

*Is not Wisdom calling? Is not Understanding raising her voice?  
On the heights overlooking the road, at the crossways, she takes her stand;  
by the gates, at the entrance to the city, on the access-roads, she cries out,  
I am calling to you, all people, my words are addressed to all humanity.'*  
— Proverbs 8:1-4, Hebrew Scriptures

July 31, 2020

## Alcyon Study Guide for Times of Spiritual Crisis – Six Doorways into Contemplative Cultural Research and Repair

Thank you for being interested in this draft of the Alcyon Study Guide—our attempts at cracking open new territory in the current landscape of despair, fixed patterns and awakening.

It started as an annotated list of the resources and authors that directed our thinking this spring. It evolved as we needed to get at the roots of things—and dig deeper into:

- How did the near total erasure of the sacred and spirit from the public narrative come about?
- What new paradigms are needed to begin making new maps?
- What lies *at the heart* of healing?
- What creates and what tramples *transformative* conversations?

The index is below: you can enter through whatever doorway speaks to you, they are interconnected and overlapping. You'll find poetry, questions, and our work and writing from this spring, as we tried to find a place to stand in order to ask right questions. You'll find the 1000 pieces of a not-yet-assembled puzzle of our times. Skim this guide and find the one thing that draws you in. Start there, ponder, go for a walk, pray for new sight.

Beautiful, daily, wide-ranging conversations with many of you shaped this guide. We ask everyone we meet: What are you seeing? What do you think is really happening? From what font of compassion are you living and responding? What is your practice yielding?

We need your insights and additions as we seek cairns in the fog. Stay in touch—and send us the writing and images that have guided your own work. Thank you and blessings from the cove, Kathryn

### Alcyon Study Guide for Times of Spiritual Crisis: Six Doorways Into Cultural Research & Repair

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# 1. Introduction

[June 2020]

**Goal (our holy aim):** to stay awake, be courageous and serve the birthing of the new  
**Assumptions:** old patterns won't serve; failure is needed; welcoming the unknown is vital  
**Starting Points:** pray, practice waiting, listening, restraint; ask good questions; pray

Watching things cracking and cracking open, our work has been evolving into creating 'centers that can hold' amidst the great changes underfoot. When the covid-19 events began unfolding in March 2020 we started collecting articles, blogs and interviews that helped widen the conversation. We sought out voices of wisdom speaking out of silence and open-heartedness. We saw that the contemplative path could bring perspective, honesty and depth to the confusion. Now, we thought, our work at Alcyon really begins:

- What are the conditions under which this kind of work can take place?
- What inner capacities are needed?

Thus was born this draft "study guide". Three contemporary contemplative perspectives illuminate it:

- Inner work, in all its beauty and pain, must be tied to our outer work if we are to have the strength and vision to renew and rebuild our corner of culture and community.
- With Jung, we see that *the spirit of the depths* (all that's hidden, rejected, refused) must inform *the spirit of the times* (current worldviews, institutions, leadership) or we will be lost and soul-less
- And we find our ground in the Christ mystery that reconstellates what it means to be born and to die, to forgive, to love one's neighbors and to seek a third way.

We also have to address an epistemological thorn in our post-modern side. By this I mean that we must answer the question "How do we know what we know?" The Pharisees were troubled by the nature of what they heard coming from Jesus and asked, "By whose Authority does he speak?" To be free means to have an inner compass, an inner authority against which we measure outer authorities and pronouncements about what is true and real. To what will we agree? We know that a problem cannot be solved at the same level of consciousness that created it. So we need to know what lens and worldview we are currently looking through and find ways in to develop free and clear and *new thinking*.

Alcyon was given to us, by Grace, to be a temple of hospitality and study for our times. A place for deep heart-opening experiences and the conversations and transformative choices that follow. A place to learn how to listen patiently until an apt question arises which warrants our attention. No one knows how to face these times fully, we need each others voices and hearts as we begin mapping our way, one puzzle piece at a time.

The following prompts are a first attempt to set a stage for the kind of hard work ahead for those who are called to imagine, envision and build anew. We need centers that can hold, places like the Irish monasteries of old. They were places of learning, independent of Rome, with no formalized structure, made up from the culture of the people and located near the center of the village. We see a similar vision and are listening for how it will be built. This is a first start--we need your additions, amendments, fire and light!

With love from the cove, and its mysteries, Kathryn & Joan

## 2. Cairns for the Journey—Conversation Starters

Swimming, One Day in August by Mary Oliver

It is time now, I said,  
for the deepening and quieting of the spirit  
among the flux of happenings.

