

The story of South Africa, and my story as a South African, is a story about victims and perpetrators at a social level. It is also the story of humankind at an individual and very personal level. But this is only part of the story. Ultimately it is a story of liberation, healing and freedom - of transcending the paradigm of oppression and suffering. My hope is that you will find many similarities to my story in your own personal lives and the social climate you find yourselves in today.

In the election of 1948 Afrikaner nationalism won a decisive victory and this government decided to choose a policy of segregation of the races called apartheid. I was born 4 years later and grew up during the increasingly violent implementation of this heinous policy which was rooted in fundamental Calvinistic Christian beliefs. Afrikaners believed themselves to be God's chosen people. In 1951, Dr. J.C. Lombard, a well known theologian, justified apartheid, greed and power-mongering in the following way - I quote,

"God is the great Divider," who "found it good to establish boundaries between people and groups of people." "We believe that white and non-white in South Africa, in the light of different cultural peculiarities, psychological differences, biological differences and differences in political aspiration as well as group affiliation, stand under different laws of life."

"The primitive and immature person can be content with passive participation and can but bow humbly because his level of civilization does not justify any voting right ... In this regard our greatest problem in South Africa is the viewpoint of revolutionary democracy of the school of Rousseau ... (according to which) everybody, in our case white and non-white, must have the franchise..."

However, white South Africans were clearly divided, but not by a great enough majority. The policy of apartheid created not only segregation between Blacks and Whites but conflict and dissension between Whites. In 1948, Alan Paton, who wrote a book many of you are familiar with "Cry the Beloved Country," bitterly wrote the poem "We Mean Nothing Evil Towards You." Here is a short excerpt:

Black man, we are going to shut you off
We are going to set you apart, now and forever.
We mean nothing evil towards you

You shall have your own place, your own institutions.
Your tribal customs shall flourish unhindered
You shall lie all day long in the sun if you wish it
All the things that civilisation has stolen
Shall be restored. You shall take wives
Unhindered by our alien prohibitions
Fat bellied children shall play innocently
Under the wide-branching trees of the lush country
Where you yourselves were born.
Boys shall go playing in the reed lagoons
Of far Ingwavuma, the old names
Shall recover old magic, milk and honey
Shall flow in the long-forsaken places
We mean nothing evil towards you.

Our resolve is immutable, our hands tremble
Only with the greatness of our resolution.
We are going to set you apart, now and forever,
We mean nothing evil towards you.

Very quickly parliamentary acts came into being to increasingly isolate and oppress Black, Coloured and Indian people.

1949 Prohibition of Mixed Marriages Act

1950 Population Registration Act

1953 Reservation of Separate Amenities Act

1953 The much hated Bantu Education Act requiring education to happen
in Afrikaans - the language of the oppressor

1954 The Resettlement of Natives Act

The more fiercely and violently the government oppressed the black people, the
greater the underground, illegal opposition grew.

- 1951** First non violent passive resistance strike by the National African Congress
- 1960** Sharpeville massacre police opened fire on school children peacefully protesting Afrikaans as the medium of education- all political parties banned
- 1961** ANC decides to engage armed struggle
- 1962** Mandela sentenced to 3 years imprisonment for incitement plus 2 years for leaving country without passport
- 1963** Start of Rivonia trial - Mandela imprisoned until 1990
- 1986** Tutu Archbishop of the Church of the Province of South Africa

11th February, 1990 **Mandela released after 27 years of imprisonment**

27th April, 1994 First Democratic election in South Africa
Mandela was 76 years old and Tutu was 62 years old

9th May, 1994 **Mandela elected President**

15th December, 1995 President established the
Commission for Truth and Reconciliation
with Tutu at head to deal with the atrocities and human rights violations of the era of apartheid -
from 1960 - 1994

White South Africans, in their guilt and shame for centuries of being persecutors, believed that a black government would mean the seizing of land and property and massive, violent retribution. Ten years after the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation, it has still not happened. That so much reconciliation and healing has happened in South Africa is a miracle brought about by the leadership of people who have reconciled the splits of their own psyches, people that are internally whole and free. Internal wholeness, healing and freedom, even in a few people, results in the possibility of healing for a nation. Leaders that are internally at war with themselves, ignorant of their motives and ruled by fear and anger, cannot lead the world to peace.

Mandela set the stage. One of the first acts passed in his government was the abolition of the death penalty - a clear statement that there would be no retribution. He invited his white gaoler to attend his inauguration as President as an honoured guest, the first of many spectacular gestures he made that showed his breathtaking magnanimity and willingness to forgive, and heal a torn and broken nation.

