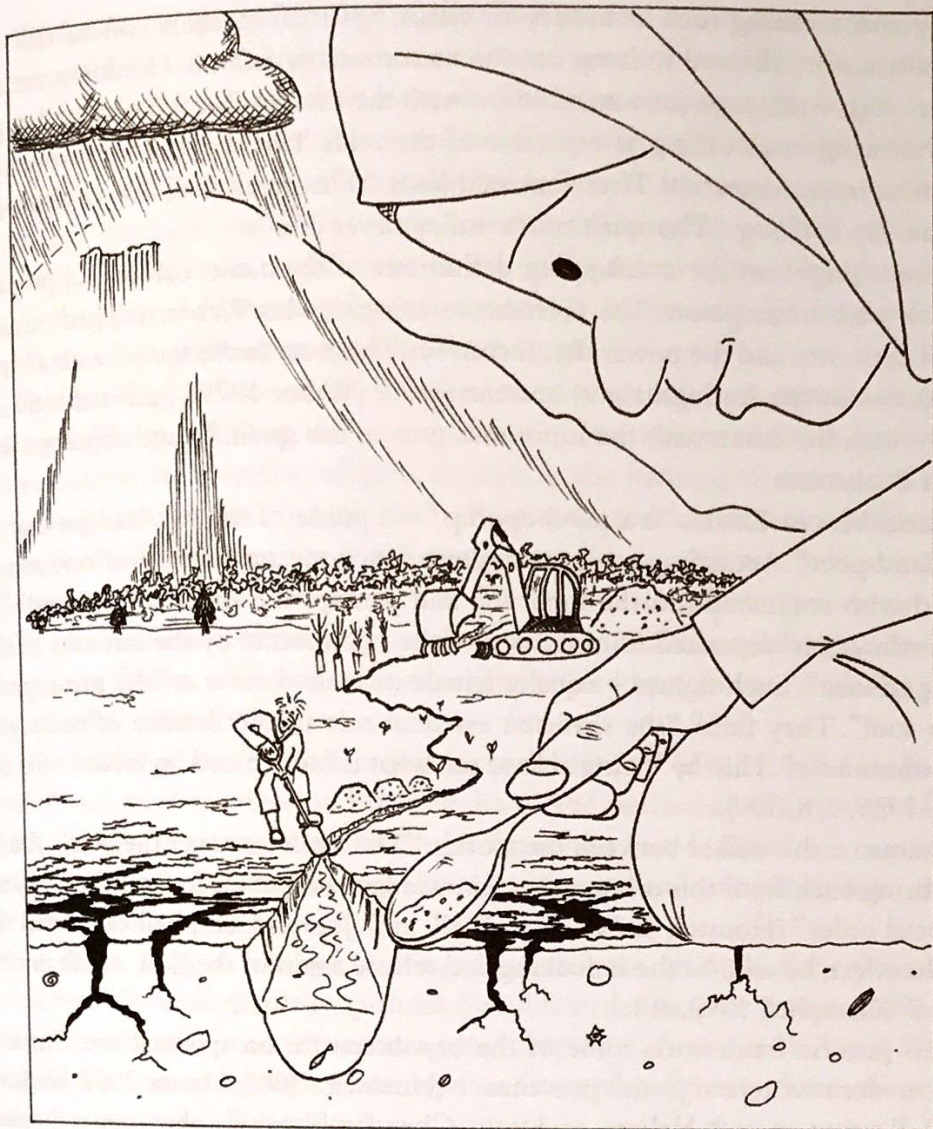


Figure 36.1 “We may have just the smallest teaspoon” (made by Matt Carmichael).

Spiritual activism arises out of being moved or called from within. Usually, this “vocation” (as a calling is) will be a burden of awareness. As was observed by the Brazilian archbishop and liberation theologian, Dom Hélder Câmara: “When I give food to the poor, they call me a saint. When I ask why the poor have no food, they call me a communist” (Câmara and McDonagh 2009, 11).

