

Meditation on Black Lives Matter **by Rev. Erin Gingrich**

Today is the anniversary of Michael Brown's murder in Ferguson, Missouri.

It is also the anniversary of the movement for Black lives that continues to gain momentum across our nation.

While the Black Lives Matter movement originated two years earlier with the murder of Trayvon Martin, it gained mainstream recognition and garnered mass demonstrations starting last year in Ferguson.

On this anniversary, let us share in an extended time of meditation today. Let us make time to grieve for the ways black lives do not matter in the United States right now. When we open the paper, turn on the TV, look at a computer and there are videos and images going viral of people of color being beaten, restrained and even killed by white people. How are we to integrate that and actually go about our day?

A few weeks ago, a young, African American woman named Evelyn, posted a video online asking, have you ever wanted to call in black?

She says, "Maybe your mornings are a little like mine. Your alarm rings. Because you're a millennial you go online and check social media. Another unarmed black person assaulted and or murdered. Your emotions can run the gamut from hopeless to confused to infuriated to reckless. The other day when I was driving to work and I noticed water randomly pouring from my eyes I realized something. I was grieving. The specifics might differ. Swap a grown man with a teenage girl in her bathing suit. Switch the skittles for loud music or not using your turning signal or praying in a church or walking.

Every re-blog, re-tweet or repost of citizen videoed footage that ultimately will never see the light of a court room, every vine you watch of someone you know from twitter being pepper sprayed and every link to a racist go fund me page.

Sure the specifics might differ, but watching the same narrative play over and over and over and over and over again.... takes a toll. Sometimes I need a minute and that's where calling in black would be so clutch.

Oh, no no no, It's not contagious. I just need a solid day to reaffirm my humanity to myself so see you tomorrow.

No its not allergies, its just I just watched a police choke somebody to death and I know no one will go to jail for it so, see you at 11.

I have a slight fever ...boiling with the rage of the police killing my people!"
She ends by asking, "I want to hear from you, What has been the emotional toll of the constant online consumption of black bodies get systematically assaulted and or murdered?" [<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cpVeUVcFMAU>]

On this anniversary, I'm calling in sick. I invite us to support each other in calling in sick right here and now. We are sick. Society is sick. We need healing.

We need to stand together as public witness against the sickness and lies we have been told about whose lives matter. We need to push back against the legacy of white superiority so we can purge ourselves of its normalcy. We can't afford to be in denial. We can't afford for this racist violence to be the status quo. We must be free from the tyranny of white supremacy. We must be free.

Let's call in sick. Let's stand in solidarity with the Black Lives Matter movement. Let's not rush past this and on to the next thing.

I've created a different kind of meditation for us this morning. It will be longer than our sermon this morning. There are three parts to our meditation today and then we'll sing a prayer together. Spirit of life.

We will begin tuning into ourselves and supporting our hearts so we can begin in love. Then we will tune into an African American woman's perspective on the sickness of white supremacy. After which, we will return to our hearts, probably hurting and outraged, and also grateful that we are sickened and not hardened or numb to the violent racism of our times.

Will you join me on this journey? Let us begin.

Notice your breath, your chest moving as your diaphragm expands and contracts.

What is the quality of movement in your chest?

What, if anything can you sense in your chest and abdomen as you breathe?

Is your chest tight? Does it ache at all? It is relaxed?

Where is it most open? Where does it feel most tight?

Can you feel anything? Or is this challenging for you?

Are you able to connect to the sensations of your body?

What is it like for you to place your attention on your body and its sensations and feelings?

What information is your body giving you?

I invite you to bring your awareness to your body sensations to focus your attention. Often, our minds generate ideas and we can run around after many ideas at once. When we do this we miss what is happening in us or around us.

We project into the future or wander around the past.

I invite you to bring your awareness to your body to cultivate your ability to focus your awareness, letting thoughts go as they arise, to simply practice being here and returning when you notice that you've strayed, which we all do.

When we practice bringing our attention into a singular point of focus,

We cultivate our capacity to be present.

We can choose what to focus our attention on.

It could be on another person and what they're saying.

We practice dropping our thoughts and reactions and instead focusing on what the person is saying so we can be available for another and truly listen.

Bringing our awareness to our bodies can also support and ground us when we are challenged. When we settle into our bodies and notice what is happening, sometimes we can notice when we are turning away, when we are running after our inner thoughts, when we are scared, when we are angry, when we are reacting and starting to shut down and shut out another person. Sometimes we might need to do this. When we are present, we can make the choice rather than react.

Let us practice this together now. As you settle into your body, perhaps scanning from your head down to your toes, what sensations do you notice? What information is your body offering you this morning?

I will ring the bell at the conclusion of this part of our meditation.

