

LEADING TO COMPASSION

ANN EISENBERG



FOR RIGHTS, DEVELOPMENT, AND PEACE

LEADING TO COMPASSION

ANN EISENBERG*

WOMEN'S LEARNING PARTNERSHIP

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Dignity is to have
a dream,
a strong one,
which gives you a vision,
a world where you have a place,
where whatever it is you have
to contribute
makes a difference.

Fatema Mernissi
(1940-2015)



TABLE OF CONTENTS

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	1
WHO WE ARE	3
WLP'S MISSION AND PRINCIPLES	5
PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL	7
LOVE AND FORGIVENESS IN THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS	9
FACILITATION GUIDELINES	13
WORKSHOP SESSIONS	19
Session 1: Practicing Compassion and Human Rights	21
Session 2: Engaging in Dialogue and Empathy	31
Session 3: Building Bridges of Understanding and Love	41
Session 4: Forgiving for the Future	53
THE LAST WORDS	63
PARTICIPANT WORKSHOP EVALUATION	65
WLP PUBLICATIONS	69

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Women’s Learning Partnership (WLP) is thankful for the generous support provided by the Fetzer Institute for the research, development, and publication of this manual, *Leading to Compassion*. We are grateful for the extraordinary opportunity we have had to deepen our understanding of love and forgiveness that this project provided. The lessons in civility, compassion, and empathy that we included in this manual will reverberate throughout our community, with our partners, and among their constituencies across the globe in the years to come.

We are grateful for the opportunity provided to us by the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice to participate in the conference “Defying Extremism: Gendered Responses to Religious Violence” in November 2014. Our colleagues Lina Abou-Habib and Allison Horowski conducted a working session on “Toward a Compassionate Society” and interviewed many Kroc Institute Women PeaceMakers and conference participants. Their narratives have inspired the sessions developed for this manual.

We would also like to thank our partner in Lebanon, Collective for Research & Training on Development Action (CRTD-A), which tested this manual in workshops during a particularly challenging time. The suicide bombings in Beirut on November 15, 2015, which took 43 lives, were the deadliest bomb attacks since the end of Lebanon’s civil war a quarter of a century ago. CRTD-A, located in Beirut, showed enormous resilience in the face of these terrorist attacks and carried out a scheduled WLP Training of Trainers workshop where *Leading to Compassion* was tested—a real test of compassion. The feedback on the sessions was extremely positive. Participants, the majority of whom came from conflict-ridden zones, engaged in the reflexive and challenging questions posed by the manual’s sessions. A young participant from Palestine noted at the end of one of the sessions, “*we shall not treat others the way they have treated us, for this will make us lose our humanity.*”





WHO WE ARE

WLP is an international partnership comprised of 20 autonomous women's rights organizations dedicated to training and supporting women in the Global South, primarily in transitioning and developing societies, to become leaders and advocates for a just, peaceful world. WLP creates culture-specific leadership trainings on women's human rights and democratic participation and partners with local organizations to help women gain the skills they need to fulfill greater leadership roles at the family, community, and national levels. Through our work we promote universal human rights, advance democracy, and strengthen civil society. The WLP Partnership transcends national, religious, ethnic, and cultural boundaries and works to empower and transform women and youth and to harness their tremendous potential as leaders in their families, communities, and societies for a more peaceful, equitable world.

Over the past 15 years, WLP has developed curricula and education resources that encourage women's leadership and rights and bolster their capacities as agents for change toward the establishment of free, fair, and democratic societies. Since 2000, WLP's programs and training materials have reached tens of thousands of women and men in over 40 countries, strengthening local organizations to become self-sustaining and empowering women's movements around the globe.



WLP'S MISSION AND PRINCIPLES

Mission: To transform power relations and promote justice, equality, peace, and sustainable development by strengthening the feminist movement.

Vision: Democratic and peaceful societies that embrace pluralism and tolerance and are governed by gender-equitable norms, legislation, and policies that translate into equal rights and equal levels of participation and decision making for women and men in the family, community, and politics.

Strategy: To achieve our mission, the WLP Partnership builds capacity through the sharing of vision, mechanisms, and concepts; exchange of experiences, strategies, and skills; and mobilization of resources.

Approach: To promote and sustain leadership that is participatory, inclusive, horizontal, and replicable.

Values: The Partnership shares values of gender equality, human rights, collective and consensus-based action, and respect for diversity.

Themes: In all our activities and resources, the Partnership focuses on the following themes: human rights, ending violence against women, human security, leadership, political participation, transitions to democracy, active citizenship, youth engagement, economic empowerment, organizational capacity development, and movement building.

PURPOSE OF THIS MANUAL

In preparing this manual, Women’s Learning Partnership (WLP) set out to connect our human rights, development, and peace advocacy with the lessons of love and forgiveness promulgated by the scientists, scholars, and activists engaged in the work of the Fetzer Institute.¹ WLP and our partners are dedicated to working together in an inclusive, tolerant, non-hierarchical, and transparent partnership on the most critical issues facing women in the Global South, mainly in Muslim-majority societies. Towards that aim, WLP develops learning tools to assist our partners and their constituencies with leadership, advocacy, mobilization, and capacity building. This manual focuses on the creation of a compassionate society in a post-conflict world.

The purpose of this manual is to provide a framework for conducting workshops on strategies that promote forgiveness, tolerance, and compassion. The target audience for the workshops is women in Muslim-majority and other societies that are currently undergoing revolutions, regime change, and/or coups, or are otherwise in the throes of rapid political and social transition. This manual takes as its premise that the relationship between the inner-self and the outer world is based on the idea of oneness, the shared pain of humanity, and a desire to heal the pain.

The lessons in the manual are not “new”—WLP and our partners have been engaged in compassionate work for over a decade and a half. However, for any of us, amidst our daily rush and goal-oriented tactics, it is too easy to lose sight of our larger purpose. This manual serves to refresh our commitment to bringing about social transformation by first transforming ourselves, and to recommit our focus on larger peace objectives. These concerns are hardly unique, and for that reason we hope that the manual and the workshops it inspires will help other individuals and organizations foster greater compassion in their work and deepen their capacity for forgiveness in their daily lives.

1. Founded in 1962, the Fetzer Institute’s mission is to, “To foster awareness of the power of love and forgiveness in the emerging global community.” Each year, the Michigan-based, private foundation supports dozens of projects across the globe that focus on compassion and peace.

LOVE AND FORGIVENESS IN THE WORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS DEFENDERS

Kent Davis-Packard²

What do human rights have to do with love and the work of Women’s Learning Partnership (WLP)? At first glance, this link may not be obvious, as the word “love” is not common in WLP manuals and trainings, nor is it found in the many human rights treaties and declarations established by the United Nations and the international community. In many ways, however, love is the silent, unspoken motivation behind each and every principle associated with respect for human rights. It is therefore the underlying principle of *all* WLP manuals, which seek to improve the lives of citizens, especially women, in the countries in which we work.

But how does love function in the context of our work if it is never mentioned? Can something as invisible and “unscientific” as love really be measured and used as an effective tool in our work? One might argue that it functions best when it is left unspoken, since the word itself has no meaning without action. WLP instead focuses on a new mode of behavior that cannot be understood or integrated without being put into practice in our trainings and workshops themselves. The sole purpose, in fact, of our workshops and trainings is to provide a safe space and forum in which we can live out these new principles rather than just read about them in books.

WLP’s manuals state our methodology, driven by our mission: “WLP promotes and sustains leadership that is horizontal, participatory, and inclusive throughout all our programs.” Each WLP workshop is considered a “microcosm of a culture of democracy in action,” guided by six practices: communication, listening, compromise, building consensus, creating shared meaning, and developing learning partnerships. In order to fully engage these practices, WLP participants and facilitators must constantly open themselves to something new—to another person’s way of thinking—in order

2. Kent Davis-Packard, PhD, is co-Executive Director of WLP. Davis-Packard’s analyses have been published by Brookings, the *Christian Science Monitor*, the *Wall Street Journal*, and the *Washington Post*.

to better understand and value the views of another. For example, WLP’s introduction to *Leading to a Culture of Democracy* states that to listen is to “be receptive to the ideas of others” and that “listening is not confined to hearing what a colleague or competitor says; it also includes valuing, respecting, and giving credit to their suggestions and opinions...”

To be receptive to another person is to “receive” them. To compromise on one’s own personal needs and to build consensus for a greater good, to be willing to join with another’s purpose and vision to create shared meaning, and to offer one’s positive energy and enthusiasm to develop learning partnerships is to put into action the principles in the UN Universal Declaration on Human Rights. WLP trainees must consider what human rights documents actually require of us in our daily lives. In the care, consideration, and process of understanding others, that indefinable elusive flowing force, which cannot be coerced, spontaneously emerges—often while a group is unaware—and much to the delight of our participants and facilitators.

Further, to want to do more for one’s community is, by its very nature, a form of love; the love is in the effort we put into our struggle for human rights—often at the cost of our own lives. Love is the internal impetus that motivates us to move beyond our fear and to risk everything to create a better world for all.

But what about those who participate in our trainings for “selfish” purposes? That is, those who seek to improve their own lot by undergoing training in leadership and democracy? Even in activities that are not “selfless,” love may play a role—in the desire to achieve self-respect and to empower oneself to make positive life changes, one automatically benefits their greater community. It is a well-known principle in psychology that one must be secure in one’s own self before being able to truly love another. It is impossible to respect another when one’s own self-confidence has been damaged—impossible to listen to others when one feels one has not been adequately heard. This, too, is part of WLP’s mission—to empower individuals to take their lives into their own hands and to reach their fullest potential.

In *Leading to a Culture of Democracy*, President and CEO of WLP Mahnaz Afkhami cited Attar’s *Conference of the Birds*, a tale that is rooted in the principle of the “path of return.” This reference to a “returning” suggests that these higher principles are latent in the heart of every human being—they are not actually new—and yet have not yet been fully recognized and consciously acted on. WLP’s work involves an inward quest in which we discover our full potential, and in doing so as individuals, we can collectively benefit our communities and move towards a more democratic society. Afkhami wrote:

Our work for democracy resembles a never-ending dream, perhaps because democracy is only an idea that provides the impetus to move us forward. Or that its reality is the process, the motion, and the reaching, a way for us to learn to understand others, to communicate with others, to learn from them, and be open so others learn from us. Or as implied in the Persian poet Attar’s Conference of the Birds, where the quest of the birds for the ideal ends with the birds looking inwardly to themselves, our search, we hope will bring us the same wisdom.³

3. Introduction, *Leading to a Culture of Democracy*, p. 4.

WOMEN'S ABILITY TO LOVE

WLP focuses on amplifying and enabling the contributions of women in particular to achieving democracy and peace. As Former Prime Minister of Canada the Rt. Honorable Kim Campbell reminded us in her opening remarks for WLP at the 2015 World Movement for Democracy, there is a wide body of literature supporting the fact that women have a unique ability to collaborate. This skill makes their presence in any leadership team achieve better results than if men only had been present and makes their outcomes more successful than those of the “smartest individual in the room.” Collaboration, by its very nature, requires a loss of self-interested motivations in favor of the success of the whole; it is to move beyond one's individual interests and to aspire to help others by linking with them in a shared vision. This, too, may be considered a form of love, and it is especially abundant when women are included.

FORGIVENESS

What role does forgiveness play in the work of human rights defenders, and what is its relationship to love? If respecting human rights is a form of love for one's fellow being, this process requires forgiveness and compassion for the faults of individuals, especially those who have wronged us. Forgiveness also allows victims of abuse to heal, as it is widely held by psychologists to be the final stage of grief. In many cases, it is only through forgiveness of oneself that one can begin to forgive others, and to heal. In its case study on prostitution, WLP's manual *Victories over Violence* highlights love as a central reason why women are able to forgive their abusers:

*Living without supervision, residents personify Steven's motto 'Love heals.' Cultivating a community is vital to success. She asserts that love empowers the women to 'forgive' their abusers, support one another and 'live differently.'*⁴

In reviewing the approach of our most effective leaders, including Nelson Mandela, Martin Luther King, and Mahatma Gandhi, we discover yet another phenomenon associated with forgiveness—its power. Many of these leaders have deemed forgiveness as the most effective way to disarm their opposition. There is, in fact, no power stronger. But forgiveness is not a deliberate action imposed on someone who has suffered an unforgivable injury—it is the natural reflex of a new kind of consciousness—one that allows the injured party to “see” their opponent in themselves. It is a rare quality and likely what distinguishes these leaders from the rest of the pack, and therefore it is worth considering in this manual.

In many ways, the core principle underlying WLP's human rights manual, *Beyond Equality*, embodies this state of mind as it encourages our workshop participants to strive for something better than mere “equality.” We need to be free of the relativity and comparison that only leads to more competition, conflict, and tension. Instead of seeing *difference*, we are to see the fundamental humanity of all,

4. *Victories over Violence*, p. 95, Session 12, Case Study.

knowing that *all* deserve better—the best. It is possible to rise above comparisons and to raise the bar for all humankind by allowing all to reach their full potential.

While one may claim forgiveness to be unique to the Christian tradition, its uncanny power is paid tribute in every faith and also in modern and post-modern philosophy and literature. In the Jewish tradition, for example, it is called *selichá* and is defined as an act of the heart. This is, perhaps, because the mind cannot attain forgiveness on its own—it is too limited by the world of binary oppositions—good/bad, ugly/beautiful, happy/sad. *Selichá*, according to Emory University Professor of Judaic Studies Rabbi David Blumenthal, involves “reaching a deeper understanding of the sinner—an empathy for the ‘troubledness’ of the other.” Blumenthal explains: “*Selichá*, too, is not a reconciliation or an embracing of the offender; it is simply reaching the conclusion that the offender is human, frail, and deserving of sympathy. It is closer to an act of mercy than to an act of grace. A woman abused by a man may never reach this level of forgiveness; she is not obliged, nor is it morally necessary for her, to do so.”⁵

Indeed, this consciousness of the “troubledness of the other” is not a matter of morals and does not imply that one actively “forgives.” In a sense, the woman cited above forgives without forgiving. To forgive is therefore a natural response that comes only over time. It is by no means to diminish a crime or assume oneself is better than another. If anything, it is to shine the light on the crime in a way that takes the utmost courage by both the injured and the injurer. For the wronged and wrongdoer, it is the acknowledgment of irreversible damage and the internal knowing that this damage cannot be personalized. It has been inflicted on one’s fellow human being and therefore becomes part of the fabric of her or his own being.

