



Dean Lawrence Carter Communes with Mystics: from Gandhi to King to Ikeda to Holmes

KENT RAUTENSTRAUS

There is something in every one of you that waits and listens for the sound of the genuine in yourself. It is the only true guide you will ever have.
—HOWARD WASHINGTON THURMAN

When you get to Atlanta, walk among the one hundred crimson hills listening to the voice; then become *The Voice*,” said Howard Thurman, noted theologian and mystic to his friend Lawrence Carter. The year was 1979 when Carter listened to the inner voice to which Thurman referred. Carter resigned as

associate dean of Marsh Chapel at Boston University to become the founding dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel at Morehouse College in Atlanta, Georgia. It was a location at which Carter was destined to arrive.

In the ensuing thirty-four years, Dean Carter has devoted his work at Morehouse to promoting the “voice” of several twentieth-century peacemakers,

including civil rights leader Dr. Martin Luther King Jr.; the pre-eminent Indian spiritual leader Mohandas K. Gandhi; Buddhist philosopher, peace builder, and poet Daisaku Ikeda; and his close friend (and spiritual mentor of Dr. King) Dr. Howard Thurman, whose interment Carter presided over on the grounds of Morehouse College. In 1999, Carter also discovered the transformative teachings of Science of Mind and its founder, Dr. Ernest Holmes.

In Holmes and the others, Carter finds rich examples of modern mystics through their shared values of consciousness, prayer, nonviolence, dialogue, and peace. And for his students, Dean Carter is himself an example of a mystic who pursues a transcendent truth that we are not separate from our Source. "I share with my students that Ernest Holmes helped me to understand my mysticism with God, that the Omni-goodness of God is Omni-present. We *are* the house of Divinity," he says with emphasis in a richly resonant voice that makes a believer out of the listener.

Dr. Lawrence Edward Carter Sr. is a distinguished gentleman in pedagogy, appearance, and manner. He is an ordained American Baptist minister with extensive educational degrees

and honors, including four honorary doctorate degrees. He is a tenured professor of religion, archivist, and curator at Morehouse College, in addition to being dean of the Martin Luther King Jr. International Chapel, where he has personally designed monuments to King, Thurman, former Morehouse president and civil rights leader Benjamin Mays, and other peace leaders.

An in-demand lecturer/author, Carter is finalizing his latest manuscript that will become an 800-plus-page book entitled *Truth, Conscience, and Soft Power in the Philosophy of Gandhi, King, and Ikeda*. Most of all, Dean Carter is a passionate student of truth. "We have fallen asleep to the awareness of God. Remember the Bible verse, 'If you've seen me, you've seen the Father.' This speaks to everyone's possibilities. Look in the mirror. You can't have what you're not willing to be. The world is us."

Mystical Meeting with Dr. King

In 1958, when he was only fifteen, Lawrence Carter was already considering becoming a Baptist minister. Knowing the potential of the talented tenth grader, Lawrence's Sunday-school superintendent surprised him one Sunday by receiving his mother's permission to

take her son across town to the Union Grove Baptist Church in Columbus, Ohio, to hear the young preacher Martin Luther King Jr. What happened next was a mystical moment in Carter's life. After attending the service, which was very inspiring to the young Carter, he approached the minister at Union Grove. "I asked the pastor if I could look at the books in his study and see how he organized his office, and he said to go right in; no one was in there. I walked into his study and began intently looking at his bookshelves when I slowly became aware that someone else was in the room. I looked around and saw Dr. King seated in a chair quietly observing me. He asked my name and learned of my interest in the ministry, and that's when he personally recruited me to attend Morehouse College, King's alma mater for his Bachelor of Arts degree."

Carter's path, however, didn't take him to Morehouse for nearly two decades. His mother worked four jobs to put her son through a college that was highly recommended by others and was also more affordable than Morehouse, but it didn't totally resonate in Carter's heart. "While in my freshman year of college in Lynchburg, Virginia, I heard Dr. King give an address

titled 'The American Dream.' I'll never forget it—it changed my life. There were four crescendos within his talk, and I closed my eyes and sealed my desire to someday go to Morehouse."