When spiritual principles have been used to harm or control others, they become toxic to the soul. Because the spiritual is the deepest source of power, it is also the most deeply misappropriated. Every imperialist knows that to colonize land and labor you must also colonize the soul. Spiritual activism therefore reclaims both spirituality and spiritual tools from authoritarian uses of religion. Not least, it reclaims metaphor from narrow literalism in sacred writings.

Without an ever-deepening inner grounding, activism likely ends in burnout or sell out. Burnout is a collapse of inner energy and meaning, including the collapse of faith and hope. Sell out is a collapse of charity, whereby inner drivers of satisfaction are displaced by outer

sources of energy and meaning such as money or status. Spiritual teachers concur that work “in the Spirit” must not be allowed to hang on outer successes or failures. Hinduism therefore privileges “karma” yoga – the yoga (or way of union with the divine) that is based on doing the right thing, on following one’s calling, irrespective of the odds. This deepens consciousness of *purusha* or innermost interconnection. Therefore, said Jesus, “The meek shall inherit the Earth”. Therefore, says the *Tao Te Ching*, “The spirit of the valley never dies”.

Spiritual activism hinges on the overlapping definitions of shamanic, bardic and prophetic functions. All work with inner power. The German sociologist, Max Weber, mapped out three understandings of authority and the power that it conveys. These are *traditional* (as with a hereditary office bearer), *bureaucratic* (or legal right) and *charismatic* (Weber 1979). Spiritual activism is concerned mainly with the latter, with the numinous gifts of the spirit. In anthropology, this is the framework of shamanism.

The shaman, said Mircea Eliade, “is a psychopomp” – a guide of souls – “and he may also be priest, mystic, and poet”. According to context, these functions are nuances of one another. All are concerned with connection to the inner life and perhaps the spirit “otherworld”. The shaman, Eliade continues, is “separated from the rest of the community by the intensity of their own religious experience”. Such figures – equally female or male – serve as “the great specialist in the human soul”. They fulfill “the shaman’s essential role in the defense of the psychic integrity of the community”. This, by “being able to see what is hidden and invisible to the rest” (Eliade and Trask 1989, 4, 8, 509).

As such, the shaman is the walker between the worlds. “The vision is never the goal”. Rather, “he or she must bring back from this other reality knowledge and power to heal the body and regenerate the social order” (Houston in Nicolson 1987, xiii). Joseph Campbell called this “the hero’s journey”. Its effect, he said, “is the unlocking and release again of the flow of life into the body of the world” (Campbell 1993, 40).

Resting on this generic framework, some of the best literature on spiritual activism is by both ancient and modern writers of Jewish provenance (Horowitz 2002; Lerner 2007; Starhawk 2011; Weiss 2002). Resting on such Hebrew traditions, Christian liberation theology is theology that liberates theology itself. Says Gustavo Gutiérrez, “solidarity with the poor ... is what we call the first act”. Reasoning is the second act in a “praxis” (or practice) of iterative “circular relationship” between action and reflection in the course of “doing theology” (Gutiérrez 2007, 29–30).

Radical Islam, which is not the same as militant (or aggressive) Islam, would hold that Islam *is* spiritual activism (Abu-Nimer 2003; Rahnema 1994). Outwith the Abrahamic faiths, Gandhi’s activism came from a Hindu background, albeit with strong interfaith influences. In Buddhism, Thich Nhat Hanh and Sulak Sivaraksa are amongst those who have developed “engaged Buddhism” to “create a culture of peace” that can confront the “structural violence ... inherent in ... our cultures and societies” (Sivaraksa 2015, 8–9).

Other activist literature draws heavily on Quaker discernment traditions (Green, Woodrow and Peavey 1994), on group dynamics (Shields 1991) and on Wiccan or neopagan spiritualities (Starhawk 2011). Activists in rural Africa have developed the influential *Training for Transformation* manuals (Hope, Timmel and Hodzi 1984). These build on Paulo Freire’s work on “conscientisation” from Brazil, which uses grassroots education to grow critical consciousness around the meanings of “full humanisation” (Freire 1972).

