

C a r a v a n s

Winter-Spring 2007

The Desert Foundation
PO Box 1000
Crestone, CO 81131
www.desertfound.org



Dear Friends,

Your prayers for rain were answered! Beginning in early July, rain visited us regularly and the threat of fire decreased considerably. Thank you for your concern.

A year has passed since our first edition of "Caravans," and we are grateful for your interest and support for our simple desert life and the educational and spiritual services that grow from it.

In August, I led a seminar, "Grief, Belief, Rage, and Surrender," at *Image Journal's* annual Glen Workshop at St. John's College in Santa Fe. I was profoundly moved by the stories participants told and by the strength we derived from our time together. Peggy Jones, a docent at the Museum of Spanish Colonial Arts near the College, made it possible for us to tour the museum and ponder the mystery and beauty of the paintings and carvings of saints that emerge from the faith of New Mexican Christians. Later in the week we toured the home studio of Arlene Cisneros Sena, an accomplished *santera* and woman of faith.

In August we met new Muslim friends in Abiquiu and Taos as we prepare for our upcoming class at Colorado College: "Desert Spirituality: from the Middle East to the American Southwest."

We are excited about the recent changes made to the Desert Foundation web site and invite you to visit it at www.desertfound.org. You will now find it easier to navigate. As always, we welcome your comments, reflections, and responses.

In September we added two new members to the Desert Foundation's board of directors: Paul Baynham of Denver, a nurse who has worked in Southeast Asia, and Pegge Bernecker of Fort Collins, who is associated with Spiritual Directors International. We met for the first time in September, and it was a joy to introduce the new members and feel their support. Pegge and Paul join Dennis W. Brown, my college roommate and Denver attorney; Judy Maselli, who has facilitated Earth-Centered Women's Spirituality Circles for over 20 years; and Seattle therapist Laura Keim.

Autumn and winter are seasons for poetry. Here in the San Luis Valley, bare cottonwood limbs brave our cold, bluest of skies and white snow dazzles on the Sangre de Cristo Mountains. I was delighted to receive an invitation to write poems for a series of upcoming books on the saints by Mirabai Starr of Taos, New Mexico. I began writing about



Fr. Dave mixes mortar for the new tool shed, which also serves as storage space and houses water tanks and solar-powered batteries.

Hildegard of Bingen, Michael the Archangel, and St. Francis in September; please pray that, God willing, I will continue this discipline for the rest of my life!

When war broke out last summer between Israel and Lebanon's Hezbollah, and then Pope Benedict's reference to Islam provoked worldwide Muslim anger and concern, I felt more deeply than ever the call to prayer, study and dialogue. I hope the reflections below on the documentary "Three Faiths, One God," will give you some hope and encourage you to pray for our future together as children of Abraham.

Your desert brother,



Dear Friends,

I always love communicating with you in print because I know that many of you don't use a computer. And I love hearing from you, as you see on page 5. It was a creative year of outreach for me. *Wild at Heart* is now available from Sounds True. These six CDs share the most important lessons I've learned over the past forty years about living a balanced contemplative life. My recording of the life of St. Teresa will be in bookstores and available from Shambhala around Valentine's Day 2007.

I've been immersed in St. Teresa for decades now and have always felt an intimate connection with the "wild woman of Avila." This was particularly strong for me as I got to "be" Teresa and become her own voice, recording stories and teachings from her vibrant and dramatic life. It was the perfect culmination of working with Mirabai Starr on her new translation of Teresa's life and writing the foreword.

My contribution to the women's retreat at Upaya Zen Center in Santa Fe over the summer also focused on St. Teresa and five stages of growth I titled wonder, bravado, disillusionment, shattering, and glory. The women even sang a funny song I wrote to remember the five points! I heartily encourage every woman I know to come to this powerful healing gathering of women. Next year's dates are July 11-15, 2007. Contact Upaya@upaya.org or call 505-986-8518.

