Availing Shadows
2013-2014
NOW IS THE TIME TO UNITE THE SOUL AND THE WORLD. NOW IS THE TIME TO SEE THE SUNLIGHT DANCING AS ONE WITH THE SHADOWS.”

– RUMI
AT DAVIDSON, WE MOVE THROUGH CONSTANT CYCLES OF TRANSITION. OUR LIVES ARE SHAPED BY MOVEMENT BETWEEN HOMES, COUNTRIES, AND CLASSROOMS, WITH ENDLESS TASKS BEFORE US EACH DAY. AS WE MOVE THROUGH THE TENSIONS OF CHANGE AND TRANSITION, WE FIND GLIMPSES OF INSPIRATION TO SUSTAIN US.

AVAILING IS AN OPPORTUNITY TO STEP INTO STUDENTS' MINDS AND HEARTS WHERE WE MAY EXPERIENCE HEALING, GRIEF, QUESTIONING, DOUBT, AND AWE, SOMETIMES ALL AT ONCE. IN THIS EDITION OF AVAILING, WE INVITE YOU TO STEP INTO THE SHADOWS WITH US: THE PLACE WHERE LIGHT MEETS DARK, FAITH MEETS UNCERTAINTY, AND LOVE MEETS RISK. FROM WITNESSING A SUNRISE IN TAIZÉ, FRANCE, TO CELEBRATING AN ALL-NIGHT HINDU FESTIVAL, OUR STUDENT CONTRIBUTORS EXPLORE FAITH AND SPIRITUALITY IN COUNTLESS WORDS, FACES, AND PLACES.

WE ARE GRATEFUL AND HOPEFUL TO SHARE THIS COLLECTION WITH YOU. MAY IT SPARK INSPIRING QUESTIONS FOR YOUR JOURNEY, AND PROVIDE YOU WITH RENEWED COURAGE TO MOVE TOWARD A DEEPER ENCOUNTER WITH THE LIGHT.

WE WOULD LIKE TO THANK CHAPLAIN ROB SPACH, THE RELIGIOUS LIFE COUNCIL, AND DESIGNER ALY DOVE FOR THEIR SUPPORT OF THIS PUBLICATION.

JOEY ALLAIRE '15 & ELIZABETH WELLIVER '16
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In the beginning,
the room is formless and void,
slowly,
stilly,
eyes adjust,
walls take shape,
socks slide onto bare feet,
in creeps the dim light of morning.

Down the road,
down the hill,
past the sandy brown buildings and wooden fence posts
the way opens;
down in the valley the shadows shrink.

Day break is near.

Fingers in pockets become stiff,
ears redden and dive beneath tufts of hair.
Too cold to stop,
too cold to sit,
too cold to work,
too cold for anything,
anything but footsteps.

Cross the bridge o’er the scurrying stream.
Sense the field shiver underfoot.
Tread the mud, cold enough to bear weight.
The morning red filters through the naked treetops high on the mountain.
Watch for the sunrise.

Into the forest
cold returns
washes,
awakens,
invigorates,
bones relish the crispness,
lungs drink in the morning,
the evergreen,
the soil,
the stone,
the water,
the grass.

The air swells--
Warmth grows in the sky,
in the fingertips,
in the blood,
Birds stir,
Trees open their eyes and stretch their limbs,
Reach up to the sky to touch the climbing sun.

Up the hill shadows vanish, forest thins,
and in the distance a tiny town welcomes the day.

Morning has broken.

SPENCER AYSCUE
WHAT IF THE CHURCH HOPPED THE FENCE?
TAIZÉ FRANCE
HANNAH SCHORR
I knock lightly on the door, even though I know the teacher is already there. I am invited in and take a seat, pulling out the textbook, pencil, and paper I carefully placed at the top of my bag to avoid rummaging through my bottomless backpack. After we exchange formulaic niceties, I flip open the book and ask my question. Questions beget questions, and we usually find that the true source of my confusion is more fundamental than I had originally thought. The teacher guides these questions; I take notes. We talk until the concept clicks, then I close the book, and the teacher wishes me well as I leave.

