

Reconciliation As a Spiritual Practice

"The concern for reconciliation finds expression in the simple human desire to understand others and to be understood by others....Every man wants to be cared for, to be sustained by the assurance that he shares in the watchful and thoughtful attention of others—not merely or necessarily others in general but others in particular. He wants to know that—however vast and impersonal all life about him may seem, however hard may be the stretch of road on which he is journeying—he is not alone, but the object of another's concern and caring; he wants to know this in an awareness sufficient to hold him against ultimate fear and panic. It is precisely at this point of awareness that life becomes personal and the individual a person...and the way is cleared for him to experience his own spirit."

Howard Thurman

The Practice of Reconciliation

When we engage in reconciliation, we invite change that will transform a relationship.

Reconciliation is a word that evokes different meanings and images. It is important that we make a distinction between apology, forgiveness, and reconciliation. The following definitions are from Webster's Dictionary. "Apology is a formal justification, defense, excuse; an admission of error accompanied by an expression of regret. It implies an attempt to avoid or remove blame or censure. To forgive is to cease to feel resentment against. To reconcile is to restore friendship or harmony or to settle or resolve differences." Another word that helps us to understand what it is to reconcile is transform. "To transform is to change the composition or structure of, to change in character or condition."

Apology alone is not enough. At the General Assembly in Cleveland, Ohio Rev. Danielle DiBona gave a thought-provoking presentation where she asked, who is apology really for? What does it do for the injured party? Is it to relieve the burden of the person who caused the injury? Does apology sometimes shift the burden from the person who has extended a hand to the injured party in that they now hold the responsibility of accepting the apology with no commitment to changing the conditions that caused the problem? With apology, the person who caused the injury may never know the impact of their actions.

A new beginning can result from reconciliation where the parties, through their encounter and commitment to change, create a better future. Apology followed by forgiveness can be an act of generosity, but still may not lead to change. It does not mean that the other person understands the problem and it may not complete the work of establishing a sense of trust and confidence. Reconciliation transforms the individuals and the present by bringing the parties to a new consciousness about the way they see, treat, and represent each other.

We constantly have a choice to either avoid or claim the chance to build trusting, long lasting, and productive relationships.

Avoiding	
Avoidance	Silence, denying the problem
Negative Projection	Buttons easily pushed, preoccupation with the problem, complaining about other person, justifying own actions
Claiming	
Encounter	Communicating with the person, shift from judging and defending to listening and sharing
Apology, Forgiveness	Empathizing with the other person
Personal Resolve	Moving from focus on the issue to focus on learning and growth
Mutual Resolve	You trust that the other has resolved and moved from focus on the issue to focus on learning and growth
Right Relations	Hold each other in esteem and are accountable for communication and new behavior

Reconciliation is a competency that takes work to develop, and it requires commitment. As you contemplate a practice of reconciliation, with another person or with a group, here are some questions to ask yourself:

What am I to do?

- Know when you are not in right relationship with a person.
- Have the humility and courage to care.
- Take steps to heal the relationship.

