Chapter V

Completing the Circle/Growing Into Oneness: Stepping into the Realm of Female God in

*The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart*

and

*Now is the Time to Open Your Heart*

The final chapter of this thesis deals with two novels one of which is a fictionalized autobiography of the author, Alice Walker. Here seems to be the writer’s attempt to fictionalize her own life and her personal Womanist growth. The title of the novel *The Way Forward is with a Broken Heart*, itself suggests growth, though ‘with a broken heart’. Walker once again uses the epistolary form to describe the mental exercise of the protagonist. The journey is not towards Womanism, because Walker is already a Womanist, but what we witness here is a Womanist’s growth towards personal and spiritual wholeness.

It is a Womanist moving ahead, is the impression that we get right away, from the very second page onwards. First it is a reference to the woman lover that Walker was with during her journey to Mississippi, “I went back with the woman I love now” (WBH 04). Walker’s falling in love with a woman is not unusual, but in fact, predictable, because her theory of Womanism strongly upholds a woman right to love another woman sexually and/or non-sexually. She believes that a woman can forge a union with another woman, and can become as ‘whole’ as in a union with a man.
Next, she refers to the art of quilt-making, and how it was an art that she practiced in her own life. The art of quilt-making was passed on and preserved from one generation to another. On her way to Mississippi she and her lover had come upon two women stitching a quilt which reminded her of her own quilt that she had made from the scraps of the Kaftans that she herself had sewn and wore during her pregnancy:

But when we walked inside two women were quietly quilting .... like the one my mother used to have .... Stitching together one of the most beautiful crazy quilts I've ever seen. It reminded me of the quilt I made while we were married, the one made of scraps from my African dresses. The huge dresses, Kaftans really, that I sewed myself and wore when I was pregnant with Our Child (WBH 04).

Like many of her previous characters Walker is trying to come to terms with her personal past. She knows that if she wishes to move forward then she has to conquer the ghosts from her past. And that probably has tempted her to undertake her journey back to Mississippi. When she reaches her old home, she is unable to recognize it at the first instance, because in a very Womanist fashion, the tree that the young husband and wife had planted to commemorate the arrival of their baby-daughter, was missing, “The tree we planted when Our Child was born and which I expected to tower over me, as Our Child now does, is not there; one reason I did not recognize the house” (WBH 05). It is strangely sad to see that it is ‘the things’ from the past that help keep the memory alive, because the people involved in the memory no longer talk to one-another, “You do not talk to me now” (WBH 03).
Walker’s ex-husband was a civil rights lawyer, but later on he gave up law and became ‘successful in the corporate world’. But as Walker suggests, even he finds art more fulfilling than anything else, he had taken up play-writing. That something was missing in his new corporate profession is what Walker hints at:

That you left civil rights law, at which you were brilliant, and are now quite successful in the corporate world. Though the writing of the plays makes me wonder if perhaps you too have found something missing in your chosen profession? (WBH 07).

May be what Walker is suggesting is that, art is essential to make us whole. And anybody who wishes to attain wholeness has to take up some form of fine-art.

Very remarkably, Walker reminds us of one of her earlier characters Fannie, from The Temple of My Familiar. Both these women have identical experience of having their husbands ignore their suggestion about reading a novel by a black woman writer. May be it was from her personal experience that she thought about Fanny and Suwelo. It was the first time that Walker had come to know of a black woman novelist. She was so very happy to know that a black woman had written a novel, that she wished that her husband would be as excited as herself. But when he doesn’t take much interest in the novel, she is frustrated. From this point on their relationship began to deteriorate:
But you would not read the thin paperback novel by this black woman I loved. It was as if you drew a line, in this curious territory. I will love you completely, you seemed to say, except for this. But sharing this book with you seemed everything. (WBH 08).

As this is also an autobiography Walker brings in live historical characters like Zora Neale Hurston and Langston Hughes in her narration. Though her husband refused to read the book by Zora, her daughter was very happy to allow her mother to pass on the literary heritage to her. She very happily became the recipient of their rich black women’s writer’s heritage. To quote Walker:

She (Rebecca) tells me now she read it before she even left home, when she was in her early teens. She says I presented it to her with a quiet intensity, and with a special look in my eyes. She says we used to read passages from it while we cooked dinner for each other, and that she used to join me as I laughed and sometimes cried (WBH 8-9).

Walker’s personal experiences have, been the biggest source for her literary writing. Almost everything that she has written in the earlier novels has some point of personal reference. The father-daughter discord that she had mentioned in By the Light of My Father’s Smile seems to have been inspired by Walker’s own strained relationship with her father. All her life Walker longed for a caring, understanding and loving father, who would be sensitive towards the need to give back to the race that gave them their identity. What she did not know about her own father was a fact which was
revealed to her by one of her brothers, much after her father had passed away:

He [Walker’s brother] remembers my father organizing in our community to build the first consolidated school for blacks in the country, which was burned to the ground by whites.... It was my father who found the woman who would become my first-grade teacher. My brother’s words are both fire and balm to my heart (WBH 14).

The mistrust that Walker had against her father is put to rest by her brother, who gives her a different picture of her father, from the one that she had. For Alice Langston Hughes takes the place of her father though just metaphorically and that too for a very short time. Yet Walker fondly remembers the time spent with Langston and the regret that she felt when he passed away. She remembers the stories that Langston shared with them at a party; just like a father would do for his children:

And he seemed the father I sort of knew. He’d given everything, been history, entertainment and example throughout the evening, telling wonderful stories of his adventures, as his eyes twinkled.... (WBH 15).

Like many of her earlier characters, like Mem and Celie, even Walker was unable to forge a bonding with other women, whom she felt close with. Walker remembers an incident from her past, before she started dating her husband; she was very close to her husband’s boss and his fiancée. Her reason to remember this woman was to connect with the lost chances of creating sisterhood in the past and thus improving the present and the future:
....to the black woman who partly inspired me to come to Mississippi in the first place.... It was she whom i loved and admired, and wanted to be with. Not in a sexual way; .... But simply to talk, to ground, to move forward together as sisters. Because of my stupidity with this man..., I lost any chance of that possibility (WBH 19-20).

Walker also regrets her inability to understand the depth of her relationship with her husband. There was a very special bond that the two of them shared even before they got married. She remembers how he would make her feel protected and safe and how it was she who failed to see the music behind all his words:

And that is what you would tell me for years to come. That you were there, with me. That your chosen role in life was to love and to protect me. That I was safe. It was music I had never heard (WBH 22).

Walker, later in her life acquires the Womanist understanding and objectivity which allows her to identify her errors in the past. Rectification becomes possible only after she accepts her mistakes. She remembers and tries to understand the whole situation from a different perspective. This she does by using third person narration and trying to understand the impact and importance of inter-racial marriage during the highly volatile times of 1960’s. She imagines a situation where they, her husband and she, had become some kind of celebrity because of their marriage. And how somebody else would look at them and note their happiness:
They talk about him because he’s got a black wife. And she’s pregnant .... What struck me about him, to tell the truth, is that he looked happy. In fact, he was probably the happiest-looking person I’ve ever seen. You could just sort of feel it rolling off him (WBH 22-3).

Something went wrong in their relationship and Alice and her husband separated. Years later they are brought together by their daughter, who like her mother, is trying to come to terms with her past. May be, like all children from divorced families even she wants to know the reasons behind her parent’s separation. The only explanation that Walker thinks of is that being an interracial couple in Mississippi with a child to raise, wore them out. There was too much tension in the air, with less of oxygen and more of hatred. Their relationship suffered as a result and the marriage shriveled and died:

I think, I say, that Mississippi, living interracially, attempting to raise a child, attempting to have a normal life, wore us out. I think we were exhausted. In our tiredness we turned away from each other (WBH 29).

In memory of the woman ancestors Walker indulged in those activities which had helped her foremothers to survive racism and sexism. In her times of difficulty she, “.... Planted trees and flowers.... I quilted, I began making a rug. I actually did needlepoint. I talked to my mother on the phone” (WBH 29-30).

She turned to art and creativity which helped her forget the pain that the racial conflict was giving them in the Deep South. The strained relationship
between the two families also took its toll on the young couple. Walker's mother could not accept a Jew as her son-in-law, because her Christian upbringing termed him as 'Christ-killer'. This Christian woman never talked about sex or rape with her own daughter. But she broke her self-imposed ban and related one incident from her past when she and her sisters had escaped rape by running away from their rapists because they were strong and fast:

That one day she and her sisters and brothers were walking down a deserted road, and white men began to make advances toward and then to chase the girls. Her brothers ran away, leaving the girls to fight or run as best they could. She understood their behavior, of course, but there was sadness in her telling of it. If they had tried to protect their sisters they would have been murdered without a thought. Luckily, she and her sisters were strong and fast; they simply outran their would-be rapists (WBH 35).

The most interesting line in this incident is the remark about the behavior of her mother's brothers. Due to years of Black patriarchal conditioning this Black woman tries to justify the ways of the Black men, who just ran away instead of protecting their sisters from the assault. Walker notices that though her brother's involvement would have accentuated the threat to their lives, yet there is "sadness in her telling". Obviously even though she doesn't say it she wished that her brothers would not have failed them. But the positive aspect about this memory is the strength and togetherness of the sisters. They stood by one another in the moment of crisis.
The true Womanist that she is Walker loves the very spirit that embodies the nation of her birth. The spirit which is prevalent in the Native Americans is the one she feels attached to. As it is her great-grandmother was a Cherokee, she feels very much an Indian as the Native Indians themselves. As she accepts the Indianness in her, she puts to rest her great-grandmother's Spirit. She makes the Indianness very much a part of her life, which is noticed by her daughter as well:

Our child has never known her mother without arrowheads, without Native American jewelry, without photographs of Native Americans everywhere one could be placed. Craft and art and eyes steadied me, as I trotted on the journey toward my tri-racial self. I do feel I have had to wrestle with our great-grandmother's spirit and bring it to peace. When I participate in Indian ceremonies I do not feel strange, or a stranger, but exactly who I am, an African AmerIndian woman with a Native American in her soul (WBH 36).