Bell

I invite you to let go of what you noticed or what distracted you with a gentle exhale.

We are practicing and noticing. There is no right or wrong.

Imagine if we had done that for 30 minutes. Would it get more difficult for you? It does for me. Our short meditation time here is long for some other congregations. When I visit, people start stirring and I sense a restless confusion and anxiety in the room. Many of us are not accustomed to paying attention together in silence in this way.

It can be uncomfortable. Irritating. People will say, I can't do meditation because I can't get quiet. It's not about having no thoughts. It's about letting them go and returning, over and over and over and over and over...when is the bell going to ring, over and over again.

Learning how to sit through this discomfort can aid us in learning how to sit through the discomfort of listening to someone who slightly irritates you, or someone who is anxious,

or someone who is hurting, or someone who is talking about their experience of oppression and white supremacy, or their expression of oppression and white supremacy. It is not always easy to listen to the pain who has been hurt or the pain of one who is hurting. We practice so that we can listen and hear rather than react and shut down.

Let us practice again together now.

I invite you to tune into your body, be present and then allow yourself to hear the words of Roxane Gray, an African American woman who wrote this opinion piece published in the NY Times last week.

“Of Lions and Men: Mourning Samuel DuBose and Cecil the Lion”

by Roxane Gay (July 31 2015 NY TIMES)

http://www.nytimes.com/2015/08/01/opinion/of-lions-and-men-mourning-samuel-dubose-and-cecil-the-lion.html?mwrsm=Facebook&_r=1

“LIKE many others, I was stunned by the story of the Minnesota dentist who hunted and killed a 13-year-old lion, Cecil, in Zimbabwe. It was a brutal, senseless thing.

The story has gone viral because it offers a strange alchemy of arrogant privilege, an animals being lured out of safety and slaughtered, and something onto which we can project outrage without having to contend with the messiness of humanity. Animals are not stained by original sin.

On Twitter, I joked, “I’m personally going to start wearing a lion costume when I leave my house so if I get shot, people will care.”

The columnist Erma Bombeck once said, “There is a thin line that separates laughter and pain, comedy and tragedy, humor and hurt.”

When people die in police custody or are killed by the police, there are always those who wonder what the fallen did to deserve what befell them.

He shouldn’t have been walking down that street.

She should have been more polite to that police officer.

He shouldn’t have been playing with a toy gun in a park.

We don’t consider asking such questions of a lion. We don’t speculate as to why Cecil was roaming the savanna.

In Cincinnati, there was a news conference on Wednesday to announce the grand jury findings in the case of Samuel DuBose. He was an unarmed man, shot in the head on July

19 by a University of Cincinnati police officer, Ray Tensing. Before the news conference, the school shut down for the day, anticipating riots, anticipating human messiness.

The prosecutor, Joseph T. Deters, was visibly angry during the news conference. “It was a senseless, asinine shooting,” he said.

And then there was the video. Less than two minutes into speaking to him at a routine traffic stop, Officer Tensing pulls his gun on Mr. DuBose and shoots him in the head. Mr. DuBose is fatally wounded, and the car begins rolling because the man behind the steering wheel is no longer able to control it. Officer Tensing falls, gets up, and absurdly gives chase, shouting unintelligibly.

Let us pause for a moment of silence to honor the life that was ended.

SILENCE

It’s a bewildering scene. When Officer Tensing catches up to the car, which has crashed, another officer has arrived. Officer Tensing says he shot *after* Mr. DuBose began rolling away despite the incontrovertible video evidence. This other officer writes in a report that he, too, saw this thing that did not occur.

Greetings from an alternate reality.

I did not want to watch this video but I did. I felt a compulsion. I needed to see what led to such a senseless murder. I hoped this was all a misunderstanding, an accident. I have no idea where such foolish hope comes from.

Often, when I write about race or gender, people offer apologies.

They say, I apologize for my fellow white people.

They say, I apologize for my fellow men.

I understand this desire to say, “We are not all like that,” or, “I wish the world were a better place.”

Sometimes, saying sorry is, at least, saying something. It is acknowledging wrongs that need to be addressed.

These apologies, however, also place an emotional burden on the recipient. You ask the marginalized to participate in the caretaking of your emotions. You ask them to do the emotional labor of helping you face the world as it truly is.

When we talk about injustice, the conversation always comes back to: What do we do? How do we move forward? How do we create change?

I don't have answers to these questions. I don't think anyone does, but there are actions that would accomplish more than offering an apology to those who cannot provide you with the absolution you seek.

When you hear, Black Lives Matter, don't instinctively respond that all lives matter, as if one statement negates the other. Instead, try to understand why people of color might be compelled to remind the world that their lives have value.