Something had pestered me so much  
I thought my heart would break.  
I mean, the mechanical part.

I went down in the afternoon  
to the sea  
which held me, until I grew easy.  
About tomorrow, who knows anything.  
Except that it will be time, again,  
for the deepening and quieting of the spirit.

**Sometimes poetry or someone else's incisive thinking is all we need to spark a new conversation.**

**Perhaps one of these passages will awaken a desire to dig deeper.**

**What poetry and quotes have changed how you see and think this spring?**

What if our religion was each other? If our practice was our life? If prayer was our words? What if the Temple was the Earth? If forests were our church? If holy water—the rivers, lakes, and oceans? What if meditation was our relationships? If the Teacher was life? If wisdom was self-knowledge? If love was the center of our being?  
- Ganga White

True experience always comes about in withdrawal "from the crowd". The original, true and proper attitude of the mind is, as Heraclites says, that of "listening to the truth of things."

Our journey into the territory of being should be made in silence, with wondering, wide-open eyes. The fullness of truth and reality is revealed only to those who attain to a silence which covers every aspect of their beings, or who, in other words make their basic attitude toward the whole of being one of delicate and reserved courtesy...

For anyone who wishes to hear what is true and real, every voice must for once be still. Silence, however, is not merely the absence of speech. It is not something negative; it is 'something' in itself. It is a depth, a fullness, a peaceful flow of hidden life.

Everything true and great grows in silence. Without silence we fall short of reality and cannot plumb the depths of being.

- Soren Kierkegaard, 1813 – 1855, Danish philosopher, theologian, poet, social critic and religious author who is widely considered to be the first existentialist philosopher, acutely aware of the failings of the institutional church once made the profoundly true statement: "Silences are the only scrap of Christianity we still have left." From *God is With Us* by Ladislaus Boros

You never change things by fighting the existing reality. To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete. - Buckminster Fuller

What people think is far more important for the future than what they do. Thoughts become deeds in the course of time. We live today on the thoughts of past times; these are fulfilled in the deeds committed today. And our thoughts which flood through the world today will flow into the deeds of tomorrow. - Rudolf Steiner, *The Karma of Untruthfulness* Vol 1

Everything that Joseph Campbell described as the initiatory experience: the crisis of meaning, being isolated from the rest of the community, the sense of facing one's own mortality, the personal suffering, the deconstruction of the old identity, like an old self is dying – everything that I just described...is what's happening on the collective level to our human civilization. Except now we are looking at planetary mortality rather than just an individual person's mortality. We are having to go through a dying of our whole identity as to who we are in relation to nature. Who we are relative to the cosmos...

And the question is, will the kind of "near death experience" we are going through in slow motion right now, be sufficient to catalyze enough of a psycho-spiritual transformation, in enough people, that those people can serve as centers of insight and equilibrium, to inform the whole? - Richard Tarnas, *School of Lost Borders*

The economist Mariana Mazzucato says that behind the climate crisis, behind every economic crisis is a crisis in thinking. - Demond Drummer, ED, *New Consensus*

I used to think the top environmental problems were biodiversity loss, ecosystem collapse and climate change. I thought that with 30 years of good science we could address those problems. But I was wrong. The top environmental problems are selfishness, greed, and apathy...and to deal with those we need a spiritual and cultural transformation. We scientists don't know how to do that. - Gus Speth

One can do nothing now, forcing is disastrous... Let me only be still, and know we can force nothing, and compel nothing, can only nourish in the darkness the unuttered buds of the new life that shall be. That is our life now: this nourishing of the germ, the unknown quicks when the new life is coming into being in us and in others — only patience, only patience, and endless courage to reject false dead things, killing processes... - *The Selected Letters of D.H. Lawrence* edited by D. Trilling

To drink in the beauty that is within reach, to clothe one's life with simple deeds of kindness, to keep alive a sensitiveness to the movement of the spirit of God in the quietness of the human heart and in the workings of the human mind – this is as always the ultimate answer to the great deception. - Howard Thurman, in *Life Goes On*

Let us say, then, that truth, as used here, is meant to imply a devotion to the human being, his freedom and fulfillment; freedom which cannot be legislated, fulfillment which cannot be charted. This is the prime concern, the frame of reference; it is not to be confused with a devotion to Humanity which is too easily equated with a devotion to a Cause; and Causes, as we know, are notoriously bloodthirsty. - *A Devotion to the Human Being* by James Baldwin

To be free is to be capable of thinking one's own thoughts - not the thoughts merely of the body, or of society, but thoughts generated by one's deepest, most original, most essential and spiritual self, one's individuality. - Rudolf Steiner

