



EXPLORATION

Reconciliation

Readings

Reconciliation occurs
between equals.
Curtiss Paul DeYoung

Photo by Angela Roma on Pexels

1. *The Magnificence Inside* by Lee Jampolsky

Some kimonos (Japanese robes) have a design and purpose that is very different from western clothes. Certain robes are very plain on the outside, and even have imperfections purposely sewn into them. On the inside they are intricately beautiful and meticulously crafted. I imagine the purpose of the robe is to remind the wearer that their beauty lies within. Those who see the robe being worn, with only the imperfect outside visible, are reminded to think of the magnificence beneath the exterior—of the robe, the person, and themselves.

If all you see is imperfection—I'm too fat, they're unfair, you're not attractive enough—it is the same as focusing only on the outside of the kimono. There is always the option to shift your focus and see the loveliness of what is in the heart.

Looking to what is on the inside of the kimono, beyond the imperfection, is precisely what forgiveness is. When you are able to look beyond the mistakes and imperfections of people and recognize their magnificence, you have practiced forgiveness.

In reference to forgiveness, I often hear the comment, "My (parent, spouse, etc.) has never really expressed their love for me. We barely talk anymore. Do you think that there is a chance that if I offer them blessings and forgiveness they will change?" This question points to the

belief that, for forgiveness to be worthwhile, the other person needs to change in some way. Instead, look within yourself. Forgiveness is your most powerful tool for healing because with forgiveness you always receive blessings—even if the person's behavior does not change. This is because: *When you behold another with the eyes of love, you see your own magnificence too.*

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17832>

2. *Even in Racists Like Me* by Philip Yancey

Martin Luther King Jr. had some weaknesses, but one thing he got right. Against all odds, against all instincts of self-preservation, he stayed true to the principle of peacemaking. He did not strike back. Where others called for revenge, he called for love. The civil rights marchers put their bodies on the line before sheriffs with nightsticks and fire hoses and snarling German shepherds. ...Historians point to ...a bridge outside Selma, Alabama, when Sheriff Jim Clark turned his policemen loose on unarmed black demonstrators. The American public, horrified by the scene of violent injustice, at last gave assent to passage of a civil rights bill.

I grew up in Atlanta, across town from Martin Luther King Jr., and I confess with some shame that while he was leading marches in places like Selma and Montgomery and Memphis, I was on the side of the white sheriffs with the nightsticks and German shepherds. I was quick to pounce on his moral flaws and slow to recognize my own blind sin. But because he stayed faithful, by offering his body as a target but never as a weapon, he broke through my moral calluses.

The real goal, King used to say, was not to defeat the white man, but "to awaken a sense of shame within the op-

pressor and challenge his false sense of superiority.... The end is reconciliation; the end is redemption; the end is the creation of the beloved community." And that is what Martin Luther King Jr. finally set into motion, even in racists like me.

Source: *The Jesus I Never Knew* by Philip Yancey

3. *Preserving the Roots of Racial Injustice* by Austin Channing Brown

In their book *Radical Reconciliation*, Curtiss DeYoung and Allan Boesak ... write, "reconciliation is revolutionary, that is, oriented to structural change." Which means, reconciliation can never be apolitical. Reconciliation chooses sides, and the side is always justice.

This is why white American churches remain so far from experiencing anything resembling reconciliation. The white Church considers power its birth-right rather than its curse. And so, rather than seeking reconciliation, they stage moments of racial harmony that don't challenge the status quo. They organize worship services where the choirs of two racially different churches sing together, where a pastor of a different race preaches a couple of times a year, where they celebrate MLK but don't acknowledge current racial injustices. Acts like these can create beautiful moments of harmony and goodwill, but since they don't change the underlying power structure at the organization, it would be misleading to call them acts of reconciliation. Even worse, when they're not paired with greater change, diversity efforts can have the opposite of their intended effect. They keep the church feeling good, innocent, maybe even progressive, all the while preserving the roots of injustice.

Source: *I'm Still Here: Black Dignity in a World Made for Whiteness* by Austin Channing Brown



4. ***Forgiveness Is Not Easy***

by Desmond Tutu & Mpho Tutu

Often when we are suffering from loss or harm of some kind, forgiving can seem too overwhelming, too complicated, to even consider. How do we forgive if there has been no apology or explanation for why someone has hurt us so? How do we think of forgiving when we feel the person has not done anything to “deserve” our forgiveness? Where do we even start?