Walker uses a casual acquaintance with another interracial couple as a backdrop of the discussion on the challenges of being a black woman writer. Even those white men who married black women could not accept the fate of a black woman writing novels. Harold and Dianne are two such people. Harold is unable to digest the fact that Alice Walker is a black woman writer. He tries to pull her down by describing her writing as very personal and therefore not worth taking note of. His argument was that great writers like Faulkner and Hawthorne and Twain never wrote about themselves, and thus they could accomplish great works. This would have been the tendency of all critical opinion about Black women writers; they would constantly have to measure up to the white male writers:
and he claims women shouldn’t write about themselves.... That white male writers, like Faulkner and Hawthorne and Mark Twain, never wrote about themselves, and that they were masters at it (WBH 38).

Dianne his black wife countered him by saying that the white male writers did not write about themselves because then they would have to accept the hidden truths about slavery and Indian killing in their family tree. This opinion would annoy Harold to a great extent. He considered Walker to be a very shameless woman. When he asks Walker as to what kind of a writer is she, she defiantly replies “A shameless one” (WBH 39). Harold had never allowed his own wife Dianne from publishing whatever she wrote as he worried that she would embarrass him by doing so. It is only after their parent’s death that Dianne’s children approached Walker with their mother’s unpublished dairy. This was one of the major Womanist concerns of Walker. She was unable to accept the condescending attitude of all towards a black woman writer. She has raised this issue in *In Search of Our Mother’s Gardens*, and described the difficulty that black women face as writers. As she herself has grown in her Womanist sensitivity. She is able to appreciate her husband’s cooperation in her chosen vocation, “Only you supported me in the work I chose to do in the world. Harold did not support Dianne” (WBH 46).

The section ‘Kindred Sprits’ is about connecting with the past especially male ancestors. It is a fictionalized version of Walker’s own attempt to connect with her past. Rosa, Walker’s alter-ego, takes up a journey along with her sister Barbara to visit their Aunt Lily, months after the death of their grandfather. Rosa undertakes this journey in order to put to
rest one of those Spirits which needed her intervention. Her grandfather’s spirit connected with her own through her struggle and suffering, “She needed to be there, to say good-bye to the spiritcase. For wasn’t she beginning to understand the appearance of his spiritcase [Sic] as her own spirit struggled and suffered?” (WBH 61).

Rosa resembles Walker in almost everything, including her pain and emotions. She has got divorced from her Jew husband, who is now living with a ‘nice’ Jewish girl. Through Rosa’s character Walker is trying to imagine the possibilities of her life after her own divorce. Whether her own husband began to live with some Jewish woman is a fact we do not need to go into. Rosa’s experience of being barred from entering her own former home by her mother-in-law and her husband’s new girl-friend leads her to examine the cracks of her wounded heart. She tries to show that she is not hurt but in reality she is as much pained as anybody in such a situation:

But did she care? No. she was free. She took to the sidewalk, the heels of her burgundy suede boots clicking, free. Her heart making itself still by force. Ah, but then at night when she slept, it awoke, and the clicking of her hells was nothing to the rattling and crackling of her heart (WBH 53).

This brings us to the title of this fictionalized autobiography. Both the author and her fictional alter-ego have to now move forward with a broken heart. Through Rosa, Walker is showing her own struggle of going through the pain of separation. Rosa falls back on her Womanist relative for their support to survive the break off. Barbara, Rosa’s sister lends her support in her moment of crisis. Rosa begins her journey towards healing by making
short trips to Cyprus, Greece and Jamaica. "She was at a place in her life where she seemed to have no place" (WBH 52). First she needs to stabilize herself before she can move on. Finally she makes a trip to visit her aunt at whose home her grandfather passed away. Along with saying goodbye to her grandfather's spirit Rosa, needs to confront her Aunt who in a very un-Womanist way was not close to her brother's wife, i.e. Rosa's mother. Rosa notices the dislike in her aunt's voice, when her aunt refutes the charge of being a drunk:

"your mama told you that lie," said Aunt Lily, unsmiling. "she was always trying to say I was fast. But I never did drink.... It occurred to her for the first time that Aunt Lily didn't like her mother (WBH 57).

Alice Walker has been giving us absolute examples of female-bonding in one novel after another. But here for the first time we see a discord between two sisters-in-law Lily and her brother's wife. This discord might be un-Womanist but there is a tinge of reality in it. There are very few cases in real life where two women related through a man would be friends, or share a bond beyond the man in question.

Even in the marital life of Barbara, Rosa seems to uphold the Womanist concerns. Though Rosa has been able to get out of an interracial marriage, her own sister lives in an abusive marriage. In spite of regular beating and abuse Barbara does not walk out of her husband's home. She allows her spirit to be polluted in the process. Rosa wonders why her sister has to take all the nonsense and go on living with him:
And she was present when Barbara’s husband beat her and called her names and once he had locked both of them out of the house overnight. .... But, in any event, Barbara continued to live with her husband many more years, and Rosa was so hurt and angry she wanted to kill.... Her sister’s spirit seemed polluted to her, so much so that the sister she had known as a child seemed gone altogether. And once gone, she had never come back (WBH 62).

Rosa doesn’t interfere between the husband and his wife because she feels that if she got involved, then she would murder her sister’s husband. And she does not wish to jeopardize her own future, “....how could she stab her brother-in-law to death without killed her future, herself” (WBH 63). Once during their childhood Rosa had protected her sister Barbara from their father’s blows by flinging herself between them with a butcher knife. Rosa could hear her brother-in-law laying blows on her sister, which seemed almost like blows falling on her own body:

As he punched out her sister, Rosa had almost felt the blows on her body. But she had not flung herself between them wielding a butcher knife as she had done once when Barbara was being attacked by their father, another raving madman (WBH 62).

What Rosa found more disturbing than the blows were the sounds of “making up”. Like almost many couples world-wide Barbara and her husband would indulge in love-making after a full-out war of kicks and punches. This was something that Rosa was unable to accept, “And then, still awake, she listened to the sibilant sounds of “making up.” harder to bear and to understand than the fights” (WBH 63).
Long after her grandmother has died and even after her grandfather’s death, Rosa realizes how her grandfather had poisoned all his family members against his wife. Her importance is understood by Rosa only after she died:

He’d only complained about his wife, and so convincingly that for a time Rosa, like everyone else in the family, lost respect for her…. Perhaps her grandfather had found the house in which they lived, but she, her grandmother, had made it a home. Once the grandmother died, the house seemed empty, though he remained behind (WBH 64).

Rosa understands her grandmother’s plight of having to live with an unappreciative husband all her life, and to find no sympathy from anywhere. Now, in hindsight Rosa weighs her love for her grandfather against his brutalities against his wife:

It was killing her, how much she loved him. And he’d been so mean to her grandmother, and so stingy too. Once he had locked her out of the house because she had bought herself a penny stick of candy from the grocery money (WBH 64).

It seems that the Womanist perspective develops within Rosa’s heart at a much later stage. Initially, even she is not altogether a Womanist, there have been incidents which bring out her Womanist tendencies, but they are few and far in between.

Rosa vividly remembers one Womanist incident from her past. She and Barbara were walking down a dusty road along with one of their
cousins. Suddenly a white man drove his car almost over them, leaving behind a trial of dust covering them up completely. Rosa very instinctively picked up a fistful of sand and threw it in the man’s direction. Unfortunately he saw her do so, so he reversed and threatened them with dire consequences, but the little Womanist in Barbara defied the man’s word and refused to own-up the doing. This put-off the white man completely and he turned and drove-off:

His car sent up billows of dust from the dirt road that stung their eyes and stained their clothes. Instinctively Rosa had picked up a fistful of sand from the road and thrown it after him. He stopped the car.... To warn her against doing such things.... But – “She didn’t throw no sand”, said Barbara, quietly, striking a heavy womanish pose with both hands on her hips (WBH 65).

Barbara in a quite Womanist manner makes the man realize his own mistake. If he was not going to accept having covered three little black girls in sand, then there was no reason for them to accept their action, which only brought out their frustration and not actually hurt someone. This little Barbara who can protect her sister against racism is unable to stand up for herself against sexism.

Walker then introduces another fictitious couple named Orelia and John. They seem to be a couple who are quite at peace with one another, but yet there is an undercurrent of mistrust and infidelity. Orelia carries a burden of non-understanding men from her past, which John finds very hard to combat. John has many virtues which can be termed Womanist. He is a man
who tries to understand his woman's rejection of him. Even in the face of Orelia's rejection of his genuineness, he remains stoic and understanding:

So John was not trusted, no matter what he did.... No matter how many times he proved himself different from other men, in her eyes he always seemed to measure up just the same and this was depressing. However, he loved Orelia and understood many of the ways she had been hurt by society and her family and empathized with her (WBH 72-3).

Orelia seems to be a victim of an internal beauty myth. Within her own Black family Orelia is mocked at by her all her brothers except one named Raymond, because the skin around her knees and elbows appeared gray and thick, they nicknamed her 'Rhino'. This caused a lot of emotional distress to Orelia, but as she was younger to the others she could not protest. The only solace was that one of her elder brothers' Raymond never referred to her by the demeaning nickname, but once he betrayed her and did so. From that day onwards Orelia was unable to trust any man. And John found it very difficult to undo the harm done to her spirit by her 'insensitive and wild' brothers.

John himself had an almost identical form of experience. Just as Orelia was ill-treated by her brothers, John was ignored in his family by his mother and sisters. John was excluded from the circle of warmth generated by massaging one another's scalp and oiling their hair. He remembers that as a child he always wished to be included in this 'ancient women's ritual' which would make him whole in more than one ways:
His sisters, with their unruly locks, had enjoyed the haven between his mother’s knees and between each other’s knees, and between his aunt’s cushiony knees, as they fiddled with each other’s hair, but he, a boy, had been excluded.... In his memories he would come upon his childhood self weeping and uncomprehending over this (WBH 77).