As Walt Whitman perceived in “Of the visages of things,” one person is “good” and the other is “bad,” one is “ugly” another is “beautiful.” But after “piercing” through the “hells beneath,” we are no worse and no better than the entirety of our race.⁶

5. <http://www.crosscurrents.org/blumenthal.htm>.

6. “[Of the Visage of Things]” Walt Whitman, *Leaves of Grass*, New York: Barnes & Noble Books, 1993, pp. 480-481.

Of the visages of things – And of piercing through to the accepted hells beneath;

Of ugliness – To me there is just as much in it as there is in beauty – And now the ugliness of human beings is acceptable to me;

Of detected persons – To me, detected persons are not, in any respect, worse than undetected persons – and are not in any respect worse than I am myself;

Of criminals – To me, any judge, or any juror, is equally criminal – and any reputable person is also – and the President is also.

FACILITATION GUIDELINES

These guidelines are to help you, the workshop facilitator, achieve your own objectives for facilitating discussions and exercises. As a facilitator, you are tasked with monitoring and steering each session's learning process. Unlike a traditional teacher or trainer, you are not responsible for leading the group to any specific conclusions or understandings. Rather, your responsibility is to create a space for workshop participants in which they, and you, can learn from the ideas and experiences of others, disagree within a safe environment, and work together to form consensus. You will create that space through careful pre-planning of room and materials set-up and by engaging in facilitation tactics that promote mutual respect, thoughtful discussion, and an atmosphere of collaboration.

FACILITATION OBJECTIVES

Communication: All facilitation begins with effective communication. Good facilitators are good at observing, listening, articulating, and communicating.

Listening: Workshop sessions are enhanced by the inclusion of multiple perspectives and objectives. Listening involves valuing what others say and giving credit to their suggestions and opinions. An effective listener is one who learns from what she hears.

Building Consensus: Building consensus is an important decision-making process for successful workshops. Through dialogue, individuals within groups, teams, or larger organizations come to understand the points upon which they agree. Decisions are formulated with a mutual understanding of options and possibilities.

Creating Shared Meaning: Small groups and large institutions can benefit from the creation of shared meaning. Through dialogue, consensus building, and shared experience, a core set

of values and principles evolves in which everyone has to some degree participated in formulating and in which everyone has a stake. Shared meaning is an adaptive and flexible approach to goal setting that is influenced by a group's composition and the passage of time. When a group creates shared meaning, each member operates within a framework in which she shares ownership and responsibility.⁷

ROLE OF THE FACILITATOR

An effective facilitator listens and learns along with the workshop participants. Your role is to organize the meetings and guide the participants through the workshop exercises. You do not need to be an expert on teaching or know all the answers. Successful discussions will result whenever there is input from many of the participants.

Directing Conversation: Sometimes you may wish to steer the group's conversation in a new direction through thoughtful inquiry. Your job is not to direct the outcome of conversations but merely to steer the direction of the discussion while keeping in mind that there are no "more valid" opinions. In this way, you can ensure that everyone contributes to the learning and knowledge sharing. A good facilitator creates a trusting, neutral environment in which everyone feels safe to express her honest opinion without being judged or attacked. This includes helping participants to feel comfortable enough to disagree with others in a thoughtful and respectful manner. Do not be concerned if there are lengthy silences between comments. These periods are moments when participants can pause for reflection or summon the confidence to speak up.

Stimulating Discussion: Throughout the manual's sessions, questions have been posed to stimulate discussion and debate. The questions are meant only as guidelines to lead the group to explore diverse themes. As long as the group is engaging in relevant and valuable discussions, you should feel free to let conversations deviate from the posed questions. If you have identified individual participants who may be shy or seem to lack the courage to speak up, you can always suggest your own opinion and ask one of them to comment on what you said. As long as you remain sensitive to the needs of the individual participants and to those of the group, are tactful and affirming, and share the responsibility of learning, you are partaking in effective facilitation.

Keeping to the Agenda: At times, a facilitator can best guide a discussion by being an effective timekeeper and reminding the group of the session's agenda. Although workshop group sizes will vary, it is almost always helpful to encourage participants to keep their comments relatively short, not letting one person or a few people monopolize the conversation. This is particularly necessary for those exercises that involve comments from every participant.

7. These facilitation guidelines were adapted from the guidelines in *Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women*, Women's Learning Partnership, 2001.

A diplomatic way to remind participants to keep their comments relevant to the topic being discussed is to direct your suggestions and instructions to the whole group rather than singling out an individual. Also, consider encouraging participants to listen to what the others are saying and to build upon previous comments.

Sharing Responsibility: Although you are responsible for guiding each workshop session to completion, you do not need to be in charge of every activity or facilitate every discussion. Sharing responsibility can and should be part of organizing the workshop sessions. A simple step is to encourage participants to volunteer to take notes for the group, read aloud instructions or narratives from the manual, and/or to facilitate the discussions. Reassuring a participant that she should not worry about her spelling if she is taking notes, or her pronunciation if she is reading aloud, can go a long way toward making her feel comfortable and inspiring others to volunteer.

Joining In: It is up to you whether you want to join in discussions. However, keep in mind that because you are organizing each session and are to some extent “in control,” participants may give added weight to your opinions and suggestions. Therefore, it is important that you limit your interventions and that when you do express an opinion you qualify it as your own perspective and not the only perspective.

Enjoying Yourself: Remember that you are also participating in the workshop to gain knowledge and to have fun. Enjoy yourself!

ROLE OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Participants come to workshops for a variety of reasons, with a wide spectrum of preconceptions and expectations about what will take place. Regardless of their level of experience or professional status, the participants’ role is to be both student and teacher, to learn as well as to share knowledge. Workshop sessions are most successful when participants listen attentively, ask questions, and challenge assumptions. Participants are responsible for contributing to discussions, working collaboratively in partnerships or as part of a larger team, and evaluating the process and progress of the sessions. Everyone participating in the workshop will benefit by contributing to a respectful and compassionate atmosphere during the workshop.

SETTING UP THE MEETINGS

It is important that you come to the meeting sessions prepared. Review the material to be covered beforehand to make sure that you understand the manual’s intended objectives and your own objectives for the workshop and for each session. Determine what materials you will need and make sure you plan to have enough of everything. Sessions can take place in an office, public facility,

private home, or anywhere there is quiet and privacy, and where participants will feel comfortable.

You may instruct participants to bring their own pens and paper, or you may supply them yourself. Depending on the room and supplies available where the workshops take place, you may wish to bring chalk for a chalkboard or bright marker pens for writing on a flip chart. Alternatively, bring large sheets of paper and tape or tacks to secure them to the walls. The chalk board, flip chart, or sheets of paper are useful for note-taking in front of the group members so that their ideas and concepts can be easily referred to throughout the session. Recording the discussion highlights on paper is particularly helpful because you can keep the written notes for future reference, referring back to the group's ideas in later sessions.

Among the exercises in the manual are some in which the group is asked to break into teams to carry out an activity. If not all participants have a copy of the manual, you may choose to make photocopies of the instructions for each team. Alternatively, you could write out the instructions in large block letters on a piece of paper and tack it to the wall so that everyone will see it.

Most sessions should last approximately two and a half to three hours. You may wish to supply something to drink or a snack to make participants feel more comfortable. Another possibility is to ask the participants themselves to volunteer to bring snacks. It is really up to you and what you think will work best. If you are unsure about what the participants would like or expect, ask them about their preference at the first session. Most importantly, plan ahead so that you know in advance what will be needed and how the sessions will be organized.

THE FIRST WORKSHOP SESSION

When You Arrive

Arrive early for the first session so that you have time to make sure that the room is set up the way you want it. Check whether there is enough light, heat, and/or fresh air. See whether the seats are arranged to your satisfaction. Although it is not required, seating in a circle is often the very best way to organize a session discussion. A circle arrangement allows everyone an equal view of the rest of the group and the best opportunity to be seen and heard by the others.

When the Participants Arrive

When participants begin to arrive, make them feel welcome. This is especially important if the participants are not already known to each other. If they do not already know you, be sure to introduce yourself and explain that you are the workshop coordinator. If there are snacks available, suggest that participants help themselves and then find a seat near someone else and introduce themselves.

Introductions

Once everyone has arrived, it is often a good idea to go around the whole group and have everyone introduce themselves formally. If the participants already know each other, you can ask them instead to state very briefly their reason for attending or their hopes for the workshop. You should participate in these initial introductions as well. The reason for doing them is to help the group members begin to become familiar with one another and comfortable speaking out.

Explanations

Begin the first session by briefing the participants on what will be discussed and learned over the course of the four-session workshop, and the basic framework of each session. You may wish to do the following:

- Note that each workshop session will last approximately two and a half to three hours.
- Describe a typical session format, including when there will be breaks.
- Explain that volunteers will often be sought to assist with note-taking, time-keeping, reading from the manual, and facilitating discussion, among other activities.

Be sure to ask if anyone has any questions.

CONCLUDING THE WORKSHOP

Depending on the group, participants may end the workshop with an informal party or some other group activity. It is important to plan ahead so that participants leave the workshop feeling that their needs and expectations have been addressed. Before the participants leave after the final session, ask them to fill out the Workshop Evaluation Form provided at the end of this manual. This form is very useful for adjusting and improving future workshop programs. It is helpful to remind participants that they can fill out the form anonymously if they choose. Remember to collect the form from all the participants before they disperse.

AND FINALLY

Compassion and forgiveness are lifetime commitments. No doubt, most of the workshop participants who will use this manual are already compassionate and engaged in creating a tolerant and peaceful world. Our hope is that the workshop sessions will refresh and reinvigorate participants to take a more active role in promoting greater compassion in their work and deepening their capacity for forgiveness in their daily lives.

The next steps are up to the participants themselves.

WORKSHOP SESSIONS

How do we go from here to a compassionate society? Will the society of tomorrow be anything like our idea of what a caring society should be—a society based on fairness, equity, help to the needy, community, family, an ethical system that stresses the value of the “other?” How do people relate to each other in such a society? What are its spaces, communities, borders? In order to have a compassionate society, is it necessary that everyone be included? In a world of instant communication and interconnection, in a world of diverse cultures and standards, how do we uphold common values and how do we live those values?

— Mahnaz Afkhami, President and CEO of Women’s Learning Partnership, from *Toward a Compassionate Society*, 2002

Practicing Compassion and Human Rights

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the link between human rights and a compassionate society.
- To examine the morality of pluralism.
- To consider where and how we can transform towards a compassionate society.

IN THIS SESSION

Human rights may come from our hearts, our history, and our common humanity, but as practitioners of human rights, we are propelled by their universality. Irrespective of gender, class, creed, or any other distinction, human rights apply to everyone. Our vocation—be it legal, economic, social, or other—is to press for a world where every human life is valued the same. Former UN Secretary-General Boutros Boutros-Ghali described the complexity and the challenge of universality. He said:

Human rights, viewed at the universal level, bring us face-to-face with the most challenging dialectical conflict ever: between “identity” and “otherness”, between the “myself” and “others”. They teach us in a direct straightforward manner that we are at the same time identical and different.⁸

[Human rights] teach us in a direct straight-forward manner that we are at the same time identical and different.

For this reason, we advocate for laws and practices that promote and safeguard human rights for all, regardless of the fears, prejudices, and traditions that may exist in our society. Human rights can stand apart from petty grievances and deep-seated bigotry and be a bulwark against unfair or

8. Address by the UN Secretary-General at the opening of the World Conference on Human Rights, 1993, <http://www.ohchr.org/EN/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=7906&LangID=E>.

unlawful treatment, even when individuals in a community dislike or distrust each other. In this way, human rights are both a standard by which we measure human civility and a program for progress where civility does not exist because of social tensions or outright violent conflict.

When we deeply disagree with the practices of a regime or a community, we can use human rights to guide how we respond. We remind ourselves that we must respect a group's free speech, their right to practice their faith as they choose, their right to raise their children within their own culture, and so on. And then, within and between those rights we are working to uphold, we try to change the group's practices that we believe contradict human rights. For example, human rights workers in India fighting child labor in the carpet industry acknowledge and address the abject poverty that drives children to the looms, as well as family sovereignty, the right to work, the need for education and alternative ways of ending child hunger, and the complex forces of the free market. They cannot simply close down all factories that violate child labor laws, lest they risk dire unintended consequences for the very communities that they are trying to help—the loss of jobs, loss of revenue, disaffection, increased poverty, and even the potential for the children to starve. Instead, they use human rights to inform their compassionate pursuit of human rights.

However, as much as human rights provide a direction for progressive social change, human rights do not show us how to influence deep-seated beliefs. Something much more than fixing laws and changing practices is needed to alleviate suffering and end conflict caused by entrenched opinions and customs. Compassion helps us see, hear, and understand peoples' motivations and what triggers them to cause suffering. Understanding the perspectives of all parties to a conflict, appreciating their history, and knowing their stories give us a way forward. Without compassion, we may be able to change a law, but we will not dismantle chauvinism, prejudice, and mistrust. Compassion gives us tools with which to establish new relationships and new practices that lead to lasting change and peace.