The work of forgiveness is not easy. Perhaps you have already tried to forgive someone and just couldn’t do it. Perhaps you have forgiven and the person did not show remorse or change his or her behavior or own up to his or her offenses — and you find yourself unforgiving all over again.

Forgiveness is not an effortless act for any of us, and it does not serve anyone to minimize the complexity involved in the work of forgiving. It is best to break our forgiving down into bite-size pieces, and begin from wherever we are standing. Tell your story for as long as you need to. Name your hurts until they no longer pierce your heart. Grant forgiveness when you are ready to let go of a past that cannot be changed. Reconcile or release the relationship as you choose.

...Our suffering, our pain, and our losses have the power to transform us. It does not always feel just, nor is it easy, but we have seen that, with time, great good can come from great sorrow....

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/26116>

5. ***Do You Believe in Justice and Equality?*** by Ijeoma Oluo

...When people say that they don’t like my tone, or when they say they can’t support the “militancy” of Black Lives Matter, or when they say that it would be easier if we just didn’t

talk about race all the time—I ask one question:

Do you believe in justice and equality?

Because if you believe in justice and equality you believe in it all of the time, for all people....

When people of color speak out about systemic racism, they are opening up all of that pain and fear and anger to you. They are not doing this because they enjoy it; it is an incredibly painful and vulnerable experience. We do this because we have to, because systemic racism is killing us. And yes, that pain and fear and anger will sometimes show in our words and our actions. But to see all of that pain, and how we fight still after entire lifetimes of struggle—and then to tell us to be more polite is just plain cruel.

To refuse to listen to someone’s cries for justice and equality until the request comes in a language you feel comfortable with is a way of asserting your dominance over them in the situation. The oppressed person reaching out to you is already disadvantaged by the oppression they are trying to address. By tone policing, you are increasing that disadvantage by insisting that you get to determine if their grievances are valid and will only decide they are so if, on top of everything they are already enduring, they make the effort to prioritize your comfort. Whether you are consciously meaning to do this or not, this is the effect tone policing has on people of color. (From *So You Want to Talk About Race*, pages 204, 207-8)

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/do-you-believe-justice-and-equality>

6. ***Holy Interruption*** by Julica Hermann de la Fuente

One of the most humbling lessons of my anti-racism education career was when I witnessed a difficult and racist presentation in a Unitarian Universalist gathering, and I didn’t think it was mine to interrupt. In fact, there were over forty people in the room, and nobody thought it was theirs to interrupt.

It was like witnessing a trainwreck in slow motion. It was terrible. And no

one said stop.

When the speaker was finished, we all struggled to process what had just happened. ...There was stark silence, followed by tortured conversation.

I learned that day that if I am in the room, it’s my responsibility to interrupt when someone is being harmed, and to center their (or our) needs. ...I’m part of a covenantal community and when a covenant gets broken, it’s my responsibility to name that break ...and to call us back into right relationship.

To throw a wrench into the agenda is one of the more destabilizing things that we can do in majority-White spaces....

This holy muscle of interruption is about courage, about a commitment to love at a higher level, about liberation and wholeness. It’s about being willing to risk being unpopular in the moment, and taking the heat that will happen when you interrupt the process.

When something happens that requires interrupting, it’s ours to do—and the more privilege we have according to our social location, the more responsibility we have to leverage that privilege. When we do, we bring the beloved community into being in that moment.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/braverwiser/holy-interruption>

7. ***The Prodigal Son***, Retold

Of course, you know the story. Two sons, but it could have been two daughters or a son and a daughter. The younger asks his father to give him his inheritance, and the father did. Of course, the impulsive, younger son travels abroad and lives extravagantly with wine, women, and whatever. He becomes the prodigal son: reckless, extravagant, and wasteful with way too much partying. He ends up broke and homeless and gets a job feeding pigs. Yuck! He was so hungry that he considered eating the pig’s food. Double yuck, because his father’s servants get bread enough to share. He considers going home and begins to practice different apologies. Meanwhile, the frugal, elder son stayed home, and worked, worked, worked the whole time for his father. Then, younger son shows up and apologizes. His father is ecstatic, and dresses

his younger son up, has the fatted calf butchered, and holds a feast with music and dancing. Woah! Elder brother, who is, of course, working in the field, hears about this and storms home. He is VERY angry. “Pop, what gives? He spent all your money and you hold a feast with the fatted calf. Hell, I didn’t even get a goat to dine with my friends.” The father says, “Listen. You are always with me and all I have is yours. But your brother was dead and is alive; he was lost and now is found. So, let’s party.” The End. Except, not the end. Father and younger son—reconciled. Yay! Elder son, not so much. Ouch! Hope this isn’t a Cain and Abel sequel.

