**CZ Notes Week 1**

**Welcome**

Thank everyone for being on the call. Excited to embark on this journey together for seven weeks. I know some of you are unable to participate every week. If you miss a week, please be sure to watch or listen to the recordings before the following week and join us as often as possible.

Introduce self and david – ask david to say hello

There are three emails that you will also find useful during the training, they are also posted on the webpage and I will put them in chat now. My email – [cat@spiritualprogressives.org](mailto:cat@spiritualprogressives.org), David’s email – [thebronze@gmail.com](mailto:thebronze@gmail.com), and Chris’ email – [chris.tikkun@gmail.com](mailto:chris.tikkun@gmail.com)

**Call Outline for Today** (which will be similar to other weeks)

1. Logistics – we will go over a few logistics on this first call. Just so we are all on the same page.
2. A Centering Exercise to bring us into a grounded, spiritual place
3. Teaching and review of some of the materials I asked you to read/watch for today. If you have questions or things arise during the teaching, please either post them in the chat or write them down to post later.
4. Short meet and greet break-out session – 15 minutes
5. Teaching and explanation of the listening exercise that you may have seen on the webpage and then we will break into groups to practice the exercise together.
6. Break-out into groups for listening exercise – 15-20 minutes
7. De-brief – questions on exercise, from teaching or from readings
8. Closing

Introduce Rabbi Michael Lerner – editor of Tikkun magazine, co-chair of the Network of Spiritual Progressives and the principal investigator in a National Institute of Mental Health research project the outcomes of which are the foundation for a lot of our work here, and author of the National best seller – The Left Hand of God, Taking Back Our Country from the Religious Right.

**Logistics**

If you need any support with Zoom, David is here to help you. You can send him a private message by clicking on “Chat” and then finding his name and sending him a message (or if that is too confusing, simply post a message in chat and he will find it!). There is information on the webpage (post in chat) - <http://spiritualprogressives.org/resources/our-podcast/spiritual-activism-training-schedule-sept-oct/> - about using Zoom. In addition, that website has all of the information you need for the training. All the assignments are (or will be) posted on that page. The recordings will be posted on that page usually within 24 hours of the call. Please bookmark this page and save it so you can easily access the information you need for the call.

Please use the chat during the calls to do the following: ask questions, let us all know your name and where you are from or located! (please go ahead and start typing that into chat now), to share with each other, etc. While we want you to be fully present on the call to the teachings and conversations, we also want you to feel connected and engaged so please do what will best support you to feel engaged and connected. I will not be reading the chat so please do not send me any private chats as I will not be able to read them during the call. If you have something you want to share with me personally, please send me an email after the call.

During the calls we will invite you to raise your hand at certain times, if you scroll over participants at the bottom of the screen, I believe that is where you can raise your hand. David, if I’m wrong, please jump on and correct me!

We will mute everyone during the calls so that there is not background noise. You are able to unmute yourself by clicking on the microphone on your screen. Please only do that if we call upon you or if you are in a break-out room with others.

We will use break-out rooms for introductions and various exercises. Before we put you in break-out rooms, we will unmute you. If you are on the phone, please be sure that if you have muted yourself. You can mute and unmute yourself on your phone using \*6.

Don’t forget that if you are having any technical difficulties with Zoom during the call and david is not available to support you (you can always send him a message via chat or even email at [thebronze@gmail.com](mailto:thebronze@gmail.com) or text him – his phone number is 240-755-3563) you can also contact Zoom directly, they have 24 hour support for participants. The information for how to contact them is on the webpage for this course.

I know that there are some people who are taking the training with others in your community. If you are participating with a group of people and you are sharing a computer together for the call and will be doing the break-out exercises together, please put your name in chat so that when we organize the break-out rooms we know not to include you in a break-out room with others!

Finally, I want to say that this training is a training. What I mean by that is that there are exercises we will do during the calls and assignments you will have between calls. I cannot emphasize enough that this training will not be as meaningful or effective for you or everyone else if you do not participate in the exercises when we do the break-out groups and if you do not do the assignments and exercises between calls. I welcome questions, challenges, etc. and at the same time, I ask that you allow yourself to be really open to what I’m sharing and teaching. Jump in and commit even if you feel some resistance. Bring those to the calls, questions, etc. because if you have them, someone else on the call does and people you engage with will have them as well. And, try to challenge because really want to understand better, not merely to criticize, critique, or argue. In other words, challenge, question, and engage as a path to deeper understanding and awareness.

