Marion Langer Award Lecture

Respect: On Witness and Justice

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Lifted by the soaring spirit of Aretha Franklin—I would like to talk to you about RESPECT. "R-E-S-P-E-C-T. Find out what it means to me. Show me just a little respect." I believe that respect is the most powerful ingredient in creating authentic relationships, in nourishing good and productive school cultures, and in building healthy communities. It is a core American value, embraced by all of us, animating our personal and professional relationships, deserving to be at the center of a rich discourse honoring the life and work and the courage and compassion of our heroine Marion Langer, who long served as the American Orthopsychiatric Association's executive officer. For those of us who are educators and clinicians, respect is a beautiful and crucial concept. We hear it in our rhetoric; we map it into our metaphors; we witness it in our relationships; we embroider it into our pedagogy; and we build it into our curricula. We try to be vigilant in practicing it, and we recognize its pragmatic, philosophical, and spiritual dimensions. And respect extends from local neighborhoods to global communities. It is the core of a thriving democracy and a civilized world.

Never has a dialogue about respect been more timely and provocative than *now* … demanding our engagement, commitment, and attention. It is, in fact, impossible for us to have any conversation that refers to child rearing and child protection or teaching and learning or that speaks about human rights and social justice without our minds being flooded by the bloody images of the last 10 years—by the tragic cataclysmic events of September 11 ... by the murders of innocent mothers and children in Afghanistan ... by the brutal bombings and attacks in Israel and Palestine and the volatile border conflicts between India and Pakistan ... by the genocide and raping of women and girls in the Sudan … by the terrifying and protracted war in Iraq and the oppression and massacre of hundreds of thousands of people in Tibet … by the uncovering of rampant pedophilia by priests and bishops of the Catholic Church ... by the devastating flooding of the Gulf Coast and the obscenely inept response of federal, state, and local governments who for years ignored all of the warnings of danger … by the separations and suspicions of racial, cultural, and religious discrimination, pitting newcomers against old timers, refugees against established and entitled citizens … by the Wall Street crash following the unleashed greed, deceit, and corruption by a whole host of corporate giants underscoring the vast abyss between the privileged few at the top and the marginalized many at the bottom … by the foreclosures of homes formerly inhabited by the hardworking middle-class and the rising numbers of homeless people struggling to survive … by the ugly rhetoric, morally corrupt behaviors, and barely veiled racism spewed from the mouths of some politicians whose primary mission has been to discredit our President.

The symbolism and reality of these assaults—taken individually or collectively—make us feel helpless, vulnerable, and victimized. Our tears express our deepest anguish, fears, confusion, and rage. Our democratic values and civil rights seem to be crumbling around us as we work to find our moral and spiritual anchor. In our adult confusions and impotence, we struggle with finding the right words to support and guide our young people. During these last several years of acute anxiety about our fragile and troubled world, we educators, clinicians, and caregivers—our society's *public* adults—have felt a particular challenge and responsibility to protect the children and young people in our charge, to help them come to terms with these awful, cruel events and their aftermath, to find a

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precarious balance between mourning and moving on, between revenge and reconciliation, between grieving and getting busy.

During these times of terror, I have, of course, felt my share of rage and anguish; I have had my share of horrifying nightmares. But on my best days, I know that I must find a way to work more intensely, wisely, and generously … that I must cut through the trivia and the distractions of my everyday life and do things that have purpose and meaning, that will make an imprint, that will ‘‘give forward’’ to the next generation. More than ever I have felt committed to enacting our democratic values. For example, I have been devoted to supporting the coexistence of educational excellence *and* educational equality, joining diversity with high academic standards *and* outcomes for all. If we are to live in this world that grows smaller and smaller, we must recommit ourselves to building schools that are truly inclusive. We must develop rigorous standards and goals for *all* our students *and* provide the supports that they will need in order to be successful in reaching them. We must develop relationships with our students that will inspire their trust, that will challenge their intellects, and that will have mutual respect at their center.

We have said these things for a long time, with the best of intentions. But over the years, our rhetoric about justice and respect has begun to sound stale and overrehearsed, much too facile. The shadows of darkness and violence that have preoccupied us recently compel us to recognize how very precious and fragile are our democratic principles, how very hard it is to sustain and nourish respect, and how complex the work of authentic inclusivity turns out to be.