Source: Touchstones

Wisdom Story

One Potato, Two Potato

by Derek Lin

One day, the sage gave the disciple an empty sack and a basket of potatoes. “Think of all the people who have done or said something against you in the recent past.... For each of them, inscribe the name on a potato and put it in the sack.”

The disciple came up with quite a few names, and soon his sack was heavy with potatoes.

“Carry the sack with you wherever you go for a week,” said the sage. “We’ll talk after that.”

At first, the disciple thought nothing of it. ...But after a while, it became more of a burden.

...After a few days, the sack began to stink.

Finally, the week was over. The sage summoned the disciple. “Any thoughts about all this?”

“Yes, Master,” the disciple replied. “When we are unable to forgive others, we carry negative feelings ...like these potatoes. That negativity becomes a burden ...and ...it festers.”

“Yes, that is exactly what happens when one holds a grudge. So, how can we lighten the load?”

“We must strive to forgive.”

“Forgiving someone is the equivalent of removing the corresponding potato from the sack. How many ...

are you able to forgive?”

“...The disciple said. ... ‘I have decided to forgive all of them.’”

“[So,] if the potatoes are negative feelings [about grudges], then what is the sack?”

“The sack ...is my inflated sense of self-importance.”

“The Tao of forgiveness is the conscious decision not just to remove some potatoes, but to relinquish the entire sack.”

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/17514>

Snippets

“Love is creative and redemptive. Love builds up and unites; hate tears down and destroys. The aftermath of the ‘fight with fire’ method which you suggest is bitterness and chaos, the aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community. Physical force can repress, restrain, coerce, destroy, but it cannot create and organize anything permanent; only love can do that. Yes, love—which means understanding, creative, redemptive goodwill, even for one’s enemies—is the solution to the race problem.”

Martin Luther King Jr.

“*Mearcstapa* [mearc-stapa, i.e., border-walker or border-stalker] is not a comfortable role. Life on the borders of a group—and in the space between groups—is prone to dangers literal and figurative, with people both at “home” and among the “other” likely to misunderstand or mistrust the motivations, piety, and loyalty of the border-stalker. But mearcstapa can be a role of cultural leadership in a new mode, serving functions including empathy, memory, warning, guidance, mediation, and reconciliation. Those who journey to the borders of their group and beyond will encounter new vistas and knowledge that can enrich the group. ...May we stalk the borders and margins, accepting our own deputized call to carry good news to the poor. ...May we always be willing to present a bouquet of flowers, even to those who may not yet know that they desire beauty.” *Makoto Fujimura*



“The healing of our present woundedness may lie in recognizing and reclaiming the capacity we all have to heal each other, the enormous power in the simplest of human relationships: the strength of a touch, the blessing of forgiveness, the grace of someone else taking you just as you are and finding in you an unsuspected goodness. Expertise cures, but wounded people can best be healed by other wounded people. Only other wounded people can understand what is needed, for the healing of suffering is compassion, not expertise.”

Rachel Naomi Remen

“We simply cannot engage with either the ills or promises of society if we continue to turn a blind eye to the egregious and willful ignorance that enables us to still not “get it” in so many ways. It is by no means our making, but given the culture we are emerging from and immersed in, we are responsible. White folks’ particular reluctance to acknowledge impact as a collective while continuing to benefit from the construct of the collective leaves a wound intact without a dressing. The air needed to breathe through forgiveness is smothered. Healing is suspended for all. Truth is necessary for reconciliation. Will we express the promise of and commitment to liberation for all beings, or will we instead continue a hyper-individualized salvation model—the myth of meritocracy—that is the foundation of this country’s untruth?”

Angel Kyodo Williams

“The trends we are seeing within restorative justice, reconciliation, transitional justice, dialogue and other forms of peace practice, are evidence of new ways of addressing human conflict that are moving beyond the old dichotomies. We have chosen to name this trend social healing partly because we see an evolving paradigm that is not fundamentally hinged around the dualities of



good vs. bad and right vs. wrong, but is rather inclined toward viewing human conflict through the lens of wounding and healing. Social healing, then, is not guided by revenge, retribution or punishment, but rather by the compassionate response of relating to all people -- victims, transgressors and bystanders alike -- as inextricably connected."

