

# Self-Empowerment

Spring 2011

The newsletter dedicated to nurturing personal development

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## IN THE MIDST OF DARKNESS, LIGHT PERSISTS

Bumping around in a dark room can feel very frightening. We want to turn on the light. Even more frightening is the experience of darkness within ourselves – facing our own shadow. We deny our darkness and project it outward (like the pot that calls the kettle black), or we can seek help to expose the darkness to the light with psychological or spiritual tools.

There is a lineage of prophets, sages, and spiritual teachers who have experienced purification, enlightenment, illumination. They potentially inspire us to find the inner light that is within each of us.

In a transcript of a Mahatma Gandhi recording (based on his article "On God") he is quoted saying "in the midst of darkness, light persists." Can you feel that? Following is the transcript of Gandhi's message.

*There is an indefinable mysterious power that pervades everything; I feel it though I do not see it. It is this unseen power which makes itself felt and yet defies all proof, because it is so unlike all that I perceive through my senses. It transcends the senses. But it is possible to reason out the existence of God to a limited extent. Even in ordinary affairs we know that people do not know who rules or why and how He rules and yet they know that there is a power that certainly rules.*

*In my tour last year in Mysore I met many poor villagers and I found upon inquiry that they did not know who ruled Mysore. They simply said some God ruled it. If the knowledge of these poor people was so limited about their ruler, I who am infinitely lesser in respect to God than they to their ruler need not be surprised if I do not realize the presence of God - the King of Kings.*

*Nevertheless, I do feel, as the poor villagers felt about Mysore, that there is orderliness in the universe, there is an unalterable law governing everything and every being that exists or lives. It is not a blind law, for no blind law can govern the conduct of living being and thanks to the marvelous researches of Sir J. C. Bose it can now be proved that even matter is life. That law then which governs all life is God. Law and the law-giver are one. I may not deny the law or the law-giver because I know so little about it or Him. Just as my denial or ignorance of the existence of an earthly power will avail me nothing even so my denial of God and His law will*

*not liberate me from its operation, whereas humble and mute acceptance of divine authority makes life's journey easier even as the acceptance of earthly rule makes life under it easier.*

*I do dimly perceive that whilst everything around me is ever changing, ever dying there is underlying all that change a living power that is changeless, that holds all together, that creates, dissolves and recreates. That informing power of spirit is God, and since nothing else that I see merely through the senses can or will persist, He alone is.*

*And is this power benevolent or malevolent? I see it as purely benevolent, for I can see that in the midst of death life persists, in the midst of untruth truth persists, in the midst of darkness light persists.*

*Hence I gather that God is life, truth, light. He is love. He is the supreme Good. But He is no God who merely satisfies the intellect, if He ever does. God to be God must rule the heart and transform it. He must express himself in every smallest act of His votary [votary means those bound by vows to live a life of religious worship or service]. This can only be done through a definite realization, more real than the five senses can ever produce. Sense perceptions can be and often are false and deceptive, however real they may appear to us. Where there is realization outside the senses it is infallible. It is proved not by extraneous evidence but in the transformed conduct and character of those who have felt the real presence of God within.*

*Such testimony is to be found in the experiences of an unbroken line of prophets and sages in all countries and climes. To reject this evidence is to deny oneself. This realization is preceded by an immovable faith. He who would in his own person test the fact of God's presence can do so by a living faith and since faith itself cannot be proved by extraneous evidence, the safest course is to believe in the moral government of the world and therefore in the supremacy of the moral law—the law of truth and love.*

*Exercise of faith will be the safest where there is a clear determination summarily to reject all that is contrary to truth and love. I confess that I have no argument to convince through reason. Faith transcends reason. All that I can advise is not to attempt the impossible.*

Ghandi was a man of great intelligence, courage, and faith. My interest in his words about God and faith are

connected with the desire to meet the darkness of humanity as courageously as possible, for healing. When we are willing to face the darkness within ourselves, we open a space for the light to come in – as poet Leonard Cohen wrote, “Ring the bells that still can ring, Forget your perfect offering, There is a crack, a crack in everything, That’s how the light gets in.”

May I face my own issues of darkness to be released and healed. May I reclaim my projections.

As we move from Winter to Spring, together we can support one another in facing our darkness, those places where there are cracks in our humanity. With courage and faith, we let the light in.

Blessings and Love to you and yours.