The Commission for Truth and Reconciliation was faced with a huge challenge. How does one deal with the oppressor without yourself becoming an oppressor. How does one move outside of a paradigm of revenge - i.e. retributive justice, of an eye for an eye, a life for a life. And how does one do this without passively sweeping everything under the rug. Healing can never happen as long as one agrees to being either a perpetrator or a victim. Archbishop Desmond Tutu summed it up by saying that neither the Nuremberg model of retributive justice, nor national amnesia was a viable option. A third way was chosen. The way known in South Africa as Ubuntu. This is a difficult word to translate because it implies a paradigm, not just a word. It speaks of the very essence of being human. It means being generous, hospitable, friendly, and compassionate. It means my humanity, is inextricably linked up to yours. We are one. A person is a person through other people. I am human because I belong, I share, I participate. A person with ubuntu is open and available to others, affirming of others, does not feel threatened that others are able and good; for he or she has a proper self assurance that comes from knowing that he or she belongs in a greater whole that is diminished when others are humiliated or diminished, when others are tortured or oppressed or threatened as if they were less than who they are.

Recently Barbara Masikela, the South African ambassador to the United States said "Nelson Mandela's greatness lies, not in what he has done, but in his admission that he does what he does because of others and with others."

This is not a new paradigm - it is the way of the Christ, the Buddha, Mohammed, Krishna and more recently Mandela, Tutu, Aung Sun Suu Kye, Thich Nhat Han - just to name a few. Ubuntu is being true to ourselves and our true nature, which is always and only essentially loving and good. It is the capacity to not allow fear to dominate our decision making.

At the Rivonia trials that condemned Mandela to 27 years of prison, Mandela and his comrades made a decision. If the courts pronounced the death penalty, they would not appeal the sentence. They would not recant, they would not compromise, they would not bargain.

They would stand by their truth. This is not to be a victim. This is to be victorious over fear, even fear of death. Without this kind of inner courage to make right decisions despite fear, South Africa could not be what it is today.

And so the Commission for Truth and Reconciliation embarked on a course of compassionate accountability. National amnesty was granted to every perpetrator who committed crimes as a part of the political struggle, if they came forward and publicly confessed their crimes, if they told the full story. If they did not they were subject to the laws of the land the criminal justice system which, like all legal systems, is retributive, but in South Africa, no longer ultimately retributive. To avoid this, they did not even have to apologise, they merely had to tell the truth about the atrocities they had committed.

This might seem like a small thing. It is not. The process the TRC employed spoke of mercy, wisdom and compassion that facilitated the healing of not only the victim but the perpetrator too. All real love is FOR all people, FOR both sides.

Archbishop Tutu's call for compassion and forgiveness resounded all the way through the hearings. He often used the phrase that my mother used so often - "There but for the grace of God go I." When Tutu says it, he is appealing to the victims of apartheid to have compassion for the perpetrators, recognising that within each of us is the capacity, born of fear, to hurt others, and a recognition of how much pain someone must be in to perpetrate violence. The irony of this always amuses me. My mother would say this to us as children to remind us to be grateful for our privilege, status, wealth and opportunity!

Contemplate for a moment confessing on international television the thing you are most ashamed of in your life and that no-one, not even your spouse, knows about you. This is what was required of men and women who had hideously tortured, murdered and raped other human beings. Full confession in front of the camera and the world. Some had the character to do this, some did not.

Winnie Mandela, who was responsible for the torture and murder of people thought to be traitors to the cause of the ANC, was someone who eventually had the courage to do this. This is what Tutu said to her during the hearings;

"I speak to you as someone who loves you very deeply, who loves your family, very deeply. I would have said to you: Let us have a public meeting, and at that public meeting for you to stand up and say there are things that went wrong, there are things that went wrong and

I don't know why they went wrong. There are people out there who want to embrace you. I still embrace you because I love you and I love you very deeply. There are many out there who would have wanted to do so if you were able to bring yourself to say something went wrong and say, "I am sorry. I am sorry for my part in what went wrong." I believe we are incredible people. Many would have rushed about in their eagerness to forgive and embrace you. I beg you, I beg you, I beg you please - I have not made any particular finding from what has happened here. I speak as someone who has lived in this community. You are a great person and you don't know how your greatness would be enhanced if you were to say "Sorry, things went wrong, forgive me." I beg you." (end of quote)

Mrs. Madikizela-Mandela responded:

"Thank you very much for your wonderful, wise words. That is the father I have always known in you. I am hoping it is still the same. I will take this opportunity to say to the family of Dr Abubaker Asvat how deeply sorry I am; to Stompies mother, how deeply sorry I am - I have said so to her before a few years back, when the heat was very hot. I am saying it is true, things went horribly wrong. I fully agree with that and for that part of those painful years when things went horribly wrong and we were aware of the fact that there were factors that led to that, for that I am deeply sorry."(end of quote)

The meeting was adjourned at this point and Tutu says - "It may have been considered a lukewarm plea, but I am not sure that we are right to scoff at even what might appear a half-hearted request for forgiveness. It is never easy to say, "I am sorry," they are the hardest words to articulate in any language. I often find it difficult to say them even in the intimacy of my bedroom to my wife." (end of quote.)

Instead of receiving the death penalty, today Winnie Mandela carries on rebuilding and healing her country and herself - always in her own inimitable and controversial way...

