



# The Compassionate Listening Project

*...listening and speaking from the heart, even in the heat of conflict*

“To put the world in order, we must first put the nation in order; to put the nation in order, we must put the family in order; to put the family in order, we must cultivate our personal life; and to cultivate our personal life, we must first set our hearts right.  
-- Confucius

*Dear Friends,*

Tonight I had the privilege of listening to Greg Mortenson, author of *Three Cups of Tea*, in the local high school gym on Bainbridge Island. The outpouring of love and appreciation for Greg, who builds schools in Pakistan and Afghanistan—primarily for girls—was nothing short of amazing. Over a thousand people packed the auditorium and a huge amount of money was raised.

This book has clearly struck a chord. I listened carefully, not just to Greg, but to the audience. I noticed the many points when applause erupted. Beyond the enthusiasm for girls' education in these remote villages, I heard another message: that after six years, the American people are tired of our interminable war against terror. There is a deep longing for compassion, and for the world to know another face of America—our generosity, our goodness, our caring hearts. Tens of thousands of people in a part of the world that easily breeds anti-American *jihadis* through gross perversions of Islam, have now seen another side of America through Greg's work. He gives us hope and reminds us of the difference that one person can make.

Our organization is part of the growing movement to awaken and spread compassion. Being at the hub, I hear from so many of you and am continually inspired by your efforts:

**Fred Whitacre**, a science teacher in Louisville, Kentucky, has taught Compassionate Listening to every middle school student at St. Francis of Assisi for 5 years now, unleashing a virtual floodgate of compassion at his school. Last February, his students succeeded in pushing legislation through Kentucky's House of Representatives requiring genocide and tolerance education in secondary schools. This year they're taking on the Senate.

**Lorenn Walker**, former Deputy Attorney General in Hawai'i, has integrated Compassionate Listening into her Restorative Circles Project in prisons.

**Anita Henderson** in Bend, Oregon, a member of our November 2006 delegation to Israel and Palestine, initiated a 3-year project to support a Palestinian women's center run by refugee women that we met with.

**Amy Rakusin**, a therapist in Baltimore is bringing Compassionate Listening to political asylum refugees.

At their own expense, facilitators **Susan Partnow** and **Andrea Cohen** are gathering Israeli and Palestinian practitioners together this week in Nazareth for advanced practice.

Singer-songwriter **Kathryn Mostow** in Fort Collins, Colorado, wrote a beautiful song for us called "The Green Line". It's about walls—on the ground and in our own hearts. She recorded it and presented it to us this summer at the Gathering. (Can anyone help us get it from a CD onto our website so everyone can hear it?).

Compassionate Listening alumnae **Deborah Rohan Schlueter** and **Celeste Archer** have founded the Student Interfaith Peace Project under the auspices of the University of Denver.

**Maha El-Taji** and I felt blessed to have gathered last May and June with 64 Israeli and Palestinian facilitators for 5 days of learning and practicing. In this issue, **Marion Pargamin** shares her insights about the training in her article, "The Vicissitudes of Compassion."

**Larry Snider** in Pennsylvania is organizing a 20-member delegation of interfaith leaders including Imams, Rabbis, and Ministers from his region. They will visit Israel and Palestine with Maha and me next spring.



*Tal, former Israeli soldier, and Jamal, former Palestinian prisoner, at the Beit Jala training.*

Whenever I feel low, I look at the photo of these two beautiful men from the West Bank training—Tal, a former Israeli soldier, and Jamal, a former Palestinian prisoner. This is what is possible for us all. Hearts can melt in a moment, former enemies can become friends. This is where my hope lies.

Blessings to you all,

*Leah*

## Restorative Circles: The Gift of Listening in Waiawa Corrections Facility

Lorenn Walker, former Hawai'i State Deputy Attorney General, champion triathlete, and public health educator, has integrated Compassionate Listening into restorative justice and resiliency programs for inmates in Hawaiian prisons. When asked, "Why should the perpetrators of crimes be offered tools to reconcile with the victims of their crimes?" she paused and replied somberly, "What is the alternative?"

