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No longer silent

Nine followers of various world faiths, including six Flagstaff authors, share their spiritual journeys in a new book on religious diversity.

By BETSEY BRUNER
Arts, Culture & Community Editor
Saturday, December 20, 2008

For local author Laurent Weichberger, his quest to spread the word about religious diversity began in earnest after the events of Sept. 11, 2001 when he began to hear reports about violence perpetrated on innocent people of Eastern heritage living in the U.S.

"For example, I was in touch with a woman named Miriam," Weichberger recalled. "She told me of a 6-year-old boy, Yussuf, who was from a Muslim family, and who the day after the attacks, while at school a gang of first-graders beat Yussuf so badly they cracked his skull, blaming him for the attacks, while a teacher stood by watching. Yussuf went into a coma, but he survived." In Phoenix, an owner of a convenience store, a Sikh, was killed simply because he was wearing a turban.

FOLLOWING HIS DHARMA

These and other stories led Weichberger, a devotee for more than 20 years of the Persian spiritual leader Meher Baba, to take action against religious intolerance.

"All of this deep ignorance fueled by hatred convinced me that I could not remain silent," he said. "I felt it was my duty (or dharma) to speak out against such brutal reactions, and offer this dark world the light of wisdom that I have come to experience with Baba, and through the various faiths that I have come to know and love."

Weichberger reached out to representatives of world faiths, many living in the Flagstaff area, and asked them to stand with him and share with the community the living experience of their spiritual path.

The result was the well-attended February 2002 "Eastern Heritage Symposium: Beads on One String," which was convened at Cline Library on the NAU campus.

COMPRESSED UNDERSTANDING

Through the ensuing years, Weichberger, a native of Manhattan, heard requests for a continuing interfaith dialogue in the spirit of the symposium.

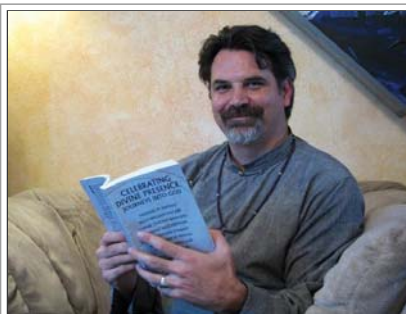
"While it was not practical to 'take our show on the road,' we could at least make an effort to share this compressed understanding in a book form, and send the book into the world," Weichberger explained. "So, I contacted the original presenters and asked them to write a chapter each, for the book."

That book is "Celebrating Divine Presence: Journeys into God," which has just been published and will be available for purchase today (see box).

Nine contributing authors are featured, including six who currently reside in Flagstaff. Of the other three, one used to live in Flagstaff, and moved to Kentucky, one lives in Tucson, and the last lives in New Jersey.

New chapters on topics not covered in "Beads on One String," such as a chapter on Listening and another on Judaism, are now part of the new book.

Each of the contributing authors was asked to present their faith perspective in terms understandable to those unfamiliar with that faith.



Laurent Weichberger holds the first copy received of "Celebrating Divine Presence: Journeys into God," a collaborative work featuring writings from nine contributing authors who share their spiritual wisdom, including six residents of Flagstaff. More books will arrive today and will be sold locally. (Betsey Bruner/Arizona Daily Sun)

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- Three-day weekends for City Hall?
★★★★☆ (32 ratings)
- Stranded traveler fond of Flagstaff
★★★☆☆ (55 ratings)

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- Specter leaves GOP for Democrats (29)
- Page Bashas' to close this summer (24)
- Torture statement restores credibility (24)
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- Pita Jungle restaurant to open May 14 (21)
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"In addition to discussing the faith itself, I asked each author to share their walk in that faith tradition, which brings the richness of their experience to the feet of the reader with much tenderness," Weichberger said.

A TIMELY MESSAGE

The timing of the book release is fortuitous, as the message of spiritual diversity it brings is more relevant than ever.

"As we saw from the events in November in Mumbai, India, the work to dispel this deep ignorance and hatred is far from over," Weichberger said. "This book is important because it is time for the world to move past narrow distinctions and prejudices and to realize that all faiths are indeed expressions of One God. The world doesn't need any more holy wars; we need love and a real experience of Oneness."

Without deeper understanding and the honoring of diversity of faith and culture, the world will continue to spiral out of control, until it goes up in flames, he added.

"At the end of the day, we are all really speaking about the same things: Love, obedience and joyful surrender to the Divine," Weichberger said.

Betsey Bruner can be reached at 556-2255 or by e-mail at bbruner@azdailysun.com.

Infobox

WHAT: "Celebrating Divine Presence: Journeys into God," a new book from London: Companion Books, 2008, soft cover, 391 pages, ISBN: 0-9525097-9-2 By Laurent Weichberger, Yaakov Weintraub,

Lopon Tsultim Wangmo, Karl Moeller, Ameeta Vora, Haring Singh Khalsa, Thomas M. Knoles, Kelly W. McCabe and Mary Esther Stewart. With a Foreword by Don E. Stevens and an Introduction by Jane Chin, Ph.D.

