



Preparing For The Extraordinary: An Essential Practice, by Alan Briskin

Preparing for the extraordinary is one of the [...] essential practices of collective wisdom. It requires clear intention and mindful preparation for achieving a greater felt sense of connection with others and spiritual forces.

Illustrating this idea with a story may be useful. The great sage, Reb Zalman Schachter Shalomi, told me once of an experience he had with his friend and colleague, Howard Thurman [...] a distinguished African American philosopher, theologian and mentor to Martin Luther King.

On this occasion, Reb Zalman had invited Thurman to Manitoba, Canada where Reb Zalman was living. Together, they went to the local Christian abbey where Thurman met with the novice master. Thurman asked him to tell him the most common complaint he heard from his students. The novice master said it was that they had to awaken for 3 a.m. prayers, requiring them to get out of bed and enter the cold chapel. "Why do this," they said when they already experienced great satisfaction with the 9 a.m. service?

In response, the novice master forbade them from coming to the 3 a.m. services. Two weeks later, they complained that they no longer felt the joy and sense of mystery that they had felt previously during the 9 a.m. gathering. The students were invited back to the 3 a.m. services with a new respect for how the preparation that occurs in the pre-dawn of attentiveness can influence what happens during the light of day. Thurman, Reb Zalman recalled with a laugh, was delighted with this tale.

Preparing for the extraordinary is that effort we make, the rituals we create, the inner psychological work we do, that sharpens our intention and paves the way for something wonderful to happen. Sometimes it is in rigorous conceptual preparation, other times in silent prayer. Sometimes it is in learning to tolerate discomfort, other times in preparing oneself for bold action.

However it is accomplished, it is rarely due to an individual alone, but to a larger social field in which individuals collaborate together, perform their role, contribute their unique talents, and feel seen and heard by others. A central principle of collective wisdom is that we each participate in creating the experience of the group and that the group has distinctive qualities that impact the individual. We are co-creators of the group experience, composers of the group field and part of the composition.

