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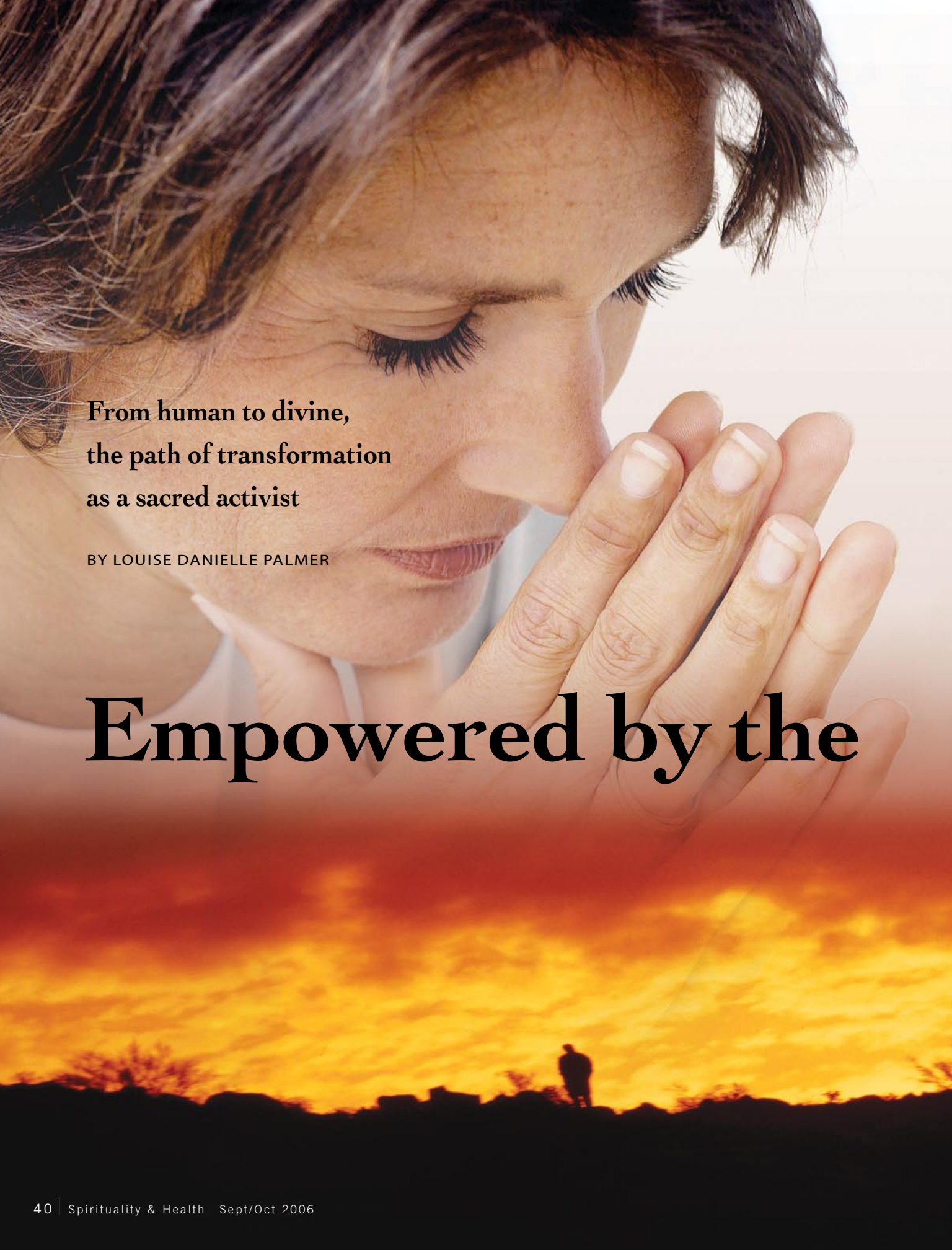
Your Guide to
Sacred Activism

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Pure Bliss
When It's Healthy,
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23 Reasons
to Love the
Bhagavad Gita



