Reconciliation Exercises

One way of understanding the reconciliation process is by realizing we hurt ourselves and each other by withholding love. Withholding love can take many forms – active and passive, conscious and unconscious – and can range from relatively benign to truly violent. The task, then, is to identify when and how we have withheld love in our relationships, and then to open the heart so love can flow again. That love can take many forms: empathy, compassion, trust, appreciation, connection, mutuality, respect, understanding, etc.

Choose any or all of the following exercises, considering them through the lens of the withholding or sharing of love. After each one, please share your experiences and reflections with the rest of the Learning Community through our course Discussion Forum, www.groups.google.com/groups/how-to-change-the-world.

1. Apology. In our reading, we see that the Apology Spectrum begins with acknowledgment of pain caused by our behavior, followed by contrition or remorse. This leads to an actual apology, perhaps accompanied by concrete amends.

Think of a relationship in your life, either in inter-personal or inter-group relationships, where you (individually or collectively) owe someone (or some group) an apology for a way in which you have withheld love. Take yourself through the four steps, as far as you can go:

1. **Acknowledgement** – How did you withhold love (or are still doing so)? What pain or harm has that caused to the other? To yourself?

2. **Remorse** – Do you truly feel sad, contrite, about your behavior? If not, what is in the way?

3. **Apology** – What do you need to release in yourself (blame, shame, anger, grief, pride, fear, judgment, etc.) that will allow you to make a heartfelt apology? Do it.

4. **Amends** – What can you do, actually or symbolically, to restore the dignity of the one(s) you have offended, mend the relationship, or heal the harm done? Do it.

2. Forgiveness. Think of a relationship in your life, either in inter-personal or inter-group relationships, where someone or some group has harmed you, individually or as part of your social identity group, by withholding love. Take yourself through the steps below, as far as you can go:

1. **Acknowledgement** – What was the act that caused you pain? What are you feeling around that – Grief? Fear? Anger? Hatred? A desire for revenge? Distrust? Something else?

2. **Responsibility** – What, if anything, might you have done, or how might you have withheld love with the other party in a way that may have contributed to their
actions or to the continuing pain or difficult relationship? Can you now forgive yourself?

3. **De-Victimizing** – How, if at all, are you holding yourself in a victim mode around this? What can you do to release that?

4. **Re-Humanizing** – What, if anything, can you understand about why the other party might have acted the way they did? Can you feel any empathy or compassion? If not, what might you release in yourself to be able to touch the heart of the other?

5. **Forgiveness** – Whether there is an apology offered or not, can you now forgive the one(s) who harmed you? That is, can you release the burden of your anger/pain that you carry inside (without having to forget what happened)? Can you extend an intention and invitation to re-weave this relationship in a good way?

3. **Letting Go, #1.** To complete either the Apology or the Forgiveness processes (or both) requires a softening of the hardened heart, which in turns requires, at some point, a letting go of whatever blocks the free flow of love and its healing power. Try this:

   Sit quietly, spine erect, feet flat on the floor, quieting the mind by paying attention to your breathing. When you have reached a state of calm, think of a relationship in your life that calls for reconciliation. Focus your attention on your heart, and notice how it is constricted regarding this relationship. What feelings or thoughts are you holding on to?

   Pick one of these that is impeding the flow of love in your heart, that you are ready and willing to change, and breathe into it. Allow the breath to soften what is hardened, gently easing the tightness. As you prepare to release this obstacle to love, first ask yourself how it has served you. You had this reaction for a reason that made sense at one time, even if it no longer serves you well. Be grateful for the lessons it has brought you, is bringing you even in this moment, and, when you are ready, release it on the out-breath into the vastness of space, to be recycled like compost into something more nourishing. Sit for a moment with this release. How do you feel? What, if anything, takes the place or fills the space left by that which you have put aside? Imagine the other party to this relationship in front of you. What would you want to say to them in this moment about the release that just happened?

4. **Letting Go, #2.** Again, identify a place calling for apology or forgiveness (of self or others) in your life, and again, identify what needs to be released from your heart to soften what is hardened, so you can move on.

   Once you have identified this, go into the natural world as best you can, and make an offering of that which wants to be released to the elements: the earth, the wind, the fire, or the water. Give it over, and ask that your allies in that element might take this and transform it back to pure energy, to become compost for growing good relationships.
Open yourself to receive a gift in return from your elemental allies – a new sense of lightness, an image, an insight, a song, a sensation – whatever form it may come in.

5. Ritual. Again, think of a relationship in your life that is ripe for reconciliation. Your task is to design and perform a simple ritual that will cleanse the blocked energy of the relationship and revivify the stream of love between the two of you. Your first choice is whether to do this ritual by yourself, or whether to actually approach the other party and invite them to do it with you. Either way is fine.

As you design your ritual, think of other rituals that have touched you deeply. Try to identify the factors that were so powerful. Use that information as you create your ceremony. You might want to consider such elements as: symbols that have important meaning, sounds or movements that can express the significance of the event, a way of cleansing or releasing what no longer serves, and a way of welcoming or celebrating a new quality in the relationship. You might also want to invoke some larger forces, such as the forces of nature or spiritual energies. There is no right and wrong in creating ritual. Whatever has meaning for you, whatever invites and enhances that shift in your heart, so that love can flow more freely, is appropriate in your ritual.