

HEALING JUSTICE

Stories of Wisdom and Love



JAREM SAWATSKY



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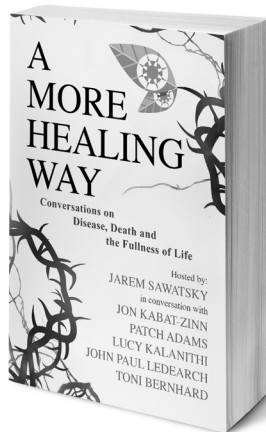
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More details can be found at the end of *Healing Justice*.

Reading Guide for *Healing Justice*

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Praise for Healing Justice

If we are to bring more peace to our planet, we need to replace punishing those who've caused harm with communications that foster compassion and healing. In this wise and beautiful book, we bear witness to how this is unfolding in highly diverse communities across the globe. Thank you, *Jarem*, for sharing these invaluable illustrations of our human potential.

**-TARA BRACH, bestselling author of
*Radical Acceptance***

Healing Justice is essential reading for this moment in history. Through captivating real-

life stories, *Jarem Sawatsky* deftly shows us that if we take the time to learn about our own humanness, justice can be transformative. In this time of reconciliation, he demonstrates how communities do not need to wait for governments to create communities rooted in healing, justice, truth and reconciliation

**-SENATOR MURRAY SINCLAIR, former Chair
of the Truth & Reconciliation Commission of
Canada 2009-15**

...reflections of a deeply curious human being who wonders if there might be better ways for all of us to behave towards each other.

**- RUPERT ROSS, national bestselling author of
*Return to the Teachings***

Jarem Sawatsky discovered in his brokenness a Muse and Angel that guided his life work and inspired this beautiful book. His central insight is that healing justice are two words joined together like two faces on one body. You heal yourself and your world by means of your illnesses and injustices. This is one of those books you wish everyone would read and keep and meditate on.

**-THOMAS MOORE, New York Times
bestselling author of
*Care for the Soul***

Chapter 1 - Shatteredness and the Unshatterable



The Unbroken

There is a brokenness
Out of which comes the unbroken,
A shatteredness out of which blooms the
unshatterable.

There is a sorrow
Beyond all grief which leads to joy
And a fragility
Out of which depth emerges strength.

There is a hollow space
Too vast for words
Through which we pass with each loss,
Out of whose darkness we are sanctified into being.

There is a cry deeper than all sound
Whose serrated edges cut the heart
As we break open
To the place inside which is unbreakable
And whole, while learning to sing
(Rashani 1991)

WHAT IF JUSTICE is about becoming whole while learning to sing? How do we nurture the conditions where shatteredness might bloom into the unshatterable? What imagination and support are necessary to sustain that journey into darkness, where we are sanctified into being? How do we cultivate the ability to hear the cry that is deeper than all sound and to see the unbreakable in the broken? What if justice is meant to lead to joy, to emerging strengthened out of fragility, to finding our place in the song? What if many of our basic assumptions about justice are misguided? What if a more healing kind of justice is possible? What if it already exists?

This poem so beautifully describes the transformation that can happen when we lean into our suffering and allow ourselves to break open. Only then can we find the unbreakable and whole, while learning to sing. When I was still teaching Peace and Conflict Transformation Studies at the university, I used this poem on the first day of classes to try to set the tone, direc-

tion, and color of class. Each time, some students were moved to tears because they too had experienced this grief that leads to joy. Somehow, the poem resonated with their true sense of themselves. I kept sharing it because it also kept speaking to my true self.

Brokenness, shatteredness, sorrow, and grief have been my companions since I was young. But I have also touched and tasted the joy and strength that come from fragility. My whole life I have been searching for a healing kind of justice.

In my childhood years, the brokenness came, mostly, from the turbulence of home.

Will Mom and Dad be fighting? Will they still be together? Will Mom rip open the locked door to the guest room again to get to Dad? Will Dad quit his job again before he has a new one? Often, I would fall asleep with my head under the pillow, praying for it to stop. Those were also the years of what my dad called the banning and shunning from the church community he helped start. During this time, I took refuge in my friends and my school.