In this session, we will begin with excerpts from an article by Charlotte Bunch on the relationship between the practice of human rights and a compassionate society. Bunch finds profound links between gender justice and the practical and legitimate implementation of human rights more broadly. She says that without a clear ethic of respect for the equal worth and value of every person's humanity, there can be no compassion. Next, we will read and discuss the fable of the elephant and the blind men, a traditional lesson about the risk of seeing only part of the whole picture, which sheds light on contemporary debates about pluralism. We will work through a short exercise deconstructing the fable, asking ourselves about the limits of human knowledge and understanding—in the real world does anyone really get to see the whole elephant? Are any perspectives authoritative? Or are all perspectives equal? Isaiah Berlin takes the middle ground in his erudite musings on pluralism and the human capacity for sympathy and shared common values. We will read short quotes by Berlin and discuss compassion in relation to pluralism.

In the final exercises, we will read and discuss Aruna Rao's recommendations for transforming organizations so that their internal workings resonate with their compassionate outward missions. Next, we will read about the creation of the Charter of Compassion, and consider strategies for integrating the Charter into our own work.

Human Rights as the Foundation for a Compassionate Society

Charlotte Bunch⁹

Excerpts

What do we mean when we speak about “compassion,” and what is the relationship between compassion and justice? While a compassionate society is a wonderful vision to work toward, we must be clear that we do not mean moving women back into the role of being the compassionate ones who must sacrifice themselves for others. A truly compassionate society can only be based on both men and women becoming more caring, and in particular, on society rewarding such values and activities. Indeed, the only path to a compassionate society is one in which the human rights of all are respected—women and men, children and the elderly, and every racial, ethnic, cultural, religious, and national group, as well as people of every sexual orientation and physical ability. Without a clear ethic of respect for the equal worth and value of every person’s humanity, compassion runs the danger of being a form of charity and condescension toward those less fortunate. What is needed is a recognition of every person’s fundamental human right to share in the resources and participate in the process of directing the destiny of the planet. Striving for justice and the realization of human rights for all is a critical pathway on the road to creating a compassionate society. . . .

... Human rights is a language for talking about this responsibility, which forms the basis for building a compassionate society. This is the compassionate belief—that we all have a responsibility for creating the conditions for everyone to exercise their human rights and realize their humanity as fully as possible.

For women, this process of reinterpreting human rights principles from the perspective of our experiences and thus expanding the understanding of human rights is crucial to building a more inclusive vision of human rights. . . . Interpreting human rights from the perspective of women’s lives requires demonstrating how human rights apply to gender specific abuses—often in the private as well as public sphere. . . . In addition, utilizing feminist analysis of gender, many have gone on to demonstrate the connection between so-called women’s issues and other basic social concerns for development, peace, human rights, and more. In integrating a gender perspective on various social issues, it becomes clear that there is no possibility of human security, of peace, of a compassionate society, of sustainable development, or of justice, if one-half of the population is left behind. Further, for those who care about creating a non-violent society or want to end militarism and ethnic conflict, violence in the home undermines these goals as well.

A culture of respect for human rights cannot be built without women’s rights; indeed, when the human rights of any group no matter how small are denied, the human rights of all are diminished. Human rights can be a bridge to a discussion of a compassionate society for the twenty-first century, but only if this bridge is made large enough, and inclusive enough, for all to cross.¹⁰

9. Charlotte Bunch is the Founding Director and Senior Scholar of the Center for Women's Global Leadership, Rutgers University. She has been an activist, writer, and organizer in the feminist and human rights movements for over four decades.

10. Excerpts from “Human Rights as the Foundation for Compassionate Society,” by Charlotte Bunch, *Toward a Compassionate Society*, edited by Mahnaz Afkhami, Women’s Learning Partnership, 2002. P. 16.

This is the compassionate belief—that we all have a responsibility for creating the conditions for everyone to exercise their human rights and realize their humanity as fully as possible.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Does women’s historically lower status in society give women a unique perspective and capacity for compassion? Why or why not?
- If you look down on a group of people, or think less of them than yourself, is it possible to still feel compassion for them if they are suffering? Why or why not?
- Charlotte Bunch writes, “Without a clear ethic of respect for the equal worth and value of every person’s humanity, compassion runs the danger of being a form of charity and condescension toward those less fortunate.” What are some examples (hypothetical or from real life) of compassion being a form of charity and condescension? What are some examples of compassion among equals?
- What is the hypocrisy, as Bunch sees it, when you advocate for better human rights protections for a community about which you feel is backward, or corrupt, or licentious, or in some other way in need of improvement?

GROUP EXERCISE

The Blind Men and the Elephant

There is an ancient fable that goes:

Once upon a time, a wise king sought to show blind men an elephant. He asked all the blind men in the town to assemble. Once they were gathered, the king’s servant brought an elephant to the men. He placed one man’s hand on the trunk, another’s on an ear, another’s on the tusk, another’s on a foot, another’s on the back, and another’s on the tail. The king let the men study the beast, and then asked them—what is an elephant? The first answered, “An elephant is very much like a tree.” The second said, “No, no. An elephant is clearly like a basket.” The third, “An elephant is exactly like a ploughshare.” The fourth, “How can you say that? An elephant is like a pillar.” The fifth, “An elephant is like giant mortar.” And the sixth, “You are all wrong. An elephant is quite distinctly like a rope.” The blind men began to quarrel, arguing so loudly that they could no longer hear each other. The king called to them to stop. He told them, “Not one of you knows what is an elephant, because you only see one side of a thing.”

First, ask the group to consider arguments for why the blind men were correct and to describe how they would defend the truth of what the blind men said. Next, ask the group to argue why the blind men could never be correct. What distinguishes the two different arguments? Lastly, ask the group to consider the story if there were no king or servant—in fact if there were no such thing as a king or servant—and everyone in the world were blind. How would that make a difference to the story? Would the truth about what is an elephant be any different? Why or why not?

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What do you believe was the original meaning behind the elephant story?
- How does the elephant story apply to knowledge in the real world?
- Do people need to be the same to share the same truth?
- Is the world, with its different languages, cultures, and beliefs, more like the blind men touching different parts of the elephant? Or is it made up of blind men, servants, and kings, each having entirely different abilities, knowledge, and status?

TEAM EXERCISE

Break the group into teams of three or four participants. Ask each team how they would retell the story in their own words to explain different cultures and religious viewpoints. Ask the teams to select a volunteer to tell their version of the story to the group. After listening to the stories, ask the participants to consider the following:

- In any of the stories, did the king (or someone else) know the whole truth?
- In any of the stories, did no one know the whole truth?
- In any of the stories, were some people closer to the truth than others?

READING ASSIGNMENT

The Courage of our Admitted Ignorance

Isaiah Berlin¹¹

Excerpts

Let us have the courage of our admitted ignorance, of our doubts and uncertainties. At least we can try to discover what others require, by making it possible for ourselves to know men as they truly are, by listening to them carefully and sympathetically, and understanding them and their lives and their needs...¹²

I came to the conclusion that there is a plurality of ideals, as there is a plurality of cultures and of temperaments. I am not a relativist; I do not say “I like my coffee with milk and you like it without; I am in favor of kindness and you prefer concentration camps”—each of us with his own values, which cannot be overcome or integrated... . But I do believe that there is a plurality of values which men can and do seek, and that these values differ... . If I am a man or a woman with sufficient imagination (and this I do need), I can enter into a value system which is not my own, but which is nevertheless something I can conceive of men pursuing while remaining human, while remaining creatures with whom I can communicate, with whom I have some common—for all human beings must have some common values or they cease to be human, and also some different values else they cease to differ...¹³

11. Sir Isaiah Berlin (1909-1997) was a political philosopher and historian of ideas. Born in Latvia, he immigrated to England. Considered one of the greatest scholars of his time, he was knighted in 1957. In his writing and speeches he made the case for pluralism and liberty, deeply wary of absolutes of any stripe—faith, politics, or moral order.

12. From <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/berlin/>.

13. From *The Power of Ideas*, by Isaiah Berlin, Princeton University Press. 2002. Pp. 11-12.

Pluralism

Pluralism has many definitions and applications—political, social, cultural, and even scientific, among them. Frequently human rights and democracy advocates use pluralism to describe, “a social system based on mutual respect for each other’s cultures among various groups that make up a society, wherein subordinate groups do not have to forsake their lifestyle and traditions but, rather, can express their culture and participate in the larger society free of prejudice.”¹⁴

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- How would you contrast the quotes from Isaiah Berlin above with the elephant story? What is Berlin trying to say about truth and values?
- For you, is the elephant story a defense of pluralism, or does it reveal the fallacies of pluralism?
- Do you believe that even though people have different traditions and cultures, all traditions and cultures are equally valid? Why or why not? What about religions? Why or why not?
- Do you believe it is morally wrong to condemn cultures and beliefs that are different from your own? Or, alternatively, do you believe you have a moral obligation to tolerate cultures and beliefs that are different? Why or why not?
- If you genuinely believe someone’s tradition or practice is wrong, even injurious, by what right can you ignore the harm it causes under the pretext that everyone is entitled to his or her own beliefs?
- What are some examples of practices or beliefs that you do not share, but you tolerate? What are some examples of practices or beliefs that you do not share, and you think are intolerable in society? What lines are crossed when a practice or belief becomes intolerable?

READING ASSIGNMENT

Compassionate Society: How Do We Get There from Here?

Suppose we were able to identify which attributes should comprise a “compassionate society”—for instance social justice, gender equality, sustainable development, and spiritual peace. The real question, the real challenge, is how do we get there from here?

— Aruna Rao¹⁵

In her essay, “Leadership for Organizational Transformation and Gender Equality,” Aruna Rao describes her and her colleagues’ experiences of working to transform organizations towards greater gender equity, and in particular the case of BRAC, the internationally renowned anti-poverty organization in Bangladesh. She says, “To strengthen BRAC’s ability to improve its programs and its internal organization quality we drew links between structure and outcomes, quantity and quality,

14. <https://en.wiktionary.org/wiki/pluralism>.

15. Aruna Rao is the Executive Director and cofounder of Gender at Work. Previously she was a Practitioner-in-Residence at the Global Gender Program at the Elliott School of International Affairs, George Washington University and the Leader of the BRAC Gender Team in Bangladesh.

and internal gender equity change to external gender equity outcomes.” Rao summarizes the lessons learned from BRAC and other organizational transformation efforts. They include the following (*emphasis added*):

- This *strategy does not attempt to “guilt” people into change* nor does it try to convince them using “brute rationality.”
- Supporting a learning process that accepts psychological resistance to change is effective by *working with both the heart and the head*.
- Effective *strategies are both systemic and personal* in that they concern themselves with systemic changes of culture and norms and with the individual learning of organizational members.
- *Dialogue* is a key tool.
- Effective strategies aim to *build the “field.”* This term is borrowed from science and refers to invisible, nonmaterial structures like gravity or magnetism. Applied to organizations it refers to principles, values, and purpose which allows organizational members, leaders, policies, structures, and systems significant room to adapt.
- The *feminist goals of social transformation need to be linked* to the espoused values of the organization. Positive change will not come about if there is no direct connection between women’s empowerment, gender transformation, and the explicit values of the organization.
- It is critical to start from where people are. . . We must negotiate with members of the organizations, and discover what they see as the issues regarding gender and women’s issues in that context. Negotiation is not simply a tactic to increase the enthusiasm of those with whom one is engaging in the organizations; what is also up for negotiation are the ideas, perspectives, and stance of the change agent. Admitting our own political commitment means that *we need to be aware [of]...our own subconscious*, those very aspects we say we are trying to change.
- We need to *examine organizational work practices*. How does the organization get the job done? What does an organization do to get the job done? What does this tell you about aspects of “deep structure?” By examining work practices, we can uncover the dissonance between organizational values and culture. . .
- It is important to *bring silent voices to the surface*, or conscious level, of the organization, and recognize that in every organization there are contesting meanings. Listening to one group of voices within or outside the organization tells you only one part of the story. By adding into the mix hitherto silent voices, the picture fills out.
- Finally, we need to challenge the “process-outcome split.” We have a tendency to focus on outcomes rather than process, not recognizing *process itself may be an outcome....* The organization needs to pay attention to gender equity and to deep structure all the time.¹⁶

16. Excerpts from “Leadership for Organizational Transformation and Gender Equality,” by Aruna Rao, *Toward a Compassionate Society*, edited by Mahnaz Afkhami, Women’s Learning Partnership, 2002. P. 32.

Negotiation is not simply a tactic to increase the enthusiasm of those with whom one is engaging in the organizations; what is also up for negotiation are the ideas, perspectives, and stance of the change agent.

| QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is “compassionate” about Rao’s transformation objectives?
- What is “compassionate” about her strategies for transformation?
- What lessons does Rao cite that have wider relevance to transforming society?

| PARTNER EXERCISE

Divide the participants into pairs to discuss practices and beliefs in their family, work, or community that lack gender awareness (an activity or custom where the wisdom and/or influence of one gender is usually disregarded or ignored. One example might be fire brigades that frequently do not consult with women in the community about tactics and priorities in an emergency). What could they do to address this lack of gender awareness? When the group reconvenes, ask a volunteer from each pair to share their ideas for transforming practices.

The Charter

The British author Karen Armstrong has written extensively on religion. She is a former Roman Catholic nun, widely admired for her writings on Christianity, Islam, and Judaism. In 2008, Karen Armstrong won the TED Prize,¹⁷ a cash prize and opportunity to make a wish to change the world. Armstrong's wish was for the creation of a Charter for Compassion, written by "a group of inspirational thinkers from the three Abrahamic traditions, and based on the fundamental principles of universal justice and respect." As of December 29, 2014, more than 110,000 people from around the world had affirmed the Charter.¹⁸ The text of the Charter follows:

Charter of Compassion

The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves. Compassion impels us to work tirelessly to alleviate the suffering of our fellow creatures, to dethrone ourselves from the center of our world and put another there, and to honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity and respect.