The alternative is what we have now—over 2.3 million people in U.S. prisons. Nearly 70% of those released are re-arrested for felony or serious misdemeanor charges within 3 years. (Department of Justice, BJS, 2007) "For years, the United States has held the dubious distinction of incarcerating more people and at a higher rate than any other peacetime nation in the world," and we know that that all too often the human, social, and economic costs of the prison "cure" are worse than the "disease" itself. (Human Rights Watch, 2007)

Drawing from the principles and practices of Compassionate Listening, Restorative Justice, and Solutions-Based Therapy, Lorenn develops programs that reach out to both the victims and the perpetrators of crimes. The "Restorative Circle" pilot project, started in 2005 at the Waiawa Correctional Facility on the Hawaiian island of O'ahu, is an example of her inspiring, practical, and heart-based work.

In order to support successful transitions from prison, inmates work with a facilitator to create their own individual Restorative Circle. The Circles can include victims, family members and friends. Those invited are given an opportunity to express their feelings and to say what they need from the inmate in order to repair relationships and regain trust. The guests are asked to focus and build on the inmate's strengths, resiliency and resources. The process allows the expression of deep emotions as well as practical planning for the inmate's transition from prison.



*"I work with crime victims, prison inmates, and homeless youth. My work often involves designing communication activities for people to learn non-violent approaches to conflict, including forgiveness. Several years ago I was introduced to The Compassionate Listening Project, and since then have used its teachings to train many, including prison inmates, with tremendous success."*

*- Lorenn Walker, former Deputy Attorney General, Hawai'i*

"Five years ago, Edwin Kansana was addicted to crystal methamphetamine. He sold drugs and stole from his family to support his habit. At the time of his arrest for drugs and car theft, he was forced to hand over his infant daughter to the police. Today, Kansana sits with his daughter, Mahina, and says he is a different man. And he wants to prove it." Kansana was the second participant in the Waiawa project. In the Circle, Kansana "apologized to his mother, from whom he stole to support his drug habit, and his younger sister, whose wedding he missed because he was high. Apologizing to his family provided an opportunity for healing. As for his family members, 'they were seeing a part of me they could never see before. I

never could speak and share feelings. My family is so grateful for this program,' says Kansana." (Honolulu Magazine, December, 2006)

Ted Sakai, a former warden at Waiawa and former state Director of Public Safety, has observed the restorative process in action at his prison. "I was blown away by the circles," he said. "The emotion was just overwhelming. After the first one, I told Lorenn, 'Next time, bring a lot of Kleenex.'" Sakai believes that he has witnessed many emotions being expressed for the first time, and a lot of healing. (Real Justice, 2007)

The program has been so well received that, in May 2007, the Hawaiian

legislature passed a bill to fund a two year, state-wide expansion of the Restorative Circle prison program. Lorenn has also created and facilitated Restorative Circles programs for youth "aging out" of the foster care system and for homeless youth in Hawai'i.

Lorenn's dynamism, passion and creativity grew out of her own life story. Although she lived on her own when she was 14 years old, dropped out of high school at 15, was adjudicated as a juvenile offender and seriously injured in an assault, Lorenn put herself through college, law school, and earned a Masters degree in public health. From 1984 to 1994 she was an Hawai'i State deputy attorney general. From 1994 to 1999 she represented children's rights in family court. In 1998 and 1999 she



was the president of the Child and Family Advocacy Section of the Hawai'i State Bar Association." ([www.lorennwalker.com](http://www.lorennwalker.com))

Lorenna traveled from Hawai'i to attend Compassionate Listening training in Washington State. She says that Compassionate Listening practices—such as listening for facts, feelings, values and essence—are the foundation for identifying and building upon strengths in others, no matter who they are or what they have done. She noted that even in the most trying situations, others recognize it when “you come from a position of respect with an open heart.” Lorenna uses Compassionate Listening skills and practices with inmates and teaches these skills to counselors and others. She “sees phenomenal results” time after time.

