



WHEN WE RISE

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Recently, my wife Jennifer and I have been studying death tolls due to slavery, war, and genocide. The numbers are shocking, especially when one considers for a moment the significance, horror, and reach of the world's inhumanity. Immanently apparent is the great complexity involved in all large-scale human endeavors, the layers of power, nuance, and chaos with regard to time and place and perspective. I do believe in the principle *judge not, lest ye be judged*. I also believe in the principle of light, something common to our experience and beautiful to behold, the simple truth that light shines in darkness, and as the sacred text reminds us: the darkness cannot overcome the light. This robust notion, a notion that can be called illumination, is obscured at times, especially when we are faced with the overwhelming deadliness of our collective history.

And therefore the questions press forward: Do we rise? Or do we merely fall?

The following numbers are conservative estimates based on the reading Jenn and I have done over the past year.

Total deaths from two atomic bombs dropped on Japan: 400,000.

Total deaths from conventional firebombing of Japan: 500,000.

In Japan alone, the United States destroyed 60 cities during WWII.

In light of the loss of life, and the devastation of families, industry, and the human heart, a deep responsibility for servant-leaders everywhere presents itself, and specifically in the U.S. May we beg forgiveness of those we've inflicted harm upon, and may we be granted the grace to make



amends. In studies of leadership and forgiveness I can say much has been accomplished to this end. And much is yet to be fulfilled.

Both within U.S. borders and beyond, the numbers are staggering, the numbers are worldwide, and they span history. Each number is an individual human being.

Total deaths throughout Asia attributed to the totalitarian regimes in Japan under Hideki Tojo and others for the fifteen years prior to atomic warfare: 15 million.

Total deaths attributed to Hitler: 23 million.

Total deaths attributed to Stalin: 27 million.

Total deaths attributed to Mao Zedong: 50 million.

Total deaths attributed to the Crusades: 9 million.

Total deaths attributed to the North African Arab (Middle East and surrounding area) slave trade over ten centuries: 25 million.

Total deaths attributed to the African/Atlantic American and English slave trade over four centuries: 10 million.

Again, may we beg forgiveness of those we've inflicted harm upon, and may we be granted the grace to make amends.

Now consider what some scholars designate as the Native American Holocaust. Conservative estimates place the total death count in excess of 30 million due to dominant culture's infliction of war, disease, and famine. The staggering nature of our wrongs to one another makes it increasingly difficult, but also increasingly necessary to approach the past, present, and future of our violence and, again, beg forgiveness of those we've inflicted harm upon, and deeply hope to be granted the grace to make amends. Significantly, though dominant culture often works hard to conceal it, dominant culture dominates; gendered, economic, and racial suppression that is age-old continues to be a stronghold throughout Western and American society.

And the violence goes on worldwide. Four million war-related deaths recently in the Congo. One million deaths due to genocide in Rwanda. Consider Liberia. Consider the Sudan.



Now consider the courage and underlying power of those who have chosen a servant-led way of life. Servant-leaders exist in the midst of slavery, war, and genocide, and lead the way toward healing and an end to violence. The Nez Perce, notorious servant-leaders of their own nation as well as in the context of United States history, hold a reconciliation ceremony each year at the site of the Big Hole Massacre. There, a little more than a century ago, Nii Mii Pu (Nez Perce) men, women, and children were massacred by U.S. forces. Today, the descendents of those who were massacred meet with the descendents of the Cavalry who committed the massacre. The Nii Mii Pu invite reconciliation, and peace. They help us rise.

Consider Martin Luther King, Jr.'s timeless message of profound social action. He forwarded a clear, sharp vision: the oppressor will never willingly give up power. And he placed human capacity in relation to the divine, in deep relation to what he called soul force, by proposing the following: when we love the oppressor, we bring about not only our own salvation, but also the salvation of the oppressor. His servant-leadership provided a unity that spanned the globe, that he and his wife Coretta Scott King called The Beloved Community. In the face of brutal inhumanity, he and Coretta rose speaking humanity, and they helped us rise.

Consider Corazon Aquino, the woman who became president after her husband was killed; she rose with People Power and restored the beauty, strength, and excellence of the Philippines. And consider her husband, who just months prior to his martyrdom, said, "The Filipino is worth dying for." In their spirit, humanity is again given the grace to rise.

Consider Czechoslovakians, enduring decades of Nazi and Communist suppression before they rose as a nation, gave the world The Velvet Revolution, a revolution without bloodshed, and elected Vaclav Havel, the poet, the playwright, as President. In this spirit, in all our shadow and light, in all our humanity, we rise.

Consider South Africa and the Truth and Reconciliation Commission.
Consider those who work for peace in the Middle East, Northern Ire-



land, the Congo, the Sudan, Rwanda, North Korea, and throughout the world.

A movement both of personal surrender and collective ultimacy comes to the fore. An understanding starts to emerge: that within the horrific violence of the human endeavor it is the nature of humanity to rise, to rise toward that which makes us whole, heals us, and presents us to one another as capable of human dignity, and able to reconcile, even after the gravest of human atrocities. There exist irrevocable movements in the history of the world in which we rise toward perfect forgiveness and fearless responsibility in making amends for the wrongs we've committed.

When we rise, we find the light we seek.

When we rise, love attends us.

And we return to beloved relationship.

Kahlil Gibran, the great Lebanese poet, said, "The strong of soul forgive." In this year's journal I see authors who are strong of soul. They forward a way of life that is important, vibrant, and necessary in the present day. This way of life, the life of the servant-leader, was articulated by Robert K. Greenleaf, and it is imbued with listening, foresight, healing, stewardship, and community.

May light and the legitimate power Greenleaf envisioned be with you in the confusion of our age. I am thankful for the many servant-leaders, in both informal and formal positions of power, within our families and communities, within our workplaces, and in our governments. Servant-leaders gift the world with action, integrity, and authentic love. They give us hope. They help us rise.

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