These themes—of educational achievement, social justice, and human dignity—have been central preoccupations in my life and my work. I have also worried a lot about how difficult those goals are to accomplish (both institutionally and interpersonally); about the great distance between our expressed values and our daily habits; and about finding new ways of addressing our chronic laments and our tired rhetoric. The opportunities and casualties of our dual quests for excellence and inclusivity, then, have been resounding notes in my siren song, particularly as I have explored in my research and writing the contours and dimensions of respect and as I have tried to shape a reconstructed view of this beautiful term.

I remember feeling the power and majesty of respect—and the deep connections between respect and justice—at an unforgettable moment of grace. It was April of 1986, at the burial and requiem for my father Charles Radford Lawrence II. My brother Chuck was giving the eulogy, his intimate and loving view of a very public man. Chuck's voice cracked as he recalled one of our father Charles' loveliest qualities.

> Our father Charles had a natural air of authority about him. He commanded respect without ever asking for it. In high school, my rowdiest friends—the guys who stole hub caps and crashed parties—were perfect gentlemen in my father's presence. They'd stand and say ‘‘yes, sir, Dr. Lawrence,’’ and answer his many questions about school and home and where their parents and grandparents were from. It was much later that I realized Dad's secret. He gained respect by giving it. He talked and listened to the fourth grade kid in Spring Valley who shined shoes the same way he talked and listened to a bishop or college president. He was seriously interested in who you were and what you had to say. And although he had the intellectual and physical tools to out-muscle a smaller person or mind, he never bullied. He gained your allegiance by offering you his strength, not by threatening to overpower you.

In my brother's words, I heard the recovery of rich meanings of respect. Through my tears, I heard the lovely symmetry and reciprocity, not the static hierarchy. I heard the tender transfer of authority, not the power plays. I heard the deep curiosity—the need to know, the urge to understand, not the arrogance of knowing enough or knowing it all. And I heard the beauty in the ordinary, daily gestures, not the drama and glory of

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Questions for Self-Assessment

1. Lawrence-Lightfoot argues that meaningful respect is *symmetrical*, not *hierarchical*. Explain.
2. Describing the work of Dawoud Bey, Lawrence-Lightfoot analogizes the relationship between Bey and his photographic subject with that between an effective teacher and her pupil. How does *curiosity* typify each of these relationships? Applying this analysis, how does Lawrence-Lightfoot regard current trends in education?
3. Lawrence-Lightfoot concludes her essay with the observation that ‘‘the immediate moment is the most significant.’’ How does such a perspective facilitate the emergence of *respect*? What are its implications for psychotherapy?

great, public moments. I am sure that my brother's words of gratitude and loving farewell have burned their way into my heart, fueled my interest in respect, and shaped the way I understand and interpret its meanings.

As a researcher and educator, I have also seen the power of respect in schools and classrooms and seen the ways in which respect is crucial in nourishing and sustaining relationships between teachers and students. In the last 35 years, for example, I have visited hundreds of schools—from city schools in poor communities to affluent suburban schools; from remote rural schools to elite preparatory academies—and in all of them, I have asked students to identify their good teachers and to tell me why they think they are good. The students' answers—across all of these diverse settings—are always the same. "Why do we think Mrs. Brown is a good teacher?" they repeat incredulously, as if I should know the answer. "Because she *respects* us," they respond. I push further, trying to discover what they mean by respect. Again, there is no reluctance or ambivalence in their responses. They feel respected by teachers who make them feel visible and worthy, who are demanding, who hold high standards for them, who insist that they learns … and they feel disrespected, or "dissed," by teachers who never bother to get to know them, who let them off easy, who do not take them seriously or believe that they can be successful. Respect grows in relationships of expectation, challenge, and rigor. It is diminished by inattention, indifference, and empty ritual.

In *A Gathering of Gifts*, a beautiful book by my sister Paula Lawrence Wehmiller (you see I have included both my siblings in this article)—a masterful and compassionate educator, an Episcopal priest, and a wonderfully poetic writer—she recalled the weeks of grueling anticipation before her first day of kindergarten and spoke about the primal fears that we all experience when we enter new communities. Her story rehearsed the raw feelings of vulnerability and the yearning for visibility and voice, the desire to be known.

