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To Engage Before We Meet (Any or All)

Spiritual Exercises

What's Your Fig Tree Story? The poet Ross Gay offers us one of the most beautiful stories about everyday Beloved Community with his poem *To the Fig Tree on 9th and Christian*. For your spiritual exercise, simply listen to him read it (maybe a couple of times) and let it take you back to your own "fig tree story." Come to your group ready to share your fig tree story, as well as why it has such a special place in your heart. (Maybe even write a poem about it!) Here's Gay reading his poem: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9aT0A28IW7E>

Allow a Movie to Become a Meditation Movies and the stories they contain allow us to engage challenging topics in ways that analytical essays and instructive quotes just can't. That is certainly true with this month's theme of Beloved Community. So this month, make movie-watching your spiritual exercise. But here's the catch, as you watch or after you are done watching, identify the one scene that engaged you the most. And then spend some time reflecting on it, digging into its personal meaning/message for you. Is there a challenge in it for you? An insight? An invitation? A message of healing? What "Beloved Community movie" should you watch? Glad you asked. Here are a bunch to choose from:

- [And Breathe Normally](#)
- [Selma](#)
- The Hate U Give
- 12 Years a Slave
- [Thirteenth](#)
- Crash
- Moonlight

Resources

Videos

The Star Spanglish Banner, Angelica Maria <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RZFGXbO7y7I>

4 Rules [practices] For Achieving Peace and Justice [beloved community] - Bryan Stevenson
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9vl7UPuCUrE>

1 - get proximate to the marginalized, 2 - change the narrative from one of fear and anger, 3 - stay hopeful about creating justice, even when it's complicated, 4 - be willing to do uncomfortable things

The Future of Race in America, Michelle Alexander <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SQ6H-Mz6hgw>

James Baldwin & Nikki Giovanni, a conversation
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eZmBy7C9gHQ>

Racial Wealth Gap https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Mqrhn8khGLM&feature=emb_logo

Articles

What Is Whiteness?, Nell Irvin Painter

[http://uuwhiteness.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/READING -What-Is-Whiteness -The-New-York-Times.pdf](http://uuwhiteness.us/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/READING-What-Is-Whiteness-The-New-York-Times.pdf)

Selma's Challenge, Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison-Reed <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/selmas-challenge>

How the GI Bill's Promise Was Denied to a Million Black WWII Veterans

<https://www.history.com/news/gi-bill-black-wwii-veterans-benefits>

Related article: <https://www.hivelearning.com/site/racism-in-housing/>

Music

Tracy Chapman, Across the Lines

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=kP3mpcb3Z4Q&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz>

Joy Oladokun, Who Do I Turn To?

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=Wmii0HEAdfo&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz>

Turntables, Janelle Monae

https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=E-1Bf_XWaPE&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz

We Won't Move, Arlissa

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=APQx0Mt1LIQ&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz>

Lift Every Voice and Sing, BeBe Winans

<https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=wLuCJpokdFA&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz>

Books

The Warmth of Other Suns; The Epic Story of America's Great Migration *Isabel Wilkerson*
Review:

https://www.journeywithjesus.net/BookNotes/Isabel_Wilkerson_The_Warmth_Of_Other_Suns.shtml

Stamped from the Beginning: The Definitive History of Racist Ideas in America, *Ibram X. Kendi*

How To Be an Antiracist, *Ibram X. Kendi*

White Rage: The Unspoken Truth of Our Racial Divide, *Carol Anderson*

The Fire This Time: A New Generation Speaks About Race, *Jesmyn Ward*

Bailey's Cafe: A Novel, *Gloria Naylor*

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting

Fundamentally racism—its heartbeat—has always been denial. And the sound of that heartbeat has always been “I'm not racist.” To be more specific, the sound of that heartbeat has always been “not racist.” And so in writing How to be an Antiracist, I've had one singular goal. If I could somehow shape the world, what I would hope would come out of this book is very simply we

would eradicate the term “not racist” from the American vocabulary. And then it would force people to recognize that they’re either what? Racist or anti-racist.