It is also necessary in both public and private life to refrain consistently and empathically from inflicting pain. To act or speak violently out of spite, chauvinism, or self-interest, to impoverish, exploit or deny basic rights to anybody, and to incite hatred by denigrating others—even our enemies—is a denial of our common humanity. We acknowledge that we have failed to live compassionately and that some have even increased the sum of human misery in the name of religion.

We therefore call upon all men and women to restore compassion to the center of morality and religion ~ to return to the ancient principle that any interpretation of scripture that breeds violence, hatred or disdain is illegitimate ~ to ensure that youth are given accurate and respectful information about other traditions, religions and cultures ~ to encourage a positive appreciation of cultural and religious diversity ~ to cultivate an informed empathy with the suffering of all human beings—even those regarded as enemies.

We urgently need to make compassion a clear, luminous and dynamic force in our polarized world. Rooted in a principled determination to transcend selfishness, compassion can break down political, dogmatic, ideological and religious boundaries.

Born of our deep interdependence, compassion is essential to human relationships and to a fulfilled humanity. It is the path to enlightenment, and indispensable to the creation of a just economy and a peaceful global community.

17. TED is a non-profit devoted to spreading ideas, usually in the form of short, powerful talks (18 minutes or less). TED began in 1984 as a conference where Technology, Entertainment, and Design converged, and today it covers almost all topics—from science to business to global issues—in more than 100 languages. TED talks can be found at <https://www.ted.com/talks>.

18. https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Charter_for_Compassion.

Compassion impels us to... honor the inviolable sanctity of every single human being, treating everybody, without exception, with absolute justice, equity, and respect.

| QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Do you believe compassion can be taught? Is it something a person is born with or not, or can it be learned?
- How can you foster compassion at your organization? Are there specific areas in your organization's structure and/or practices where more compassion would bring greater equity and transparency and raise morale? Where would you like to see more compassion within your organization?
- Are there specific areas in your organization's work where more compassion would make the organization more effective and more true to its mission? Where would you like to see more compassion in your organization's programs?
- Can you imagine ways to increase compassion at home, within your extended family, and even in your neighborhood?

Engaging in Dialogue and Empathy

OBJECTIVES

- To explore strategies for improving dialogue.
- To practice active listening and respectful communication.
- To consider the impact of empathy in addressing human rights and resolving conflict.

IN THIS SESSION

Despite broadly shared humanistic aims, human rights and conflict resolution do not always follow the same trajectory; they can even have sharply divergent goals in a given situation. For instance, human rights advocates might prioritize justice for victims, exposing perpetrators, enforcing laws, protecting whistle-blowers, and ensuring the full payment of reparations, while those seeking to resolve a conflict are frequently more concerned with reducing or eradicating violence, inducing the aggrieved parties to dialogue, finding shared objectives and areas of agreement, and working out differences. Human rights workers are passionately partisan for victims of abuses, while peace-negotiators try to be impartial. Nevertheless, there are important lessons to be shared by the two disciplines. In this session, we will examine three important tools of peace-brokers that can have a profound impact on the effectiveness of human rights advocacy: dialogue, active listening, and empathy.

Dialogue: Dialogue serves a number of constructive purposes.

In its most basic form, two sides to a dispute can create the opportunity to explain their perspective and position and be heard by the other side. In the right context, under the right conditions, the two sides will look deeper into the areas where there is misunderstanding and stereotyping, which may lead to finding common ground. Dialogue, of course, is not a substitute for

Empathy can transform the relationship between two people or between two sides to a conflict.

concrete steps that change the conditions that are creating the conflict. But the process of the dialogue may establish a positive pattern for the more significant structural changes that need to follow.

Active Listening: An effective listener is one who learns from what she hears. Demonstrating that one is listening closely has a salubrious effect on the speaker, giving him or her confidence that their speaking is productive. Active listening involves hearing, demonstrating that one understands what has been said, and responding in a productive manner, either in words or by expression. Active listening does not mean you necessarily agree with the speaker, but it shows that you hear and care about what he or she is saying. Active listening shows respect and it creates at least a minimum level of interaction between the speaker and the listener that may become an opportunity for deeper engagement and even trust.

Empathy: Empathy can transform the relationship between two people or between two sides to a conflict. Dialogue creates an opportunity to humanize the opposition by breaking down stereotypes and allowing for frank discourse on the areas of disagreement. If during the dialogue parties can empathize with one another, they will increase their potential for finding a resolution. While transforming the relationship between two sides will not, in itself, solve a dispute—be it contested land, past grievances, or political opportunity—empowerment and empathy can change the dispute paradigm, creating a more productive climate for problem-solving.

In this session, we will read about the role of dialogue in healing the monumental rift in Rwanda between Hutus and Tutsis after the 1994 genocide. A role-playing exercise follows in which participants will participate in resolving a dispute between a women's rights activist and a sports club president after a women's football match is canceled to appease conservative religious leaders. In the exercise, we will examine how we speak to each other, listen to each other, and empathize with each other in order to come to an agreement. Next, we will discuss two short reading selections on the power of empathy to influence dialogue, improve relationships, and heal rifts. The final reading selection is about two women from Northern Ireland, a Catholic and a Protestant, who reached across decades of mutual animosity to find a solution to the internecine violence destroying their communities.

Dialogue is a basic process for building common understanding. By letting go of disagreement, a group gradually builds a shared set of meanings that make much higher levels of mutual understanding and creative thinking possible.

—Edgar H. Schein¹⁹

Reconciliation in Rwanda: Building Peace through Dialogue

Vanessa Noël Brown²⁰

Excerpts

Facilitated dialogue in the aftermath of a national conflict can counteract otherwise destructive debates and promote reconciliation. Through the thoughtfully orchestrated use of dialogue, there is cause for optimism that Rwanda can reposition its narrative, filled with cycles of interethnic violence, to become one of Africa's 21st century success stories. Dialogue is being used in various forms throughout the country, from formal discussion clubs to academic conferences, to help Rwandans strengthen national unity and equality.

Protracted conflicts such as the Hutu-Tutsi colonial legacy in Rwanda often result in violence, due to seemingly irreconcilable differences of identity. During intrastate conflicts, such as the 1994 genocide in Rwanda, parties dehumanize the opposing side. Forging national unity in the aftermath of neighbor-on-neighbor killings poses a tremendous challenge. Today, Rwanda provides a compelling case study in how dialogue—from community clubs to academic conferences—is making a significant impact on reuniting communities and preventing hate-filled narratives from being passed to the next generation.

The 1994 Rwandan genocide stunned the world with its intensity and volume of killing in this otherwise beautiful country, located at the center of the Great Lakes region. While this tragedy will never be forgotten, Rwanda offers an inspiring example of how solid leadership and an active civil society can engage citizens in rebuilding their communities. This African nation can claim marked success in progressing from its darkest hour to a new era marked by economic development, increased security and, most importantly, the hope that national unity is indeed possible. Beyond the statistics, a recent visit to Rwanda provides a snapshot of how dialogue is being used to build interethnic reconciliation and national identity. In some cases, these aims are being achieved by helping communities to rediscover traditional conflict resolution methods while, in others, Rwandans are challenging long-standing cultural norms that contradict the notion of equality for all.

Rwanda provides a compelling case study in how dialogue—from community clubs to academic conferences—is making a significant impact on reuniting communities and preventing hate-filled narratives from being passed to the next generation.

19. Edgar H. Schein, psychologist and author, is former professor at the MIT Sloan School of Management. He has written extensively on organizational development, career development, group process consultation, and organizational culture.

20. Vanessa Noël Brown holds a Master's degree from George Mason University's School for Conflict Analysis and Resolution and was a recipient of a year-long David L. Boren Fellowship in Morocco.

Dialogue, Culture and Conflict

Dialogue, as a conflict resolution tool, differs from other communication methods such as mediation and negotiation. Instead of participants setting out to persuade one another of the accuracy of a particular point of view, parties engaging in dialogue approach the discussion as a constructive exchange of ideas, during which they can evaluate alternative perspectives.

In the Rwandan context, dialogue is being used to facilitate community-building through the reunion of neighbors who, in some cases, were perpetrators during the genocide. While conflict resolution theorists proffer this technique as broadly useful, the reality of turning dialogue into effective conflict resolution practice depends on good facilitators and willing participants. While intrastate conflicts continue to rage in Africa, the current progress of reconciliation efforts in Rwanda offers hope for a more peaceful future.²¹

| QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- How is dialogue improving human rights in Rwanda?
- What do you think are the objectives of the people participating in the dialogues in Rwanda?
- Are their disputes or conflicts in your community that would benefit from the parties engaging dialogue? If so, describe them.

| TEAM EXERCISE

Communicating across Differences

In March 2015, the Progress Youth Club from the Malda district of West Bengal organized a high-level women's football match as part of their golden jubilee commemorations. At the last moment, organizers were forced to cancel the match due to a rumored *fatwa* issued by a local cleric. National-level players who had come from across the country were sent home. The football club's president, Reja Razi, said, "Last week some *moulavis* (clerics) raised their objection to the women's football match. . . A meeting was held . . . between us and the [clerics] who were against the match. The next day, many more clerics said the match would be against Islam. They also threatened to make a stronger agitation if the match was held. The Block Development Officer then ordered us to stop the match."²²

Scenario: A women's rights activist and sports fan living in West Bengal is outraged at the cancelation of the match and decides that she must speak out against it. As she sees it, women's rights, equality, health, and enjoyment of life are being trampled and the sports club, which initially took courageous steps to engage women, folded at the first sign of opposition. She is able to make an appointment to meet with the club president, where she intends to ask him to speak out boldly for women's and girls' right to play football and to reschedule the match. The football club president is also concerned about being

21. Conflict Trends, 2008. http://www.accord.org.za/images/downloads/ct/ct_2008_1.pdf.

22. <http://www.goal.com/en-india/news/136/india/2015/03/15/9837222/fundamentalists-issue-fatwa-against-womens-football-match-in>.

pressured by religious authorities and believes deeply that sports should be for both boys and girls. At the same time, he is anxious about stirring up trouble with religious authorities, who might take stronger action against the club on another occasion. He feels he needs to look out for the long-term interests of the club, which serves thousands of youth.

Divide the participants into teams of three. Team members will choose one person to role-play the club president, and another to role-play the women's rights activist. The third team member will observe the conversation between her teammates and record her observations.

Taking on their respective roles, the club president and the activist meet and have a five- to ten-minute conversation, during which the activist presents her concerns and tries to persuade the club president to speak up for women athletes and to reschedule the football match.

During the conversation, the observer takes notes on her teammates' conversation. Her observations may include:

- What are their styles of communication?
- How well is each listening to the other?
- How well is each responding to the arguments of the other?
- Are they discussing what they agree on? Are they able to find common ground?
- Have they made suggestions about solutions or compromises?

When the group reconvenes, ask the observers to briefly share their observations. If time permits, ask a few pairs to repeat their role-play before the whole group, changing their approach in light of what they have learned from the exercise and discussion.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Was it reasonable to expect the club president and the activist to find common ground? Why or why not?
- For the activists and the club presidents: Was it difficult to support your position? Why or why not?
- What kind of factual information would help to make the activist's communication more effective?
- What assumptions or stereotypes about each other might have affected the way the club president and the activist responded to each other?
- Were the club president and the activist respectful to each other throughout their conversation? Were they empathetic to the other's position?
- Were the club president and the activist very far apart in their goals?
- On your team, did the activist and the club president really listen to/hear what the other was saying? Were they active listening? How could you tell?

Empathy: The Human Super Power

If you work in the field of human rights, conflict resolution, or in any field that aims to reduce the suffering of others, you have probably been told at least once if not dozens of times that you are admired for your selflessness, or your charity, or your altruism. But people who think that helping others is “selfless” could not be more wrong. Why? Because of that extraordinary and profoundly human capacity: *empathy*.

Empathy is being able to imagine what another person is feeling, and in doing so finding a connection between yourself and that other person. To empathize with someone, you have to believe that the other person is in some way like yourself, an equal. Empathy starts with sympathy, when you feel compassion towards another, recognizing their needs or agreeing with their view. The super power comes when you can go one step further and imagine yourself in their position, feeling their pain or their joy. Empathy is a window and a bridge. Empathy reduces prejudice; it leaps over barriers between class, creed, race, and abilities; it inspires us to help others; and it encourages us to make decisions in the best interest of larger numbers of people. But it is not only a super power, it is a super food. Studies have shown that empathy is good for relationships and marriage in particular.²³ Another study reveals that empathetic doctors have healthier patients.²⁴

Which brings us back to why we help others. Anyone who has spent years fighting for victims, campaigning to change legislation, or educating to raise others out of poverty, knows that at its core, helping others feels good. It is not selfless at all. Because when you feel empathy, reducing another’s suffering reduces your own; bringing joy to another brings you joy. That is why charity in itself is such a small accomplishment—you can be charitable to those you feel are not your equals—divided from you by class, race, ethnicity, religion, even gender. But motivated by empathy, you are healing yourself and the world.

Empathy is window and a bridge. Empathy reduces prejudice, it leaps over barriers between class, creed, race, and abilities, it inspires us to help others, and it encourages us to make decisions in the best interests of larger numbers of people.

23. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/feeling_like_partners/.

24. http://journals.lww.com/academicmedicine/Fulltext/2012/09000/The_Relationship_Between_Physician_Empathy_and.26.aspx.

Benefits of Empathy

Marshall Rosenberg²⁵

Our ability to offer empathy can allow us to stay vulnerable, defuse potential violence, help us hear the word “no” without taking it as a rejection, revive lifeless conversation, and even hear the feelings and needs expressed through silence.

Time and again, people transcend the paralyzing effects of psychological pain when they have sufficient contact with someone who can hear them empathically.

By maintaining our attention on what’s going on within others, we offer them a chance to fully explore and express their interior selves. We would stem this flow if we were to shift attention too quickly either to their request or to our own desire to express ourselves.

The more we empathize with the other party, the safer we feel.