Key principles of spiritual activism

From our experience as participant-observers, the following are the most important principles of spiritual activism.

1. *The Validity of Spirituality.* By “validity” we mean a reality check on worldview. In some cultures, especially where indigenous societies are intact, it would be abnormal not to conduct activism from within a spiritual framework. Elsewhere, for example, in France with its secular constitutional principle of *laïcité*, a spiritual worldview brought into public life can be considered inappropriate. Many activists will describe themselves as “spiritual but not religious”, but what is meant by “spiritual” varies. For some, spiritual validity rests on faith as an inner conviction of knowing. For others, it might come from conviction spurred by spiritual experiences of the type that are studied in transpersonal psychology. Sometimes, the exigencies of activist work means that a sense of the divine just breaks through.

2. *The Centrality of Consciousness.* Consciousness is central to all experience. It is the only way we know anything, including the presumed fact of our own existence. Altered or alternate states of consciousness are therefore of great interest in the framing of social reality and influencing that framing (Bucke 1961; James 1960). Politicians and advertisers understand this and may shape with it a shrunken reality. Activists need to understand it too in liberating human potential. Lower states of consciousness, such as drunkenness, impair the perception of reality. Higher states of consciousness offer an expanded worldview whilst not damaging “normal” perceptual and cognitive faculties. Higher states are characterized by a sense of underlying unity, love, bliss and ineffability (Tart 1969).

3. *The Totality of the Psyche.* The psyche is the totality of inner life. The Freudian view was modeled on a tripartite division between the *id* (the instinctual self), the *ego* (the conscious self) and the *superego* (the internalized authority figure). To Freud, “God” was nothing more than the latter writ large. Religions that insist on an authoritarian, patriarchal view of the divine offer little that challenges this view.

In contrast, Jung in his later writings held that the ground of the psyche, the “collective unconscious”, is fundamentally spiritual. Simplified, the Jungian model of the psyche posits the ego or the outer conscious self as resting on a deep Self or soul (Jacobi 1942). The ego is our self-image. Its alter-ego, the Jungian “shadow”, is everything about ourselves that we have repressed or not yet developed (Figure 36.2).

Simplified Structure of the Human Psyche (based on C. G. Jung)

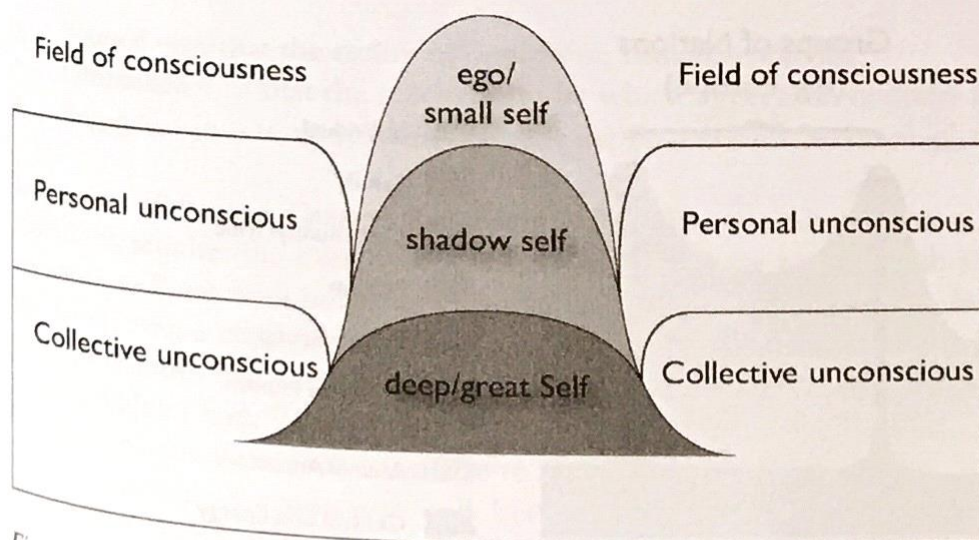


Figure 36.2 The Jungian Psyche Individually (made by Alastair McIntosh).

