

Spiritual Resources on Racial Justice

These resources were initially compiled by Rabbi Patricia Karlin-Neumann, Senior Associate Dean for Religious Life at Stanford University and adapted and reprinted with her permission. If you have additional spiritual resources about racial justice or other suggestions, please contact Chaplain Carolyn Fure-Slocum (cfureslo@carleton.edu).

Resources from the Christian tradition:

Martin Luther King Jr., “On Being a Good Neighbor” *Strength to Love*,
http://okra.stanford.edu/transcription/document_images/Vol06Scans/July1962-March1963DraftofChapterIII,OnBeingaGoodNeighbor.pdf

“The Souls of Poor Folk” (Poor People’s Campaign Report, April 2018),
<https://www.poorpeoplescampaign.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/04/PPC-Audit-Full-410835a.pdf>

John A. Powell, “Othering and Belonging: An Embodied Spiritual Practice,” in *Deep Times*, February 2019 issue, <https://journal.workthatreconnects.org/2017/08/29/othering-and-belonging-expanding-the-circle-of-human-concern/>

Patrisse Cullors and Robert Ross: “The Spiritual Work of Black Lives Matter”
<https://onbeing.org/programs/patrisse-cullors-and-robert-ross-the-spiritual-work-of-black-lives-matter-may2017/>

Is America Possible?

“On Being” episode with theologian and civil rights activist Vincent Harding
<https://onbeing.org/programs/vincent-harding-is-america-possible/>

More Beautiful

“On Being” episode with Imani Perry, who writes at the intersection of law, race, culture and literature <https://onbeing.org/programs/imani-perry-more-beautiful/>

Imagining a new America

“On Being” episode with writer Ta-Nehisi Coates
<https://onbeing.org/programs/ta-nehisi-coates-imagining-a-new-america/>

“The movement of the Spirit of God in the hearts of men and women often calls them to act against the spirit of their times or causes them to anticipate *a spirit which is yet in the making*. In a moment of dedication, they are given wisdom and courage to dare a deed that challenges and to kindle a hope that inspires.”

Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, Footprints of a Dream: The Story of the Church for the Fellowship of all Peoples, p. 7.

“Do not be silent; there is no limit to the power that may be released through you.”
Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman, Deep is the Hunger, p. 25.

God, God, open unto me:
Open unto me—light for my darkness
Open unto me—courage for my fear
Open unto me—hope for my despair
Open unto me—peace for my turmoil
Open unto me—joy for my sorrow
Open unto me—strength for my weakness
Open unto me—wisdom for my confusion
Open unto me—forgiveness for my sins
Open unto me—tenderness for my toughness
Open unto me—love for my hates
Open unto me—Your self for my self
God, God, open unto me! Rev. Dr. Howard Thurman

The Episcopal Church, “Racial Reconciliation”

<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/racial-reconciliation>

The Presiding Bishop of the Episcopal Church, The Most Rev. Michael Curry, who faced his own terror of racism growing up black in Buffalo, NY, recently made this statement to the press regarding the murder of George Floyd: “This crisis reflects deep sores and deep wounds that have been here all along. In the midst of COVID-19 and the pressure cooker of a society in turmoil, a man was brutally killed. The basic human right to life was taken away. His basic human dignity was stripped by someone charged to protect our common humanity. And perhaps the deeper pain of this is the fact that it’s not an isolated incident. The pain of this is that it’s a deep part of our life. It’s not just our history. It is American society today. We are not, however, slaves to our fate, unless we choose to do nothing. ... Opening and changing hearts does not happen overnight. Our prayers and our work for justice, healing and truth-telling must be unceasing.”

Reconciliation is the spiritual practice of seeking loving, liberating and life-giving relationship with God and one another, and striving to heal and transform injustice and brokenness in ourselves, our communities, institutions and society. (<https://www.episcopalchurch.org/racial-reconciliation>)

Like the stages of repentance, it requires a great deal from us:

Confession/Telling the Truth: Who are we? What things have we done and left undone regarding racial (in)justice and healing? How does racism shape the way we see and experience the world? How do we participate in white supremacy?

Regret: Sincere regret does not allow us to set aside the searing pain of racial injustice, to get on with our busy lives. While the knocking on our hearts during prayers of repentance prompts them to open—regret keeps the door ajar.

Restitution/Repairing the Breach: How can we begin to reform our broken institutions and systems? How do we call others into the journey? How will we pursue racial justice? How will those of us who are white become more fully accountable to people of color, in order to participate in restoration and healing?

Resolution/Proclaiming the Dream: Our holy days create what Dr. King called “the fierce urgency of now”—a deep awareness that this moment is critical in changing directions. We affirm the vision of the Beloved Community, committing our lives to work in partnership for racial justice.