In my teen years, after my parents split, my turbulence still came mostly from home and living with my mom. The questions changed. Will Mom be throwing up from her migraine? Will we need to go to the food bank again? Will Mom be telling me what

an awful person I will become? Will she follow through on the suicide threats? Will I find her? Will I get Huntington's Disease, the disease eating away at my mom? Will I become my mom? In these years, I took refuge still in friends and in my excellent inner-city high school, where white people were the minority. The whole world was at that school. From early on, my belonging went beyond race, religion, and social class. But I also learned to take refuge in the wilderness, in my canoe where I learned sitting meditation, how to touch the earth, how to listen to the stillness. I read everything I could by Henri Nouwen, Jean Vanier, and St. Francis of Assisi.

In my twenties, for some odd reason, I studied conflict and peace in university. Those were the years of falling in love, getting married, starting a family, and starting work. While at graduate school in Virginia, my love, Rhona, and I decided to start having kids, and after a few months, she was pregnant with twins! We decided to go back home where we would have more support to raise the kids. I lined up work, teaching peace and conflict studies at a university, and we returned home. In the two years that followed – which we call the dark years – our turbulence came from Rhona's dark post-partum depression combined with the sleep deprivation that comes from babies who did not like to fall asleep. Again, the questions changed. Will Rhona be

depressed and unresponsive? What will I be heading into at home? Will the ringing phone be my mom telling me that I will be a bad parent? Will I get this same disease? In those years, we took refuge in our church community, our friends, and family. I read everything I could by Thich Nhat Hanh, Margaret Wheatley, and John Paul Lederach.

When our twin daughters turned three, life was so much better. We felt like we could take on more challenges! At the university, I was told that I would lose my job if I did not get a doctorate. So, we relocated to northern England for me to do doctoral studies.

I could study anything. I chose to study healing justice. During this time, our turbulence came from the death of my mom from Huntington's Disease. Rhona had another bout of depression, and as students, we had almost no money. But the turbulence also came from these ever-present questions: Will I get the same disease as my mother? Will I become like her?

Brené Brown eloquently describes how facing your brokenness can shape you in significant ways.

““You find the courage to own the pain and develop a level of empathy and compassion for yourself and others that

allows you to spot hurt in the world in a unique way.” (*Braving the Wilderness*)

This was my experience. There is a deep and profound connection between those who have suffered deeply. They feel this heart to heart connection between them. And sometimes, they unfold with each other in ways they don't feel able with others.

So, I started what would become a decade study of Healing Justice. I knew about brokenness and shatteredness. My own bullshit detector was on high because I needed to cut through the superficial and the unwise to try to learn about healing that reaches down to your deepest sense of who you are and how you are going to be in this world. I felt like the well-being of those closest to me depended on me learning to live with this wisdom and love.

In my work and life, I kept hearing little hints that such a healing wisdom and love might already exist. I kept hearing stories from indigenous communities about ‘people re-learning who they are,’ about ‘taking offenders onto the land,’ about needing to ‘return to their traditions’ as part of sustaining a ‘healing way of justice.’ The more I listened, the more I learned that this ‘alternative’ voice comes, not just from indigenous communities, but also from engaged Buddhists, fringe Christian communities, and other communities.

I set out to see if I could find concrete examples of this healing justice being practiced in living communities. I wanted to see if I could show up in such a community and touch and taste this healing justice. What I was really curious about was, if one could find healing justice, would it offer sufficient breadth and depth to help address some of the dissatisfaction I was feeling with more mainline Western approaches to justice, conflict, and peace. Would it help me to face my own brokenness with healing, wisdom, and love?

For many individuals, communities, and states, justice has come to reflect the same ugliness as injustice: pain, loss of power, loss of identity, disorientation, loss of respect, becoming broken and, in the extremes, killing other people. Being ‘brought to justice’ is not something many seek in their lives. Sometimes, it is the very seeking of justice that leads to deep experiences of injustice.

