

*Multi-Faith Memorial for Nelson Mandela
December 8, 2013 @ Reno Buddhist Temple*

We preach forgiveness: it is an important teaching and practice in our faith traditions and essential in Christianity. We often focus the call to forgive on the personal level. It is not always easy to forgive, especially if we've been injured unjustly. But it is even more challenging on a political, national or global level. I may be willing to forgive, but how can we summon that will corporately and do it on a national level? Nelson Mandela showed us a way.

As president of South Africa he established the Truth and Reconciliation Commission. Apartheid sowed injustices and abuses and those could not be overlooked. But Mandela knew in his soul that the response to injustice could not simply be retribution. The world knows too well the cycle of vengeance and how it breeds violence, hatred and death. The oppressed become the oppressor. The only way to move forward was through forgiveness. The only way to unity among races was through reconciliation.

Nelson Mandela taught the world that this was possible. It was not simply a dream. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission became a model for many other nations who had undergone a similar experience of strife.

That Nelson Mandela was imprisoned for twenty-seven years and yet was committed to reconciliation and forgiveness tells us that this conviction came from deep within his soul. That is why he is such a light of hope for us. That is why people have described him as "magnanimous", which is characteristic of forgiveness.