As a single footstep will not make a path on the earth, so a single thought will not make a pathway in the mind. To make a deep physical path, we walk again and again. To make a deep mental path, we must think over and over the kind of thoughts we wish to dominate our lives. - Henry David Thoreau

For every human illness, somewhere in the world there exists a plant that is the cure. I believe that there is a healing potential locked inside plants which is integral with their evolution, just as it is part of human evolution to learn to tap this wonderful gift of Nature. - Rudolf Steiner

Wallace Black Elk asked by a sincere young man what we could do to heal the earth, he replied: We don't have to heal the Earth; she can heal herself. All we have to do is stop making her sick. - Eliot Cowan, *Plant Spirit Medicine*

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. We have been wrong. We must change our lives so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption, that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and learn what is good for it. - Wendell Berry

"All maps are wrong: maps are only as good as the terrain allows them to be. They are only good for the meantime. What happens, then, when our maps no longer have any affinity with the terrain they assumedly represent? What happens when the edges come to the middle where we live? When what was once true no longer feels so? When the furniture in the hallway is no longer recognizable? How do we respond to the ground when it no longer endorses us? What do you do when you are well and truly lost?"

- Bayo Akomolafe is an author, speaker, and 'walkout' academic, globally recognized for his poetic, unconventional, counterintuitive take on global crisis, civic action and social change.

## 2. Situating and Re-Mapping Ourselves and World

You never change things by fighting the existing reality.  
To change something, build a new model that makes the existing model obsolete.  
- Buckminster Fuller

The economist Mariana Mazzucato says that behind the climate crisis,  
behind every economic crisis is a crisis in thinking.  
- Demond Drummer, *ED, New Consensus*

We can and need to sustain the crumbling house as much as possible.  
But we can, indeed must, also build a new house alongside in which we can eventually move in.  
This is a house that we build both in ourselves and in the world.  
- Luigi Morelli, *Horizons for a New America*

**How do we correctly assess where we are and what's happening?  
We come to situate ourselves and our world  
by naming the assumptions, context and worldviews by which we live.  
Honesty and transparency about these leads to compassion.  
If I don't know my own roots and worldview,  
the current 'official reality' is my default.**

- **What is my worldview and where did I get it?** From parents, school, culture? Formerly the domain of theologians and civil society, the answers to these big questions are now up to each person to experience, articulate and live out of:
  - Who am I—what is the nature of being human
  - What am I here for—what is the purpose and meaning of life—where am I going
  - Who are the gods...the spiritual beings...the unseen forces at work in creation
  - [How] do I meet them—subdue, transform and co-create with them
  - What is the fundamental reality of my life (Roberta Bondi's great question)
  - How do I understand birth and death
  - Where does my hope lie
- **How do I articulate what's unfolding now**
  - How did we get here – who can help us see clearly
  - William Barber names the confluence of five interlocking realities of systemic racism, systemic poverty, ecological devastation, the war economy and the often false moral narrative of white nationalism/Christian fundamentalism (in *The Souls of Poor Folk, auditing America, 2018*)
  - What do you add to those five
  - Who are our prophets and moral compasses now
  - What shall we call what's unfolding now—does a name matter? Is it a great awakening of empathy and compassion? an inevitability? a covid-19 pandemic? an uprising against oppression? a world corporate technocracy coup? a planetary threshold experience with death? a fork in the road? a spiritual crisis?

- In what larger context can we hold these current unfoldings?

- What are the previous planetary crises and the signs of this one
- What large and small rhythms and cycles to life on earth can illuminate these times
- What is the arc of human history...the evolution of consciousness throughout the ages
- How do civilizations rise and fall—can we name the forks in the road
- Who traditionally held the moral narrative about humanity
- In William Barber’s words, how has it been hijacked in America and how did that happen
- How did we all participate in creating a functionally atheistic culture without a shared moral/spiritual center
- The 12 Steps say that healing comes after a ‘fearless and searching moral inventory’ – what would that look like for our country
- What were the gifts of ‘western civilization’: philosophy and arts/culture; individual freedoms; systems of more egalitarian rule; industry and invention; interest in the wonders of earth; religious pluralism; progress in science and medicine; comfort, conveniences, free time; + \_\_\_\_\_
- What are the limits and failures of ‘western civilization: white European colonization and systemic oppression of indigenous and people of color; earth devastation (plants, minerals, animals); secularization, specialization and materialism (and the near-total erasure of the sacred from public life); body and soul illness and a bio-chemical view of medicine that sees death as a failure and pharmaceutical responses as a success; scientific reductionism and hubris; hijacking of the moral narrative by fundamentalists and white nationalists; excess, selfishness, greed; loss of privacy, rest and renewal; meaninglessness, dislocation and despair; + \_\_\_\_\_
- What is the challenge of technology and globalization
- How is artificial intelligence and its vision of transhumanism at work
- Is the human being a mistake, failure, experiment, work-in-progress, gift
- Am I partially responsible for where we are
- How are my worldview, theories, patterns being challenged
- Will change be enough or is transformation needed
- What new ideas, great or small, were rejected before they were accepted

- How then shall I live?

