

The Crazy Wisdom Bookstore Salon on Miracles: An Experiment in Community and Inquiry


By Lucinda R. Kurtz, Salon Facilitator

When an idea is ripe in the collective unconscious, it is ready to be plucked and savored by us all. And so it has been with the Crazy Wisdom Bookstore Salon. Tapping into a long tradition of communal inquiry, curious Ann Arborites braved the elements and cold winter nights between January and April to gather at the Tea Room. With a deep intention to create a safe space to explore new ideas and express our hopes and fears, we built a strong foundation for an evolving community through dialogue, inquiry, and respect for diverse perspectives.

The focus of the four winter Salons was on miracles in their myriad manifestations. Each of the four different programs looked at miracles from a different perspective and invited speakers to share their insights into the meaning of the word "miracle" and their own experience of miracles. These thoughtful comments then sparked an exploration into the complexities of the topic by the Salon participants. The audience ranged from 35 to 65 folks of all ages and stages of life, some standing or sitting on the floor, comfortable in big overstuffed arm chairs, or squeezed into folding chairs by the size of the gathering. Some Salon participants became devotees and came to each Salon; others came to one or two Salons on topics that most interested them. There was a palpable excitement at each Salon, an expectancy that comes from recognition that together we have created a container for new possibilities to emerge.

The form of a Salon as used by the ancient Greeks and the 17th and 18th century Europeans seemed like an ideal format for the creation of community and the examination of new ideas. As I investigated the use of the Salon, I discovered its profound influence in disseminating radical theories that ultimately contributed to a complete social and political revolution on the Continent. In the early part of the twentieth century Mabel Dodge Luhan and Gertrude Stein brought this form to our country and gave it a uniquely American flavor. Eric Utne, publisher of the Utne Reader, revived the form in the early 1990's and received a powerful response from communities nationwide.

Our first Salon in January was on "Miracles in Healing" with guests: Sara Warber, MD, Family Physician and Co-Director of the Complementary and Alternative Medical Research Center at the University of Michigan; Coco Newton, MPH, RD, and Roger Newton, PhD, President and CEO, Esperion Therapeutics, Inc.; and James A. Arond-Thomas, MD, Specialist in Behavioral Medicine and Oncology. This was a truly remarkable evening, empowered not only by the inspiring and honest communications of our invited guests, but also by the deep sharing of miracles in healing from so many members of the Salon community. We had succeeded in creating a safe container



The Crazy Wisdom Bookstore Salon - Fall 2003

Thursday, September 18: Journeys of our Spiritual Leaders
 Thursday, October 16: Varieties of Spiritual Paths
 Thursday, November 20: Wisdom of our Elders

Upcoming Speakers include:
(Clockwise from upper left) Aura Glaser, Brian O'Donnell, Barbara Brodsky, Max Heirich, Elizabeth Alberda (playing pan pipes), Dorothy Coyne, Bronwen Gates, and Michael Andes. Salon Facilitator Lucinda Kurtz is pictured in the middle.

(For the full program schedule, see ad on page 3 or listing in the Spiritual Development section of this issue)

ies 'miracles?' Or are they natural events that are statistically uncommon and extremely complex, but which scientists shall eventually explain when science knows enough?" Every guest related in their own unique way the manner in which they experienced the miraculous in their own personal and/or professional life. Sara Warber found the creation of the Complementary and Alternative Medical Research Center a miracle, a coming together of critical forces in the exact right moment to allow for the manifestation of a far-reaching and transformational idea. And on a personal note, she shared the tender final year of her mother's life and the miracle of healing that occurred within the family as they held each other in love and compassion.

emotional and physical transformation in his son that he was able to be with us and attest to something beyond our mental models and current understanding of what is possible in the healing realm.

James Around-Thomas shared his own personal healing journey, the insights it provided him and the courage it gave him to completely shift not only his approach to medicine, but also the location of his practice. He moved from a very scientific, research-oriented focus to one that seeks a personalized approach to health and wellness with the goal of empowering the whole person and providing support for many people diagnosed with cancer who are determined to enter into the annals of the "remarkably recovered."

The setting of these Salons, in the moment in history where the engines of war and the outcry for peace churned around us, added another powerful energy to the passion of the community. January and February of 2003 saw the steady and unsettling escalation toward the war in Iraq. Our gathering in February followed massive world Peace Marches from New York to London, the Brandenburg Gate in Berlin, to Auckland, Capetown, Manilla, and Seoul, Korea. The Salon, "Miracles in Holy Scripture that Inspire Hope for World Peace," provided a way for those of us present to participate in the massive human cry for peace that was emanating from every corner of the globe.