Following his heart in his junior year, Carter was accepted for graduate study at Boston University, where Dr. King received his doctorate degree and where the theologian/poet Howard Thurman served as dean of Marsh Chapel. Carter resonated with the mystical writings of Thurman and the legacy of King and found both at Boston University. "I wanted to be taught by the same professors who taught King," he says, adding that while on campus, he began a deep friendship with Thurman, which ultimately led to Carter being selected as associate dean of Marsh Chapel after Thurman funded Carter's PhD.

"Most Beautiful Person Who Walked the Earth"

On April 4, 1968, the night of Martin Luther King's assassination, Carter committed his life to furthering the teachings of his beloved mentor. "I thought Dr. King was the most beautiful person who walked the Earth representing Jesus." Decades later, in 2013, Carter remains true to his vow, enthusiastically living

and teaching the principles of nonviolence as espoused by Dr. King and King's mentor, Mohandas Gandhi. "Dr. King respected everyone's humanity because he believed in the sacredness of all human personality. He reminded us not to reduce people to their mistakes, and that's why he found it so easy to forgive others by not seeing intentionality in their mistakes."

Dean Carter also teaches that Gandhi, like his mentor the famous Russian writer Leo Tolstoy, proclaimed that the kingdom of God is within. "Gandhi studied the religions of the world. He broke out of the box of nationalism and crossed major boundaries that otherwise fence people. He discovered that the roots of nonviolence are found in the core teachings of all faiths."

Dr. Carter finds a parallel teaching in Gandhi and King's philosophies and those of contemporary Buddhist leader Daisaku Ikeda with the tenets of Religious Science, which promotes the essential nature of people as being Christ-like or Buddha-like. "Ernest Holmes introduced me to the idea that it's all God right where I am. I simply have to elevate my awareness to know that God is within, closer than the very

veins in my neck." He adds emphatically, "Each of us represents the embodiment, the incarnation of divinity...the Divinity."

Mystical Experience— Discovering Ernest Holmes

As energized with Spirit as Carter is today, there was a time in the late 1990s when he experienced career burnout and considered leaving Morehouse. His ministry didn't look and feel the way he thought it should. During this "valley," he inducted Dr. Michael Bernard Beckwith, the founding minister of Agape International Center in Culver City, California, into the prestigious Martin Luther King Board of Preachers, after a student gave him a cassette tape of Beckwith speaking. "Anyone who can preach this well should belong to the MLK Board of Preachers," I thought to myself. "After the induction, Dr. Beckwith invited Carter to visit Agape, a transdenominational spiritual center founded on the teachings of Dr. Holmes and Thurman. Carter took Beckwith up on the invitation, thinking he might also look around Los Angeles for a new opportunity in ministry."

Dean Carter heard Dr. Beckwith speak on "The Authentic Existence" at a midweek service and was greatly



Dean Lawrence Carter speaking at Morehouse College

inspired. He asked Beckwith to recommend a book that would best describe the teaching on which the center was based. Beckwith handed him Dr. Ernest Holmes's book *Words That Heal Today*. Dr. Beckwith had recently written a foreword to the new edition. Carter read the book in record speed, devouring the spiritual truth embodied within Holmes's words. "It was like the old saying, 'When the pupil is ready, the teacher will appear!'" Dean Carter was profoundly moved by the mystical writings of Holmes. "It was one of the most powerful books for its clarity, simplicity, and freshness in declaring that Jesus is the great example and not the great exception." Carter says that in short order Holmes became "central in my life as one of the most decisive theologians in how to think about my cosmology and how I could talk about my spirituality."