Judith Thompson

"If discipleship practices offer the means to lead us from segregation to solidarity, lament provides the mood. We dare not come to this ministry of reconciliation with any other posture. We move forward humbly, as those only slowly awakening to the extent of the damage done by our previously defective discipleship. The road ahead will often feel unnatural to those of us who've been discipled in the narrative of racial difference. For those who've known only racial privilege, the journey toward equitable reconciliation will sting at times. We are accustomed to segregation, novices on this journey to solidarity. And so, we must practice."

David W. Swanson

"Even if my neighbor doesn't understand my religion or understand my politics, he can understand my story. If he can understand my story, then he's never too far from me. It is always within my power to build a bridge. There is always a chance for reconciliation, a chance that one day he and I will sit around a table together and put an end to our history of clashes. And on this day, he will tell me his story and I will tell him mine." *Paulo Coelho*

"Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are. It is not about patting one another on the back and turning a blind

tion exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth. It could even sometimes make things worse. It is a risky undertaking but, in the end, it is worthwhile, because in the end only an honest confrontation with reality can bring real healing. Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing."

Desmond Tutu

"Social psychologist Brené Brown summarizes this tendency in explaining our inability to engage in a conversation on race: 'You cannot have that conversation without shame, because you cannot talk about race without talking about privilege. And when people start talking about privilege, they get paralyzed by shame.' True reconciliation, justice and shalom require a remembering of suffering, an unearthing of a shameful history and a willingness to enter into lament. Lament calls for an authentic encounter with the truth and challenges privilege, because privilege would hide the truth that creates discomfort."

Soong-Chan Rah

"Peace is not just about the absence of conflict; it's also about the presence of justice. ...A counterfeit peace exists when people are pacified or distracted or so beat up and tired of fighting that all seems calm. But true peace does not exist until there is justice, restoration, forgiveness. Peacemaking doesn't mean passivity. It is the act of interrupting injustice without mirroring injustice, the act of disarming evil without destroying the evildoer, the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free."

Shane Claiborne

Questions

1. In reading #1, Lee Jampolsky writes about some kimonos that are made very plain outside and beautiful inside. He concludes, "I imagine the purpose of the robe is to remind the wearer that their beauty lies within." Where does society locate beauty? What problems does this

create? Where does beauty reside for you? Jampolsky then writes, "Looking to what is on the inside of the kimono, beyond the imperfection, is precisely what forgiveness is." Said differently, the inside of the kimono is where inherent worth and dignity reside. In considering forgiveness or even reconciliation, how do you weigh a person's actions versus their essence? Of course, we cannot forgive some actions, but we can forgive many. What does forgiveness reveal of the person forgiving? Jampolsky suggests that it shows their magnificence. How might this be true? What do you regard as your magnificence? Why?

2. In reading #2, Philip Yancey admits that his racism at the time of Selma and Montgomery was extreme. But, he writes of King, "I was quick to pounce on his moral flaws and slow to recognize my own blind sin." (See <https://philipyancey.com/our-soiled-legacy> for more of his reflections.) Eventually, King's goals of reconciliation, redemption, and beloved community broke through his moral calluses. What does King have to teach activists today about reconciliation, redemption, and beloved community? What of King's approach no longer applies today?
3. In reading #3, Austin Channing Brown writes that superficial attempts at racial harmony cannot be considered reconciliation. For Brown, the problem is that. "The white Church considers power its birthright rather than its curse. "Do you agree? Why or why not? She notes that these attempts at racial harmony "don't change the underlying power structure of the organization..." Brown concludes, "They keep the church feeling good, innocent, maybe even progressive, all the while preserving the roots of injustice." Do you agree with her analysis? Why or why not? What are some examples of racial harmony? What are some examples of authentic racial reconciliation? How do they differ?



4. In reading #4, Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Mpho, write about forgiveness. They acknowledge that forgiveness can be difficult. What can make forgiveness challenging? While we may focus on what another must do to deserve our forgiveness, is forgiveness ever really deserved? Why or why not? Are there things that we can do to choose forgiveness even when it is hard? They write, "Reconcile or release the relationship as you choose." Do people assume that forgiveness requires an ongoing relationship? Why? As they make clear, forgiveness can lead to reconciliation or a relationship's ending.
5. In reading #5, Ijeoma Oluo writes about how difficult it is for people of color to talk about systemic racism because of all the pain that goes with it. Because of this, when they are told that their "tone" is too harsh, and they should be more "polite," it "is just plain cruel." Do you agree? Why or why not? Is this expectation of politeness an example of what Robin D'Angelo calls "white fragility?" Has it been hard to "hear" the truth in your life? What made it hard? What do we need to do to be able to listen to hard truths? Since reconciliation requires truth, how does white fragility undermine any possibility of reconciliation?
6. In reading #6, Julica Hermann de la Fuente writes about her failure to interrupt a racist presentation at a UU gathering and her subsequent regret. Has this ever happened to you? What were the circumstances? She concludes, "When something happens that requires interrupting, it's ours to do—and the more privilege we have according to our social location, the more responsibility we have to leverage that privilege." Do