Listening to Rabbi Elliot Ginsburg, Reverend Linda Dominik, and Imam Harry Bissell, we were able to see the potential inherent in the Jewish, Christian, and Muslim faiths to provide a pathway to peace. Together we held a powerful hope for a peaceful solution to the conflict, yet

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to hold intimate revelations of deep sadness as well as awe and amazement at healings that had taken place in our lives and the lives of our loved ones.

To initiate our conversation, I shared a section from the Foreword of Caryle Hirshberg and Marc Barasch's book, Remarkable Recovery: What Extraordinary Healings Tell Us About Getting Well and Staying Well. In the Foreword, Larry Dossey, asks the question, "Are remarkable recover-

Coco and Roger Newton shared the amazing healing journey they experienced with their young son who seemingly overnight developed symptoms of disturbing and debilitating psychological syndromes. Their journey took them through the traditional medical establishment and out to alternative healers and healing modalities that ultimately provided a release and healing in a most unexpected way. Roger stated that it was only because he was actually present at the healing and witnessed the powerful

also expressed our misgivings at the seeming dissolution of bonds between peoples in the Middle East and globally and the lack of a coherent and peaceful vision of peace in our political leaders.

I shared a passage from Bruce Feiler's Abraham: A Journey to the Heart of Three Faiths that seemed to capture the expectancy of the moment and the challenge before us: "You could not have written a script that would say that today, after thousands of years, with all our technology and sophistication, we would still be fighting a war over this place, over the legacy of Abraham. But the reason is that this is the place of relationship. This is not only the

shared their deep knowledge and appreciation of the lessons and message of the Course. Lucie took us experientially into the essence of the Course, to begin removing our blocks to the awareness of love's presence in our lives. She helped us understand the Course as a method of training our mind away from the "normal" thinking of the world, from a thought system based on fear to one based on love.

And what moment more poignant could there be to look at this tendency we have as human beings to react in fear rather than respond in love and acceptance than during this week in March when President Bush announced his

been able to create together. I felt remarkably grateful and humble to be in the presence of so many souls willing to share the sacred moments in their lives with our community. I listened to the unfolding of stories of healing, discovery, journeys, death of loved ones, and rebirth. The whole panoply of life's transformational moments seemed to be revealed. We concluded this Salon, as we had ended each one, with the participants standing in a circle, acknowledging silently the contributions each one of us had made to the creation of this special community.

There was a strong consensus among the members of the group that we wanted to continue meeting and exploring together in the Fall. We discussed what issues hold the most passion for us. I distilled a focus for our Fall Salon series from the wealth of ideas presented and hope that I accurately captured the essence of the group's will. Our Fall Salon series will focus on the variety of spiritual paths and the journeys of our spiritual teachers and elders. Please see the announcement of the Salon in the Spiritual Development section, or the ad on page 3, of this issue of *The Crazy Wisdom Community Journal* for more details. Again, we have a remarkable group of men and women from the Ann Arbor area who will challenge us to probe more deeply into the complexities of our ideas and experience. It has been my great privilege and honor to facilitate this Salon where I have met people of such depth and expansiveness. Please join us the third Thursdays in September, October, and November as we continue to deepen our inquiry and develop our community.

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spot where it is possible to connect with God, it's the spot where you can connect with God only if you understand what it means to connect with one another. So the question is not whether God can bring peace into the world. The question is: Can we?" And so we as Salon participants struggled with this challenge in the microcosm of the world that we were creating in the present moment, trying to model a new way of relating by bringing together Christians, Muslims, Jews, Buddhists, atheists, and people of all faiths.

This fundamental question carried us forward to our next Salon in March, A Course in Miracles. Lucie Nisson, MSW, a psychological-spiritual consultant and David Bell, Minister of the Interfaith Center for Spiritual Growth,

intentions to forcefully enter Iraq. The safety created in the space of the Salon allowed us to collectively experience the intensity of our distress as we all prayed for a miracle. The Course defines a miracle as "a divine healing of human perception." We acknowledged that here in this moment we were creating love and healing in our own lives as we connected with each other. And this is the miracle that we could create together.

Our final Salon in April called upon the Salon community itself to come forward with experiences of the miraculous in our own lives. The Salon, "Your Personal Experiences with Miracles," brought together many former Salon participants and a number of new people, all interested in sharing special moments in our lives in the intimate setting we had