This is how I pray. I treat prayer like office hours, going in armed with questions, thinking through answers, and then leaving until the next time a suitably important question appears. In my prayer, I see a god of reason, a god that makes the world make sense. This is certainly not a god I would approach without a topic for discussion. However, over spring break, my natural tendency to pray at god’s office hours was challenged by the style of prayer at Taizé.

Taizé is an ecumenical monastery in France that welcomes young people for one or two weeks at a time. A typical day includes a Bible study, some manual labor to help maintain the monastery, and thrice-daily worship services centered around music, scripture, and ten minutes of silence. The first day, I had questions prepared for those ten minutes in god’s office hours. For the next two days, I desperately rummaged through my backpack full of old questions and ideas, sought out new ones in the scripture reading, or fell into the comfortable Our Fathers and Hail Marys of my childhood. What else was I supposed to do for ten minutes? I’m comfortable being in silence – I once won a round of the Quiet Game that lasted for six hours – but I didn’t know how to be in silence with god. Without a question, I wasn’t a student; without words,
I wasn’t a thinker; without a role, I was lost. My definitions and defenses had been stripped away, leaving me open, vulnerable, and scared.

Fortunately, I didn’t remain scared for the whole fifty minutes. Like the first time I jumped into my uncle’s pond, the initial shock is terrifying, but you adjust and find comfort in the feeling of water or god flowing around you. Words and questions had helped me focus my thoughts and connect with god, but I was the only one who had ever needed them. To my surprise, God seemed perfectly happy to let me rest in the immensity that no number of answered questions could reveal, to sit in awe in the presence of the unfathomable. To my even greater surprise, I was happy to stay there as well.

Of course, I still ask questions. I’m pretty sure that’s part of my nature, and I don’t think I’ll ever stop visiting god’s office hours. But the ability to be still in god’s presence allows me to understand god in a way I couldn’t through the methods of prayer that came more naturally to me. Prayer is a lens through which we see god, but if we are not careful, our lenses can limit which aspects of god we see.

What lies in the shadows of one view may be clear as day from another. If this story has any moral, perhaps it’s to try to pray in many ways. Maybe god will surprise you; or maybe you’ll surprise yourself.
The human race raced to construct a tower to reach heaven. Deep flowed the desire to know and be known by God, to run fingers through His radiant beard, understanding. Men and women, daily and nightly, with single-thought unfailing ascended the stairs, spiraling, into cloud and sky. Until finally clouds turned black and the stronghold casts long, dark shadows on the world. Silence spilled from the sky; the world trembled when from directions various the tender voice of woman declared poetic: You are confused. and the tower fell in on itself, becoming a flock of ten thousand birds (dove and raven among) and ten thousands directions they took in flight. The world seeks them still...

Alone: in monolithic shadow or
Together: tongues of fires and birds on our shoulders.

Bird songs—

Nicht ohne jede Herz uns Geist, die zu Himmel schreien, können wir Gott erreichen.

为了感动神，每个心，每个精神得喊天堂。

Solamente por el grito al cielo de cada corazón y cada mente podemos alcanzar a Dios.

Behdoohneh fekr and ghalbeh paak, racidan beh khoda momken neest.

Sans que tous coeurs et tous esprits crient vers les cieux, on n’atteint pas Dieu.

Sem que todo coração e toda mente gritem ao céu não atingimos a Deus
Non possiamo raggiungere Dio senza il grido di ogni cuore e mente al Cielo.
Not without each heart and mind shouting to Heaven can we reach God.
THAT TIME GOD ANSWERED MY PRAYER

...AND IT SUCKED.

Avery Haller

In eighth grade, Nick came back to school fifteen pounds lighter after a bad bout with the flu. That’s the day I asked God to make me sick.

The first time I got fitted for a bra, I was already a D cup. You could say I was a “mature” thirteen year old. But, surrounded by wiry pubescent, I just called myself fat.

