

**Letter to Beloveds* is the bridge between the original *Measuring Love* brown paper and Chapter Two—*Healing Love: Into Balance*.

Healing Love: Into Balance

A Brown Paper by Audrey Jordan, Kate Morales, Rosa Gonzalez and Shiree Teng

Letter to Beloveds*

Picking up where we left off...

Seven years ago, surrounded by a small group of young Brown men, Sammy Nuñez, former executive director of Fathers and Families of San Joaquin (FFSJ) brilliantly and defiantly asked me point blank, **"How do you measure love, Shiree, 'cause that's what we're doing out here..."** as I introduced myself as the incoming learning and evaluation partner to The California Endowment's efforts to transform outcomes for California's boys and men of color.

I sheepishly shied from addressing his provocation while silently held onto that question for the next five years. How do we measure love as that's what organizers are doing in the streets? If we, in the social and racial justice movements, are not doing what we do out of love, then what are we doing? I couldn't let that question go. In the summer of 2019, Sammy and I, with the tremendous support from Audrey Jordan and Kate Morales, released our ***Brown Paper: Measuring Love in the Journey for Social and Racial Justice***.

Since the release of our first Brown Paper, purposely not called a "white" paper, we have been honored and surprised by the paper's reach and adaptation by so many activists, educators, evaluators, organizers and justice dreamers. Challenging the norms of white supremacy, colonization and the routine abandonment of ourselves have resonated in corners farther and wider from what we had imagined plausible.

Then the phone call on Friday, May 25th, 2021 came. A beloved colleague, Masha Chernyak, former chair of the FFSJ's board called to tell me that **Sammy had been arrested** on allegations of child sexual abuse from decades ago, placed in county jail, held without bail, and within seven days, FFSF had lost over \$1M of its operating budget. (insert link to news articles)

I felt the sky drop. I felt numb, shocked, devastated. Sammy's someone I had admired, respected, loved, believed in, supported. I considered Sammy kin as fellow travelers on the road to freedom. How could this be, someone I held so dear, an accused child molester?

It seemed like overnight, a political tornado had landed. The forces that did not want to see young men and boys and families rise had their revenge. They were successful in taking down FFSJ. They accomplished what they'd set out to do, it seemed, setting back the promise of progressive and positive change in Stockton overnight. Today as I write this, Sammy remains in jail.

As I agonize and reflect on the initial messages in *Measuring Love*, I still believe that Sammy's life is sacred. Everything he and others did at FFSJ and many are still doing in Stockton and in the state of California are still valid and impactful. Yet Sammy obviously has dark sides to him that few knew. I had to ask myself, how do I (and others) understand Sammy's story? How do I break down that he's human, with his bright and shadow sides? How do I begin to make sense of this?

As Sammy's tragedy continues to unfold, I had to look deeply inside myself as a way to understand how to relate to those who have hurt us. I ask myself,

How do we forgive those who have trespassed our trust and love?

How do we find forgiveness when our hearts have been violated and broken?

In answering those questions for myself, I had to think about all the worst things I've ever done in my life – stealing from those dear to me; lying to others by saying one thing and not meaning it, violating their trust in me; pretending to be someone I'm not; harming myself sexually in exchange for access, approval and/or status. This list is exhausting and painful to even find words for.

To forgive Sammy, I must first look at myself and all the ways I have caused harm, to myself and to those I say I love and respect. I don't know half of Sammy's story, or even that much, as others don't know half of my story. And I know I'm evolving every day. I'm not the same person I was last year, last week, last night. How do I hold Sammy with love, along with a whole lot of utter disappointment, sense of betrayal, and have all that can possibly live in one person? Unless I can do that for me?

Connected to understanding Sammy's journey is a parallel journey to understanding myself. The critical thing is to **not bury it under the rug**. We tend to bury our wounds. We tend to not want to talk about it. When that burial or denial becomes habitual, it doesn't allow us to progress emotionally or spiritually so we get stuck. Stuck inside our own little dark corners where denial, lying to myself can feel safe and familiar and comfortable. Or there are times we know we gotta heal relationships, but don't know where to start or how to create entry points to healing in our relationships.

The antidote to all that emotional burial that we habitually do is to tap into the power of love, to demystify how to address harm in our relationships, take action, baby steps. Otherwise, we will continue to witness the throwing away of our people at worst, and/or being engrossed in wasted energy with people who we call "comrades" in the struggle. Dirty water under the bridges don't wash themselves magically away.

LOVE IS THE INVITATION to look, address, resolve those stuck relationships that are waiting for us under those bridges.