Jung's model is helpful in activist work. It is not just others that have a shadow side. As activists, we must grow in awareness of our own shadows. Failure to do so leads to dysfunctional organizational dynamics within movements. The problem is not that we all have a shadow. The problem is when we deny it and project it out onto others, seeing in them what we deny in ourselves. While this may energise the cause and give a holier-than-thou feeling, it may misread reality. Sometimes, the issue is less the corporation, or the government, than with our own unresolved relationship with, say, an authoritarian parent figure.

Jung's view of the psyche also models the profound interconnection of all things. The soul is not alone. The soul exists, both individually as an "individuated" being, and collectively, in a dynamic relationship with others, the universe and the divine (Figure 36.3). Mystical religion holds the same. In Indian philosophy, individual soul, *atman*, is ultimately one with universal soul, *Brahman*. Therefore, *tat tvam asi* – "thou art that".

4. *The Nonviolent Basis of Spiritual Activism*. Being rested in love, spiritual interconnection renders it irrational to demonize others. To cause another harm is only to harm our own extended self. As such, nonviolence becomes both a philosophy and practice in spiritual activism. It seeks to break what Hélder Câmara called the spiral of violence (Câmara 1971). Here, the primary (or Level One) violence of social injustice leads to the secondary violence of rebellion by the oppressed. That in turn drives the tertiary violence of repression by the powerful. This feeds back into the oppression of more primary violence that both impoverishes and brutalizes the nation (Figure 36.4). Such an ever-tightening spiral of an eye for an eye, said Gandhi, turns the whole world blind.

Nonviolence can be secular and purely tactical (Sharp 2005), but at its deepest and most effective level, it is the means by which violence is itself absorbed by transcendent love (Wink 2000). To Christian pacifists, this is the meaning of the crucifixion. In the East, it is the cosmic *karuṇā* or compassion of the Buddha nature. Islam also represents absolute nonviolence in the Qur'an's version of the Cain and Abel story. Abel chooses to die rather than to kill, saying to his murderous brother: "If you stretch out your hand to kill me, it is not for me to kill you, because I

The Transpersonal Basis of Community

After Jolande Jacobi, 1942

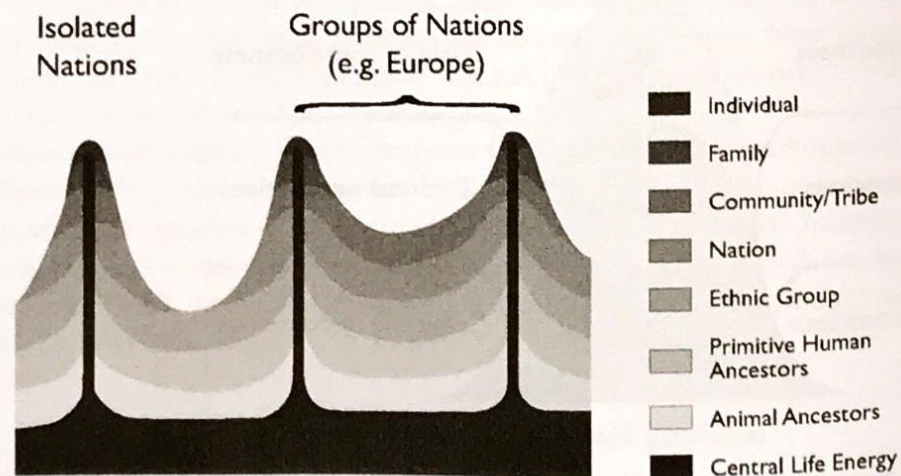


Figure 36.3 The Jungian Psyche Collectively (made by Alastair McIntosh).

