



The Practice of Reconciliation

By Paula Cole Jones

When we engage in reconciliation, we invite change that will transform a relationship.

Apology alone is not enough to achieve reconciliation. In fact it may do more to relieve the burden of the person who caused the injury than it does for the injured party.

Apology followed by forgiveness can be an act of generosity, but still may not complete the work of establishing a sense of trust.

See also **Reconciliation as a Spiritual Discipline** by Paula Cole Jones

Reconciliation—the dictionary definition is to restore friendship or harmony or to settle or resolve differences—transforms both parties by bringing them to a new consciousness about the way they see, treat, and represent each other.

Reconciliation is a competency that takes work to develop, and it requires commitment. As you contemplate a practice of reconciliation with another person or with a group, here are some ideas to consider:

What am I to do?

- Know when you are not in right relationship.
- Have the humility and courage to care.
- Take steps to heal the relationship.

Why am I doing it?

- To heal fractures that reduce your ability to live and work effectively with others.
- To hold the other person in esteem and stop reacting from a negative point of view.
- To learn the other person's perspective so that you can find mutual solutions.
- To end preoccupation with troubled relationships that rob your vitality and valuable time or end in indifference that hardens our feelings.
- To be congruent with the belief that people can create the Beloved Community.
- To replace the ripple effect of resentment with the ripple effect of reconciliation, which has benefits that go beyond the current relationship.

When do I do it?

- Most often in a private moment between you and the other person. Trust that you'll know when the opportunity is present.
- Or plan it: Take initiative with a call or e-mail.

- Reconciliation efforts almost always begin after considerable personal struggle.

Where do I do it?

- In person.
- On the telephone.
- In a combination of telephone and letter or e-mail.
- Usually over several conversations or notes.

Whom will it impact?

- The person with whom you've had the conflict.
- The group you belong to, whether family, friends, or community. I make a point of letting others know that we have resolved our differences, especially if the conflict is something that happened in a group setting. This models for others what it means to be in right relationship. It also prevents our old anxiety from being spread or taken out of context by others.

How do I do it?

1. Create lists: One has names of people with whom you need to reconcile. The other has names of people with whom you have begun reconciliation. The lists keep your commitment tangible and help you decide when the time is right to reconcile with specific people. Drawing a line through names on the first list and adding them to the other as you begin reconciliation with people will provide a sense of growth.

- If your list is long, start by focusing on a few names.
- Resolve to review your lists at set periods.
- As names come off, add new ones.

2. Understand your motivation: For this to be a spiritual practice, you must be genuine. If you find yourself preoccupied with a difficult relationship, try to do an honest assessment to understand the feelings that underlie your concerns.

3. Shift your attention: Ask yourself what you need to let go of so you can shift your attention away from your sense of hurt, betrayal, frustration, guilt, or avoidance to a commitment to be in conversation. This will put you more at ease so you can think about what effect you and the other person are having on people around you, whether you have a personal, professional, or faith community relationship.

4. Decide how to raise the issue: How to raise the issue is not always clear. Remember that this is an exchange with someone who is likely to have negative feelings, too. You have no idea how the other person will react. This is the part that feels risky and can prevent you from the needed encounter. I use the word encounter because raising the issue is not a matter of going in with a solution, but of facing the person with an openness to understand his or her experience and find solutions together, knowing that people experience the same things differently.

It is often helpful to have a conversation with someone else about the frustration you feel before reconciling with a particular person. This can help you gather courage to face the

issues, understand the other person, and restore the relationship. The discipline is to become aware of your intentions so you do not enter the conversation with the goal of justifying your actions.

5. Encounter the person: One can sometimes resolve a strained relationship without addressing the cause of the strain with the other person. Try letting go of your negative reactions, and see if you can achieve a functional relationship without bringing old baggage into your interactions. More often, though, you will need to reconcile directly with the other person. Sometimes I just take a deep breath and let the current moment be the time.

6. Make a new commitment: After airing the issues, make a commitment to change:

- Promise the other person that you will not speak negatively of her or him.
- Promise that you will come directly to him or her when you feel a need to address other issues or go deeper.
- Agree jointly to more specific changes.

7. Bring closure on the past: Recently, I have started writing a closing statement that acknowledges that we have put the conflict behind us and are moving forward. This reminds me to leave the conflict in the past.

8. If your efforts fall short: Go to the list of Avoiding and Claiming Behaviors (below) to see where the process is stuck. Re-examine your own role first, and begin working from that point. You must be honest with yourself along the way.

- Journaling can help you tap into feelings and assumptions that are not clear to you.
- Talking with someone you trust may provide insight.
- If your communication with the other person fails, you can decide to resolve the issue for yourself, without an expectation that the other person is ready to work through the issues.

AVOIDING

Avoidance	Silence, denying the problem
Negative Projection	Buttons easily pushed, preoccupation with the problem, complaining about the other person, justifying own actions

CLAIMING

Encounter	Communicating with the person, shift from judging and defending to listening and sharing
Apology, Forgiveness	Empathizing with the other person
Personal Resolve	Moving from focus on the issue to focus on learning and growth
Mutual	Trust that the other has resolved and moved

Resolve from focus on the issue to focus on learning and growth

Right Relations Hold each other in esteem and are accountable for communication and new behavior

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