- To what shall my life bear witness
- How shall I nurture a daily tether to soul and spirit life
- How shall I seek equanimity and take up the task of using power wisely
- How does anger, outrage and despair become courage for transformation
- What seeds of Beauty, Goodness and Truth will I plant for the future
- How will I be transformed – how will I spend my time, money, energy

**Though I may not be here with you, I urge you to answer the highest calling of your heart  
and stand up for what you truly believe.**

**In my life I have done all I can to demonstrate that the way of peace,  
the way of love and nonviolence is the more excellent way.**

**Not it is your turn to let that freedom ring.**

– John Lewis, Final Words, 2020

### 3. Taking Up Contemplative Cultural Research & Repair

Everything true and great grows in silence.  
Without silence we fall short of reality and cannot plumb the depths of being.  
- Soren Kierkegaard

Without spiritual insight, earthly culture will die.  
- Rudolf Steiner

**What's missing from the conversation of our rational, secular and polarized culture?**

**Can we survive without silence and spaciousness?**

**What is inner work and why is it necessary?**

**Before the outer world changes, what is asked of me?**

- **Holding Ourselves to Integrity (Wholeness) and a Center:**

- Doing my inner work so my outer work is honest and on good foundations
- Being accountable for that work before God and another human being
- Knowing the fundamental reality of your life (Roberta Bondi's great question)
- Practicing my core practices regularly
- Develop new capacities
- Know my knee-jerk reactions, sympathies and antipathies
- Learn where I am open-minded and where I am not
- Tracking dreams, daily questions, awareness (journal, artistic work...)
- Resting, waiting, listening, refraining
- Being with Nature, Sun, Wind, Soil, Stones daily
- Being with sorrow, depth, darkness, confusion
- Finding your places of reactivity and rage, judgment, lack of equanimity or open-mindedness (Who or what do I not want to listen to?)
- Learning how you react when what you've believed in good faith turns out not to be true
- Doing your own 'searching and fearless moral inventory' of self and country
- Refraining from clichés or repeating things you have already said three times
- Refraining from repeating something that you haven't looked into
- Refraining from reactivity and exaggeration
- Finding new ways of speaking, in the moment, simply, from your heart and experience

- **Creating a Glossary and Asking Questions**

- Let themes, feelings, words, phrases, issues, events come to you and awaken something like a calling, a warm interest, a sorrowing sense about something in particular that is your cultural research and repair to take up
- With the near total erasure of the sacred from the public sphere: Notice how world views and themes are framed or coded
- Notice themes that get coverage and those that don't: explore how much you want to know about what's not being covered.

- Be curious: Ask 'qui bono' – who benefits from this point of view, for what purpose is something being aired, ... or if you wish, 'follow the money' and ask who is paying for this to be said or sold?
- Ask about context—what are the roots of this, why now, how else might it be
- Collect the questions you and others are asking—stick with noticing and observing the phenomena with equanimity
- Start your own glossary—words and themes that are new to you, that you will research
- Notice what you take for granted, what you accept, what you reject or resist

### • Comparing Notes

- Ask friends and colleagues to help you see beyond your own horizons
- Engage in conversation with the intent of uncovering something new
- Notice what gets repeated and goes viral, what remains hidden or on the fringes
- Notice what you hadn't thought about, and what feelings are associated with discovering that

### • Taking up a Theme most important to you, contemplatively

- Placing Attention there: open a file, or create a place on a shelf, or in your heart
- Engaging in "sacred imaginative interrogation" -- In Jewish midrash it's asking questions of the text/theme, seeking deeper meanings than what's first seen, reimagining the dominant narrational readings while crafting new ones to stand alongside—not replace—former readings
- Opening: to dreams, art, images, songs, articles, books, events that illustrate, excavate, illuminate
- Taking into your Heart: Letting it resound and become a prayer
- Being with the present moment: in its fullness, power, mystery, unknowableness—and waiting till something new appears