Empathy allows us to re-perceive our world in a new way and move forward.

To be able to hear our own feelings and needs and to empathize with them can free us from depression.²⁶

| GROUP EXERCISE

- Ask the group to brainstorm the benefits of empathy.
- Record participants’ comments on a board or large sheet of paper.
- Ask the group to consider what empathy helps you feel, what it helps you to do, and how it helps you to do it.

| QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Why is empathy a super power?
- Do you think empathy and love are connected? Why or why not?
- Do you think a person can learn to be empathetic, or is it a skill you have to be born with? Why or why not?
- How do you think empathy can make you a better active listener?
- How does empathy make you better at relationships at work, at home, with your extended family?
- How might empathy transform people on opposing sides of a conflict?

25. Marshall Rosenberg (1934-2015) was an American psychologist and founder and former Director of Educational Services for the Center for Nonviolent Communication, an international non-profit organization.

26. <http://cultureofempathy.com/References/Benefits/Articles.htm>.

Reaping the Harvest of Peace and Justice

Ireland's struggle for independence began several centuries ago when it was conquered and then colonized by the English. Their rule over Ireland's Catholic majority was often characterized by prejudice, discrimination, and neglect, leading to poverty and famine. In 1921, Irish revolutionaries gained ground, winning a measure of national independence through a treaty. Under the terms of the treaty, six Protestant majority counties in the north were partitioned to remain part of Great Britain. Despite the Protestant majority's support for British rule in Northern Ireland, the new Irish Republic continued to formally regard the partition as provisional, as did most of the Catholics residing in the North. In recent decades, as a result of the disputed status of the territory, sectarian violence between Catholics and Protestants in Northern Ireland led to over 3,000 dead in a country with less than two million inhabitants.

Against this historical backdrop, Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams were drawn together by a violent tragedy that would transform their lives forever. On August 10, 1976, two of Maguire's nephews and one of her nieces were killed on a Belfast street corner when a British army patrol shot an Irish Republican Army (IRA) gunman whose car then plowed into a sidewalk.

After the tragedy Maguire, a Catholic, appeared on television, denouncing the IRA's violence. Williams, a woman of mixed religious background, had witnessed the accident and immediately circulated a petition. With 6,000 signatures to protest the children's deaths, she presented the petition on television two days later. At the children's funeral, Maguire and Williams, grieving and tired of senseless violence, joined forces, agreeing to strive for peace. They founded an organization called Women for Peace, later renamed the Peace People Organization.

Within a month the organization mobilized 30,000 women, both Catholics and Protestants, to march the Belfast streets. Although accused of collaboration with the enemy and physically threatened, Maguire and Williams did not stop marching and attracted more followers. Their supporters were drawn to the peace movement by their common goals. Participants discovered that they shared not only their desire to end the violence, but that people on both sides of the conflict faced poverty, lack of political autonomy, and civil liberty restrictions imposed by Northern Ireland's emergency legislation.

Maguire and Williams earned worldwide recognition for their work, receiving the Nobel Peace Prize in October 1977. Williams eventually left Belfast for the United States, but Maguire continued her efforts to reeducate Northern Ireland's warring factions and to bring them to the negotiating table. Dismissed during the 1980s and early 1990s by those who considered rage the only reaction to injustice, she persisted, articulating her message of nonviolence long before the 1998 peace agreement was reached.

As Maguire explained, "I believe that hope for the future depends on each of us taking nonviolence

into our hearts and minds and developing new and imaginative structures which are nonviolent and life-giving for all. Some people will argue that this is too idealistic. I believe that it is very realistic. I am convinced that humanity is fast evolving toward a higher consciousness. For those who say it cannot be done, let us remember that humanity learned to abolish slavery. Our task is no less than the abolition of violence and war..." Indeed, she still insists that "to reap the harvest of peace and justice in the future, we all have to sow the seeds of nonviolence, here and now, in the present."²⁷

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What were the events that inspired Mairead Corrigan Maguire and Betty Williams to seek a resolution to the conflict in Northern Ireland?
- What events allowed the two women to empathize with each other?
- What goals did Protestants and Catholics in Northern Ireland share?
- Does having a common goal surmount all differences between people? Why or why not?
- What role does empathy play in surmounting differences?
- How did empathy empower these two remarkable women to work together across enemy lines?
- How does empathy empower you?

27. Information from *The Vision of Peace, Faith and Hope in Northern Ireland*, by Mairead Corrigan Maguire with John Dear, S.J., ed., Maryknoll, NY: Orbis, 1999. This piece was adapted from a similar essay in *Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women*, Women's Learning Partnership, 2001.

Building Bridges of Understanding and Love

OBJECTIVES

- To explore multiple meanings in the language of rights.
- To examine bridges of understanding—historical, cultural, religious, or other.
- To discover strategies for creating shared experiences.

IN THIS SESSION

Working toward a compassionate society means continuously striving for what is best in humanity. A compassionate society is an aspiration, which grows stronger as more people join the effort. It is not something one can intuit, but takes discipline and rigor to manifest. The forces aligned against it—greed, chauvinism, intolerance, and ignorance—are very powerful. Compassion cannot happen by accident. Rather, peace, forgiveness, and love are the products of human effort and intelligence, and a little faith.

In her poem “Splittings,” from *The Dream of a Common Language*, Adrienne Rich wrote, “I choose to love this time for once with all my intelligence.” That is what we are trying to do as well. With all of our intelligence, we are reaching across what divides us—peeling back layers of meaning behind words that hurt, building bridges across differences, and finding common ground on even the most historically violent battlefields.

In this session, we will begin with short excerpts from an article by Chidi Anselm Odinkalu about what can happen to language when it is appropriated by an elite group or class. He cautions that everyday-people fighting for freedom and peace “will not build their struggle around the notion of human rights unless that language and those who wish to popularize it speak directly to their aspirations and survival.” Next we will examine our own language and words that cut differently for different communities. We will consider how different words hold different values and associations for communities on opposite sides of a dispute, and how important it is to understand the power of

words' multiple meanings when trying to build social and emotional bridges among people in conflict. The following reading selections and exercises examine extraordinary efforts of individuals and organizations who were able to build bridges of understanding among people divided by tragedy and violent conflict. From the capital of Liberia, to the line of control in Kashmir, to Ground Zero in New York City, the people in these stories lay the groundwork for greater historical, cultural, and religious understanding, against enormous odds.

The final reading selections are about people creating shared experiences and common ground for communities steeped in mistrust. We will look at what others have done and consider our own ideas for creating shared experiences. We will reflect on the emotional power of shared experiences, and address their transformative capacity and their limits for creating a more compassionate society.

READING ASSIGNMENT

If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language, that goes to his heart.
— Nelson Mandela

Why More Africans Don't Use Human Rights Language

Chidi Anselm Odinkalu²⁸

Excerpts

...Africa is living through a human rights crisis and a crisis for human rights. It is impossible to locate any African country in which the hope held out by the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR),²⁹ or any of the standards that have mushroomed under it, is not habitually assaulted by a combination of abuse of public power, private privilege, and resulting popular destitution.

While Africa's human rights problems are immense, even ubiquitous, most of our people do not describe their problems in human rights terms. Many communities and groups involved in social justice movements and initiatives in Africa are reluctant to make the Universal Declaration, or language inspired by it, their mascot or medium.

To seek to explain this by reference to the high illiteracy level in Africa—itsself a denial of several human rights—is to avoid the problem. Nor is it enough to wish this alienation away by inveighing against the unfortunate historical fact, true though it is, that Africa was hardly represented when the Universal Declaration was negotiated or adopted. After all, the struggle for independence in Africa predated the UDHR and remains, with the anti-apartheid campaign, the most popular and successful human rights movement known to African peoples.

28. Chidi Anselm Odinkalu is senior legal officer for the Africa Program of the Open Society Justice Initiative. Odinkalu is a lawyer and advocate from Nigeria and currently also chairs the Governing Council of Nigeria's National Human Rights Commission.

29. The Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted by UN General Assembly in 1948 (at the time the UN was made up of 58 participating nations), is a non-binding declaration of universal aspirations.

What then explains the current crisis of human rights and the retreat from the human rights paradigm as an engine of struggle?

In Africa, the realization of human rights is a very serious business indeed. In many cases it is a life and death matter. From the child soldier, the rural dweller deprived of basic health care, the mother unaware that the next pregnancy is not an inexorable fate, the city dweller living in fear of the burglar, the worker owed several months arrears of wages, and the activist organizing against bad government, to the group of rural women seeking access to land so that they may send their children to school with its proceeds, people are acutely aware of the injustices inflicted upon them. Knowledge of the contents of the Universal Declaration will hardly advance their condition... .

While Africa's human rights problems are immense, even ubiquitous, most of our people do not describe their problems in human rights terms.

The current human rights movement in Africa—with the possible exception of the women's rights movement and faith-based social justice initiatives—appears almost by design to exclude the participation of the people whose welfare it purports to advance. . . . Instead of being the currency of a social justice or conscience-driven movement, “human rights” has increasingly become the specialized language of a select professional cadre with its own rites of passage and methods of certification.

All this is not to say that we should do away with the norms of human rights or with groups that purport to promote or defend them. Human rights norms articulate values that are truly universal and essential. . . . People will struggle for their rights whether or not the language of human rights is accessible to them. But they will not build their struggle around the notion of human rights unless that language and those who wish to popularize it speak directly to their aspirations and survival.³⁰

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is Chidi Anselm Odinkalu saying is the problem with the international language of human rights?
- What is the harm in devaluing the currency of human rights language? Ultimately, who is served when the international human rights discourse carries little meaning or bears little weight?
- What do you think needs to happen for the language from the international human rights documents to have greater relevance for the peace and freedom advocates that Odinkalu is writing about?
- What are the long-term advantages of international human rights standards becoming part of the discourse and strategy of African rights advocates?

30. Excerpts from, “Why More Africans Don't Use Human Rights Language,” by Chidi Anselm Odinkalu, *Human Rights Dialogue* 2.1 (Winter 1999), December 5, 1999. Carnegie Council for Ethics in International Affairs. http://www.carnegiecouncil.org/publications/archive/dialogue/2_01/articles/602.html.

GROUP EXERCISE

The single biggest problem in communication is the illusion that it has taken place.

— George Bernard Shaw

That's what careless words do. They make people love you a little less.

— Arundhati Roy

Amid social tensions and conflict, language and what people say to one another take on enormous importance. Words can be a lifeline between warring parties seeking to end the violence. Or they can be a match thrown into a puddle of gasoline, inciting rage and destruction. There are many words that carry multiple meanings depending on which side of a conflict you are on. Some words are never neutral. Being aware that one's words might mean different things to different people is indispensable in advocating for peace and human rights. Anticipating misunderstandings gives you the chance to communicate better and to hear what others are really mean to say.

Below is a list of words that are sometimes fraught with multiple meanings. Ask the group to discuss several or all of the words below, and what they might signify for different people and why. Participants may have additional words to add to the list for their discussion.

As you go through the list, write each word on a board or large piece of paper along with the participants' comments about its meanings and the different values associated with it.

(The group should pick which words it wants to discuss. You can add any additional words that participants identify for the discussion.)

Affirmative action	Fundamentalist	Non-state actors
Appeasement	Gender sensitivity	Peacemaking
Civil disobedience	Gender violence	Pluralism
Civil rights	Genocide	Proportionality
Collective punishment	Globalization	Protesting
Collective responsibility	Honor	Quiet diplomacy
Compromise	Human rights	Quotas
Cultural rights	Justice	Radicalism
Equality	Love	Reconciliation
Feminism	Nationalism	Revenge
Freedom	Peace-keeping	Security
Equity		

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Which words were open to the widest interpretations or had the most meanings?
- How can being aware of words that are fraught with multiple interpretations help in coalition-building and negotiations?

Humans are enormously resilient and resourceful. In and as much as horrific acts have driven people apart, they have also brought people together in profound and durable ways. History is filled with examples of inexplicable friendships and extraordinary alliances that demonstrate humanity's capacity for decency and grace. Building bridges across cultures makes us wiser, but building bridges across tragedy and conflict makes us powerful.

Three remarkable stories follow about people living in conflict, building bridges of understanding and peace.

Liberian Women for Peace: Turning God's Ear

For nearly a decade, warlords and rebel groups sought to dislodge long-time Liberian strongman and president, Charles Taylor. In the battles between Taylor's military troops and the anti-Taylor militant groups, civilians were caught in the middle—murdered, raped, or forced to fight themselves. Villages were destroyed and children were turned into soldiers.

In July 2002, two courageous Liberian women, Leymah Gbowee and Comfort Freeman, from different Lutheran churches, recruited several hundred women of faith to speak out against the violence. Their message read: "In the past we were silent, but after being killed, raped, dehumanized, and infected with diseases, and watching our children and families destroyed, war has taught us that the future lies in saying NO to violence and YES to peace! We will not relent until peace prevails."

At a gathering of the Christian women, a Muslim woman, Asatu Bah Kenneth, spoke out and vowed to organize Muslim women to join their peace efforts. They called their new organization "Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace." On April 1, 2003, Christian and Muslim women united to protest the devastating war. More than 3,000 women participated in protests across the capital Monrovia. One of the organizers, Vaiba Flomo, asked, "Can the bullet pick and choose? Does the bullet know Christian from Muslim?"

As the ranks of the women protestors swelled, international pressure for a solution to the conflict mounted. President Taylor agreed to meet with rebels for peace talks, but there was little progress. "Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace" occupied the building where the two sides were negotiating and refused to leave until peace was announced. People brought the women food, water, and encouragement. Within weeks, Charles Taylor was forced to resign and was exiled to Nigeria, charged by the UN with crimes against humanity.