For the next 7 weeks, I am asking you to remove, if you will, your doubting hat (the voices in your head that tell you this is not realistic, etc. – voices we all have) and to remain open to what I am sharing, even when it challenges some of your convictions and beliefs.

**Centering Exercise** – breathing in past, future, ground self in this moment

Once in present moment, ask them to focus on what it is that brought that to this training. What voice inside of you called you to be here today, to commit to be here for the next 7 weeks? What is the burning desire within you? Find that place inside your body where that lives and allow it to fill you up and then once you have found it, go ahead and say it out loud and also, if you want, I invite you to type it in the chat.

As Rabbi Tarfon said – “It is not your responsibility to finish the work of perfecting the world, but you are not free to desist from it either.”

May the burning desire within all of us guide us, inspire us, deepen our commitment, and sustain us through the doubts and challenges and may they be the spark of delight and joy as well.

**Teaching**

**Spiritual Activism For Our Times**

One of the things we learned through the research at the Institute of Labor and Mental Health is that the Left dismissed spirituality and religions. We are very concerned about is the way the Left deals with these issues and to be clear, we are not asking you or advocating for you to become spiritual or religious if that is not your inclination. The NSP is composed of people who are religious, spiritual but not religious, atheists and secular humanists who want nothing to do with religion – all are welcome here. And, it is important to understand some of the ways that the Left’s position on these issues has undermined their effectiveness.

In the last two to three decades, the Left has chosen to draw a line in the sand between politics and religion or spirituality. Believing deeply in the separation of church and state and rightfully critical about the role religion has played in the oppression and exploitation of people for thousands of years, the Left is skeptical (at best) about religion or spirituality playing any role in politics. As a result, they have chosen to narrow their activist approaches to advocating for political rights and economic entitlements. Unlike the Right, the Left does not talk about or bring into the political discourse universal values grounded in spiritual teachings such as love, kindness, generosity, and care. When the Left uses terms such as ‘justice,’ they steep that term in political ideology, not spiritual or theological ideology. By relinquishing any hold on the questions of moral values to the Right, the Left strengthens the power of the Right to speak to people’s need to live in a moral society, a society where they believe good conquers evil.

How the Right Claimed the Moral High Ground

In 2004 the GOP and conservative religious groups created the “I Vote Values” campaign. This bold move gave the GOP the mantelpiece they needed to claim that only they cared about morality. The fact that the morality about which they cared was narrowly focused to a few issues such as abortion, same-sex marriage, and stem cell research, did not undermine the power of the message.[[1]](#footnote-1) The Left, with its angry anti-religious approach, was then and remains today unable and unwilling to tackle this issue head-on.

This characterization of an angry, anti-religious Left was evident in the 2016 Democratic primary when Hillary supporters characterized Bernie as an angry liberal, a label that was then turned on Hillary in the general election. When asked about whether being Jewish informed his politics, instead of drawing on the wealth of radical teachings contained in the Jewish teachings, including the Torah’s injunction to love the stranger, Sanders simply said that he learned a lot about how to treat others from the lessons of the Holocaust and from his mother. His politics, while undoubtedly embedded in values of love and justice, were articulated in terms of ‘rights’ and ‘entitlements’ not as fundamental values on which a society should be structured.

The Right continues to build on the message that they are the gatekeepers of morality (whether that is true or not!). The response of the Left is to simply reframe and challenge the narrow messages of the Right (for example, using the phrase ‘anti-choice’ in place of ‘pro-life’) rather than acknowledging the ethical conundrums that underlie some of the issues of the Right and, by focusing on narrow issues (such as, fracking) rather than putting forth a moral platform or vision of their own. In other words, imagine a democratic platform that began with the following preamble:

*We, members of the Democratic Party, believe that all life is sacred. We see everyone human being as part of one humanity, all deserving of being treated with respect and dignity. We believe that a society should be judged successful not by how much money and profit it generates but rather by how much love and kindness, care and generosity, justice and peace, and awe of the universe it generates. These guiding principles will inform our positions and the policies that we promote.*

This preamble offers an opportunity to engage with the difficult and rich questions of how to create policies and programs that embody the values articulated within it. If the Democratic Party started from this place, it would challenge the Republican’s stronghold on the question of morality and force a public discussion on issues of meaning and purpose. Until that occurs, the Right can continue to claim the moral high ground.

