

What Makes You Come Alive: A Spiritual Walk with Howard Thurman. By Lerita Coleman Brown, Minneapolis: Broadleaf Books, 2023, 213 pps.

What gives you joy? What is your passion? I have been asked these questions on and off over the years by counselors, spiritual directors, colleagues, and companions. Now, thanks to an invitation from Lerita Coleman Brown, by way of an introduction to Howard Thurman, I have a new take on that query using the words of Thurman, “*What Makes You Come Alive?*” Lerita Coleman Brown answers the challenging call to engage what makes her come alive: sharing the wisdom of Howard Thurman with others. She presents the work, in the words of Belden C. Lane, Emeritus Faculty at Saint Louis University in St Louis Missouri, as an engaged author, weaving aspects of her own spiritual walk with the spiritual walk of Howard Thurman, the twentieth century philosopher, theologian, educator, preacher, mystic and author. Through this book, we learn how one person’s spiritual journey, Howard Thurman, can be a source of sustenance, affirmation, strength, and wisdom for those who follow, Lerita Coleman Brown and you and me.

For the neophyte of Howard Thurman, Brown’s text serves as an introduction to his life, work, wisdom, and spirituality. For those familiar with Howard Thurman, Brown’s work serves as an invitation to engage more deeply his spiritual practices. Aptly pulling on original sources and secondary texts written by scholars of Thurman, Brown surfaces and discusses critical aspects of Thurman’s integrated spirituality which lead the reader to understand a man who lived toward being alive each and every day.

Howard Thurman understood that coming alive began with stillness, silence and solitude; by “center[ing] down” (p. 25). He developed the art of centering down early on by seeking the Divine in nature, knowing in his center that he—and in turn, everyone—is God’s Beloved, and recognizing more and more the actions of grace in the everyday nudges of the Divine as his attentiveness grew. He practiced the religion *of* Jesus, not the one *about* Jesus (p. 99). In doing so he profoundly understood the sustenance and empowerment it offered all the vulnerable, the marginalized and the dispossessed and, as a result he lived into and became a source for the compassionate Christ.

Thurman’s everyday mysticism carried a both/and stance: it was both an individual encounter with God and one that led to the individual in community. His practice of stillness in the Divine, silence before the Divine and solitude with the Divine, sustained him and compelled him to respond in the world for the world as a “sacred activist” (p. 153) and as one having been mentored to mentor others into coming alive.

By touching on each of these core practices of Howard Thurman’s spirituality and reflecting periodically in light of her own life, Brown invites us to consider engaging these practices in our own life. As already noted, this volume provides thoughtful challenge for both the neophyte as well as those who already know something of the mystic Howard Thurman. Brown offers questions for reflection and suggests steps to live into being alive engaging the spiritual practices of Thurman at the end of each chapter.

Those who face marginalization, doubt their worth, desire to draw closer to God’s embrace, and those who walk with them as counselors, spiritual directors, colleagues, and

companions will find this book a worthy introduction to the mystic Howard Thurman as well as a source for sustenance and growth toward living fully the life each of us is called to lead. Dr. Lerita Coleman Brown's work serves as a unique contribution to the corpus of both the thought and study of Howard Thurman as well as contemporary spiritual literature.

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