



healing racism

The Oneness of Humankind: Healing Racism Today

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The guiding principle behind the healing of racism is the Oneness of Humankind. This is not an old concept warmed over. It is knowledge about our collective capacity to reach deep into the human spirit and solve the most complex challenges of our time.

Springtime of Hope

The compound problem of race and other issues such as poverty only can be resolved with the acceptance and understanding of our human oneness. Our shared humanity is the glue that holds us and our future in its grasp. We are familiar with how families grow into clans, then tribes, and tribes into kingdoms and then states/nations. The pressing need is to be unified in all essential aspects of human life, yet infinite in our diversity.

The Oneness of Humankind

Oneness is not sameness, and in no way should it be associated with a “color blind” society. For the first time in the history of our planet, the reality that no single culture or “race” can thrive without other human populations becomes clear. Oneness is a consciousness that is emerging across barriers of ken and geography. In future generations, racism may seem as archaic as the beliefs of our ancestors who actually thought racial traits marked different species.

The deep roots of racism are anchored in the false belief that one race or culture is superior. Further, the principle of the Oneness of Humankind means that not only White people can be racists. Given the same history and circumstances, any group of human beings may behave in similar ways.

Our planet has over 6 billion people. Locked inside hearts and minds is the resilient potential to resolve the challenges we face. It takes a confluence of perspectives to counter racism. These include:

- Understanding the Oneness of Humankind
- Internalizing the principle of Unity in Diversity
- Believing racism can and will be eliminated
- Recognizing that individuals are endowed with seeds of great capacity

What does it mean to be human?

There are fundamental pillars that enable humans to be noble, strong, and confident. What are the powers that allow humans to reclaim their dignity? What allows some human beings to defend other groups? To be racist, or not?

Humans share with animals the external senses of sight, touch, taste, smell, and hearing. The Oneness of Humankind implies that as a species, human beings are uniquely gifted with *internal* senses. These include:

Imagination: Only humans can conceive things that are yet to be.

Thought: Humans interpret reality and solve complex problems.

Comprehension: Humans create meaning out of experience.

Memory: Humans selectively retain what they imagine, think, and comprehend.

These internal senses or powers are spiritual in nature and are what make us uniquely human.

The Disorder of Racism

Racism involves a prejudice and the motivation to act against an individual or a group believed to be inferior. This has nothing to do with personal

preference or valuing a particular aspect of one's own culture. Memories are formed as emotions connect with life events. When we learn or mislearn something as emotionally charged as racism at an early age, this is almost impossible to forget. However, new experiences enable us to relearn our way out of racially-based thinking and behavior. Correcting deep-seated distortions requires more than a plea of "Can't we all just get along?" or even the admirable hope that "We shall overcome."

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Healing racism entails a tremendous amount of personal reflection. All have been affected by racism, but each of us from every "race" and culture can heal. The ability to comprehend the impact of our mis-education and mistaken beliefs is essential in healing racism. Racism is a process of false information and fear-based emotional conditioning. It must be replaced by emotional intelligence (Goleman, 1995).

Successful Efforts

Recent advances in healing racism build upon earlier successful efforts which have not been prominently profiled. The massive movement of human beings into slavery was a global enterprise. But the 1860s gave rise to a movement where persons moved beyond their own racial group to defend others on a national and international scale. A prominent example of that era was the Underground Railroad that freed thousands from enslavement.

Widespread healing racism initiatives began in Michigan in the late 1990s. A small group of business and community leaders, inspired by the Institutes for Healing Racism model developed in Houston, Texas, courageously launched movements in their communities. One was incubated at the Starr Commonwealth campus, and still operates today as the National Resource Center for the Healing of Racism. In Michigan, more than 3000 people from all backgrounds jointly began the journey to heal from the wounds of racism. This movement spawned several like-minded initiatives in schools, churches, and communities.

The belief in the Oneness of Humankind is the central philosophy that provides safety and revives hope for the elimination of racism. We know the cost of not addressing health care. We know the cost of not addressing education. More and more, we recognize the human and economic cost of not addressing racism.