Orelia and John attempt to heal one another towards spiritual wholeness. John helps Orelia to trust men, by trying to rub off the negative image of men that she has been carrying since her childhood. Whereas, Orelia opens up the doors of the healing ritual of women, out of which John was always excluded. Orelia gives him the much-desired head massage on a full moon day, giving it the aura of an ancient ritual, “He felt warm and cozy and accepted into an ancient women’s ritual that seemed to work just fine for him too. It turned him on and gave him an idea” (WBH 77).

Orelia is a woman who is in love with the idea of love itself. Even while she is living with John she falls in love with one politician named Everett Jordan a man who made her laugh. She tries to reason it out with John, because she feels that she was very much satisfied with their life. But she is unable to get over the attraction at least for the moment. John tries to help Orelia come out of the relationship with Everett, not by threats but by cuddles. Like a true soul-mate John nurses Orelia out of this ‘illness’ as she calls it. Orelia falls in love and she immediately lets John know about it. While John has an affair with Belinda, a divorcee with two children, he hides it from Orelia as much as possible. Finally one day he spills the beans when a letter comes from Belinda for Orelia. It is not that Orelia would not have allowed him to have an affair, but the issue was about honesty. John
had tried very hard to make Orelia trust men again, once that she could do it John went ahead and broke her trust, and in the process ended their relationship.

The next story that Walker retells is about two friends and their lover. Marcella and Sally are on verge of dissolving their friendship when they are first introduced to the readers. The reason behind this separation is a dream that Sally had had in which she took Marcella’s place in Angel’s arms as if Marcella was just not there. The feeling of being abandoned by her best friend for a man who was ‘a hollow man’, makes her feel very bad. And that is what she complains about:

“But where did I go?” Marcella had asked, as Sally told her, .... Sally didn’t know where she went .... “When you didn’t know what happened to me, I felt abandoned (WBH 106).

More than the pain of infidelity on Angel’s part it is Sally’s refusal to tell her as to what happened to her in her dream takes a heavy toll on their relationship. What Sally hides from her is the fact about Marcella’s death that she saw in her dream in an accident, wherein she was crushed by a car. The symbolism of this dream is explained later. The car that crushed Marcella was in reality Angel who was crushing her with his hollowness. One year after their break-off Marcella breaks off with Angel whom she realizes is a man who has been performing different roles in his life. A man who cannot be taken on his face value does not deserve to be lived with.
Angel was never himself in his relationships. He always performed whatever role was expected of him. His mother wanted him to be a brilliant scholar and so he was, but only for his mother’s sake. He always strived for other person’s approval, first his mother’s and then Marcella’s:

The only time he’d felt loved as a child was when his mother approved of his performance in school.... He’d confused loved with approval and felt condemned to perform – in every relationship (WBH 109).

These performances prevented the true Angel from really getting involved. It was always someone else who was present and not he himself. And so Marcella is not much pained when he moves on to another woman, because he himself was not present where he was so it hardly mattered as to who was in his arms, “That the person in Angel’s arms hardly mattered since he himself was not really there” (WBH 110).

Everybody’s spiritual wholeness is so much at the heart of Walker’s characters, that it is also evident from the way in which Marcella reacts to Angel’s happiness with his new-love. She is happy to know that he sounds very happy and content with his new-love. She advises him to go on doing whatever was making him happy and thus making him whole:

She told Angel how “in himself” he sounded and advised him to do more of whatever it was he was doing. Obviously his one night with the new love had begun to bring him back to himself (WBH 109).
This is very unusual but at the same time very Womanist. The coming back of two friends after a period of 5 years is also very Womanist in its nature. Marcella realized that Sally was ready to sacrifice herself by getting involved with "the hollow man" of Marcella's life so that Marcella would be free to chase her own dream and freedom to attain wholeness.

The next section is very appropriately titled 'Big Sister and Small Sister', as this is a story about two sisters trying to come to terms with the decision that they have taken in the past. Though they have lived all their lives together, there has always been an invisible rift between the two of them. They have always been opposites, yet there is something which binds them. These two black girls have had a highly volatile racist past to deal with. Big Sister has been brought up on stories of horror told to her by her Auntie Putt-Putt, which sometimes seems to be gossip coming out of 'Her story'. Big Sister was addicted to her stories of racism, revolving especially around the sexist oppression faced by the women during slavery. While Little Sister seemed to be interested only in books and taking walks in the woods. The two sisters reacted differently to their Aunt's stories, though the stories wounded her sensibilities in some ways, Big Sister became an addict:

They'd been the bane of Littler Sister's childhood; she had felt instinctively that they wounded something in her, and had avoided Auntie Putt-Putt in favour of books and long walks and the tossing of pebbles into streams. But Big Sister has been hooked, a willing captive. As an adult she compulsively reiterated the stories, much as Auntie Putt-Putt had done. It gave her life a quality of moroseness and easily triggered resentment (WBH 115).
These two opposite approaches to the passing on of the oral tradition becomes their character in the days to come. The Little Sister is freed from her immediate surroundings and elevated into an imaginary world of books and the real world of nature. Whereas the Big Sister’s ‘moroseness’ did not allow her to leave behind the oppressive sexist roles decided by the patriarchal society, and therefore she constantly complained and cringed. Big Sister was surprised to see that her younger sister never seemed to bother about all the house work that she would have to do, “The way she did the dishes, automatically, ever noticing them, made it seem that she never did housework at all. It was the same with dusting the furniture or sweeping the floor” (WBH 122).

Big Sister always felt less appreciated for all the work that she put in, she felt very disturbed when the family never appreciated the food that she cooked. Their mother would complain about something, the father would eat it without any taste and the brothers would make fun of her cooking. The only one who genuinely appreciated was the Little Sister:

Her mother instantly lifting the tops off pots, peering into the oven, complaining about something.... And then her father, gulping down everything without a word, as if he didn’t taste it, and her brothers, saying the biscuits were lumpy and throwing them at each other like rocks. And Little Sister. The most irritating of all. Because she alone never complained or criticized.... Her attention completely on the flavours of the food (WBH 122).

Both these sisters who seem to be living on two different planes of existence who need to converge and help one another become whole. Big
Sister feels the need to once again go back to Aunt Putt-Putt's ruined house and get back her life which she willingly allowed to be burdened with the woes of the world, "Big Sister said, next morning; If we can find Uncle Loaf's house I will be happy.... If I revisit the place where my unconscious was trained to fixate on the dark, I will become well" (WBH 118).

During her journey into the past Big Sister remembers a day when she had gone to take Uncle Loaf's and Aunt Putt-Putt's blessing before going off to a school to learn to become a veterinarian. There for the first time she saw Uncle Loaf helping Auntie Putt-Putt in the kitchen garden, "It was as if the quiet oak tree in the yard had suddenly shaken itself and begun to meander down the road" (WBH 136).

But it was Uncle Loaf who made her departure a memorable event. He gave her a handful of silver dollars, and set her free from their rounded world of silence:

Uncle Loaf went to his room and returned with a handful of silver dollars. He handed them to Big Sister. "Far away", he said .... And she had walked out of their embrace, free at last.... Recalling this day now.... Big Sister began to feel health, balance of spirit and soul return to her. She saw that she too had been seen as someone deserving of getting away (WBH 136).

Little Sister also has a ghost of racism looming in her memories from the past. She had made friends with a white girl named Blaze, who was the daughter of her mother's employer. The two girls had had a wonderful time together; they played in the creek, on the swing and climbed trees together.
But suddenly one day Little Sister was informed by Blaze’s father that, “Miss Blaze isn’t here today. She’ll be back ....” (WBH 128). As a young child, Little Sister did not understand the hidden message behind “Miss Blaze’s” disappearance, but as she grew up she gradually understood what had happened and so in order to protect herself from the pain caused by racism she began to forget all the memories associated with Blaze. This left a gaping hole in her emotions which needed to be tendered to, before Little Sister could attain wholeness:

But Little Sister refused to remember this emotionally. Refused to permit it any validation in her feelings. Because to do so, she felt, would be to become complicit in her own betrayal. And she felt she had been betrayed. No. “good old days” could ever exist for her, once she understood that even her happiest days rested on a foundation of inherited evil. An evil that said, when she least expected it: “Miss” Blaze .... (WBH 129-30).

As a result of her bitter experience with friendship of a white girl, Little Sister did not allow herself to love or come close to any of the white women with whom she worked. She tried very hard to maintain distance. But sometimes her guard would fall and she would be genuinely drawn into a relationship with her white co-workers. The dilemma that she faced everyday made her wonder as to what is more painful, to love someone by compulsion which is beyond one’s control, or to choose not to love no matter what:

Is not affection or love something pitiful, and degraded, when it is compelled by circumstances beyond your control? And when to choose not to love, or to feel affection, represents a greater
danger to the soul than one’s simple inability to do so? (WBH 133).

Though she never speaks about it, Big Sister knows about what has been plaguing her ‘little sister’ while lying on the banks of a lake after a bath. Big Sister helps Little Sister in coming to terms with her emotions and thus becoming whole. Little Sister joins Big Sister in her journey to redemption, and Big Sister helps Little Sister come to terms with her past betrayal. Finally it is the two sisters who aid one another in attaining their spiritual wholeness:

“Ah, wake up, Little Sister, it’s not as bad as all that!” Big Sister said gently, shaking her....
“Oh, cut it out,” said Big Sister.
“I see those tears!”
“You do?” said Little Sister, surprised.
“Yes!” said Big Sister emphatically....
She cried, leaning against Big Sister’s shoulder, until there were no tears left. And sure enough, soon she was smiling for real, because she was with her Big Sister, after all, and they were celebrating the close of a very happy day (WBH 137).

