

We have to be present or “woke” or we might miss the rumbling of a dam that is about to break, a volcano that is about to erupt, or the seething resentment just below the surface of a police officer’s polite and routine request for driver’s license and registration. We might let our guard down at the wrong moment—with lethal consequences. To be “woke” is to be spiritually alert and willing to be a witness to injustice or catastrophe:

We owe one another: a witness. When we see systems that hurt and hinder, we owe it to the hindered to train our eyes on their plight. If we are being wronged, we owe it to ourselves and anyone in a similar position to make our voices heard. To be woke is to see and say what has gone unseen, unspoken. We have eyes, voices. We can offer both.³

Everyday Contemplation

AS I RECALLED in *Joy Unspeakable*,⁴ my childhood included raucous play in the morning, lunch, then shower and a Sit during the afternoon until dinner. During the Sit, my sisters and I could read, write, or just heighten our awareness of the world around us, but stillness and reflection were required. Contemplative porch practices are no longer required of me; they are part of me.

My contemplative practices include writing, music and dancing, prayer, stillness, social justice activism, and teaching. These practices are the choices of one individual. What happens when the practices are communal and practiced together? What happens when contemplation is not a personal practice, but a collective, biogenetic, and spiritual response to crisis?

3. Tomi Adeyemi, “What Does It Take to Be Woke, Stay Woke, and Live Woke? An Exploration of the Definition—and Weight—of the Word,” *O: The Oprah Magazine*, February 6, 2019, <https://www.oprahmag.com/life/relationships-love/a26145644/woke-definition/>. As far back as 1962, *The New York Times* published an essay on appropriation of Black culture, “If You’re Woke You Dig It,” by William Melvin Kelley, an African American novelist known in some quarters as the godfather of “woke.” Then, in 1972, a play written about Jamaican activist Marcus Garvey by Barry Beckham, *Garvey Lives!* contained the stirring line: “I been sleeping all my life. And now that Mr. Garvey done woke me up, I’m gon’ stay woke.”

4. Barbara Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable: Contemplative Practices of the Black Church* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 2004).

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Crisis Contemplation

Healing the Wounded Village

