



BIANNUAL PUBLICATION OF THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR VICTIMS OF TORTURE

# First Light

Summer 2011



Love, Compassion, and Forgiveness in the  
Rehabilitation of Survivors





*First Light* is published semi-annually and is intended to inform the interested reader about torture, its effects and what we can do in aiding survivors to overcome their experience of torture and war. CCVT views itself as part of a larger global community and is committed to the struggle for human rights, justice and the end of the practice of torture. We chose to call this publication **First Light** because as the first light before true dawn, it symbolizes the first ray of hope for survivors of torture.



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Mandate  
The Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture aids survivors in overcoming the lasting effects of torture and war. In partnership with the community, the Centre supports survivors in the process of successful integration into Canadian society, works for their protection and integrity, and raises awareness of the continuing effects of torture and war on survivors and their families. The CCVT gives hope after the horror.

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# The CCVT Befriending Program

Mulugeta Abai

*A heart with no friend is a gloomy heart*

The trauma of uprootedness, in its different manifestations, can easily lead to alienation. In an alienated condition, people feel that “the most beloved components of their lives - names, experiences, education, accents, originalities, personalities - act against them.” Repulsed and rejected, uprooted survivors of torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity in Canada are in danger of losing any kind of love and attachment to their home country.



When newcomer survivors knock at our door at CCVT, we take them through a thorough assessment. Part of their intake is the requirement to give us the name and telephone number of a contact person. In 75% of the cases, survivors have nobody in this big city to be contacted by our CCVT counsellor in case of emergency.

This “loneliness of exile” may lead to the retraumatization of survivors. Back home, tyranny isolated them forcefully from the nurturing of the family and the community. Here in Canada, they are left to themselves. This may produce a feeling of exclusion and rejection in vulnerable survivors. This isolation, combined with apathy at the community level, gives them the feeling of being “nobody” in a dynamic society.

Survivors seek to break the fetters of their helplessness, but they are unable to do that alone. Loneliness leads to loss of hope and ambition and can result in a lonely life of survivorship. Alienation may lead to an identity crisis that is a peculiar mental and psychological disorder in which newcomer survivors may not only experience a personality split, but worse, they can lose every shade of their personality.

Identity crises may lead newcomer survivors to feel humiliated by the atmosphere and by themselves, and disconnected from the social world and their inner self. They may reach the point of unconditional denial of the positive aspects of all cultures. Cynicism as such is fatal because it denies the spiritual dignity of humanity and the standards of morality and justice elaborated by the human race. The first victims of this crisis are survivors themselves. Uneasiness, pessimism, lack of patience, ambiguity about everything, hatred, isolation, loneliness and frustration are only some symptoms of this crisis. All these act as insurmountable barriers in the way of survivors’ meaningful integration. This is a dangerous stage in the odyssey of survivors which, if not overcome, can lead to irreparable mental damage and even suicide.

To overcome our clients’ feelings of alienation and self-alienation, the CCVT has developed its befriending program for survivors. This program that has been in place for the last 25 years and is based on the concept of mutual love: newcomer survivors who are people of love and compassion should be loved by all in return. We are helped by approximately 300 volunteers who frequently act as befrienders or befriending tutors for our clients. We act as facilitators and match them with clients who are looking for a befriender. The befriending program has clearly defined goals:

- To provide support, foster independence and mitigate the effects of torture so that survivors can gain confidence, avoid the sense of shame, failure, guilt—the failure of a dream becoming true, etc. which are usually common to victims of torture.
- To provide effective means of cultural exchange in a non-threatening way and in an atmosphere of trust and friendship. To help them rediscover joy and bolster their self esteem.

- To assist them to make the transition from a victimized position to active community members

We, at the CCVT, are living witnesses to the positive impact of the CCVT befriending program. This program has proved to be effective in bringing meaning to the lives of both CCVT clients and its volunteer "befrienders." Let me share some stories.

One of our clients had gone through such devastating trauma that the befriender was unable to teach him English. The befriender became so committed to his friend that he learned his friend's language to be able to improve his communication with him. Our client became suspicious and discontinued the friendship. The CCVT befriending volunteer continued with learning the language. He is presently an expert in that language and is enjoying the friendship of many people from his friend's ethnic community. Our client has recently resumed his friendship with him.

Let me share another story. Narges (a fictitious name) is a survivor of torture and war from a Middle Eastern country. Her father and siblings were killed during war. Two of her brothers are still missing. As a young orphan girl, she married one of her relatives. She loved her husband, but they lived together for a short period of time because the militia forces invaded her house and killed her husband. She was pregnant at that time. She went to another part of the country and lived as a displaced person. With tremendous difficulty, she managed to deliver her daughter, but the warlords found her and threatened her life. She was left with no option but to cross the border with the baby, and seek asylum in a neighbouring country. Living as an asylum-seeker and single mother was extremely difficult. She got involved with a man and lived with him for three years. Unfortunately their relationship could not continue since her common-law partner was abusive towards her. The branch office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees came to know about her predicament. She was accepted as a bona fide refugee and referred to the Canadian government for resettlement.

She was on the verge of collapse when she visited us at the CCVT. She was pregnant and had to support her three-year-old daughter. We provided her with the holistic support of the CCVT, including the befriending program. We matched her with a long-standing volunteer of the centre, Sara. Sara went far beyond her way to support this single pregnant woman who was only 27 at the time. She chose to visit Narges almost everyday and provide her with emotional, spiritual and material support. Sara spent a great deal of time in teaching English to Narges, who was not able to attend language courses due to her pregnancy. With the help of the CCVT, Sara found a good gynaecologist for Narges and escorted her to the doctor. She also mobilized her friends and family members to visit Narges and provide her with companionship and gifts. The CCVT counsellors and Volunteer Coordinator paid Narges frequent home visits and always found Sara helping Narges in different ways, including cooking. The challenge came when Narges was hospitalized for delivery. It was with the help of Sara and her connections that CCVT could arrange home care for her first child. Narges gave birth to a baby girl and Sara continued to offer her support.

Sara is still a befriender with Narges. Both children are in excellent condition; the first child is going to school, and the second is in day care. Narges is fluent in English and is happily living with her children. Along with Sara and her two children, Narges join us in our different entertainment program.

The CCVT clients enjoy the highest standard of morality. They were and are driven by their feeling of love and compassion for their fellow human beings. They love Canada and the Canadian people. We should join hands and reciprocate their love.

*\*Mulugeta Abai is the Executive Director of the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture*

trauma to haven  
Staff care, respect, foster hope:  
personhood restored.  
Rosemary Meyer

# Gladys Canales, The Brave

Natalia Durango

“War is a problem reduced to mathematical calculations and, because of that, sometimes the laurels of victory crown wrong heads, and the real heroes live in silence”. At least that was the belief of Lieutenant Colonel of Artillery Don Nicanor Beunza, a former Peruvian military official who fought during the Pacific Wars at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century in South America.

Perhaps, from that historic time until the present day, the war has been like this statement: a situation reduced to numbers. However, and fortunately, there are some anonymous heroes who are still fighting, even after the end of the war, in order to help survivors who need more love, compassion and support to cure their injuries.

Gladys Canales can understand very well what these above mentioned ideas mean. She has lived in her own skin the most terrible horror of the war, but she also has known very well, from her own story, how love and compassion can bring people to life after years of torture and abuse.

Gladys, who was unfairly incarcerated under Peru's Antiterrorist Law and, suffered 8 years of unjust imprisonment, torture and abuse. Today she is the face of compassion that thousands of Peruvian war survivors recognize. She was proved innocent and pardoned, but getting that status meant a long and exhausting struggle full of tears.

## Background

At the beginning of the 1990s, Peru was living amidst an internal war against the Maoist guerrilla Sendero Luminoso. This illegal armed group started an armed campaign in Peru in 1980 after some years of communist political activism. In 1980, Peru called for elections for the first time in 11 years. Sendero Luminoso was one of the few leftist groups that did not take part, and, instead, they chose to launch an armed struggle in the northern part of the country. These were the boom times for armed leftist movements in South America.

The following years were terrible for the Peruvian people. Forced recruitment, indoctrination, death and terror were the daily bread in this South American country. However, the horror generated by the guerrilla group was no less terrible than the battle of the government of Alberto Fujimori (1990) against Sendero Luminoso.

While it is true that the Fujimori Government virtually ended with Sendero Luminoso in 1993, it is also true that those actions left more than 700 recognized victims of wrongful imprisonment, more than 15 000 people missing, 37 000 deaths and dozens of massacres committed by the Colina Group, a paramilitary anti-communist death squad created during the administration of Fujimori.

According to the Peruvian Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) Report, “The TRC has reasonable grounds to affirm that President Alberto Fujimori, his adviser Vladimiro Montesinos, and high level officials of the National Intelligence Service are criminally responsible for the assassinations, forced disappearances and massacres perpetrated by the ‘Colina’ death squad”.



**Natalia Durango**



**Gladys Canales survived years of torture. Today she has a organization to help innocent victims. She lives in an apartment in Lima with their two daughters.**

Similarly, the TRC stated that several facts, some of which were true, but the majority were manipulated by the media, served to create and exaggeratedly recreate terrorism as a latent threat to justify the authoritarianism of the regime and improve the Fujimori political image.

Ernesto de la Jara, professor and member of the NGO Justicia Viva (Live Justice), confirmed in his report “On behalf of the innocents” “that watching innocent people wearing striped pyjamas accused of being part of Sendero Luminoso as a ‘Government war trophy’ was then common like seeing Coca Cola commercials on T.V.”

Gladys Canales was unfairly part of this circus created by the Fujimori government to improve his image and popularity. In 1993, she was forcibly taken out of her house when she was sleeping with her husband and her two little daughters. The military soldiers were looking for subversive flyers, but they could not find anything. However, they arrested and beat her in front of her children. They had no evidence against her, only the forced ‘confession’ of another person who gave Gladys’ name to survive the military soldiers’ torture and save her own life. But these accusations were enough for the police; they were looking at increasing their list of catches to appear successful no matter what.

After some days of electroshocks and abuses, Gladys showed up on TV wearing a striped jumpsuit, terrified, and was accused of being part of Sendero. “They wanted me to say names, 70 at least if I wanted to save my life. But, what could I have said if I was a simple housewife and I had no idea about those things?” That was the

beginning of the terrible nightmare.

### **Dark Nightmare**

On October 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1993, while Gladys was sleeping, a group of 40 soldiers raided her home at 4:00 am looking for subversive propaganda. Then, she was taken to a prison called El Callao where she remained isolated and was tortured for several days. “At that time, the military asked for any number of names. If someone said names they could go home, but if the person had nothing to say, they were probably arrested, as happened to me”, Gladys said.

During this arbitrary detention, Gladys was physically and mentally abused. On the last day, she was interrogated by the District Attorney’s Office, but her answers were not part of the declaration. “They wrote what they wanted and declared me guilty of helping Sendero Luminoso”. That day, the District Attorney’s Office organized a press conference and Gladys showed up like a criminal on national TV with a group of people.

That terrible day was followed by other no less sad moments in Gladys Canales’ life. She was imprisoned in a closed regimen jail. This entailed having only 30 minutes on the patio per day, with 23 and a half hours spent enclosed in a small room with no books, (even The Bible was prohibited) no radio, no TV and only one visit every 3 months. She ate the same plate of beans every single day for years and never took a shower; she

could only clean herself in a small sink. She remembers that all her days were equal, with the routine changing only “on torture and punishment days”.

The period in prison destroyed her marriage and her family; her house was taken by the soldiers and her daughters grew up with social stigmatization. They were raised with sacrifice by the mother of Gladys, who was living in a precarious financial condition.

The nightmare ended in May 2000, after seven years and nine months in jail and after a deep review of her case by the TRC, which declared Gladys innocent and pardoned. She was also publicly pardoned by the Peruvian president, Alejandro Toledo, in 2003.

### The Elixir of Compassion

Gladys came back to life, but in order to relieve her soul, took another journey. She decided to change her life and the life of others, giving hope, compassion and love to war survivors like her.

As she said during a telephone conversation with a magazine, “the survivors of war have to stay and help the wounded”. And, perhaps, because she can understand how much love a survivor needs to recover from their pain, she founded an organization to help the victims of torture in Peru.

She started a campaign in order to help people like her. No matter her poverty, fear or pain caused by her experience, Gladys raised her voice, causing her voice to be heard in Norway, where the government has supported her organization for five years with excellent results.



**After the political violence period in Peru 15.000 people still missing and the Police still founding mass graves.**

The Asociación Reflexión de Inocentes Liberados (Reflection Association of Innocent Freed) brings together people who were imprisoned on spurious charges of belonging to subversive groups and won their freedom through the Mercy, Grace and Forgiveness Law.

“We work with people who suffered political violence and we are prioritizing our job with remote communities of our country. Actually, we are a group of people united to defend human rights and we have positively changed the life of more than 700 people.”

The organization has presence in 17 zones and covers all of Peru, offering legal support to the victims of violence and offering financial support as well. For example, many victims have received, with the help of Gladys Canales’ organization, a 115 square meter tract of land to build a house as a part of the reparation they deserve. Similarly, she has also worked with some governmental commissions on the declassification of legal documents in order to find the truth of the political violence in Peru.

This work has led Gladys to countries such as Guatemala, Mexico, Canada, Norway and Kenya. She even signed the Nairobi Declaration in 2007 and won a Canadian prize from the International Centre for Human Rights and Democracy Development based on her endeavour to defend human rights.



**The Andean women wove a scarf to remind the violence they suffered and in order to sensitize people about respect for human rights.**

Today, when Peru is facing a new presidential election period and the daughter of Alberto Fujimori is looking for the power, Gladys is still struggling there in order to defend the human rights of dozens of victims.

Yes, maybe war is sometimes regarded as a mathematical problem reduced to numbers. But fortunately, love and compassion can always change the end of the story, especially when the survivors decide to change the future - survivors like Gladys Canales, the brave.

*\*Natalia Durango Vásquez is a colombian journalist based in Toronto. Over the past ten years she has covered political transitions, social crisis and armed conflicts in Latin America. She also has worked on-site covering conflict in Middle East and the war in Lebanon.*



### Persian Statement on Love

Love must not be reduced to a habit of inclination.

Even the love for giving water to flowers must not become routine. Love is not merely the practice of liking someone, or even doing so passionately.

Love continuously demands renewal, and calls for constant change.

Freshness is the essence of love; novelty its fabric.

How can one seize freshness and novelty and expect love to remain?

Love never accepts forgetfulness, but once.

A crystal ball breaks once; its broken pieces can be kept, but those sharp pieces will no longer comprise the ball.

Take caution, for everything endures age and time.

With neglect, love may also lose novelty, leaving excuses to take the place of intimate feeling.

By Nader Ebrahimi

# Love and Compassion as a Response to Oppression

Negar Jafari



Ever since humans created social order, those who are “different” from the perceived norm have been oppressed. Oppression is seen so often that it has created a foundation of normalcy within us. Although we are outraged by the outcome of oppression, we have learned to accept it as a cruel part of our world. In order to understand oppression and some of the responses towards it, we need to understand the different circumstances in which we are oppressed and violated. In this article, I want to draw attention to the response of the Baha’is of Iran who have been oppressed since the inception of their faith.