WHERE: Locally it will be on sale starting today at Sacred Rites, 8 N. San Francisco St., call 556-0018 or visit www.sacredrites.com. Also available in January 2009 via amazon.com and barnesandnoble.com

COST: Retail price, \$19.95

INFO: Contact Laurent Weichberger at laurent@ompoin.com

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alison g. wrote on Jan 7, 2009 10:17 AM:
 " In my opinion—and experience—"God" is not about worldly power, opinions, differences, belief systems, or more importantly the projection of beliefs onto others. God is THE ultimate goal & the reality within each of us that we, individually, must discover how to find. But we can help each other through our earned knowledge and experience. This is when walking together as brothers & sisters, regardless of choosen spiritual/religious tools, can assist another in their journey toward God. Thus, all efforts become more blessed both, individually and collectively. Kudos to the authors of this book who reach out their hands & their love, not only to those of the same faith but rather to all, in this time where poverty, greed, & desparation appear to run ever so rampant. "

mira wrote on Dec 30, 2008 11:28 PM:
 " to those of you who say that this article is invalid and that disagree with the title of it. Or even perhaps think it is not worth reading, i simply wanted to say that all religions have their extremists but those select few do not represent of all of the others that follow that faith or religion. Do i think we should go and "...hug all Muslims.." no, as i do not think we should hug all Christians or pagans or Buddhists.I do not think you should hug any body if you do not feel inclined to but i do think we need to put our religious dogma behind us and stop acting like a bunch of spoiled brats and finally accept each other for who they are. "

Rev. Edward Flanagan wrote on Dec 26, 2008 5:31 PM:
 " I'm not commenting on the book -- which I suspect will more than fulfill its promise. What I find lacking is this review, a

superficial veneer, a shallow fly-over which gives absolutely nothing of substance regarding what I suspect is a most important work for our day and age. fr. ed flanagan, los angeles "

Reagan Crowley wrote on Dec 26, 2008 3:52 PM:

" I am very impressed with the spirit and motivations behind this book. It is timely and, in my opinion, tenderly aware of what is really important. Way to go! "

Laurent Weichberger wrote on Dec 25, 2008 8:16 PM:

" Dear Steve Lowen,

In fact, I started as an atheist in New York City, until age 17 when I met Meher Baba in a spiritual experience. So, of course I recognize and honor your viewpoint. Atheisim , reason and logic all have their place.

What resides deep in your heart?

Love and more love,

Laurent "

Steve Lowen wrote on Dec 22, 2008 6:05 AM:

" Wonder if this author will recognize those of us 'non-believers' who follow reason and logic, not dogma.? "

Steve wrote on Dec 21, 2008 9:58 AM:

" Silent? Do you call the hijackings silent? Taking down the world trade centers silent? Cutting the head off of a live American Kidnapped worker silent, videotaping it and sending the video to his family silent?

Who made that headline? "

Don wrote on Dec 21, 2008 9:01 AM:

" This is progress of sorts. After much self-study and life experience, I realized long ago that no single religion has the sum total of Truth. To even begin to come close, all religions must open themselves to the truths of the others. There must be a coming together, and that can only happen when each sect sets aside it's superiority complex and accepts itself as part of the whole cloth of existence.

The concept of different religions being at loggerheads is ridiculous. Follow the teaching of Mohandas Gandhi when he said, "The friend you must cultivate is that part of your enemy that knows the truth." In this way, your enemy can become your friend and ally.

Namaste! "

iah a. wrote on Dec 20, 2008 8:31 PM:

" Laurent Weichberger should be given much praise for his works of goodness, teaching those what should be common sense of loving one and other..

this is a new era for keeping an open mind and understand the true meaning of the word "diversity" "

Flag wrote on Dec 20, 2008 5:08 PM:

" Yep, we need to hug all Muslims...what trite..... "

Alice wrote on Dec 20, 2008 2:44 PM:

" Outstanding article...as the tears rolled down my face, I thanked my Lord for my salvation and for all those who participated in this article...This is something that should be addressed each day...God Bless this newspaper for printing this article and all who contributed to the book...Merry Christ-mas and and truly a blessed New Year....

Alice "

Marisa wrote on Dec 20, 2008 1:22 PM:

" ALL religions have people among them who torment, or even murder, those who don't believe the way they do..."in the name of God, Allah, whomever" - extremists, of course - but undoubtedly, from knowing and listening to various people from various religions, it's evident that there are also those among the various religious communities (including Christianity) who would act this way if they thought they could get away with it. Thank goodness for the LAWS of the land, and thank goodness for people who realize that this country is and should remain secular - and who still have the courage to think for themselves and not the way some preacher/priest/bishop/rabbi/imam tells them to think. "

penny wrote on Dec 20, 2008 10:45 AM:

" I think that it would be ideal if people would broaden their minds and believe in unity and oneness. I believe we are all trying to get to the same place we are all just traveling different paths. Unfortunately there are those who believe their way is the only way. We saw this back in the Hitler days. We saw this back in the days of slavery. Unfortunately we will probably see this until days end time. Somehow, somewhere some people thought that it was okay to belittle others and that if someone was different from them to cast them out and put them down treat them less than an animal. These groups grew and continue to grow out of fear. Instead of people standing up for their rights and what they truly believe, people fear that their family will suffer and hardship will fall upon them. I believe it is time to trust in God and stand in faith. God will provide, we may suffer some but in the end we may empower others to stand in faith and together we may conquer Hate once and for all. "

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Comments are not always reviewed immediately, especially when posted on weekends or nights.

We reserve the right to delete any comments that, upon further review, fail to meet our guidelines.

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