Leymah Gbowee, who in 2009 was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize, said, "The people of Liberia have hope. Our vision is for the unity of families and the elimination of hunger and disease. We believe God's hands are under us in this effort now. God has turned his ears toward us."³¹

31. Information for this story was collected from: "The Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace: Women can make the difference," by Lucie Gil, Institute for Cultural Diplomacy, 2013; <https://culturaldiplomacyinafrica.wordpress.com/2013/05/23/the-women-of-liberia-mass-action-for-peace-women-can-make-the-difference/>; "Women's Peace Movement of Liberia," by Amanda Molinaro, Peacemaker Heroes, March 2015; http://myhero.com/hero.asp?hero=womens_peace_movement_liberia_08; "Liberian women act to end civil war, 2003," by Kylin Navarro, edited by Max Rennebohn, Global Nonviolent Action Database, <http://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/liberian-women-act-end-civil-war-2003>.

Kashmiri Women Breaking the Silence

Allison Horowski³²

Ashima Kaul grew up in North Kashmir near the military line of control on the highly contested India/Pakistan border. A Kashmiri Pandit, she was raised in an inclusive environment and attended a missionary school that welcomed students and teachers of all backgrounds and religious affiliations, including Catholics, Muslims, Sikhs, and Hindus. In 1990, Ashima was living in New Delhi with her husband and young daughter when Kashmir erupted into violence. She was a freelance journalist writing on issues such as the environment, economic development, and gender, but was distanced from the social and political issues in Kashmir.

It was not until 1997, when a family friend gave Ashima a tip for a story, that she became more involved in the struggles of Jammu and Kashmir. The tip led her to a Muslim Kashmiri hospital, which was understaffed, unsanitary, and overwhelmed with women seeking care and family planning while their husbands and children filled the waiting rooms. Many were rural women who had traveled long distances to the hospital and had to return home immediately because they could not afford to stay the night. Ashima saw firsthand the toll of the Kashmir conflict on women, an aspect that she had never heard about in the news. She said, “this woke me from my slumber.” Ashima decided to return to the Kashmir region.

For two years, Ashima traveled from village to village, talking to women from different backgrounds and religious affiliations about their experiences. Despite their differences, Ashima realized that the women had valuable stories to share. All were deeply affected by the conflict, but, as women, their perspectives were minimized or ignored altogether, even within their own communities.

Convinced of the power of women to rebuild peace in Kashmir and Jammu, in 2000 Ashima founded *Athwaas* with several others, an organization to promote dialogue among the women of Kashmir. *Athwaas*, which means “handshake” in Kashmiri, was established to promote women as peacemakers. Women from around the Kashmir region traveled to New Delhi to participate in “Breaking the Silence,” an *Athwaas* conference for women to discuss the conflict and how it affected them. The conference was so successful that *Athwaas* became a traveling group in 2001, going to rural areas throughout Kashmir. A group of ten women, including Pandits, Hindus, Muslims, and Sikhs, all from Kashmir, traveled from village to village, meeting with the women in each community. Ashima believed that despite their differences, *Athwaas* could be a way for women to “share their own realities.” As Ashima explained, the women did not have to agree with one another, but they could acknowledge each other’s painful experiences as they in turn shared their own.

Throughout their travels, the leaders of *Athwaas* strove to be neutral in the face of divisive and long-standing conflicts. Their hope was to promote the capacity of Kashmiri women to be a powerful force for peace by building common ground. As Ashima described it, “choosing sides is divisive and harmful to one’s identity.” The women they met with, including widows, Muslims, and Pandit

32. Allison Horowski, Women’s Learning Partnership’s Program Associate for Events and Publications, interviewed Ashima Kaul Dec. 2, 2014 in Washington, DC, for this story.

refugees, shared stories of their experiences and survival. Many said it was the first time anyone had asked them for their perspective. Among the women themselves, often it was the first time they had heard another point of view.

Athwaas' work continued for ten years. For many women, forgiveness was a difficult process, but the dialogues in *Athwaas* were a step toward rebuilding the communities that had been torn apart by conflict.

[P]eace is an intimate process....

In 2010, the violence in Kashmir was ignited again, destabilizing the entire region and forcing *Athwaas* to put its work on hold. Ashima, however, continues her work encouraging others to work towards peace and is now running training workshops for Kashmiri youth. As she notes, “peace is an intimate process,” and she encourages participants to deconstruct their own prejudices to reveal their compassion, love, and humanity.

9/11 Victim’s Mother Expresses Forgiveness 10 Years After

Tala Hadavi, Voice of America

Excerpts

Sept. 13, 2011

Many Americans felt the need to retaliate after the terrorist attacks on the United States in 2001. And ever since then, U.S. forces have waged a world-wide war against the Islamic extremists who claimed responsibility. But not all Americans seek retribution to ease their pain. Phyllis Rodriguez is one mother who expresses forgiveness, not hate, toward those who killed her son 10 years ago on September 11.

Phyllis Rodriguez’s son Greg died in the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center. He was a computer specialist working on the 103rd floor of the north tower. She recalls how she found out that something terrible had happened that Tuesday morning.

“On our answering machine was a message from Greg, our son, that said, ‘There’s been a terrible accident at the World Trade Center. I’m OK, call Elizabeth,’ our daughter-in-law.” But Greg Rodriguez was not OK and neither were nearly 3,000 others. “I was just hoping, hoping that he had survived, and not allowing myself to admit the worst,” recalled Rodriguez.

That came soon enough when Greg Rodriguez was declared dead. And with it came his parents’ conscious decision to make a difference. “The main thing that we realized very early the morning of the 12th is that our government, given its history, was going to do something military and violent in retaliation in the name of our son and that that wasn’t going to do any good and we didn’t support it.” Phyllis Rodriguez and her husband Orlando released an open letter to then President George W.

Bush. “It ended up being circulated around the country and around the world. It was part of the way that helped us cope with the loss,” Rodriguez explained.

The couple wanted no part of revenge. They opposed the death penalty for the man who became known as the 20th hijacker, Zacarias Moussaoui. Phyllis befriended Zacarias’ mother, Aicha el-Wafi. “I felt that this woman has to be very, very courageous because her son is the most hated person probably at the moment and here she was standing up for her son,” said Rodriguez. “We realized what we had in common was our common humanity. We were human beings. It is a very valuable part of my life and my healing.”

... Phyllis Rodriguez says she copes with the loss of her only son by opposing war and participating in human rights and forgiveness projects. “I don’t think it happened for a reason, but it did happen and I feel fortunate that I had the inner resources to respond in the way that I did,” Rodriguez said.

Rodriguez says she is at peace knowing she will never see her son again, but is not at peace with the state of the world. That is why, she says, she is trying to make a difference.³³

| GROUP ACTIVITY

Ask the participants what themes unite the three stories above: Liberian women coming together for peace, Kashmiri women sharing stories, and Phyllis Rodriguez meeting Aicha el-Wafi? Record the answers on a board or large piece of paper.

| QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What did the Christian and Muslim Liberian women have in common? What did the Kashmiri women participating in Athwaas have in common with each other? What did Phyllis Rodriguez and Aicha el-Wafi share?
- Was the source of the women’s power the same in each story? Why or why not? What was their source of power?
- Do you have any power in your life that comes from working with people who are very different from yourself? Can you describe that power?
- Do you think you would be empowered by connecting and dialoguing with others with whom you have been in conflict? Why or why not?
- What are some groups of people you think would benefit from finding common ground? What do you think they have in common? What could they accomplish if they could unite?

33. “9/11 Victim’s Mother Expresses Forgiveness 10 Years After,” by Tala Hadavi, Voice of America (VOA) News/USA, September 13, 2011. <http://www.voanews.com/content/article-911-victims-mother-expresses-forgiveness-10-years-after-129804118/174865.html>.

How do people live with the knowledge that their neighbors wanted to kill them?

Anne Hoiberg, US-based psychologist and former president of the San Diego United Nations Association, traveled to Bosnia in 1995 to supervise voter registration. During the three-year war in the Balkans, citizen and voter records had been destroyed. The fragile peace accord had patched together a political solution to the conflict, but the extreme tension between neighbors, Bosnians, Serbs, and Croats was still palpable. Anne met with WLP staff in 2014 and shared the following story about how some people dealt with the constant animosity that threatened to explode into violence:

As Anne described it, there was a pervasive atmosphere of sadness from the conflict that left the people who remained ragged and downtrodden. Anne asked “How do people live with the knowledge that their neighbors wanted to kill them?” One coping technique was the Sunday coffee gatherings that her Bosnian landlord held for the community, sometimes as many as five gatherings in one day. Men and women came to talk with one another to heal and alleviate their hatred. This communication allowed the community to find common ground and to begin to move forward after the trauma and violence they had endured. This counseling, informal as it was, allowed people to persevere in the face of horrific tragedy and start to rebuild their community.³⁴

Goma Festival Seeks Healing, Peace Through Music

Hilary Heuler, Voice of America

Excerpts

February 18, 2015

Several years ago, fed up with the violence engulfing their region, a youth group in Goma set out to hold a music festival for peace. The first attempt in 2013 was canceled as mortars rained down on the city. But in 2014, 25,000 people came to Goma to hear their favorite Congolese artists play. . . . Now in its second year, the Amani Music Festival has started to attract some of the continent’s biggest names, despite recent clashes in the area.

For decades Goma has been synonymous with crises. Desperate refugees converged on the city after the Rwandan genocide in 1994. In 2002, a nearby volcano buried part of the city in molten lava. Various rebel groups have taken and re-taken Goma in recent years, including M23, which was driven out of the area in 2013.

34. Lina Abou-Habib and Allison Horowski, Women’s Learning Partnership, interviewed Anne Hoiberg at the ‘Defying Extremism’ conference hosted by the Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace and Justice, University of San Diego, in California, November 2014.

One ambitious youth group dared to imagine that their city could be different, however, and they seized on the idea of music. Vianney Bisimwa, one of the youth group's organizers, said they wanted to change the image of a town slowly clawing its way back to stability.

“We went through war, and the war really negatively impacted the promotion of culture,” said Bisimwa. “So the idea was, how can we try to change the way people see this town? Because all the reports on DRC were, ‘don’t go there, people are killed, there is no way, no hope, no future. . . . People were really traumatized, there was a lot of frustration, there was anger. There were many things coming from this experience of this special year of struggling with M23. So the first edition was an opportunity for people to breath,” said Bisimwa. Peace, he added, is a process. He said he hopes events like this finally will get people talking about the past, and thinking about the future.³⁵

Religious Leaders Gather in Good Faith to ‘Make a Difference’

Elvina Fernandez, Voice of America

Excerpts

October 15, 2015

Thousands made their way to the Go MAD (Go Make A Difference) carnival at the Church of Visitation, Seremban [in Malaysia], yesterday. Leaders and followers of different faiths came together to join in the celebration, with the theme “Mission Towards Transforming Humanity.”

The carnival featured a dunk tank, face painting, rock climbing, an inflatable playground and various food stalls. There were also entertaining performances by church members and the local community.

Parish priest Father Harrison said the carnival kept in mind the need to welcome all races and religions to come together and unite in their differences. “It is time to open our church and welcome brothers and sisters of other faiths to come together as one,” he said.

The Go MAD carnival began with the reciting of Quranic verses. This was followed by Hindu Sangam Negri Sembilan reciting Hindu holy scriptures. The Sikh community was represented by Giani Napinder Singh and the Buddhists by vice-chairman Goh Kim Seng.

The Archbishop of Kuala Lumpur later joined these representatives in releasing two white doves as a symbol of purity and peace. He declared that such events should be held more often to bring the various races together. “Such events should be held more often to prove that Malaysians can live peacefully together.”³⁶

35. Voice of America, <http://www.voanews.com/content/goma-festival-seeks-healing-peace-through-music/2648987.html>.

36. The Malaysian Insider. <http://www.themalaysianinsider.com/citynews/seremban/article/religious-leaders-gather-in-good-faith-to-make-a-difference/religious-leaders-gather-in-good-faith-to-make-a-difference>.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- How do you think the participants felt in each of the activities above?
- Do you believe that meeting in a café, dancing at a concert, or playing at a multi-faith festival can make a difference in a community? Why?
- What sort of connections are being formed among the participants at the different events? What are the organizations trying to accomplish? What do you think is accomplished? Tolerance? Forgiveness? Love?
- What types of activities could communities engage in to bring more women together from the sides in conflict?

TEAM EXERCISE

From informal meetings in cafés to traveling panels of women leaders, common ground can be established nearly anywhere. The spaces need to be safe, violence-free zones, where people can simply talk to one another, and listen to each other. Sometimes, the most valuable space is one in which the issues that divide the community are not discussed at all, but instead the participants focus entirely on something that brings them mutual joy. These can be sports competitions, musical performances, art shows, plays, building projects, community picnics, joint-religious services, youth councils, computer classes, cookbooks, book fairs—the list is endless.

Divide the group into teams of four or five participants. Ask the teams to consider communities in conflict in their neighborhood, village, city, or country and to choose one. Next ask the teams to plan an event or project that would bring the people in the community together. Ask the teams to consider:

- What is their plan?
- Where would the event be held or project take place?
- Who would be invited?
- How long would it last?
- What measures would be taken to ensure everyone felt safe?
- What could be accomplished?

Ask a volunteer from each team to take notes on the team's plan. When the group reconvenes, each team volunteer should report on her team's idea.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Which project gatherings stood out for you the most? Why?
- Do you think the gatherings were realistic? Why or why not?
- How do these sorts of gatherings promote tolerance? How do these sorts of gatherings promote human rights?
- Do you think there is a spiritual component to gathering people together? Why or why not?
- If you do think there is a spiritual component, what is it?
- Do you think opposing sides to a conflict, or victims of human rights violations, can ever love their former enemies? What would it take for love to exist where there was formerly only hate?

Forgiving for the Future

OBJECTIVES

- To explore the meaning and power of forgiveness.
- To explore the relationship between justice and forgiveness.
- To explore whether forgiveness can pave the way for peace and love.

