Transformative Activist Trainings

Martin Luther King Jr. did not become an icon of social change by giving a speech saying, “I have a complaint.” He inspired action by sharing his dream. Facing the political realities of the coming years, social change movements need a positive vision and leaders who can articulate that vision while conveying empathy, caring, and generosity of spirit to those who do not yet agree with us.

Rabbi Michael Lerner and Cat Zavis offer such a training. In it, participants learn how to articulate a vision that unites people to create a world that speaks to their deepest needs; how to present a coherent strategy to change economic, political, and social dysfunction; how to engage in heated dialogues where all parties can be heard and understood; how to challenge power dynamics; and how to overcome internal struggles within organizations and movements that undermine their effectiveness.

Cat Zavis, a lawyer, mediator, and expert in empathic communication, is executive director of the Network of Spiritual Progressives.

Rabbi Michael Lerner is editor of Tikkun.

Some trainings are already scheduled, and Cat is willing to set one up in any community where you can get fifty people to enroll.

For information on currently planned trainings and for information on how to create one in your geographic area, contact cat@spiritualprogressives.org.
 Residents of Ferguson, Missouri, protest the shooting of Michael Brown in August 2014.

Black lives matter. In the face of relentless murders perpetrated by white police against Black people in the United States, this simple assertion has become a powerful political intervention. Affirming that Black lives matter involves mourning Eric Garner, Michael Brown, Tamir Rice, Trayvon Martin, Oscar Grant, Aiyana Jones, Rekia Boyd, and Trayvon Martin’s killer was acquitted—quickly following his acquittal, the #BlackLivesMatter hashtag—created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi after the Trayvon Martin case—began a popular movement that challenges exploitative systems in our society.

At Tikkun call upon our elected representatives to institute a multi-level attack on racism, including a) imposing community control on police forces and enacting severe penalties against any police and their supervisors who engage in or tolerate racist behavior; b) teaching about contemporary racism and the history of anti-racist struggles at every grade level from fourth grade through high school; c) restoring affirmative action in college, graduate, and professional schools, as well as in corporations with more than 100 employees; and d) implementing a Domestic and Global Marshall Plan as articulated at tikkun.org/GMP to eliminate poverty (which falls unevenly across racial lines) in the United States and around the world. Please join us in pushing for this. We can’t let racism out of our sights—it is too destructive to everyone’s humanity.

Global capitalism is destroying the life support system of the planet. Meanwhile, the capitalist ethos of materialism, individualism, and selfishness is destroying the ethical foundations of our families, friendships, and communities. Even so, the fantasies of “reform from within” persist, and anticapitalist critique is widely dismissed as pointless rhetoric. Even sensitive and well-intentioned people have come to believe that “socially responsible business” holds the key to transforming the world for the better. All the more reason to wrestle these three books. Read together, they provide a valuable foundation for spiritual progressives who are looking for new ways to express the fundamental need to restructure our global economic and political arrangements in accord with the values of love, generosity, environmental sanity, peace, social justice, and nonviolence.

We regret not having previously hailed Michael Edwards’s brilliant exposition of why businesses won’t save the world, no matter how principled their foundational or their boards of directors. As Edwards points out, “The best results in raising economic growth rates while simultaneously reducing poverty and inequality come when markets are subordinated to the public interest.” Read this book together with Jerry Mander’s classic, The Corporatist Apparatus, and you’ll be able to help your friends throw away their fantasies of maintaining their liberal ideals while eating a rich pro-capitalist diet.

In The Just Market, Jonathan Brandow demonstrates that the Torah provides a solid foundation for a critique of the modern capitalist economy. Addressing issues as broad as employment, profits, a level playing field, and respect for the environment, he offers a radical reconstruction of the norms of the ancient world that can reconnect with the human spirit, peace, social justice, and nonviolence.

The situation involving ISIS can’t be fully understood without a grasp of the way Western modernity looks irrational and detached to people in the Middle East. The West’s generosity toward Israel has confused it with the Arab world in a way that makes Westerners think of it as an external threat. Theorists of decolonialization have been spelling this out for the past two decades. Mignolo seeks to conceptualize a world in which human beings and the natural world are no longer exploited by a global capitalism’s quest for endless accumulation. Without validating the violent strategies used by some decolonizing projects, we can seek to understand why people might join movements that do not integrate into their practice a commitment to human rights.

The Capitalism Papers by Brian D. McLaren will continue to take part in this struggle in the years ahead.

The #BlackLivesMatter hashtag—created by Alicia Garza, Patrisse Cullors, and Opal Tometi after Trayvon Martin’s killer was acquitted—quickly became a rallying cry nationwide. This outpouring is the latest manifestation of a struggle whose roots lie in the history of slavery and Jim Crow. This outpouring is the latest manifestation of a struggle whose roots lie in the history of slavery and Jim Crow. Another story that offers hope in this moment is a Palestinian Israeli memoir of his life as a young soldier on the front line of Operation Defensive Shield, a devastating offen-

sive against Gaza by Israel. Dovrat’s memoir takes you into the inner life of a principled and caring soldier whose acceptance of the standard narrative of the Holocaust initially allows him to believe that Israel’s wars are necessary and just. His views start to change when he encounters a Palestinian village shatters his certainty and he comes to question the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the necessity of the Occupation. This is a beautiful and hopeful story!

The Darker Side of My Holocaust is a memoir of his life as a young soldier on the front line of Operation Defensive Shield, a devastating offensive against Gaza by Israel. Dovrat’s memoir takes you into the inner life of a principled and caring soldier whose acceptance of the standard narrative of the Holocaust initially allows him to believe that Israel’s wars are necessary and just. His views start to change when he encounters a Palestinian village shatters his certainty and he comes to question the uniqueness of the Holocaust and the necessity of the Occupation. This is a beautiful and hopeful story!

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