The Healing Racism Process

Typically, Institutes for Healing Racism involve intensive two-day experiences which move beyond tolerance to create deep learning. These result in new cognitive and emotional understanding among persons who had not previously experienced deep meaningful relationships across racial divides. To understand how racism distorts reality, many beliefs must be reconstructed. The stories of healing racism involve transformational, emotional experiences. Genuine human interactions are blended with specific subject matter, including:

- Recognizing that racism is, like other disorders, an emotional commitment to dysfunctional beliefs
- Understanding the pervasive impact of White privilege
- Recognizing the effect of institutional or structural racism.
- Embracing the Oneness of Humankind
- Taking new steps in the Healing Racism journey

What are outcomes to the Healing Racism process?

Reggie Newkirk, expert and co-author of *Racial Healing* (2000) tells a story that represents the overwhelming response people have to the healing racism method: “Not only did the process assist me to share heartfelt concerns, it also aided me to develop listening skills, and a discipline that allowed me to listen and hear others without engaging in mental combat” (p. 40).

Nathan Rutstein, author and transformation agent, wrote these words in *Racial Healing*: “All of my energy was directed at defeating the external enemy. None of it was directed at the enemy within me. ...I now know why. Deep down I was afraid of what I would find....I had fooled myself into thinking that I was free of racial prejudice” (2000, p. 60).

And this is accomplished without inter-personal or inter-group confrontation. In both of these excerpts, we cannot assume the race or culture of either Reggie or Nathan. Their comments apply to everyone at different stages of healing. There is no room in Oneness to allow races to divide again. At the same time, we must sustain the pride and distinction of cultural groups. In fact, cultural pride is an important part of the healing process. It is a new kind of pride that dismisses old thinking such as, “Now it is time for another race to dominate just like it always has been in history.”



Today, most of the laws that can be written about racism are in place. This attests to the valiant work and effort of countless people who worked to establish race equality. But the data about the disparity in poverty, health care, violence, education, youth delinquency, and employment are sure signs and symptoms that racism is embedded in our structures. The most concerned of us find it a daunting task to reduce the gaps where race figures so prominently.

To remedy disparities means we must not only look at changing attitudes and behaviors, but transform structures that perpetuate racism. These structures perpetuate racism. Until a critical mass of people can see the reality of race in the world in which we live, the structures or system will prevail. Honorable citizens who have made the necessary changes in attitude and personal behavior mostly feel powerless in the face of “structural racism.” Simply put, racial healing gets enough people ready in heart, mind, and spirit to change the structures.

The Education of our Children

The earliest education on race occurs in the home. For example, a bright active three-year-old African-American boy explained to his grandmother, “My

Mommy is Black!” He waited for his grandmother’s response. Such moments are pivotal in formulating the child’s feelings about “Blackness.” While



education begins with parenting, too often it is delegated to a system marked by structural racism. Deep beliefs come from those we know, love, and trust. Grandparents, aunts, uncles, and other family members also show the way. Healing Racism methods provide the necessary safety to break the “don’t talk rule” or the “color blind fiction.”

When informed parents, educators, organizations, and business owners understand Oneness, and when

these principles are built into relationships and the curriculum, we will have indeed turned the bend in the road to the healing of racism. But we as adults must reclaim ourselves before we can reclaim our children.

Racism is closely intertwined with the culture of poverty. When we do not understand those of different backgrounds, we are likely to fear and avoid them. As an African-American elder shared, “I’m afraid of those boys. They don’t listen or respect me.” Another community member said, “When I meet with them one-on-one, they are the nicest kids. But when they’re with their buddies, they turn into different people, and I’m scared of them.” Once our children become “them,” empathy is suppressed. The Oneness of Humankind provides a new standard to make all children our children.

On an institutional level, our school systems are reeling to find stability about race and culture. But many staff feel ill-prepared to deal with today’s diverse children, let alone with each other on matters of race. In some schools, the teacher’s lounge is as segregated as the student lunch room. The dynamics of multi-racial/cultural challenges require, nay

demand, educators and families who understand the deep implications of the Oneness of Humankind and can implement this foundational approach in our schools and communities.

Information about Healing Racism workshops is available from the National Resource Center for the Healing of Racism. See www.nrchr.org

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