IN THIS SESSION

Forgiving is an activity that is meant to address, even repair, the past while the force of its impact is wholly directed towards the future. For human rights advocates, forgiveness may feel like a practice out of time—something that happens too late to make a difference in our work. We like to think of ourselves as the surgeons, our entire focus on removing the cancer. But forgiveness can be just as important for saving the patient. Long after the ‘surgery’ a person can suffer, a community can falter, a country can decline. Indeed, the satirical expression, “the operation was successful, but the patient died,” may too frequently be applicable to some international human rights advocacy efforts.³⁷ Forgiveness is not an alternative to just laws and justice for victims, but an additional—much needed—salve for the deep wounds inflicted by human rights offenders.

In this session, we will read several descriptions of forgiveness by proponents and skeptics and explore its potential role in human rights work. Complicating the practice of forgiveness, particularly for human rights advocates, is our central desire for justice for victims. We will consider whether there is any meaning in forgiveness when justice is not served, or in some cases never even sought. Next, we will read and discuss one man’s story of a terrible crime, and his family’s struggle to forgive the perpetrator, although he escaped prosecution.

37. For instance, this criticism has been lobbed at the International Criminal Court (ICC), which after decades of human rights advocacy for its establishment (in 2002), has had just two successful convictions, both of Congolese warlords. The court has 34 judges, over 700 staff, and an annual budget of \$166 million. *Forbes*, March 12, 2014.

In the final reading selections and exercise, we will examine the power and limits of reconciliation. In a speech, former First Lady of South Africa, Graça Machel, expresses her gratitude for South Africa's Truth and Reconciliation Commission in moving the country past violent recriminations and vigilante justice. At the same time, she describes a country that has not healed from its past and is struggling economically, socially, and spiritually. We will examine how forgiveness can transform individuals and society in some situations, sometimes even paving the way for peace and love.

اعف عما أغضبك لما أَرْضَاكَ أَعْقَلُ النَّاسِ
أَعْدَرُهُمْ لِلنَّاسِ

**The wisest is the one who can
forgive.**

—Arabic Proverb

READING ASSIGNMENT

When you forgive somebody who has wronged you, you're spared the dismal corrosion of bitterness and wounded pride. For both parties, forgiveness means the freedom again to be at peace inside their own skins and to be glad in each other's presence.

—Frederick Buechner³⁸

Know What Forgiveness Is and Why It Matters

Robert Enright³⁹

Excerpts

Forgiveness is about goodness, about extending mercy to those who've harmed us, even if they don't "deserve" it. It is not about finding excuses for the offending person's behavior or pretending it didn't happen. Nor is there a quick formula you can follow. Forgiveness is a process with many steps that often proceeds in a non-linear fashion. But it's well worth the effort. Working on forgiveness can help us increase our self-esteem and give us a sense of inner strength and safety. It can reverse the lies that we often tell ourselves when someone has hurt us deeply—lies like, I am defeated or I'm not worthy. Forgiveness can heal us and allow us to move on in life with meaning and purpose. Forgiveness matters, and we will be its primary beneficiary. Studies have shown that forgiving others produces strong psychological benefits for the one who forgives. It has been shown to decrease depression, anxiety, unhealthy anger, and the symptoms of PTSD.⁴⁰ But we don't just forgive to help ourselves. Forgiveness can lead to psychological healing, yes; but, in its essence, it is not something

38. Carl Frederick Buechner is an American writer, theologian, and ordained Presbyterian minister.

39. Robert Enright, a pioneer in the scientific study of forgiveness, is a professor at the School of Education, University of Wisconsin-Madison. He is widely published on the subject.

40. PTSD is Post Traumatic Stress Disorder, a mental health condition that is triggered by witnessing or experiencing a horrifying event.

about you or done for you. It is something you extend toward another person, because you recognize, over time, that it is the best response to the situation.⁴¹

I've never been entirely comfortable with the concept of forgiveness.

Leon F. Seltzer⁴²

I've never been entirely comfortable with the concept of forgiveness. Sure, if you're truly to get over being wronged or abused, you'll need to forgive the person responsible for hurting you. Yet to me there can be something uncomfortably condescending about forgiving another. It's almost as though you're saying, "I'm better than you, 'cause *I* never would have done what you did to me... but because of my charitable ideals, I'm going to forgive you anyway." And it's this regrettable link between forgiveness and the presumption of superiority that makes me a little uneasy about the whole concept.⁴³

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What is your definition of forgiveness?
- What happens to you emotionally when you forgive someone?
- What happens to you emotionally when you are forgiven?
- Is there anything about forgiveness that makes you uncomfortable? What is it?
- Do you believe forgiving should be contingent on anything? If so, what? Justice being served? An apology or other act of contrition? A passage of time? A recognition of mutual suffering? A recognition of mutual humanity?
- Do you believe any action is eligible for forgiveness? Why or why not?

The pursuit of happiness and the ability to participate in one's community are human rights. Healing from the pain of another's act is essential to being able to be happy and to function again in the world.

— Kent Davis-Packard
WLP Co-Executive Director

41. From *Eight Keys to Forgiveness*, by Robert Enright, October 15, 2015. http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/eight_keys_to_forgiveness.

42. Leon F. Seltzer, PhD, is the author of *The Vision of Melville and Conrad* and numerous articles in the fields of literature and psychology.

43. From Can Compassion Transcend Forgiveness? By Leon F. Seltzer, August 27, 2009.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/evolution-the-self/200908/can-compassion-transcend-forgiveness>.

| PARTNER EXERCISE

Ask the group to brainstorm what types of actions or injuries would be the most difficult to ever forgive. Record their ideas on a board or large piece of paper.

When the list is complete, invite participants to consider items on the list they *might* consider forgiving under the right circumstances. Ask volunteers to explain under what circumstances they could imagine forgiving any of the injuries/crimes/violations listed on the board.

| QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- What were the common themes among the circumstances that participants could imagine forgiving?
- What were the common themes among the circumstances that participants found unforgiveable?

| GROUP EXERCISE

In their book, *The Book of Forgiving*, Archbishop Desmond Tutu and his daughter, Reverend Mpho Tutu, wrote:

Without forgiveness, we remain tethered to the person who harmed us... Until we can forgive the person who harmed us, they will hold the keys to our happiness, they will be our jailor.⁴⁴

Ask the group to consider the quote, and then respond to the following questions:

- What are the Tutus saying? Can you explain what they mean in your own words?
- Do you agree with the Tutus? Why or why not?

***The weak can never forgive.
Forgiveness is the attribute of the
strong.***

– Mahatma Gandhi

| TEAM EXERCISE

Divide the group into pairs. Ask each pair to review the nine steps to forgiveness described below by Fred Luskin. Ask the pairs to discuss each step—how it might feel to apply it, how relevant is it, how valuable it is, what might be the result/s (positive and negative)? When the group reconvenes, ask the partners to share their thoughts about the ‘nine steps.’

44. From *The Book of Forgiving: The Fourfold Path for Healing Ourselves and Our World*, by Desmond Tutu and Mpho Tutu, HarperOne, 2014.

Nine Steps to Forgiveness

Fred Luskin⁴⁵

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a couple of trusted people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to feel better. Forgiveness is for you and no one else.
3. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciling with the person who upset you or condoning the action. In forgiveness you seek the peace and understanding that come from blaming people less after they offend you and taking those offenses less personally.
4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts, and physical upset you are suffering now, not from what offended you or hurt you two minutes—or 10 years—ago.
5. At the moment you feel upset, practice stress management to soothe your body's fight or flight response.
6. Give up expecting things from your life or from other people that they do not choose to give you. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, friendship, and prosperity, and work hard to get them. However, these are “unenforceable rules:” You will suffer when you demand that these things occur, since you do not have the power to make them happen.
7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you.
8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving power over you to the person who caused you pain, learn to look for the love, beauty, and kindness around you. Put more energy into appreciating what you have rather than attending to what you do not have.
9. Amend the way you look at your past so you remind yourself of your heroic choice to forgive.⁴⁶

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Which steps did you find most practical?
- Were there steps you did not like or felt were not helpful?
- Do you agree with the maxim, ‘a life well lived is your best revenge’? Why or why not?
- Do you believe that forgiving is part of a ‘life well lived’?

45. Fred Luskin, PhD, is the director of the Stanford University Forgiveness Projects, a senior consultant in health promotion at Stanford University, in Palo Alto, California, and a professor at the Institute for Transpersonal Psychology.

46. September 1, 2004 http://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/nine_steps_to_forgiveness#.

Forgiveness Is Not Justice

Sonja Lybomirsky⁴⁷

It is certainly easier to forgive someone who sincerely apologizes and makes amends. However, justice—which may include acknowledgment of the wrong, apologies, punishment, restitution, or compensation—is separate from forgiveness. You may pursue your rights for justice with or without forgiving someone. And if justice is denied, you can still choose whether or not to forgive.

Forgiveness and Justice

Everett L. Worthington Jr.⁴⁸

Excerpts

On New Year's Eve 1995, my mother was murdered. Someone broke into her house in search of hidden treasure. When she awakened, she was bludgeoned repeatedly with a crowbar.

The police were vigilant. Soon a youthful suspect confessed to the crime. But later, when the police found that the physical evidence was contaminated, the youth recanted his confession and walked away freely.

My brother Mike had discovered Mama's body when he and his son visited on New Year's morning. The sight of the house in shambles was devastating. As he walked into the house, he first saw the blood-splattered walls, then my mother's body in a pool of blood.

Within a month, Mike, my sister Kathy, and I independently forgave the murderer. Furthermore, in honor of Mama's memory, we wanted to do what she had taught us—to honor life rather than dishonor it. Independently, each of us decided that if evidence could be uncovered so that the youth could be prosecuted, we would not advocate the death penalty.

This crime had a profound impact on me. I had studied forgiveness scientifically since 1990. The crime focused my attention more on how to balance justice against forgiveness and how to help people who are experiencing deep wounds to forgive. The crime and its aftermath literally gave me a new mission in life—to promote forgiveness in every willing heart, home, and homeland.

Mike was also profoundly affected by the murder. He couldn't get those scenes of violence, bloody walls, and Mama's broken body out of his mind. He had flashbacks and recurring depression. In

47. From: *The How of Happiness*, by Sonja Lybomirsky, 2007.

<http://www.pbs.org/thisemotionallife/topic/forgiveness/understanding-forgiveness>.

48. Everett L. Worthington, Jr., PhD, is a Professor of Psychology at Virginia Commonwealth University. He has written more than 30 books on forgiveness of others, self-forgiveness, character strength, religion, and psychology.

summer 2005, Mike ended his life, unleashing a new wave of suffering in our family. We grieved for his loss, which trickled down like spreading blood from the act of violence perpetrated by a youth in search of quick cash.

Besides suffering and coping with the loss of loved ones, our family has had to deal with profound questions.

By forgiving, did we lessen our drive for justice?

Does forgiveness work against justice, or can forgiveness ever work alongside of justice?

Forgiving changed our emotional experience, but it did not affect our desire for seeing the perpetrator caught and brought to trial. Justice often actually works to promote, not undermine forgiveness. Isn't it easier to forgive a convicted and punished criminal than someone who gets off scot-free? When we are harmed, we experience a sense of injustice. This is called the "injustice gap." The bigger the injustice gap, the harder an offense is to forgive, and the stronger the negative emotions are. If the offender does anything to help balance the books, the injustice gap is narrower and forgiveness is easier.

Did forgiving shorten our grief?

Forgiving probably doesn't shorten grieving. But part of grieving is telling a story repeatedly about the loss. If the story is spiced by bitterness, resentment, and rage, the griever makes his or her self-image more negative. But if the griever can rise above the suffering to forgive he or she sees the self as a stronger person. Grief will not be shortened but one's sense of self will be different.⁴⁹

[T]he most dangerous thing in life is to let people become convinced that truth has just one face...

Khaled al-Berry⁵⁰

I used to think there was only one way to know truth—the divine way, the infallible way. But now I believe that the most dangerous thing in life is to let people become convinced that truth has just one face. At the root of forgiveness and tolerance is the belief that truth has MANY different faces and that the face you see of truth is not in any way of better value than the faces others see.⁵¹

49. <http://www.thepowerofforgiveness.com/pdf/Worthingoton.pdf>.

50. As a teenager Khaled al-Berry belonged to the radical Egyptian Islamist group, el-Gama'a al-Islamiya. A former BBC journalist, he is now editor-in-chief of dotMSR, a multimedia website. In 2009 Khaled published his book, *Life Is More Beautiful than Paradise: A Jibadist's Own Story*.

51. From <http://theforgivenessproject.com/stories/khaled-al-berry-egypt/>.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- How might forgiveness promote human rights and contribute to lasting peace?
- Do you think that you could forgive someone for committing a terrible act even if he or she was never legally held accountable for it?
- Some people believe in divine justice, that God is the supreme arbiter of justice. Does the thought of God's justice enable you to forgive someone for a terrible transgression? Why or why not?
- What does 'justice' mean for you? Public exposure of the crimes and people responsible? Prosecution? Jail time? Corporal punishment? Acts of atonement?
- Do you believe that there always needs to be some kind of justice before forgiveness?

***Without justice and love, peace will
always be the great illusion.***

—Archbishop Hélder Pessoa Câmara

We need a vision of how to build a healthy society...

Graça Machel⁵²

Excerpts

... South Africa has not even begun to understand the deepest social crisis, which has been structured, engineered, crafted and systematically implemented along decades and decades by the apartheid system precisely to break the social fabric of this nation, so as to oppress and control the majority of the people.

I don't believe that in 18 years of freedom, this nation took the time to seriously revisit what kind of psychological and emotional damage has been inflicted on men and women in this society. Let's remember families have been torn apart for at least three generations. A significant number of parents in their 40s and 50s today, they grew up in torn, disrupted and dysfunctional families. They carry with them the emotional mutilations. They are trying hard to mould their children around a concept of a family, which they didn't have, and they didn't enjoy.