### • Creating an Annotated Bibliography

- Trace your thinking and research and prayer as it evolves, noticing what allowed your deepening, opening, seeing anew
- Name for yourself the ten (more or less) voices you consciously and regularly listen to as you seek a fuller picture
- Write short descriptions of what you find important in your bibliography

### • Preparing and Sharing your Research and Prayer

- Practice writing your version of "Here I Stand" or "This I Believe" as a way of honing in on what matters most to you, what's at the core of your life and work
- Prepare a Working Draft on a theme that touches Self, Soul, World
- Include: Definitions, Images, Song, Dance, Bibliography, Quotes
- Ask a friend to listen and share ideas

## 4. Alcyon Study—our ongoing lists and questions

### Glossary

For years we've been collecting themes and words that seem essential for a modern lexicon.

Now we're being asked to befriend many new one.

We've found that words and themes that repulse or scare us are just the ones we need to spend time with.

Abyss	Future	Resurrection
Addiction	God	Rule of Life
Anti-racism	Golgotha	Sacred
Archetype	Harrowing of Hell	Sacred Text
Attention	Heart	Science
Awareness	Hospitality	Silence
Chaos	Human Being	Sin
Communities of Despair	Imaginal	Sophia
Confession	Immune system	Soul
Conspiracy	Industrialization	Soul Wound
Contagion	Inner Life	Spirit
Contemplative	Inner Work	Spiritual Direction
Culture	Interiority	Spiritual Worlds
Darkness	Joy	Spiritual practice
Depth	Karma	Spirituality
Depth Psychology	Magic	Stars and Planets
Death	Materialism	Systemic Poverty
Death statistics for US	Medication Assisted Treatment	Systemic Racism
Destiny	Meditation	Technocracy
Discipline	Pandemic	Threefolding
Dislocation Theory of Addiction	Pharmaceutical Industry	Ventilators
Dreams	Poverty in America	Virus
Earth	Prayer	Warmth
Embodying	Prison Industrial Complex	Western Civilization
Epidemiology	Prophetic Vision	White Privilege
Epistemology	Race	White Fragility
Evil	Rebirth	World War I and II
Evolution of Consciousness	Recovered/Recovery	Trauma
Faith	Religion	
Forgiveness	Reparations	

# Questions and Themes arising in 2020

How do we find the right question in times of crisis?

How do we hear the cries of the heart and soul

Open-mindedness...curiosity... warm interest...

Mixed in with reading we lived with the rhythm of the sun and moon, the tides, the

- What was inevitable—why are we shocked or outraged or afraid
- Who has been preparing us for this and whose words we now hear in a new way
- What is Earth telling us
- Who are our elders and wise ones
- What are our Hearts telling us
- How much do I want to know and bear
- How do we describe the prevailing scientific worldview, it's strengths and weaknesses
- What lies outside the acceptable public health discourse, who decides
- What is naivete, wisdom, science, intuition, Authority, authority
- What is up for consideration (*sider* – relating to the stars), what is named a conspiracy
- What are outlier points of view telling us about the dominant narrative
- What is a virus, how is this one unusual
- What is contagion, what do Pasteur and Koch and current voices say about germ theory
- What is health and immunity, why is America so ill
- Why are some more susceptible than others (co-morbidity, compromised immunity)
- What social, economic and public health issues are at work
- What technological and pharmaceutical issues are at work
- What nerve does vaccination inflame, making conversation difficult, what's at stake
- What astrological, planetary, solar and lunar patterns are at work
- What/who is globalism, its origins, who benefits, its side effects
- What are statistics and how are they gathered
- How many people die daily in the US (7,000, or 2.8 million annually, based on 2018 figures)
- What is included in the statistical category "flu and pneumonia" and why
- Who decides what goes on the death certificate
- How does a crisis catalyze fear and make thinking calmly difficult
- What is fear, who is behind fear, how does fear work
- What is death, why is death feared, is death a failure
- What is greed, apathy, selfishness
- Who is Earth and who has known and loved her and spoken for her
- What is our moral narrative and how has it been hijacked
- What changed when 1 billion people viewed George Floyd's death
- Who has been talking about all this before now
- What has changed now – why are more people listening
- What is change and how is it different from transformation
- Who do I admire, where do I go for my research
- Who are our modern prophets
- What is our fundamental reality

# Annotated Bibliography

To whom do you turn, trust, and why?  
What are the different gifts of  
an instagram meme, an hour long interview,  
a thirty minute read, a book, a lifetime of study and action?  
Where is the prophetic vision in these times?

