



# GATHERING THE SPIRITUAL VOICE OF AMERICA

*To Deepen Our Knowing of Oneness and  
Our Compassion as a Nation*

A National Reflection with America's Religious and Spiritual Leaders

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## ***Gathering the Spiritual Voice of America***

### **To Deepen Our Knowing of Oneness and Our Compassion as a Nation**

#### **This Call to Gather**

***“The hour calls for moral grandeur and spiritual audacity.” – Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel***

The next few years will be pivotal ones for the whole of the global community. As a world culture, we have come to value material progress and consumerism at the expense of the very living systems that sustain us and make up our Earth. In doing so we have put aside the spiritual principles of Oneness and interdependence, and lost the understanding that in hurting one part of creation, we hurt the whole. We have come to value individual gain and advancement at the expense of the wellbeing of the collective community. In doing so we have put aside the values of compassion, inclusion and sacrifice, forgetting that we advance our own wellbeing by advancing that of all others. Greed has led to conflict and suffering, and this is threatening the whole of the human community, and the rest of the planet. Our ecosystems cannot bear much more of the continued depletion of their resources, and our human societies cannot bear much more of the inequities that the current modes of resource utilization engender. Our technologies have simply outstripped our wisdom, and now it is time to catch up. It is time for our collective spiritual wisdom to come forward, from all corners of the globe, around universal principles that can guide the development of a new consciousness and new way of living, in harmony with our planet’s resources and needs, and in harmony with our fellow human beings. To do this, we must bring the sacred back to the center of our lives. Economic and political measures alone will not enable us to address the crisis we face. A spiritual movement is already underway and we can help it advance to the point where significant change can take place, where we can experience the consciousness and paradigm shift so greatly needed.

America has a huge role to play in cultivating this new awareness. As a nation, we embody the wisdom of every major faith tradition and have a strong indigenous tradition of our own, where the sacred was a defining force. Our plurality and religious diversity are among our greatest strengths. As a nation, we have reaped the benefits of material advancement but have also come to know the pitfalls of this kind of progress without an accompanying spiritual awareness.

This call to Gather the Spiritual Voice of America is an effort to draw together the best of America's spiritual wisdom to help the nation redefine its priorities and find a new way forward. We anticipate bringing together 40-80 key spiritual thinkers and visionaries, as well as other thought leaders, for a four-day reflection on how to bring the sacred back to our center, how to deepen our knowing of Oneness and our compassion as a nation, and what transformations this would bring into the workings of our everyday lives and into the collective sphere.

There is an urgency to this call. America has lost much ground in the last few years. Our leadership has come into serious question. We face political, economic and social challenges as well as serious environmental problems. Many sectors of society have lost their session of mission and purpose, bowing to personal profit over the call to serve.

A shift in thinking and behavior must come into being within the next few years if we are to alleviate the suffering these challenges may engender. Can we respond in time? To do so, we must begin to see with new eyes, hear with new ears, expand our empathy to encompass all, and redefine our priorities. The old models will not lead us forward. We must as a nation see where the future is calling, because the choices and steps we take as Americans in the next few years will have great impact on the rest of the world.

## **The Role of the Feminine**

***“Sages have said it is the feminine, inside men and women alike, that holds awareness of our Divine nature and the intended work of our highest selves.” – Barbara Sargent***

Women, and particularly the feminine qualities, have a great part to play in helping us to become receptive and connecting us again with the sacredness of the Earth and its life systems. To move beyond old models we must make way for the feminine to enter as a strong guiding presence and voice. The Global Peace Initiative of Women organized a Summit in Jaipur, India in March 2008 called *Making Way for the Feminine for the Benefit of the World Community*. The focus was on how the feminine principles in both women and men can guide us back to a deeper understanding of Oneness, interdependence, compassion and inclusion; how they can make us receptive to what we already know deep inside. These principles enable us to consider the consequences of every action, every policy. Policies that harm any ecosystem – excessive cutting of forests, polluting of waters, infiltration of toxic chemicals into the environment etc. -- are acting against these principles of Oneness, interdependence and compassion. The continuation of policies that foster great economic inequities and enable poverty and hunger, are also acting against Oneness, interdependence,

compassion and inclusion. Similarly, the culture of violence not only harms many and counters basic human values, but it also acts against our own self interest. Harm to another nation is harm against ourselves and disregards the principle of Oneness.

To build a new culture that takes as its foundation these universal principles will require a coming together in a different way. Women can and must lead this effort, working in partnership with men.

*Gathering the Spiritual Voice of America* is being organized under the direction of a group of women spiritual leaders, but it will bring together approximately an equal number of women and men from the different faith traditions who recognize the principles of Oneness and compassion as keys to America's future.