Sojourners: Faith in Action for Social Justice

<https://sojo.net/articles/our-white-friends-desiring-be-allies?fbclid=IwAR2KU8MeuaSOBL0NUbWVVwmHooxlaA8P26Haa4MflzvBWUnrN5ihsdcaCFc>

United Methodist Church Awakened Life Curriculum

<https://www.gbhem.org/education-leaders/collegiate-ministry/awakened-life-curriculum/>

United Church of Christ (UCC): [White Privilege: Let's Talk | A Resource for Transformational Dialogue](#)

Resources from the Jewish tradition:

Rabbi Sharon Brous keynote talk at Prophetic Resistance Summit, Indianapolis,

2017: <http://propheticresistancepodcast.libsyn.com/episode-16-season-2-rabbi-sharon-brous>,

transcript also available here: <http://ikar-la.org/wp-content/uploads/PICO-Prophetic-Resistance-Keynote.pdf>

Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel, “Religion and Race”, the opening address at the National Conference on Religion and Race, Chicago, commemorating the hundredth anniversary of the Emancipation Proclamation. It is here that Rabbi Heschel first met the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King Jr. Jan. 24, 1963:

“Few of us seem to realize how insidious, how radical, how universal an evil racism is. Few of us realize that racism is man’s gravest threat to man, the maximum of hatred for a minimum of reason, the maximum of cruelty for a minimum of thinking.

Daily we should take account and ask: What have I done today *to alleviate the anguish, to mitigate the evil, to prevent humiliation?*

Our concern must be expressed not symbolically, but literally; not only publicly, but also privately; not only occasionally, but regularly.

What we need is the involvement of every one of us as individuals. What we need is *restlessness*, a constant awareness of the monstrosity of injustice.

An act of violence is an act of desecration. To be arrogant toward man is to be blasphemous toward God.

In the words of the prophet Amos (5:24):

Let justice roll down like waters,
and righteousness like a mighty stream.

<https://voicesofdemocracy.umd.edu/heschel-religion-and-race-speech-text/>

Prayer for those who have died in the Black community due to racism
adapted from tradition Jewish prayer, “*El Malei Rachamim*”

May God remember
The souls of those whose lives
were stolen from them
by hatred and horror.

Our brothers and sisters,
Hanged because their skin was black
Tortured by vicious and brutal mobs.
May God remember those killed, both then and since, in acts of hate,
Acts of terror against an entire people,
And against humanity.

Though holiness was diminished by their deaths,
May we remember them and recognize their dignity,
May their legacies quicken in us
a quest for truth and justice.

Let us honor their memory
By word, by deed, by acts of hope and kindness.
Let us honor them through the study of history
And by working against bigotry and bias,
As we cling to their memory,
So may God embrace their souls
And give them everlasting peace.

Let there be rest.
And let it be, at long last, the perfect rest—
Oh Merciful God, Most High

From the Jewish textual tradition:

Genesis 4:10:

“And God said, “What have you done?
A sound—Your brother’s blood cries out to me from the soil.”

Midrash Rabbah 22:9:

Rabbi Judan, Rabbi Huna and the rabbis each commented, “Thy brother’s bloods”—plural—this means his blood and the blood of his descendants.

Genesis 2:7:

Then God fashioned the man—dust from the soil—and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life,
so that the man became a living being.

Rashi on Genesis 2:7:

God gathered dust from the entire earth—from its four corners—in order that whenever he might die, it should receive him from burial.

Rav Joseph Soloveitchik, Majesty and Humility:

Man was created of cosmic dust. God gathered the dust, of which man was fashioned from all parts of the earth, indeed, from all the uncharted lanes of creation. Man belongs everywhere. He is no stranger to any part of the universe...

Talmud Sanhedrin 37B, Mishnah 4:5:

Regarding Cain, who murdered his brother, “The bloods of your brother calls to me.” (Genesis 4:10)

It does not say the “blood of your brother but rather the “bloods” of your brother, his blood and the blood of his offspring. Another explanation: The “bloods” of your brother (refers to the idea that) his blood is spilled on the trees and on the rocks.

Therefore a single person is created to teach that if anyone causes a single life to be lost, it is regarded as if she or he has destroyed a whole world, and if anyone saves a single life, it is regarded as if she or he saved a whole world.

It is because of the peace of creation that no one shall say to another, “My father is greater than your father.”

Humans stamp many coins with one seal and each is like the other, but the Holy One stamps each person with the seal of Adam and not one of them is like another.

Therefore, every person must say, “For my sake was the world created.”

Resources from the Buddhist tradition:

Thich Nhat Hanh, Creating True Peace: Ending Violence in Yourself, Your Family, Your Community and Your World, pp 1-18

"Hatred does not cease through hatred at any time. Hatred ceases through love. This is an unalterable law." (Quote from the Buddha)

May all living beings become happy. May all beings become spiritually, mentally and physically healthy. May all experience goodness and may not a single living be maltreated.

