

## **Right Relationship Team UUMA Good Offices**

Created by Melissa Carvill Ziemer with contributions from Clyde Grubbs,  
Julica Hermann de la Fuente and Samantha Wilson

**Current as of December 2023**

### **Part I: The Basics**

#### **Purpose of Good Offices Right Relationship Team:**

The purpose of the Good Offices Right Relationship Team is to support, guide and companion members of the UUMA concerned about a break in collegial covenant. Team members are able to work with those who have been directly harmed by a break in covenant and are also available to work with those who have violated our code and want to work toward repair and restoration. The specific roles that the Good Offices Right Relationship Guide may play in any given situation are described in the Accountability Procedures section of the UUMA Guidelines.

#### **Expectations of Good Offices Right Relationship Team:**

The Good Offices Right Relationship Guides will be expected to:

- Complete the required introductory training before accepting any referrals.
- Approach the work as praxis; corps members will commit to meet monthly for reflection, consultation and continuous learning about the theory, art and practice of working toward right relationship.
- Function in a collaborative manner; in some instances more than one Good Offices person will be needed to work with members in crisis or conflict.
- Respond to any inquiry requesting support in a timely manner and engage in discernment about their own capacity before accepting any referral.
- Submit required report forms in a timely manner.

#### **Selection/Term Limits**

The Good Offices Right Relationship Guides will be selected by the UUMA's Director of Ministries for Collegial Care and the Good Offices Coordinating Team member with the portfolio for supporting the Right Relationship specialization. Members of the UUMA in Full Fellowship will be invited to apply for the role at least bi-annually, or whenever there are openings in the corps. Appointments to the corps will be for renewable two-year terms.

### **Part II: Meanings of Terms and Discussion of Concepts**

#### **What is right relationship?**

Right relationship is a concept with roots and relevance in many religious and spiritual traditions. The Hebrew and Christian scriptures offer numerous commentaries and teachings about how humans should seek to relate to God, to other humans and to this earth we share. In their book "Practicing Right Relationship," Sellon and Smith point to the Hebrew word Shalom, a state of active and creative peace, as one way of understanding right relationship. They also lift up the

mujerista Christian concept of the “kingdom of God,” coined by Ada Maria Isasi-Diaz, which refers to the understanding that all are children of God, interrelated with one another and with obligations to one another and to God for the lives we create with and for each other.<sup>1</sup>

The Noble Eightfold Path of Buddhism offers detailed and specific instruction in right understanding, right thought, right speech, right action, right livelihood, right effort, right mindfulness and right concentration. Through these teachings, practitioners develop in three essential areas of Buddhist discipline: ethical conduct, mental discipline and wisdom. Practicing these leads to freedom and liberation from the way of suffering.

In contemporary Christian practice, the term right relationship is readily found within Catholic and Quaker teachings. The Catholic Worker Community Casa Alma grounds their understanding of right relationship in scripture; right relationship is about justice “with God, with others and with the earth.”<sup>2</sup> Quakers reference the 17th century economic reformer John Beller and the 18th century theologian John Woolman in their uses of the term right relationship to discuss how our lives with each other and with this earth should be ordered.<sup>3</sup> The American Friends Service Committee, Quakers for Earthcare Witness and the Friends Peace Team all ground their work today in a vision of right relationship.

Contemporary Unitarian Universalist usage of this term is likely inspired by all these sources. It may also draw upon the work of James Luther Adams who wrote extensively about covenant and about human beings as promise making, promise breaking, promise renewing creatures. The work of repairing and restoring our relationships when we break our covenants is another way of understanding right relationship in our context.

The Rev. Clyde Grubbs remembers the term coming into usage in feminist Unitarian Universalist circles as part of the discourse related to anti-oppressive work in the 1970s. In his work on the creation of this material, Rev. Grubbs has described the ways in which the Indigenous American ethic of balance may have some resonance with the ethical ideal of right relationship. He writes that among the woodlands peoples of the Americas, the ethic of balance refers not only to relationships between and among people, but also to animals, the sun, the moon, the directions and future generations. From this understanding of the world, there are natural consequences for being out of balance; in this way “the eco-spiritual notion that not being in right relationship to the earth will create destructive consequences is closer to the indigenous idea.”<sup>4</sup>

**For our purposes in this document, we are working with the understanding that right relationship is both an ethic and a practice.** Right relationship as an ethic refers to our

---

<sup>1</sup> Sellon, Mary K. and Smith, Daniel P. “Practicing Right Relationship: Skills for Deepening Purpose, Finding Fulfillment, and Increasing Effectiveness in Your Congregation. Herndon, VA: The Alban Institute, 2005, 8.