Lorenna says that strength-based solutions are possible in any situation. “If you see a guy on the street and he is drunk and smells bad, you can express honest admiration and ask, ‘How *did* you manage to survive the night outside and get up and get here this morning?’” In any life, even the most desperate, there is resiliency that can be built upon. When asked what she says to those who might think she is “molly-coddling” offenders, Lorenna says again, “What’s the alternative?”

Without providing opportunities for restorative justice we will simply continue to increase the number of people in our prisons and recidivism rates. “Our prisons are brutal and people treated with brutality behave brutally.” Our conditioned reaction is retribution—we are taught to attack. Lorenna believes strongly that non-violent alternatives can be taught. Research



*Lorenna congratulating inmate with former Warden*

shows that restorative justice programs are more effective than the criminal justice system in keeping offenders from re-offending. And, Lorenna concludes, “*this feels so much better!*”

Lorenna’s message to Compassionate Listeners is, “**You can do this! You can take an idea and turn it into something!**”

And in this way, Lorenna Walker’s great and fierce heart challenges us all.

## The Compassionate Journey a path of reconciliation

by Brian and Lisa Berman

“The horrors and atrocities cannot be erased. The big question is, do I want to go to my grave carrying all these emotions?” stated one participant in our Compassionate Journey to Berlin last May. This was the big question for each of us. Members of the delegation came from the USA, Great Britain, and from Germany and brought with them their fears, denial, hate, trauma, guilt, shame, and most importantly their willingness to heal.

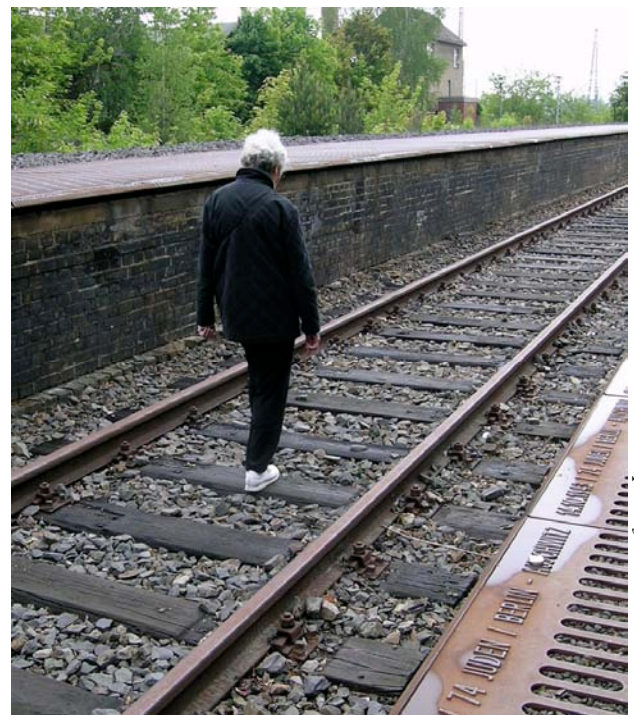


photo by Brian Berman

*Participant walking on the deportations tracks in Berlin*

In our opening circle everyone shared why they were here and what they hoped and dreamed would come from our time together. Our eldest participant was 80 years old and born in Berlin. This was her first return to her homeland since leaving in the late 1930’s. One of her intentions was to learn Compassionate Listening so that she could be a better listener to her children and grandchildren. She was also seeking to recover memories. With the help of another participant living in Berlin, she found the location where her father’s studio had been. When we visited the memorial site where the deportation to the concentration camps took place, she expressed, with deep emotion, how easily this could have been her family’s fate.

An American participant carried a deep hatred for what the Germans had done to the Jewish people and he had been carrying this hatred for over 60 years. On our

third day together, he expressed that his hatred had diminished and that a strong skepticism had emerged. On the fourth day he informed our group that even the skepticism had diminished and his curiosity was emerging. On the fifth day he shared that the person he had known his entire life was no longer his operating identity. His demeanor was free and light-hearted.