During such a critical period of self-realization, my association with my body and fatness—or ugliness as society taught me—haunted me throughout middle school, high school and my first two years at Davidson. No matter how much I exercised, I was unarguably bigger than most other girls.

But Nick had given me hope; if I could just get a really bad flu, I’d lose the creases in my stomach that made me feel unlovable.

I prayed for years that I would get sick. Just enough to put me off food for a couple weeks, please. Please? PLEASE?! I tried to justify begging The Almighty for “If I was skinny,” I said to God, “I would have the confidence to do your work." But God called my bullshit.

My illnesses set on slowly enough that it took me a few months to realize I was sick. It started with occasional stomach pain. Then I began throwing up a few times a week. No big deal, right? I ignored the signs that my digestive system wasn’t functioning because I was happy to have expelled a few calories. A miracle! God had finally intervened to make my life easier. I thought that’s what prayers were for: getting God to fix your problems overnight. Instead, God gave me a long dose of pain.
I finished my second semester of sophomore year sleeping fourteen hours a day. My mother cried over my hollow gaze when I returned home. I had to cancel my study abroad plans and take a semester off of school. When I was finally diagnosed, I was throwing up undigested food so often that it had become a comforting sensation.

Finally, I found a diet that allowed me to eat with less pain. Immediately after I switched, I lost twenty pounds in fourteen days. After losing that amount of weight in such a short period of time, it took me several months not to recoil at my perceived disproportion. When I was able to look at myself with composure again, I realized that all the suffering I’d gone through was God’s answer to my prayer.

I am now the same size that I was in seventh grade. Most of the time, I feel small. But I am in pain every day, every time I eat and oftentimes in between.

I asked God to make me sick, to “fix” God’s creation, and God listened. I told God that God was wrong, God nodded and showed me what the world would be like if I were right. And that world sucks.

When I was thirteen, I rejected my body so vehemently that I prayed for God to break it. Through my illness, I have learned to appreciate my body for how it functions, rather than how it looks. I have learned to rejoice when my stomach gurgles—that means my migrating motor complex is working!

My story is not evidence of divine cruelty. I believe the opposite. God does not make life easier; God makes life fuller. In order to realize a deeper understanding of human life, I had to experience suffering.

Thank you, God, for teaching me the responsibility that comes with being made in your image. My body is an inherently beautiful tool for spreading the foundations of the Kingdom. I have heard your rebuke. From now on, this little light of mine, I’m gonna let it shine.
PHOTOGRAPH //
THE ALOHEMIST
OF THE SAHARA
BY JULIA WATKINS
Moses knew the thirst of his flock and struck the obstinate boulder.

Flashing forth in a loud angry rush—water!
—flooding the ravine and spooking the lazy camels.

Why?
(Moses, who knew so much better than to let his heat rise, his patience fade.)

What strength would it have taken to hold back your striking hand?

How many more miracles can God show one man?

More times than I’d ever planned I’ve read and taught that story. I’ve strained my imagination but I thought I’d never understand.

Till the same heat rose in me—

Till I stood to strike as if desperate thirst drove me, as if I could drive a stubborn rock to cry. As if I could flood this desert where I stand parched and impatient for miracles.
On a bus down through the valley of San Jose, Costa Rica, I ate German chocolate and cried. Jorge was the most giving patient I encountered, and the aching I felt from intimately witnessing his pain swelled inside me and streamed down my face.

I was in the final days of volunteering at Nuestra Señora de la Esperanza, a home in Cartago, Costa Rica for 28 persons afflicted with HIV/AIDS. The patients in this home are of varying ages, ability, and stages of HIV infection. Their medical care, including free dental care, nutritionist visits, psychology appointments, and the incredibly expensive cocktail drug ($1000-$2000 per month) is covered solely by donations. Most patients stay from three months to a year; the most severely ill staying permanently.