The Right’s claim of representing the “moral majority” has had a few consequences, including the fact that it has emboldened the angry, anti-religious Left to use this fact as one more piece of evidence that religion is the problem. They throw out the baby with the bath water and along with that, many people who identify as religious or spiritual who may be inclined to support the Left if they changed their discourse. In a study of progressive grassroots religious activists in the 1990s, Stephen Hart summarized this dichotomy. “Progressives often fail to articulate, and sometimes even try to hide, the ethical values that ground their proposals. The right, meanwhile, engaging in discourse that is generally more passionate and transcendent, has seized the discursive high ground.”[[2]](#footnote-2) He elaborated this point by explaining that these progressive activists act as if the following rules exist:

“Don’t talk about anything other than the practical steps of achieving the immediate goals the organization is trying for! Don’t bring up any basic values (religious or political) that underlie your commitment to the organization! Don’t ask anyone to articulate their reasons for participating in the group! Don’t talk in terms that engage people’s passion! Discuss issues in purely instrumental terms whenever possible!”[[3]](#footnote-3)

This reluctance, even strong resistance, to bringing one’s faith or spirituality into politics ensures that those who identify with spiritual and religious traditions will continue to be vulnerable to manipulations of those beliefs by the Right. Limiting one’s discussion of political issues in purely instrumental terms is a manifestation of the embodiment of the values of scientific measurement and the capitalist marketplace within social justice efforts. Again, instrumental terms, however, are not inspiring. Narrowing its focus in this way, the Left yet again provides the Right the upper hand in using spiritual language to move people to action grounded in faith.

Fortunately there are more and more people on the Left embracing religious and spiritual values in their social justice work. They have done so because they have seen the need for political activism to be infused with spiritual values as a way to unify and consolidate efforts, occupy a moral space in contrast to that offered by the Right, and to reflect deep values that undergird the policies promoted, yet unarticulated, by the Left. While the Left is responding to these efforts by including interfaith contingencies at marches and call upon religious and spiritual organizations and communities to support or oppose legislation, they still fail to infuse their message with basic values that underlie their work. This is so even though, if asked what values lead them to promote progressive proposals they would articulate basic values that reach across political divides. Their failure to explicitly articulate these values is one reason the Right continues to expand its base and the Left continues to lose ground.

Reclaiming the Moral High Ground - What A Spiritually Infused Movement Looks Like

It is not difficult to find consensus on some universal spiritual values that can guide the work of activists who strive to create a loving and just world. We at the Network of Spiritual Progressives have articulated one version of this in our New Bottom Line and our Path to a Loving and Just World. A New Bottom Line is one in which all our social, economic, and political systems are judged successful to the extent that they maximize love and kindness, care and generosity, compassion, social, economic and environmental justice, environmental sensitivity and sustainability, enhance our capacity to respond to each other as embodiments of the sacred and to the universe with awe, wonder and radical amazement (rather than as a resource from which we can extract to meet our wants), rather than the old bottom line that measures success to the extent the institutions and systems maximize money and power.

Integrating and infusing our movements and efforts with a recognition that our burning desire for a loving and just world has stirred hearts and actions across the generations, that there has been forward progress and setbacks, and that ultimately, (as Martin Luther King, Jr. said) “the arc of the moral universe is long, but it bends toward justice” is what is at the heart of spiritual activism.

“Ultimately, one of the best ways to take care of our souls is to build a society that supports rather than undermines our highest moral and spiritual intuitions and inclinations.” (Rabbi Michael Lerner)

We at the NSP are trying to do our part to bend the arc of the moral universe toward justice and we believe that working to develop long-term strategies is an important and missing link in the process of doing so. It is also what makes our work challenging. We are not trying to address the piecemeal attacks that keep coming down the pipeline. They’ve been coming for decades and as wonderful as people are who have been trying to do that and as important those efforts have been, they are finding that their victories are being overturned and they this is so because they didn’t pay attention to building a new consciousness in this society. As I said above, the Right has been paying attention to that and has been very effective. That has been one of the huge deficits in the consciousness and approach of the Left because they thought they could win each little battle without dealing with the big questions of what kind of society do people really want, what kind of society can and should we build and how do we go about doing that. These were often dismissed as utopian or ideological or too intellectual or too grandiose or who has time for it when putting out every little fire when in reality only putting out 1/3 of the fires. All we need to think about right now is the barrage of attacks on the federal level from the Trump administration and Republican Congress as well as those on the local level. For every fire we manage to put-out (temporarily), they have many more coming down the pipeline.