Fresh New Perspective

Carter returned to Atlanta and Morehouse College a changed man. "My assistant stared at me and finally said, 'You're different. You're not as pushy as you used to be!'" I guess I was forcing things a bit too much before, and since discovering Dr. Holmes, everybody on campus with whom I came in contact responded to me differently as well." Carter decided not to leave Morehouse. His inner voice spoke to him loudly and clearly—he was to continue evolving his work as dean, and this now included teaching the transformative philosophy of his new spiritual teacher, Dr. Ernest Holmes. "At baccalaureate services, I began with an evocation instead of an invocation, and this was based on Dr. Holmes's belief, shared by Dr. Beckwith, that an invocation invites God to a place where God has left, but an evocation acknowledges that God is right

where God always was." Carter says the reception to this New Thought idea from his fellow Baptist faculty members and students was immediate and affirming. "One of the tenets of the Baptist faith is 'freedom of conscience,' which permits you to explore and search for truth," he says. He adds that after being exposed to the teachings of Holmes, "My whole career took off. I started going with the flow and flowing with the go." The founder of Religious Science and author of *The Science of Mind* had opened Carter and the Morehouse community to a "Howard Thurman" way of thinking.

There must be always remaining in every life, some place for the singing of angels—some place for that which in itself is breathlessly beautiful...throwing all the rest of life into a new and creative relatedness.

—HOWARD

WASHINGTON THURMAN

Synchronistically, as Carter blended Baptist teachings with New Thought, people of all faiths began showing up on the Morehouse campus for spiritual dialogue. "The Jews, Sikhs, Hindus, Buddhists, Muslims, and Christians all showed up!" In the ensuing years, Carter has actively

promoted spiritual dialogue between people of differing beliefs as "soft power," and this is a main point of his soon-to-be-released book, which he describes as his "magnum opus." Dr. Holmes directly inspired Carter's new focus. "Holmes read a large number of religious references and created a unifying spiritual philosophy that respects the truth in all faith traditions. He created a rainbow bridge to get people across religious communities in dialogue."

Ambassador for Spiritual Dialogue

To date, Dean Carter has received over a thousand speaking engagements from diverse faith groups all over the world, traveling to thirty-seven countries promoting the soft power of religious dialogue. He was a delegate to the Second and Third Synthesis Dialogues in Italy with the Dalai Lama of Tibet and delegates from many religions convened by the Association of Global New Thought (AGNT). He was also a speaker at the Council of the Parliament of the World's Religions in Barcelona, Spain. More recently, he was a delegate and presenter at the 2012 Awakened World Conference in Italy. Carter has subsequently inducted the clergy leadership of AGNT into

the MLK Board of Preachers as a gesture of kinship with the New Thought movement and in acknowledgement of the powerful gifts of these individuals.

His input is always transformative to any conference and any conversation. "Dean Carter is a universal mystic in the style of the great philosophers," says Dr. Barbara E. Fields, executive director of AGNT. "I believe he is driven by a reverence for the capacity of Thought, itself, as a manifestation of the Divine." Adds Dr. Michael Bernard Beckwith, "What a joy it is to the soul when we unexpectedly meet a kindred spirit and intuitively know—and know that we know—that our friendship was forged lifetimes ago. That is exactly what happened when I first met my dear friend and spiritual brother Reverend Dean Carter. From that first moment to the present one, what a blessing it is to share our mutual and profound love of the great mystic Howard Thurman and how his teachings continue to influence our lives. Larry is one of those individuals who has powerfully merged the mystical teachings of New Thought/Ageless Wisdom and dynamically expresses them in his life."

Cosmic Awareness

"I am always guided by Spirit," Dean Carter states. "The answers I am seeking to life's questions often come to me in my sleep and are quite profound." He expresses gratitude for his many blessings, chief of which are a loving family comprised of his wife, Dr. Marva Griffin Carter, and son, Lawrence Edward Carter Jr., and the extended family of Morehouse. He is also grateful for the mystical brush with Dr. King; for personally knowing Dr. Howard Thurman and other renowned theologians and peace leaders from around the world; for his ever-evolving path of Spirit; and for discovering the transformative and ecumenical teachings of Dr. Ernest Holmes, which proclaim that there is a cosmic spark of the Divine within all. Carter quotes his beloved mentor Dr. King, "We are tied together in a single garment of destiny."

This is, Carter states, the mystical marriage.

It is my belief that in the Presence of God there is neither male nor female, white nor black, Gentile or Jew, Protestant nor Catholic, Hindu, Buddhist, nor Moslem, but a human spirit stripped to the literal substances of itself before God. —HOWARD

WASHINGTON THURMAN ■