<sup>2</sup> See the website for Casa Alma at <https://casa-alma.org/right-relationships-2/>

<sup>3</sup> See these websites for Quaker initiatives at <https://www.afsc.org/story/right-relationship?fbclid=IwAR0MXfUwqVgHOW9SG9BQ-Ff4xnallSdx9Zy2mZ X4JYAMYkMNuhOLsyca73E> and <https://www.quakerearthcare.org/article/living-right-relationship>

<sup>4</sup> Private email communication, May 2020.

affirmation of the principles of interconnectedness and interdependence. Right relationship as an aspirational practice is manifest in our history and heritage as a covenantal people.

*Hoshana for Right Relationship*<sup>5</sup>

By Rabbi Rachel Barenblat, the Velveteen Rabbi

הושע נא / *Hosha na*, please save!  
For the sake of Acting in good faith  
For the sake of Boundaries and their maintenance  
For the sake of Choosing to see clearly  
For the sake of Directly naming what is broken  
For the sake of Ending unconscious patterns  
For the sake of Finding strength to speak  
For the sake of Growth and transformation  
For the sake of Holding firm to principle  
For the sake of Integrity in all things  
For the sake of Justice in every moment  
For the sake of Keeping ourselves honest  
For the sake of Love and awe in equal measure  
For the sake of Making real teshuvah  
For the sake of Noticing when we're culpable  
For the sake of Opening ourselves to becoming  
For the sake of Power wielded justly  
For the sake of Questioning and discernment  
For the sake of Repairing what we've damaged  
For the sake of Standing in our truth  
For the sake of Taking responsibility  
For the sake of Understanding our own choices  
For the sake of Victims of abuse, believed and honored  
For the sake of Walking away from toxicity  
For the sake of eXamining our behavior  
For the sake of Yin and yang in balance  
For the sake of Zeal to do what's right, not just what's easy:  
הושע נא / *Hosha na*, please save!

**How do we come into right relationship?**

In Unitarian Universalism we understand each life as a blessing. We affirm that each life is sacred and that every night a child is born is a holy night.<sup>6</sup> And, we also affirm that the record of human history on this earth reveals inequities and injustices that privilege some lives more than others with grave and profoundly destructive consequences.

---

<sup>5</sup> Barenblat, Rachel. <https://velveteenrabbi.blogs.com/blog/2017/10/hoshana-for-right-relationship.html>

<sup>6</sup> Fahs, Sophia Lyon. "Each Night a Child is Born is a Holy Night" in *Singing the Living Tradition*, #616.

As we grow, we are socialized into the systems and structures of inequity that persist on this earth. Coming into right relationship is a lifelong practice which is continuously informed by experiences of what it feels like to be in and out of right relationship in our own bodies, in our own lives. It is also informed by our ongoing learning and reflection upon the diverse religious and ethical understandings of human beings. There is no single universal ideal of right relationship. In our tradition, faith formation offers people of all ages a set of values and ethics to live by while also encouraging us to understand and respect other ways of being in this world. In Unitarian Universalism, to come into right relationship is a lifelong process of discovering how to be connected in healing and life affirming ways with ourselves, with others, with the earth and with the Holy.

### **How do we maintain right relationship?**

We maintain right relationship through practices of repair. Because we are human, we will make mistakes. We will make choices which separate us from ourselves and our own deepest values. We will hurt people we love, unintentionally and even sometimes on purpose. We will make choices that desecrate the earth, often without even knowing that is what we are doing. We will place money or power or prestige and countless other idols first. We will sin and we will be separated. We will do these things not because we are bad or wrong but because we are human and limited and fallible.

We return to right relationship by endeavoring to notice when we have become separated from self or others or the earth or the Holy or by being willing to listen when others tell us we have become separated. Noticing is where we begin. From there the work of right relationship involves learning and practicing skills of repair and reconciliation.<sup>7</sup>

For those of us harmed, we restore and maintain right relationship by seeking appropriate avenues of support and healing. We trust that the institution offering this opportunity will indeed hold us and the process will help. We learn to name how impact has occurred, and what is needed for true forgiveness and healing. We engage in an iterative process of discovery and deeper wholeness.