**From human to divine,
the path of transformation
as a sacred activist**

BY LOUISE DANIELLE PALMER

Empowered by the

{An Invocation}

“Rise and place your hands on your heart. Bow your head to your heart and in doing so, bow your mind, bow your intelligence, bow your ego, to the presence of the Living One, however you understand that within you. And as you bow your head to your heart, be real about where you and I are at this moment. You and I are in an apocalyptic situation in which the entire world is burning, in which the whole future of humanity is threatened, and in which all of the species are being decimated by our greed and our cruelty. And so, in bowing the head to the heart, we are doing more than simply enjoying a spiritual moment. We are all crying out silently and in profound pain, in an agony of compassion and in a hunger of spiritual delight, to the Beloved to dwell in us, to come and transform us, to make us wise, to make us authentic, to awaken us, and to give us the power, the grace, the intensity, and the energy to become authentic sacred activists.” ▶

WOMAN: CORBIS; LANDSCAPE: ERIK RANK/GETTY

Sacred

We must live in such a way that the splendor of our lives, the passion of our lives, and the beauty of our lives reaches out in a flame of divine passion that awakens the divine passion in others.

Sacred activism was born from a visionary experience, but it is much more than a vision. It is an epic narrative of birth and death. It is an invitation to undergo a radical change that ignites the divine spark deep within. It is a way through to a world so transformed that its contours cannot yet be described, only imagined. It is a plan and a promise and a prayer. If it strikes you, as it struck me, like a sword of light through the heart, if it delivers you to your highest calling and brings you to the awful grace of truth, it's because this message is delivered in a prophetic voice.

This voice is deeply rooted in mystical law, inspired by a lifetime of spiritual devotion, divined through shattering revelation. It belongs to Andrew Harvey, an Oxford-trained religious scholar and author of 30 books, and co-editor of the bestselling *The Tibetan Book of Living and Dying*. Harvey is recognized the world over as a living mystic who has charted the journey into the great wisdom traditions of Buddhism, Sufism, Hinduism, and Christianity. He was the first major Western teacher to be openly gay and among the first to champion the rise of the feminine face of God. Spiritual and intellectual luminaries ranging from Marianne Williamson to Lance Morrow have called him a “genius” and “one of the world’s irreplaceable resources.” Still, Harvey has not always been popular in New Age circles. Just as he was labeled a traitor for deconstructing the Eastern “guru” system and advocating instead a “direct

path” to God, some now criticize Harvey for sounding a call for sacred activism that is too radical.

“When the coming crisis reveals itself fully, it will threaten us at the most fundamental depths,” Harvey says. “If we aren’t rooted in our spiritual identity, we will be driven into meaninglessness and despair unless there are people to say, ‘No, this horror can be healed through the sublime truth! We will survive and we will find purpose and joy and love through sacred practice and sacred action.’ In fact, that is the whole point of the crisis — to drive us to that place where we, as a species, will have to go into our divine nature. The truth of our situation brings tremendous turmoil, a huge, sacred turbulence into the core of one’s life, but this turbulence is the condition for the flowering of more and more divine grace, divine passion, and divine energy.”

Larry Dossey, M.D., likens Harvey to an “Old Testament prophet whose words are ignored at great peril.” Indeed, in keeping with the tradition, Harvey has walked through the spiritual fire himself, emerging not with a scorched heart but with a tender one. Sacred activism is the bright flame that burns urgently inside him, fueled by a compassion for all creatures and for all of life. His mission, as he sees it, is to exhort, compel, guide, and inspire every one of us to become fire-walkers as well. And so, into the fire we step.

The First Task of the Sacred Activist

We all know, on some level, that things are bad. What we may not know — and what may be Harvey’s greatest contribution to shaping the story we live by — is that two realities are manifesting as a result of our actions, positive



and negative, individual and collective. Harvey believes a Great Death is unfolding at the same time as a Great Birth; they are emerging simultaneously because they are interdependent. Indeed, Harvey characterizes this death as the birth canal of new life — of a new humanity that recognizes its divinity. But there's a caveat: only a powerful, loving army of sacred activists can transcend the Great Death and usher in the Great Birth.

Harvey believes that our first task is to see the crisis clearly, because it is in seeing that we will be compelled to transform ourselves — our habits of denial, addiction, and overconsumption — and from that holy place of spiritual transformation, respond with the depth of love and action that is necessary. So here are the seven aspects of the Great Death:

1. Population explosion. Demographers believe the current population is expected to triple to 9 billion by 2050 — 3 billion more people than the planet can support.
2. The growth of fundamentalism. Rather than coming together and relinquishing their claims of exclusivity, the world's religions are retreating into violent separatism.
3. Nuclear proliferation. The unprecedented spread of weapons of mass destruction is a great (and growing) threat to life on the planet.
4. Ecological devastation. One hundred-twenty species disappear into extinction every day, our seas are polluted, the Amazon is on fire, Antarctica is melting, and on.
5. Our technological worldview. We have turned the Earth into a great cement garden. Being disconnected from the natural world impoverishes our spirit and imagination.