*In alphabetical order, here are the people and resources that we found or were sent to us as valuable to know about as we broadened our research this spring of 2020. Please write us if you want the fuller version (10 pages) with the comments, highlighted quotes and active links.*

## People

Rev. William Barber, co-chair Poor People's Campaign: A National Call for Moral Revival  
Johanna Blackman, of MDI's A Climate to Thrive, collates a superb anti-racism resource  
John Bloom, Head of Anthroposophical Society in America  
Cynthia Bourgeault, contemplative Episcopal priest/hermit, author, teacher, blogger  
Stephen Buhner world-renowned herbalist, researcher of plant medicine and nature's secrets  
Dr. Zach Bush internist, endocrinologist, hospice care work led to understanding the human being  
Rachel Cargle, public academic, curator of *The Great Unlearn*  
Dr. Tom Cowan, working out of Anthroposophical medicine  
Brian Culkin, author of *On Heroin*, interviewed by Piers Kaniuka on Resistance Recovery  
Gail Faith Edwards, Maine herbalist  
Charles Eisenstein, social philosopher on human cultural evolution, economics and consciousness  
Christine Gruwez, author and lecturer on being a contemporary and on the nature of crisis  
Piers Kaniuka Resistance Recovery Founder, interviews on addiction and culture  
Robert Kennedy Jr. Environmental lawyer, activist for scientific vaccine debate  
Heather Cox Richardson, Maine-based historian, charting politics with a view to history  
Arundhati Roy, Indian author and activist  
Robert Sardello, founder School of Spiritual Psychology, author, blog  
David Whyte, poet and essayist  
Gordon White, Rune Soup, blog and interviews on permaculture, magic, culture and the paranormal

## Journals

**Emergence Journal**, quarterly online publication featuring innovative stories/op-eds that explore the threads connecting ecology, culture, and spirituality

**Deepening Anthroposophy** an independent newsletter for friends of Anthroposophy

**New View** a journal supporting spiritual renewal in our times, based on the quest for a new wisdom of the whole human being, inspired by Rudolf Steiner's Anthroposophy and related approaches.

**The Present Age** a monthly international magazine for the advancement of Spiritual Science

## 5. APPENDIX Alcyon writings—spring/summer 2020

Spring/Summer 2020 chronology of how we are making sense of things  
Each month we found new insights, new questions

### April – *News from the Cove* [e-newsletter]

#### BEING STILL ALCYON

Dear fellow contemplative-researchers-of-the-heart,

The land, the cove, the rocks beneath our feet hold firm. Our heads and hearts take tumbles. Fissures open wide in front of us. The un-imaginables demand a place at the table. And at last we turn straight into the Unknown and bow down to it. Oh my.

In the rich, mystery-filled soil of the tradition that roots us, **it is the Still Week** (as Holy Week is called in some countries). In the shadow of the spring full moon – deep inner work is asked if the outer practical work of dealing with life-on-earth is not to overpower us. Can I be radically present and centered? Can I bring equanimity to my empathy? Can I **be not afraid**?

**Big unavoidable questions** that had drifted out of collective sight come roaring forward, and land right in the middle of the crisis, asking us to **see clearly** the forks in the road. Who are we truly? What did we come here for? Where are we going? Whom do we serve? Recovering our humanity, re-finding our coordinates as Fully Alive Awake Human Beings is our task now.

Like you, **we're untangling threads** of the big knot we're entwined in. First we are taking stock, and taking time to take it all in. Some of you have sent us probing questions, blogs, and poetry that illumine dark corners and tease out hidden roots of this moment. From these we are preparing an annotated and illustrated guide mapping questions and choices we see emerging. ([Email us](#) if you want to receive this working draft for cultural research and repair in these times.) Yesterday an email with a quote from Rudolf Steiner arrived with the subject line: "Without spiritual insight earthly culture will die." And so... we take up our work with renewed courage, and are paying attention in particular to these three messengers.

#### Sorrow. Warmth. Honesty.

**Sorrow** is what one guest was steeped in when he returned from an encounter with a noble tree down by the water. Hunched over in his chair, in a whisper, he wept, "I just want to say I'm sorry to Tree, to Earth—I'm so sorry that I have not seen You before today. How could I have not seen You?"