It may sound presumptuous, but I have observed as a South African and also as a Mozambican, that we in this country, we have a huge difficulties in communicating in a smooth, peaceful and accommodating manner. We hold a lot of anger, a lot of aggressiveness in communication. Our societal interactions are in many cases that of accusing one another, blaming one another. It is

52. Graça Machel is an internationally renowned advocate for women's rights. She is the widow of Nelson Mandela and of Mozambican president Samora Machel. On October 2, 2012, she gave this address at the 2nd Annual Desmond Tutu Peace Lecture. For the full text of her comments, go to: <http://www.tutu.org.za/graca-machel-addresses-the-2nd-annual-desmond-tutu-international-peace-lecture-2-october-2012>.

almost as if it is the responsibility of somebody else within our society, all the ills we face.

I sincerely think we are in pain, we are hurting, we are bleeding. We are harming one another because we cannot control our pain. I'm not talking of the strikes, I'm talking of society in normal relations. Those who go as far as raping women, children and the elderly are an expression of self-hate. They hate themselves so deep that they feel the need to inflict, and sometimes in a very sophisticated way, to inflict pain and hurt to others. And of course in that, they become hollow of their own sense of humanity and they are trying to destroy the humanity in their victims.

I think we need a vision of how to build a healthy society; how to heal the character of the sons and daughters of this beautiful nation. This vision should help us to get ourselves free from anger, free from fear, free from accumulated frustrations, which inhibit us, or make us unable to touch others in a loving manner.

...We need to have a comprehensive and coherent understanding of what has happened to our feelings, to our emotions, to our social relations, to the way we communicate with one another, to be able then to put this social fabric together.

This vision should help us to get ourselves free from anger, free from fear, free from accumulated frustrations, which inhibit us, or make us unable to touch others in a loving manner.

[Archbishop Desmond Tutu], you led us to confront our demons with the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. It sounded like it would have been an impossible job, but perpetrators and victims were able to look into the eyes of each other, of one another. They faced the truth, painful as it was and they ended up accepting one another, accepting the past and to join hands and say yes, let's build the present and future together. I think we need something like, but as a movement, not only as a group of people who have happened to have perpetrated some atrocities. We need to do this with the consciousness that as a society we are in pain, we are hurting, and we are bleeding.

This vision should help us get ourselves free from anger, free from fear, free from accumulated frustrations, which inhibit us...

... I chose not to speak of this problem as a women's problem, but I know that women are the rock. I want to present women tonight as agents of change with the strength and resilience they have, not as victims as many times are being portrayed. If they can bring up their children alone its because they have resourcefulness and they have the capacity to go beyond themselves and to embrace and love. Women will have to join this, and why not, even to lead the way, in the way they educate their children, men and women, boys and girls to know how to accept one another, to protect one another, to love one another and to make of our societies and our family happy ones...

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

Graça Machel describes the enormous contribution that the Truth and Reconciliation Commission made to facilitating South Africa's acceptance of its past, and to helping former foes to work together for South Africa's future. But she also describes a South Africa that is still largely unhealed, and in particular she cites the family unit as being threatened and even damaged by the country's oppressive and violent history.

- What are some of the societal problems she mentions that are holding South Africans back?
- What does she think the country needs in order to heal?
- Which people does she think may be in the best position to hasten the healing—those she describes as knowing “how to accept one another, to protect one another, to love one another”?
- What role has forgiveness played in helping South Africa move forward from its oppressive and criminal past? What else does society need?

TEAM EXERCISE

Divide the group into teams of three or four participants. Ask the teams to consider the following quote:

When I despair, I remember that all through history, the way of truth and love have always won. There have been tyrants and murderers, and for a time, they can seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall. Think of it—always.

— Mahatma Gandhi

Ask each team to consider a human rights violation that is of concern to them. Have the team draft a request for forgiveness from the human rights perpetrator that they believe might significantly move the victim or victims to consider forgiving the perpetrator. They will need to imagine the offenses from the perspective of the offender, but also to consider the injuries and continuing harm suffered by the victim. It does not matter if the team does not believe that the perpetrator would, in reality, ever make such a request. The purpose of this exercise is to explore what a request for forgiveness would need to include to have an impact on the victim. The requests for forgiveness should be four to eight sentences in length. When the teams are finished, have a volunteer from each team read their request to the group.

QUESTIONS FOR GROUP DISCUSSION

- Did you find any of the requests for forgiveness moving? Why or why not?
- Listening to the requests, was it possible to imagine in any of the situations that the victims would be able to one day forgive the perpetrators? If so, which ones?
- Were the requests for forgiveness simply apologies, or something more? If they were more, describe the difference.
- Have you ever considered forgiving a human rights offender? If so, what were the circumstances?
- How would relations change in your community if the perpetrators of discrimination, corruption, and violence asked for forgiveness for their actions? Is it even possible to imagine?
- Do you believe that real rapprochements are possible between victims and perpetrators? Can victims and perpetrators find a way to work together for a better future? Can victims and perpetrators ever heal their divide so well that one day they *might* love each other? If your answer is yes, describe how you imagine that might happen.
- The American theologian and political commentator Reinhold Niebuhr once said, “Forgiveness is the final form of love.” What do you think he meant? Do you agree with him?

THE LAST WORDS

WHY LOVE AND COMPASSION BRING THE GREATEST HAPPINESS

Tenzin Gyatso, the 14th Dalai Lama⁵³

Ultimately, the reason why love and compassion bring the greatest happiness is simply that our nature cherishes them above all else. The need for love lies at the very foundation of human existence. It results from the profound interdependence we all share with one another. However capable and skillful an individual may be, left alone, he or she will not survive. However vigorous and independent one may feel during the most prosperous period of life, when one is sick or very young or very old, one must depend on the support of others.

Interdependence, of course, is a fundamental law of nature. Not only higher forms of life but also many of the smallest insects are social beings who, without any religion, law or education, survive by mutual cooperation based on an innate recognition of their interconnectedness. The most subtle level of material phenomena is also governed by interdependence. All phenomena from the planet we inhabit to the oceans, clouds, forests and flowers that surround us, arise in dependence upon subtle patterns of energy. Without their proper interaction, they dissolve and decay.

It is because our own human existence is so dependent on the help of others that our need for love lies at the very foundation of our existence. Therefore we need a genuine sense of responsibility and a sincere concern for the welfare of others...

53. From <http://www.dalailama.com/messages/compassion>.

LET THERE BE SPACES IN YOUR TOGETHERNESS

Let there be spaces in your togetherness. And let the winds of the heavens dance between you. Love one another but make not a bond of love: Let it rather be a moving sea between the shores of your souls. Fill each other's cup but drink not from one cup. Give one another of your bread but eat not from the same loaf. Sing and dance together and be joyous, but let each one of you be alone, Even as the strings of a lute are alone though they quiver with the same music. Give your hearts, but not into each other's keeping. For only the hand of Life can contain your hearts. And stand together, yet not too near together: For the pillars of the temple stand apart. And the oak tree and the cypress grow not in each other's shadow.

—Kahlil Gibran, *The Prophet*

PARTICIPANT WORKSHOP EVALUATION

Please evaluate your experience participating in the workshop sessions by filling out the form and checking the box that best indicates your response next to each statement. Your responses in this evaluation form and your recommendations below will be reviewed and used to adjust and improve future workshop programs. Your evaluation form is anonymous unless you choose to write your name on it.

We are very grateful for your taking the time to fill out this form. Your opinion is very valuable to us.

Thank you!
Women's Learning Partnership

| Participants Workshop Evaluation: Leading to Compassion

Workshop completion date.....

Name(s) of your workshop facilitators.....

Your name (optional, you may leave this line blank).....

Scoring: 1=Totally agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree;

4 = Totally disagree; 5 = I do not know/I do not care to comment

Please read each of the following statements carefully. You may find that you agree or disagree with a number of them.

Participants Workshop Evaluation: Leading to Compassion

OVERVIEW:

1=Totally agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Totally disagree; 5=I do not know

		1	2	3	4	5
1	While participating in the workshop sessions, I felt the setting was supportive and nurturing.					
2	When the workshop ended, I had a much better understanding of how compassion and forgiveness fit into my own life and work.					

AFTER PARTICIPATING IN THE WORKSHOP, I BELIEVE:

1=Totally agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Totally disagree; 5=I do not know

		1	2	3	4	5
3	The emotion of compassion is the basis for human tolerance, pluralism, universality, and charity.					
4	The principle of compassion lies at the heart of all religious, ethical, and spiritual traditions, calling us always to treat all others as we wish to be treated ourselves.					
5	Compassion gives us tools with which to establish new relationships and new practices that lead to lasting change and peace.					
6	Pluralism, a social system based on mutual respect for each other's cultures, is a helpful approach to a compassionate society.					
7	Compassion can be taught.					
8	Through dialogue, two sides to a conflict can develop common understanding.					
9	Dialogue can lead to much higher levels of mutual understanding.					
10	Dialogue is not a substitute for concrete steps that change the conditions that are creating the conflict.					
11	There are disputes or conflicts in my community that would benefit from the parties engaging dialogue.					
12	The emotion of empathy can help disagreeing parties to be more productive in a dialogue together.					
13	Helping others is a "selfless" act.					
14	People can overcome psychological pain when they have sufficient contact with someone who is empathetic to them.					
15	Empathy can be taught.					
16	"Careless words," words that are misunderstood or have multiple meanings, can lead to or exacerbate a conflict.					
17	The right words can build bridges of understanding between people.					
18	Sharing your story can help others understand your perspective.					
19	Shared projects (music festivals, picnics, prayer gatherings, etc.) that do not deal directly with the root causes of a conflict between two communities, can have a positive impact on reducing tension and mistrust between the communities.					

1=Totally agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Totally disagree; 5=I do not know		1	2	3	4	5
20	Opposing sides to a long conflict can overcome their hate and mistrust if the conditions that are creating the mistrust are resolved.					
21	It is possible, in some circumstances, for former enemies to one day love each other.					
22	Forgiving has emotional and social benefits for the forgiver. Forgiving can decrease depression and anxiety.					
23	Forgiving is not the same as forgetting.					
24	Forgiving shortens grief.					
25	It is easier to forgive someone who sincerely apologizes.					
26	It is possible to forgive someone who accepts no responsibility for his actions.					
27	There needs to be justice for victim before she can apologize.					
28	"Forgiveness is the final form of love."					
29	Forgiveness can be taught.					

EVALUATING THE SESSIONS AND FACILITATOR:

1=Totally agree; 2=Somewhat agree; 3=Somewhat disagree; 4=Totally disagree; 5=I do not know		1	2	3	4	5
30	Some workshop sessions were much too long.					
31	Some workshop sessions were much too short.					
32	Each session fulfilled the objectives we discussed at the beginning of the session.					
33	I learned a lot, and what I learned is very applicable to my life.					
34	I did not learn very much new material, as I am already very familiar with the information that we covered.					
35	Even though I was familiar with some of the material we covered, the workshop conversations helped refresh my knowledge and inspired me to be more compassionate and forgiving.					
36	The facilitator was very professional and at the same time very welcoming and warm.					
37	The facilitator knew how to keep the conversations lively and engaging.					
38	I would recommend this workshop to my friends and/or colleagues.					

Training Manuals

Beyond Equality: A Manual for Human Rights Defenders, Mahnaz Afkhami and Ann Eisenberg, 2015 (Available in English)

Leading to a Culture of Democracy: A Toolkit for Women in Transitioning Societies, Mahnaz Afkhami and Ann Eisenberg, 2015 (Available in Arabic, English, French, Persian)

Leading to Action: A Political Participation Handbook for Women, Mahnaz Afkhami and Ann Eisenberg, 2010 (Available in Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, Kyrgyz, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Telugu, Turkish, Urdu)

Leading to Compassion, Ann Eisenberg, 2015 (Available in English)

Leading to Choices: A Leadership Training Handbook for Women, Mahnaz Afkhami, Ann Eisenberg, and Haleh Vaziri, 2001 (Available in Maghreby Arabic, Shamy Arabic, Assamese, Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, Hausa, Kyrgyz, Malay, Meiteilon, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Shona, Spanish, Swahili, Telugu, Turkish, Urdu, Uzbek)

Leading to Choices: A Multimedia Curriculum for Leadership Learning, 2003 (Available in Arabic, Bahasa Indonesia, English, French, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Turkish, Urdu)

Making IT Our Own: Information & Communication Technology Training of Trainers Manual, Rakhee Goyal, Marion Marquardt, and Usha Venkatachallam, 2008 (Available in Arabic, English, French, Russian, Persian)

Measuring Change: Monitoring and Evaluating Leadership Programs, Rakhee Goyal, Alexandra Pittman, and Anna Workman, 2010 (Available in English)

Victories over Violence: Ensuring Safety for Women and Girls, Mahnaz Afkhami and Haleh Vaziri, 2012 (Available in Arabic, English, French, Persian, Portuguese, Urdu)

Yes I Can: Leadership for Teens Ages 13-17 Years, Be Free Center/Bahrain Women's Association, 2011 (Available in Arabic, English, French, Turkish, Urdu)

Translation Series

Guide to Equality in the Family in the Maghreb, Collectif 95 Maghreb-Egalité, 2005 (Available in Arabic, English, Persian)

Iranian Women's One Million Signatures Campaign for Equality: The Inside Story, Noushin Ahmadi Khorasani, 2009 (Available in Arabic, English, Persian, Russian)

Documentary Films

Against All Odds, 2006 (Available in English)

Because Our Cause Is Just, 2013 (Available in Arabic, English, French, Persian)

From Fear to Freedom: Ending Violence Against Women, 2012 (Available in Arabic, English, French, Persian, Portuguese, Russian, Spanish, Turkish, Urdu)

Human Rights: The Unfinished Journey, 2015 (Available in Arabic, English)



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