

COLLAB ORATE
Peacemakers #3
Within

Peacemaking starts within peacemakers. Examining my own interior world, that is not an auspicious beginning.

Within me labors a host of conflicting urges. Let me describe a moment last Tuesday at 3:07 p.m. A nap beckoned. One client needed his contract completed. Another called for a no-notice meeting on something urgent. Her knock approached like thunder after lightning. A blattering truck ground my ears. My paralegal walked by, smelling good (she is my spouse, so I suppose that is okay). Sofie the dog peered at me with that “I’m fun; let’s have fun together” twinkle. Her tail jiggled a preference for a squirrel-laden route through Hamlin Park. My left knee throbbled, and blood sugar waned. The Libyan bombing nagged. Would Brian Williams detail smoking wreckage? Washington roundballers in the Sweet Sixteen—that Isaiah kid. The economy growled a threat. A visceral tweak teased me as a recent critic yammered silently. Mike’s surgery Friday worried me. A dawn Wittgenstein segment darted past. My crushed lumbar disc throbbled. My garage brimmed with school books my Rotary club collected for Africa; would they would get rained on during transport? A sternal spasm stabbed as my dead dog, and a buddy’s recent memorial, brushed the periphery of consciousness; these melted into one another, *homo caninus terminus*. Jack Bauer executing people efficiently, for national security (of course), on Netflix after dinner. Oddly, part of me welcomes the carnage of 24. Just below these items churned a hundred or thousand others, vital, throbbing, but unrecognized, sub-linguistic. Then, 3:08 p.m. arrived.

Peacemakers bring minutes like this, and 1,439 others from each day, to negotiation tables. Fortunately, forebrain cortical functions suppress much of the freeform torrent when necessary. Across the peacemaking table sits a person (or several) who suffers the same subliminal cacophony, but copes even less effectively because of personal trauma presently endured—divorce, assault, betrayal, death. And so, together, clients and peacemaker constitute the assembled players. This could be bad.

One retreats to skills. These seem so frail, so puny before the task. **Listening**. Listening is five percent compassion, and ninety-five percent turning down one’s own volume. One discovers a quiet place from within, drags it to the surface. Personally, I conjure a simulacrum of serenity from my study before sunrise. In quiet, others can be heard, just barely. **Repeating**, saying again what has been said at the table. Parroting sounds stupid, but keeps clients talking. As information grows, an alternate narrative for the warring parties shapes up. **Curiosity** helps. Few journeys hold wilder rides than distressed humans splattering their fractured meaning upon a conference table. Well-meaning inquiry pries open those floodgates. Clients’ laden messages, however, are encoded. **Sympathy** breaks the cipher. Sliding even one foot into a client’s worn and smelly shoe opens them up. Common language emerges, glimmers of trust. We begin **re-narrating**, weaving another way to frame their world. The warp and woof of this new story encompasses the misery of each, and, on good days, hints resolution without bloodshed or emotional carnage. If they share a common tale, no matter how sad a tragedy be recounted, the hard work is done. Only drafting and details remain.

To begin peacemaking while noisy bodes disaster. Mohandas Gandhi, India’s ascetic politician, encouraged followers in the Kheda district to resist British arrogance. Many villagers were arrested, some injured. Gandhi called the Kheda incident his Himalayan Miscalculation. He had sent tribal people out to nonviolent resistance without having prepared their inwardness for the inevitable rigors. In Gandhi’s view, non-violence is an ascetic discipline. One magnifies one’s own failings, as in a convex lens, and shrinks those of one’s opponents, as in a concave lens, in order to fairly assess the relative merits of conflict. Gandhi’s revolutionary optics benefit only those who possess an interior place of serenity from which to peer. To venture out before marshalling resources within is to re-enact Gandhi’s Himalayan Miscalculation. Peacemakers inevitably encounter thunderheads; they need maps to avoid gullywashers and blizzards. That guidance unfolds from quiet discovered within.

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