

Community and Human Rights: Growing Together

- A. Dr. King gave his life for racial equality and the ending of racial segregation which had haunted our nation of “liberty and justice for all” for 345 years (from 1619 to 1964) -- at least on paper with the 1964 Civil Rights Act which ended Jim Crow Laws by making racial discrimination in employment and public accommodations illegal, close to 60 years ago; and that was only in legislation, in the arena of laws -- not in attitudes, not in the heart of fellow Americans. While this new law brought in a revolution and forever changed the social landscape of our nation, we still need a revolution of attitudes, a revolution within the human heart.
- B. Keep in mind, I want to deeply impress you with this crucial and vital point: removing racial segregation was only a process, a procedure, a means to the end -- the Beloved Community. The Beloved Community was Dr. King’s goal, aim, purpose and end to all his 13 years of labor from the age of 26 until he was assassinated at the age of 39. From 1955 to 1968, his whole focus and energy was the Beloved Community. Why? Because the Beloved Community is the vessel, the container and human rights and social justice are the contents. The Beloved Community safeguards, retains and sustains human rights and social justice. No Beloved Community, no human rights or no social justice. You can’t have one without the other. Without the Beloved Community, human rights and social justice only comes in bit and pieces, here and there, sporadic and episodic whereas without human rights and social justice, the Beloved Community is mere empty words with no ring of reality, practicality or substance. It is crucial that we see a vision, the vision that Dr. King saw, the dream that guided him: The Beloved Community embodying and preserving human rights and social justice.
- C. I’d like to pass on to you 21 guiding principles of what constitutes the Beloved Community and what manifests the Beloved Community. And in like manner of our Maker, we must remember that words create. In all three dimensions of the human realm, words create: in the physical, the psychological and the spiritual. And words from the source of love, especially, have the longest shelf life and the highest and most lasting form of endurance and longevity. So after I declare, these 21 guiding principles of the Beloved Community, I would ask that those present would respond openly with the phrase, “YES WE CAN” -- following the legacy of Barack Obama who stood as a symbol of hope and possibility as he entered into his presidency back in 2009:
- (1) It offers radical hospitality to everyone; an inclusive family rather than exclusive club;
 - (2) It exhibits personal authenticity, true respect, and validation of others;
 - (3) It is the recognition and affirmation, not eradication, of differences;
 - (4) It involves listening emotionally (i.e., with the heart) – fosters empathy and compassion for others;
 - (5) It tolerates ambiguity – realizes that sometimes a clear-cut answer is not readily available;
 - (6) It builds increasing levels of trust and works to avoid fear of difference and others;
 - (7) It acknowledges limitations, lack of knowledge, or understanding – and seeks to learn;
 - (8) It acknowledges conflict or pain in order to work on difficult issues;
 - (9) It involves speaking truth in love, always considering ways to be compassionate with one another;
 - (10) It avoids physical aggression and verbal abuse;
 - (11) It resolves conflicts peacefully, without violence, recognizing that peacefully doesn’t always mean comfortably for everybody;
 - (12) It releases resentment and bitterness through self-purification (i.e., avoidance of internal violence through spiritual, physical, and psychological care);
 - (13) It focuses energy on removing evil forces (unjust systems), not destroying persons;

- (14) It involves unyielding persistence and unwavering commitment to justice;
- (15) It achieves friendship and understanding through negotiation, compromise, or consensus – considering each circumstance to discern which will be most helpful;
- (16) It righteously opposes and takes direct action against poverty, hunger, and homelessness;
- (17) It advocates thoroughgoing, extensive neighborhood revitalization without displacement;
- (18) It encourages and embraces artistic expressions of faith from diverse perspectives;
- (19) It promotes human rights and works to create a non-racist society;
- (20) It shares power and acknowledges the inescapable network of mutuality among the human family;
- (21) It cannot receive or accept hostility or coercion in any form or for any purpose in that such dishonors our humanity.

D. In closing, I'd like to pass on four concluding points, four take-aways:

1. In this room right now are various strands of a beautiful quilt, many spokes all pointing towards the same, one hub: human rights and social justice. Just let these principles of the Beloved Community become your practice and you will see an organic growing together in which interdependency and the strength thereof becomes your lasting factor of sustainability.
2. The critical connective tissue is the mutual sharing of stories. The practicality of dyads and small home gatherings over pot luck dinners provide a context for the sharing of stories which bring forth mutual care and mutual accountability unfounded before. The sharing of stories has lasting, blending power that converts "me" to "we."
3. We have the DNA already within for the Beloved Community. We are all wired to connect, intertwine. If we are true to what is within with a heart for interpersonal and cross-cultural communication, we will sense the transformation from a mere crowd to a genuine community.
4. Finally, I'd like to leave with one of the most insightful words of Dr. King in our possession: "The moral arc of the universe is long, but it bends toward justice." Let's traverse this arc in unison and as a community beloved.