Let us begin with the historic and systemic definition of oppression. Oppression means to exercise one’s state of authority by perpetrating violence and cruelty towards others. Many people may immediately link “oppression” to the first English colony which held

Africans as slaves in the United States beginning in 1619. The enslavement of Africans in the English colony is an important historical example of oppression; however, if we look deeper we can discover brutality even before that. For instance, the Arab slave trade in the 8th and 9th Century enslaved 11 to 18 million Africans. Not to mention in the 6th Century when the Greeks believed it was a necessity for every family to own a slave. In all three historical periods, slavery was enacted by the powerful. In these cases, to be rich meant to be powerful. People in different historical times have abused their power in similar ways. Why have we come to believe that with power comes great cruelty? And, why has this become acceptable to make others suffer when we hold power?

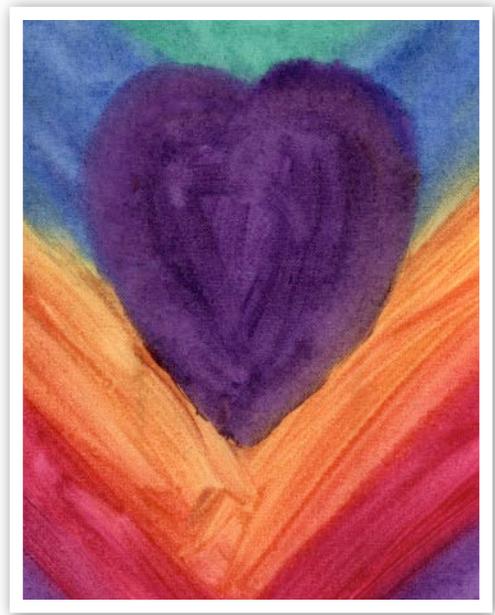
It is the sense of authority that gives us a great amount of discretion. Sometimes this is because we misunderstand authority, thinking it means forcing others to bend to our will. For example, we know that we must not disobey our employer at work because he or she has the power to fire us. Relating this to oppression, one can state that we are to do as we are told by those who hold authority because we know that if we do not, we will be punished.

The Baha’i faith was founded in the mid-nineteenth century by a young Persian, Mirza Husayn-Ali, who is known by the title Baha’u’llah (1817–1892). Members of the Baha’i faith in Iran are a recognized group that has been oppressed for more than 160 years. They have been denied education, employment, barred from carrying out their religious practices and have been stripped of their social and legal rights. Members of this faith have faced persecution by the government, which in the past several years has dramatically increased. They have been subjected to torture and systemic attempts at complete elimination as a faith community. Baha’is have been recognized world-wide for their response to this extended period of oppression. Baha’i families have worked to respond non-violently to this persecution due to a great love for their faith and for the people of Iran. The Baha’i response towards oppression is based on the teachings of Baha’u’llah which states, unity “is the alpha and omega of all Baha’i objectives”. The Baha’i faith believes that the light of unity is capable of enlightening the whole earth.

The Baha’i response to oppression is learned through an image of unity that is seen as the next stage in humanity’s social growth. It sees humanity collectively reaching a point of social maturation. This unity is expressed practically by working shoulder to shoulder with others to build a better world. They do this by offering educational programs for children and youth, contributing to the development of their nation through their profession, and

engaging in humanitarian projects for the most disadvantaged members of their society. This faith's approach to social change disregards all forms of disruptive methods. It is noteworthy that within the Baha'i faith all members are to abide by the state law in any country that they are residing. This vision of unity is seen as the means of social change and is so essential to the Baha'i faith that this community carries on in unity building, even in the face of violent oppression.

Baha'is reject all forms of coercive force as they believe the model of social change they are using can only be achieved if it is gained through voluntary means. The Baha'i faith requires all members to respond to hatred with love and kindness. I want to call attention to Mona Mahmudnizhad, who was a 16 year old Baha'i youth in the city of Shiraz, Iran. Mona was arrested and executed for practicing her faith and dedicating herself to the education of children. During her execution by hanging, Mona kissed the rope that was going around her neck and slowly let go of this world. This showed her certainty and love as a response toward hatred. Although she was only 16 years old, her love for the faith remains unquestionable.



By expanding our minds and our abilities, we can erase oppression and replace it with love. We need to use love as a defense mechanism and be each others' hands. Our society should be more compassionate about different beliefs. It is important to learn how to forgive those who have hurt us and respond with love in order to help them understand their actions. If we fight back with more hatred, we are only causing a larger conflict, rather than if we show love when we are silenced which can have a lasting positive impact.

Why have we made hatred a part of society? It may be because it is easier to neglect one another, rather than explore our differences and use them to strengthen each other. In many Middle Eastern countries, difference in religion is used to oppress certain people. Instead, we need to learn from our differences and take small steps towards getting closer to each other. We may have different political or religious beliefs, but is that a just reason to destroy our society? Unfortunately, we have been taught that whatever is different is a sin. However, if we use each other's differences to overcome our anger and our lack of knowledge about different cultures, we can develop love in ourselves and teach our children.

Every human being has the power to change him or herself, which is the first step to changing a society. To change the world we need to first change ourselves, and in fact we should always continue to grow mentally and socially, and have our vision set on bettering the world. We cannot stay in the past with older cultures, although we are to respect them for the time period they existed in. If we stay within the same social circles, it is much more difficult to learn about diversity. We need to teach our children to respect and explore the differences they meet. As a society, we need to collectively recognize our thoughts and try to overcome what divides us.

From the 6<sup>th</sup> century to the present 21<sup>st</sup> century, we have seen major historical changes, but we need to continue to develop. Millions of people remain in horrific conditions due to inequity and oppression. Our hope for a better world begins with educating ourselves and spreading love. We need to love ourselves and grow compassion for others. Looking at people's differences as a new ideology and trying to learn from them can benefit us socially. The ability to respect each other's differences and be passionate about change can only be ignited with education.

Once we are able to love and find love within ourselves, we may seek love in others.

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# Love and Compassion in Christianity

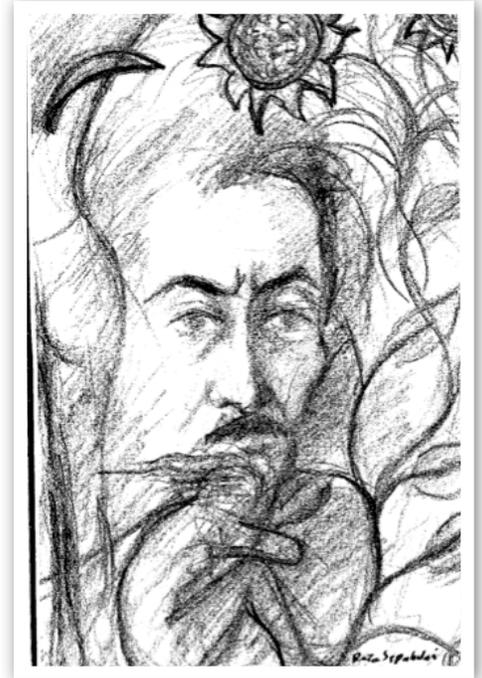
Desiree Dumlao

Christianity is love and love is Christianity. In the Old Testament, we come across the Ten Commandments that can be interpreted as the basis for the Jewish as well as the Christian love and compassion. God has mentioned that He is One who has “mercy through a thousand generations on those who have love for” Him. (Exodus, 20: 3-17) In the Ten Commandments, when God orders humans not to steal and be respectful of their neighbors, it speaks to the Lord’s compassion. It is ordered that we should extend his love and compassion to one another, specifically to those who are downtrodden and vulnerable:

“When a refugee sojourns with you in your land, you shall not do him wrong. The stranger who sojourns with you shall be to you as native among you, and you should love him as yourself.” (Leviticus 19:3)

In this sense, God is both a giver and receiver of love:

“My dear friends let us love one another, since love is from God and everyone who loves is a child of God and knows God. Whoever fails to love does not know God, because God is love. My dear friends, if God loved us so much, we too should love one another.” (1 John 4:7, 8, 11)



This is a specific sort of love that is entirely different from sexual or worldly love. Love in Christianity has nothing to do with egotism and selfishness. Christianity rejects the “logic of exclusion” that is a pre-requisite for torture and all sorts of cruelties of humans against their fellow species. It replaces this terrible attitude with the logic of inclusion by insisting on the love for one’s neighbor, even the bitterest enemies. Loving the other is the best guarantee for social, racial, ethnic and gender harmony among members of human family:

“But I say this to you who are listening: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who treat you badly. To anyone who slaps you on one cheek, present the other cheek as well; to anyone who takes your cloak from you, do not refuse your tunic. Give to everyone who asks you, and do not ask for your property back from someone who takes it. Treat others as you would like people to treat you. If you love those who love you, what credit can you expect? Even sinners love those who love them. And if you do good to those who do good to you, what credit can you expect? For even sinners do that much. And if you lend to those from whom you hope to get money back, what credit can you expect? Even sinners lend sinners to get back the same amount. Instead, love your enemies and do good to them, and lend without any hope of return, You will have a great reward, and you will be children of the Most High, for He himself is kind to the ungrateful and the wicked.” (Luke 6:27-35)

Love is inter-connected with the Christian faith that cherishes the idea of hope as one of the main incentives for human progress. However, love is far beyond any other consideration and is approached as a mortar that binds

people of diverse background and as the main impetus for human closeness to God. What will follow is extracted from one of St. Paul's letters:

"Love is always patient and kind; love is never jealous; love is not boastful or conceited, it is never rude and never seeks its own advantage, it does not take offence or store up grievances. Love does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but finds its joy in the truth. It is always ready to make allowances, to trust, to hope and to endure whatever comes. Love never comes to an end. But if there are prophecies, they will be done away with; if tongues, they will fall silent; and if knowledge, it will be done away with. As it is, these remain: faith, hope and love, the three of them; and the greatest of them is love." (1 Corinthians 13:4-8, 13)

In the majority of instances in the Christian Greek Scriptures, or New Testament, the word "love" is a translation of the Greek word *a·ga´pe*. Explaining the meaning of that term, the reference work *Insight on the Scriptures* says: "[A·ga´pe] is not sentimentality, based on mere personal attachment, as is usually thought of, but is a moral or social love based on deliberate assent of the will as a matter of principle, duty, and propriety, sincerely seeking the other's good according to what is right. A·ga´pe (love) transcends personal enmities, never allowing these to cause one to abandon right principles and to retaliate in kind." A·ga´pe can also include deep feeling. "Have intense love [a·ga´pe] for one another," recommended the apostle Peter. (1 Peter 4:8) Thus, it could be said that a·ga´pe involves the heart as well as the mind.

One dictionary says that empathy is the "identification with and understanding of another's situation, feelings, and motives." It has also been described as the ability to put oneself in the other fellow's place. So empathy requires first of all that we comprehend the circumstances of someone else and second that we share the feelings that those circumstances provoke in him. Yes, empathy involves our feeling of another person's pain in our heart. The apostle Peter counselled Christians to show 'fellow feeling, brotherly affection and compassion.' (1 Peter 3:8)

The Greek word rendered "fellow feeling" literally means "to suffer with another" or "to have compassion." The apostle Paul recommended similar sentiments when he exhorted fellow Christians to "rejoice with people who rejoice; weep with people who weep." Paul added: "Be minded the same way toward others as to yourselves." (Romans 12:15, 16)

There are lots of obstacles in day to day life to extend our natural empathy to others. Yet we can cultivate this fellow feeling. If we listen more attentively, observe more keenly, and imagine ourselves in the situation of others more frequently, our empathy will flourish. We will as a result feel impelled to show more love, kindness, and compassion to our neighbours and the human race, in general.

Let us not allow selfishness to smother our empathy. "None of you should think only of his own affairs," Paul wrote, "but consider other people's interests also." (Philippians 2:4) Empathy will help us to discover that "there is more happiness in giving than there is in receiving." (Acts 20:35)

In sum, love in Christianity is all-embracing and universal. It starts from individual relationships and expands to love for the family and society and ultimately to the whole universe and relationship between God and human beings. Christian love intends to remove all kinds of disharmonies. It provides a passion and enthusiasm to make life easy for each and every member of human society.

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# Love and Compassion in Islam

Huda Bukhari

There is a regrettable tendency among some western scholars and media persons to depict Islam as a religion of hate and violence. This, more than anything else, stems from their political motivations and ignorance. In this short article an attempt will be made to explore love and compassion within the Islamic scripture and traditions.

One cannot deny the existence of verses in the holy Qur'an of the need for the use of coercive measures against non-believers and hypocrites. It is also true that one of the attributes of God (Allah) in Islam is the wrath (Ghadab). However, it should be noted that the practical application of these provisions are limited compared to God's love and absolute compassion for His creatures.

There are abundant references to the concept of love and compassion in Islamic scripture, theology, philosophy, mysticism and ethics. Compassion provides a strong motivation to love and love gives a powerful incentive to have compassion. These two become identical in the Islamic context. Allah loves His created universe in general and its creatures, the human race in particular. In fact, one of Allah's names is *al-Wadood*, which has different meanings in the Arabic language: the One who loves, the One who is the source of all love and loving-kindness, the One who is most affectionate, the beloved, the One who is deserving of all love and affection, the One who is the goal of the highest love. According to the Holy Qur'an God is "the Ever Forgiving, the Most Loving" (Qur'an, 85:14).

Another name that is repeatedly attributed to Allah in the Qur'an is *Rahman* (the compassionate, the merciful). With the exception of one, each of the 114 sections of the Qur'an begins with the verse: "In the name of God, the most compassionate, the most merciful". God extends his love and compassion to each and every human person. God loves *Muhsineen* (good and charitable people [Qur'an, 2:195, 3:134, 3:148, 5:13, 5:93]. He loves *Mutahhareen* (those who are clean and pure) [2:222, 9:108], *Sabireen* (stoic people) [3:146], *Mutawakkileen* (courageous and trustful persons) [3:159], and *Muqsiteen* (lovers of justice and egalitarianism) [5:42, 49:9, 60:8].

Islam believes in the creation of all human persons from the same essence and their equality before God. Allah, according to the Qur'an, has created humans "in the best design" (Qur'an, 95:4) and has made them His deputies on earth.

Provisions as such are prerequisites for racial, ethnic, gender and social harmony among members of the human family. We read the following marvelous verses from the Holy Qur'an: "O mankind! Lo! We have created you male and female, and have made you nations and tribes that ye may know one another. Lo! the noblest of you, in the sight of Allah, is the best in conduct. Lo! Allah is Knower, Aware. (Qur'an 49:3 - Section al-Hujurat, Verse 13). This is an explicit advice of the extension of God's love to all humans regardless of differences. Universal love as such precludes all sorts of torture and atrocities against humans. The extension of love and compassion compelled the 4<sup>th</sup> Islamic Caliph Ali to advice his children to be tolerant with his murderer after his death.