> It is 1951, and summer has come to a steady, hot, quiet hum in late August. A healthy amount of boredom in the air begins to let the summer end, making way for anticipation of my first day of kindergarten, the beginning of school. My brand new first-day-of-school dress hangs on the mirror over my bureau. Red plaid, I think, with a white collar. New cotton undies and slip and soft white ankle socks are folded on the bureau. And in an open shoe box, with white tissue paper unfolded enough to see them, are my new red school shoes. (My mother had told the salesman "something sturdy in a school shoe." I had been picturing bright red patent leather party shoes and was crestfallen when "sturdy" signaled the salesman to bring out brown with a tie.) Mom and I must have persevered, each with our own image of what my first school shoes would be, because I ended up with oxblood red leather with a double strap and double buckles—pretty but sturdy—"handsome" was my father's peacemaking word for the compromise shoes. Every end of August night before going to bed, I would carefully lift the shoes out of the crisp paper, smell the fresh, new leather, put them on the floor next to my feet and think, I am going to school. I'm going to step up the big high steps onto scary Mr. Gurky's scary big school bus where I've heard that the big kids chant, "Kindergarten baby, stick your head in gravy" when the little kids get on. I'm going to real school in a strange new place. *Will anybody know who I am?*[1]

The big question: 'Will anybody know who I am?'

The big question: "Will anybody know who I am?" For teachers and students across the developmental spectrum—from kindergarten through graduate training—the question is the same and respect is a potent, omnipresent concept. It is on our tongues and embedded in our rhetoric; it is central to our value frameworks and institutional missions, and it shapes our daily actions and interactions. It is, therefore, both practical *and* prophetic.

By now, I am sure you gather that my view of respect challenges traditional conceptions of the term. Let me briefly tell you what I mean by respect, identify what I think are its key dimensions, focus on a quality of respect that I find one of the most surprising and generative, and look at the work and wisdom of one practitioner of respect who embodies this quality. I will close with eight challenging lessons for those of us who want to join theory and practice, for those who want to join the practical and the prophetic, and for those of us who want to build families, communities, and schools animated by respect.

Respect is commonly seen as deference to status and hierarchy. Usually respect is seen as involving some sort of debt due people because of their attained or inherent position, their age, gender, class, race, professional status, accomplishments, etc. Whether defined by rules of law or habits of culture, respect often implies required expressions of esteem, approbation, or submission. By contrast, I focus on the way respect creates symmetry, empathy, and connection in all kinds of relationships, even those, such as parent and child, teacher and student, doctor and patient, employer and employee, commonly seen as unequal. Rather than looking for respect as a given in certain relationships, I am interested in watching it develop over time.

I believe that respect generates respect; a modest loaf becomes

[1] Paula Lawrence Wehmiller, A Gathering of Gifts 5-6 (2002).

many. With that in mind, I am interested in how people work to challenge and dismantle hierarchies rather than how they reinforce and reify them, as well as with the ways in which the organizational context shapes the ways in which people engage in respectful relationships. Because I focus on individuals, it is important to consider how family roots, temperament, and life stories shape the ways in which people are able to become respectful and respected. Rather than the language of inhibition and constraint typical of a more old-fashioned view of respect, I listen for the voices of challenge and exuberance. Rather than the language of dutiful compliance, I hear the words of desire and commitment. Rather than the broad and esoteric abstractions of philosophers—so distant from the complexities of people's lives—I watch for the details of action and try to decipher the nuances of thought and feeling.

Six Dimensions of Respect

In my book, which begins with birth and ends with death, I identify six dimensions of respect—not to be heard as discrete ingredients of a prescribed recipe, but rather as a framework for considering the rich, experiential complexity of the term. Each dimension reveals a different angle of vision. The first dimension is *empowerment*. When we are respectful of others, we want to offer them the knowledge, skills, and resources that they need that will allow them to make their own decisions and take control of their lives. The second dimension is *healing*. In showing respect for another, we hope—through our work and actions—to nourish a feeling of worthiness, wholeness, and well-being in them. The third dimension is *dialogue*. In showing respect for another, we encourage authentic communication. We listen carefully and respond supportively. We are willing to move through misunderstandings, distortions, conflict, and anger toward reasoning and reconciliation.