The stigma of the HIV virus is pervasive in Latin America. When I would mention my work to my host mother or the attendees of a church I visited, they would rush in to fill the air space after my words with praise for working with such a belittled people group. Inklings of support groups are just beginning to seep through the machismo-saturated cracks; these people require care and HIV prevention methods need discussion.

My first day there I had taken Jorge for staff; I watched him do everything from clean the facility to tube feeding unconscious patients. On this particular day, 23-year-old Paloma passed away; and Jorge, who had spent an inordinate amount of time with her, was distraught. To take his mind off the private funeral onsite, I had Jorge show me his art. Amidst drawings of flowers and the stunning
mountains surrounding Cartago was a beautiful picture of a rising bird, a heart with a date and name next to a gravestone inscribed “Mi Gran Amor.” After I asked, Jorge told me about his grand love of 28 years, Viktor, who passed away in 2011 from pneumonia. After Viktor died, Jorge turned to alcohol and became so ill that he ended up in the hospital, where he then found out that he had HIV and learned about Nuestra Señora. He spoke with such tenderness, pain encompassing every feature.

Later that day, a Catholic service was held for those wanting to honor Paloma’s memory. I was among seven people there, and I could not help but notice the outpouring passion Jorge had for God. Watching Jorge worship with the pain of a man suffering a grievous loss was more moving than words can express. On the bus ride to my host family, I thought of the incredible love Jorge displayed for Viktor, Paloma, and God, and wept. I wept because his love was so ascertainable, and the world hated him for it. Shunned by countless people, Jorge’s love ran deeper and stronger than the veins of stigma and emotional scar tissue. We humans crave respect and its ugly cousin, approval, and Jorge had neither.

Despite the heavy atmosphere, Nuestra Señora is a happy place; I can recall smiling or laughing until my face hurt on at least five separate occasions. I am so grateful I was there during a time when I was truly needed, even if I was just sitting with the residents asking frivolous questions like “What is your favorite type of Costa Rican coffee?” I believe God put me in that place at that time to listen and to love, and most of all, to reflect on what it means to be a caretaker.

CHRISTIANA AKINS
Bow your head.
Be thankful.
Do what they say
And to heaven,
You pray,
That’s the place to go.
But you don’t know
Where you might land.
In dirt,
Or sand?
On the beaches and fields,
See the power he wields.
Look to him.
You know it’s all in the hymns that we sing
And what tomorrow might bring.
But what about now,
And what about how?
And that we’re flying through space
At a million billion miles
And a zillion trillion more
Till we reach that front door
On the palace of Jesus
And Buddha
And a priestess
Muhammad
And Krishna
To find that we missed them.
’Cause they were there all along,
But we couldn’t get along
With the life that they gave,

And we thought they would save us.
From what?
Maybe ourselves.
To take us off the shelves,
But maybe we never were,
And why would you ever want to be sure?
’Cause I sure wouldn’t.
I would just like to live.
And I don’t know what to believe . . .
I know I believe
In the spirit and the trees
And the bright, stinging bees
And how they save the flowers.
’Cause they show me what life is:

an Eternity . . .
. . . of Stillness

Imagine lying on the ground without
moving or opening your eyes and
imagine how long it would take you to
starve to death

I’d say it’d be . . . forever.
So we really do have time
To learn, and to grow.
And we won’t ever know.
But that’s not for us,
It’s for them.
And that is why I say amen.

SCOTT WALKER CUNNINGHAM
The Poor are the spiritual reserves of the world.
WASHING FEET

Katie Gomulkiewicz
Inspired by “Christ Washing the Feet of his Disciples” by Tintoretto in the National Gallery

He washed the feet of his disciples.
The great I AM stepped down and washed the dirt from the toes of Judas who for 30 pieces of silver betrayed him.

I do not want to wash her feet. Some days, I do not even want to look at her. The betrayal and cruelty she has caused me holds the weight of betrayal against my heart like rusted silver.

Judas’ feet are clean. They have been washed by the lamb.

I must wash her feet. I must bend down and clean her grimly toes.