Love provides one with moral and spiritual motives to help poor vulnerable people who desperately need one's support. The Qur'an has repeatedly asked Moslems to extend their help to *Ibn as-Sabil* (refugees and those who are left on the roads). According to the Sufi tradition of Islam, love is a mortar that binds human beings and all creatures together.

To conclude, it should be mentioned that one can easily find numerous verses and traditions of love, compassion, mercy and forgiveness in Islam. What we need today is a modern and progressive interpretation of the Islamic scriptures and traditions.

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# The Impact of Love, Compassion and Forgiveness on Survivors of Torture, Abuse, etc.

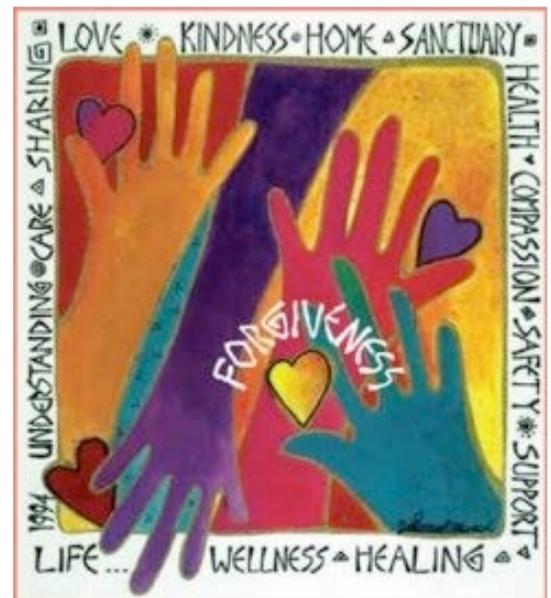
Susanna Bourejma

In German, there's a proverb that says "time heals everything". I, Susanna Bourejma, would like to agree that we slowly heal from many different kinds of emotional and psychological wounds as time passes. But as with physical healing, the right kind of medicine can help speed up the healing process. Also, in some cases, the person may never really heal, but may simply learn to live with the damage or injury.

In my opinion, any kind of emotional damage is healed by love and compassion. In my previous job as a social worker working with homeless people, I have seen really rough and abused men become sweet and tame when someone showed them that they really cared about them. I also had a neighbour with schizophrenia at one point who - when she was having an episode - was yelling obscenities and when I greeted her with a big honest smile, she calmed right down and started telling me about her life and the emotional abuse she had suffered. Similarly, I've seen a change in behaviour and attitude in several students I've had at CCVT. Some of them were really shy and in their shell when they first arrived, but then, after a while, when they started to feel safe, they came out of their shell and blossomed. I also remember 2 students who acted very tough in the beginning and didn't seem to care about anyone or anything. After a while, both of them softened up and turned into very sweet people. We all have different coping strategies and safety mechanisms (walls, masks, etc.) and when we feel loved and accepted, we can let our guard down and show people who we really are deep down inside. I believe that this is the person we're supposed to be.

If I compare my ESL classes at CCVT to my "regular" ESL classes, I find that there's a big difference. At CCVT, my students are generally more appreciative and modest. I can sense a feeling of thankfulness for being alive in them that - I believe - has to do with having lived through hell, having survived and escaped; if you know how horrible life can be, you can appreciate and enjoy freedom and a good life a lot more afterwards. In my class, I try to give my students as much love and compassion as I can without taking away from their dignity by melting away in pity. I treat them as "normal" people in the sense that I show them respect and lighten up the lessons with (appropriate) humour. As another proverb says: "Humour is the best medicine."; by laughing we can instantly feel better and forget about our own problems. The only thing that's different is that I try to avoid any possible triggers. I find I have a much stronger bond and connection with them than with my other "regular" class. My students at CCVT not only respond really well to caring people (such as their counselors and other CCVT staff members), but I also find them very sweet and loving with each other. I think there is an underlying understanding of what everyone has been through and they instinctively give each other the love and support that they also need to get.

From my personal self-healing and personal development I can also say that when someone treats you in a disrespectful or abusive way, we usually get triggered and we relive that same kind of damage again and again unless we find ways of dealing with it differently. In the end it all comes down to reacting out of hurt and pain and trying to protect that inner innocent core, our spirit. And in response, we then hurt others. In the end it comes down to recognizing that most people in society are not really out to hurt us on purpose, but that it's their own abuse and dysfunction that makes them act a certain way. Once we realize that, it's easier to respond calmly. (Mind you, when I'm well-rested and grounded it's much easier than when I'm busy and stressed.)



If we can respond with love, the other person usually calms right down. The same thing of course goes in reverse: if someone gives us love and compassion when we're upset or not feeling good about ourselves or life, we instantly feel better. Once we get continued support from a loved one, such as a spouse, another relative or a close friend, we start believing in ourselves and build up our self-confidence, we start to respect ourselves (again) and can then be successful in anything we choose to do. It often only takes one person to love you and believe in you to turn your life around.

Finally, we can also deal with forgiveness, forgiving ourselves for having allowed ourselves to be a victim (if there was a choice) and forgiving the abuser/torturer/etc. Unfortunately it is rare that the abuser or torturer would ask the victim for forgiveness. It would be great help in the healing process, but the main thing to understand is that it is not the victim's fault! It is the abuser or other perpetrator who is emotionally very sick and that's why he (or she) did it. In the end, they will also need to go through healing, but that's not the concern of the victim. The victim simply has to understand that there's nothing they did wrong to provoke the abuse. The abuser was simply unable to give love the way a normal, healthy person would, because they never learned and experienced it themselves. So, in the end, it all comes back to love: compassion is one kind of love, the love for other people, and forgiveness also has to do with love by recognizing that those perpetrators simply didn't know love and that was the only way they knew how to be.

In summary, if we can start loving ourselves and others, we can slowly heal the world around us. We may have a long way to go, but we have to start somewhere.

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We often think of peace as the absence of war; that if the powerful countries would reduce their arsenals, we could have peace. But if we look deeply into the weapons, we see our own minds - our prejudices, fears, and ignorance. Even if we transported all the bombs to the moon, the roots of war and the reasons for bombs would still be here, in our hearts and minds, and sooner or later we would make new bombs. Seek to become more aware of what causes anger and separation, and what overcomes them. Root out the violence in your life, and learn to live compassionately and mindfully

- Thich Nhat Hanh -

# Love and Building Connection among Survivors

Andrea Lagios



When we think, write and speak about survivors of torture, war, genocide and other crimes against humanity, the images that tend to prevail are those of victims suffering from unrelenting trauma; people who have lost their families, homes, jobs, countries and their identities (Aidani, 2010; Malkki, 1995; Marlowe, 2010; Pupavac, 2006). While we must acknowledge and validate the tremendous loss and hardship faced by such survivors, and the after-effects of trauma that they must overcome each day, we must not lose sight of their incredible resilience, courage, determination and strength that have enabled them to survive and continue persevering. By focusing on trauma and hardship, we invariably resort to concentrating on how survivors need help, often overlooking the methods of coping, healing and prevailing from various circumstances they have already undertaken (Farwell, 2001; Marlowe, 2010; Nguyen-Gillham et al., 2008; Pupavac, 2006; Ross-Sheriff, 2006; Ryan, Dooley & Benson, 2008).

An avenue for hope and healing that has received little attention to date is that of love and compassion. Expressed through many different shared experiences, love may be present in strategies of collective and individual survival and healing. These strategies include humour, creative expression, and other acts that build solidarity between people. Love may also be expressed in numerous ways over periods of time; during conflict and throughout resettlement. Wherever it is present, love is worth looking for and talking about! It is an expression of humanity that strengthens families, secures friendships, builds communities and ensures that we overcome despair and hatred to forgive, rebuild, and heal. When we are able to love ourselves and each other, we are able to build a unified front and devise strategies that resist injustice and oppression (Abuelaish, 2010).

We can think about how love and compassion are manifested in almost infinite ways. For instance, focusing on loved ones was an important strategy to maintain hope among survivors of the Holocaust. Those who suffered in concentration camps express having derived energy by thinking about those they loved, and thought about them regularly to sustain their hope of survival. The connection between love and hope during the Holocaust is exemplified throughout survivors' stories of loyalty, where they were motivated to keep themselves alive in order to ensure the protection of others, and by having faith that they would be reunited with their loved ones (Armour, 2010). Stories about families and falling in love were shared inside concentration camps and ghettos as a means to overcome suffering, maintain hope, and collectively remember (Walsh, 2007). Even after survivors of the Holocaust immigrated to other countries, they focused on their survival in resettlement in part by maintaining family connections, having children, and fostering acceptance. Some survivors have expressed wanting future generations to learn love and compassion from the Holocaust, rather than hatred (Armour, 2010).

The actual presence of loved ones undoubtedly increases resiliency and can both serve to buffer the experience of trauma, as well as enhance the capacity to heal from it (Walsh, 2007). Yet we must also be attentive and sensitive to the reality that many survivors of torture and war may not still be surrounded by loved ones, having possibly lost them during conflict or forced migration. In this sense, we must also be attuned to the presence of compassion and forms of collective caring, which may also exist in a myriad of ways.

Connectedness with others could derive from shared experiences of loss or survival (Armour, 2010; Harris, 2007; Mossallanejad, 2005; Reeler et al., 2009; Walsh, 2007). People also foster connection with each other by making meaning of their experiences and expressing shared emotions (Armour, 2010; Walsh, 2007), creating new hopes and dreams collectively (Reeler et al., 2009; Walsh, 2007;), expressing forgiveness about past experiences of trauma and injustice (Abuelaish, 2010; Mossallanejad, 2005), and sharing creative expressions such as writing, artwork and music (Harris, 2007; Goodsmith, 2007).



One such example of building connectedness and community solidarity to facilitate healing is dance/movement therapy - an initiative that flourished among African youth survivors of torture and war. Through engaging in dancing and drumming consistent with local cultural traditions of the youth, dance/movement initiatives have helped to build interpersonal connections, collective resilience among the youth, and foster a sense of awareness about a shared experience of trauma (Harris, 2007). In essence, youth's ability to come together and engage in this form of artistic expression has contributed to revitalizing a sense of community after their experiences of mass violence, building their resilience and enabling them to heal collectively.

In a similarly creative project among survivors of torture and war, the Baltimore-based not-for-profit organization, Advocates for Survivors of Torture and Trauma, initiated a photo project called "Healing Images", encouraging groups of survivors to express their experiences through photography and share them with the community. Survivors incorporated images that represented their personal identities, showcased the importance of their loved ones, and created images that symbolized their strength and healing. This incredible initiative drew survivors together to meet and relate to one another, creating a powerful experience to join together in their healing journey, which became what was described by one participant as a family gathering (Goodsmith, 2007). This extraordinary community project also invited survivors to share their experiences of torture and war with the general public, generating empathy and opening a profound avenue for increased awareness and advocacy for human rights.

When thinking about love, compassion, connectedness, healing, and the good nature of human interaction more generally, there is another vital element that is often left out of the discussion on torture and war; namely, humour. Despite initial reactions to any suggested relation between such trauma and humour, it is worth taking a closer look at how fundamental the use of humour is in our everyday interactions. Humour provides a degree of warmth in many social situations, allows us to express our personalities and embrace our humility, and quite simply makes us feel good. Beyond the common saying that laughter is the best medicine, it has the potential to keep people's spirits alive in terrible conditions. Humour has been underappreciated in light of its therapeutic potential, and while it should not minimize the significance of trauma, it can mitigate the intensity of stressful reactions to traumatic experiences (Garrick, 2005). Humour can also be an important healing tool, as it can allow people to bond, and may help in creating a new perspective on horrific experiences and memories (Garrick, 2005; Mossallanejad, 2005). When humour can be found in oppressive and unjust conditions, it also becomes a powerful tool to undermine those that perpetuate injustice, allowing survivors to build solidarity and resistance against their oppressors and the system they operate within (Mossallanejad, 2005).

The capacity to love, so inherent to our sense of humanity, can be a significant avenue for healing from the trauma associated with torture, war, genocide and crimes against humanity. Survivors have demonstrated

their profound resilience and strength in their ability to love and build a sense of connectedness that allows them to maintain hope during conflict and heal in its aftermath. Through compassion, creative expression, humour, and undoubtedly various other similar means, the determination of people to create solidarity has allowed them to use this love and connectedness as strategy of survival and resistance. Thus, while we are attuned to the sometimes unimaginable experiences of trauma and hardship that people face, we must never forget their determination to persevere. With an understanding of the importance of love for survivors, let us also remember to express love. When we embrace our ability to care for each other and show compassion, we invite the profound prospect of building solidarity and a collective force against oppression and injustice.

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# Feminist Perspectives on Self-Love

Alison Mills

Among popular self-help books, the importance of self-esteem is often emphasized; however such books do not usually include a deeper societal analysis of the influence of oppressions and hegemonic cultural norms. There is an over-simplification in the suggestions made to improve self-esteem: the focus is on the individual, with the individual person being seen as ultimately responsible for their own self-healing, as though if a person would only make alternative decisions, or if a person would only believe in herself, she could just one day make the choice to be self-loving. This skewed concept of the individual as having the sole ability for self-transformation does not take into account forces outside the individual's control. We see this attitude quite clearly when some Canadians talk about the homeless, who say, 'If they would go out and get a job, if only they respected themselves enough'. Another example of this kind of belief coming into play is that of women who are depressed: sometimes even friends and families believe that the woman who is depressed could just choose to be more optimistic and to be more energetic, insinuating that she is being lazy and self-indulgent by claiming to be depressed.

What is the meaning of love – for self and for others – in North American society? Feminist writer bell hooks addresses this question in her book, "All About Love". There are some key ideas about love that she puts forth in this work that are particularly significant to the concept of self-love: hooks explains that there is a lack of a common definition of 'love' and asserts that a definition is required. The one she suggests is love as a mix of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility and respect.

In addition, hooks describes love as a verb, rather than a noun, meaning that to claim to love is to claim to act in a loving way. This definition has many useful applications to the concept and practice of self-love: hooks provides the example of partner abuse. Applying hooks' interpretation of love, it becomes harder for abusive partners to claim that they love their victims – abuse and love cannot co-exist as love is only present through actions demonstrating these values of love; abuse has absolutely nothing to do with care, commitment, trust, responsibility or respect.

My focus is on how hooks' definition can be applied to the concept and practice of self-love and how it might promote an understanding of how to act in a self-loving way. Caring for one's self could involve demonstrating commitment to one's self and one's goals and dreams. Trust could be acted out by having trust in one's own judgment, instincts and perceptions. Knowledge can foster self-love: knowledge about oppressive forces and how they can stand in the way of self-love can remind the individual that they may be internalizing racist, sexist, homophobic or xenophobic cultural messages. Taking responsibility for one's own actions is also an important aspect of self-love - it is linked to the notion of self-forgiveness. The final value of respect is also crucial to self-love: to maintain respect for one's self – one's time, one's body, one's skills and experience.