We listened to survivors of the Holocaust, and former Nazi party members. We were struck by their commitment to educate the youth of today, in hopes that it will never happen again. We felt blessed that they are still alive and sharing their experiences. One day this generation will be gone and who will carry this message forward to our impressionable youth?

We are so grateful for all those who participated in the Compassionate Journey as well as all those who helped pioneer this work in our Jewish German Reconciliation Project. A special thanks to Eve Rennebarth from Germany who assisted with the delegation. May reconciliation and healing blossom in all of our hearts.

We have scheduled the dates for our next Compassionate Journey, Please join us **May 13–20, 2008** for our next Compassionate Journey. For more information and a slideshow of this year's trip:

<http://www.bermanhealingarts.com/CompassionateJourney.htm>

*“Bless this state of grace! I’m deeply touched at the end of these seven days. Life after this will be a new adventure. I feel like I just got off a ladder ten stories up the shaft of awareness. I am exhausted, but exhilarated. This practice of compassion and Compassionate Listening is very humbling; I feel challenged in a way I’ve never felt before, with a strong sense of connectedness with every one of the participants after what we shared as a group and exchanged as individuals. And by curious extension, I feel a new kind of connectedness with all beings around me.*

*Wherever I go, I meet strangers whose lives appear tenderly fragile, whose faces hold the potential for injury or enlightenment. I release judgment, the inner quarrels, the treadmill of mental acrobatics. To be present with heartfelt intent and show my light—that’s what’s on now.”*

*– Alexa Dvorson, participant, Compassionate Journey*

### Calendar of Events

Please see our website for information about upcoming workshops in Seattle, Portland, Toronto, Palo Alto, Arcata and Vancouver, in addition to the Compassionate Journey to Berlin.

## The Vicissitudes of Compassion

by Marion Pargamin, with photos by Leah Green

*In June 2007, thirty-eight Israeli and Palestinian facilitators spent 3 days together in the West Bank town of Beit Jala to practice Compassionate Listening with Maha El-Taji and Leah Green. In these trainings, we all come together as students and teachers to learn in the heat of the fire. In this article, Marion, an Israeli participant, writes about how she became triggered in one of the sessions and how she has worked to come to peace. Her insights offer wisdom for us all.*



*Israelis and Palestinians in the Beit Jala training, June 2007.*

By the end of the Compassionate Listening workshop in Beit Jala, I felt completely exhausted. I needed to be alone and to rest for several days in order to come back to myself. It was time for reflection on what happened, after gaining some perspective, and to better understand the vicissitudes of compassion.

In this workshop we had many opportunities to work together on how we respond to peoples' words and deeds—either it is coming from their heart, or their wounds and the need to defend themselves. These last days proved how difficult it is to stay connected to our heart in the heat of conflict, and how vigilant we must be in order not to slip into judgment and blame.

I believe compassion is more than a response to somebody. It is a state of mind that we can cultivate in any circumstance; it doesn't depend on someone's speech or judgment. Compassion is ready to contain and understand the suffering of the other, beyond words, to see their fear, anger and frustration under the aggression.

Thich Nath Hanh describes in his book *The Heart of the Buddha's Teaching*, a beautiful teaching of the Buddha on compassion. The practice of "Inclusiveness" helps us to go beyond suffering, to reach for freedom. It is the capacity to receive, embrace and transform suffering inflicted by our enemies, or even the people we love.

If you take a handful of salt and pour it into a small bowl of water, the water in the bowl will be too salty to



drink. But if you pour the same amount of salt into a large river, people will still be able to drink the river's water. Because of its immensity, the river has the capacity to receive and transform. It does not suffer because of a handful of salt.

If your heart is small, one unjust word or act will make you suffer. But if your heart is large, full of understanding and compassion, that word or deed will not have the power to make you suffer. You will be able to receive, embrace and transform it in an instant. To transform your suffering, your heart has to be as big as the ocean.