My lessons learned from Sammy...

What are yours?

Go toward the pain, don't bury or pretend it away

- Acknowledge the hurts that live so deep inside each of us. Don't bury the pain.
- Hurt people hurt people. This is a truth that lives beyond our control. True, transformative healing requires a massive culture shift, lots of resources, and most of all, love.

There is no liberation without community – we're all shackled

- Our success is not and cannot be measured by what we did and didn't do as individuals; there is no liberation without community. Our success can only be measured in the context of our community. When Sammy and countless others are sick, we are all sick as a sacred human community.

Accountability and love co-exist

- Sammy and all those who have caused harm are still sacred... and they need to be held accountable to those they've harmed
- Sammy's life is still sacred; he's a blessing and we can still love him.
- Justice needs to be served according to those he's harmed; not determined by the carceral state. They need to say what is justice to them. Sammy needs to be held accountable to those directly harmed by his actions.
- Love is about accountability. If we love Sammy, we need to hold him accountable. And holding someone accountable requires resources. The safest communities are the ones with the most resources. The ability to hold someone accountable requires a massive infusion of resources. Accountability and resources go together like yin and yang.

Where are the places to heal from sexual trauma and molestation for those who are causing harm?

- Where are the places to talk and heal from a history of child molestation and desire to harm others? Not in therapy, not in our organizations. How does someone like Sammy who have been sexually harmed himself, and has caused sexual harm to others, where do they go to to process their healing?



Patriarchy and deceit are everywhere... don't deny it. Don't look away. We got to be able to accept, name and address it. And we have to do it ALL THE TIME.

- Patriarchy and toxic masculinity behaviors of power over, sexual harm and abuse, exploitation, total disregard of others' humanity are deeply ingrained in our society and inevitably, within our sector and our organizations. Just because our organizations are about social and racial justice doesn't mean we're immunized against patriarchy and all its manifestations.

In groups, we need to work through our emotional landscapes. Tied to the land, rooting us in wellbeing, belonging, interdependency.

- People's words are not always what they practice—unhealthy practices and behaviors live right under the surface. Many people in our movements have been through so many adversities, and still are able to present as healthy beings. Yet both the traumatized and healed psyches exist inside that provide both the motivation, energy and destructive venom to live side by side inside each of us. We need to learn to hold the person who's lovable **and** their despicable behaviors in our understanding of their, as well as our own humanity as true.
- Inside our justice organizations, we have esteemed elders, yelders and young ones who have done harm. We have young, able, powerful male-identified activists who are repeat offenders who have caused, and are continuing to cause great harm to femme-identified colleagues. We need ways to name, bring attention to, and heal these acts of betrayal and to explore how to repair from the harm.
- There are creeps in the movement. It hasn't been safe to expose them. We need to consciously cultivate the culture to attack the head. If the culture is strong enough, the heads can be held accountable. Too often we give our leaders a pass. We gotta be willing to risk that. Love says nobody is above that.
- Work to remain open to all spirits yet discern the evil spirits by keeping our bodies clean, keeping our spiritual energies clean, continuing to process rage, to not open up to harmful spirits to latch onto us. Purification is important to align us to stay discerning. In groups, we need to work through our emotional landscapes. Tied to the land, rooting us in wellbeing, belonging, interdependency. Sankofa moves us to recapture our pasts, not romanticizing our past and to create new communities and collective practices.



Loving ourselves is a demand, not a “nice to do”

- Loving ourselves requires intentional cleansing, bringing in the good. We attract the energy we emanate. We have a choice of what we let live in our bodies. It’s not always easy. Some of us need to spend our lifetime choosing not to enact pedophilic or other demons.
- “Self-love” can be superficially interpreted as a spa experience, like having a glass of wine after work or going to the salon. Yet loving ourselves is so much more demanding. **Loving ourselves looks like clear and clean boundaries. Saying what we mean and meaning what we say. Living a life that is in integrity with our values. Being on our purpose day after day, and getting back up after we fall.**
- Loving ourselves is much harder said than done. It is the foundational piece to everything else. **We can only love others as deeply and as truly as we love ourselves.**

It takes a lot of energy to love and to grieve. And without grieving we can’t see and feel our way through. The unmetabolized grief dulls our deeper senses as sadness, pain and grief are all parts of the essential human experience, just like happiness, joy and hope.

We have to bring balance recognizing that the mind has been overloaded with importance by colonization that says the mind is supreme. We need to bring balance of the mind with our hearts, our intuition and ancestral knowing, as well as the knowing that lives inside our bodies.

With love that heals,

Shiree

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