I believe that it is always possible to love one's self. It is important to note here the distinctions between healthy self-love and unhealthy narcissism. When applying bell hooks' definition of love, narcissism can appear to be the same as self-love: one can be narcissistic by caring for one's self, by committing to one's self, and by trusting only in one's self, however narcissism is not characterized by knowledge or responsibility. Self-love differs in that it is about feeling secure enough and confident enough in one's self to be able to engage with the world and with others, learning from others, gaining knowledge and taking responsibility for ourselves and our actions. Self-love is also about acknowledging that we are independent beings, but that we are also interconnected and full growth cannot take place in isolation.





None of us are immune to the influences of society. In order to achieve self-love, it is important to understand that it becomes more difficult when faced with oppression. In North America, there is a hegemonic belief that we live in a system of pure meritocracy and a land of opportunity for all. Meritocracy is the idea that if you only work hard enough you will be successful, largely meaning financially successful. Factors that are outside of the individual's control such as sexism, racism, colonialism, homophobia, xenophobia are not acknowledged as barriers to self-love, nor are they acknowledged as barriers to financial success. In terms of homophobia, it becomes challenging to believe in your right to self-love when ideas about love that are accepted in society are those that conform to heteronormativity, and to strict gender binaries of male/female and nothing in between.

Patriarchy is a barrier to self-love, as is evident from the experiences of women who are survivors of sexual assault. For those that have lived through it, there are many common reactions: feeling guilty, blaming one's self, low self-esteem, feeling dirty and not wanting to be in one's own body. Women who have been raped feel this way in response to living in a rape culture. A rape culture is one that doesn't properly address violence against women and that normalizes sexual violence. This can be seen very clearly in the mainstream media where sex and violence are often concurrently glorified. This is a culture that produces all the

messages and ideas of how to interpret the experience of sexual violence that victims have to negotiate: cultural norms about family and marriage, misogynist interpretations of religion, norms of femininity such as that women are weak, controlled by our bodies, dangerously seductive, emotional, overly sensitive and, in summary, inherently less-than-a-man.

Racism and colonialism create barriers to self-love. Women of colour not only live with dominant norms of femininity, but also with ideas that are the product of colonialism, such as that men and women of colour are more sexual, controlled by the body and more "primitive", while the white man is characterized as being more "civilized", intelligent, controlled by the mind, basing his actions on logic and reason. These tropes persist even today, and contribute towards feelings of self-blame and inadequacy among survivors who are women of colour.

Newcomer men are also oppressed by the notion of being less-than-a-man, ie. less-than-a-white-man. Those who were previously breadwinners in their countries of origin here in Canada face unemployment, underemployment and poverty due to the barriers of language, racism and xenophobia. Having a good job and providing financially for the family have traditionally been associated with masculinity. Lack of employment for newcomer men can cause feelings of emasculation. Prior to immigrating to Canada, newcomers are convinced that their education and employment experience are acceptable. Upon arrival, newcomers are faced with a reality in which their education and employment experiences are deemed worthless. The psychological difficulty of trying to believe in your own self-worth in face of the reality of not being able to gain employment, being stuck in the cycle of poverty that our social assistance programs create, pressure from relatives to be successful and possibly to send back money all create barriers to self-love. The more barriers, the more exhausting it becomes to trust yourself and to believe that you deserve self-love, or to be loved by others.

Keeping all this in mind, how can we foster self-love, in spite of such immense obstacles? Below I will provide some suggestions based on each of bell hooks' values and characteristics of love: care, commitment, knowledge, trust, responsibility and respect, and I will try to explain how these values might guide an individual towards self-love. I will also incorporate the idea of interconnectedness as a better model than the more limited model of the individual having sole responsibility and control over his or her own life and future.

I will also reiterate here hooks' assertion that love should be demonstrated and carried out through action. Self-love is an action, while self-esteem is the result of that action. Self-esteem is similar to self-love in that it involves valuing one's own character, skills and abilities, believing in one's own perceptions and instincts and being able to trust your own opinions and knowledge in order to make decisions independently when

necessary. Self-esteem is the result of a practice of self-love. Achieving a healthy self-esteem is important to survivors of trauma as it leads to greater self-reliance and allows one to reach one's full potential. Once a healthy self-esteem has been developed and maintained by continued self-love, it becomes possible to apply one's self and all one's skills to achieving one's goals.

Self-care can be fostered through community, through the acknowledgement of our inter-connectedness and of the reality that no individual can be happy or experience love in isolation. Self-care can involve seeking out supports and being brave enough to reach out for help. CCVT offers the opportunity for support, through one-on-one settlement and trauma counseling, psychiatric supports, support groups and social gatherings. Friends and family are also important supports - CCVT offers this kind of support through the volunteer befriending program. Family should be recognized as a highly important part of anyone's support system, hence the need for family reunification among newcomer populations. Imagine the challenge and difficulty of being in a new country without the companionship, familiarity and support of one's spouse, one's children or one's parents. These supports are all ways to break isolation and to acknowledge that growth does not happen on the individual level with no outside support or contact. To choose to seek out the supports of services, friends and family is to choose to care for one's self.

It is also important to acknowledge that although the individual may need supports such as those listed above, it is the individual themselves that does the hard work of getting to the appointment, investing energy in being present during counseling and talking about one's most difficult life experiences, going out to look for jobs, attending English classes and being open to change. For this reason, the individual should not be considered weak or inadequate by reaching out for help. In fact, this action requires strength and endurance.

Commitment is also necessary. Self-love is not something that can be achieved overnight – an individual must choose to commit to investing in themselves and to continually accessing supports. A commitment is also required for gaining new knowledge – learning is a life-long process.

Knowledge can come from consciousness-raising – discussion with others that reveals a shared experience. Support groups such as those held at CCVT can facilitate awareness about oppression and injustice and can demonstrate that the problem does not lie with the individual – that the individual is not somehow flawed or incompetent or not trying hard enough. This kind of knowledge can also foster trust in one's self, for example, that one didn't get fired for being incompetent or lacking in some way but that one was fired due to outside forces of discrimination and racism. This knowledge fosters trust in one's own judgment – that it was unfair, that you did do your best, that you are talented and skilled.

There seems to be a link between the two values of responsibility and self-respect: in her article, "Self-Forgiveness and Responsible Moral Agency", Margaret Holmgren provides her interpretation of how self-forgiveness can lead to self-love. She defines self-forgiveness as, "[...] having a just sense of real wrong doing on account of which she experiences negative feelings such as guilt, self-resentment, or self-contempt. In forgiving herself an offender overcomes these attitudes in order to reach [...] self-acceptance, which comprises compassion and love and respect for oneself as a person" (Holmgren, p. 55).

Feminist philosopher Robin S. Dillon also examines the relationship between respect and forgiveness in her article, "Self-Forgiveness and Self-Respect". She troubles the definition offered by Holmgren, reminding the reader that self-forgiveness is not easy to achieve – guilt and shame can be very powerful and difficult to overcome. When consumed by feelings of guilt, one's agency is affected: it becomes harder to feel confident to make decisions or to trust in your own judgment. Guilt and shame affect self-identity and feelings of self-worth; life with full self-consciousness becomes less bearable.

This is where self-compassion comes in. Compassion is defined by the American Heritage Dictionary of the English Language as, "Deep awareness of the suffering of another coupled with the wish to relieve it" (Houghton Mifflin). Perhaps compassion for the self is possible: to develop a deep awareness of one's own suffering as well as the wish to relieve it. In order to develop a deep awareness, it is important to find a



means of naming one's experience through language. This can be achieved collectively through group consciousness-raising, through the creation of new language and terminology or by re-claiming and redefining existing language so that it truly reflects one's experience. Another reason why self-compassion is a useful step towards self-love is that it helps to determine the wish and intent to relieve one's own suffering, but does not imply that it is necessary to have the ability to do so at the present time.

Taking responsibility can also encompass political organizing and a declaration of a clear intent to alleviate one's own suffering and shared suffering with others through activism. Finding ways to take action can help an individual or a group to demonstrate agency – to have a voice, and to feel some control over one's own life.

A deeper societal analysis of the influence of oppressions can spread awareness to the general public, to government officials and to policy-makers. Recognition of the need for interconnectedness to foster growth and self-love transfers the responsibility for healthy self-esteem from the individual alone to the individual in connection with professional supports, family and friends. Connections to community also help to create change that goes beyond the scope of the individual, that goes on to address society and that invites a call for change when injustices occur.

I find hope in the vision of bell hooks, who imagines a society in which all strive to live by an ethic of love – love for self, love and compassion for others that is demonstrated through actions that reflect the values of care, commitment, trust, knowledge, responsibility and respect. Self-love nourishes hope, as in order to heal and to live a rich, successful life, it is necessary to believe in yourself, to believe that you deserve a joyful life and freedom from oppression; self-love is that sustaining faith in one's self and one's value that allows a person to feel hope and to envision a future of achieving her dreams.

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For me, forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?

- bell hooks -

In All about love

## Frankenstein's Message: Life Without Love is Monstrous

John Duncan

In 1818 a 21-year old Mary Shelley published *Frankenstein*—her first novel—the story of which took on a life of its own, replicating itself countless times and in countless ways throughout modern culture. Almost everyone knows the story of the obsessed scientist working alone in his laboratory to artificially create a living being, and succeeding only to lose control of his creation, which then destroys his life. What many do not know is that Shelley's novel is very much a meditation on love, its fundamental importance for humans, and the great danger of turning away from it.

Shelley imagined a young man—Victor Frankenstein—driven by excessive scientific ambition to create a living being. Frankenstein collected parts of large dead bodies—small parts being more difficult with which to work—sembled them together, and brought a huge gruesome man-like being to life—"the creature." Immediately however, there was a problem. So ghastly was the creature in appearance that Frankenstein himself could not bear to look at him. In fact, not a single person in the novel can stand the sight of him. So deeply repulsive is Frankenstein's monster that everyone who sees him is driven to detest him. Shelley created a character whose appearance made it impossible for him to be loved.

Certainly Shelley did not have to write the novel this way. For example, she could have made the creature much less repulsive in appearance, and perhaps jealous or malicious at heart, and still produced a compelling story in which a creature turned against its human creator. But Shelley made the creature strictly unlovable, and we readers, to whom the novel is ultimately addressed, and who alone may care about the creature, are obliged to ask why.

Two replies arise from the novel. The first is that Shelley sought to portray what it would be like for a being capable of love to be absolutely refused love. The second is that Shelley explored the monstrous results of turning away from love, for that is precisely what Frankenstein does as he assembles the creature, leading eventually to the destruction of all that is dear to him.

Many more have seen at least one of the film versions of the Frankenstein story than have read Shelley's novel, which is a shame. Although the film versions have their charms, because the reader's inability to see the creature is crucial to how the novel works the films deviate necessarily from the novel. Because the creature is composed of the parts of mature bodies rather than infant bodies, he is physically mature when he is brought to life, which seems to speed his psychological development. Although Frankenstein abandons him as soon as he creates him, by observing people from the periphery, the creature manages to pick up an education quite quickly. Later on, Shelley has the creature tell Frankenstein his life-story, which allows readers to glimpse the creature's psychological development from the inside. We read of his developing perceptions, reactions, desires, aversions, etc, all of which turn out to be the sorts of psychological events that any normal person would experience in comparable circumstances. Thus the reader comes to identify and sympathise with a character that is absolutely rejected by every character that sees him. We experience the creature's appreciation for moving literature, and his tender affection for others, and we sympathise with his longing for companionship.



Richard Rothwell's portrait of Mary Shelley

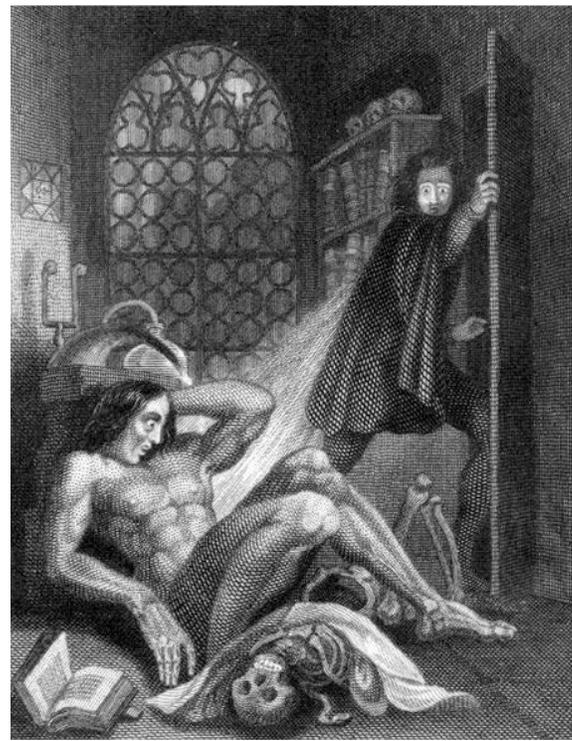


Illustration by Theodor von Holst from the frontispiece of the 1831 edition

Like human beings, he has the capacity to love. But he is unlovable.

Identification with the creature is as inevitable as is the complete rejection the creature faces throughout the novel. The creature is moved by compassion to help others; he tries to communicate with them, and he longs for companionship, but in each and every encounter, as soon as he is seen, his ghoulish looks render him utterly repellent. Privy to the love the creature has to give, and the yearning he has to be loved, readers begin to expect that some character in the novel will come to see beyond his exterior and befriend him, but Shelley quashes all such expectations. We experience the creature's repeated rejections keenly. After each rejection we are moved to understand a little better the fact that the creature is insurmountably repulsive on sight.

At one point the creature decides to attempt to communicate with a very kind and virtuous family he has been admiring in secret. He begins with the blind father, and things seem to go well, but when the mature children return home to see the creature with their father they are so shocked that they beat him off with blows and move away never to return. Not even the deepest kindness and virtue can see beyond the creature's monstrous appearance.

Frankenstein himself, the very creator—almost the father—of the creature, eventually has a long conversation with the

creature, and so has the opportunity to learn a great deal about his clearly human feelings and concerns. However, after the conversation Frankenstein does not change his basic view that the creature, unbearable to look at, is utterly despicable.

In a film, through repeated exposure to the creature's image we might become accustomed to even a very disgusting looking creature, a phenomenon likely to be accelerated if we were to follow the monster's very human inner life. However, in the novel, we generate the creature's inner life in our own imaginations—our inner lives—and we are given no image to which to become accustomed. Thus expecting that someone must be able to befriend the creature, each rejection is something of a shock to the reader, wherein the shocks themselves constitute the un-see-able, and almost unimaginable monstrousness of the creature.

The result is that readers come face to face with the merciless denial of love; unbearable for the creature, hate and destructive reprisals ensue, and he knows all too well that the latter vices are the product of the former privation. "I am malicious because I am miserable" (119). "My vices are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor" (121). He also knows that if someone cares for him, if he is able to "live in communion," "my virtues will necessarily arise... I shall feel the affections of a sensitive being and become linked to the chain of existence and events, from which I am now excluded" (121). The creature understands that he is subject to a brutal frustration of his natural human-like needs to love and be loved, but that if just one being with similar needs were able to care for him, his turn to malice would be reversed.