I had experienced this kind of unconditional and complete compassion with an angry woman I met in the street. It was the fruit of practicing meditation and mindfulness on a daily basis. It had developed my capacity for inclusiveness. But it doesn't happen often...

One cannot expect that a few days of practice will awaken such compassion. But it is important to cultivate it slowly in order to establish a basis and plant seeds, like we did in the workshop in Beit Jala.

During the workshop, I had the opportunity to face my limited capacity to deal with my own suffering, triggered by a Palestinian's aggressive speech. I realized that my heart was not as big as the ocean at that moment. Maybe I have heard too many of these speeches, almost automatically delivered, full of hatred and demonizing Israel.

Since I generally tried to suppress my anger, it was not transformed. The suppressed suffering tended to accumulate, not to disappear. It could burst out some day.

This time, when I realized my heart was shrinking, I was able to accept it. This shrinking heart called me to understand the need to put a limit to the aggression, in order not to fall into "idiot compassion."

In her book, *The Places That Scare You*, Pema Chodron describes another teaching of the Buddha about what prevents real compassion.

She says that we fall into idiot compassion when we avoid conflict and protect our good image by being kind when we should say a definite "NO." Compassion doesn't imply only trying to be good. When we find ourselves in an aggressive relationship, we need to set clear boundaries. The kindest thing we can do for every one concerned is to know when to say "Enough."

Many people use the ideal of compassion to justify self-debasement. In the name of not shutting our heart, we let people walk all over us. In order not to break our vow of compassion, we have to learn when to stop aggression and draw the line.

The workshop at the Everest hotel was an opportunity for me to practice this aspect of compassion. It was a hard mountain to climb—like mount Everest itself! (The workshop took place at the Everest Hotel. - Editor)

Pema Chodron brings another interesting teaching about "trouble makers," those people who provoke us and trigger all kinds of emotional reactions. She says that we have to see where we are "hookable," so that we can work with it.

If we don't see where we get provoked and hooked with complete honesty and directness, without guilt—just a straight look at where we get stuck—we will always have this blind spot to drag us down. If we want real freedom, we need people around who are going to provoke us, to show us where we still have work to do. They are showing us about ourselves, no matter what their intention is.

During these three days I was hooked and triggered and other people were triggered by me. In order to be free of the vicious circle of anger, I do my best to accept this peacefully.



*Marion and Mai, a Palestinian participant. During the training the two women discovered they live in neighboring villages, across the East-West divide in Jerusalem.*



*Our West Bank training took place in Beit Jala, just yards away from the Wall, where we sang and prayed together one afternoon.*

## Advanced Training 2008 Registration is open!

We invite you to join our 2008 Advanced Training in Compassionate Listening, now open for registration. The training consists of two extended weekends, nine days total with an intimate group of 17-25 people.

Compassionate Listening is a skill set and spiritual practice that calls for deep integration. The purpose of the Advanced Training is to strengthen skills, catalyze personal growth, and offer direction and support in a safe and loving learning community.

Of the 68 people who have participated in our Advanced series to date, many have come with the intention of deepening their skills in order to embody the practice in daily life. Others come with the intention of integrating Compassionate Listening into their work, initiating new programs or projects, or going forward with our Facilitator Certification path. Everyone is welcome.

### **What are the prerequisites?**

The Advanced Training is open to everyone who has taken a 1 or 2-day introductory workshop or participated in a delegation (or will do so by February 2008). The Advanced Training is a prerequisite for our Facilitator Certification program.

### **Set these dates aside:**

**Advanced weekend #1:** February 14-18, 2008 Thursday 4:00 pm - 3:00 Monday;

**Advanced weekend #2:** May 1-5, 2008 (same times)

### **Who will facilitate the training?**

The Series will be taught by a team of our experienced facilitators: Susan Partnow, Brian Berman and Andrea Cohen, and director Leah Green will spend time with the group during the 2nd session (see their bios on our Workshop page on our website). Additional facilitators in training will assist/support.