Dom Hélder Câmara's 'Spiral of Violence'

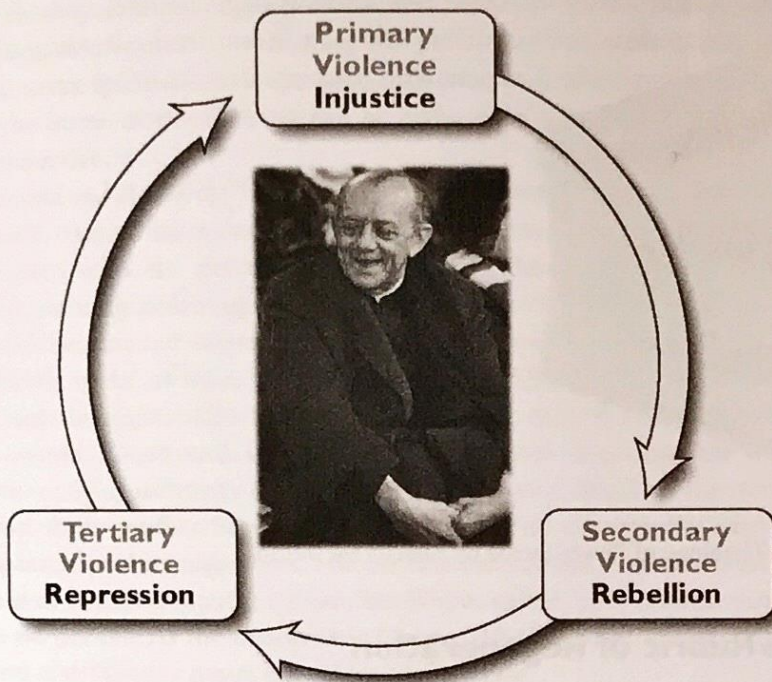


Figure 36.4 Violence, Nonviolence and Liberation Theology (made by Alastair McIntosh).

respect God, the Cherisher of the Worlds. You will only draw down sin upon yourself" (Qur'an, Surah V:27–32, paraphrased).

5. *Engaging the Powers.* As spirituality is in part the interiority, or inner cohesion, of the structures of outer reality, inner life at both its individual and collective levels will shape outer events. If abuses of power are tackled only at an outer level, for example, by chopping off the head of a tyrant, others will only spring up Hydra-like. Lasting and nonviolent activism must seek to transform structures from within.

This wrestling with the inner nature of power is a triune process (Figure 36.5). The Powers – be they of nations, social movements, organizations or key individuals – must be (Wink 1992):

- Named – so that the reality of oppression is made explicit;
- Unmasked – so that the mechanisms by which oppression operates are understood; and
- Engaged – so as to nonviolently wrestle the Powers back to their higher, God-given vocation.

6. *Prophetic Vision and Courage.* To sense power in its innermost form, as well as its outer constellations, requires the exercise of the heart as well as the reason. Such acuity calls for constant attention to Truth with both a small and a capital T. As the story of the Emperor's New Clothes illustrates, even a child can have power when working with truth. To hold issues "in the light" of truth requires that activists work on seeing that their flame burns clean. On purifying their motive. As Jesus said, "Blessed are the pure of heart for they shall see God" (Matthew 5:8). This, and perhaps this alone, is the antidote to a post-truth world.