Shelley's portrayal of what it would be like to be excluded from the love of every other person prompts us to consider how much each life depends on relations with others. Participation in "the chain of existence and events" depends on interaction with other persons. From one's family and friends on the one hand, to the market and state administration on the other hand, people participate through relationships. No relationships, no participation. No participation, no life. Furthermore, Shelley suggests that integration in the circle of a caring relationship may be sufficient to turn a person from the path of destruction to the path of virtue—love as therapy.

The second reason Shelley made the creature strictly unlovable, I have suggested, was to explore the monstrous results of turning away from love. Frankenstein turns away from his family and friends in order to produce the creature, the result of which is an unlovable being in whom misery turns to malice, which ultimately destroys the very family and friends from whom Frankenstein turned away. Thus the creature—as unlovable being—is the product of turning away from love, and we must follow Shelley from the creature to his creator, from the monstrous to its source.

A crucially important way Frankenstein turns away from love is by discontinuing correspondence with his friends and family back home. “I wished ... to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature, should be completed” (37). By ceasing to reply to the letters he receives, Frankenstein turns away from concrete expressions of the love of his family and friends. This is especially significant because Shelley made *Frankenstein* an epistolary novel. The entire novel is presented as a series of letters written by a man named Walton. The expedition leader Walton is undertaking a perilous journey of scientific discovery through the northern seas to the pole, and on the way he rescues Frankenstein from an ice flow. Dying, Frankenstein tells his story to Walton, and it is in Walton’s letters to his sister that we read the whole of the story of the creature. Undoubtedly, Shelley thought it fitting to construct her novel out of personal letters because the letter is a wonderful concrete manifestation of love. One makes the effort and takes the time to correspond with another in order to relay one’s cares to him or her, and to read his or her cares, all within the realm of intimacy and in order to maintain a relationship. Thus within a novel whose very message is, as I am arguing, love, and which is epistolary in form, Frankenstein’s turn away from personal correspondence during the very period in which he creates the unlovable instrument of his destruction is no accident.

Walton is in some important respects very much like Frankenstein. Both risk almost everything to realize a great scientific discovery. Turning away from companionship and toward his own ambitious project, Frankenstein created the monster that destroyed his life. Walton was on a very similar path, leading an expedition into treacherous icy waters in order to discover the secrets of the polar region.

It is instructive to note that when Frankenstein hears of the crew members’ fears and wishes to turn back, he attempts to rally them to continue Walton’s expedition.

Oh! be men, or be more than men. Be steady to your purposes, and firm as a rock. This ice is not made of such stuff as your hearts might be; it is mutable, cannot withstand you, if you say that it shall not. Do not return to your families with the stigma of disgrace marked on your brows. Return as heroes who have fought and conquered, and who know not what it is to turn their backs on the foe. (183)

Instead of learning from his own mistakes, even after both living through and recounting to Walton the long story of the ruinous consequences of his ambitious pursuits, Frankenstein urges Walton’s crew members to follow dangerous ambition, and not to return to their loved ones. He is irremediably and tragically flawed by ambition.

In contrast, Walton does not stop writing letters to his sister—indeed the entire novel is composed of those very letters. Furthermore, from the beginning, Walton has a keen sense of the companionship he lacks—as keen as the creature’s sense of his own longing for affection. Early on, Walton tells his sister “I greatly need a friend” (9). During his final days, Frankenstein fills the role of Walton’s friend, and it is partly Frankenstein’s story that persuades Walton to turn back for his crew’s sake, but also the fact that Walton never turns away completely from openness to others. Early in Walton’s expedition, when he is putting together his crew, he encounters a man whose story, he recognizes, manifests the necessary element of self-sacrifice at the heart of genuine love. The ship’s “master” had been betrothed to a woman he loved but who fell in love with another man. The woman’s father approved of the marriage to the master who had some wealth, but would not approve of the marriage to the lover who had none. Rather than make the woman he loved marry him even though she loved another, the master gave his wealth to his rival and convinced the father to approve their marriage. The master—“heroically generous” in Walton’s words—sacrificed his own interests when he saw that the one he loved would flourish with another. “What a noble fellow! you will exclaim,” Walton writes to his sister, “He is so; but ... he has passed his life on board a vessel, and has scarcely an idea beyond the rope and the shroud” (10). In some sense, Shelley is saying that love is natural. Untutored seamen (as well as the creature) are capable of love simply by virtue of being human flesh. “[E]ven in these rugged bosoms,” if we discard what is worthless and

superficial, noble “feelings... beat” (9). The generosity of doing for those we care for what is best for them, regardless of our own interests, is noble and heroic, and Walton has always been able to recognise it as such.

Throughout his life, Frankenstein meets with instances of such generosity, but they do not inspire him sufficiently. Indeed, at one point Frankenstein’s own betrothed worries that he no longer loves her and so, out of the same self-sacrificing love that motivated the master’s heroic generosity, she offers him his freedom. “I confess to you ... that I love you,” she writes, “But it is your happiness I desire as well as my own, when I declare to you, that our marriage would render me eternally miserable, unless it were the dictate of your own free choice” (158). Frankenstein is certainly moved by such expressions of love, and he does grasp the message of the novel at times, which gives his character depth and interest. But if he is no mere cardboard character, a comparison of him with Walton shows that the latter is sufficiently moved by expressions of love to be able to turn back from the temptations of ambition before it is too late. The same cannot be said of Frankenstein, and as we have seen, he recommends ambition to the bitter end.

Much earlier, while Frankenstein worked on the creature he began to realise that his project was not right, and he began to detest the work (well before there was a complete creature to detest). Something in him was unhappy with the work, but he refused to heed his own distress and soldiered on. Later, he says to Walton: “If the study to which you apply yourself has a tendency to weaken your affections...then that study is certainly ... not befitting the human mind” (37). Shelley has Frankenstein express a kind of Rousseauian view about the importance of preserving natural affections, the weakening of which is a form of degeneration (see Duncan). Frankenstein goes on to say that if such natural affections had been properly preserved, “Greece had not been enslaved; Caesar would have spared his country; America would have been discovered more gradually, and the empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed” (38). Refusing to heed the signs of degeneration in his own natural affections, Frankenstein fell into a tragic enslavement which led ultimately to the destruction of his world.

In the creature we see what happens to one who is denied love. In Frankenstein we see what happens when one turns away from love. The argument of the novel is that love is fundamental—natural—but it can be denied and snubbed, with monstrous results. In Walton we see that we can be recalled to love and the interests of others, and Shelley asks us to consider whether heeding the call of love might help to preserve entire communities. Might it save a Greece, a Rome, a Mexico, or a Peru? Might it save a Canada, an America, an Afghanistan, or an Iraq? That would be a tall order, but if we kept the channels open, and kept others’ interests in mind, Shelley gives us some reason to believe, the world might be that much better.

A novel is a kind of letter, from the author to the reader, and in the case of *Frankenstein*, the letter contains a message we are asked to consider: life without love is monstrous. For readers who are like Walton, *Frankenstein* may help reveal the importance of love in a world that often seems to be eclipsed by careerism, competition, profit, instrumentality, bureaucracy, militarism, indifference, and propaganda. Indeed, in such a world, where the lives of many are frequently violated, and sometimes with shocking brutality, returning to Shelley’s meditation on the fundamental and therapeutic nature of love would seem worthwhile.

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**Est-ce qu'on peut  
juger la culture à  
laquelle on  
appartient ? Peut-on  
aussi être une  
victime d'une autre  
culture qu'on vienne  
s'embrasser?**

Jackie Gakumba

**Should we judge the  
culture to which we  
belong ? Is it possible,  
moreover, to fall  
victim to a culture  
that we have  
wholeheartedly  
embraced?**

Translated by Dorna Mossallanajed

De temps à temps on est perdus et dégoûtés de ce que l'on est devenu par rapport à là on était ou d'où on vient. On dit que l'être humain est libre, mais quand on y pense vraiment ce n'est pas tout à fait vrai. Dans plusieurs cas, la société dans la quelle on a choisie de vivre ou on n'a pas choisie (ici je parle comme les réfugiés) modifie négativement et positivement notre vue, notre personne et notre quotidien. Et lorsque l'on est dans une nouvelle société, la pression à l'entente dans une nouvelle culture est par moment trop intégrée que l'on se sent coupable d'être différent. C'est là où l'on peut se révolter en se demandant si l'on est bien placé pour commenter voire même juger la sévérité de la culture à laquelle on appartient.

Dans l'extrême exemple des survivants de génocides, de conflits de guerres ou de tortures, on ne peut pas dire que tous arrivent à trouver la force pour ainsi donner un sens à leur nouvelle vie! Un petit pourcentage de ces derniers choisit d'oublier le passé et se reconstruire en s'adaptant à leur culture adoptive. La douleur et la haine sont d'une forte intensité qui devait être un moteur de transformation en êtres libres. Si les survivants pourraient ouvrir les yeux et leurs esprits, ça pourrait leur donner le courage d'examiner leur façon de vivre avec la douleur et de trouver une autre manière de revivre pleinement. D'ailleurs il ya un proverbe Rwandais qui

From time to time we feel lost and disgusted of what we have become when we consider where we were, and where we came from. It is said that human beings are free, but when we really think about it, this is not entirely true. In many instances, the society in which we chose or did not choose to live (such is the case of refugees) impacts – whether negatively or positively – our view, the person we become, and our daily lives. And once one is in a new society, the pressure to fit into the new culture is, at times, so built-in that we feel guilty for being different. It is in this instance that it becomes possible to rebel by asking if we are well-placed to comment – even to judge – the severity of the culture to which we belong.

In the extreme example of genocide, war, and torture survivors, we cannot say that they all successfully find the strength to give meaning to their new lives in such a way. A small percentage of such survivors choose to forget the past and rebuild themselves by adapting to the adopted culture. The pain and the hatred are very intense, and should be a vehicle for transformation into free beings. If the survivors could open their eyes and their minds, it could give them the courage to examine their way of living with pain, and find another way to start living fully again. Moreover, there is a Rwandan proverb which says: "The bird who has never left his tree cannot know that elsewhere there exists sorghum"; however, this is often easy to miss. Because of ignorance, fear of the unknown, and lack of information

dit « **L'oiseau qui n'a jamais quitté son tronc d'arbre, ne peut savoir qu'ailleurs il y a du sorgho** » ; mais souvent ceci n'est pas évident. Peu nombreux choisissent parfois même ne choisissent pas ce chemin à cause de l'ignorance et la peur de l'inconnue et leur manque d'informations pertinentes à leur séjour dans le nouveau monde. Et enfin, l'être humain est un être de routine et déteste le changement, ainsi que la procédure d'intégration. Il ne veut pas apprendre de l'expérience des autres, et veut toujours voir les autres et avoir un autre point de vue du monde basé sur son expérience antérieure.

Une des questions que je me pose souvent c'est quoi la culture? Bien qu'il n'y ait pas de définition exacte pour tous les dictionnaires, l'anthropologie donne un point de base correcte qui dit que: «**La culture est le système de croyances, de valeurs, les coutumes, les comportements que les membres de l'utilisation de la société pour faire face à leur monde et un avec l'autre, et qui sont transmis de génération en génération et ce par apprentissage** ». Comme chaque individu vient d'une famille avec une vision fondamentalement unique, croyances, valeurs et coutumes, on pourrait ainsi dire que chaque changement de pays pour s'intégrer dans un nouveau, devient comme un mariage "interculturelle." Mais comme dans un mariage où chaque conjoint provient de différentes origines ethniques, il y a non seulement la transition de deux individus uniques, il y a aussi un pont entre deux cultures différentes. Prenez le cas des occidentaux et des africains dans leurs propres valeurs culturelles.

Par exemple: considérant que la culture occidentale a des valeurs typiquement basées sur l'individualisme, les droits et les privilèges, l'égalité et l'affirmation de soi, la culture africaine a des valeurs de collectivisme, le devoir et l'obligation, d'hierarchie et de l'auto-effacement. Pas très étonnant que le choc de cultures se produise! Juger la culture à la quelle on appartient se doit d'être positive et constructive à travers des pratiques sans préjugés. Les préjugés nuisent beaucoup à l'objectivité de la pratique comparative aux autres cultures et la notre. Une meilleure compréhension entre personnes de cultures différentes doit être créée. Il permet également aux gens d'apprendre des autres et d'améliorer leur propre culture. Il permet également aux gens de modifier leur comportement tout en respectant les personnes de culture différente ; ce qui est cependant utile et souhaitable.



that is pertinent to their stay in the new world, few choose this route. And lastly, human beings are by nature routine-oriented and hate change, which is precisely what the process of integration requires of them. They are unwilling to learn from the experiences of others, and always want a point of view based on their own prior experiences.

A question that I often ask myself is, what is culture? Although there is no definition common to all dictionaries, anthropology gives a useful starting point, which states that: "Culture is a system of beliefs, values, customs, and behaviours that members of a society use when facing the world and each other, and that are transmitted from one generation to the next." Since each individual comes from a family with a fundamentally unique vision, beliefs, values, and customs, each change of country and subsequent integration into a new country can be likened to an "intercultural" marriage. But like a marriage in which the spouses come from different ethnic backgrounds, it is not simply that there are differences between two unique individuals – there is also the vast gap that often results between two entirely different cultures. Let us examine the case of Westerners and their cultural norms as compared to those of Africans.

Consider the fact that Western culture has values typically based on individualism, rights and privileges, and the equality of people and affirmation of the self; whereas African culture has values of collectivism, duty and obligation, hierarchy, and self-effacement. It is thus not very surprising that culture shock should result! Judging the culture to which we belong should be done in a positive and constructive way, and through non-prejudiced means. Prejudice detracts a great deal from the objectivity of practical comparison between other cultures and our own. A

Malheureusement, souvent nous jugeons les valeurs des cultures sans connaissance objective de ce que leurs pratiques culturelles sont, ou comment ceux-ci sont adaptées aux situations particulières rencontrées dans des environnements différents. Souvent, dans de tels cas, les gens ont un point de vue exagéré de la réalité des pratiques.

Habituellement, cela mène aux gens de juger les cultures avec un regard négatif. Ceci ainsi crée le désaccord et les conflits. Si on ne porte pas attention à la façon dont on compare les cultures, cela nous mène souvent à regarder de bas notre propre culture, bien sur quand on remarque des pratiques libres non incorporées dans nos propres cultures.

Etre victime de la culture que l'on a nouvellement embrassée est très courant pour les enfants des immigrants ainsi que leurs parents. Un parent qui a des valeurs culturelles encrées dans son approche familial peut victimiser ses propres enfants sans se rendre compte que ce qu'il fait n'est pas acceptable dans sa société adoptive. Les enfants se sentent incompris et victimes à cause du refus des parents de s'adapter à la société. Par exemple, le fait de gifler ou donner des fessées aux enfants à titre de punition est considéré comme un acte criminel dans beaucoup de pays occidentaux. Les parents deviennent ainsi victimes de la société qui les a reçus. Les enfants qui grandissent dans une société telle que la notre, ont souvent tendance à rendre leurs parents victimes tout en rapportant aux autorités locales de ces pratiques non adéquates à la société qui les a accueillis.