7.

you agree? Why do we sometimes fail to recognize or leverage our privilege? What role can privilege play in the work of reconciliation? In reading #7, *The Prodigal Son* retells this well-known parable of Jesus with its theme of reconciliation. What do you make of this parable? Why? How would you explain and defend your actions if you were the younger son? If you were the father? If you were the elder son? What does the parable actually "teach" about forgiveness and reconciliation?

The following questions are related to the Snippets

8. Martin Luther King Jr. writes, "The aftermath of the love method is reconciliation and creation of the beloved community." What is a minimal requirement for the process of reconciliation to proceed? Tolerance? Respect? Concern for the Common Good? Fairness? Love? What gets in the way of reconciliation? Privilege? Power? Prejudice?
9. Makoto Fujimura focuses on the role of *mearcstapa*, of being a borderwalker, of living between two groups. Have you ever experienced this or known of someone who did? What were the challenges? Fujimura writes that such a person can facilitate "empathy, memory, warning, guidance, mediation, and reconciliation." How can a *mearcstapa* build bridges that lead to reconciliation?
10. Rachel Naomi Remen writes that "wounded people can best be healed by other wounded people." Why might this be possible? Relative to healing, she concludes, "what is needed, for the healing of suffering is compassion, not expertise." Since reconciliation is a type of healing from suffering, what role can compassion play in reconciliation? In this regard, does privilege or power seem to increase or decrease compassion? If the latter, how might privilege or power impede reconciliation? In cases like these, what can be done to encourage reconciliation?
11. Angel Kyodo Williams, an Ameri-

can writer, activist, ordained Zen priest, and author of *Being Black: Zen and the Art of Living with Fearlessness and Grace*, identifies "a hyper-individualized salvation model—the myth of meritocracy" as a significant barrier to reconciliation. Why might this be true? For her, reconciliation can only proceed when "me" becomes "we." So, what gets in the way of emphasizing the common good over individual gain? How can this be addressed?

12. Judith Thompson writes that "social healing" views "human conflict through the lens of wounding and healing" rather than "the dualities of good vs. bad and right vs. wrong." How might this reframing reduce defensiveness? How might it promote reconciliation?
13. David Swanson writes that lament and humility are necessary if the racially privileged are to move from segregation to solidarity. Does this make sense? What makes this movement difficult? He concludes that because "the journey toward equitable reconciliation will sting at times ... we must practice." He calls this discipleship, but we may also understand it as spirituality. What might a spirituality of reconciliation include?
14. Paulo Coelho writes, "Even if my neighbor doesn't understand my religion or understand my politics, he can understand my story." Do you agree? Why or why not? How can story-telling grow connections between strangers? How can story-telling promote reconciliation? How can storytelling reveal the truth in ways that build bridges? In what ways is storytelling encouraged in your congregation? How can story-telling create stronger bonds and enhance covenant?
15. Desmond Tutu wrote, "Forgiving and being reconciled to our enemies or our loved ones are not about pretending that things are other than they are." Do you agree? He noted, "True reconciliation exposes the awfulness, the abuse, the hurt, the truth." What is the purpose of reconciliation? Given your answer,

what then does reconciliation require? For Tutu, “Superficial reconciliation can bring only superficial healing.” Why would this be true?

16. In referring to conversations about race, Soong-Chan Rah quotes Brené Brown, who said, “You cannot have that conversation without shame because you cannot talk about race without talking about privilege. And when people start talking about privilege, they get paralyzed by shame.” Why is it hard to acknowledge privilege? Rah writes that “privilege would hide the truth that creates discomfort.” Which releases discomfort and shame: silence or talking? Which shame is more corrosive of the common good: not talking about privilege or talking about privilege? Which facilitates reconciliation? Are privileged people also unwilling to enter into feelings of lament? Why?
17. Shane Claiborne writes, “true peace does not exist until there is justice, restoration, forgiveness.” Do we have true peace in society? Why or why not? Claiborne recommends “the act of finding a third way that is neither fight nor flight but the careful, arduous pursuit of reconciliation and justice. It is about a revolution of love that is big enough to set both the oppressed and the oppressors free.” What is necessary for a third way? What must a third way overcome? How can our congregations pursue a third way?