The prophetic function is to walk between the inner and the outer worlds and lubricate the flow of life back into the community. Rarely is this comfortable work. One steps into such a role when called, and steps back out of it again when no longer needed. Prophecy is not a job

Walter Wink's Trilogy of Empowerment

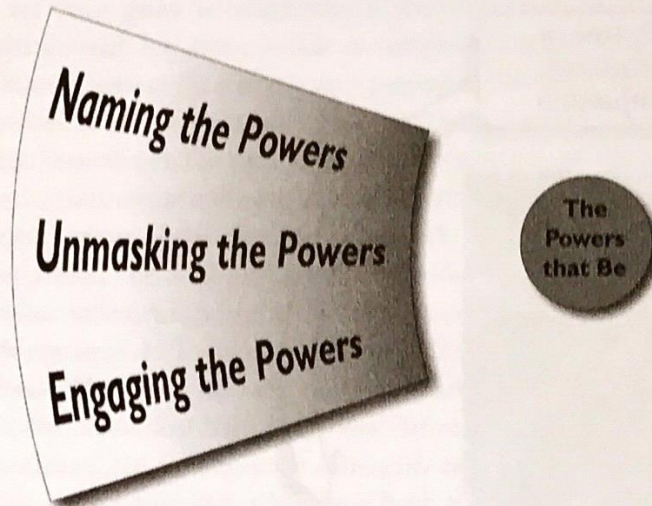


Figure 36.5 The Theology of Power (made by Alastair McIntosh).

The Rubric of Regeneration

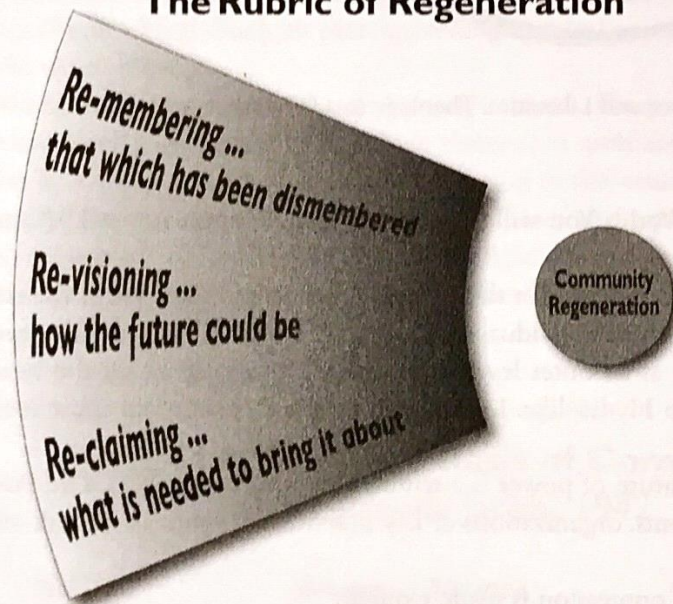


Figure 36.6 The Role of Spiritual Vision (made by Alastair McIntosh).

for life with a pension at the end. The devil's got all the money, God's forever broke, therefore prophecy must proceed on the economics of "daily bread".

Prophetic vision often emerges from another triune process. Re-membering what has been dismembered, re-visioning an alternative future and re-claiming what is needed to bring it about (Figure 36.6). Again, the art is to frame everyday issues within life's bigger picture. This is explicit in the opening line of Hinduism's most sacred text, the Bhagavad Gita. The Penguin Classics translation begins: "On the field of Truth, on the battlefield of life, what came to pass, Sanjaya..." (Mascaró 1962, 43).

What we are shown here is that the "come to pass" of everyday events are nested within the wider "battlefield" of life. That, in turn, is nested in the opening of the divine way of Truth or

Dharma. But who is Sanjaya? Sanjaya is the eagle-eyed charioteer to the blind king, Dhritarashtra. The Gita thereby acknowledges political and moneyed power but shows that these are blind. Without Sanjaya's prophetic vision, they will perish and be unable to play their part in the world. As such, to speak spiritual truth can have influence by legitimizing or delegitimizing courses of action in the outer world. Blessing can be given or withheld. Cursing is both unnecessary and counterproductive.

7. *Charisma and Authority*. "Charism" is a Greek term that, properly used, means a spiritual gift. Properly attuned to, it may arise out of practices such as stillness, prayer, meditation, the study of sacred texts, the practice of kindness and the creative arts – including music, poetry, storytelling, painting and song. One does not possess charismatic gifts but is possessed by them. This calls for heightened awareness as to how such power can play.