Pour conclure, je dirai que les gens ne veulent pas exprimer le mépris qu'ils ont pour la société de l'objet de critiques. Juger les pratiques culturelles et ses fonctions implique potentiellement être d'origine de la culture à critiquer. Un individu devrait être en mesure de juger ce qui n'est pas utile d'avoir en tant que valeur dans sa propre culture. Condamner une pratique particulière ne veut pas dire que la culture est sur la totalité erronée, ou qu'elle est généralement inférieure à toute autre culture. Cette culture pourrait avoir de nombreuses caractéristiques admirables. Toutefois, un commentaire objectif sur une culture nécessite néanmoins une approche de tolérance totale. Par la suite, la même pratique doit être dans un contexte hypothétique culturel et le statut consensuel de la croyance dans la culture-accord ou de désaccord.

La tolérance est sans aucun doute une vertu. Dans une société tolérante, les communautés devraient être



better framework for understanding the differences between people from different cultural backgrounds must be created. Such a framework not only permits people to learn from others and to improve their own culture, but also allows them to modify their behaviour whilst respecting persons from a different cultural background. Both of these are useful and desirable characteristics.

Unfortunately, we often judge the values of other cultures without objective knowledge of their cultural practices, or how these practices are adapted to particular situations and in different settings. Often, in these cases, people have an exaggerated viewpoint of such practices and how they apply to reality.

Normally, this leads to the judging of other cultures with a negative eye, and creates disagreement and conflict. If we are not careful about the way in which we compare cultures, this can lead us to look down upon our own culture. This is the case, for example, when we notice free practices not incorporated in our cultures.

Being a victim to the culture that we have just come to embrace is very common to immigrant children and their parents alike. Parents who have cultural values engrained in their familial approach can victimize their children without realizing that what they are doing is not acceptable in their adoptive societies. Children in these cases feel misunderstood and victimized because of their parents' refusal to adapt to the new society. For example, slapping or spanking children as a way of punishment is considered a criminal act in many Western countries. Immigrant parents who continue this practice thus become victims of the society that has received them. It is in such ways that children unintentionally create victims of their parents, all while presenting a facet of non-suited practices to the local authorities of the new society that has welcomed them.

prêtes à vivre dans une coopération pacifique avec celles qui voient les choses différemment. Selon moi, il n'y a rien dans la nature de la tolérance qui nous oblige à dire que toutes les croyances, toutes les religions et toutes les pratiques sociales sont tout aussi admirables. Au contraire, si nous ne pensons pas que certains sont mieux que les autres, il n'y aurait rien pour nous de tolérer. Tolérer, c'est aussi être capable de sortir de votre propre culture, de la comparer aux autres et voir ce qu'il y a lieu et ce en utilisant le bon sens, tout en ayant une vue totalement impartiale.

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4. Dominique massaux. Fiche de lecture 2003. Enseignant : Yvon Pesqueux .....
5. en Conseil de la 'Columbia University', Edwin C. Nevis devient thérapeute et

To conclude, I would say that people do not want to express the mistrust they feel towards societies that are the object of criticism. Inherent in judging cultural practices and functions lies the potential of being part of the judged culture. Thus, individuals should be able to judge what they do not find useful in terms of values in their own culture. Condemning a particular practice does not mean that the culture as a whole is erroneous, or that it is inferior to other cultures. On the contrary, the culture may have many admirable characteristics. Nevertheless, the objective critique of a culture necessitates a completely tolerant approach. Then, that same practice must, in a hypothetical cultural context, be consensually approved or dismissed.

Tolerance is without any doubt a virtue. In a tolerant society, communities are prepared to live in peace-loving cooperation with those who see things differently. In my view, there is nothing in the nature of tolerance that obliges us to say that all beliefs, religions, and social practices are equally admirable. Quite to the contrary, if we did not believe that some qualities were better than others, there would be nothing of which to be tolerant. Tolerance also implies the capacity to take a step back from your own culture and compare it to others, all while exercising sound judgement and, to the extent possible, a completely impartial point of view.

*\*Jackie Gakumba has worked as a Trauma/ Settlement Counsellor at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture since 2006.*

We have the ability to achieve, if we master the necessary goodwill, a common global society blessed with a shared culture of peace that is nourished by the ethnic, national and local diversities that enrich our lives.

Mahnaz Afkhami

# On Forgiveness

Ezat Mossallanajed

The contemporary South African novelist, Gillian Slovo, has marvelously resolved the dilemma of forgiving one's torturer or killers of close relatives during the period of transition. Her mother, Ruth First, was assassinated by the security forces of the apartheid regime. Years later, her father, Joe Slovo, contributed towards the creation of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission in post apartheid South Africa that considered granting amnesty to the assassin of Gillian's mother. Let us learn from Gillian's personal reflections:

“The reconciliation that I experienced was with what happened, not with the perpetrators. And this for me is the important thing about TRC that it helps a whole society reconcile itself to its past without ignoring or denying it.” (1)

It is easy to grasp from Gillian's experience that her idea of justice is by no means retributive. Punishment should serve objectives such as correction, deterrence, rehabilitation, reformation, reparation and cure. These objectives are accompanied with the ultimate idea of forgiveness, extended even to the perpetrators of heinous crimes, both at the individual and social levels.

The dilemma of forgiveness stems from the fact that all culprits ask for pardon and, while granted, they repeat the same actions. Therefore, forgiveness must be attached to certain conditions. The perpetrators should show their sincere efforts to overcome their normal sense of denial and expose their past vices in all dimensions. They must show that they are willing to pay their debt to their victims and to the society as a whole.

It is impossible to reform perpetrators until and unless they acquire a new conscience. This new understanding should guide them to care for survivors more than they do for themselves. They must feel remorse and accept punishment in order to get emotional peace. According to the Bosnian scholar and linguist, Prof. Smail Balić, “evil cannot be offset by good when there is no genuine remorse.” (2) There is no doubt that remorse and repentance serve no purpose if not accompanied by practical measures by perpetrators to reform themselves and compensate their victims.

There is a need for the victims and the society as a whole to develop the idea of ultimate forgiveness. We need to have both retrospective and prospective attitudes. The idea of looking back to the crime should serve the purpose of looking forward to the future of the society. I never forget the great Indian political leader and theorist Jaya Prakash Narayan (1902-1979) who always pushed Indian authorities to reform criminals. I came to know about him on my first trip to India in 1977. In those days there was a well known criminal and smuggler in Bombay (called Mombay today) by the name of Haji Mastan who used to run a gang of organized criminals. The late Jaya Prakash Narayan tried single-handedly to reform the notorious Haji Mastan by meeting and talking with him frequently. Haji Mastan, encouraged by JP, closed down his shop and reduced his criminal activities. People of Bombay heaved a sigh of relief.

I agree with the Nobel Prize Laureate, Wole Soyinka, that “capacity to forgive enemy is based on love, at least a certain doctrine of love.” (3) The transitional society that has emancipated itself from the regime of hate and terror must develop a new and all embracing perspective of love. Loving the enemy has a powerful healing impact both on victims and on the entire society.

Notes:

1. Gillian Slovo, “Truth and Reconciliation in South Africa,” in footnote No. 6, p. 50.
2. As quoted in Simon Wiesenthal, *The Sunflower: On the Possibilities and Limits of Forgiveness*, Schocken Books, New York, p. 111. Prof. Balić's remark is in repose to the following question put before him and other contributors by the book's author, Simon Wiesenthal: “You are a prisoner in a concentration camp, a dying Nazi soldier asks for your forgiveness. What would you do?”
3. Wole Soyinka, *The Burden of Memory, the Muse of Forgiveness*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, New York 1999, p. 98.

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## An Unfinished Dialogue

Paulina Wyrzykowski & Hagar Afek-Levv

**At the start of World War II the Jewish population of Poland was more than three million. In some towns, Jews constituted more than fifty percent of the population. By the time the war ended, barely 11% of those people were still alive, and a way of life, as well as a significant portion of both Jewish and Polish history, had been wiped out.**

*Hagar Afek Levy (Schmeidler) was born in a small town near the Sea of Galilee in Israel and immigrated to Canada last year. Her father, who was born in Poland in 1939, was one of the lucky ones that survived the Holocaust as a child thanks to help from his parents' Polish friends. He came to Israel when he was ten years old, and considered himself neither a survivor nor Polish. Hagar has travelled to Poland several times in search of her roots, and has worked as a Holocaust educator emphasizing the universal aspects of racism. She has worked with survivors and wrote biographies about the unique route that every one of them took from his or her own Holocaust to a life of productiveness and "normality". She has a particular interest in telling the stories as a powerful tool for healing and transforming painful memories.*



Hagar Afek Levy

*Hagar speaks:*

Thinking about the first time I became aware of the Holocaust is like trying to remember when I became aware that there is a sky. It was always there, part of the air. At a certain age you start asking questions. The "remembrance day for the Holocaust and courage" held on the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising, was simply one day in a chain of days that tell the history of the Jews: Hanukkah (commemorating the time evil Greeks tried to convert all the Jews), Purim (when a Persian politician planned to kill all the Jews), Passover (wicked Egyptian king enslaved the Jews and wanted to kill them), Holocaust day, and remembrance day for those who died in wars with those Arab nations that didn't accept Israel's existence. All these days marked occasions when mean people wanted to kill the Jews and divine providence, along with the courage of the few who stood proud and tall, saved them. On Holocaust day in Israel, radio and television play only sad music and survivors tell their story. At school we held special ceremonies and stood at attention for two minutes as an alarm was sounded throughout the state. It wasn't until I got a little older that I realized while grownups were happy enough to tell me all about the sky, they were reluctant to give me the other, darker, answers I needed.

We didn't really learn about the Holocaust as a historical event. The details were "recruited" for the ideology: the answer to those who want to kill us is the Jewish state. The courage of the Warsaw ghetto fighters was a symbol of the "new Jew" - taking action, strong, proud. The fragility of life, the death of so many was incomprehensible anyway. I felt special on Holocaust day because I had a family connection even though my father, born in Poland in 1939, didn't consider himself a "survivor" and wanted nothing to do with Polish identity. As a newcomer to Israel at the age of ten he made great efforts to assimilate in this new place that defined itself in opposition to the Jewish diaspora and the way of life, and death, it symbolized.

The survivors who came to the new country had to adjust to the new place, build lives and families. The Jews that had moved to Palestine under the British mandate were from the same Eastern Europe, mostly from the same families. The huge difference was that they had looked to the future and left the "old Jew" behind them. The "Holocaust story" fit into the Israeli national narrative as the ultimate proof that the Zionist movement had been right. They had foreseen the future and had urged all Jews to return to Palestine before the war. The suffering of individual survivors, their helplessness and painful memories did not fit in. There was a feeling that these "weak" Jews, having survived the Holocaust, should have stayed behind in Europe. In Israel there was room only for the "new Jew", prepared to build the country and to fight for its existence.

Under such circumstances survivors felt they could not tell their stories, and in most cases invested themselves in creating new lives to replace the ones that had been cruelly destroyed. Marriages happened without compatibility, just young people simply celebrating the fact that they are alive. These flawed families, their secrets and hidden pain nurtured what is considered the "second generation" of survivors. These children speak of how hard it is for one's life to be no more than a tribute for the ones who had died. They were not permitted weaknesses; the fact of their existence was to be the ultimate triumph over the Nazis' genocidal plans. Although the Holocaust was rarely mentioned in such families, many of these second generation children recall being awakened by their parents' screaming at night and terrified in the morning by their parents' denial. It was only during the 80s that the memory of the Holocaust became less politicized and more nuanced and individual in Israel. As the second generation reached adulthood and the survivors aged, they felt the need to tell their personal stories before it was too late.

For many Israelis, the Holocaust is a justification for maintaining a strong army, remaining totally independent and trusting no-one. Some Holocaust survivors feel proud to visit Auschwitz with army delegations, and having a strong army and a free state where Jews can feel safe is a great consolation when faced with the meaningless death of so many.

For myself, I felt that this was not enough. I came to believe that there are more lessons that can and should be learned from the darkest days of humanity. This is why I began to read about the Holocaust, speak with survivors, and why I eventually became a Holocaust educator. I discovered narratives other than the Jewish one: the Nazi narrative, the Polish one, the Russian, the Roma, and so on. With each individual account and each new perspective, the Jewish story expands and gains new context. One of the books that really opened my eyes was "***If This Is a Man***" by Auschwitz survivor Primo Levi. The more I learned about the Holocaust and other genocides, the more I came to believe that the Holocaust was not just a Jewish story, but a human story featuring victims, victimizers, and, most fascinating, the silent majority that allowed horrible things to happen. I took the Holocaust as my point of origin, and came to see it as a reason to stand up against human rights violations no matter who the perpetrators may be.

In the Jewish Holocaust narrative, the Poles, as well as the Germans, are often painted as the villains.

My family survived thanks to the Poles, friends of my grandmother who risked their lives to help her. Yet despite such accounts, the sense of betrayal in the Jewish community runs deep. Most of the Holocaust survivors I worked with emphasized their anger at the Polish neighbors who, at the very least, benefitted from their "disappearance". They tell stories about Polish policeman who took part in the deportation and Polish informers who betrayed Jews for two kilograms of flour and a bottle of vodka, taking over their property without conscience, murdering Jews during and after the war. After the Holocaust, my grandmother, proud, and well rooted in Polish culture, wrote in a Polish Catholic magazine: "What the Germans did made me not trust the Germans. What the Poles did made me not trust my fellow human beings."

My perspective on the Polish role in the Holocaust changed the more I learned about the subject. I learned, for example, that it was more dangerous to help Jews in Poland than in any other country under Nazi

occupation (doing so carried the death penalty not only for the individual, but often for their entire family or village), and yet despite this, Poland has the highest number of the “Righteous Among Nations” (those individuals recognized by Israel as having helped to save Jews during the war). I also came to believe that the two communities, Polish and Jewish, had been so isolated from one another before the war that it is difficult to speak of a moral obligation on the part of Poles to risk their lives for virtual strangers. Even before the Nazi occupation, Jews were the “other” and anti-Semitic rhetoric was an everyday part of Polish politics. Intermarriage was almost unheard of. All this made it easier for me to understand, if not always justify, Polish indifference, since I too had been brought up in a Zionist family to believe Jews outside Israel would never assimilate fully into any other country, but would always remain outsiders and be seen as such.

I was drawn to learn about the historical, psychological and practical mechanism of genocide. I learned about dictatorships in Latin America, and about the apartheid in South Africa, the Armenian genocide and Stalin's gulags. The progression was fascinating: it never happened overnight. The de-humanization, the isolation, and the fear- it was all the same, with only minor variations. Within everyone there is the capability to become a murderer. There are no guarantees; anyone can become a victim, and most people are inclined to become bystanders.

