

Nine authors contribute to new book

By Laurent Weichberger
Earth Odyssey Contributor

I am now flying over the Swiss Alps, a veritable sea of snow peaked beauty and wonder, splashed with high altitude lakes. My destination is India, the motherland of Far-Eastern spirituality. Lord Rama, Lord Krishna and more recently Prince Siddhartha, (popularly known as Lord Buddha), all were born in ancient India, not to mention the countless saints and Masters who have graced that land. I first started traveling here more than 20 years ago, at age 19, making repeated pilgrimages to the grave of my beloved Master, Meher Baba.

I was born and reared in Manhattan. As we all know, life and perceptions dramatically shifted as a result of the horrific events of Sept. 11. Now, I will share three stories with you, which inspired me to share the love, peace and wisdom of Eastern spirituality with the Western world. After that, I will tell you something about the nine special contributing authors who came together, in Oneness, to honor each other's faith in our new book, "Celebrating Divine Presence: Journeys into God."

The day was Sept. 12, 2001, and unbeknownst to kindergartner Yussuf (age 6), it would be a day like no other. He arrived at his mid-west school only to have his classmates beat him up, throw him to the ground and repeatedly crash his tender head into the concrete ground, putting him into a coma. All this while, the teacher in charge stood by and did nothing to stop this cruel beating.

And what was the cause of this abuse? Yussuf is a Muslim, and they all knew this, so they punished him for the attacks that brought down the World Trade Center and killed thousands of Americans. How could such a child be responsible for terrorism sponsored by right-wing extremists from another country? He cannot! This monstrous beating was a perfect example of deep ignorance fueled by hatred and prejudice.

As a spiritual aspirant, how could I hear such a story and not respond? Our book is a call to love, to knowledge and wisdom, to tolerance, and ultimately a call to Oneness.

Shortly after hearing this story, also in September 2001, I heard that a Sikh gentleman in Phoenix was shot to death by a hate-filled American, who was so ignorant that he thought a Sikh (wearing a turban) must be Muslim. Then, not long after this, I received a gift from a friend. It was a T-shirt about Meher Baba, my Master, with a photo and quote from him. Happy to receive this loving gift, I put the shirt on and went for a walk in downtown Flagstaff.

Within minutes, an American young man stopped me, literally stepping in front of me and putting out his hand, saying, "Tell me about your shirt." I said, "It's Meher Baba, my spiritual Master." He read the quote on the shirt: "When the Word of my Love breaks out of its silence and speaks in your hearts, telling you who I really am, you will know that that is the Real Word you have



Photo by Betsy Bruner

Pictured at the November 2007 Beads on One String gathering are, from left, Ameeta Vora, Thom Knoles, Laurent Weichberger, Kelly McCabe, Haring Singh Khalsa and Mary Esther Stewart.

been always longing to hear." Then he looked into my eyes and said, "You had better watch out, even Sikhs are being shot right now!"

In all my life, I never thought I would have such an experience, let alone right here in Arizona. To be confronted by a fellow American with a warning to be careful for my life because I am sharing my association with an Eastern master? Wow! How can this be happening?

I somehow managed to respond to this young man, "Ignorance prevails, but not forever." He listened, shook my hand and stepped back to let me pass. That experience, in combination with the two stories I shared above, put me in a state of mental turmoil. How can I do anything to relieve the deep ignorance of the worldwide response to these events?

How can we begin to heal the wounds and achieve a right relationship with the overwhelmingly peaceful Muslim community the world over? I soon realized that my new work in this world is to work toward Oneness. But how?

I approached my first friend in Flagstaff, Kelly McCabe, an inspired and loving Hindu in the tradition of Ramakrishna of Calcutta and Vivekananda. I shared my vision with him and he encouraged me to share with the people of Arizona, the American people and ultimately the world, the wisdom and beauty that is continuously flowing from the East.

Kelly introduced me to local leaders of Buddhism, including Ani Tsultim. I had already met Thom Knoles, a local Vedic teacher, as well as Ameeta Vora, a beautiful Jain, and later Haring Singh Khalsa, a delightful Sikh yoga instructor here in Flagstaff, so I asked them all to please join me. Then I

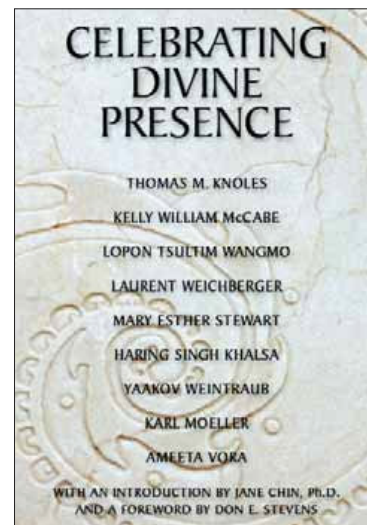
met Esther Stewart at a local Catholic church gift shop (while looking for a good book on St. Francis). I still needed Islamic representation, but Muslim representation was not easy to find in the winter of 2001.

So, I reached out to Karl Moeller, a reformed Islamic Sufi in Tucson, whom I had known for a few years, and we finally had a core group of amazing spiritual companions.

First, we presented a full-day event in February 2002 at Northern Arizona University (NAU) titled: "Eastern Heritage Symposium: Beads on One String." Then I asked Yaakov Weintraub, in New Jersey, to join us and share his Judaism with the world. After having received repeated encouragement to share this message of love, tolerance and Oneness as far and wide as possible, our group lovingly worked together for seven years (like Beads on One String). The world needs this type of interfaith sharing and dialogue now more than ever.

Gathering at Kelly's Temple dedicated to the Divine Mother, Durga, we manifested a book with these topics:

- Laurent Weichberger: Listening, Ancient Mysticism, Modern Mysticism, Sacred Places
 - Thom Knoles: Vedanta
 - Kelly McCabe: Hindu Spirituality
 - Karl Moeller: Islamic Sufism
 - Ameeta Vora: Jain: Radical Intent
 - Lopon Tsultim Wangmo: Tibetan Buddhism
 - Yaakov Weintraub: Judaism
 - Mary Esther Stewart: Christianity, If St. Francis Was Here
 - Haring Singh Khalsa: Sikh Dharma
- With an Introduction by Jane Chin, Ph.D., and a Foreword by Don E. Stevens, each contributing author has poured out both the



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essence of their faith and their personal journey on that path. We have brought together dozens of sacred images and we lay at the dear reader's feet these fruits of our spiritual labor. I personally have received so much love, grace and guidance on my path with Baba and my gratitude seems to increase in direct proportion with the wonder and glory I perceive in God's Creation. Working together with these holy ones has been part of that grace. By standing together in love, tenderly holding hands in honor of each other's faith, focusing on similarities, we make an interfaith prayer for lasting peace and a real experience of Oneness.