The next section is titled ‘Growing Out’ which deals with the growing out of the box that one is born in. Anne and Jason are two black lovers who find one another’s company quite fulfilling. Anne is a bisexual person, who along with her present lover, is attempting to understand the black artists that dominated the audio visual media. She like Celie of The Color Purple has found God in nature and had understood the power of love, “And she felt, ....a kind of thankfulness that she felt more and more strongly these days – now that she had recognized God in Nature, and had given in to love, and
she was happy, happy!” (WBH 142). Womanist seems to be the middle name of Anne Gray. Because whatever she does, whether it is appreciating the black artists or loving both men and women – both sexually and non-sexually, or loving tears, she is a Womanist in all her actions and attitudes:

They’d forgotten magic mushrooms had this effect on her: tears and laughter, perfectly mixed .... She actually loved tears, once she was in the release of shedding them, because she knew laughter was just beneath them (WBH 145).

Anne perfectly balances her tears with her laughter. She very easily connects with other women and appreciates women’s capability. Once when her car breaks down she calls up an all-woman car specialists. Her white husband Philips makes fun of the two women who come to tend to her complain, “I hope you know what you’re doing, he’d said” (WBH 147). A statement, which puts all the three women, including his wife up against him. Finally, when the car started within minutes of the women mechanic’s taking over, then even Philips had to appreciate the work done by them:

In a matter of minutes they had it going. Phillip smiled down at the three of them and the three of them smiled up (the mechanics bored, businesslike; she archly, tickled) and she felt herself across a line from him. We can do it! She thought (WBH 147).

In the next section we witness a conscious birth of not one but two Womanists, who awaken towards spiritual wholeness. There are many issues being discussed in this section by Anne and her lover Jason’s wife Suni.
Protection of Women, nuclear disarmament, spiritual wholeness, sisterhood of black and white women, to name a few. There creates an odd triangle between the three lovers – all three of them want to be with one another at some point of time. It is Suni, the White wife of Black Jason who writes to Anne requesting her to be a part of her sisterhood and accept her as a sister. This relationship is reminiscent of Celie-Shug relationship of the earlier novel. The only difference is that here the sisterhood is between a Black woman and a White woman, which takes the concept of Womanism to a higher level:

She had written Suni a letter saying yes, perhaps they could be sisters, which was a reply to Suni’s opinion that perhaps sisterhood was possible between them, and might even involve sitting outdoors on the steps in the evening braiding each other’s hair (WBH 156).

These two women do not only create a sisterhood but also share the concept of having an ancestor looking over them and being their guardian angel in whatever they do. They called this presence “Grandma” – a very very Womanist thing to do. The ancestor passing on her wisdom to the coming generation through its regular presence is not something new for Womanist. The spirit which a Womanist sees is embodied in every aspect of the universe, it can be there as an invisible presence, is something they would love to believe in.

Anne receives a letter from some woman requesting her to pledge her support to the movement to end violence against women. Anne writes back extending her support to the movement, she writes:
All of us are being attacked because we are women, and no one really cares about us but us .... Refuse the role of victim! Create a new role and identity as fighters for Our life! I send you my love, and my support, and my strong clenched fist. In Sisterhood, Anne Gray (WBH 149).

After writing this letter, Anne sits back and wonders whether it is only now that violence against women has started happening? And the answers that come to her are in the form of a question, which reminds her that women’s rights have been violated by men since ages, and now was the time to avenge these violations as women had become united and strong enough to protect themselves.

Walker also voices the concerns of the Black Feminists of the 60’s as her heroine is placed in that era. Anne wonders whether the white women who seek Black women’s solidarity in their fight against sexism would ever be able to see Black men as the perpetrators of crimes against their own women? Or would the Black men be condoned only as a fellow victim and never condemned for his role as an oppressor?:

And if that was the reason, then undoubtedly these white women against violence against women were seeking not to be seen as only white women. And she wondered if there were not black men somewhere in the murkiness of all this – and the white women not wanting to appear racist, but intent, nonetheless, on asserting their right to exist, unmolested (WBH 150-51).

Anne also understands that in a world ruled by powerful rich White men it was very easy for everybody to crucify the Black man as the biggest threat
to 'the white damsels in distress'. Again what Walker attempts to do is to put the whole episode in its right perspective. One cannot forget that the white men were in control of the media and so they could portray whatever they wished:

How easy it will be for all the attention to focus on black males, their violence, their general unruliness, because that is simply how America responds to its white damsels in distress; even though the majority of rapists, killers and what not are white men.... White men, of course, control the media. They are notoriously kind to themselves (WBH 151).

Walker neither condones nor condemns the role of a Black man in the White supremacist society. She simply puts forward the fact of Black man’s victimization at the hands of white man. Again it is Anne’s ‘Grandma’ who desires to be fair to the ‘good white man’ as well. Anne voices the dilemma faced by all those non-racist, non-sexist, secular people around the world – the dilemma of whether to protest against the violence or to suffer in silence. This she says is not new to the people of color especially women, and then Anne’s Grandma chides in that even good white men face this dilemma:

Anne Gray continued her day, thoughts of complicity, assertiveness, guilt, crowding her: to speak out provoked violence; to remain silent encouraged death. It was a dilemma not at all new to people of color, or women. Or even to good white man, too, said Grandma, grudgingly but determined to be fair (WBH 152).
This is a big step for the Black protagonists of Walker’s fiction. Up till now these women had opened their Womanists doors to Black men and white women apart from themselves, but now they are welcoming in their fold all those white men who empathize with the victims of racism, sexism and classism. Thus Womanism becoming in its real sense ‘universal’.

Walker goes on to discuss the biggest threat looming large over the heads of the entire humanity and that was – nuclear explosion. Through Jason, Walker voices the criticism that people fighting against the nuclear powers had against the black people and feminists – that they did not participate in their movement Anne answers in her characteristic way and says that both these communities are fighting a day-to-day battle of survival against the white male, so it was difficult for them to immerse completely in something that they did not see as immediate danger:

Jason was angry that more black people did not join the anti-nuke movement…. Angry, too, that more feminists did not see it as a women’s issue.

“Give us a break”, said Anne. “Of course it’s a black and women’s issue, but black folks anyway are preoccupied with day—to-day survival (WBH 155).

The presence of the ‘Grandma’ in both Anne’s and Suni’s lives helps them sustain their sisterhood. The beauty of Suni’s ‘Grandma’ was that though she was a white rich girl, her ‘Grandma’ was a Black spirit which made her connect with the Black people of her nation. Eradicating racism was her life’s mission which she had acquired while teaching Black children in Mississippi, and the awareness of a Black ‘Grandma’ always present with
her cemented her belief in black-white equality, “.... and the awareness, while there, that a black "Grandma", similar to the one who lived in Anne’s consciousness, lived in hers also” (WBH 158).

Suni finds liberation in the ashram of an Indian Guru who wakes her up from her mortal sleep to open her heart and accept the inevitable spiritual change necessary for one’s moksha. Gurumayi was like an oasis in a parched desert of Suni’s life. She was surprised to see that women can also be spiritual gurus; even Anne is surprised to know this. But then Anne says that only a woman spiritual guru would have been of any interest to her, and shares her experiences with Anne:

The first time I saw Gurumayi I fell in love with her, she said ....I never knew there were women gurus, said Anne. Neither did I, said Suni. But when I saw her, I thought : Of course, How natural. For sure I wouldn’t have been as interested in listening to a man (WBH 161).

Anne on her part associates with a young boy named Adam, who is as old as her first child which she aborted. According to her, there is nothing sexual or romantic about this liaison, but yet it is one of the most fulfilling of all relationships that she has had. Anne always felt the need to explain the reasons behind her giving up the unborn child. She wished to express both her grief and love to the spirit of that child. And Adam gave the opportunity to redeem herself:

I believe Adam and I have known each other a long time. May be always. That he is my soul’s recognition of a child I aborted twenty-five years ago…. I’ve wanted to connect with it. not so much to apologize, but to explain my terrified and
impoverished circumstances, the fact that I was abandoned by his father who was also young and scared, and to express my grief and love (WBH 162-3).

Just as Suni is taught the lessons of spirituality by her Gurumayi, the universe reveals its mysteries to Anne through her connection with this young boy. Anne’s spirit is released from its burden of guilt which prevented her to whole-heartedly be a part of the creation. Dancing with Adam seems to be like dancing with the very Spirit of this Universe. Adam seems to be the connecting element in Anne’s life. For Anne it appears that he is her first man, “in a way, he feels like my first man” (WBH 162). Adam brings with him the purity and innocence of a first relationship. The biggest lesson that Anne learns is the lesson about the non-punishing Universe. She learns that the Universe is not out there to punish you for your transgresses:

And one of the most serious things for me has been the understanding that the Universe is not that interested in punishing us. Every move we make is simply part of its reflection (WBH 163).

Thus, Suni’s and Anne’s spirits find themselves free to be a part of the creation and attain wholeness in the true Womanist sense. This also proves that Spirituality is very much a part of the whole Womanist scheme. The final goal of all Womanists would certainly be Spiritual wholeness. Becoming one with the Spirit that embodies the Universe seems to be their mission.
The final section is once again narrated by the author herself wherein she herself is the subject. ‘This Is How It Happened’ is the title of this section and it which deals with her relationship with her friend Marissa. A woman who was a very god dancer and the one, who taught her that to be physically attracted to women, was also an available option. Yet the two women didn’t become a couple because Walker felt very uneasy in her presence, as she seemed to be much freer and advanced to her:

After sleeping together once or twice why don’t we become lovers? .... I certainly loved and admired her. Yet she seemed somehow beyond me, freer. I felt I’d never catch up. Her “way” seemed natural to her. I would have to learn it. This frightened, irritated and depressed me.... I tried to imagine the two of us as a couple and it made me uneasy (WBH 173).