I rediscovered my love for Celtic Spirituality as I spoke on that topic in LaVeta, Colorado in conjunction with the Spanish Peaks Celtic Music Festival. The strong Celtic connection to desert spirituality was so evident as I related the story of St. Kevin being told by an angel to go to a "desert glen" and as I prayed with St. Columba: "Sometimes in a lonely cell, in the presence of my God, I stand alone and listen." Next year's late September "conference" may be a retreat. Contact Rev. Claudia Smith, St. Benedict's Episcopal Church at 719-742-5202 or revclaudia@centurytel.net.

I will help lead a pilgrimage to the Holy Land in May 2007. Other teachers represent the Jewish, Sufi, and Buddhist traditions. This is an opportunity to visit some of the sites most sacred to all three Abrahamic traditions, particularly in Jerusalem. Contact tina@authenticasia.net or call 888-586-9958.

The heart of my life is not traveling but simple solitude at home in my desert hermitage. That's harder to describe than writing and teaching. As we welcome the dark days of winter and the holy season of Advent in

preparation for Christmas, I begin a long four-month retreat of silence, study, and prayer. And I take each one of you with me. Is there something specific you'd like me to hold in prayer? In the words of St. Columba again: "In the silence of my heart I can hear His will, when I stand alone and quietly listen."

Gratefully,



Beneath the snows of the Sangre de Cristo mountains, Tessa prepares to empty branches from our new wood cart into the Crestone slash dump.



Thank you for your generosity!

We are grateful for your letters, contributions and prayers this past year. P.P. from Valley Cottage, New York, donated the new cart which makes hauling firewood and slash from our “fire mitigation” efforts so much more efficient. Major benefactors in Colorado provided Fr. Dave with four brand new solar panels and an updated system, so he finally has enough electricity. (Not being able to use the computer on gray days was seriously affecting our productivity levels.) A newly donated little shed solves our storage dilemma, since our hermitages are small. It even includes a work bench for Fr. Dave and his tools for maintenance and repairs.

Can you help?

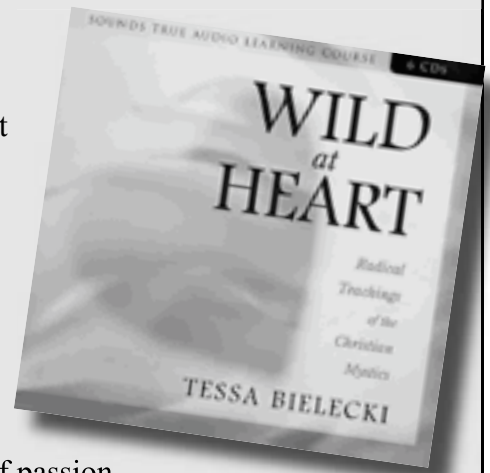
We live very simply, and our needs are minimal; still, we count on your support to supplement what we generate ourselves through our apostolic work “on the road.” This coming year we need books for the library, a new door for the Hogan (Tessa’s hermitage), a kerosene pump, and training for web site management. We are still raising money for health insurance.

Wild at Heart

Teachings and Practices to Free the Mystic in You
www.soundstrue.com/800-333-9185

Is an intimate experience of the Divine meant only for saints and mystics? Ask Tessa Bielecki, and the answer is an emphatic no. “Mystical experience is as natural to us as breathing,” she explains. “It erupts spontaneously and graciously when we live on the spot and savor the real.” *Wild at Heart* presents her call to you, the ordinary seeker, for a loving realization of God that is your divine birthright.

A former Carmelite nun and abbess of a monastic community, Tessa Bielecki guides you through six hours of practical, easy-to-follow teachings—stemming from her forty years of communal worship—and an in-depth study of Christian mystics, including Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint John of the Cross, Saint Augustine, and others. Join her to rediscover the radiant heart of Christianity, and bring the mystic’s depth of passion to your own spiritual practice.