Your fellow traveler, *Rev Jill*

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## **Illuminate the Dark to Embrace the Light**

by Reverend Rhetta Morgan (See bio page 5)

### Prologue

In the beginning was the Heart.  
And the light and dark  
were expressions of the  
Heart’s magnificence.

Why don’t we celebrate the dark? Do we focus on the light because we are uncomfortable with the dark? How would we experience light if we were at home in the dark? I am defining the dark as *conscious dark*, the experience of what happens when we close our eyes for meditation, prayer, and an awakened experience of night – not the unconscious darkness of sleep or shadow.

We celebrate the return of the light during this season. Many traditions have stories centered on spiritual revelation depicted by light. I looked for stories, ceremonies, and rituals that honored the dark. It was very difficult to find anything that didn’t refer or allude to evil and perversion.

To contemplate the dark can be uncomfortable because in the dark we are vulnerable. In the busyness of our daytime lives we can be distracted. When we quiet ourselves for meditation or prayer, we stand naked amidst the great mystery of the dark. Darkness is the unknown; it is the vastness of outer and inner space. For many of us, experiencing darkness awakens fear. Even without a negative connotation, contemplating darkness can be overwhelming; we realize we are not in control. Our individual fear is stressful and produces anxiety. Our group fear coagulates into projections onto the darkness. Like the busyness of our days, projections distract us from our

vulnerability and lack of control of the dark. The dark becomes our fear manifest around the world. I am sharing three projections that arose for me as I reflected on the mystery of darkness.

### *Affirmation*

*We restore the innocence of darkness  
so that our celebration of light is unimpeded.*

### The Feminine - fear projected onto softness

The feminine qualities of darkness, coolness, and receptivity bear the brunt of our collective fear. These qualities, when projected, manifest as a lack of reverence for the feminine. Girls and women throughout history have endured a range of mistreatment from hatred to an uneasy tolerance because we are afraid of full feminine power. We all contain a feminine and masculine essence, yet we are afraid of our soft power, the power of intuition, of receptivity. Let us sit together in our discomfort, breathing, and paying attention as we contemplate the treatment of girls and women around the world. By sitting in our discomfort, we begin to peel back the layers of our projected fear. With acceptance and compassion, we begin to set in motion, energetically, a new legacy, one in which fear does not guide our behavior.

### *Affirmation*

*The feminine within me is holy. May girls and women  
around the world be safe and respected.*

### Black/Brown people - fear projected as intolerance

A dear friend told me about the comments of a student from South Africa who was attending classes here in this country. He commented that Americans will say that racism doesn’t exist anymore. He observed that racism is alive, but it has become very subtle. To think of the atrocities done to people of color, even in recent times, boggles the mind. It is a devastating fear of darkness that would cause such destruction in the lives of brown and black people. Our fear of indigenous people the world over has caused us to look down on practices such as treating the earth like a living being. Those who did not understand their traditions considered the spiritual practices of black and brown people savage. What could be savage about living in tune with the earth’s rhythm, planting and harvesting in alignment with the sun and moon, and using the earth’s resources with great reverence?

### *Affirmation*

*By sitting with my discomfort, I begin to dissolve my  
fear of dark people.*

(continued on page 3)

### Death - fear projected onto our transformation

Ultimately our fear of the dark brings us to the subject of death. The dark reminds us that we will die. Death is the unknown and most of us fear the unknown. This is one of the central dilemmas of the human experience; how do we reconcile our limited understanding of who we are and why we are here, so that our lives can have meaning and purpose? Because we fear death, we create war under the guise of protecting ourselves. We allow our fear to disconnect us from the rhythm of birth and death, from the pulse of life. Death is the great unknown that invites us to surrender to our ultimate transformation.

#### *Affirmation*

*I breathe into the truth of my impermanence.*

*I trust God.*

How do we illuminate the dark? We can peel away our projections:

1. Confront fear of the dark with compassion.
2. Breathe through discomfort; sit with it.
3. Reconnect to the innocence of darkness.

With awe – Watch ... Listen ... Wait ...

*Healing happens in the dark.*

*Gestation takes place in the dark.*

*Revelation bursts forth from the dark.*

Those who have a spiritual practice begin to get acquainted with the dark. Meditation, prayer, and observing quiet time makes the unfamiliar familiar. It can take years to become comfortable with silence and darkness but long-term meditators will share that it is worth the diligence.

#### *Affirmation*

*As I cultivate a spiritual practice,*

*I restore innocence to darkness.*

Speak to the dark. Extend your heart into the darkness. Breathe into compassion. Open a door to this rich conversation. When we have cleared the dark of our projections and restored it to holiness and innocence, the light and dark become reflections of something much greater. The integration of light and dark leads us to the fullness of an open heart.