### **What is the tuition for the series?**

Tuition is offered on a sliding scale of \$1,750 - \$2,400 (no questions asked) and can be made in three installments. A \$300 deposit secures a place in the training. Tuition includes all meals and double room accommodation with the option of singles for a bit more. Those requesting partial scholarships may call our office to inquire.

### **Where will it be held?**

The Advanced Training will be held near Seattle at the beautiful Seabeck retreat center, located at the base of the Olympic Mountains on the Hood Canal.

### **Details/Registration:**

<http://www.compassionatelistening.org/advanced.html>

### *From our graduates:*

*"The exercises were stimulating and gave us a lot to chew on. They moved me and brought me to insight and change quickly. I am filled with awe at the potential power of this work and filled with gratitude for it. It's fabulous!"*

*"Compassionate Listening is a powerful gift to the world, and the process of becoming a Compassionate Listener is an amazing growth experience."*

*"I find Compassionate Listening to be the most valuable work of this sort that I have done. It goes deep, and is not formulaic. I now feel certain I can continue integrating this work into every aspect of my life."*

*"I am changed! And my capability as a leader will expand as a result."*

*"What meant the most to me in the Advanced Training was stepping into the fire and seeking my truth. The space, the permission, the trust—and the accompaniment by my great group."*

## Sally's Corner:

Compassionate Listening is about *empowering individuals to heal polarization and become a powerful force for peace in their daily lives, at home, school, work, and beyond.*



It starts with our introductory workshop: *Healing the World from the Inside Out.*

Lately, many requests for Compassionate Listening have come from communities; religious and spiritual communities, schools, businesses and local government. They tell us they could use help listening and speaking from the heart. Some have large or small-scale conflict and are looking for healing. Others wish to build skills so their communities and work groups can flourish.

Our facilitators are experienced and inspired professionals who excel at their work and can adapt a training to your needs. Leah is now planning her second training for synagogues, helping members to create the safety and structure needed to listen to each other on painful issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. We have similar trainings scheduled in Quaker and Christian communities. Diversity is a great gift when we learn to see the essence of the other, beyond positions and defenses.

Does your community have challenges or conflicts you would like help with? If you'd like to talk about bringing us to your community, please give me a call at 360-297-2280 or send me an email: [sally@compassionatelistening.org](mailto:sally@compassionatelistening.org). We'd love to support your dream.



Steve, Terryll and Henri at the Summer Gathering.

**Thank you!**

**Janet Tu** for the wonderful article about us in the Seattle Times (see the link on our homepage).

**Firedoll Foundation, Friendship Foundation,** and the **Jewish Fund for Justice** for your support for our spring trainings in Israel and Palestine.

**Jean Houston** for including Compassionate Listening taught by **Carol Hwoschinsky** at her School for Social Artistry.

**Stefan Merken and Murray Polner, Dr. Judy Kuriansky,** and **Jennifer Hawthorne** and **Jack Canfield,** for including chapters by Leah Green in their new books.

**Robbie, Emile** and **Joy** for your service on the board. We wish you well with your new endeavors!

**Phyllis Selinker** and **Maria Cook** for joining the board of directors.

**Beverley Neff** and **Phyllis Selinker** for the gifts of your time with our website and database.

**Reena Lazar,** for assisting at the Vancouver training and **Jan Hutton** for assisting in Ann Arbor.

**Aura Hammer, Sylvia Margia,** and the **Women at the Center** in Nazareth for hosting our Israeli trainings.

**Cheri Catt** and **Len Wolf** for their remarkable service and assistance at the trainings in Israel and Palestine.

**Susan Partnow** and **Andrea Cohen** for your October 5th/6th follow-up training in Nazareth for Israelis and Palestinians.