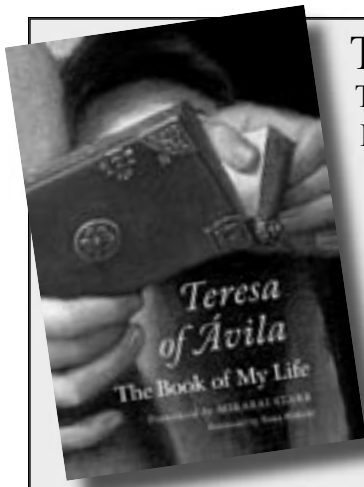


Holy Daring—The Way of the Mystic

Have you felt incomplete in your spiritual life? Are you searching for a way to expand your contemplation of the Divine? *Wild at Heart* offers you the opportunity to embark upon Saint Teresa’s “holy daring”—the complete embrace of everything that arises in your life. This, teaches Tessa Bielecki, is the way of the mystic—an unending celebration of God that continually unfolds the ecstatic experience of all as sacred.

“Disciplined Wildness”—Redefining the Act of Prayer

To the mystic, prayer means much more than routine recitations and entreaties to God. On *Wild at Heart*, Tessa Bielecki shows you the immersive prayers and meditations of the early Christian fathers and mothers, to instill in you their “disciplined wildness.” Through many exercises and insights, you will radically change where, when, and how you pray. Imagine reading a psalm in a way that deeply reflects your heart in any particular moment ... singing and dancing with God ... or allowing yourself to pray entirely without words. With Bielecki’s gentle instruction, you will develop a personal mode of prayer to expand your awareness of God everywhere you turn. (*From the cover notes.*)



Teresa of Avila: The Book of My Life

Translated by Mirabai Starr

Foreword by Tessa Bielecki

Book and compact discs available February 14, 2007

www.shambhala.com/888-424-2329

“Saints’ lives are not always page-turners. But Mirabai Starr’s wonderfully fresh translation of the Life of Teresa of Avila captures the passionate spirituality, the talent for intimacy, the frankly fallible humanity that attracted her contemporaries to the woman Starr describes as “not an obvious saint.” Tessa Bielecki’s deeply-felt Foreword is one inducement among many to take this welcome new translation to heart.”

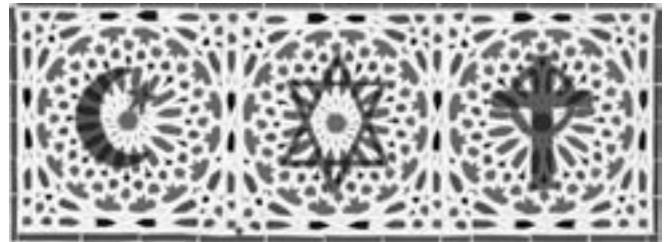
Cathleen Medwick, author of Teresa of Avila: Progress of a Soul

Three Faiths, One God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam

A documentary by Gerald Krell and Meyer Odze

www.threefaithsonegod.com

reviewed by David Denny



Three Faiths, One God: Judaism, Christianity, Islam,” presents a challenging and hopeful exploration of the common ground shared by traditions that also share a very troubled history. Jewish, Christian, and Muslim scholars examine our shared scriptural heritage and, without glossing over our differences, offer directions for deeper respect and understanding between our faiths. Viewers meet practitioners of these faiths and witness vignettes of family and ritual life. We learn about common themes in each tradition through examining Islam’s five pillars: faith in the oneness of God, pilgrimage, fasting, charity, and prayer.

The film provides reassuring evidence of Islam’s emphasis on justice and peace as well as Qur’anic teachings on tolerance and respect for non-Muslim believers. Those who wonder about the role of women in Islam will encounter articulate Muslim women who have found personal fulfillment and spiritual depth in their faith.

“Three Faiths” explores how these traditions coexist in the United States, and we observe remarkable encounters between Jewish, Christian and Muslim Americans. Students who participate in Chicago’s Interfaith Youth Corps tutor other students and describe how their prejudices break down as they hear and trust the stories and struggles of friends from other faiths.

The film looks back on the “*convivencia*” between the three faiths in medieval Spain and deals with contemporary international tragedies, including the murder of *Wall Street Journal* writer Daniel Pearl. Pearl’s father Judea appears in a dialogue with Muslim scholar Akbar Ahmed, who describes how the Qur’an condemns the teachings of Osama bin Laden. One moving scene introduces Umar Ghuman of the Pakistani parliament, who apologizes to Judea.