6. Corporate media. Instead of being informed about the true dimension of the crisis and our role in it, we are subject to an avalanche of celebrity trivia, half-baked news, “reality shows,” pornography, and violence.

7. This “Coca-Coma,” as Harvey calls it, puts us in a state of anxiety, depression, and fear, keeping us addicted to our destructive, consumerist way of life. While we chase after that which keeps us hectically busy but never fulfills us, we have no time and no peace, the essential ingredients of a spiritual life and the key to discovering our divine identity.

In the course of evolving as a species, we have discovered one-half of the God-power within us: the power to destroy. Now, Harvey believes, we must embody the other half: the power within us to create. This power is reflected in the golden mirror he calls the Great Birth, made up of Seven Stars that counteract the Great Death. They are:

1. The crisis itself. The forces of destruction we have unleashed will be so horrific that they have the capacity to shake awake the slumbering divine within us and the radiant impulse to nurture and sanctify life. From that place, nothing but grace, love, and salvation flow.
2. Democratizing media. New communication technologies are a source of alternative information independent of government and corporations. They represent an unprecedented grassroots organizing tool with global reach.
3. Creative technologies. That which brought us the cement garden can, and is, bringing us life-enhancing innovations, including new sources of energy that are self-generating and nonpolluting. Advances from medicine to quantum physics will have the capacity to heal us and

There is a way to be a conscious creator with God in this stupendous birth of the divine human taking place through the chaos of our time.

the planet in new ways we can't yet foresee.

4. The spiritual renaissance sweeping the globe, countering the fundamentalist impulse. In the past 30 years, most sacred texts have been translated and mystical practices that have been closely guarded secrets for millennia have been shared. It is no coincidence, Harvey says, that we are now being blessed with the divine wisdom and power that allow us to transform ourselves.

5. An evolution in the philosophy of nonviolence. In the past century, individuals such as Gandhi, Nelson Mandela, Rosa Parks, and the Dalai Lama have given us the tools, the insight, and the knowledge of how to affect fundamental change through love and compassion.

6. The return of the Sacred Feminine. The healing of the planet and humanity is unfolding as the full power of the feminine, in all her rage, beauty, and wildness, unfolds. Sacred activism is the sacred marriage of the masculine (consciousness) and feminine (creation) forces unifying heaven and earth, body and soul, spirituality and politics, the human and the divine.

7. The will of God to allow for a humanity transformed. As well as the detached spectator envisioned by patriarchal traditions, Harvey says God is also Mother determined to save and elevate her creation, pushing us deeper into our divine creativity and revolutionary passion.

"I know there is a way to be a conscious creator with God in this stupendous birth of the divine human taking place through the chaos of our time," Harvey says, "and that is the way of the sacred activist. But the word 'sacred' carries with it the need for great inner transformation."



Andrew Harvey

Only when we have truly surrendered our will to God, only when our minds and hearts are shattered open by what we have created out of our ignorance, will we go deep enough to the divine within and bring out the energies of transformation, Harvey says. "People can criticize this teaching as too morbid or too bloody, but it's neither. It's the law of transformation in all the authentic mystical traditions."

How Does Andrew Harvey Know?

Harvey was raised in southern India, a place he credits with instilling in him a love for all religious traditions, as well as a deep sense of the sacred dimension of life. From the age of nine, he was educated in England and became the youngest person ever to be awarded a fellowship to All Souls College at Oxford. Disillusioned with academia, he returned to India in his mid-twenties, embarking on a journey across the continent during which he met a succession of saints, sages, and teachers, and began his study of Hinduism. In Ladakh, he was introduced to the great

An Invitation to Become a Sacred Activist

During the weekend of October 13–15, *S&H*, Andrew Harvey, and Miriam's Well are inviting a group of 50 explorers to take part in an experimental workshop entitled "Sacred Activism: Hope in the Darkness" at Miriam's Well, in Saugerties, New York. The workshop, led by Andrew Harvey, is for people interested in creating a whole/holy new level of hope, meaning, and engagement in their lives and within the world. We are inviting people to experience and explore the work of sacred activism at the deepest level, and to create a community within which to do it. Each participant will be asked to commit to a personal program to take home with him or her. They will also be involved in an ongoing study of their engagement with this process. This workshop will transform, galvanize, and invigorate all involved through a range of spiritual tools and practices, journaling, dialogue, active commitment, and mutual accountability. What we discover and create together will form the basis of a new community of sacred activists and a template for Andrew Harvey's Center for Sacred Activism.