The fourth dimension—and the one on which I will focus my remarks in this article—is *curiosity*. When we are respectful of others, we are genuinely interested in them. We want to know who they are and what they are thinking, feeling, and fearing. We want to know their stories and their dreams. The fifth dimension of respect is—of course—*self-respect*. In order to show respect to another, we must feel good about ourselves. Self-respect must not be confused with narcissism or entitlement. It results from a growing self-confidence that does not seek external validation or public affirmation. It is learning to live by our own internal compass—one defined by a daily, private vigilance. And the final dimension of respect that I explore is *attention*. When we are respectful of another, we offer our full, undiluted attention. We are fully present, completely in the room … sometimes engaged in vigorous conversation, sometimes bearing silent witness.

Respect subsumes empowerment, healing, dialogue, curiosity, self-respect, and attention

Curiosity: The Lens of Dawoud Bey

I want to talk to you about curiosity—and its messenger Dawoud Bey—because I think it is perhaps the quality of respect that surprises and enhances our view more than any other. Curiosity—it seems so innocent, so ordinary, so doable … and it seems to be the least tainted by political hype or tired rhetoric. It also seems so fundamental to relationships of all kinds—relationships between lovers, between parents and children, between teachers and students, between mentors and mentees, among colleagues—all kept alive by genuine curiosity, by wanting to know and be known, by the search for knowledge, by discovery, openness, and attention to newness and change, by making oneself vulnerable to hearing things painful or incoherent. And curiosity is fundamental to our quest for justice and our commitment to inclusivity. Individually and institutionally, we must be genuinely interested in the stranger's voice and in the challenges and opportunities that his or her new perspectives will bring.

As an artist and photographer, Dawoud Bey creates larger than life-sized color portraits that allow us to see into the psyche of his subjects. His powerful images hang in art museums across this country and around the world. When Dawoud talks about his art, he points to the "development of a relationship" with his subjects at the center of his work. If most of us think of photographers with a camera held up in front of their faces, using their equipment as mask or barrier, hiding out while they expose others, then Dawoud Bey stands in defiant contrast. He believes that photographers must enter into relationships with their "subjects" that are mutual and symmetric, where *both* photographer and subject are unmasked, making way for trust and dialogue. Dawoud's photography is more about discovery, more about finding out what is "true" for each person through listening to his or her stories, than it is about presenting a likeable portrayal. For him, photography begins—always—with a "deep curiosity." "I am endlessly curious," he says about the primary motivation that defines his respectful regard of the people with whom he works.

In his early 20s, Dawoud began his career hanging out in the streets of central Harlem—streets that were both exotic and familiar to this middle-class Black boy from Queens. For 5 years—from 1975 to 1980—he worked to develop his unique approach to making pictures about the human experience. His "hanging out" was methodical. He would select a particular area—usually a 10-block square like 125th to 135th Streets, moving from East to West—and he would land there each day with his 35-mm camera hanging around his neck. For several days, he wouldn't take any pictures; just stand around, approach people, and begin a conversation. Sometimes he'd go to the same bus stop for several days in a row and begin to recognize the people who would arrive at the same time each day. They would also begin to notice him, and eventually they'd strike up a conversation. "This was very hard for me," admits Dawoud. "I was an incredibly shy person by temperament. As a child, I was very reticent, a stutterer, real fearful of reaching out. I think making pictures was the way I began to engage people ... the way I came out of my shyness."

But even as a novice, Dawoud knew that photographs grew out of relationships and that the process had to be reciprocal. This reciprocity usually emerged out of the sharing of stories. Courageously pushing past his reticence, Dawoud forced himself to reach out to folks and make a connection. Sometimes he had to begin the storytelling in order for people to feel moved to carry on. But once the "ball got rolling," he found that one story encouraged others. Before you knew it the afternoon had slipped into evening, and an atmosphere of reciprocity had emerged. The stories were usually inspired by a question, by genuine curiosity about the other person. The curiosity could not be faked.