Each of our traditions, according to Rabbi Irving Greenburg, has a lot to be modest about, given how we have mistreated each other over the centuries. Religion is, as Christian theologian Krister Stendahl notes, a dangerous thing because it deals with the Absolute. He counsels us to remember that God alone is absolute, and we would do well to resist temptations to claim that the Mystery has its exclusive manifestation in my own tradition and that others must be eliminated. We are, in the end, united by our limitations, and we need each other. This is an ecological, rather than monocultural approach to truth. No one is asked to think less of his or her tradition, but rather to bring its beauty and wisdom to the fore in a common effort to live, not in a Tower of Babel, but in a symphony of compassion.

Responses from our Readers

I was delighted to find out about you yesterday at the end of a weekly hour of contemplative prayer that my wife and I lead at the Bishop's Ranch Episcopal Retreat Center in Healdsburg, CA. I am the former steward of the Episcopal House of Prayer, a small contemplative retreat house on the grounds of St. John's Benedictine Abbey at Collegeville, MN. My wife and I share your goals in our small ways of leading retreats and pilgrimages near and far. You may be interested in a book I just finished, published by the Liturgical Press. It is: *Oasis of Wisdom: The Worlds of the Desert Fathers and Mothers*. You can see a summary and reviews at litpress.org.

Rev. D.K.

Please find enclosed a small contribution to your very BIG venture. I'm sending it to support your work. Madeleine L'Engle's "Glorious Impossible" keeps ringing in my mind. Good luck to you. The desert seems very far from Philadelphia.

M.F., Philadelphia, Pa.

When we are most weak God is most strong. When we are totally disarmed He transforms us. Hang on for dear life! Thinking about you. I don't have a computer, but my daughter passes on news from your web site.

C.P., Keene, N. H.

The Summer-Fall 2006 *Caravans* was extra good. Wish you'd come visit. I have an enormous library of books about Arabia and the Arabs. Thesiger's *Marsh Arabs* as well as the other one. And William O. Douglas on *Strange Places, Friendly People*. Also *Law in the Islamist World* among many others you'd enjoy. Wish I could go on the trip to Palestine and Jordan, but is right now the best of times for that?

F.F., Sedona, Az.



Desert Foundation board members, from left to right: Judith Maselli, Pegge Bernecker, Dennis Brown, and Paul Baynham. Laura Keim is not pictured. Barry Paduani of Palmerton, PA designed and printed these Desert Foundation/Caravans t-shirts.

Christmas

2006



O Christ,

What shall we offer you coming on earth?

Angels offer praise;

Heaven lights up a star;

Magi bring gifts;

Shepherds their wonder;

Earth a cave;

Desert a manger.

We offer you a

MOTHER.

(Source unknown)

May you have a blessed Christmas,
a happy new year, & a holy Epiphany!
Love, Jessa & Fr. Dave

The Birth of Jesus

According to the *Qur'ān* (19:29-33), Mary returned to her family after giving birth to Jesus. Her shocked relatives sought an explanation. Mary simply pointed to the infant. Her family said,

“How can we talk to one who is an infant in the cradle?”
He said, “I am indeed the servant of God, who has given me scripture and made me a prophet, and made me blessed wherever I am; and has prescribed prayer and charity for me as long as I live, and kindness to my mother as well; and did not make me an arrogant malcontent. And peace is upon me the day I was born, and the day I die, and the day I am resurrected, alive.”

(Translated by Thomas Cleary)

Chanukah Prayer

During each night of Chanukah, a candle is added to the menorah. Here is the blessing over the candles:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe

Who has sanctified us with His commandments and commanded us to light the lights of Chanukah. (Amen)

Here is a blessing for the feast itself:

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe
Who performed miracles for our ancestors in those days at this time.

Blessed are you, Lord, our God, sovereign of the universe
who has kept us alive, sustained us, and enabled us to reach this season. (Amen)

To learn more about Chanukah and hear these blessings in Hebrew, please visit: www.jewfaq.org/prayer/chanukah.htm.