The divine heart is really the Divine Mother's heart feeling the suffering created by our ignorance.

Tibetan adept Thuksey Rinpoche and undertook with him the Mahayana Buddhist Bodhisattva vows. After moving to Europe, he devoted himself to an Indian teacher named Mother Meera, and embarked on a decade-long exploration of the Sufi tradition. In his forties, Harvey developed a relationship with the great Christian mystic Father Bede Griffiths, who helped him synthesize his spiritual explorations and reconcile Eastern and Western mysticism.

For anyone on a serious spiritual path, Harvey learned, there are two kinds of initiations. The first is the realization that everything and everyone comes from the same divine source, or what some call "unity consciousness." It took 15 years of rigorous practice before Harvey was graced with this experience at the age of 37 while living in Paris.

"I saw everything vanish into light and I knew I was the



Serving with Love

light and the light was me," Harvey explained during our interviews at his home in New York City. "It was like the void exploded as the whole world blazed with light. I wasn't there in my room anymore — there was just a fiery dance of atoms, a fiery dance of bliss consciousness. The Sufis say there are two journeys, the journey to God and the journey in God. That was the end of the journey to God for me. It was the most beautiful initiation imaginable. I thought it was 'it,' not realizing it was just the beginning, a gift to make you strong enough to take the great shattering."

This shattering marks the second initiation, he explains. "The divine heart is really the Divine Mother's heart feeling the suffering created by our ignorance. So, as the divine draws you nearer, it draws you through these rounds of beauty and bliss until you are ready to experience the agony of the Mother's heart, which nearly kills you."

Harvey's second initiation took place over two decades, culminating in 2000 in a pilgrimage to Arunachula, a mountain in southern India not far from where Harvey was born, a place where yogis have for thousands of years performed austerities and other acts of spiritual devotion to Shiva, the great Hindu god of creation and destruction.

"I began my walk around the

To register, go to miriamswell.org or call (845) 246-5805.

Other opportunities to become a sacred activist include joining a *Spirituality & Health* Volunteer Day at various locations around the country this fall. Attendees will meet and work alongside fellow *S&H* readers, as well as *S&H* staff, through a range of programs and activities in partnership with other organizations. This is the first phase of *S&H* In Action, a pilot volunteer program we plan to expand with your support and participation. We have committed to providing a specific number of participants at the locations listed below, so please join us in creating a new community coming together as love in action:

San Francisco, California, September 16, Muir Woods Native Plant Nursery, 20 participants

Klamath, Oregon, September 23, Habitat for Humanity, 15 participants

Danbury, Connecticut, September 30, Habitat for Humanity, 12 participants

Boulder, Colorado, October 7, mountain bike trail maintenance, 30 participants

For more details and locations, go to SpiritualityHealth.com/Volunteer, or to sign up, email Volunteers@SpiritualityHealth.com.

From the heart of the sacred activist flows a golden, ecstatic torrent of passion to change all things out of love for all things.

mountain in the dark,” he recalls. “There I was, trying to concentrate on my mantra, thinking I was going to have a transcendent experience, when out of the sacred darkness emerged all the horror and grief, the abject, unspeakable obscenity of India’s suffering: deformed people, crying old women with no money, people with AIDS clawing at me — a cacophony of misery all around me. Finally, I came to this crossroads and there, strapped to a board, was an epileptic screaming and howling, his mouth foaming. That scream ended something for me. I can only describe it this way: until that moment, despite everything that had happened to me, there was a kind of invisible glass wall around me. That scream shattered that glass wall. I lost control over my whole body and started to shake and tremble.