For if God can humble himself and wash the feet of his betrayer-- then WHO AM I to not wash her feet?
I am from the smooth stain glass panes that illuminate the Chapel in the woods, casting shadows that dance across the bima and from the soothing verses of “Oh Guide My Steps” I’m from the colorful tzedakah box and from the aroma of steaming matzo ball soup and from the humble yet powerful Angela Buchdahl: an Asian American rabbi seeking justice for minorities and authenticity for diverse Jews

I remember that I am from a family that struggles with religious connections to Judaism yet embraces its cultural aspects and from the echoing strings of the cello that plays Kol Nidre, a song of reflection on the most solemn of nights and from the process of obeying those famous—or infamous—Ten Commandments

I am from an exclusive suburban community which (for better or for worse) fosters a culture of mutually exclusive identities, a community where we must accentuate or diminish traits that make us whole and I’m from the restraint within not to challenge the aggressor with ferocious words or sharp punches but instead with the spirit of tikkun olam: healing the world

I am from a struggle people ambitious and accepting; empathetic even, yet misunderstood and from a background of intercultural love: we are citizens and students of this mysterious and mystical world

And finally, I am from a family willing to learn and change A family willing to interact within and create bonds with others I am from a culture that seeks guidance in history but looks for answers in the present and solutions in the future I am from a world where light works with dark and creates transformation And I am honored to be a small, miniscule part of this progress.

This poem was written as an interfaith dinner club exercise in which we investigated the roots of our beliefs, especially during childhood (written November 2013)
Before the age of thirteen, I believed the sun created the shadows to protect us from sweltering humidity. My father, six foot six inches, the tallest man I’d ever seen, beamed above the earth as the sun flooded upon his bald head, creating a wake of shade behind him. In the summertime, he was like the Giving Tree, only he moved and I could not keep stride behind him. When I grew older, I learned the heaviness of the shadow grows as we come closer to the heights of our fathers. The sun traces our figures like delicate silhouettes etched upon the bricks, darkness that lies behind us no matter how hard we try – the mortality we fail to escape. I want to deny that I will pass this heaviness on to my children, this graveyard of memories each daughter inherits as part of her ancestry, the wounds her mother carved into her body when she turned thirteen and decided she did not want to have a shadow any longer, when she decided she wanted to escape the heavy weight of her ribcage, and only by grace, decided to stay. God, did you create the shadows to protect us in the arms of shade or to teach us to mourn the depth of our graves? Now, twenty, I can’t hide behind my father’s shadow any longer forced to face the God who turns our faces toward filtered rays, makes us struggle to find a liberated way forced to face the sun who pours out darkness into space, chasing us until we face the pain that we create, hiding in our wake until we embrace the shadow that we try – we fail to escape.
Cicadas lie like dead sentinels
upon the earth, armored
bodies crushed under foot.

Perhaps God cast them down;
damned to gravity,
their wings weights
dragging them from His realm.

I violated their right to rest, yesterday
found a broken body ground
into the paving stones.
I stole his wings.

Will his soul still rise?

Their cries haunt me: incessant
rhythms of legs and wings,
legions of mourning kin.

They’ll rise again
When summer seeps up from the earth
in red eyed waves,
walk warily, patiently
wait for the fall.
Shines she so brightly, that sister of the sun!
For barren are the waters, black, that 'cross the aether run.
Below, in rows, the bearded soldiers stand erect and poised,
As swiftly falls the coolest mist and silence: the only noise.
And high above, in realms afar, a hunter prowls and creeps;
Before him goes the goddess of love, though they shall never meet.
How manifest and glorious, Creator’s work displayed:
Just by His breath, His open mouth, what all there is was made.
In all His power, all His might, what awes us most is this:
He came, His breath was stilled, He died, He rose that we might live.
Emmanuel in the Morning’s Breath and passing shadows of Night.
Taizé, France.