Max Weber spoke of three types of authority (Weber 1965). *Traditional* authority is authority that comes by right, often of inheritance, such as that of medieval kings. It is less common in today's world. *Charismatic* authority is the prophetic function that we have just discussed. *Bureaucratic* (or *legal*) authority is that of the administrator. Much of the tension in activist movements arises from conflict between the latter two. The charismatics can walk roughshod over sound organizational management. The bureaucrats can fail to understand charisma and impose the systems of a stifling managerialism that Weber called "the routinization of charisma". Both functions are needed. As the charismatic George MacLeod who founded the Iona Community in Scotland said: "God is never served by inefficiency".

8. *Cults are the Shadow Side of Charisma*. Our inner lives do not automatically find benign expression. A failure to discern between deeply called service and mere egotism causes the inner light to burn but with a smoky flame. A lack of grounding in the deep self with its bedrock of humility can cause charismatic power to inflate the ego. This gives rise to celebrity and even cultic dynamics.

Cults exploit their followers' needs and neediness for parent figures along with simple explanations and defined courses of behavior. Both social and transpersonal psychology have contributed much to understanding how cults come about. Anybody engaged with charismatic power should verse themselves in some of this literature (Galanter 1999).

9. *Discernment as Spiritual Process*. Given such pitfalls on the one hand, and hidden resources on the other, what navigational tools do spiritual traditions offer? The most pivotal is *discernment*, or deep inner listening and testing. Many descriptions of this in activist literature draw upon the Quaker practice of "meetings for clearness".

Parker Palmer describes clearness meetings as "circles of trust". Here, "is not just a place where we learn to ask honest, open questions. It is a focused microcosm of a larger circle of trust, a setting in which we have an intense experience of what it means to gather in support of someone's inner journey". This relies on building the capacity for "creative listening" in the assembled group. It is the soul that is being drawn "into the light" of clearness; the soul not just of one, but of all who are involved, and beyond (Palmer 2004, 134).

Notably, Buddhist spiritual community can be called either the Noble Sangha or the Satsangha. *Sat* mean "true", thus there is a sense that truth emerges in community together.

Standing Rock: A case study of spiritual activism in practice

In July 2016, Energy Transfer Partners were given permission to build a \$3.78bn pipeline to carry half a million barrels daily of fracked crude oil from North Dakota to Iowa. A previous route had been rejected because of the potential threat of contamination to water supplying the majority white town of Bismarck, but such concerns evaporated a few miles south, on a route threatening lands and waters sacred to the Standing Rock Sioux tribe.

The elders of Standing Rock chose to focus the campaign on water pollution. Activists of all stripes were designated Water Protectors and campaigned under the slogan "Water is Life" – *Mni Wiconi* in Lakota. The thousands of protestors were told to avoid the warpath and trained in nonviolence. They intuited that images of state violence against unarmed Native Americans would trigger alarm amongst huge swathes of the US public. That is exactly what happened, with juxtaposed photos from the Standing Rock camps and the 1890 Massacre of Wounded Knee going viral.

Driving their approach was the Sioux understanding of the interconnectedness of all life. This is captured in a Lakota saying – *mitakuye oyasin* – "We are all related". Ladonna Bravebull Allard exemplified this in responding to police brutality at the Sacred Stone camp of Water Protectors, saying: "How can we stand in the face of violence? Because I was born to this land, because the roots grow out of my feet". Likewise, Eryn Wise of the International Indigenous Youth Council, who responded to police violence with the message: "Our youth are watching and remember the faces of the officers that assaulted them. They pray for them" (Camp of the Sacred Stones 2016). Police violence was widespread (Amnesty International USA 2016), yet the nonviolent line held with the presence of Native Americans from some 300 tribes and their non-Native allies.