The mind stands in the dark and is afraid, as conceptualizing the enormity of the great mystery is more than the mind can conceive. The mind seeks to find the right question, seeks to conquer through knowledge – it seeks to control – but the heart reaches around the infinite with ease. The heart has no need to understand, but rather to permeate, to encompass. With the integration of light and dark, the heart and

mind lift us into our evolution fully prepared for what is to come.

So, as we celebrate light, anchored in rich darkness, we no longer run from the darkness because we are afraid. The dark has become an essential part of the great luminous heart, revealing deeper and more expanded insight. Darkness has become the awe-inspiring backdrop for light, creating a wholistic experience of beingness.

And....

### Postlude

In the beginning there was the heart,  
and the light and the dark  
were expressions of  
the heart's magnificence.

And all who experienced the heart  
held this to be true.

But over the ages the heart was lost  
and many searched, for  
they remembered a time  
when the heart was plenteous and alive.

For centuries they looked  
and when they found it, they were afraid.

They fought about how to interpret this heart;  
they said that one or the other was the only way to  
interpret it.

They asked, would the heart make us unrecognizable  
to ourselves?

They admitted that they were afraid and  
together they breathed through their fear,  
picked up the heart and held it high.

The light and the dark  
shone with luminous brilliance  
which opened the next levels of human consciousness,  
and the magnificence

they experienced  
will take the next  
2,000 years to tell.

amen



# Girl Who Saw Injustice Made Justice Her Life's Work

by Tim Stanley, Jan 22, 2011

One hot Arkansas night in the summer of 1965, a conscience-stricken 12-year-old girl crept back to the field where just minutes before a handful of men in stark white hoods had gathered to deliver a message.

They were gone, but their victim was still there.

She found him tied to the railroad tracks, where he had been beaten. He was still conscious.

Quietly cutting the black man's bonds, she gave him directions to the nearest city and sent him on his way.

Many years afterward, Carolyn Wagner would describe that moment as the first of two key turning points in her life.

The next would come nearly three decades later, when as a mother, she had to watch her teenage son, who was gay, endure bullying and assaults at school.

Wagner and her family eventually won a federal Title IX lawsuit against the Fayetteville, Ark., school district that her son attended, in a case that went all the way to the U.S. Supreme Court.

For Wagner, the former Ku Klux Klansman's daughter who had gone from witnessing one kind of extremism firsthand to another, it was a seminal event. Her transformation into social crusader was complete.

A nationally known gay rights advocate and former vice president of the national Parents, Families & Friends of Lesbians and Gays (PFLAG) board, Carolyn Marie Wagner died Tuesday, January 18, 2011 in Tulsa after a long battle with cancer. She was 57.

A memorial service was held at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Dennis R. Neill Equality Center in Tulsa. Serenity Funeral Home handled the arrangements.

Wagner, a longtime Arkansas resident, and her husband, Bill Wagner, retired to Tulsa three years ago, and she continued her advocacy work here through the local PFLAG chapter and Oklahomans for Equality, among other groups.

Despite her worsening health, "Carolyn was involved in everything," said Toby Jenkins, executive director of Oklahomans for Equality.

"She made sure everyone knew about the Equality Center and its programs. She brought us a lot of national attention and connections that we didn't have before.

"I don't think the average gay person in Tulsa has any idea that this mother with the strong Arkansas accent was the kind of warrior she was in fighting for our issues."

In 2000, Wagner was a grand marshal in Tulsa's annual gay pride parade, alongside Gabi Clayton, with whom she had founded the support group Families United Against Hate.

In a statement this week, Families United praised

Wagner's life: "Plenty of people tried to stop her, but never with any success. ... We know her legacy will never die as long as we carry the spirit of her love within us, and take action with as much courage, humor, and wisdom as she did."

Wagner once talked about her youth in a report issued by the Southern Poverty Law Center.

She had been a witness to Klan violence at an early age and used to drive her father to his Klan meetings. Although she went only reluctantly, Wagner said it wasn't until that night in 1965 that she made up her mind not to be a passive observer any longer.

A Fort Smith, Ark., native, who held a nursing degree from Westark College, Carolyn Wagner, a registered nurse by trade, devoted much of her professional career to children, including abuse victims and those suffering from cancer and terminal illnesses.