The reason for her to move onto a lesbian relationship comes as an explanation of the fall-out in Marissa – her friend’s marriage. Marissa had stopped enjoying and participating in the act of love-making with her husband because her husband Tripper’s sexual needs came at the center of their sexual life. She became least important in the whole act, even if she did not participate in it actively, her husband would hardly bother. And so her body began to say no to sex with her husband, which led to her being with other women, who would understand her body much better than the man:

Eventually I realized it was because over time Tripper’s sexual needs set the times of love’s occasions. I was never able to say no, but my body did. It withheld its pleasure, since its own desire was not permitted to set the pattern of celebration and release (WBH 171).
May be this was the story of Walker’s own life as well, and so she took women as lovers in the later part of her life. The final section is titled ‘The Brotherhood of the Saved’ refers to the Brotherhood created by like-minded religious people who come to pray for her uncle called Uncle Brother. A group of white and Black people came to pray for the health of Uncle Brother, because they believed that as everybody was created equal, everybody had the equal right to redemption, “But now they’re the Brotherhood, and they claim now they believe every man is created equal. ‘Course, they didn’t seem to know they could believe this till the laws changed” (WBH 190).

Her mother informs Alice that this very Brotherhood which accepts Black people as equal, have their reservations regarding lesbians:

They also say that what you do with women is a crime.
You mean sleep with them?
Yes.
Well, I said, pushing the swing so that it rocked a bit to the left,
If sleeping with women is a crime it’s one for which the whole world is guilty (WBH 177).

Walker takes her mother and two of her aunties to see a Lesbian movie. They are shocked and surprised to see whatever was going on in the movie. All three of them found it absolutely unnatural and atrocious. Yet when Walker offers to take them again they are as much interested. Walker opens up a new avenue for her elders to think about.
Walker's cousin Harry was also a Gay and therefore his father threw him out of his house. The manner in which the brothers reacted to their children's homosexuality was amazing. Uncle Brother's decision to throw his son out of his home was the conventional one, but the consequences were very difficult for him to handle, he couldn't sleep at night in peace, has nightmares and screams into the night. His brother, Walker's father has this explanation to give:

He falls asleep, screams like somebody's killing him in his dreams, wakes up shaking like a leaf. How you going to cut your own child out of your heart and not scare yourself to death? (WBH 193).

In contrast to this Walker's father moved out of his house because his wife did not refuse her congregation, when they ordered her to throw their daughter out of their home and their lives. The father understood and respected the individuality of his daughter more than the mother did, "The day she mentioned her congregation advised her to stop letting you come home or talking to you on the phone, and she did not say she'd told them to go to hell, I moved out" (WBH 193). Thus, for Walker it was her father, with whom she was not initially close, who understood her better. He accepted her the way she was, and approves of her decision.

Finally, Walker addresses her ex-husband and offers the dream of a better tomorrow amidst the uncertainties and chaos of the modern times. She says that it is the memories and art that we carry forward from our past which will help us survive the violence of the modern day. She also refers to
the growing tendency of people wanting to go back to the refuge of the past, in order to run away from the present. What she feels is that we have to embrace the past and move ahead in the present with the power it gives to us, the power of knowledge and certainty:

We are a frightened, a broken hearted nation; some of us wanting desperately to run back to the illusory “safety” of skin color, money or the nineteen fifties.... We find we have only ourselves. Our experience. Our dreams. Our simple art. Our memories of better ways. Our knowledge that the world cannot be healed in the abstract. That healing begins where the wound was made (WBH 199-200).

In the interview printed at the end of the novel titled ‘If You’re Loving, You’ll Always Have Love: A Conversation with Alice Walker’, Walker gives her advice to the young people of this world, which turns out to be the perfect end to this discussion:

Q: What advice might you have for people who don’t seem to be able to graduate and move on?

A: When you cling to what is no longer there, you suffer. I know from personal experience that clinging is painful (WBH npag.).

Thus, the motto of forgive and forget seems to be as Womanist as all other characteristics discussed in In Search of Our Mothers’ Gardens, and The Way Forward is a perfect example of it.

Now is the Time to Open Your Heart

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The final novel in this discussion is comparatively very different and mature in more ways than one. In her earlier fiction Walker's protagonists have begun their journey from a certain point of spiritual vacuum and then have move towards spiritual wholeness. Most of her early women had to fight for their basic survival first before turning into aggressive Womanists. But the protagonist of *Now Is the Time to Open Your Heart* has already reached the state of spiritual awareness. Kate Walkingtree, the protagonist is a character based on Walker's grandmother Kate Nelson. She was murdered when Walker's father was just a boy. This novel is a tribute to that ancestor whom Alice never met, but always thought of. She imagines the psychic growth of this powerful woman who incurred the wrath of somebody who was afraid of her power:

My father's mother was murdered when he was a boy. Before she married my grandfather, Henry Clay Walker, her name was Kate Nelson. This novel is a memorial to the psychic explorer she might have become. It also made clear to me in the writing how much I miss her. And have always missed her (NOH npag.).

This seems to be a tribute to not only her grandmother but to Walker's all those female ancestors, who had not been given the chance to explore and conquer the world of spiritual enlightenment. The presence of Eastern philosophy is constantly felt, right from the very acknowledgement, Walker invokes the *devas*, angels and *bodhisattvas* for guiding explorers, pioneers and artists in their mission to change the world, "With this writing, whatever its faults, I express my gratitude to all devas, angels, and bodhisattvas who
accompany, watch over, and protect explorers, pioneers, and artists” (NOH npag).

Spiritual growth is also evident in Walker herself through her writings. It appears that some kind of peace and tranquility has set in her soul, and that is what she is transmitting through her novel. The fight is over, Womanism has been established, now is the time to move on and encounter other spiritual and universal challenges. Walker calls her grandmother ‘Walkingtree’ – a very interesting name but not new. The connection between trees and women has already been established in *The Color Purple*. Celie could identify with the pain felt by the trees, as a result of the acute deforestation undertaken by men. The first chapter is titled ‘Cool Revolution’, here we are introduced to the psychology of a Black woman amongst white middle-class spiritual seekers.

Kate Walkingtree is a Black woman who has enrolled in a meditation programme and finds herself to be a misfit in a group which undermined the struggle of the third world countries, calling them ‘hot’ revolutions. Without empathizing with the people of these conflict-stricken countries, Kate’s teacher makes a passing judgment on the absolute truths of poverty, starvation, violence and annihilation that is a living reality for a majority of these countries. In putting forward his understanding of the ‘cool’ revolutions introduced by the Lord Buddha; he dismisses all those people who fight for their survival:

Today he was talking about the misguided notion that as “hot” revolution, with guns and violence, such as the ones attempted
in Africa, Cuba, and the Caribbean, could ever succeed…. The only revolution that could possibly succeed…. Was the “cool” one introduced…. By the Lord Buddha (NOH 04).

Walker, through her characters moves ahead on the evolutionary ladder of spirituality, but does not forget the ground realities. Her feet are very much planted in her identity that of a Black person, an “other” for almost all who are present with Kate in her meditation programme. Kate knows that it is very easy to romanticize the third world struggle and ignore it by calling it useless, but the real pain can be understood only when you know the real circumstances. Spiritual wholeness is miles away from all these people whose basic survival is threatened and it is easy to sit and romanticize about it but difficult to really live the life of poverty and hunger:

Easy enough for him to dismiss the brown and black and yellow and poor white people all over the globe who worried constantly where their next meal was coming from she thought. How they would feed, clothe, and educate their children? Who, if they did sit down to meditate, would probably be driven up again by the lash. Or by military death squads, or by hunger, or by …. The list was long” (NOH 05).

Kate loses her interest in whatever is being done at the center after this off-hand remark about a majority of the world population. Kate is born into a Christian family, brought up in Christian way, but even as a young child she cannot accept the concept of the primary sin – a sin committed by
merely being born. She comes here to find solutions for her spiritual quests, but even here she is disappointed. So finally she moves on to nature and began to feel one with the creation at large, because nature accepted everything and everybody with open arms:

That evening and the next day and the next she found herself unable to mediate. She kept looking out the window instead, just as she had looked out of the window of the Church of God and Christ, as a child, when she had been unable to believe human beings, simply by being born, had sinned.... She slowly, slowly, made her way to the largest redwood tree and sat under it (NOH 5-6).

Kate’s experience of the subtle racism leads her to newer pastures of spiritual quest. After attempting to detach herself from all her things memories and even money – which she burns one by one – she moves on to a spiritual journey up the river Colorado with a bunch of nine other women. In her dreams she has regularly been searching for some river, which once she finds runs dry. This dry river is symbolic of the dryness within herself, the deep-rooted desire to flow with the river of life and wholeness forces her to look for the source of the inner dryness and make it whole through a conscious spiritual effort:

She began to dream each and every night that there was a river. But it was dry. There she’d be in the middle of an ancient forest searching for her life, i.e. the river, and she would find it after a long journey, and it would be sand (NOH 14).
Like many of Walker's protagonists, Kate also needs to make peace with the ghosts from her past, especially coming to terms with the violent death of her parents. In her attempt to detach herself from her present, she begins to feel a dissolution occurring all around her. Dissolve the old and create the newer, fresher and better life for herself, seems to have become her goal now, "She could feel her house dissolving around her, as her parents dissolved when she daydreamed them, and there was a feeling of relaxing, of letting go, that was welcome" (NOH 13).

At the time of these events she is with a man who cannot understand her predicament because it is more psychological than physical. Kate's knees have begun to creak, but he was absolutely unaware of the sound. She wants him to kiss her knees, but he just forgets to do so, and so even without wishing it Kate begins to think of her lover before him, a woman closer to her in age, would kiss even the slightest bruise or cut:

He was so inexperienced he could not hear her creakiness.... She wanted kisses on her knees that he could not remember to offer; nor could he understand, exactly, why kisses should be needed. It boded ill for them. The lover before him would have understood perfectly. A woman closer to her own age (NOH 12).

Finally, when she decides to undertake a journey down the Colorado River, she does it with other women. Kate felt more comfortable with women and also because women seemed to be the only ones concerned about the dryness of the river beds. Men have long ago cut off their connection with the wholeness-rendering nature.
Environmental concerns have always been a very vital issue for Womanists. They have always connected with nature in more than one ways. Kate is a Walking-tree whose inner river has dried out. Walker has always appreciated and acknowledged connection between women and nature:

Her journey now was to be with women. Only women. Because of women. And partly because she had seemed to feel, and to wonder aloud, about the possibility that only women, these days, dreamed of rivers, and were alarmed that they were dry. (NOH 16).