The ways in which the Holocaust affected my family are implicit in the ways we relate to the world and each other. A lot of morbid sense of humor and putting a great emphasis on what is really important: education (because they cannot take your knowledge), empathy for the ones less fortunate than us – those are the humanistic values we were taught. We didn't value money or property, which can be taken. My father was looking for a place where he would feel at home. He was looking for his roots as far as possible from Poland. He became the storyteller of a village in the northern part of Israel. I looked for my roots too, while trying to make sense of this entire Holocaust subject.



**Paulina Wyrzykowski**

*Paulina Wyrzykowski is a human rights lawyer and activist who emigrated from Poland with her family at the age of ten. She has worked with refugees in Canada, Egypt and Uganda, and has a particular interest in transitional justice initiatives aimed at holding the perpetrators of past human rights abuses accountable in post-conflict settings.*

*Paulina speaks:*

I can pinpoint exactly the moment at which I became aware of the Holocaust as a discrete event because of how it shook my understanding of the world. It was about two years after my family and I first immigrated from Poland, and I was twelve years old. The junior high school I attended invited a Holocaust survivor to tell her story during Holocaust memorial week. The woman who came was a Polish Jew. I don't remember the account itself, but I do remember the shock of realizing that she and I did not share a common historical narrative. Like many Polish children, I had grown up steeped in Polish history and in the history of WWII in particular - one of my grandfathers spent part of the war in a concentration camp because of our family's involvement in the resistance, the other enlisted at fifteen to fight the Nazis. I had been born and lived in Warsaw, a city nearly completely destroyed after the Warsaw Uprising in 1944, and like you, had taken for granted the various state-sanctioned anniversaries officially commemorating Polish heroism or martyrdom. In Communist Poland, however, the Holocaust was not acknowledged as unique - I had been taught at length about concentration camps, but I learned about them as places where the Nazis sent anyone they did not like: Jews, communists, resistance fighters and intellectuals. At twelve, I had no consciousness of the difference between Auschwitz the labor camp and Auschwitz the death camp. It was with a

sense of real shock and a kind of disorientation that I came to realize, as the survivor spoke, that she was describing the Holocaust as a uniquely Jewish fate. I had started out from a position of commonality - excited that finally someone was coming to talk to Canadian kids who I thought were pretty ignorant about the war that my family knew and spoke so much about. It was hard for me to accept that the speaker did not share this assumption and that she spoke of herself as Jewish, but never as also Polish.

Like you, it took me a long time to see how the Polish historical narrative was manipulated for the benefit of the Communist state and its idea of nation building. There was no room, in all of that heroism, for ambiguities. Poles were always victims, never the victimizers. Individual narratives were publicly acceptable only if they matched the official version of events and the result was a culture of selective silence both in the public sphere and within individual families which is only now starting to change. It's a mechanism that I was first confronted with that day at school as a twelve year old, but which I didn't really begin to understand until more than a decade later, when I started to work with political refugees and trauma survivors from other parts of the world. Listening to their testimonies taught me what questions to ask, when a lack of continuity in someone's narrative could be a clue to missing parts of the story. It's only then that I began to hear the same silences in my own family's history and in Polish history more generally. It was hearing about other genocides that brought me back to the Holocaust, but also to the other historical traumas my family has been witness to, the complexities of trying to retain some kind of ethical integrity in a succession of oppressive regimes. In this way my journey was a mirror reflection of yours; you took the Holocaust as your point of origin and came to see it as a reason to stand up against human rights violations no matter who the perpetrators may be; I began by working with modern genocide survivors and that led me to look again at the Holocaust and my own history.

You speak about how the Holocaust continues to play out in modern Israeli consciousness, both politically and at an individual family level, and I can't help seeing the parallels between that and the role played by historical narrative in Poland. Poland has a long history of suffering from both German and Russian aggression, and the Polish political discourse is often dominated by notions of martyrdom, this idea that Poland is uniquely victimized among nations and perpetually threatened by external forces against which it must remain vigilant. Such an identity rejects any inquiry into the possibility of Polish wrongdoing as an attempt to demoralize and weaken the nation. Again, this is beginning to shift, and some prominent voices are calling for a less embattled, more constructive national identity. One sign of this shift has been increased discussion of the Holocaust and Polish involvement in the Holocaust. When I was growing up, I learned that Jews were persecuted by Germans, and frequently rescued by Poles. "Szmalcownicy," those Poles who turned Jews over for a reward or blackmailed them, were acknowledged to exist, but they were portrayed by the Communist state as the dregs of society, small-time capitalists who would have turned over their own mothers for money. To say that this version of events is at odds with Jewish collective memory would be an understatement. In my study of the Holocaust it has sometimes seemed to me that Jewish survivors feel more resentment towards Poles than they do against the Nazis. This is beginning to be discussed openly in Poland, and authors such as Jan Gross, who focus on Polish profiteering during and immediately after the Holocaust, as well as the atrocities committed by Catholic Poles against their Jewish neighbors, are widely and publicly discussed. These publications are seen as controversial and often draw heavy criticism, but they are nevertheless part of mainstream Polish consciousness in a way that would have been unthinkable even a decade ago. For the first time, really, Poles are becoming aware of the Jewish narrative and engaging with it.

I am not surprised that so many Jewish survivors feel very bitter towards Poles; it is an appalling betrayal for friends and neighbors to stand idly by as you are dragged away to your death. Increasingly it appears that while some Poles actively participated in hunting down Jews and others rescued them, most were simply indifferent, or preoccupied with their own efforts to survive the war. Under conditions of adversity, people tend to draw more distinct boundaries between self and the other, between those on whom resources are to be expanded and those who will be left to their fate or exploited to aid one's survival. I don't believe this is a specifically Polish trait

– I believe it is a human one, but not any less horrible because of it.

You mentioned Primo Levi before - I remember that what made the biggest impression on me while reading "The Saved and the Drowned" (Levi's account of Auschwitz) was this feeling that in his mind, nobody who came in contact with the evil of the death camps was innocent - that there were only degrees of guilt. This question of complicity began to obsess me – what does it do to a person to come face to face with genocide as a victim, or a witness, or an accomplice? What happens when an entire nation is placed in that position? What does it mean for that generation, but also for the ones that come after?

The Holocaust is not the sum total of the historical wisdom my family, in one way or another, has passed down to me, but it is a part of it. At the heart of intergenerational trauma lies the idea that the emotional responses of trauma survivors and their outlook on the world can be passed down to future generations devoid of the original context. The mistrust of the world and other humans that I learned as a child are based on unspoken assumptions made by my family, those assumptions in turn motivated by bitter historical experience. Sometime in my late teens I learned that my grandmother is half-Jewish, one of many facts my family simply never discussed. Although she was orphaned young and as far as I know never strongly identified with a Jewish identity, she certainly would have been Jewish enough to qualify for extermination under the Nazis. Luckily, she and most of her remaining family fled east, deep into the Soviet Union, before the Germans invaded Lviv, the city in which she was born.

The way you speak about your family makes me smile, because it reminds me of my grandmother. She never, while I was growing up, talked about the Holocaust. But once I saw her putting down flowers on some pavement in Warsaw, and when I asked why, she said it was the anniversary of the Warsaw ghetto uprising and that was the place where the entrance to the ghetto used to be. And she too used to stand over me as I did my homework, telling me to study because education is the one thing nobody can take away.

Both my professional experience and the family history I carry have led me to believe that a process of "othering" is what allows human beings to turn against their neighbors, and also that this kind of darkness lies within each of us. That is why it appalls me to see the occurrence of genocidal violence used as a justification to reinforce racial or ethnic stereotypes – the way that atrocities in Rwanda, for instance, have sometimes been used as evidence that the African continent is somehow more "barbaric" than other parts of the world. It is a comfort, but a false one, to think that we are not capable of turning against one another. And when such unspeakable violence does occur, it echoes down the generations.

When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. There have been tyrants and murderers and for a time they seem invincible, but in the end, they always fall..think of it, always.

– Mahatma Gandhi –

# Transformative Student Testimonies from Two CCVT Journal Entries

Catherine Raine

When Ezat invited me to contribute some writing on the topic of “love, compassion, and forgiveness in the rehabilitation of survivors,” I went to my journals to look for stories. I found a couple of entries which speak to survivors’ extraordinary inner strength, gratitude for life, and desire to help themselves and their communities.

## January 20, 2010

I’ve been enjoying the student presentations in my CCVT English class because they’ve created a listening space that feels fresh and new. So far, students have talked about computers, Albania, Eritrea, and fun places to visit in Toronto.

We also listened to a more personal narrative about a student’s struggle as a refugee claimant. She told us that she fled from her home country not once, but *twice*.

The first time was because of war, and then her family returned when political independence was achieved. Sadly, conflict flared up again, so she left for good. Now she lives alone in Canada while her children and grandchildren reside in Europe and the Middle East.

I asked the speaker how she stayed so positive. “You smile all the time. How do you do it?”

“I have a lot of friends, and I like to help them. I am part of a community. When I break the fast at Ramadan with everybody, I don’t feel alone.”

She then asked me why some people in North America stayed so negative: “Why they don’t give thanks for all the good things they have?”

## February 22, 2010

This morning one of my students gave a very moving presentation about the struggle to come to terms with her new life in Canada. When she came here less than two years ago, she had no English, no money, and no friends or family. In the shelter, she slept all the time because she was so homesick.

“Then I decided to have a talk with myself. I told myself it wasn’t good for me to sleep so much. I needed to study English.”

She was scared because she hadn’t gone beyond middle school in her home country. Regardless, she steeled herself for the task because she knew she had to have English communication skills to survive in Canada.

“On the first day of my class at CCVT, I cried because I couldn’t understand my teacher, Susannah. She was kind and told me not to cry. She said that she would help me.”

With Susanna’s compassionate encouragement, my student didn’t give up, and in two years, she has progressed from not knowing a single word of English to speaking in front of the class for fifteen minutes. She found the strength to fight for her new life when she could have just kept sleeping all day to escape reality. She’s a heroine to me.

*\*Catherine Raine was a LINC Instructor at CCVT between 2006 and 2010.*



# Through Forgiveness, Rebuild the Future

Chris Tumu and Andrea Lagios

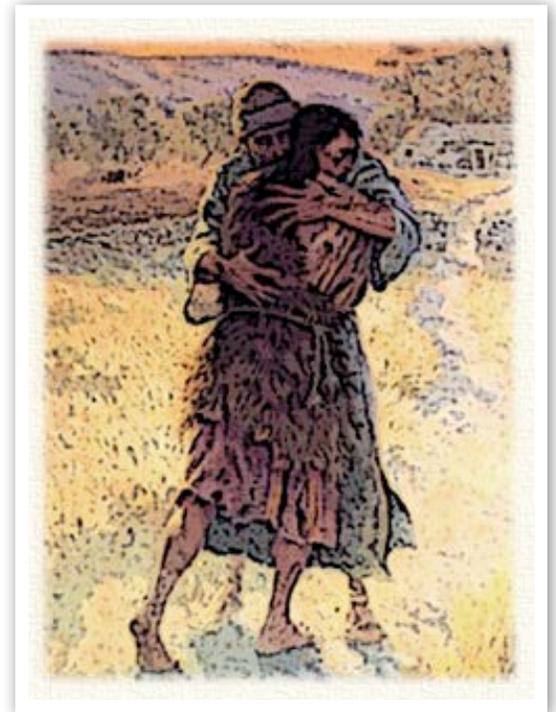
I remember asking my mom and my family why they called us Rwandais, and if we are Rwandais, why we are not in Rwanda. Even though I was born in Tanzania, my father told me that our family fled the country when Tutsis started to be assassinated in 1959. We lived in Tanzania as refugees for thirty-five years, wondering when we would be able to return home to our country.

My father would tell me how President Habyarimana kept referring to my country, Rwanda, like a glass full of water: he said that if the glass was already full, how could you pour more water inside? If you pour more water and the glass is full, water will flow over, everywhere. What he meant was that before Tutsis could return home, those that were in the country would have to go. Before we could return, more Tutsis were supposed to die so we could fill the place where they were, because there was no place for us.

Rwanda was my homeland before I ever stepped foot into the country. As a refugee in Tanzania, I kept thinking that if I went 'home' to Rwanda, it would truly be my home. My family had always told me about this beautiful country of a thousand hills. I had always known that one day we would return to Rwanda, and I expected to see a beautiful country, with beautiful people and things. I never saw what I had been envisioning all these years. The first day we repatriated back to our homeland, I found how many people had been killed; people were scattered everywhere, their bodies causing the streets to stink. The thousand hills that I had been thinking of became the thousands of bodies of people that had been killed. Were these the hills I had been told about, that I had come to know before ever seeing them, or had these hills moved somewhere else?

Following the genocide, the newly established government encouraged those who had killed others to ask for forgiveness, while asking those who had lost their families to extend their forgiveness and try to move forward. Those Hutus that fled into Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo) and other surrounding countries were asked to come back and help rebuild the country, even though some of them had participated in destroying it.

At first, it was difficult for both sides to show understanding towards each other. Some people have tried to name what happened in the genocide differently; they have said the genocide was against Rwandais people, rather than acknowledging that this crime was committed against Tutsi people. By calling the genocide by a different name, some people have benefitted from its denial. Yet, while we are trying to move on from this profound event in our history, others have preserved the ideology of the genocide, trying to bring the country back to where it was during the time of the genocide. Even though some people still harbored the same mindset to pull the country back into darkness, over time, they found that in order to build the country, we needed to work together and live together in peace. For those who have the same idea of bringing the country back to this mindset, this is the time for them to remember what has been denied from the country - if you have committed harm, look back now and do something to help people rebuild what another has destroyed. For those that have denied what happened in the genocide, this is the time to ask for forgiveness.



Let us remember what happened in 1994; the destruction of the country, and the overpowering smell of death everywhere. When we compare that with our homeland today, merely seventeen years after the genocide, the country has been rebuilt. How about we keep moving in this direction? Let us show them, those who have destroyed, and have in mind to destroy again, that we are conquerors.

The way I try to forgive is just to try to move on, to go to another page, to take another step. If I keep reminding myself, keep going through it, keep having conflict with the people that have killed my family, I will never go to another step, another stage of my life. I will never forget what happened, but try to understand the situation, to be able to move on with my life and not let others' actions in the past be the barrier for me to go to another place. I can do more. I can prove more. When you fail, and someone wishes you to fail, he will be happy, because he is successful. But if you succeed in what you were supposed to fail, he will be unhappy, because he or she did not find what was expected. This is what we are doing, not out of revenge. I do it for my future. I do it for the people who will come after me, like my children, so they will never face the same problem as I was facing.