On the other hand, President Botha and to a lesser extent President de Klerk, were unable to take ownership. They are little men. De Klerk, qualified his apology out of existence. We have to make this important decision in life. Will I take responsibility for my life or not?

There is only one crime that is not pardonable and that is the one that cannot be confessed. Excuses cannot be forgiven. To have so much shame that you cannot own to what you have done is called Pride. It is the sin of ex presidents Botha and de Klerk. If nothing has been

admitted to, nothing can be healed and forgiven. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission was based on this premise.

Healing happens when we are able to take responsibility. In the first instance this is to admit what we have done - to ourselves and then to others.

One of the slogans of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission was, "The truth might hurt, but silence kills." Unless we can take ownership and speak the truth, the acid stain on our inner life gradually erodes away the entire person and leaves a mere hollow husk..

Mandela himself is able with grace, ease and humility to own his own short comings. A couple of years ago in an interview with Oprah he said, "In my younger days I was arrogant - jail helped me to get rid of it. I did nothing but make enemies because of my arrogance. He added that he abhors ignorance - which he defines as a person's inability to see what unites us instead of only those things that divide us. A good leader can engage in a debate frankly and thoroughly, knowing that at the end he and the other side must be closer, and thus emerge stronger. You don't have that idea when you are arrogant, superficial and uninformed."

Another prerequisite of healing is to see and understand our own dark motives with compassion and acceptance instead of judgment. We are all one. What I cannot do for myself I cannot do for you. All aspects of oneself that are viewed as unacceptable and relegated to the underworld of the unconscious, are then recognised in the other who becomes the enemy to be destroyed. This is projection and is the underpinning of the ways in which we reject others.

To decompensate into shame and self loathing is to become self absorbed and self pitying. What was done becomes all about me instead of about you. It begs the victim to feel sorry for you and to help you. It is not loving and without love and acceptance of yourself you cannot love another.

Apartheid means a condition or state of apartness. Inner apartheid results in external apartheid. Every damning judgment I have of myself will contribute to the fragmentation of the world.

Healing requires an apology, not only with empathy and understanding but also a willingness to pay compensation in which ever way is most helpful to the victim. Unfortunately it is this part of the reconciliation process that never happened adequately. To compensate all the victims would have bankrupted the country. Token gestures were made. Real compensation will have to happen on an individual and daily basis for decades to come.

Healing is understanding the effects of my behaviour on the other, myself and my community with empathy. Empathy requires knowing what I feel -because if I do not, how can I possibly care about how you feel.

Healing happens when we are allowed to tell our story, without interruption, without corrections, without our emotions, our perceptions, thoughts or desires being challenged. Healing happens when we are listened to and our story is accepted. Healing happens when someone weeps with us, when the one presiding over the hearing of our story breaks down and weeps, when the world weeps with us for what we have done and for what has been done to us. Only hearts broken open with compassion can weep.

A poem sent in by a citizen during the hearings says:

A world is wept.

Blood and pain seep into our listening: into our wounded souls.

The sound of your sobbing is my own weeping;

Your wet handkerchief my pillow for a past so exhausted it cannot rest - not yet.

Speak, weep, look, listen for us all.

Oh people of the silent hidden past.

Let your stories scatter seeds into our lonely frightened winds.

Sow more, until the stillness of this land can soften, can dare to hope and smile and sing;

Until the ghosts can dance unshackled,

Until our lives can know your sorrows

And be healed.

The horrors perpetrated by the South African government will be added to the annals of atrocities committed by humans over the history of the world but what is enduring is the healing that happened - the image that sums it up in my mind is the televised scene of two mothers, one black and one white, sobbing, embracing one another, comforting one another, united in their common suffering and grief. The white mother was the mother of a state torturer. The black mother was the mother of the young man tortured and killed in detention by the white woman's son. If this is possible then the world can heal itself.

Antje Krog, an Afrikaans journalist that covered the hearings of the TRC expressed for me and many South Africans the gratitude we feel for the TRC - not only the leaders but the victims and perpetrators who transcended hatred and showed us how to love, when she says,

“Against a flood crashing with the width of a brutalising past on to new usurping politics, the Commission has kept alive the idea of a common humanity. Painstakingly it has chiselled a way beyond racism and made space for all of our voices. For all its failures, it carries a flame of hope that makes me proud to be from here, of here.

But I want to put it more simply. I want this hand of mine to write it.

For us

all; all voices, all victims:

Because of you

this country no longer lies

between us but within,

It breathes becalmed

after being wounded

in its wondrous throat

In the cradle of my skull

it sings, it ignites

my tongue, my inner ear, the cavity of heart

shudders towards the outline

new in soft intimate clicks and gutturals

of my soul

The retina learns to expand

daily because by a thousand stories

I was scorched

a new skin.

I am changed for ever. I want to say

forgive me

forgive me

forgive me

You whom I have wronged, please
take me

with you.