Kate leaves behind a hurt lover who tries to find fault with her so that it would be easy for him to forget her. But what he sees is a change not in his attitude towards her but an unalterable change happening within himself. Kate has passed on the power of dreams to her lover. In his dream he sees a Hobbit-like creature which moves on a path which leads to a trail within a bush. Suddenly the creature disappears leaving behind a message, which awakens him to a new reality of the Guardian Spirit, “You are lost, my boy, the spirit being says (NOH 17). He gets up from his dream crying out for the way to the river. In that very instant he realizes that everything is not over between him and Kate, and that he has also joined her in her quest for wholeness:

Wait! He calls. Which way to the river? ....
He lies cradling her pillow, suddenly knowing it isn’t over between them. that it will now never be, no matter that they may soon part. He has somehow joined her journey (NOH 18).
As a matter of fact both of them have come together over his painting of space and earth that she finds herself so much engrossed in it, because she feels that space and emptiness are their true home, “Because emptiness, space, is our true home?” he’d replied.....and the blue of your sky (NOH 18). Space allows Kate to fly away as a bird. Their relationship is not binding, it is liberating. Liberation is there in it for both of them. Though Kate is the first one to realize this, her lover does follow her in her path of liberation and ultimate freedom to be whole within the emptiness. Kate’s journey on the river Colorado begins with the purification of her internal system. Her body begins to cleanse itself by throwing out all those unnecessary goods which are like unwanted burden on the spiritual journey up ahead. She begins to puke out all those unspoken and spoken words, which had accumulated over years. She has to free herself completely of this burden before she can begin to take in the knowledge that the river and its canyon to offer. Over the roar of the river she hears the roar of all those words trying to leave her body all at once:

....an internal roar as of the sound of a massive accumulation of words, spoken all at once, but collected over a lifetime, now trying to leave her body..... All the words from decades of her life filled her throats. Words she had said or had imagined saying or had swallowed before saying to her father, dead these many years. All the words to her mother. To her husbands. Children. Lovers. The words shouted back at the television set, spreading its virus of mental confusion (NOH 23).

To de-clutter one’s life was a lesson that Kate was trying to share with Yolo since a long time. But he could just not give away his material possession, as they reminded him of that time in the past with which they
were associated, “He felt they represented times in his life he could not recall without their presence. They represented stories” (NOH 25). He had witnessed Kate de-cluttering her house and mind over the period of time that they were together. Kate had a feeling that in order to allow new things to flow through your body you have to make space within by de-cluttering. During his lifetime Yolo had collected more possession than he knew what to do with them. He had books, magazines and especially clocks of all shapes and kinds. Even if only the battery of a clock would have failed, he would go and buy a new one. On a sub-conscious level the clocks became mementos of a “time when people lived and behaved as if they were going somewhere” (NOH 26).

Yolo realized that the hidden purpose behind his buying so many clocks and preserving the stopped ones was his way to preserve time. He wished to live in the past may be, because he was afraid to move on. He was clinging to the past time, past memories and past relationships, “So that when he looked about his cluttered rooms with their assortment of rundown clocks, he understood he had, by buying them, been attempting to preserve time, to hoard it” (NOH 26-7).

The de-cluttering that Kate was experiencing on the river was happening through both puking and loose motions. She was losing all the negative emotions and memories through the outflow of the fluids from her body. She remembers the reasons behind the failure of her first marriage. Kate had become merely a servant for her husband and her child – together they presented a serving dish on a Valentine’s Day – they had completely
forgotten her being as an individual. All her years with them Kate had swallowed one insult after another, one blow after another:

More years passed, and she stayed with them, and she saw how they ceased to really see her. They saw instead a service, a servant. And she’d gazed into their greedy eyes and saw the rest of her life being sucked away. And she had swallowed and swallowed (NOH 28).

And it was this swallowing which was eventually coming out. Even while she was in this marriage she felt that she needed to be free from everything that surrounded her. The feeling of being imprisoned and captured, not merely by relations and people but more importantly by possessions, was very strong in her heart. In fact she was shocked to discover that she was trapped by possessions. Being an American, the love for possessions must have been an integral part of her being – so the realization that she was trapped must have been an absolute shock, “She thought of how diligently she’d worked to free herself. Difficult because of the shock she was in, discovering she was trapped. Captured most of all by possessions” (NOH 28-9).

Yolo was the first one to realize that her internal being was becoming freer as he felt for along time that whenever he held her close to him he could hear a humming coming from her body, as if all her molecules were singing. But she was not awakened enough to hear this humming herself:

For months h’d felt, every time he held her, a kind of humming coming from her body. A buzzing..... And yet when he
mentioned this to her she said she felt no such activity....Not so, he’d insisted. Your molecules are singing (NOH 29).

Though she is unable to feel the internal change that had visited her, Kate wishes that some change, for the better, should come once she is back from her trip down the river. As she has undertaken this journey to invite change in herself because she has begun to feel unhappy with her present self. She desires some growth of the spirit within her, “Of course I will change; at least I hope so. Pray so. Without changing I will be doomed to stay my present self and I’m so weary of that!” (NOH 30).

Kate had already begun changing even while she was living with her first husband. She desired to change her status right from the day she felt like a mere servant in her own home. Kate decided to leave her marriage to move on. When she told her husband that she was leaving, he tried to throw her off the cliff that they were hiking. He left her on the mountain and drove back without her. The next morning he raped her ignoring her resistance. Later on he apologized for having shoved her on the mountain, but didn’t say anything about the rape. His excuse was that he felt the two negative emotions that men indulged in — Anger and fear! The most amazing thing was that he was just not bothered about what his wife felt. Reason enough for her to leave.

The bitterness associated with her first marriage was anchoring her down heavily in the past. Once these memories were out of her way she was healthy enough to take in all the beauty and knowledge that the natural environment had to offer. Now she was able to interact with the other
women and actively participate in their discussions. One night she sat with the senior group of women and they together began to unravel the mystery of the beauty-myth. Beating the signs of getting older was their center of discussion. One of them said she just couldn’t bear to see white hair on herself, she inevitably dyed whenever the need arose. Someone said she never did, while some other women revealed how she first feared the ‘grays’ (white hair) but later on as she realized that Gray was not such a bad color she began to love grey hair:

Gray, said Cheryl. Gray had such terrible associations, .... It was the color of blandness, dullness – Lifelessness. But then I began to notice stones and water, and gray skies, not to complain about but to appreciate. If you’ve ever lived through a drought you appreciate gray skies. Rain. Rain is gray she said. (NOH 37).

Coming from a person who has been born and brought up to adore youth and physical beauty, this is a profound statement of sure spiritual growth. It’s not very difficult to undertake an inward journey once the outer trappings are shed off. Kate shares her own experience of having straightened and dyed her hair as a young college going girl. But as she grew she realized that hiding her real self under all that color and artificialities was as unnatural as anything. It did not allow her to be herself and see and appreciate the change that meant something. What? She did not know yet:

I began to experience a feeling I hadn’t felt since high school, when I first began straightening my hair. I began to feel humiliated. It felt like I was abusing myself. Hiding something important that was not really at fault. Besides, I started to feel I
was missing what was going on with me. The incredible change; it had to mean something. What did it mean? I wondered (NOH 38).

These elderly women bond over their own experiences of growing up. Some have moved on some have not. On her tenth day on the river, Kate dreamt about her mother who told her that she was supposed to understand without being told that women of her mother's generation were crippled by the societal norms, but the next generation was free to fish with both their hands and live a life of fulfillment:

The tenth night on the river she dreamed of her mother.... They were sitting beside the ocean, and her mother gazed out on it as she spoke: *It puzzled me that you did not understand*, she said. *But how could I understand?* Kate asked. *I was never told anything.* The secret is, you do not have to be told.... *We do not need a boat for this* (NOH 39).

Kate pens a story of a mother-daughter after this encounter with her mother in her dreams. The story is about three sisters comforting their father on the event of their mother's death. The protagonist of the story is more close to their father, than the other two. This fact is resented by the other sisters. Kate is unable to write more on the small post-it. Kate and the other women experience the physical struggle of survival during their final days on the river. The rapids grow extremely fierce and one of the boats overturns throwing all the passengers in the river. These women swim to the safety of the shore on their own strength and courage. This is quite satisfying and encouraging not only for these particular women but for the entire group,
"To know they had depended on their own strength and courage to pull themselves to shore" (NOH 43).

This rush of adrenalin takes them to the issue of sex. They share their experiences and their preferences with one another. Sue, one of the younger women was a Lesbian, who never felt the need to have a boy friend. Her explanation to Kate was that her being a lesbian would have something to do with the fact that her mother never loved her even when she was a child, ever since she had always been in search of mother’s love. Initially, Kate did not think that she could love a woman like she did a man, but eventually she did have women lovers. Though she could not certify that they were better lovers than men, which came as a great comfort to her:

She’d found pleasure eventually in relating to women as lovers. But she couldn’t claim she thought they were better, as lovers, or as partners, than men. And this was, actually, a great comfort to her; she felt, finally, in emotional and erotic balance (NOH 46-7).

It is not only Kate who balances the lesbian and straight relationships, but also Walker who strikes a balance in her portrayal and depiction of these relationships. Apart from the deeper understanding about Lesbian relationships, Sue passes on the quest for the attainment of the Virgin goddess, a goddess who is whole in herself. Sue had given up the physical realm and had become a celibate in order to find her:

Now, though, I’m celibate.... And now, perhaps it was time to leave that area of exploration, and, like Sue to enter another: the life of the virgin, one who is whole unto herself.... She felt she
would be leaving the body itself. But there was a land beyond the sexual body, and friends like Sue proved it. They were out there in it, already, inhabiting new forests, sailing new seas. (NOH 45-7-8).