“I walked off into this field covered with sharp stones and cut my feet open. My bowels were running all down my legs. I was a complete derelict. I had joined the people in the darkness. I was nowhere and had nothing. Someone who knew me saw me and told me: ‘Shiva has struck you down, you must return and you must be peaceful.’ He took me back to my hotel and I didn’t leave for three days. The first day I experienced all the suffering I’ve lived through in my life and I cried and cried. And on the second, I went through vision after vision after vision of what has happened and will happen on earth, the Great Death. And on the third day, I was lifted from the dead, and I saw the Great Birth. This is where I speak from,



The Buddha of Compassionate Action

and why I am in a state of advanced urgency. I know where we are and I know where we’re going if we don’t do everything we can to change.”

The Birthing of Sacred Activists

This death and rebirth process is described in the great mystical traditions as a rending apart, a disemboweling, or a dark night of the soul. It is the crucifixion and the resurrection. It is what the shaman and the saint experience. It is represented in the life of

Rumi, Jesus, and the Buddha, all of whom, it is said, differ from us only in that they know that God resides within. It is, in fact, represented in our own lives, through our own personal experience, whether we consciously recognize it or not.

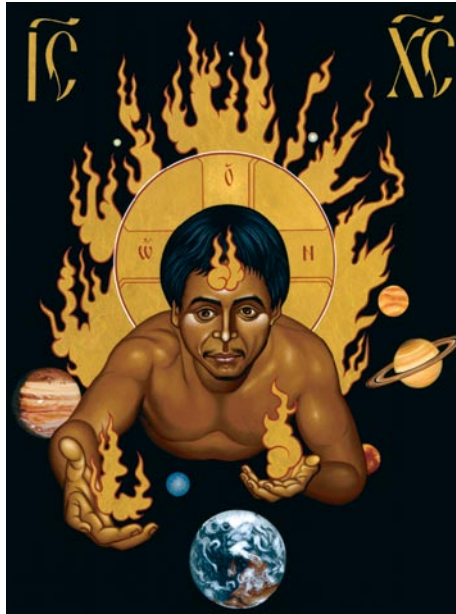
“A seed has to break open for the seed to spill and a tree to grow,” Harvey notes. “A woman’s body is nearly torn apart when a child is born out of it. This universe was born in a vast scream of light, a stupendous and glorious Big Bang. Creation is often terrifying, bloody, ferocious, and that is how it happens in the soul.”

It is also how it will now happen in the soul of the world, Harvey believes, and it is crucial to understand and to fully engage in this process ourselves so we are equipped to “midwife” this great rebirth.

“When the blood of heartbreak comes together with the light of divine joy and peace, the sacred heart of the sacred activist is born, and from that heart flows a golden, ecstatic torrent of passion to change all things out of love for all

We must turn our whole being to God in praise and longing so our actions are illuminated, guided, and energized by divine light.

things,” Harvey says. “The world is going to go through what looks like annihilation. Only those who aren’t afraid of this and are able to teach about this, only those who have taken on this deep mystical practice, will be able to lead the world through this great transformation. The birth of the divine in the human is a volcanic, cosmic event. It isn’t like you wake up one day in Kansas as Jesus Christ. It’s a huge, frightening, scary, amazing, incredible set of processes that unfolds over a lifetime.”



The Cosmic Birth of the Divine Human

The Transformation

Being a sacred activist means a profound engagement of this process on a personal, spiritual, and political level. Through our willingness to let our hearts break open completely, Harvey says our pain will be transformed into love — a love that is so eternal, so transcendent, so unbound, that we ourselves become identified with it. This is not a rational process. It is a kind of divine alchemy.

While this process is a mystical one, it is also grounded in practical action. Harvey outlines five ways in which we can work to unleash the astounding power of divine passion and love necessary to heal and transform ourselves, and the world, step by step, one by one.

The cornerstone of sacred activism is serving God with our whole being. Can we have enough humility to recognize that we need the divine light to heal and change? Harvey believes we must. We must turn our

whole being to God in adoration, in thanksgiving, and in longing, so that our actions are illuminated, guided, and energized by that light.

Without turning to the great source of power that transcends us all, Harvey says, we will not be able to elevate our consciousness to act wisely and precisely and powerfully enough to make a real difference. Being truly centered in our divine identity allows us to face the Great Death and respond to it with love,

rather than burn out, fall into anger, or give up in frustration. Spiritual practice enables us to surrender the fruit of our actions to God, face our own shadow, and maintain faith.

Serving the divine may include regular visits to a mosque, church, temple, or mountain; it may consist of daily meditation and prayer; it may involve chanting the names of God. Whatever it looks like for us, steeping ourselves in the depths of our divine identity must be at the core of our lives as authentic sacred activists. (See box on page 91 for additional resources.)

