

Parents Weekend Multifaith Service
University Public Worship
Stanford Memorial Church
February 26, 2012

Reflection by Hannah Kopp-Yates '12

When I was 7 years old, my mother sent me to a children's yoga camp. The director of this ashram, Swami Sita, held a ceremony of blessing at the end of the session, and asked each child a few important spiritual questions to see if we had taken anything from our two weeks there.

"Hannah, who was your first teacher?" she asked. I dug way back into my seven-year-old brain and said, smartly, "Madame Bertrand was my kindergarten teacher at french school!" Swami Sita smiled, shook her head and gestured toward my mom, who was sitting proudly behind me. *Your mother-- your parents--were your first teachers, the Swami said, Don't forget to honor them, okay Hannah?*

So. Parents-- we honor you. Thank you for helping guiding us to where we are now. And thank you for bearing with us as we reach out blindly, sort of palpating the world, searching, searching for spots where we can sink in and go deep and start to uncurl the big mysteries.

I want to share with you a quote from Howard Thurman, which I have returned to over and over again on days when I feel a bit lost: Don't ask what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is more people who have come alive.

So I guess that's what I've been trying to figure out here: not what will help me make a living, but what will help me come alive. Stanford is a safe space for us to explore that. We can tumble around on the floor and bump into each other and splatter paint on the walls. We're playing, really. And it is very serious play indeed, because through connecting with each other and exploring our edges and excavating the bits of ourselves we've never looked at before, we're coming closer to being able to offer the world what it needs.

One of the things I've most appreciated about my time here is, well, the *time* here. Certainly, many of us are juggling an internship, two volunteer programs, twenty academic units, singing in an cappella group, and touring with a circus troupe. But if we choose to take it, there is also time to pause, to be in silence, to have an empty moment--a luxury that most of the world simply cannot afford.

Those are the moments where I have come closer to aliveness, to understanding what the world might need. Those are the moments when I have been able take a deep a breath and say, "Wow, there is a lot of pain in the world and I really don't get it, and it isn't fair, but I'm not going to look away. I'm not going to keep distracting myself from it." These are sometimes the moments where tears can come, and true laughter--where feeling and doing can join hands again. These are also the moments of inspiration--when I open up to the possibility of the universe acting through me rather than me always trying to manifest *my* vision, *my* project, *my* life.

Lord, make me an instrument of your peace.

In the quiet moments we can remember that we are one organism, all of us sharing this breath, these minds, and this earth. And that's, I think, what we must strive to make of our Stanford education: a simple shift from me to us.