Walker liberates the concepts of Womanism from its very physicality and takes it to a spiritual realm. The characters in *Now is the Time* do not proclaim themselves to be ardent Womanists like her earlier characters, because they are firmly rooted in the ideology of Womanism. Here Walker explores and extends the frontiers of Womanism. These women are born womanists, now what? This is the question that Walker seems to be answering in this novel.

The next journey that Kate undertakes is in South America, where she goes to join a group of spiritual seekers who have come to cleanse their bodies and souls with the help of a shaman and his medicine, very interestingly called the ‘Grandmother’. As soon as the group reaches the shaman, the first thing that he says is:

.... no sex....Making love is something we enjoy, of course. But it has its place and time that is not the same place and time as the Grandmother medicine. This medicine, you will see, is from the Grandmother. That is its spirit Grandmothers are not sexy....It is to pay respect, he said finally, reflectively. It is to have an experience of the soul that is undistracted by desire. (NOH 49-50).

Before beginning their medication the *shaman*, whose name was Armando Juarez, made them drink a lot of a frothy liquid, which began a
spell of vomiting and loose motions. This was done in order to cleanse their bodies, as the bodies which would receive the grandmother medicine would have to be pure and clear:

They’d been asked to drink half a gallon of a frothy liquid that tasted like soapsuds. This was to provoke the vomiting and the diarrhea that would clean them out. You could never put a sacred medicine into a polluted body (NOH 51-2).

When she took the decision to come to South America Kate decided to know everything about the treatment that she could know in America itself. She visited a local shaman who had given her the purifying drink. She was introduced to the teacher who was unique because she was the Grandmother – a spirit who was there to pass on the wisdom of centuries together, “The teacher however was unique. She was Grandmother. The oldest Being whoever lived. Her essence was that of Primordial Female Human Being as Tree” (NOH 52).

Though the Grandmother medicine tasted awful to all of them and many more before them took it just to cleanse their bodies of all the poison that would be lodged within their bodies. Kate felt that she was taking the medicine not only for herself but for everyone and everything that constitute this universe:

.....she asked.... for help for the humans of the planet and for the coming generations and for the animals and plants and rocks. She asked that she be guided to knowledge of how to act in the world for the highest good of all. She asked that the medicine accept her and do no harm. She called on the
Grandmother Spirit to protect her, while she was being taught (NOH 62).

Kate was first introduced to Armando at Anunu the local shaman’s place. There she had heard a recording of his voice which sang the songs of healing and one particular line always caught her attention he sang, “Now is the time to Open Your Heart” (NOH 66). Open Your Heart to the Grandmother of all mankind, so that she can heal the wounds and lead you to wholeness. Anunu had said that Grandmother would want to know everything about her and it would be helpful if Kate shared the reasons for her seeking help with Anunu herself. The three things that came to Kate’s mind were firstly she felt that that everything had come to a passé, time was up, because the whole world seemed to be in a mess. Human race had reached a dead end. Secondly she thought that she there was nothing left for her to do with her life and lastly she felt her bi-sexuality was a problem:

I believe all is up with us, she said. Us humans....I am also unconvinced of the need to do anything further with my life, said she....I don’t seem to find much of a difference between women and men when it comes to loving them (NOH 67).

Kate, at this stage, seems to be a person without a vision, a goal and confused identity. Her present state is a result of many things: her difficult childhood (being ignored as a child), Global human concerns and failings, and the eternal conflict between homosexuality and heterosexuality. According to Anunu the last is not a problem at all because Grandmother appreciates both these kinds of relationships. Because Grandmother loves
both men and women equally she seems to be a physical manifestation of the Womanist spirit. There is the balance of Yin and Yang in Grandmother and through her in all those lives that she has touched. In order to balance the opposite energies in our bodies we need both the feminine and the masculine qualities, “There will be times when the masculine will demand your interest and attention, she said. Times when the feminine will rise and exact her due” (NOH 68).

Kate had always felt a kinship with the plant world. She had instinctively eaten a yellow flower on the banks of the Colorado River when she was vomiting out her past miseries, she had felt immediate relief. She wished to know the name of the flower, but then found it better to call it a friend rather than refer to it with a man-given name, “She did not need to know the name humans had given the flower. To herself she called it friend and from then on looked for it along the banks of the river and felt concern for its health” (NOH 31).

Kate was surprised to know that there were a group of people; known as ‘ethnobotanists’ who studied people’s relationship with their plants. Kate had always felt instinctively that plants and people were relatives – a hard-core womanist that she is. Even as a child she would talk to, caress and kiss trees. She tried to communicate with the plant world without consciously understanding what she was actually doing:

People and their plants. Plants and their people. She had an instinctive understanding, perhaps from birth, that people and plants were relatives. As a child she had spent hours talking to,
caressing, sitting in, kissing, and otherwise trying to communicate with trees (NOH 69).

In *The Temple* Walker established or rather discovered our link with the animal kingdom. Here she is exploring the link between humans and the plant world. What Walker seems to be attempting is to unravel the mystery of interconnectedness of all the elements of this universe. She is exploring the Super-consciousness that is the inherent essence of all beings big and small.

In the very midst of the story Walker introduces Mother Earth as the narrator. She is talking to humans—her children. She wishes that humans should at the foremost ‘Abandon’ the thought of that human actions will ultimately destroy the earth. Because destruction is a part of the creation process. This reminds one of the Indian Belief of The Trinity – The Creator, Sustainer and Destroyer. Destroyer is as important as the Creator. Mother Earth seems to warn that human beings are destroying only their own happiness and comfort and peace of mind by their destructive activities:

FIRST OF ALL, ABANDON ANY NOTION THAT ANYTHING [sic] you humans do will destroy me. That is because I am your mother.... What you are destroying is your own happiness. Your comfort, which I put so much playful effort into creating. Your peace of mind. Your joy. There is no potion, no poison you can create, that will do anything but rearrange the pattern I have made .... So destruction too is part of the overall design (NOH 77).
Mother Earth’s final advice about saving the planet is for all human beings to become one mind—albeit a mind of clay, which can be easily molded into one shape and then another. Flexibility is the key to sustenance. Giving up speech would be the second step; an action which would take down the artificial barrier and bring us down to the human reality. Communication without words leads to higher interactions, and connections which would be hard to ignore:

All that is required is that everyone becomes as one mind. The mind, actually, of clay, she said, and laughed....There is no need to talk, really....Clinging to speech they’ve lost the ability to read one another, to feel one another, to know one another at a glance. Or with a sniff. It is entirely within human capability to do this (NOH 77-8).

This seems to be Walker’s answer to Kate’s first dilemma regarding the end of everything. She is projecting a picture of a better tomorrow through human effort on a large scale. Kate realizes that most of the major issues of this world are because we have deliberately looked away from one-another’s eyes. We are afraid to see the humanity and the fear in our enemies’ eyes.

The soldiers who blow up their enemies have to necessarily evacuate their own bodies as it becomes hollow from within:

If you see a human being, really see them, Kate thought, how could you kill them?....Blow up the memory of the fear in the eyes of the enemy was the command. Blow it up before I feel it too deeply in myself. There was no way of not knowing, on some level, that the bombing left a hole in the bomber, made it necessary to evacuate himself (NOH 78-9).
Kate cleansed her body of the painful memories of her first marriage during her journey down the river Colorado. On this trip in the rainforests of the mighty Amazon, Kate cleanses her body of the unhappy memories of one her marriage with a woman named Lolly. Kate fell in love with Lolly because "the woman had resembled an older relative who’d died" (NOH 81). The marriage with Lolly fell through because Lolly’s was not as honest and clear about her intentions regarding their relationship. She seemed to be with her only for fulfilling her material wants and desires. She was "someone who wheedled and cajoled until she got whatever it was she wanted" (NOH 81). This relationship acted as an eye-opener for Kate. She realized that not all women were innocent and helpless. And that not all women were trustworthy enough. Walker is criticizing the basic human nature – no matter whether it was male or female.

After a few sessions the medicine that Armando gave them stopped working on Kate. It seemed she was now ready for the next stage of healing. Putting the ghosts of her own failures and troubles from her own past was followed by putting to rest the wandering spirits of her ancestors. Kate felt that her shaman Armando and his helper Cosmi carried the spirits of their ancestors within themselves which helped them in their healing of other people’s wounds. Kate thought of her own ancestors who needed her to rectify the wrongs done to them. There was one particular man with no teeth and a bloody mouth who required urgent attention:

Kate pondered this. She was still plagued by those ancestors of hers who’d lived and died miserably. They wanted her to rectify their wrongs, she felt…. For instance, there was the man with no teeth. A bloody mouth (NOH 90).
This ancestor had often visited her and shared his story with Kate. This man’s teeth were pulled out of his mouth without any anesthesia being given to him. The reason behind this cruelty was that he was a slave to a master who had rotten teeth, and his mistress took fancy of his strong white African teeth. This man had selected Kate, his successor to release him from his suffering. His suffering was also hindering Kate’s own spiritual progress and therefore Armando holds Kate’s hand asks the ancestor to have mercy on her. To allow her to sleep and relieve her of her bad dreams, he sang a song of mercy which asked, “Is it right to break the hearts of those who would honor us, by requiring them to sleep, without rest, with our own bad dreams?” (NOH 92).

Armando gave her a special medicine which would help her have lucid dreams. And in this dream Kate would be able to talk to her ancestor and state her love clearly and seek her own freedom. Kate has a dialogue with her ancestor and finds him eager to share his wisdom. He feels that it is the job of the ancestors to pass on the message of forgiveness, not to avenge the wrong-doing but to let go and forgive:

Our job is to remind you of ways you do not want to be, he said.... There is also the question of loyalty to the dead. We feel we need to avenge, to make right. To heal by settling a score. Healing cannot be done by settling a score (NOH : 97).