But surely, there must be communities that model a better kind of justice rooted in healing, wisdom, and love. I set out to find them, learn from them, and share their stories.

Looking back on this decade, I really can’t believe this happened. I am filled with deep gratitude that so many opened their doors and their hearts to me so that I could learn from these communities. I only

visited communities when they agreed to participate, to host me, and to teach me first-hand about their practices, and to keep giving me feedback on how to share their story until they were satisfied.

My search for healing justice took me to:

- Plum Village, a Buddhist monastery and community in southern France and home to Nobel Peace Prize-nominated author, Thich Nhat Hanh;
- Hollow Water, an Aboriginal community in Canada who are leaders in Indigenous healing;
- The Iona Community, in the highlands of Scotland at the birthplace of Benedictine and Celtic Christianity;
- The Sarvodaya Movement, in Sri Lanka, where I toured some of the 10,000 villages of Awakening Through Sharing with their 80-year-old leader Dr. A. T. Ariyaratne, known as the Gandhi of Sri Lanka;
- Oasis of Peace (Wahat al-Salam – Neve Shalom), a peace village in Israel where Jews and Palestinian Arabs who are citizens of Israel live together as a model of what their countries' future could look like; and
- Bougainville, in Papua New Guinea – the site of the most violent conflict in the Pacific

region since World War II, a conflict in 1988 – to a peace accord in 2001. This matrilineal society experienced a profound breaking but also was finding ways of healing unknown to most other parts of the world.

For some reason, leaders from each of these communities agreed to accept my invitation to come to Canada for a gathering on Healing Justice in July 2012. These communities so often fight to go upstream, against the current of their surroundings. I wanted to give them the opportunity to share with like-minded but differently-located communities. Who knows what might come from them sharing their stories with each other? Somehow, the Canadian government agreed to pay for the gathering, and these folks all gathered at the small Mennonite University where I worked.

Behind the scenes, Rhona and I were still dealing with the turbulence of the disease that had ravaged my mother. Halfway through this decade studying healing justice, on October 27, 2010, I was given the results of a genetic blood test that determined that I did inherit Huntington's Disease. I did not yet have symptoms, but every nine months, I would go to my neurologist to see if the symptoms had started and to see if it was time to give up my career. Two years after the gathering, I went on permanent long-term

disability because the disease was active and made it too difficult to do the work I previously loved to do.

My research was unfinished. I had published an academic book with the stories of three of the communities: Hollow Water, the Iona Community, and Plum Village. Academic books are great for career advancement but not great for sharing stories and wisdom with the public. For several years, I asked the publisher for my rights back from this book so that I could share these stories in a much more accessible form, and in 2018, they agreed.

My health is not good enough to write the stories of the last three communities I visited or to share about the truly incredible experience of listening to the wise sages from these communities engaging with each other at the gathering.

From my broken hill, I want to share these stories with you. They have equipped, inspired, and trained me to enjoy the downward journey of life I am living now. From these communities, I have learned to touch the wisdom of the poem:

There is a brokenness

A shatteredness out of which blooms the
unshatterable.

There is a sorrow

Beyond all grief which leads to joy

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And a fragility
Out of which depth emerges strength.

More times than I can count, I have touched the
hollow space

Too vast for words
Through which we pass with each loss,
Out of whose darkness we are sanctified into being.

I have traveled the world - and made the longer
journey of traveling from my head into my heart -to
listen to the

cry deeper than all sound
Whose serrated edges cut the heart
As we break open
To the place inside which is unbreakable
And whole, while learning to sing

I feel spoiled. Sure, I have holes in my brain, and I
am unable to hold a job, but I feel spoiled. I have had
such an abundance of wise teachers and opportunities
to learn to walk in a healing way.

In my book, *Dancing with Elephants*, I share about
my own journey of stumbling -literally - my way into
healing. In the video series, *A More Healing Way*, -
available free to those on my email list

(<http://www.jaremsawatsky.com/healing/>) – I interview 5 experts on their best advice for living in a more healing way. In this book, I share with you three of the stories of these brave, creative communities, who are living out a healing justice day-to-day.