Sorrow descends on us. It accompanies our waking up, it comes in whispers and lies under our fear, fury and frenzy. **Sorrow's task is to ask: What did I not see? What did I see but turn aside from? Whom was I blind to?**

**Warmth** comes from the sun, and the interior fire. The intellect tends to the cool and contracted; the heart, open and alive, radiates warmth. When warmth enters us, we become interested in the Other, we are drawn to the edge. **Warmth asks: What am I now seeing—what is being revealed to us in these times?**

**Honesty** is the beginning of the turn around. We begin to unearth all the places we have been afraid, dishonest, naïve or self-centered. Honesty is the hardest one, no one can give it to us—it has to be dug for within. **Honesty asks: How now shall I live? How will I change for good?**

With great love and admiration for each of you, in your work and prayer, alone and together,

Kathryn

Maundy Thursday 9 April 2020

## May – Bench Markings Annual Report 2019-2020

**Confusing** [by JJG]

*I was there when God set the heavens into place;  
When God fixed the horizon upon the deep;  
When God made the heavens above firm,  
And the fountains of the deep gushed forth;  
When God assigned the sea its limits,  
So that its waters never transgress God's command;  
When God fixed the foundations of the earth,  
I was there as a confidant,  
A source of delight every day,  
Rejoicing before God at all times,  
Rejoicing in God's inhabited world,  
Finding delight with all humanity.  
— Proverbs 8:27-31*

Chilling air, restless wind, moody sky, phantom sun waxing and waning: who that fashions the foundations of earth and sky these days – have you lost confidence? Where is your confidant, she who awakens delight in you for the sheer thrill of creating life and light? Are you dismayed with setting limits for space and time? The joy of fulfillment you once felt in withdrawing your power to make room for freedom - are you appalled at how some of us have used our priceless wills? Because you are confused is that why nature is confused? Why we are confused, even unto numbness of soul at how to proceed? Our coming-ins and our going-outs today are marked with neither clear purpose nor abandoned delight. How to walk under this heaviness into lightness of soul? What shall I shed? What shall I take up? [JJG]

**Untangling** [revision of News from the Cove article by KB]

Like you, we're untangling threads of the big knot in which we're entwined in. First we are taking stock, and taking time to take it all in. Some of you have sent us probing research, blogs, and poetry that

illumine dark corners and tease out hidden roots of this moment. Big unavoidable questions that had drifted out of collective sight come roaring forward, and land right in the middle of the crisis, asking us to see clearly the forks in the road. Who are we truly? What did we come here for? Where are we going? Whom do we serve? Can we 'be not afraid'? Recovering our humanity, re-finding our coordinates as Fully Alive Awake Human Beings is our task now. Sorrow, warmth and honesty are our trustworthy companions in these times.

**Sorrow** descends on us. It accompanies our waking up, it comes in whispers and lies under our fear, fury and frenzy. Sorrow's task is to ask: What did I not see? What did I see but turn aside from? To whom was I blind?

**Warmth** comes from the sun, and the interior fire. The intellect tends to the cool and contracted; the heart, open and alive, radiates warmth. When warmth enters us, we become interested in the Other, we are drawn to the edge. Warmth asks: Who is my brother, my sister, my neighbor? How is it with your soul?

**Honesty** is the beginning of the turn around. We begin to unearth all the places we have been afraid, dishonest, naïve or self-centered. Honesty is the hardest one, no one can give it to us—it has to be dug for within. Honesty asks: How now shall I live? How will I change for good?

## May – Writing an Oracle

In late March Cynthia Bourgeault sent out an "Oracle from Eagle Island" where she landed in mid-March as the world began to wake to the implications of the Covid-19 virus. Her strong and clear words were an invitation to attempt an Oracle from Seal Cove. In the early days, what were we seeing and feeling—and could we capture something that we could use to test ourselves as things evolved. What did we think was happening? Where did we stand? Here's what we wrote:

[5/7/20]

The French word for work is *travail*. It's English partner **travail** has many connotations--of arduous work involving painful effort, tribulation, anguish, and even the labor of childbirth. And here we are.

**First trimester of 2020** was the great inevitable unveiling of much that had been hidden, kept out of view, taboo and dismissed. We find ourselves in a great collective era-defining fall into awakening. Our roots and practices prepared us for this inevitable tearing of the veil. And yet many, though not all of us, needed weeks to land on our feet, and learn to walk straight again, without being cowed by fear, distraction, confusion and hostility.

At Alcyon these weeks we've been engaged non-stop in digging into the roots of these events, and taking our own roots seriously. We stand on the shoulders of those who:

- listen for the voices and signs of our times
- bring the intellect into conversation with the heart
- find home at the edges and with the marginalized
- contemplate spans of time (mystics),
- see the great arc and evolution of humanity (students of Anthroposophy)
- take up certain practices faithfully (monks)
- engage the inner journey of the psyche (shamans and depth psychologists)
- bring love to bear upon evil (Manicheans)
- proclaim "whether I live or die I am the Lord's" (followers of Christ's way)

This puts us at odds with much of the modern world, in its allegiance to scientific reductionism and materialism—and its erasure of the sacred from the public sphere. And yet we too, are discovering that we hold tightly to our perceived needs and fears—and à la Charlton Heston, will only “give up my [fill in the blank] when they pry my cold, dead fingers from around it”.