That is not to say that the responses and efforts to resist all of these attacks are not important, they certainly are. And while we attempt to deal with them, we need to simultaneously win the minds and hearts of people to a different kind of world. We need to focus on a cultural and spiritual transformation of our society, not just economic entitlements and political rights. Because of the ongoing attacks of the Trump administration we feel huge pressures to respond to the immediate and real assaults on people’s rights. But this consciousness to be reactive and constantly respond to the attacks makes us less effective. Yes, there are times when we absolutely have to be on the streets, and every time we do that, we should be simultaneously putting forth the vision of a world based on a New Bottom Line.

We are just as devastated and horrified about Trump as you are, but the danger of Trump is not simply what he will do in these next 4 years, but the degree to which Trump-ism will reshape the political landscape because the ideas that have been the right-wing ideas will now have a huge articulation not only from Trump but from all of the people he has brought in to positions of power and influence in our society and the obedient media that believing it must be “fair and balanced” and acknowledge that these are the people who now have power, the media will give them and their ideas more time. Obama did not bring in people who would articulate and defend a progressive worldview. On the contrary, he kept showing to the Right that he would be compromising with them and he appointed people in his Cabinet who had a worldview exactly opposite what those who supported had expected. This is why our role is so critical because there are very few in the Left who have learned that lesson from the election and are saying we have to build a whole new consciousness. Instead what they are saying is that we have to fight and resist each new attack and while that’s important and we support those efforts, that is not enough because we will not win the hearts and minds of people through those efforts. That is what makes our role unique and powerful. Our strategy is to first change the culture of the Left so that it begins to:

(1) recognize that changing consciousness is a central need to build a truly loving and just world.

(2) stop shaming and blaming people who are not yet with us.

(3) bring this additional consciousness of advocating for the vision of the world we want into resistant efforts and

(4) then, after we have transformed the Left, reaching out to people who were Trump voters or didn’t bother to vote b/c so alienated by whole thing and speak to their needs in a way they’ve never heard spoken to by anyone on the Left.

This training is based on fundamental principle that people are acting in irrational, self-destructive ways, rather than assume they are, in fact, irrational, self-destructive, or fundamentally racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, anti-Semitic, etc. We have to ask ourselves what are the real needs they have that they are seeking to meet but have adopted strategies to meet them that will actually not meet those needs and in ways that are destructive, irrational, hurtful to self and others, and then develop ways to meet those needs with more rational strategies that actually meet their needs.

Problem/challenge is that people are not always aware of their needs and that the Right has figured out how to meet some of their needs but in destructive and misguided ways.

The research we’ve done at the Institute of Labor and Mental Health helps us uncover what some of those needs are (and now this is being addressed in more mainstream society and by some on the Left who were not addressing it previously – Michelle Alexander, Van Jones, Gus Speth).

**Breakout**

Introductions (2 minutes/person, groups of 3-4 people) - 15 mins.

**Empathy Skills:** Listening Exercise - teaching - 5 minutes (diff. Btw facts, feelings and needs) and explain the exercise

Throughout this training we will work on developing skills in empathic and compassionate listening and speaking. We believe that these skills are critical to be able to work for meaningful transformation for our society. Everything we are sharing in this training, as I mentioned before, is focused on working to transform consciousness (ours and the society at large). It may seem that practicing these skills are not important to the current circumstances, yet we know that if we continue to dismiss people who are not with us and fail to understand their needs, as well as the needs of those who are with us but who are speaking in ways that are not helpful, we will not be successful in our efforts to create long-term meaningful change. So this training is asking you to think of this work, like any spiritual practice, as a marathon, not a sprint. There are skills we need to develop and understandings we need to acquire to build a spiritually progressive social change movement. I imagine that some of you may feel frustrated because you may want to know what to do tomorrow, or who to write letters to, etc. And this training is about something very different, it’s about developing the capacity to build the infrastructures and means of building community with each other and beyond so that we can create an entirely new society based on love and justice.

So this exercise is focused on what I believe is the first stage of communication – listening to understand rather than listening to respond. Explain the exercise and then explain the difference btw facts, feelings and judgments.

Facts – those things that one can see or know – for example, something that a video camera would capture. So for example, the flooding in Houston reached levels higher than have been previously recorded in history.

Feelings – I feel scared, upset about the destruction in Houston.