### **What is the difference between hurt and harm?**

The *Creative Interventions Toolkit* defines harm as “Some form of injury to a person, group or community. This injury can be of many types: physical, financial, emotional, sexual, spiritual, environmental and so on.”<sup>8</sup>

---

<sup>7</sup> Mia Mingus offers a powerful statement about our responsibility to care for our relationships (and the skills we need to develop to do so) in the essay “On Collaboration: Starting with Each Other” <https://leavingevidence.wordpress.com/2012/08/03/on-collaboration-starting-with-each-other/>

<sup>8</sup> See the Creative Interventions Toolkit at <https://transformharm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CI-Toolkit-Complete-FINAL.pdf>, page 489.

Mariame Kaba, a practitioner and leader in the field of transformative justice explains that the difference between hurt and harm is the difference that deliberate intent makes.<sup>9</sup> If we activate old pain for someone unintentionally, we may hurt them without realizing we would create that impact with our words or actions. If we deliberately seek to inflict injury or to gain power or control over another or to enhance our own position at the expense of another, that is harm.

The UUMA Guidelines define harm for our purposes as a violation of the UUMA Code of Conduct. Our Guidelines do not address the matter of intent, but the Right Relations Guides with the Good Offices specialization may sometimes need to be discernment partners with participants in a restoration process around questions regarding intent and impact as part of the process of working toward repair.

### **What is accountability?**

The *Creative Interventions Toolkit* defines accountability as follows: “For people involved, thinking about the ways they may have contributed to violence, recognizing their roles, acknowledging the ways they may need to make amends for their actions and make changes toward ensuring that violence does not continue and that healthy alternatives can take its place.”

<sup>10</sup>

In our context, the UUMA Guidelines understand accountability as an obligation and a process. We are accountable to the Holy that called us into ministry and to the vows we took when we were ordained. As ministers in fellowship with the UUA we are accountable to follow the rules established by the Ministerial Credentialing Committee. As ministers in a variety of institutional contexts we are accountable to advance the mission of the organization for which we work. As colleagues we are accountable to the integrity of the ministry which we maintain by respecting the Ethical Standards and Expectations of Conduct outlined in our Code of Conduct in the UUMA Guidelines.

The accountability procedures in our Guidelines exist for the times when colleagues express concern that we have failed to maintain our required ethical standards as well as for times when we come to that realization on our own.

### **Part III - Frameworks, Resources and Tools**

Team members will be equipped and supported in this work through our ongoing consultation group gatherings. Topics we will cover in the consultation group may include:

- Conflict transformation tools and resources
- The meaning and practice of Right Relationship generally and in the UUMA in particular
- The merits and limitations of direct address

---

<sup>9</sup> Kaba, Mariame. “Transforming Harm: Experiments in Accountability”  
<http://bcrcw.barnard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/09/2019-10-25-Transforming-Harm-Experiments-in-Accountability.pdf>

<sup>10</sup> Creative Interventions Toolkit,  
<https://transformharm.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/CI-Toolkit-Complete-FINAL.pdf> 488.

- Impacts of racism and oppression on the work of Right Relationship
- Impacts of guilt and shame on the work of Right Relationship

## Books and other Resources (provided by Samantha Wilson, with annotation)

**"[The Little Book of Restorative Justice](#)" by Zehr** - This one-- essential reading. A go-to guide. Western-framework, articulated by Howard Zehr-

**"[The Little Book of Circle Processes](#)" by Pranis** - Also white/western-framework, and good prompts/thinking behind circle-based work:

**"[Fumbling Towards Repair](#)" Workbook** - Brilliant. Grassroots. I love this. I've used some of their worksheets for 1-1 dialogues.

**"[Transformative Community Conferencing](#)" by Rev. Dr. David Anderson Hooker** - this is the framework I used very intentionally in Phase 1. This is where the phrase, "The people are not the problem-- the problem is the problem" came from.

You could also watch a video webinar of Dr. Hooker talking about [Transformative Community Conferencing!](#) I really enjoyed this-- hosted by the Zehr institute.

He also did a series on ["Narrative shifts"](#) and changing the story-- which is the underlying process of Transformative Community Conferencing. For example - narrative Shifts in Youth:

### Other Resources...

These all include at least someone I know/trust or have worked with. So, that's how I decided to list them here!

