



C a r a v a n s

Winter 2014

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

*Life nowhere appears so brave, so bright, so full of oracle
and miracle as in the desert.*

Edward Abbey

Dear Friends,

2013 was full of creativity. We finally found our stride as writers, created Sand and Sky Publishing, and designed our own logo. And we proudly present our first book, *Season of Glad Songs: A Christmas Anthology*. Self-publishing is a joyous adventure! Both of us wrote the book and edited it; Tessa chose the art, compiled the rituals and blessings, did lay-out and design; Fr. Dave wrote poetry, did the typesetting and computer graphics. We love being part of the whole process.

Season of Glad Songs

The book is divided into six parts, one for each dimension of the Christmas season: Advent, Winter Solstice, Christmas, New Year's, Epiphany, and Candlemas. Nearly 200 illustrated pages include contemplative essays and poetry, a blessing or ritual for each season, prayers and practical advice, even "reviews" of our favorite Christmas books, music, and movies. We have worked hard to make *Glad Songs* ready for you in time for this Christmas. You can order it from Amazon, of course, but it helps us more if you order from CreateSpace.

Going out Is Going in

We were also productive in other ways this past year. In late August we introduced the first Camino de Crestone, reflecting on the meaning of walking on pilgrimage to sacred sites throughout Crestone's varied landscapes. John Muir summed it up best: "I only went out for a walk, then stayed out till sundown, for going out, I found, was really going in." According to poet Bliss Carmen, "The benefit of out-of-doors is not that it takes us away from civilization but that it restores us to ourselves."

One of our greatest joys is hosting Colorado College religion classes in our hermitages, sharing our contemplative life with eager students. We also spoke on two occasions at the Unity Church in Taos, New Mexico.



The Desert Foundation is an informal circle of friends exploring the wisdom of the world's deserts with a special focus on peace, respect, and reconciliation between the three Abrahamic traditions, which grow out of the desert: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. We are a 501 (c)(3) organization founded in June 2005 by Tessa Bielecki and Fr. Dave Denny. Contributions are tax-deductible.

Desert Tracks and Web Site

Because of our intense focus on *Glad Songs*, we have not been able to update the Desert Foundation web site, and we apologize. But this has given us the opportunity to think more deeply about starting over with an entirely new design, which will be our first priority in 2014. What would you like to see on the new site? Which sections do you read most often? Do you subscribe to *Desert Tracks*, which sends you emails about new updates?

Seeds, Seasons, and Celebration

We facilitated the annual retreat for Colorado spiritual directors in September at Sacred Heart Retreat House in Sedalia, Colorado. We called it *Sand and Sky: Landscape, Seasons, and Spirit*.

Participants especially loved our new liturgies on “Landscape and Soulscape,” “Celebrating the Sabbath,” and “*Convivencia: A Prayer Service for Openness and Forgiveness*.” Fr. Dave recited Sura 97 from the Qur’an in Arabic. “Primordial Words and Symbols” focused on light, the eagle, the door, and silence: not the absence of noise but the silence *under* the absence of noise, the presence of something much deeper.

We’ve been invited to present a similar retreat called *Seeds, Seasons, and Celebration* May 23-25, 2014 at Shambhala Mountain Center in Red Feather Lakes, Colorado. We will also give a class called *Fire and Light: Wisdom of the Christian Mystics* at St. Edward the Confessor’s Church in Dana Point, California April 7-10, 2014. Please join us for one or both of these events.