This piece of advice is very healthy for the battered soul of Kate. She had always felt that she would not like to be the link between her ancestors and the present generation, because she felt that she “I did not want to relay any
more sad messages from the other side” (NOH : 90). But this assurance of freedom from hatred gives a big boost to Kate’s spirit. On being liberated from the past by one of her ancestors, Kate realizes that even she has a job to do for her healing ancestor. She gives him back what was taken away from him, his beautiful teeth. Kate hands Remus, her ancestor, a cob of corn to eat. He laughs and says that he has no teeth to eat it with. Kate insists that with a little faith he will definitely be able to eat. He obeys her request and as soon as he tries to eat it, the hard corn flies of the cob and attach themselves to his gums:

We living have jobs too, she said…. She watched as Remus, only to please her, put the hard, dry ear of corn into his mouth. Blood smearing it as he did so, …. The kernels of corn immediately flew off the cob and attached themselves to his gums. Remus, said Kate, beginning to chuckle at the astonished look on his face, you now have a full set of teeth (NOH 98-9).

The happy ancestor left her with herself in peace and contentment. Here too Walker uses the collective past of the Black family to explore and liberate the spiritual vacuum of this family. The healing happens on both the sides, the ancestor is relieved to go on and the present generation is freed to undertake its own spiritual journey.

After Kate experiences her own healing she participates in the healing of Lalika – a black woman murderer. She had murdered the man who had raped her and was about to rape her friend. They were caught when they were trying to escape. Once in jail they were repeatedly raped by the jailers and these rapes were filmed and sold in the market. After being let out due
to the interference of a human rights organization, Lalika had come here to be free of the acute pain and suffering that she had faced. Armando, Cosmi and Kate come together to relieve Lalika of her pain. Kate held her hand and Armando sang the song of forgiveness. A song which said that the victim needs to forgive in order to be free and live a full life:

Who is it that most needs forgiving? .....  
Who is it that can return?  
Free and gentle  
Like the rain?  
It is the self, my love,  
My adored one,  
It is the self.... (NOH 105-6).

Lalika and her friend Gloria were blessed with the presence of a woman ancestor named Saartjie Bartmann, who herself was tortured and murdered, during their time in the prison. She came to them in spirit and filled in the vacuum of a caring loving mother. She was always present with them whenever they were being violated. Her green skirt took them out of their abusive surroundings and thus helped them survive through their ordeal:

From that time on, we disappeared from our captors. We did not fight them. we did not curse them. we did not even try to ignore them. all of which we had done before. They did whatever they did to our bodies but we had flown into that luminous grass skirt (NOH 116).

This was the Mother Spirit that took care of her two oppressed girls. This is how the two of them were made to feel loved and cared for by a presence to whom they could pray and who answered their prayers, “And Gloria and I
knew we had found our savior. Someone to pray to. Someone who answered prayer” (NOH 117).

In the circle of people trying to attain wholeness along with Kate and Lalika were different people from different sections of the society. There was one Hugh Brentforth, who belonged to a family of new-immigrant settlers. They had a huge ranch on which was situated a stream. A native American old man would sometime show up and request them to give a jug full of water from that particular spring. Hugh would sometimes drive this old man to the spring. He would never know what they wanted the water for. Without Going into the details about this ritual Hugh’s family allowed the spring to be dug up by the energy development company, who were after the hidden coal that might be there underneath. Under the spring they found a hidden lake which protected the bones of the old man’s ancestors from thousands of years ago:

Exactly, said Hugh. The bones of the old man’s people from thousands of years ago. Resting there forever with a huge body of water separating them from any disturbance, and with only a tiny, trickling spring to connect them with the living (NOH 130).

Walker feels that one should not live in the past, yet one should always keep the past alive especially the one connected with the ancestors. Because it is our predecessors who pass on their wisdom to us and help us understand our present better. Hugh was unable to understand the devotion of the old man who religiously came to get the water from the spring. Hugh felt guilty on behalf his own family who destroyed this precious link.
between the living and the dead of these indigenous people. Hugh wished to know what the old man did with the water that he took in the plastic jar. The answer came in Kate’s dream. The old man connected the ancient ancestors with the comparatively recent ones by sprinkling the water over the burial ground of the recently dead people and over himself and prayed for all his ancestors and for the living ones as well:

In fact, she had dreamed the night before that there were two burial grounds on Hugh’s property. The ancient one from which the Indian elder got the water and a much less ancient one at the opposite edge of the land…. He knelt to pray. After praying he rose and sprinkled the water over the ground and over himself. He was trembling with exhaustion and sadness, but he was weeping with love (NOH 132-3).

Only a few foreign settlers, like Hugh, were able to appreciate and understand this amazing connection between the living and the dead. Due to his sensitivity he had to come to heal himself, for the sins committed by his elders were far more weighing than anything that he had known.

During their stay in Armando’s retreat the seekers were also taught the lesson of living in peace and harmony with non-human beings. They realized ‘towards the middle of their stay’ that their huts had other beings apart from themselves. “Every hut, it turned out, had its non-human resident” (NOH 140). Walker seems to be saying that we are not alone on this planet and therefore we should learn to appreciate the presence of other beings in our lives. One of the participants named Rick was a son of an Italian druglord. He had come to purge his soul of all the crimes committed
by his family against humanity. Kate helps him see his real self which was lost somewhere under the layers of affluence and money. Kato helps Rick become whole:

Looking him directly in the eye she had said to him, enunciating very clearly: *I see you* ....Rick stood up, looked self-consciously around the circle, and departed. He was gone all the next day (NOH 159).

While helping Missy, a victim of child-abuse rid her pain, the other participants discover their own animal-kin. Rick, Missy and Hugh see dragons, whereas Kate sees really big snakes wrapped around each other. According to Armando the Grandmother medicine took the seekers to the origins and endings of everything and therefore the grandfather reptiles would always come along to assist their understanding, “Grandmother Yagi is a medicine of origins and endings, yes, Armando concluded, softly. That is why Grandfather reptile always appears” (NOH 159).

Attaining wholeness for a white person like Rick is difficult but not impossible. Rick also can become a womanist in earnestness only if he is able to see the reason behind the invisibility of the white man. Armando explains to Rick that one can see only when the power that sustains that being is visible, “A PERSON IS VISIBLE ONLY WHEN IT IS POSSIBLE [sic] to perceive what sustains him” (NOH 160).

The White man has harmed the world so much that in order to be visible to others and in order to see others he will have to wash his eyes with
tears, the only cure for invisibility. And only when he starts seeing others, will he stop his destructive ways and attain wholeness, “In my opinion, he said, after a while, the only medicine that cures invisibility among the powerful is tears” (NOH 162).

On her last day at the retreat Kate is visited by an old woman who is famous for turning things into beautiful objects just by thinking. This woman dispels the fear of old-age that Kate has been harbouring for quite some time. She feels that once she grows old she would have nothing to do. Her life would become redundant. But with the coming of this beautifully creative old woman her perspective towards old-age changes entirely, “So that is old age! Kate thought waking. The ability to visit what is ugly and to transform into beauty anything you touch” (NOH 165). Kate’s final query about her relationship with her parents is solved while she is on the plane coming back home. The post-it on which she had written the story about father-daughter relationship suddenly lands in her hand. This brings her back to the memory of her family. After attaining her wholeness she is able to objectively look at her mother’s refusal to love her:

That she was not her father’s biological child was the reason her mother was always dissatisfied with her. Why part of her motherness was missing. It grew back only as She, the daughter, resolved to look into Life for herself: We do not need a boat [a mother] for this, she had said, and: the secret is, you do not have to be told (NOH 179).
Thus with the help of the grandmother Yage, the Bobinsana Kate is able to unravel the mysteries shrouding her life, and is now cured enough to move ahead on her path of wholeness.

In the meantime Yolo, Kate’s partner has also found her calling of the island of Hawai. He had gone there for a vacation but it turns out to be a life-changing experience. There he meets his ex-girlfriend Alma through unwittingly participating in the death of her son Marshell. Through Alma he meets a group of people who seek their wholeness through two wise women called Aunty Pearlua and Aunty Alma who bring them close to the feminine element of their being. The group consisted mostly of men who were lost either in power or addiction of some other kind like marijuana or drugs. The two women come to them as healers and guides who help them overcome their personal weakness and promise to change the world to be a better place:

She (Aunty Pearlua) thought they should resign from participation in any addiction whatsoever, even from drinking coffee and black tea.... No drugs, no alcohol, no “recreational” sex, no caffeine, and no tobacco. She asked the men in the gathering to make this vow (NOH 170).

The men found it difficult to take up this challenge, but Aunty Pearlua convinced them to do so for the freedom of the coming generation. When Yolo gets back he shares his experiences with Kate who sees the difference in her lover and then the two of them decide to marry in the true spirit of togetherness. They invite their friends to the marriage venue which was on
the banks of a river, where they could sit together and share stories after their wedding.

The final spiritual realization for Kate comes in the form of a sermon given to her by Grandmother. It is in this sermon that Grandmother reveals the teaching of Buddha and the concept of Advaita – Oneness with the Absolute One “Aham Brahmasami”, how you are the one that you are looking for, “Tat Avam Asi” is the main philosophy of this sermon. Grandmother asks Kate to ‘Open her Heart’ and allow the world to flow into her. One day when Kate is looking for the Grandmother she does not find her and wails out:

Oh, Grandmother, you are not here/and she said: But you are ....You are Grandmother, said Yolo ....Yes, I am Grandmother as she is; there is no separation, really, between us. And that, on this planet, Grandmother Earth, there is no higher authority. That our inseparability is why the planet will be steered to safety by Grandmother/Grandmothers or it will not be steered to safety at all (NOH 201).

Finally Kate attains her wholeness along with a group of other awakened souls. Walker’s progress on the path of Womanism has many milestones, Now Is the Time To Open Your Heart is one of them. Once Womanism becomes a way of life, spiritual growth becomes the next stage. Walker includes people of all ethnicity and race in her journey towards fulfillment. She proves that Womanism and Spiritual Wholeness is for one and all. It is not restricted to a group of people only. This makes Walker’s theory truly Universal in its true sense.