Despite his shyness, Dawoud thinks part of the reason he was able to learn how to reach out to people was because his father was an amazingly friendly and gregarious man who "had the ability to engage everyone." He could stand on the street all day and enjoy "talking to anybody about anything." Dawoud remembered how his father, Ken, would stop and talk to the man selling hotdogs on the corner. "His curiosity was provoked by anybody ... He'd ask the guy how long he'd been selling hotdogs, who his supplier was, how much profit he made, and so on ... endlessly curious." But it was not only that Ken was eager to engage in conversation that amazed his son, it was also his ability to connect with all kinds of people whatever their station or status.

Ken was an electrical engineer by training, and he usually held the position of manager or director in whatever shop he worked. But he never used the power of his position to diminish others or to pull rank. Dawoud remembers visiting his dad at work and "never having the sense that he was the boss." "He had an easy relationship with all the men who worked for him." Dawoud loved his father's curiosity, his gregariousness, and the even-handed way he dealt with everyone around him. Even though he grew up feeling awkward and shy, so different from his father's ease and cool, he must have absorbed some of his social inheritance. In his early days meeting people and taking pictures in Harlem, a part of his father seemed to grow up in him.

When Dawoud Bey photographs his subjects and bathes them in light, he wants them to feel 'seen' in the way he felt 'seen' in a respectful teacher

When Dawoud describes the curiosity and commitment that are part of his work, and the depth and complexity that he strives for, he takes me on a "flashback" to his second-grade teacher at P.S. 123, a public school—filled with African American teachers and students—in Queens. When he photographs his subjects and bathes them in light, he wants them to feel "seen" in the way he felt "seen" in Mrs. Jones' classroom. "Mrs. Jones," he recalls, "was profound and extraordinary and very inspiring." "In what way profound?" I ask somewhat surprised at a word that seems to go beyond most people's recall of second grade. His response is immediate. "She established real relationships with every single child in her class. Everything was possible and everyone could do it." Ever since second grade, all of Dawoud's other teachers and all of his other educational experiences have been measured against Mrs. Jones' "amazing skill and compassion," and they have all come up wanting.

By the third grade, Dawoud's parents had enrolled their son in P.S. 131, a higher achieving White school where he was the only Black child in his class, where he remembers feeling an uneasy, unnamed anxiety every time he stepped off the bus and into the school. Dawoud recalls an incident in fourth grade when one of the little girls got her lunch stolen, and he looked up to find the teacher singling him out. He saw her cold stare and her accusatory finger waving in his face, and he felt baffled and confused. "I was innocent, I didn't even get the connection. '*Me*?' he stammered. 'Are you talking to *me*?'" asked Dawoud in a sweat. Yes, she meant *him,* and he was to go down to the guidance office immediately. He was the culprit. There was no

doubt in her mind. Dawoud rose up from his seat, walked the long march to the door amid the quiet stares of his classmates, and dutifully took himself to the guidance office, where, as he remembers it, the counselor gave him some "weird" tests "putting square pegs in round holes." In Dawoud's memory, this is one story among many. "I'd get singled out," he recalls. "Much of the time I was in a conflicted state. There were strange things going on, but what do you say? I couldn't name what was happening, and I couldn't find the words or the courage to ask."

The following year, in fifth grade, he remembers that the class was writing a group play about Colonial America, and the play was to be written in verse. Dawoud loved the assignment and he leapt right into the middle of the work. The teacher was gratified by the way her class pulled off the assignment so quickly and with such apparent ease and mature collaboration. She inquired of everyone how they had been so incredibly productive, and the children all pointed to Dawoud, who smiled back shyly. "I remember," says Dawoud with hurt in his eyes, "how her expression changed in that moment. The raised eyebrow, the amazement, the surprise." She must have applauded his inspired work and thanked him for his contribution. But the only thing that Dawoud can remember is her utter bafflement and his inner confusion. The teacher was unable to reconcile his brightness with her stereotype of him. How could this Black boy produce this verse? She seemed tormented by this.