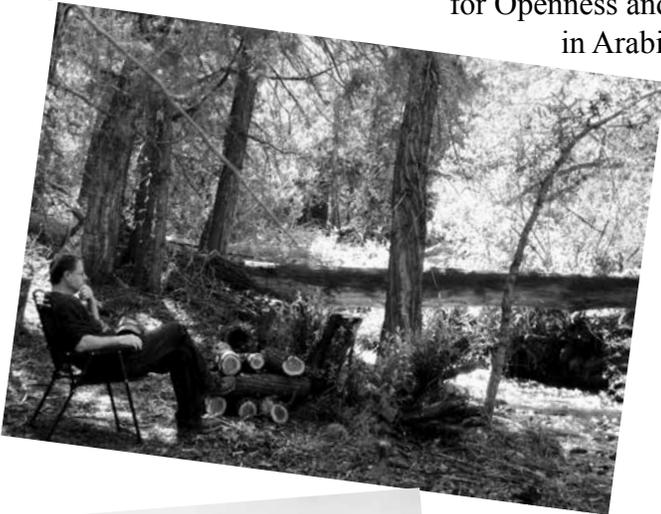
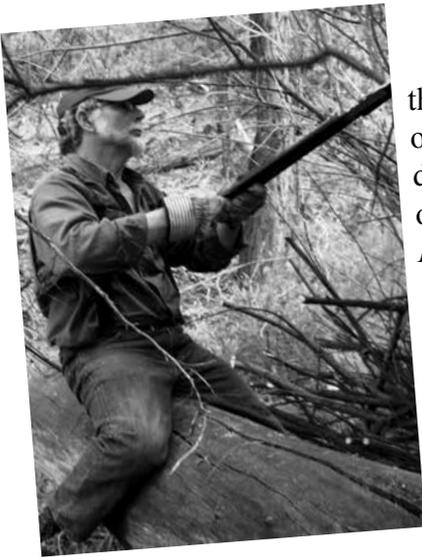
Would you like us to give a retreat, workshop or evening lecture in your area? Are you willing to help us make the contacts, find the venue, and gather participants?

Fire and Flood

It’s ironic that we began last summer’s *Caravans* by telling you about our “unusually wet spring” which brought “excellent drought relief.” Shortly later, our valley was struck by lightning, and five major wildfires began burning to the west of us.

Strong winds blew heavy smoke across the valley every afternoon. Levels of air pollution became so unhealthy, Colorado Public Health advised us to stay inside with all the windows closed: not easy in the heat wave. We could see no farther than a half mile in front of us. The skies darkened every afternoon, and we had to turn on our lights before 5 pm. It “rained” so much ash, we needed to sweep off our porches each morning. We packed our evacuation bags. Suzanne Frazier, a generous friend north of Denver, let us store treasured archives of photos and writings in her basement.

Then the floods came, and she had to move those fifteen banker boxes to the second floor of the house because her area was on Evacuation Alert. Thank you, Suzanne! In Crestone we had far less rain than other parts of the state. Yet San Isabel Creek ran higher than we’ve ever seen it.



From the top: Fr. Dave straddles a log across the creek to prune away leafy debris. Will Pascone from Providence, R.I., sits beside the same log, enjoying quiet time in the “Park” he helped create. Tessa gave a women’s retreat called “Something Spacious” in Orange County, California with Donna Couch and Pegge Erkeneff, who is also on the Desert Foundation’s Board of Directors

In between working on the Christmas book, with the help of two friends willing to haul logs and slash, we stepped up our fire mitigation, pruning and thinning more trees around our hermitages. We opened up an entire area to the east, so Tessa now has a clear view of the mountains. We also created another open area near the creek (we call it the "Park!"), where we can sit on days of solitude, the flowing water enhancing our prayer and reflection.

Forty Years of Collaboration

This past year we realized that we have worked together for over forty years, beginning as monks in the Spiritual Life Institute, where we edited *Desert Call* and teamed up on workshops and retreats around the country. After leaving monastic life in 2005, we created the Desert Foundation, *Caravans* and our web site, new retreats and a course on Desert Spirituality for Colorado College, and now Sand and Sky Publishing. In 2015 we will celebrate the Tenth Anniversary of the Desert Foundation. And soon, after *Season of Glad Songs* is finished, we'll begin working on our memoirs. What a fruitful collaboration for so many decades!

We are grateful to each one of you for both your spiritual and financial support all these years, which makes so much productivity possible. We cannot continue without it.

Hope you enjoy "Season of Glad Songs!"
-- Tessa & Fr. Dave

Songs Glad and Sad

As we approach Advent and Christmas, our new book is a **glad song**. But our present financial situation is a **sad song**: the Desert Foundation cannot cover our monthly stipends for November and December. After we fill our propane tanks for the winter and pay for this issue of *Caravans*, our bank account is close to empty.

