



ACTING TOGETHER ON THE WORLD STAGE

TOOLS FOR CONTINUING THE CONVERSATION

moral imagination

MORAL IMAGINATION

The peacebuilding scholar/practitioner John Paul Lederach describes the capacity required for conflict transformation as the “moral imagination.” This capacity, which allows a person to simultaneously stay grounded in the troubles of the real world and work toward a better one, is developed through the practice of four disciplines (or, put another way, the embracing of four principles).

The centrality of relationships and acknowledgment of interdependence.

This discipline requires “the capacity of individuals and communities to imagine themselves in a web of relationships even with their enemies....The centrality of relationship... recognizes that the well-being of our grandchildren is directly tied to the well-being of our enemy’s grandchildren.”

The practice of paradoxical curiosity

requires “attentive and continuous inquiry about things and their meaning” to yield understandings that rise above the dualistic polarities in which choices and conflicts are so easily framed (i.e. we are right and good, you are wrong and bad). Paradoxical curiosity invites us to “locate a greater truth” by creatively grappling with “seemingly contradictory truths.”

Space for the creative act.

“Providing [such] space requires a predisposition, a kind of attitude and perspective that opens up, even invokes, the spirit and belief that the creative act and response are permanently within reach, and most important, are always accessible, even in settings where violence dominates and through its oppressive swath creates its greatest lie: that the lands it inhabits are barren.”

The willingness to risk.

“To risk is to step into the unknown without any guarantee of success or even safety.... People living in settings of deep-rooted conflict are faced with an extraordinary irony. Violence is known; peace is a mystery. By its very nature, therefore, peacebuilding requires a journey guided by the imagination of risk.”

In his seminal text *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, Lederach suggests that in addition to understanding the “landscape of protracted violence,” peacebuilding practitioners must

...explore the creative process itself, not as a tangential inquiry, but as the wellspring that feeds the building of peace. In other words, we must venture into the mostly uncharted territory of the artist’s way as applied to social change, the canvases and poetics of human relationships, imagination, and discovery, and ultimately the mystery of vocation for those who take up such a journey.

[Note: This presentation of the moral imagination is adapted from the “Introduction” to *Acting Together I: Performance and the Creative Transformation of Conflict Volume I: Resistance and Reconciliation*, edited by Cohen, Varea and Walker. Published by New Village Press, 2011. pp.11 - 12. All quotations are from *The Moral Imagination: The Art and Soul of Building Peace*, by John Paul Lederach. Published by Oxford University Press, 2005.]