**"[RJ Listening Project Report](#)"** - this is really the response to the more western-framework stuff I listed at the top. This was an effort to do some listening across the USA and Canada, and looking at how RJ got co-opted by white, non-profits as a "certification" tool rather than as a way of being. Worth it to get a sense of "what is the state of RJ by practitioners today?"

### "The Ahimsa Collective"

Their list of resources is great: <https://www.ahimsacollective.net/rj-movement-building>  
There are a bunch of trainings/trainers in the Bay area they list at the top of that webpage. The film, "Hollow Water" is good - available for free online-- indigenous approaches to dealing with sexual harm in a community.

I would also look out for when Ahimsa puts on their in-person trainings again (<https://www.ahimsacollective.net/trainings>). You can email them to get on their mailing list/waiting list. The trainings we did were mostly done in prison with folks who had been incarcerated for sexual harm, led by folks who identify as survivors of sexual harm.

A bunch of Ahimsa folks are featured in these videos about **shame, accountability, and harm**. This is really good thinking for how to do some of the healing/accountability (STICKING POINTS MAGHGHGHHGHG) stuff you will be doing this coming year: <https://youtu.be/tRhoaRlyeq8>

### International Institute of Restorative Practices (IIRP)

I have friends/practitioners in Los Angeles who studied at this school-- I have not used these resources, but I've been impressed and found very trustworthy friends and practitioners who learned within that community.

Their list of free online webinars:

<https://www.iirp.edu/continuing-education/free-webinars/#watch-a-recording-of-this-past-webinar-2>

They have online professional development courses you may enjoy this summer!

<https://www.iirp.edu/continuing-education/online-professional-development>

**Eastern Mennonite University is the other big RJ graduate program:**

<https://emu.edu/cjp/grad/restorative-justice>

EMU is also where the Zehr Institute is held. They also publish the "Little Books" series I listed some of the top-- the whole list is here, you might find a gem. I see one on "negotiation" that you may really enjoy, if your intuition tells you that will be a focus of your time next year:

<https://emu.edu/cjp/resources/little-books>

**For something completely different...**

**"Community: The Structure of Belonging"** by Peter Block. Brilliant white dude facilitator on community conversations, mostly focused on civic life. This book is my go-to-guide for powerful questions that help us get unstuck. I used this book I used for Phase 1 and Phase 2. There are MANY videos of him online talking about this text-- just look on YouTube, you might find a gem.

**Miki Kashtan** - This one is a favorite facilitator of many people. VERY SKILLED. Lots of videos of her online, too. One that I listened to and found very useful (for working with PCD stuff) was her work on "convergent facilitation."

\*\*\* **Creating Willingness to Collaborate:** I found this video helpful. I actually listened to it on a long drive to a PCD meeting with YRUUP one time! I was grateful I did. "Maximizing Willingness for Collaborative-Decision Making" - <https://youtu.be/BajMokLFpVY>

Key point in her work as facilitator: people come together MUCH more easily around sharing and being facilitated in sharing their needs, hopes, values rather than their positions. This, hmmm... now that I think of it, might be why I hate the "sticking points" phrase so much-- it feels like it has the potential to be about the positions. We need people focused on the needs, hopes, values and getting creative because they realize they have shared ones-- for example, Fennel saying "I value being mentored by people older than me, and I value mentoring people younger than me"-- that is about a value and hope. We can work with that. But if we start from "We need the age range to be X" we get stuck.

**In 2018, she led a training about this online... the link to that 2018 course (with a nice interview) is below...** if she is offering something like that again, it might be worth the money for you + someone else to come. Kristin and I had fantasies of training YRUUP and PCD youth in some different RJ/facilitation practices as a way to build trust and build skills:

<http://nvctraining.com/media/2018/MK/convergent-facilitation/index.html>

**NVC Offerings for 2020:**

[https://nvctraining.com/index.php?option=com\\_k2&view=itemlist&layout=category&Itemid=138](https://nvctraining.com/index.php?option=com_k2&view=itemlist&layout=category&Itemid=138)

**Dominic Barter** - A favorite facilitator/teacher of one of my best colleagues, from Brazil. I haven't spent too much time with his work, but someone who is very close to me says that the moment I do I will have found kin.

<https://www.restorativecircles.org/>