**Second Trimester 2020 May through August** We’re thinking of these four months at Alcyon as a blessed cradle in which deep, honest, hard and joyful work and prayer can take root as we begin the “building of the new house, both within ourselves and in the world” (Luigi Morelli, *Horizons for a New America*)\*.

We are postponing what we thought would be happening so that we can be with what is happening. We’re paring down, making room, great spaciousness we hope, for the something new that needs to be tended carefully:

- cultural conversations of sorrow-filled honesty and spaciousness
- taking seriously the call to die in order to be transformed
- creating study guides and maps for these times

Martin Luther, when once asked what his plans were for the following day, reportedly said “Work, work, from early until late. In fact, I have so much to do that I shall spend the first three hours in prayer.” To rebirth the sacred into our lives we will be dying to a multitude of cherished patterns. In the loving space of community life we will begin seeing the clues to the new life that awaits us.

**\*Background** We started sensing that 2020 would have a new trajectory last fall, when the inspiration for a Guest Teacher Program came to us—in which we would ask some of our favorite teachers to bring new imaginations to the cultural and spiritual desert of our times in a series of retreats called *Beauty in the Desert*.

We found one such moving picture in Luigi Morelli’s upcoming book *Horizons for a New America*. He asks how to live in both the ‘undeniable movements of *decline and destruction* and those of *ascent and renewal*’ that stand side by side in our times:

A guiding image of this work is that of two houses. The house that we have inhabited with our minds, hearts and limbs is crumbling, and this should give rise to pain and anguish. No one wants to see their own house crumble if she can shore it up. We can and need to sustain the crumbling house as much as possible. But we can, indeed must, also build a new house alongside in which we can eventually move in. This is a house that we build both in ourselves and in the world.

## July Intro to 2020 Summer Conversations

The Alcyon Center is open, in pared down ways,  
for those who wish to join us in the hard work of  
awakening, rebirthing, and growing courage for our times.

*Faith is not making religious-sounding noises in the daytime.  
It is asking your inmost self questions at night—and then getting up and going to work.*  
by Mary Jean Irion

Six years ago we began to put together training programs to meet what we were calling ‘the cultural moment’. Watching things crack apart in the world, our work evolved into creating ‘centers that can

hold' amidst the great changes underfoot. We began to see just how deep we would need to dig to get at the roots of cultural dislocation, historical injustice, ecological devastation and the thirst for soul numbing pharmaceuticals and spiritless technology.

Now, in the spring of 2020, the fundamental questions are even more at stake: What is the purpose of human beings? Where is humanity heading? What is evil, what is good? What does it mean to do work that helps humanity evolve? Three portals inform our work these days.

**Dying** How do we stand in the face of fear and death? Paul Tillich in *The Shaking of the Foundations* shouts out "The new is created not out of the old, not out of the best of the old, but out of the *death* of the old. It is not the old which creates the new. That which creates the new is that which is beyond old and beyond new, the Eternal." We are grounded in the Christ Mystery that re-constellates what it means to be born and to die. We are not afraid of this mystery or what it calls us to, though we tremble at the implications. It also calls us to *inner work* which requires its own dying, full of both beauty and pain. This inner dying, tied to our outer work, brings strength and vision to be about the work of standing with those who suffer -- and seeing clearly.

**Crisis** The ancient Greek root means to come to a moment where you have to decide. Christine Gruwez writes that there are three parts to a crisis: trigger, crisis and revelation. The corona virus is a trigger, but the crucial work is finding the *true nature of the crisis*. In late May 2020 the fury and lament over the cascading, unrepentant violence against people of color fills the air with the deeper truth that "we can't breathe". The crisis is not the virus—but how do we name the crisis? To whom do we turn for Wisdom? What is your prayer and study revealing?

Gruwez suggests that our current ways of thinking may lead to change, but if we are seeking transformation, a new way of thinking must be birthed -- *thinking with the listening, intuitive heart*.

**Heart** Alcyon aims to be a place where this kind of thinking can live. A place for the creative depths of silence. A place to listen to the clouds, wind, silence itself, and also the future. A place of heart-opening experiences and the choices that follow. A place to study, plant seeds, and set the stage for the hard work ahead.