## Return to the Homeland

By Chris Tumu and Andrea Lagios

Return to the homeland, site of destruction  
Smell in the air, bodies stacked where once homes were  
Families, histories, disposed of and drained with sewage  
Memories lost, replaced with those that awaken our tenuous rest  
Distinction of once-measured faces; us and them, them and us  
Tension and fear that the tide will turn backwards  
Over hatred and resentment that our presence made the glass flow over  
But we are the same in belief and culture, home and hope  
Fight not for revenge against them, but to turn the page for us  
Look back to family lost while stepping forward for our children  
When failure is to be defeated, resistance will be to succeed  
Forgiveness because we choose never to understand hate  
Assured that only God will ever know the purpose of this suffering  
With strength, we will our hearts to change chapters  
The dawn of spring brings with it the return of blood in our minds  
But with the absence of hate in this eternal loss  
And hope for our future when we accept and forgive

## Love for Our Clients

When we hear of or see our clients' misfortune, and we feel the pang of their suffering, and are moved to extend the help that lies within our power, this is love and compassion. In order to fulfill our commitment to those who seek our help and advice we need strength, because suffering lies all around us. The suffering we see is more than balanced by the joy that flows to us along with love and the urge for practicing compassion and love to protect survivors from being overwhelmed by the force of suffering.

Mulugeta Abai, Executive Director

Unconditional love and kindness to my clients are merely expressions of human compassion to create mutual inner and external peace. It is a genuine strive to radiate reciprocal happiness and freedom from suffering.

Abdul Abubaker, Language and Skills Development Coordinator

I am always humbled by the courage and resiliency demonstrated by the survivors of war and torture who pass through the doors of CCVT every day. The strength and determination they exhibit in the face of adversity is inspiring. I am grateful for their willingness to trust me with their stories, to share their moments of happiness and sorrow. I am grateful for the contributions that they make to our communities, to our city, and to Canada.

Gabriela Agatiello, Settlement and Trauma Counsellor

Working with survivors of torture is an honor and privilege. They come with a lot of resilience, wisdom and courage. They take sides as they believe neutrality helps the oppressors and not the victims. They are brave enough to stand against tyranny.

Mohamed Ahmed, Trauma and Settlement Counsellor

They say that neither should a ship rely on one small anchor, nor should life rest on a single hope. We at CCVT acknowledge our client's determination, strength and supremacy and provide hope for them when everything seems hopeless. Most importantly one thing that I have grown to learn along with the clients is to never lose our infinite hope when we need it the most. CCVT is a home where hope, endless care and support are given to people who believe CCVT is their home to trust.

Michelle Emamnazar, Settlement and Trauma Counsellor

Our CCVT clients are sources of inspiration to us. They might be emotionally struggling, but their strength to move on, to be part of the Canadian society has prompted our deep respect and admiration.

Ferdinand Alvarez, Administrative Assistant

I am honored to be in a situation where I am able to provide service to heroes. Our clients are our inspiration and I look up to them. They provide me with strength on a daily basis.

Huda Bukhari, Manager of the Settlement Services

It is truly a privilege and honor to be able to serve survivors of torture and/or war, as these clients are generous enough to share their painful stories, but also their strength, resilience, compassion, and knowledge, with us at CCVT. Through getting to know the clients and their experiences, our own capacity for love, empathy, understanding and hope, is deepened.

Sidonia Couto, Child and Youth Counsellor

My clients are a source of inspiration and provide me with an inexhaustible wealth of knowledge. They are also an opportunity for me to grow and be free from my own complexities.

Teresa Dremetsikas  
Program Manager

If we could all take a minute each day to think about innocent people and/or survivors of torture and war, and simply put ourselves in their shoes, we would be filled with the love and empathy required to change the world, thus causing hate to lose strength.  
Jackie Gakumba, Settlement and Trauma Counsellor

One of the most satisfying things about working with CCVT clients is to hear how these clients seek out loving contacts... with family, children, friends and supportive people in the community. So often, love is an intuitive and unspoken means to recovery.  
Dr. Deborah Stein, Psychiatrist

From the heart of the suffering,  
There is a means of survival & inspiration.  
Dignity, we are deserving,  
Because faith is why the heart functions.  
We cannot act selfishly,  
For heroism is not only in the man, but in the occasion.  
We must act willingly,  
Since hope is awakened by the possibility, a passion.  
When there is confidence, triumph, and hope; failure is not an option.  
CCVT gives hope and aspiration.  
Desiree Dumloa, Administrative Assistant

Love for our clients makes them the Rising Sun with many good rays to brighten all of us.  
Thilaga Jeganathan

Of all those who knock at our door, a client is the most significant person. More than what we give to clients, we receive from them. They have inspired us with their love, reliance and steadfastness. Clients are the goal of all activities we do. We do not consider them as our guests or visitors; CCVT is their home. They provide us with great favor by letting us serve them.  
Ezat Mossallanejad, Settlement and Trauma Counsellor/  
Policy Analyst

They say man can live about forty days without food, about three days without water, about eight minutes without air, but only for one second without hope. It is an honor and a privilege to be part of a team that serves clients to give them hope. Their spirit is truly inspirational.

Christine Womiloju, Children and Youth Settlement Counselor

My clients are a reflection of Godliness, a message of Love to all of us who should strive incessantly to ameliorate their condition through all we have in disposition and above all through Love. In CCVT, the opportunity to be in touch with my clients' reality has emboldened my vision to seek a better world, full of Love where all of us can rely on, because there is nothing better in life than Love it self.  
Selamawit Yohannes, Settlement and Trauma Counselor

## Letter on the murder of David Kato

Honourable Mr. Lawrence Cannon  
Minister of Foreign Affairs  
Lester B. Pearson Building Tower A, 10<sup>th</sup> floor  
125 Sussex Drive  
Ottawa, ON K1A 0G2

February 3, 2011

Dear Hon. Cannon,

We join the East and Horn of Africa Human Rights Defenders Project/Network (EHAHRDP), Protection International and Foundation for Human Rights Initiative, and other sister agencies to share our deep sadness over the brutal murder of David Kato, a brave and highly dedicated human rights defender and activist for the rights of Lesbian, Gay, Transgender and Intersex (LGBTI) persons in Uganda.

We, at the Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture (CCVT), were shocked and distressed by the murder of David Kato. I am writing to you to reiterate the demands set forth by our sister organization in Africa, EHAHRDP. I sincerely request you to make an immediate intervention and ask responsible authorities in Uganda to take immediate action to seek justice in the death of David Kato, and ensure protection for LGBTI persons in Uganda.

We call on you, Honourable Cannon, to ask the Ugandan government for a full and independent investigation into the death of Mr. Kato in Uganda; to promote justice and the prosecution of those responsible for his death, ensuring that there is no impunity for those responsible; and to support an end to harassment, discrimination, persecution and stigma against LGBTI persons in Uganda in promotion of human rights. We ask that you use all bilateral and unilateral means to communicate with the Government of Uganda to ensure these demands are met.

According to the information we have recently received, David Kato was murdered on the 26<sup>th</sup> of January, 2001, in his home in Mukono, Uganda. Prior to his death, he had been receiving an increased number of death threats and a heightened level of harassment following the release of an article in the Ugandan tabloid newspaper, the "Rolling Stone", which published photos of alleged members of the LGBTI community calling for them to be hanged. Together with two other activists, David took the newspaper to court for violating their right to privacy and life, resulting in the High Court of Uganda awarding damages to the three plaintiffs and issuing a permanent injunction for the newspaper not to further release the outings. We know that just days prior to his death, Mr. Kato expressed great fear over the elevated harassment he was receiving.

As you may know, same sex relations are illegal in Uganda with provisions in the Constitution and criminal laws penalizing same sex marriage and other acts referring to intimate relations between LGBTI persons. These provisions have been used by the Ugandan government to harass and persecute members of the LGBTI community. The growing homophobia of the Government of Uganda and religious leaders have further fuelled the escalating attacks against LGBTI activists and greatly increased harassment against this community. The local media have also contributed to putting the lives of LGBTI activists and community members at risk by directly naming them in publications and contributing to prejudiced rhetoric.

Once again we call upon you, Honourable Cannon, to intervene and ask respected authorities in Uganda to take urgent actions to thoroughly investigate the death of David Kato, prosecute those responsible, and put an end to the persecution and harassment of LGBTI persons in Uganda.

Our front-line counselors at the CCVT have served LGBTI people who have escaped to Canada from Africa, Latin America, Middle East, and Europe. We believe that the right to freedom of sexual orientation is an inseparable component of human rights. We are highly committed to the protection of sexual minorities. We have continued and will continue to provide our holistic services to them. It is only under religious fanaticism and tyranny that they have experienced torture both at the hands of government officials and at the community level.

Thank you for your attention to this critical human rights concern, and I am looking forward to hearing from you.

Yours sincerely,

Mulugeta Abai  
Executive Director

The plague of mankind is the fear and rejection of diversity: monotheism, monarchy, monogamy and, in our age, monomedicine. The belief that there is only one right way to live, only one right way to regulate religious, political, sexual, medical affairs is the root cause of the greatest threat to man: members of his own species, bent on ensuring his salvation, security, and sanity.

- Thomas Szasz-

Minister  
of Foreign Affairs



Ministre  
des Affaires étrangères

Ottawa, Canada K1A 0G2

MAR 17 2011

Mr. Mulugeta Abai  
Executive Director  
Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture  
194 Jarvis Street, 2nd Floor  
Toronto ON M5B 2B7

Dear Mr. Abai:

Thank you for your letter of February 3, 2011, regarding the killing of gay rights activist David Kato in Uganda.

Canada was saddened to learn about the killing of Mr. Kato. The Government of Canada called upon the Government of Uganda to conduct an immediate and thorough investigation into his death and to increase the protection of the human rights of all Ugandans. Canada has conveyed this message to the Ugandan High Commission in Canada.

Canada is concerned by the draft Anti-Homosexuality Bill that seeks to further criminalize homosexuality in Uganda, imposing stiff penalties, including capital punishment and life imprisonment. Canada believes the Government of Uganda, in accordance with its obligations under international human rights law, must protect all Ugandans from discrimination and abuse, regardless of sexual orientation.

The Government of Canada takes this issue very seriously and has raised it at the highest levels. During the 2009 Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting, the Right Honourable Stephen Harper, Prime Minister, expressed Canada's deep concern and strong opposition to the bill to Ugandan President Yoweri Kaguta Museveni.

Thank you for taking the time to share your concerns.

Sincerely,

The Honourable Lawrence Cannon, P.C., M.P.

Canada

## CCVT Programs and Services

1. **Mental Health**
  - **Counselling**
  - **Individual and Group Therapy, Mutual Support**
  - **Groups Crisis Intervention:** suicide attempts, break-downs, family problems, etc.
  - **Coordinated professional services:** doctors, lawyers, social service workers provide treatment, documentation and legal support
2. **Settlement Services**
  - Includes information/orientation, interpretation/translation, counselling, employment-related issues and referrals to resources relating to the economic, social, cultural, educational and recreational facilities that could contribute to the initial settlement of the client.
3. **Children/Youth Program**
  - Intake/assessment, settlement services, mental health services, recreational and empowerment activities that incorporate conflict resolution, mentoring, peer support and story-telling
4. **Volunteer Program Befriending**
  - to assist survivors in rebuilding their connections to others as well as to the greater community.
  - **ESL Tutoring** and **Conversation Circles** to help
5. **Public Education**
  - responds to numerous requests for information, assistance and consultations on torture and the effects of torture as well as regularly producing resource materials
6. **Refugees in Limbo**
  - Providing services to refugees in limbo that include counselling, assisting in sponsorships, family reunification and other immigration-related issues.
7. **Language Instruction and Training**
  - LINC/ESL classes specially designed to address the needs and realities of the survivor of torture (concentration, memory, depression, triggers)  
Computer training: basic and intermediate levels
8. **International Projects**
  - CCVT is associated with a coalition of Centres which support victims of violence, repression and torture, in exile or in their own countries

students learn and practice their English.

**Escorting and interpreting** for survivors at different appointments (medical, legal, social).

Any comments or thoughts about First Light  
We warmly welcome letters to the editor!

Just mail your comments to:

**Attn: The Editorial Committee**  
**Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**  
194 Jarvis St. 2nd Floor,  
Toronto, Ontario, M5B 2B7  
Canada

Or email them to: The Editorial Committee c/o [mabai@ccvt.org](mailto:mabai@ccvt.org)

and we'll do our best to publish them in the next issue. We reserve the right to shorten any letters due to space requirements.

I want to help CCVT respond to the needs of survivors of violent oppression who have sought refuge here in Canada.



Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_

Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

- \$20
- \$40
- \$50
- \$150
- \$250
- Other

**Canadian Centre for Victims of Torture**

194 Jarvis St. 2nd floor  
Toronto, ON  
M5B 2B7 CANADA  
Tel: (416)302-6261  
Fax: (416)363-2122

Donate online!



**CCVT MONTHLY GIVING PLAN**

You can pre-authorize small monthly deductions on your credit card. It's so convenient, most of our Monthly Giving members hardly notice their small monthly donation, but it allows them to contribute more. CCVT can plan better knowing how much money to expect each month. And, because we save on paper and postage, more of your contribution goes directly toward helping torture survivors.

- Yes I'd like to join the CCVT Monthly Giving Plan by making a monthly donation of:
  - \$10
  - \$15
  - \$20
  - Other \$ \_\_\_\_\_

- Please charge my:
  - VISA
  - MasterCard Card Number: \_\_\_\_\_ Expiry: \_\_\_\_\_

Signature: \_\_\_\_\_

- I understand that payments will continue automatically until I notify CCVT of a change.

- I'd prefer to spread out my gift by using post-dated cheques. I have enclosed \_\_\_\_\_ (number of) post-dated cheques each in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Thank you for your support!**

Charitable Reg. 13332 7908 RR0001

If you come to my home, bring me a pencil, a black pencil;  
 I want to draw a line on my face, so I won't be caged for the crime of beauty,  
 also a cross on my heart so I won't be tempted!

Give me an eraser for erasing the lips, I don't want anyone to blacken me due  
 to their redness.

A shovel, so I uproot my feminine virtues, sow my being... without these is  
 heaven's way easier.

Give me a razor to shave my hair off and air my head, and to think some  
 without head cover.

Give me thread and needle, for my tongue.

I want... to sew it to my mouth... this way are my cries quieter.

Don't forget the scissors, I want to censor my thoughts!

I also need washing powder to wash my brain!

When I've washed my brain to hang it on the line  
 so the wind can take my marks to where the Arab threw his flute.

Do you know? One should be realistic! If you find a silencer, also take it!

I want to shut my sobs in my throat when they beat me as a prostitute for the crime of love and choice.  
 I want a copy of my identity, to, so when the religious brothers and sisters swear at me and humiliate me in  
 the name of preaching, I can remember who I am.

Pray to god... if you see they sell rights somewhere, buy some for me, so I  
 can mix it with my food and deny me them before others do.

Finally, if you get some money, buy me a sign to hang on my neck...  
 and I'll write on it in large letters:

I AM HUMAN! I AM STILL HUMAN, I AM A HUMAN  
 EVERYDAY.



By Ghada al-Samman  
 An able poet from Syria