The old views of respect based on habit, ritual, or law lead to relationships that are static, asymmetric, and constraining

Dawoud's tales of being painfully misunderstood—the ways in which his fourth- and fifth-grade teachers were blinded by their prejudice—remind me of the opening passages of Ralph Ellison's classic novel, *Invisible Man*, a book published just before Dawoud was born.

> I am an invisible man. No, I am not a spook like those who haunted Edgar Allen Poe; nor am I one of your Hollywood-movie ectoplasms. I am a man of substance, of flesh and bone, fiber and liquids—and I might even be said to possess a mind. I am invisible, understand, simply because people refuse to see me. Like the bodiless heads you see sometimes in circus sideshows, it is as though I have been surrounded by mirrors of hard, distorting glass. When they approach me they see only my surroundings, themselves, or figments of their imagination—indeed, everything and anything except me.

The plight of Ellison's invisible man echoes through Dawoud's later childhood stories. He suffered what Ellison describes as "the construction of their inner eyes," and he learned—the hard way—that to exist we must be visible. The contrast between the biased oversight of his teachers at P.S. 131 and the full, empathic attention bestowed by Mrs. Jones surely influenced Dawoud's approach to his art. His photographs—motivated by curiosity, shaped by a commitment to his subjects, and their consent and participation—allow his subjects to express themselves, bathed in respectful attention.

Our view of knowing—really seeing—the people in our lives—in our relationships, our schools, our families, our communities, and our world—might be informed by Dawoud Bey's masterful and compassionate lens. Threaded through his story, we see the daily acts of justice, the warm embrace of inclusivity, and the relentless curiosity that says "*yes*" to little sister Paula's haunting question: "Will anybody know who I am?"

Times have changed since Ellison spoke about the anguish and isolation of invisibility … and times have changed since Dawoud Bey suffered the assumptive caricatures of his teachers who could not see his beauty or his braininess … and times have changed since my sister Paula climbed onto the school bus hoping to be seen, known, and cherished when she crossed the threshold of her classroom. But I would argue that the lessons drawn from their stories have even greater poignancy now when the current educational discourse and policies are being driven by narrowing standards and creeping standardization that neglect the relational dimensions of teaching and learning … when our schools remain rigidly segregated by race, ethnicity, and class … when our long-standing aspirations for schools as the institutions for individual and group mobility, as the engines of access, opportunity, and justice continue to be unrealized. Dawoud's story and Paula's haunting plea feel both anachronistic and contemporary, both time-limited and timeless.

Eight Lessons

In closing, then, let me offer eight lessons that I believe are important for those of us who want to honor and enact our dual missions of excellence and equity, and welcome the exciting and difficult challenges of transforming and strengthening our schools; for those of us committed to embracing diverse voices and inclusive communities and institutions, and for those of us who want to honor and celebrate the legacy of Marion Langer, whose advocacy

work in human rights had respect at its center.

The first lesson is on symmetry. We need to reconstruct our images of, and metaphors for, respect. The old views of respect, that emphasize hierarchy, approbation, and obedience based on habit, ritual, or law, tend to lead to relationships that are static, asymmetric, and constraining. People become stuck in their roles—of power or impotence, responsibility or irresponsibility—and are neither challenged nor inspired to try on other personas or develop new ways of being. Respect that is symmetric and dynamic, on the other hand, supports growth and change, encourages communication and authenticity, and allows generosity and empathy to flow in two directions. The image is one of a circle, not a triangle or a pyramid. From this new perspective, differences in power, strength, and expertise may remain, but the respect creates a relational, generative symmetry.

The second lesson is on relationship. Respect grows in relationships, and it is shaped by the context. I cannot possibly envision respect in the abstract. It is grounded in individual reciprocity and engagement, defined by the immediacy of the moment and the constraints of the setting. It is visceral, palpable, conveyed through gesture, nuance, tone of voice, figure of speech. One of the reasons "to dis" has become a verb spoken by all of us—not just by cool-talking adolescents—is because it seems to capture, in one sharp syllable, the potency of respect *not* given … the moment when we are suddenly made to feel diminished, dismissed, and demeaned. Those of us seeking to nourish respect, then, must see its embeddedness in growing relationships and appreciate the immediate and visceral way it is transmitted.