She founded Camp Rainbow, a camp for children with cancer, which later became Children's Oncology Camps of America.

Bill Wagner said: "Carolyn will be remembered as an activist and civil rights hero to many, but for me she was simply the love of my life, my best friend, and an amazing mother to our children."

Wagner is survived by her husband of 37 years, Bill Wagner; one son, William Wagner II; one daughter, Clara Kelly Stein; and two granddaughters.

Friends are contributing to Families United Against Hate or PFLAG.

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*Tim Stanley, tim.stanley@tulsaworld.com*

The previous obituary came to my attention through a communication from PFLAG Philadelphia. I am grateful for the light that shines in the midst of darkness through courageous souls who advocate for the rights of minorities. Many LGBT individuals have benefited from the work of PFLAG and other organizations dedicated to support, education, and advocacy.

The PFLAG Philadelphia Chapter normally meets on the third Sunday of each month, 2-5pm. All meetings are strictly confidential. Call 215-572-1833 for more information or visit [www.pflagphila.org](http://www.pflagphila.org)



# SPRING FUNDRAISER



Hello, Friends! Happy Spring!

Many of you have responded generously to our annual Spring Fundraiser. This is the time of year that our readers are encouraged to send a voluntary contribution to help cover the cost of publication and other ministry endeavors.

For the cost of just one meal at a local restaurant, you can make a huge difference in supporting the ongoing work of this ministry.

This is a golden opportunity to say “yes” to the cycle of Giving and Receiving. Take a minute right now to write a check payable to **Agape Interfaith Ministries**, donate online, or feel free to send a book or two of postage stamps, which also give great support. Your help truly does make a difference. Whether you send \$5 *or more*, every bit of support makes this sharing of inspiration possible.

**Thank you for your support!  
Blessings to you!**

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There are two ways of spreading light: to be the candle, or the mirror that reflects it.  
Edith Wharton

## Rev. Rhetta Morgan

Reverend Rhetta Morgan is an Interfaith Minister, musician, poet, Insight Speaker, writer, and author of the article “Illuminate the Dark to Embrace the Light” on page 2 of this issue. The article is based on a sermon she shared recently at Common Ground Fellowship Sacred Space. ([CommonGroundFellowship.com](http://CommonGroundFellowship.com))

I am delighted to announce that Rev Rhetta has founded a new interfaith ministry in Philadelphia called Ecclesia Spiritual Center. The first sacred gathering was held in the Interfaith Chapel of Holy Innocents St. Paul’s Episcopal Church, 7001 Torresdale Avenue, in Northeast Philadelphia. The celebration included music, movement, wisdom sharing, and group participation. It was a deeply heart-centered and joyful experience.

Although the monthly gatherings on the 3<sup>rd</sup> Friday are in NE Philadelphia, various spiritual study groups are forming in West Philadelphia. I am excited to see the growth and support of this community based on the principles of love, creativity, and relatedness.

Previous to her call to ministry, Rhetta studied classical vocal performance at the prestigious Peabody Conservatory of Music. As soloist with the Lady Chapel Singers, she has toured England, Germany and Italy and is arranger, soloist and advisor on their internationally acclaimed CD. In addition to singing, Rhetta also plays piano, percussion and mandolin.

Integrating her musical skills with her deep spiritual practices, Rev Rhetta sings rich, sweet, memorable songs to the Divine, calling forth divine qualities in us as we are folded into the songs and chants. Weaving strands of Jazz, Folk, African, and African American music, she sings of a world community that celebrates cultural and spiritual diversity. Rhetta writes and arranges songs of profound expression connecting her voice with the listener’s heart.

When her ministry proclaims *We are Love in Action in the World*, many will be inspired to live this in a new way, making a positive difference in their community.

For more information call 267.262.1079 or email [EcclesiaSpiritualCenter@yahoo.com](mailto:EcclesiaSpiritualCenter@yahoo.com)

## Daily Word

*God's light dispels all darkness.*

Dark clouds may at times hide the sun. And there may be days in my life that seem clouded and dark. Whatever my challenge or sorrow, I know there is a place where God's light never ceases to shine and where there is no darkness. I go to that place within in prayer.

Finding a comfortable spot, I close my eyes. I see the light that penetrates any shadow, and I feel the radiance of God's love in my heart. I am comforted and strengthened. My mind is calm with a deep sense of peace. I face nothing alone; God's presence is always with me. There is no darkness that can withstand the light of God. I am safe. I am comforted.

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Love

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Love & Blessings

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