It would force Americans... to recognize that all policies are either racist or anti-racist... All ideas are either racist or anti-racist. Then we can truly have an accounting of ourselves, of our ideas, of our policies, and of our country. Because at some point we are going to have to stop denying that we have metastatic racism. Because if you didn't already know, it is literally killing America. It is literally killing this world. [Ibram X. Kendi](#)

Check-in *Share something of your journey with racism or where racism is showing up in your life now.*

Quotes for Inspiration/Readings

I knew as well as I knew anything that the oppressor must be liberated just as surely as the oppressed. Nelson Mandela

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions. [The 8th Principle](#)

...I'm sick of filling in your gaps
Sick of being your insurance against
The isolation of your self-imposed limitations
Sick of being the crazy at your holiday dinners
Sick of being the odd one at your Sunday Brunches
Sick of being the sole Black friend to 34 individual white people
Find another connection to the rest of the world
Find something else to make you legitimate
Find some other way to be political and hip...
From, [The Bridge Poem](#), by Donna Kate Rushin

My work with the poor and incarcerated has persuaded me that the opposite of poverty is not wealth; the opposite of poverty is justice. Finally, I've come to believe that the true measure of our commitment to justice, the character of our society, our commitment to the rule of law, fairness, and equality cannot be measured by how we treat the rich, the powerful, the privileged, and the respected among us. The true measure of our character is how we treat the poor, the disfavored, the accused, the incarcerated, and the condemned. [Bryan Stevenson](#)

Two hundred fifty years of slavery. Ninety years of Jim Crow. Sixty years of separate but equal. Thirty-five years of racist housing policy. Until we reckon with our compounding moral debts, America will never be whole. [Ta-Nehisi Coates](#)

You can always figure out who is executing the system. It appears that almost everybody's executing it, even you are executing it until you are actively fighting it.
Bernice Johnson Reagon, founder, Sweet Honey in the Rock

Sitting in Silence

Questions

1. What was your first experience of Beloved Community?
2. Who taught you the most about creating Beloved Community?
3. Has the distinction between “community” and “beloved community” been important to your spiritual path/sensibility?
4. What do you think is the most unrecognized impediment/threat to Beloved Community?
5. It’s said that Beloved Community isn’t about the absence of conflict, but the willingness to stay at the table and work through it. What has been your best strategy for staying at the table? What practice or wise words keep you from running (or attacking) when things get hard? How well are you doing at staying at your current table of conflict?
6. What is your first response when you hear the call to “Love your enemy”? What does “loving your enemy” mean for your right now?
7. [Ibram X. Kendi](#) writes, “One either allows racial inequities to persevere, as a racist, or confronts racial inequities, as an anti-racist. There is no in-between safe space of “not racist”.” Looking back, how were you first taught that the space of “not racist” was real?
8. It’s said that Beloved Community requires us to “[get proximate to the marginalized](#).” What are you learning about the “right” and “wrong” way of doing that?
9. How are you healing from having your hopes for Beloved Community dashed?
10. What one new commitment will you make this year to build Beloved Community?

Sharing/Deep Listening

Respond with your thoughts and experiences with the topic. We create a safe space by listening deeply and not responding. When sharing, connect with what is true for you. When listening, give the speaker your full attention rather than thinking about what you will share.

Reflection and Gratitude

This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Consider lifting up one comment or experience for which you are particularly grateful.

Song

I Can’t Breathe, H.E.R.

https://music.youtube.com/watch?v=E-1Bf_XWaPE&list=PLvXOKgOQVYP4X1rIBAPoYr49-EhKcvtMz

Extinguishing the Chalice

Beloved community is formed not by the eradication of difference but by its affirmation, by each of us claiming the identities and cultural legacies that shape who we are and how we live in the world.

bell hooks, Killing Rage: Ending Racism