Assessment/Judgments – The government is not doing anything to help the people in Houston.

Another example:

Facts – You are speaking at a volume louder than you were a few minutes ago.

Feelings – I feel anxious

Assessments/Judgments – you are yelling and angry

**Listening Exercise Instructions:**

Here are the instructions for the exercise. Participants take the following roles within their group:

A - Speaker;  B - Listener for facts;  C - Listener for feelings;  D – Listener for assessments or judgments

Make sure someone other than the speaker is tracking time.

The exercise:

‘A’ – talk for 3 minutes without interruption on their chosen topic

*possible topics*: your thoughts and feelings what is happening the world, something in your life that you are having a strong reaction to

‘B’ - listen for the 'facts' expressed by A in their talk

‘C’ - listen for the 'feelings' expressed by A in their talk

‘D’ – listen for assessments or judgments

It is important that nobody speaks except for A, even if A runs out of things to say before the 3 minutes are up. Sitting in silence can be an interesting experience in itself for discussion later.

Once A has had their 3 minutes to speak, B is then given 2 minutes to summarize back the 'facts' expressed by A during their talk, and then C is given 2 minutes to summarize back the 'feelings' expressed by A during their talk. D is given 2 minutes to reflect any observations

Possible topics - you can talk about the anxiety you are feeling about what is happening, concerns you have about something in your life

When you get into your break-out group, make sure that you are unmuted - your phone (by pressing \*6) and your computer/iPad (by making sure the microphone is unmuted). Then introduce yourselves to each other with your name and where you are from. These groups will be different from the first meet and greet group that you were with earlier. This way you have an opportunity to meet more people in the training. Then please jump right into the exercise. You will have time to do the exercise one time.

We want everyone to have at least one person/buddy to connect with between calls each week. We will ask you to do exercises with each other, you can discuss the assignments with each other, and get to know one another and support each other. To facilitate this happening, we want you to take about five minutes after you complete the exercise to exchange your contact information with the other people in your break-out group and, if possible on this call, take time to schedule a time to connect during the week to practice this exercise with one another during the week. It may be that it works to break into smaller groups to schedule these calls, in other words maybe you’ll meet in groups of 2 instead of in groups of 3 or 4, if so that is fine. Try to make sure that everyone in your group has someone to practice with during the week. It is possible to do this exercise with only two people as well the second person will listen for both facts and feelings. If you are unsuccessful in scheduling a time with someone else to practice in the group after you attempt to do so during and after the call by exchanging information, please email david at [thebronz@gmail.com](mailto:thebronz@gmail.com) and he will help connect you with someone else in the training who needs a partner. This is someone you will be working with for the rest of the 7 weeks and hopefully beyond!

**Questions/Gleaning**: From exercise and from teachings/homework. If you have questions about the exercise or from the teaching or homework, please post those in the chat. If you are on the phone and you cannot post it in the chat, please unmute yourself when you hear a moment to do so and we will hear your question.

**Closing** - Assignments for next week and closing

Homework Action: Practice the listening exercise with your buddy and also have 2-3 conversations with people using the listening skills you learned in the exercise. These conversations can be about anything you want. The focus is to practice listening to be able to discern from facts and feelings (and if you are able), also needs (or the underlying meaning of what is important to the person speaking). The point is to listen to hear and understand, not to respond or convince.

Homework Assignments – on the webpage. Put link in chat again <http://spiritualprogressives.org/resources/our-podcast/spiritual-activism-training-schedule-sept-oct/>

**Reading and Blessing**

“An open ear is the only believable sign of an open heart.”

~ David Augsburger

In the midst of hate,

I found there was, within me,

an invincible love.

In the midst of tears,

I found there was, within me,

an invincible smile.

In the midst of chaos,

I found there was, within me,

an invincible calm.

I realized, through it all, that...

In the midst of winter,

I found there was, within me,

an invincible summer.

And that makes me happy.

For it says that no matter how hard the world pushes against me,

within me, there's something stronger – something better,

pushing right back.

-Albert Camus

Blessing

1. Robert P. Jones *Progressives & Religious: How Christian, Jewish, Muslim, and Buddhist Leaders Are Moving Beyond the Culture Wars and Transforming American Public Life* (New York: Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. 2008), 5. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Stephen Hart, *Cultural Dilemmas of Progressive Politics: Styles of Engagement among Grassroots Activists* (Chicago: University Chicago Press, 2001), 20. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Hart, 15. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)