

Walking Together for Peace

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By

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I discovered that the lack of multiple stories sometimes leads us to a faulty worldview that is sometimes associated with injustice and conflict. As I tell my psychology students, if you grew up believing that the world is a hostile and unjust place, you are more likely going to approach the world with hostility. If you believe that all Muslim people are wicked and out to kill Christians, you will have difficulty living at peace with Muslim brothers and sisters. Similarly, a Muslim who believes that Christians are infidels that must be eliminated from the face of the earth will kill Christians at will. Students who believe that they would not succeed in their education, would always engage in varied forms of examination malpractice. Professors and lecturers who believe that unless they abate students' malpractice, students may not complete their university education in time, would always support examination malpractice. Students who believe that they need the protection of secret cults to survive university education will seek out and join cults. Individuals and groups who believe that they must cheat others in order to make money will always cheat others even when they already have a lot of money and power. These types of worldview could only be the result of what Chimamanda calls a single story. If we have diverse stories, we may develop the type of multiple perspectives that encourage justice and peaceful co-existence.

Can you imagine waking up one morning and finding out that someone is plotting for your downfall. If you have the worldview of hostility and injustice, you would likely start plotting for the downfall of this person. But if you have a broader worldview, you would take one of psychology behavioral approaches to management of emotion titled, "Stop, Relax and Think." This activity may lead you to understand that there are other ways to approach this challenge one of which could be staying focused in your work and ignoring the threat. You may even find yourself having empathy for the individual because you know that the

purported action is misguided.

My sisters and brothers, the feeling of empathy for those who hurt me is what allows me to forgive and continue to maintain relationships with them. When others hurt me, I have the feeling that it is not my job to take revenge but rather it is my duty to stay calm and focused hoping that someday, they will realize their mistakes and turn away from hurting other people. Indeed, I feel that it would be unjust for me to spend my God-given talent on planning revenge. If every other person engages in revenge-planning and execution, our world would indeed be an unjust and hostile place.

I feel that some people actually engage in injustice in many ways because of the lack of focus on our individual and collective giftedness. It is unjust to go through university education, graduate with a degree but have no competence or enhancement of abilities. It is unjust to pay your tuition and refuse to attend lectures or study your coursework. It is unjust to attend lectures without paying your tuition. It is unjust for a student to graduate with second class, upper or first class and demonstrate third class competence in propounding and implementing solutions to the challenges of life. It is unjust to join mob action without thinking about its consequences. It is unjust to hide your talents because you do not want another person or an institution to gain from your talents. It is only a shallow perspective of life that would make people embrace these unjust attitudes. I believe that we owe our world hardwork, integrity, accountability and responsibility. We must work together for social justice in order to give peace it's place in our world. Let us actively deconstruct narrow perspective in our lives through education and the acquisition of knowledge by seeking out multiple stories. I believe that any education that does not improve human welfare and move our world closer to justice and peace is a failure.

I feel that good education engenders fairness and equity. It liberates the mind from single stories and creates a collage of multiple stories. Education empowers us to harness our talents for development. It inspires us to seek out what we can do for other people and the world rather than what others and society can do for us. It is this type of spirit that keeps us resilient in the face of varied challenges of life. Because we have a goal, we will never give up. We keep working hard to make our

own mark on earth. No wonder my father never stopped caring for his people and letting go of hurts meted out to him.

A few months ago, my sister and I were wondering why our father had continued to stay physically fit, mentally alert and calm despite all that he had been through in life. We concluded that his secret must be his ability to manage conflicts through varied ways that include allowing others to cheat him. The other day, we learned that he purchased an engine that he was told is original for his bus. He discovered later that it had fake parts. Instead of returning the engine, he decided to replace the fake parts. About a year ago, my father learned about Moringa and became a distributor of the product. I noticed that my father got the plant and began to share and encourage his customers to plant them for their use. I wondered why he was giving out his source of income to many people. My mother expressed that it is as a result of lack of business acumen but my father corrected this impression and helped us to understand that he wanted more people to be using Moringa to stay healthy.

I have learned that peace requires justice and equity and each time I enrich another person with my knowledge and talents, I am treading the path of equity. I am happy that the sharing stories section of this website helps us to learn from each other's story the ingredients of peace and support ourselves in this journey towards social justice and peace.

