***“We must respond to impressions no longer from the vantage point of personality but from love of being present.”***

de Salzman, The Reality of Being, p 13, Shambhala 2011

I am inviting you to participate with me in a *sangha*, a learning community that will meet on Zoom weekly beginning this October, with the aim of studying and working with [The Reality of Being](https://www.amazon.com/Reality-Being-Fourth-Way-Gurdjieff/dp/1590309286/ref=sr_1_1?crid=BITAT3GCHV25&keywords=the+reality+of+being&qid=1687288262&sprefix=The+reality+iof+bein,aps,173&sr=8-1), Jeanne de Salzman’s book on the topic of Presence.

As you may know, the book is based on the journals and notebooks of Mme. de Salzman, and edited posthumously. I have found it to be extremely helpful in my own journey. While its language (in translation) is clear, its structure makes it a difficult read. I hesitate to observe that the book is deliberately chiastic, because I have not done a deep dive on its structure. I will say that its effect on me has certainly been chiastic in nature. I often found myself paging backwards, and found that marginal notes I made on one page were often repeated or paraphrased in the text itself several chapters later.

The idea for this *sangha* came from a dialog I had about the book with my friend Father Ben Thomas, a student of Cynthia Bourgeault who also serves on Cynthia’s Wisdom Council. Father Ben is Associate Rector and Theologian in Residence at St. Gregory’s Episcopal in Boca Raton, FL, where he leads the adult formation curriculum. When Ben suggested that he teach The Reality of Being, I offered that this book would be most helpful if it were presented though a chiastic (as opposed to linear) structure, and offered to sketch out how that could be done. We’ve been in a fruitful dialog ever since. It’s time to include others.

Ben Thomas and I will be gathering the group and presenting the material in a 90 minute meeting. There will be an introductory meditation, feedback time on the practice from the week before, a brief lesson and discussion on a topic based on different passages from the book, and a suggested practice for the following week. And I know Ben would add: “…but we’ll see how things go.” The community inquiry takes priority over any plans we might have.

**This is a personal invitation**that I am extending to you. The core of the invited group are the members of a multi-year study group gathered by Ben, focusing on the Gospel of Thomas. I’ve been a member of that group for three years, and highly recommend my fellow wisdom practitioners and seekers. We practice “pot-luck inquiry”: everyone brings something for the table. Good questions are highly valued. My commitment in reaching out to you is based on my time together with you: I think you would make an excellent member. **Please do not forward this invitation.**

**The commitment that Ben and I would ask**is that you attend the first three sessions, and then discern whether you choose to continue. Payment for the course is via a freewill, online offering. (After three weeks, you should know what it is worth to you.)

The group will begin meeting on **8 October at 10am Eastern time (7am Pacific, 8am Mountain)** and end at 11:30am Eastern (8:30am Pacific, 9:30am Mountain). It will meet weekly thereafter, until we individually or collectively decide we are done.

**If you are interested, please reply**to this email with any questions you have, or just tell me that you’re in. Ben will send out a formal invite before the first meeting. If it’s not for you, thanks for taking the time to read this far. I value your friendship, and your companionship along the Way.

Namaste,

Stuart

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