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### Poetry, Miracles, and the Path to the Beloved Community A Talk in Six Parts

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

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**Poetry, Miracles, and the Path to the Beloved Community**  
**A Talk in Six Parts**

*A Keynote Address by Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg*  
*at the National Association for Poetry Therapy Annual Conference*  
*April 23-26, Black Mountain, North Carolina*

Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg spoke at the 2015 conference about the power of poetry to help us make our own path, join with others on the path to make and keep what Martin Luther King, Jr. called “the beloved community,” and explore the mythic, healing, ecological, spiritual, and communal dimensions of living that path. Here is the beginning of her talk, which weaves poetry and prose together. For a full transcript of Caryn's talk, please click here:  
<http://carynmirriamgoldberg.com/2015/05/16/poetry-miracles-and-the-path-to-the-beloved-community-everyday-magic-day-848/>

**1. The Path to the Beloved**

The path is the path: littered with seeds and leaves  
from just before one beloved died or another  
found you. The rocks here are heavy and take  
multiple humans exerting heat and force to shift.  
The branches are so blossom-weighted that they  
scratch your tender face if you turn too quickly.  
The beloveds wind thread-wide tunnels of life  
below ground, or roost in the the cedars of memory  
and future. Everything, everyone you have the possibility  
to love makes and follows a previously-unflappable  
path, rife with swirls and switchbacks, bramble too  
engaged with itself to open, and sudden clearings.  
Where did you think you were going anyway?

Home is as still as the eye of cardinal, balancing  
on the thinnest cottonwood branch just burst into  
leaf and daring. Home is the next step into the next story.  
Home is the bend in the river at dusk, the mid-afternoon  
waking on the porch while bird song criss-crosses  
the damp air, the pounding rain, the return of sunlight.  
Home twines your path with mine, branching out  
beneath the bowl of stars to show us how  
we changed into who we always were.  
~ Caryn Mirriam-Goldberg

“Our goal is to create a beloved community and this will require a qualitative change in our souls as well as a quantitative change in our lives,” Martin Luther King, Jr. said. In naming the racial divides that catalyze injustice, violence, and fragmentation – brokennesses that hurts us still – he called on us to grow the deepest reaches of our individual souls and widest embrace of our collective lives. In considering what Dr. King said about the beloved community and our conference's theme on word-paths, I've been exploring how the miracle of poetry can help us make and keep the beloved

community, in which we can do the hard work of reconciliation: to bring into the fold diverse voices and visions without losing our own.

Our path and our people come to us when we go to ground: engage with what's really here. Poet and writer Wendell Berry explains, "The difference between a path and a road is not only the obvious one. A path is little more than a habit that comes with knowledge of a place. It is a sort of ritual...through experience and familiarity, of movement to place; it obeys the natural contours." The path shows us how to seek and keep, release and begin again, break our hearts open, and deepen our best thinking so that we can contribute to, as Dr. King says, "a reconciled world by raising the level of relationships among people to a height where justice prevails and persons attain their full human potential."

And poetry? All of us here know how a line, a rhythm, an image, and even more so, the practice of reading and writing can catalyze a qualitative change in our souls toward greater peripheral vision that erases some of our previous ways of limiting ourselves. "I learn by going where I have to go," Theodore Roethke writes in "The Waking." Poetry is the phone line between the surface of our lives and our deepest callings, a lifelong conversation full of confusion, clarity, trespasses through fear or delight, and a whole lot of divining for water with some sticks out in the wilderness. It's our flashlight in the dark woods, showing us where and how to step next.

The complete talk is accessible here: <http://carynmirriamgoldberg.com/2015/05/16/poetry-miracles-and-the-path-to-the-beloved-community-everyday-magic-day-848/>