I have discovered that a peaceful disposition is greater than material wealth. I yearn for peaceful co-existence of all people but I recognize that the reality of having it depends on one person at a time. It is this understanding that leads me to try to go for peace at all circumstances and teach others to do the same. I would rather give up finest possessions than give up the opportunity for peace. I have sometimes placed myself in harm's way (according to other people) in my quest for peace. I remember discovering that one of my father's uncles was not happy with him. I prepared myself to go and see him. Individuals who knew my great uncle told me that I was playing at the lion's den and would get myself hurt. In my usual way, I prayed for the grace to remain focused and God granted me the grace to meet my great uncle. I heard his story and felt empathy for him. I can tell that he too felt my concern for him. Not only was I able to meet and speak with my great

uncle, I became someone he reached out to for comfort and prayers. His wealth and power seemed intimidating to others but to me whose motivation was reconciliation, he was my great uncle who I could advise and pray for.

At another time, I visited home from the United States and discovered that my extended family (great-grandfather's lineage) was involved in a conflict that has led to the development of factions and even consulting traditional powers. I felt pain and empathy for my people because I knew that they must be feeling anger and hatred. I braced myself and attended the men's meeting that was open to only men. I spoke to them about cooperation and the importance of forgiveness. I challenged them to call an emergency meeting of all our family members, fathers and mothers, young men and women for a resolution of the conflict. They followed my lead and the conflict was resolved at home. Subsequently, those living in the United States and elsewhere were informed and they too made peace with each other. There was great rejoicing in our family compound that day as we ate and drank together again. The joy that I saw on the faces of our family members led me to feel that they were yearning for peace but perhaps the pride of life made it momentarily difficult for them to agree.

I know that my extended family's story might resonate with other families who are at each other's throat because of minor or major issues. It might also resonate with clans and villages and even religious families at rancor. My hope is that someone reading this story might be inspired to be an agent of peace to end one conflict or another. Can you imagine what would happen if each of us returned to our institutions and families and touched one person's life with peace? We would have an explosion of stories of peace and perhaps our next volume of the stories would be so diverse and yet connected that many more people would be inspired to become agents of peace. Who knows, peace might become the next in thing among youths.

Before I end my story, I must let you know that I am not a perfect agent of peace. There have been times when I struggled with letting go of hurts and moving on for peace to reign. There have been times when I struggled with staying focused. My most recent example of trying times was multi-faceted. A person I respected so much heard many single stories about me and concluded that they were true and

abused me verbally. Another made up her mind that I took a decision that worked against her and circulated the information so wildly that throughout my one-month travel overseas, some individuals reacted negatively towards me because of the single story. Another person abused me verbally so much that I yearned and prayed for death so that I could get away from the challenges forever.

On my way returning to this country where I had experienced the abuses, I found myself weeping uncontrollably in the aircraft as every second bringing me closer to Nigeria hurt my soul. I tried to put my feelings in writing and this is what I wrote:

When I left Nigeria on 30 March 2012, I was feeling very unhappy having come to the realization that Nigeria does not appreciate honesty. (This is a single story by the way because there are many people in Nigeria who love honesty). I remembered my students and felt that I needed to go on for them. I have tried so hard to learn from Jesus who knew that he was going to be betrayed by his own disciple and yet celebrated the last supper with all of them. I was hoping that although I know that I live and work among people who challenge my generosity and commitment to work, persons that I would give up my comforts for though they cannot stand up for me (this is also a narrow perspective because there are individuals who love and cherish me)- I thought that I would return to my work with renewed spirit. Every minute drawing me closer to Nigeria hurts my heart and yet I felt a need to return to the country for my students.

So you see, the road to actualizing justice and peace can be thorny and depressing but finding a reason to continue despite all odds might be helpful when the going gets tough. Also, knowing that there are others who have struggled through similar circumstances might help us to get through the dark moments of our soul (St. Theresa of Avila). This is my inspiration for telling you some of my stories.

My dear young ones, with CNN, I would encourage you to go beyond borders and connect to people around our globe. You will find out that stories of life experienced in Nigeria do indeed resonate with people living a million miles away from us. This means that we must tell and hear multiple stories of peace, and who

knows, the stories of peace we tell other people may decide to make their abode among us. We can indeed work together for justice by sharing our stories of peace on YouTube, I message, chat room, 2go, wiki, Facebook and other forms of media.

May God bless and grant us peace.

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