Hannah Schorr

EMMANUEL
EMMANUEL IN THE MORNING’S BREATH AND PASSING SHADOWS OF NIGHT
TAIZÉ, FRANCE.
We love our definitions. For instance, according to Google, telescope: an optical instrument designed to make distant objects appear nearer. But the identity, the essence of a telescope, its relationship to the world, can’t always be summed up in a brief definition. Similarly, belonging to a community cannot always be summed up by just: religion, race, socioeconomic status, geographic location, common time. But sometimes it can.

...Of the spirit, race of heart as it keeps time with the dance, wallets left in rows of cars parked in an isolated lot, here. Now.

Sweat permeates the air, competing with the dense, murky perfumes for dominance. Incense also pulses between the crouching, panting, alert bodies—everyone not still, but quivering potentials, not matches that need a lighter, or the lighter, but the light itself, simply biding time before it ignites.

A slap on the skin of the drums.

And dance!

As the music starts, the entire group leaps with a cheer! And as if a wind rushed through the temple, skirts began to flutter into the flight of twirls, bangles began to twinkle into the presence of stars against their sister constellations as skeins of midnight hair became a backdrop to the rotation of their personal sky—red skirts and green scarves and black hair and brown skin.

Feet clumsily keeping up with the raging spirit, toes greeting the ground in soft caresses, treading lightly, then not at all—leaping, soaring—no longer feet and toes, but tools of dance, the dancer’s trade—and then, not even a dancer but the dance, but the spirit of the heavens and of the stars, their constant cycle—but the air of here, the stars of the pinpricks of burning incense, of lit candles, of fluorescent lighting, of us.
The music stops.

Then humanity crashes in like thunder, as you no longer know what’s more sore—your mouth from smiling or feet from dancing for hours on end or hands weighed down, draped in too many bangles or forehead to which the glue of the bindi has shifted to pinch your skin.

Now crouch.

Catch your breath. And inadvertently catch her breath. And his.

You are in such close proximity to the boy clutching his sesame street backpack despite the glare of the lady with the missing tooth as the adopted child with the hazel nut shaped eyes watches on in earnest curiosity and the businessman with the five o’clock shadow coughs into his almost beard, no time to think about the time he thinks he never has to do all that needs to be done. You are in such close proximity to the beautiful, spirited dancers, that your breaths are their breaths and their breaths the beat of the dance.

And again!

We dance around the Hindu deity statues at the time of night that depending on your mood, is either extremely late or extremely early. To us, we simply were infinitesimally in this moment, suspended in time. Not because we were lost. But utterly found. Utterly consumed by what the toll of the drum would bring.

We had not danced until 3 am. We just danced and time moved, because dancers move and the world moves as we are wont to do.

We were all attending the Hindu Garba performed during their festival of Navarathi, though a lot of us were not Hindu. The festival represents cyclical time as we revolve around the unmoving symbol of the deity in two lopsided circles from symbolic life to death to rebirth. Like time, we do not exist only within the clock. Like us, the spirit does not only exist in the religion.

Our bodies were not the dance because we were religious, our spirits were rejoicing because we were the music.

So what if by any standard or stretch of imagination we could not dance?
So what if we bumped into each other, tripped over spilled food crumbs from the devout breaking their fast? So what if that sweat did conquer the perfume and we were all tired, sweaty masses that grace and rhythm gave up on long ago?

We simply were.

We are being and we were being those beings like the sun and the sky, the rain and the earth, as a community that rose and descended together, yelled in joy and frustration and breathed together, lived and felt together.

I found myself amidst the dance.

Not as an accomplished dancer. Oh, no. Not as a listener of music. But as a star conceived by a human mind to revolve together—to belong.

Though if you think about it, we always belonged.

We always had the night. And we were always the stars.

We simply had to look beyond ourselves and realize that humanity had already drawn lines between her stars, connecting us all.

And no telescope was necessary to see it. Just conscious, mindful eyes—not I’s.
you call me out upon the waters, the great unknown. Let the Spirit lead me where my trust is without borders. Let me walk upon the waters. And I will call upon your name, and keep my eyes above the waves. When oceans rise, my soul will rest in your embrace. For I am yours and you are mine.