Resources from the Muslim tradition:

God is clear in the Qur'an about standing up for justice for ANY HUMAN BEING in chapter 4, verse 135 "O you who have believed, be persistently standing firm in justice, witnesses for God, even if it be against yourselves or parents and relatives. Whether one is rich or poor, God is more worthy of both. So follow not [personal] inclination, lest you not be just. And if you distort [your testimony] or refuse [to give it], then indeed God is ever, with what you do, Acquainted."

- <https://sapelosquare.com/> (a website by and for African American Muslims)
- “Let not the hatred of other towards you prevent you from being just. Be just, that is closer to piety” (Quran 5:8)
- “O mankind, We have created you from a male and a female, and made you into races and tribes, so that you may identify one another. Surely the noblest of you, in Allah’s sight, is the one who is most pious of you. Surely Allah is All-Knowing, All-Aware” (49:13)
- "Divine Duty: Islam and Social Justice," Yaqeen Institute (<https://yaqeeninstitute.org/nazir-khan/divine-duty-islam-and-social-justice/>)
- "Black History, American Muslims, and Conversations About Race" (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=UKa12C5CbMU>)
- Hadith, narrated by Sahih al-Bukhari: "Beware of the supplication of the oppressed, for there is no barrier between it and Allah."

Resources from the Hindu tradition:

<https://www.ihsanishan.com/ihsanishanblog/blacklivesmatter>

Namaste means:

My soul recognizes your soul. I honor the light, love, beauty, truth and kindness within you because it is also within me. In sharing these things there is no distance and no difference between us. We are the same, we are one.

Another foundational philosophy originates in the ancient Hindu scripture the Maha Upanishad (Chapter 6, Verse 72) which says:

Only small men discriminate saying: One is a relative; the other is a stranger.

For those who live magnanimously the entire world constitutes but [one] family.

Resources from the Sikh tradition:

“The Labor of Revolutionary Love,” Valerie Kaur and Parker Palmer, Session 7

<http://revolutionaryloveconference.com/videos>

Resources from the Unitarian Universalist tradition:

Unitarian Universalist Spiritual Practices for Social Justice

<https://uucsj.org/study-guide/spiritual-practice-and-social-justice/>

Litany weaving Jewish and Christian texts and traditions

Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., Remaining Awake Through a Great Revolution
Talmud Brachot 9b

Marge Piercy, “The Low Road” in The Moon is Always Female

**Through our scientific and technological genius,
we have made of this world a neighborhood
and yet we have not had the ethical commitment
to make of it a brotherhood.**

**But somehow, and in some way,
we have got to do this.
We must all learn to live together as brothers
or we will all perish together as fools.**

**We are tied together in the single garment of destiny,
caught in an inescapable network of mutuality.
And whatever affects one directly affects all indirectly.
For some strange reason I can never be what I ought to be
until you are what you ought to be.
And you can never be what you ought to be
until I am what I ought to be.**

We are tied together....

“How do we know when the night ends and the day begins?
One sage answered,
“The night ends and the day begins
when there is enough light to differentiate
between a white thread and a blue thread.”

“No,” his friend replied.
“The night ends and the day begins
when you recognize the face of your brother.”

We are tied together in the single garment of destiny.

What can they do
to you? Whatever they want...

How can you stop them?

Alone, you can fight,
you can refuse, you can
take what revenge you can
but they roll over you.

**We are tied together
In the single garment of destiny.**

But two people fighting back to back can ...

keep each other sane....

With four
you can play bridge and start
an organization...

We are caught in a network of mutuality.

A dozen make a demonstration.
A hundred fill a hall.
A thousand have solidarity and your own newsletter; ten thousand, power and your own paper;
a hundred thousand, your own media;
ten million, your own country.

I can never be what I ought to be until you are what you ought to be.

It goes on one at a time,
it starts when you care
to act, it starts when you do
it again after they said no,
it starts when you say, "We"
and know who you mean, and each day you mean one more.

**"The night ends and the day begins
when you recognize the face of your brother."**

**We are tied together in the single garment of destiny.
We are caught in a network of mutuality.
And I can never be who I ought to be
Until you are who you ought to be.**

Organizations involved in social justice from a faith perspective:

[Faith in Action](#)—national network bringing faith-based values of racial, economic, and environmental justice into the political sphere

Minnesota branch of Faith in Action: [Isaiah MN](#)

Revolutionary Love Project
<https://revolutionaryloveproject.com>

Faith matters network
<https://www.faithmattersnetwork.org/our-vision>

Faith-based Discussion Questions for White Allies:

The following questions were prepared by Rabbi Rachel Mikva regarding “White fragility,” a term coined by Dr. Robin DiAngelo, defined as “a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves.”

➤ How might the emphasis on vulnerability and brokenness in our religious traditions serve as a counterweight to white fragility?

➤ Many sympathetic white people are eager to grapple with structural racism and complicity. But even empathetic pain in anti-racism work sometimes becomes the focus of an interracial group—another manifestation of white fragility. What teachings of our traditions can work as a caution against white pain becoming the center of attention?