### **Uniting Around Universal Principles**

***“What are the forms in business, social action and peacemaking that can help us see the Oneness of society and the interdependence of life?” Roshi Bernie Glassman***

Over the past few years, America has become a divided country – politically, economically and religiously. This has been to our great detriment. Despite our differences, we would be better able to address the environmental, social and economic challenges before us if we can tap our unity and sense of common purpose. Our coming together as a nation will be of great benefit to the world community, especially if we find our way to real leadership in addressing climate change and poverty and can develop a new commitment to the nonviolent resolution of differences. We can begin transforming the environment of fear and anger that has captured the country, into one of compassion and inclusion that will enable us once again to be heard and respected around the world.

The changes that we need to strive for are more than cosmetic. To eradicate hunger in our country, to see again the sacredness of the Earth, its forests, rivers and mountains and to ensure the preservation of these precious life forces, to ensure the quality and security of our natural foods, to commit to providing all Americans with the basic needs of food, housing and healthcare, and a decent job, to provide good education for all of our children, education that is not only job preparation but cares for the development of the whole person, to provide all Americans with access to the information needed to make informed decisions, to cultivate discernment, humility and the modest use of Earth's resources -- to achieve these goals, a significant shift in consciousness and way of being is needed, not just a few new laws. Change will come through a spiritual effort that opens us to the meaning of Oneness and compassion, and which brings knowledge of how to incorporate these into our common public space. Knowing Oneness, we cannot turn away from the eyes of

hunger. Knowing interdependence, we cannot bear the misuse of our shared resources. Knowing compassion, we will not bear the killing of others across the world in the name of our own security. How do we deepen this knowing among the American people and reclaim the sacred?

Whatever political, economic and environmental changes that are required can be facilitated by a parallel spiritual undertaking that has as its goal a change in the hearts and minds of people in all sectors of society, in all regions of the country. While this may seem like a tall order, the effort is already underway. Americans are already waking up to the environmental crisis, to the crisis of poverty and war. Can our nation's spiritual leaders collectively provide the vision and expression of how we need to evolve as a nation to regain our sense of purpose and of the sacred?

### **Out of Silence – a Guide for Transformation**

***“We bring a spiritual energy and commitment. Women have long nurtured the feminine gifts placed within them by the Creator, not for their own fame or aggrandizement, but for the good of the world community... There is courage in this place. – Rev. Dr. Joan Brown Campbell***

*Gathering the Spiritual Voice of America* will seek to generate spiritual energy, commitment and courage. It will be structured as a reflection, alternating between times of dialogue and silence, meditation, sacred song and prayer. Among the thoughts to guide this reflection are:

- The many levels of meaning of Oneness -- how can this knowing guide the development of our society and the way we relate to one another
- Our relationship to the communities in nature – the implications of interdependence, and how this understanding can renew the vision of the sacred
- The deeper manifestations of compassion – how should it guide us, how can we teach it and incorporate this quality into healthcare, education, government, etc. How can compassion guide our policies
- The role of the feminine – becoming receptive and inclusive and shifting the paradigm to one of gender sharing
- Reclaiming the language of faith and the sense of sacred duty to engage, educate and enlighten on the part of all sectors of society
- Finding the universal principles and values that can unite us as a nation – a shared vision of all spiritual communities – moving away from the division of doctrine to a common understanding of the principles that underlie all the religious tradition

## Envisioned Outcomes

While many interreligious gatherings have taken place in recent years to talk about tolerance and respect for different faiths, this gathering seeks to achieve something radically different. Its goal is to bring together our various spiritual communities, to tap our collective spiritual wisdom, and to explore together the avenues for regeneration and transformation in response to the crisis of our time. It is unique because it is the first time in our country that such an inter-spiritual reflection is being conceived and led by women.

This 4-day reflection will seek in its own way to help foster a spiritual regeneration, realizing that this is a process that will require the efforts of many, many individuals across the country and take place over a period of time. But through these efforts we aim to align ourselves with the highest positive forces so that we can take constructive steps toward transforming the various forms of violence – conflict, poverty, neglect, exclusion, and environmental degradation – that threaten our nation and world today.

It is likely that a spiritual vision will emerge with a statement of principles and priorities designed specifically for our nation at this moment in time, which can be widely distributed as an inspiration and guide.

**This gathering may seem like a small step in shifting our thinking and behavior regarding the pressing issues of conflict, poverty and harm to our Earth– but we aim to create together a vast spiritual reservoir from which new vision and inspiration can emerge to guide people in communities across the country and help bring us together as a nation.**

This Summit will take place under the guidance and direction of a select group of American women of spiritual vision and commitment. The Global Peace Initiative of Women is a global network of women and men who believe that the feminine has a key role to play in healing division and conflict and bringing about the global transformation that will lead to a more sustainable and peaceful world community.

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