We are **deeply grateful** for your support and continue to count on you in order to pursue our writing life, update the web site, and keep our retreat and peacemaking outreach rooted in desert silence and solitude. We keep our budget simple in order to survive.

We are especially grateful to you who offer **monthly donations**. Just \$10.00 monthly adds up to \$120.00 annually, a substantial help to our small-but-loving labor. If you are unable to help, please **pass along** *Caravans* to a friend who may appreciate our message and wish to help. Maybe you have a reading or prayer group that will pool resources to make a donation. Or invite us to give a lecture or retreat. **Buy books** from CreateSpace.com for Christmas presents. The more the merrier!

In the meantime, we pledge to continue our **dedication** to two passions: sharing what we have learned from our desert experience, working and praying for peace in our Abrahamic family.

Author Msgr. Joseph Champlin has a Muslim friend who loves to say, "There are only two kinds of people—those I love and those I don't know." A commentary on Sura 49:13 of the Qur'an asserts that God made different tribes and nations so that our difference "should lead us to get to know each other, make us interesting to each other, learn from each other and be challenged to compete in doing good." The Desert Foundation is dedicated to helping us get to know one another in the hope that love may follow. It is wonderful to be involved in such work. **Thank you** for your commitment, and please stick with us!

The Geologist of the Soul:

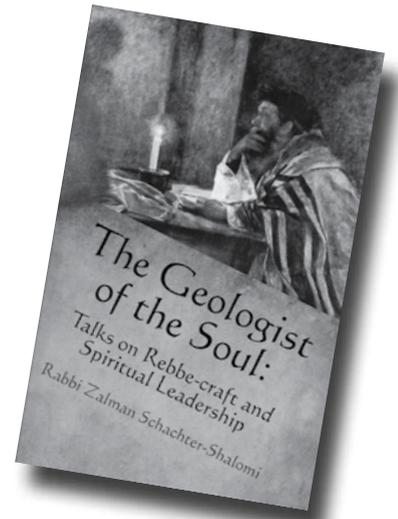
Talks on Rebbe-craft and Spiritual Leadership

Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Edited by Netanel Miles-Yepetz

Albion-Andalus Books, Boulder, Colorado, 2012, 132 pages

Reviewed by Tessa Bielecki



“My rebbe was a geologist of the soul,” said the seventh Lubavitcher Rebbe, Rabbi Menachem Mendel Schneerson (1902-1944). “There are so many treasures in the earth: gold, silver, diamonds. But if you don’t know where to dig, you’ll only find dirt, rocks, and mud. The rebbe can tell you where to dig, and what to dig for, but the digging you must do yourself.”(xi)

Reb Netanel Miles-Yepetz edited this collection of talks by Rabbi Zalman, founder of the Jewish Renewal movement and one of the world’s leading authorities on Hasidism. Reb Zalman discusses Jewish spiritual leadership from the perspective of the Hasidic Rebbe, applying traditional Hasidic models and teachings to contemporary situations.

He covers spiritual guidance, the teacher-student relationship, the efficacy of intercessory prayer, scales of moral and faith development, the House of Hillel (loving-kindness) and the House of Shammai (discipline), the value of spiritual imagination, intuition, mentors, “intimate apprenticeship” and the importance of first being a disciple and not a “spiritual loner.” In the discussion of spiritual typologies, I was charmed by the descriptions of Jesus as a “viscerotone,” Buddha as a “cerebrotone,” and Moses as a “somatotone.”

I got confused with some of the Hebrew, the Four Worlds, and the Tree of Life. Otherwise I found a wealth of inspiration in these informal talks. It felt as if I were sitting at Reb Zalman’s feet, listening to stories from all the great Hasidic lineages, experiencing Reb Zalman himself as a *butzina kaddisha*, a “holy candle,” full of light, wisdom, humor, and compassion. I was touched by the humble accounts of his own painful failures.

The strongest talk is the last, a summary dialogue between the two rebbes. Through Reb Netanel’s clear insights and questions, we understand the difference between a rabbi and a Rebbe and a spiritual director and a Rebbe: the Rebbe and his Hasid have a deeper “soul-affinity” and a “contract of intimacy and concern” that ideally focuses on spiritual development yet may also involve “more mundane concerns – children, the cows and the chickens.”