When others share their reality, don't immediately dismiss them because their reality is dissimilar to yours, or because their reality makes you uncomfortable and forces you to see things you prefer to ignore.

Avoid creating a hierarchy of human suffering as if compassion were a finite resource. Don't assume that if one person says, "These are the ways I am marginalized," they are suggesting you know nothing of pain and want.

Understand that the seemingly endless list of black people who have died at the hands of law enforcement or racist zealots or other bringers of violence is not just a news peg or a matter of "identity politics." This is the world we live in. The traumatic blur of videos, this stark imagery of how little black life matters, takes its toll. It creates a weariness I worry will never go away.

It feels impossible to talk about race or other kinds of difference. But if we don't have difficult conversations, we will be able to reconcile neither this country's racist past nor its racist present.

I am thinking about how and when people choose to show empathy publicly. Cecil the lion was a majestic creature and a great many people mourn his death, the brutality of it, the senselessness of it. Some people also mourn the deaths, most recently, of Sandra Bland and Samuel DuBose, but this mourning doesn't seem to carry the same emotional tenor. A late-night television host did not cry on camera this week for human lives that have been lost. He certainly doesn't have to. He did, however, cry for a lion and that's worth thinking about. Human beings are majestic creatures, too. May we learn to see this majesty in all of us."

In a moment, I will invite us into silence again.

Let us share silence to feel the pain of the truths she shared and the beauty of her spirit, whole and wise despite the weariness she worries will never go away.

In the silence, let us honor the majestic in Black lives.

Bell

Chris Crass is a Unitarian Universalist social activist. He wrote the following piece to encourage white activists who were feeling devastated and defeated by racist violence. We are not all white here and devastation may not be the word that describes your experience. Where white people may feel devastated, people of color may feel devastated

too, as well as resilient and resolved to shatter the lies of white supremacy. White people may feel this, too. As such, I'd adapted his text in this spirit.

He writes,

1. Take a moment to appreciate the fact that you allow yourselves to have feelings about the brutal racist injustice that permeates society. While your heart may be broken or angry or resilient, another alternative is that your heart could be hardened by the scarring of internalized white supremacy that has divested you from loving your own full humanity and the humanity of others.

Your devastation is the result of your heart being alive and refusing the socialized indifference that post-Civil Rights movement, white racialization aims for. Your internal capacity to be devastated by this murderous racist system is a source of power that serves you well and is what can help you be part of bringing this system down.

2. Focus your attention on momentum for justice, and decentralize the roadblocks... There are millions of people in motion for Black liberation at this moment, and courageous Black feminist leadership is front and center and the vision, strategy, inspiration, and guidance of the leaderful #BlackLivesMatter movement is where our attention should be, rather than on the ... post-racial racist... people in your life who just want to argue or ...grab and hold our attention – often making it hard to see the people around us in motion or ready to move for racial justice.

Ask yourself – am I choosing to open my heart and mind to the leaders who give me energy, who give me hope, who love humanity ...today?

3. Be loving with yourself, supremacy systems want you to exhaust yourself by beating yourself up, for not doing enough, for letting [others] demobilize you, for “not being good enough” to be the activist you want to be. Tell these voices of supremacy systems that they cannot have you, that you are stronger than they would ever allow you to believe, and that our movement is far more effective and stronger than supremacy systems want us to understand, to feel in our bones, to feel as tears of pain and sorrow roll down our face.

4. For every Ida B. Wells, Anne Braden, William Lloyd Garrison, W.E.B. Du Bois, Ella Baker, Elizabeth ‘Betita’ Martinez, and Alicia Garza, there are millions of people whose names we don't know, who give what they can with the talents, capacities, and other responsibilities they have, and united by vision, strategy, culture, and love and rage,

...they make movements move.

What you do matters. You are not alone.

Let courageous leadership move you.

5. Reach out to others, as you are, and generate mutual support, as many are having or have had these same struggles. Refuse the isolation supremacy systems seek for you. Accept the interdependence liberation calls us into, even when supremacy systems tell us we aren't good enough to experience it. Love is on our side. We will get free, all of us.

For White Activists Devastated and Feeling Defeated by Racist Violence

JULY 31, 2015 BY CHRIS CRASS

[HTTP://GOODMENPROJECT.COM/FEATURED-CONTENT/FOR-WHITE-ACTIVISTS-DEVASTATED-AND-FEELING-DEFEATED-BY-RACIST-VIOLENCE-HESAID/](http://GOODMENPROJECT.COM/FEATURED-CONTENT/FOR-WHITE-ACTIVISTS-DEVASTATED-AND-FEELING-DEFEATED-BY-RACIST-VIOLENCE-HESAID/)

Silence

Bell

Song Spirit of Life