Their resistance was bolstered by the arrival of 2,000 US Army veterans led by Wes Clark Jr, the son of a former US army general and presidential candidate. The vets came consciously to redeem their own past actions and to honor the commitments that they made as soldiers to protect Americans against all enemies, both foreign and domestic. In a formal ceremony reflecting the spirit of *mitakuye oyasin*, they sought, and were offered, forgiveness for a long list of specific injustices. As such, they came in service to the Standing Rock elders, supporting both their aims and methods.

It appears that assaults on native spirituality awoke Wes Clark Jr's own latent Christian spirituality. Raised Catholic, he tried to find a religious home but nothing quite clicked. Hearing news of Water Protectors being put in dog kennels and of praying elderly women being beaten transported him back to his childhood church, "with Jesus saying, 'What you do to my brothers, you do to me.' Suddenly it made sense. Now it's like a fire has been lit inside me".

(Joseph 2016)

Citing the example of Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Clark called for veterans who were happy to be arrested in the cause of peace and spoke of expecting to be beaten up, or worse. Word got out that the veterans planned to form a protective barrier between law enforcement and Water Protectors, forcing police to attack them. On 4th December 2016, while Barack Obama was still president, the US Army Corps of Engineers withdrew permission to construct the pipeline. It said that new routes should be considered (Darcy 2016). However, this was reversed when Donald Trump came to power. In 2017, the pipeline was driven through.

Let us mention two lessons of the campaign. On the downside, some Native elders were left feeling that Clark's campaign had swamped theirs, leading to confusion of lines of leadership and legitimacy. In addition, some veterans felt that in apologizing for America's history, Clark had overstepped their implied mandate (Linehan 2016). However, spiritual activism will inevitably arise out of deeply conflicted and conflicting situations. Often, an activist will feel divided within themselves. We may "quake" under the tension of holding the polar opposites of differing viewpoints and objectives together "in the light". Such is why we have to seek refinement of our inner flames and patch the inevitable "security vulnerabilities", or points of personal weakness, within our psyches. This is why traditions like the Quakers, the Jesuits and

many indigenous peoples' structures place such emphasis on clear truth sought through shared discernment in community.

On the upside, other Native elders and protestors felt that the presence of the veterans had been "very powerful", perhaps even decisive in the Army Corp's concession. At multiple levels, it carried a redemptive quality. Standing Rock reminds us that while force can appear to win on the short wave, the Spirit usually plays a long wave game. Trump's rise to power was swung by his 81% vote amongst evangelicals. Tackling such reactionary religious forces requires a deeper political theology, a spirituality that will, in part, come from learning with humility from groups like the Lakota Sioux.

The future of spiritual activism

Our case study points to active nonviolence as the deep driver of spiritual activism. Metaphorically, it "refreshes the parts that other beers cannot reach". This essay has been written in the backdrop of the rise of authoritarian populism – especially in the UK with Brexit and in the US with Trump. However, there is an "activist moment" to be caught at such times. They illuminate the shadow in the body politic. In counterpoint, those who might not normally be open to spirituality start asking deeper questions.

On New Year's Day, 2017, a one-time Buenos Aires nightclub bouncer – now Pope Francis – issued an astonishing message for our times. Called *Nonviolence: A Style of Politics for Peace*, it states (Francis 2017):

On this occasion, I would like to reflect on nonviolence as a style of politics for peace. I ask God to help all of us to cultivate nonviolence in our most personal thoughts and values. May charity and nonviolence govern how we treat each other as individuals, within society and in international life. When victims of violence are able to resist the temptation to retaliate, they become the most credible promoters of nonviolent peace-making.... May nonviolence become the hallmark of our decisions, our relationships and our actions, and indeed of political life in all its forms.

The year of 2016 was when "post-truth" made the Oxford Dictionary. Africans have a proverb: "the brighter the light, the darker the shadows that gather around". But conversely, dark shadows can make new light visible. Such is the hope, a hope beyond mere optimism, of spiritual activism.

Acknowledgement

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