Reb Netanel points out that “a Rebbe’s mastery is not one of *information*, but of *attunement*.” Reb Zalman concludes: “Attunement is not verbal, it’s not left brain, so there is no way to write about that or get it through reading alone. No, not everyone can become a Rebbe, and certainly not by education; one needs something from *Above* to fulfill this mission.” (120)

The book ends with an announcement of the promising on-line *Geologists of the Soul Forum* (www.geologistsofthesoul.com), a series of interviews moderated by Amitai Zachary Malone. The first interview is with Reb Netanel himself who deals expertly with the uses and abuses of religion and spiritual leadership today.

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Seeds, Seasons, and Celebration

May 23-25, 2014

Shambhala Mountain Center
Red Feather Lakes, Colorado

Celebrate late spring in the mountains. How does the outer landscape reflect your inner landscape? Explore the sacred in the ordinary, the role of poetry, and the diverse weather you may encounter throughout the mystical seasons of your life. This interspiritual weekend draws on the wisdom traditions of the Abrahamic peoples who emerged from the desert: Jews, Christians, and Muslims, in an effort to move beyond fear of contamination to vibrant cross-fertilization. It weaves together lecture and discussion, silent meditation and personal sharing, hiking the land and journaling. Saturday evening's session in the Great Stupa focuses on the presenters' rich experience of Buddhist-Christian dialogue, especially during Naropa Institute's pioneer dialogues in the 1980s.

For information and registration visit www.shambhalamountain.org or call 1-888-788-7721.



Fire and Light

Wisdom of the Christian Mystics

April 7-10, 2014

St. Edward the Confessor Church, Dana Point, CA

What is Christian Mysticism? Why is it relevant for us today? How does the wisdom of the Christian mystics help us practically in our daily lives? This four-day course focuses on earthy mysticism, mysticism of the body, the mysticism of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, Celtic mysticism, the mysticism of St. Francis, St. Hildegard and Carmelite mystics St. Teresa of Avila and St. John of the Cross, and includes meditations from their mystical writings. For information, call 949-496-6011.



Season of Glad Songs

A Christmas Anthology

by Tessa Bielecki & David Denny

\$20.00

Imagine a quiet Advent sitting beside a crackling fire preparing for a festive and sacred Twelve Days of Christmas. The authors take you there and beyond. There's something for everyone: young or old, whether you go to church or not. The tone is mystical *and* down-to-earth. Poetry, illustrations and essays, rituals and blessings, prayers and practical advice, even book, music and movie reviews help you celebrate a soulful season of glad songs, from the dark stillness of Advent through Christmas, the New Year and Epiphany, on to the welcome light of a candle on a cold February night. Order from CreateSpace.com or Amazon.com. All proceeds support the Desert Foundation.

Sand & Sky
Publishing

The Desert Foundation • PO Box 1000 • Crestone, CO • 81131



Star Thistle

David Denny

The camels get a lot of credit:
A cold coming they had
And pounding heat. But they came and they went.

Me, I sometimes stop and stare
At a star no longer there.

I haven't traveled much
Since that run to the Nile.
And after, he didn't stray far from the shop

Until he fled to the dust
And came back lean and restless.
I took him to towns, the hills, the lake.

He loved figs and knew
That I love thistle buds.
He liked to tease me, so he'd say

"I remember you when you
Were nothing but rabbit ears
And rickety stick-legs." (Of course

He didn't know me then;
I remember him in diapers.)
He never struck me; he cleaned my hooves.

After what they did
To him I wanted to die.
But that's the good thing about

Being asinine:

Yes, I sometimes stop
And stare at a star no longer there

And these days I'm dumb enough
To see starlight in
A thistle blossom and I eat it.

I may walk on, or stop
And stare at a stalk and taste
A star on my tongue, like honey or fig.

Merry Christmas, Happy Hanukkah and Happy New Year
from the Desert Foundation!

Leslie McNamara, an artist who lives in Santa Fe, has been our friend for almost fifty years. She created this donkey-star watercolor as a Christmas card for us in 2012. Tessa asked Fr. Dave to create a poem inspired by the art, and he wrote "Star Thistle."