We must revere ourselves as sacred instruments of God. This means trying to keep our selves whole through proper diet and rest, regular exercise and meditation, and psychological work on our own shadow.

Of all practices, shadow work is the most challenging. It involves acknowledging that we are all colluding in this

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Empowered by the Sacred *continued from page 47*

crisis in the ways we think, act, feel, eat, consume, and pollute; in the way our culture is intoxicated by money, power, and celebrity. It involves understanding that “they” are not doing it; “we” together are doing it.

“You are going to have to be the change you want to see, and you’re going to have to be very strong and very powerful, and that strength and that power will not come from your ego,” Harvey says. “It will come from your surrendered self. It will be God’s presence residing in you, driving you on like a whirlwind into the center of the world to radiate the power of love.”

Recognize that everybody and everything we meet is the face of God — the woman bagging our groceries, the dog gamboling in the garden, Democrats and Republicans. Sacred activism is about acting from a place of “secret unity” with all beings so that we no longer hate or separate ourselves from those we consider to be our enemies. Only people who have forgiven at that depth can embody the kind of intelligent love that opens doors in locked prisons, the kind of love that will lead us out of our own folly and illusion. The divine will not bless anything less than divine action, Harvey says, and the divine blessing is crucial.

“This doesn’t mean we don’t criticize and we don’t fight against bad policies, it simply means we manifest respect,” Harvey says. “People can feel when you patronize or condemn them. If we instead approach everyone and everything we meet as a face of God, a light will go on in our life and the mystery of the unity of the divine will become clear to us. We will receive the guidance we need. We will be helped — perhaps more helped — by the people in opposition to our ideas than by those who support our ideas, because they will be a face of the Divine saying to us,

‘Get your ideas sharper, be more in love with Me. Do more to be real in your life so those who oppose you will be overwhelmed by the reality of your presence, because it will be My Presence in you.’”

Figure out what we realistically can do in our own community with our own resources. We aren’t called to save the world single-handedly (although if every person took action, it would change the world), but to do what we can in our own lives.

“One morning, wake yourself up at three in the morning and pray to the Beloved,” Harvey suggests. “Open your heart to the agony of the world and listen to what comes to you. What is your heartbreak? What robs you of sleep? What makes you cry out to God in the middle of the night? What makes you yearn with

“I don’t say follow your bliss; look where that has gotten us. I say follow your heartbreak.”

your whole being to change? Find out, because if you do, you will find a source of inextinguishable flames and tears which will open your sacred heart. When your sacred heart is open, out of it will come a torrent of focused passion, which will give you the energy to go on and on, giving of yourself. So I don’t say follow your bliss; look where that has gotten us. I say follow your heartbreak.”

Consider what it means to have sacred compassion on every level for all beings, including the animals, everywhere in every community around the world. We must be determined to act responsibly and compassionately in the way we vote, the car we drive, the investments we make, the food and clothes we buy. We must educate ourselves about what is happening in the world around us.

Resources for the Sacred Activist

Books by Andrew Harvey:

The Direct Path

The Son of Man

The Way of Passion

DVD: *Sacred Activism*

CD/Tape Sets:

Radiant Love: Christian Mysticism

The Direct Path

Song of the Sun: Rumi’s Journey

Available at andrewharvey.net

“Learn about why two billion people are living on less than a dollar a day,” Harvey suggests. “Try to understand the systems of cold evil by reading masterly analyses of the ways in which corporations are killing our world. Start waking up from what Graham Greene called America’s ‘insanity of innocence.’ Become bloodied by the real blood of the real world and start aligning your choices with all the beings of all the world as global citizens.”

These five kinds of service make up a daily practice. Practice does not imply perfection, it implies slow, steady, gentle but intense work. Then, when we are called to face situations that require of us all that we are, Harvey says, we will find that everything we need is waiting in our hearts. The blessing of the Divine will fill us with love and with joy. It will flow from our hands and our hearts, and it will transform this world, because we ourselves have been transformed:

“We must live in such a way that the splendor of our lives, the passion of our lives, and the beauty of our lives, is its own statement reaching out in a flame of divine passion that awakens the latent divine flame of passion in others.” ❖

Louise Danielle Palmer is editor of *SH*.

Look for Sacred Activism in Action in our upcoming issues.