There is more to health than the absence of disease. This is one of the key teachings of Deepak Chopra. We need not just avoid the things that lead to ill-health, but we need to cultivate the things that lead to full health. In the same way, there is more to justice than the absence of injustice.

These healing justice communities are taking increased responsibility for their own well-being. They work at personal and collective health and foster a kind of resilience that leads their whole communities to healing and love. For each community, healing justice is rooted in learning their true names, living in the present, reconnecting with the earth, and returning to wholeness even in the midst of the broken.

The search for healing justice in these pages may take a reader to some uncomfortable places. Healing justice does not neatly follow the logic, structure, or purpose of criminal justice or social justice. The search for healing justice brings the reader face to face with communities and their more collective imaginations. Moreover, these communities are faith

or spirit-based communities of three different kinds. Those who value a rationalist, secular, individualist approach will likely find these stories most challenging.

These stories are not an independent, objective analysis of healing justice (as if such a thing could exist). It is my attempt to learn respectfully from three communities that practice healing justice. This is a very personal journey where the author is not absent or invisible. While I am not a member of any of these communities, I have cultivated friendships in each. As a reader will soon learn, friendship, respect, and personal journeys are very much a part of healing justice.

I tried to write this with the daring courage of Brené Brown, the blinking boldness of Malcolm Gladwell, the disquieting poetry of Maya Angelou, and the deep compassion of Thich Nhat Hanh, but my own voice kept breaking through. As part of healing justice is learning our true names, I hope you will forgive me for using my own voice.

This book is about what happens when ordinary communities confront injustice with healing, wisdom, and love. Each chapter tells the story of a different community. Some of these communities are famous – like Thich Nhat Hanh’s home community - and some are relatively unknown – like Canada’s Hollow Water

community. Each has faced deep trauma and injustice but has found a way to respond with a kind of wisdom and love called healing justice.

The Wisdom And Love Of Pelicans

Awakened from my slumber on some high rocks of the shoreline of a wilderness island, at first, I heard a noise so loud I thought maybe a plane was crashing. As I got my bearings, I figured out there was no plane, just pelicans. Hundreds and hundreds of pelicans invaded the quiet bay where I was resting. I was in my late teens. The pelicans landed in the bay with some military order – landing line upon line – making as much noise as they could. Then they started sweeping the bay side to side. I took me a little while to figure out it was feeding time. They were working as a team to scare the fish and unsettle the waters, so they could eat. Just as it seemed to be over, another large flock of pelicans arrived. They had let the others eat first and had stay circling in the air. When the first group was running low on fish, the airborne pelicans started to land, scaring the fish back into the bay. When this wave landed, it was their turn to eat. This story seared into my mind. Pelicans love to spend time alone or in small groups, but sometimes, we need community. Some healing practices, like say eating, work better in a community. I witnessed this same behavior in pelicans three times

in my lifetime, so far. The second time was a year to the day from the first. The third time was 24 years later as I was writing this book for you.

There is a kind of wisdom that comes to those who sit in silence and to those who stay present to the miracle and mischief of creation.

If there is anything for humans to learn from the fishing habits of the great white pelican, it will not be found by trying to copy the pelicans' habits. The lesson is not that we should hunt in larger groups and plan our hunting raids in multiple waves. I know this is obvious as long as we are talking about pelicans. But as we turn to the communities' stories, some will be tempted to learn only by copying their habits – or worse yet – trying to force others to copy their habits. This book is not written to foster habit copying. Rather, it is written to dare the reader to be a better lover! My university students would always giggle when I told them this was the purpose of my teachings.

Some stories blow open our minds and hearts, such that we must radically re-think and re-feel what

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seems possible in the here and now. To me, the stories that follow belong in this group. I hope that, by sharing stories of people and communities already living a bold and wise love, you too will be dared to become a better lover, wherever that takes you.