Dear Friends,

Transparency is a value we hold dear in the Compassionate Listening Project. In this spirit, we thought you might like to know about our budget. Our total operating budget for 2007 is \$91,000, making us a very small non-profit organization. We receive no government or corporate funding. As the Director, I raise my salary by teaching, training, and speaking. Our remaining administrative costs are covered through program revenue and donations from individuals and small family foundations. This year, 76% of our total income has come from programs: workshops, training programs, delegations, Summer Gathering, and sales from books and videos. The remaining 24% has come from you, our community of Friends.

We are grateful to you beyond measure. Our Friends have literally helped us keep our doors open, the phone connected, the newsletters printed and mailed, our accounting in meticulous order, our taxes filed, and the website hosted. Because of our community of Friends, we've reached many thousands of people this year through our programs and trainings, talks, articles, newsletters, and website.

If you stand behind our mission of creating a more compassionate world, and it would bring you joy to be a part of our community, we invite you to partner with us.

Your tax-deductible contribution of \$25 or more is deeply appreciated. In addition to helping with the organization, your donation secures you a place in our hearts, and your name on our 2007 *Friends of Compassionate Listening* page on our website. We hope it also brings you pride to know you are an integral part of our work. Thank you so much for your consideration,

*Leah Green, director*

**YES! Count me as a Friend of Compassionate Listening**

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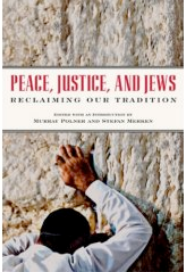
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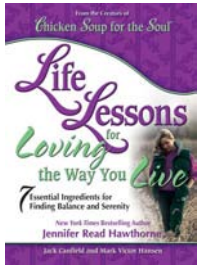
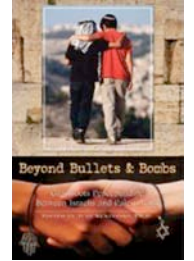


**Our sincere thanks to Stefan Merken and Murray Polner, Dr. Judy Kuriansky, and Jennifer Hawthorne and Jack Canfield, for including chapters by TCLP director Leah Green in their new books (you can find them on Amazon):**



**Peace, Justice, and Jews: Reclaiming Our Tradition:** In this landmark collection of contemporary Jewish thought, Polner and Merken have drawn on the work of a wide variety of thinkers and activists in Israel and the US including charity workers, political demonstrators, conscientious objectors, prison workers, animal rights advocates, mothers and fathers, refuseniks, rabbis, soldiers, journalists, and professors who pursue human rights as the key to security, a view nourished during two millennia of the Diaspora, and which has proudly seen Jews at the forefront of struggles for civil rights, labor rights, anti-militarism, and compassion for the most vulnerable among us: the poor, the hungry, the helpless, the oppressed.

**Beyond Bullets and Bombs:** In the midst of ongoing Israeli-Palestinian conflict, civil war, and political discord, courageous civilians from both sides are working together toward mutual understanding and peace. Israeli Jews and Arabs, and Palestinian Muslims and Christians, young and old, men and women, are cooperating in grassroots people-to-people projects, developing educational programs and creating activities to bridge their differences. Beyond Bullets and Bombs showcases such impressive and important projects that deserve more support and world attention. In 40 captivating chapters, experts tell intriguing personal stories interwoven with psychosocial models and principles proving how people living in hostile cultures can establish peace.



**Life Lessons for Loving the Way You Live:** In this inspiring yet practical book, the authors share some of their most important lessons to help us adjust our attitudes, feel more balanced and experience the serenity that comes from doing and being our best—no matter what the outcome. Powerful stories illustrate each lesson, with themes such as:

- feeling more at home in the world
- creating happiness from the inside out
- turning fear into courage
- transforming your life through real honesty
- letting go of judgments
- leading with the heart.

*Forty-three people came together from N. America for our Summer Gathering - a beautiful, inspired weekend in a learning community of compassionate listeners. We hope you will join us next summer - August 1-3, near Seattle.*

Photo by Leah Green



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