Respect is grounded in individual reciprocity and engagement, defined by the immediacy of the moment and the constraints of the setting

It is important that we not confuse respect with civility, the third lesson. Although these notions are related, they are certainly not the same. Civility refers to the rituals, routines, and habits of decorum that characterize a gracious encounter. We think of the etiquette of politeness and manners, an important, but relatively surface engagement. Respect certainly includes attention to these rituals of civility, but it goes deeper. It penetrates below the polite surface and reflects a growing sense of connection, empathy, and trust. It requires seeing the "other" as genuinely worthy.

Storytelling, the fourth lesson, is at the center of respectful encounters. Stories lubricated by a genuine curiosity, authentic questions, and attentive listening. Stories also allow for rapport and identification across the boundaries of class, race, gender, prejudice, and fear. Through the unique and specific aspects of each other's stories, we discover the universals among us. (Portraits, of course, also allow us to discover the universals in the particular.) And, remember, stories are not exclusive property. One story invites another as people's words weave the tapestry of human connection.

The fifth lesson is on language. If we are to make progress toward an authentic pluralism, a real diversity of voices in our organizations, then I think we have to listen carefully to the language we use, and get rid of code labels—like *inner-city, at risk*, *disadvantaged,* even *urban*—that are masks for words we refuse to say in the politically correct and subtly racist environments we tend to inhabit … and we have to strike—or at least revive and reinvest in—tired terms—like multiculturalism and diversity—that have lost their punch and challenge. One of the reasons I love the word *curiosity* is because it is so plain, so core, so untarnished. (It is the curiosity in Dawoud Bey's work that resists caricature and stereotype.) If we really practice curiosity, we will be genuinely interested in understanding the colors and differences in our midst. We will be eager to get to know the stranger.

Consider the sixth lesson—dissonance. Getting to know the stranger is not only motivated by curiosity. It also requires that we anticipate the inevitable moments of misunderstanding, misinterpretation, and missteps … that we prepare ourselves to navigate the moments of distrust and disappointment …. that we choose carefully when to fight (not dissipate our energies) and when to engage the conflict that may open up the path toward reasoning and reconciliation. In other words, in building respectful relationships and healthy organizations, we must welcome the disso-

Suggestions for Further Reading

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nance of voices and perspectives. In fact, we need to learn to *love* the dissonance—the noise, the spark, the discomfort, the challenge that it causes. It cries out for notice; it demands attention; it pushes towards resolution. Whether it is the dissonance in Miles Davis' *Sketches of Spain* or the haunting harmonies in Alicia Keys, or the dissonance in a Romaire Beardon collage, or the flash of rage or defiance in a Dawoud Bey portrait, it allows us to see the conflict *and* the resistance, to reflect on it, and if we are courageous enough, to take respectful action.

The seventh lesson is on family origins. The imprint of family is powerful in shaping the ways we each negotiate respectful relationships. As we try to create relationships that are nourishing and challenging—that have respect at their center—we often confront the ghosts of our parents, the haunts of our early experiences as a child. These echoes can be inspiring; we create relationships that have the imprint of our parents' empathy and generosity. This was the good fortune of Dawoud Bey, who inherited his father's irrepressible warmth and curiosity. But others of us must work to challenge harsh and troubling generational echoes. We have to try hard not to unleash on others the assaults our parents—wittingly or unwittingly—inflicted upon us. Our determination to become teachers, clinicians, and healers may, in fact, be inspired by the deep residues of pain inflicted by abusive parents. As adults, engaged in respectful encounters with our students, our clients and patients, we must do the opposite—act out of compassion and empathy, restraint and connection—and in so doing heal ourselves.

Respect is not just carried through talk. It is also conveyed through silence, the eighth and final lesson. I do not mean an empty distracted silence. I mean a fully engaged silence that permits us to think, feel, breathe, and take notice … a silence that gives the other person permission to let us know what he or she needs. In nourishing respectful relationships, then, we must develop receptive antennae, take on the role of witness, and learn to live in the stillness.

"At the still point," says T.S. Eliot in his poem "*Four Quarters*," "there is the dance." Birth and death join at such moments, inviting our deep curiosity, our full attention. For the dying and I believe for the living, the immediate moment is the most significant. Now is the time. Now is always.

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