

# Knowing Your Why

## **PART 1: Motivations and costs**

It is important to wake up to our complicity in some of the systems of oppression that we're so quick to denounce. I want to see all of us taking the work of self-transformation seriously even before we claim that we are out there ready to march alongside other people. So, starting with ourselves begins with our questioning the why. Why are we doing this work? Why do I feel compelled to be a part of this social justice movement?

I want us to be more critical about how we approach this work from the beginning. And I know that some people may say, well, I do this work because it's just the right thing to do. I think that that's also sometimes not a sustainable why because the right thing to do sounds good, and it makes it a moral imperative, but it also can dwindle very easily, as soon as you realize you have to give up something, as soon as you realize that there is a cost.

Sometimes there is a distancing of yourself from the issue at hand, and can give off that savior vibe, where you position yourself as a moral savior who is coming to the rescue to help other people who are less fortunate whenever you can. But you don't really see yourself as being a part of the problem and the solution.

The most sustaining why is the one in which we can see ourselves in it. So, white people just don't want to dismantle racism or white supremacy because they have people of color in their lives. White people should understand that white supremacy isn't just killing people of color. It's also robbing white people of their humanity. Similarly, I want men to not want to dismantle misogyny or sexism or the patriarchy just because they have women in their lives that they care about. I also want men to want to do this because they understand that the same forces that are killing and hurting women in their lives are the same forces that are robbing men of their ability to be vulnerable, their ability to stay at home with their children, their ability to talk about mental health openly. So, these issues aren't just about helping marginalized people. All of these issues are connected in such a way that, if we don't dismantle all of them, they're eventually going to come for us, too.

So, I think the why question is such a fundamental way for us to begin this work in a more authentic way that puts us on the map, that sometimes we like to think of as totally unrelated to our lives. So, I want more people to feel invested in this work because it's about all of us. It's about reclaiming our humanity as much as it is about supporting those who are marginalized, and therefore, this work must be considered important and urgent for all of us.

*The Wake Up: Closing the Gap Between Good Intentions and Real Change*  
By Michelle MiJung Kim,

And behold, a man came up to him, saying, 'Teacher, what good deed must I do to have eternal life?' And he said to him, 'Why do you ask me about what is good? There is only one who is good. If you would enter life, keep the commandments.' He said to him, 'Which ones?' And Jesus said, 'You shall not murder, You shall not commit adultery, You shall not steal, You shall not bear false witness, Honor your father and mother, and, You shall love your neighbor as yourself.' The young man said to him, 'All these I have kept. What do I still lack?' Jesus said to him, 'If you would be perfect, go, sell what you possess and give to the poor, and you will have treasure in heaven; and come, follow me.' When the young man heard this he went away sorrowful, for he had great possessions.

*Matthew 19:16-22*

“And whoever gives one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is a disciple, truly, I say to you, he will by no means lose his reward.”

*Matthew 10:42*

### Questions to Consider:

1. What inspires and drives your dedication to promoting racial justice, housing justice, migrant justice, LGBTQ+ inclusion? How do the teachings of Matthew 19:16-22, Matthew 10:42, Mark 12:30-31 shape your motivations in this context?
2. Have you ever felt that your efforts to promote racial, housing, migrant justice, and LGBTQ+ inclusion have successfully brought justice to individuals who couldn't achieve it on their own? If so, what specific circumstances contributed to this sense of accomplishment, and what inspired you in these instances?
3. Can you recall instances where your advocacy for racial, housing, migrant justice, and LGBTQ+ inclusion came at a personal cost? How do you connect these sacrifices with the idea of relinquishing possessions, as mentioned in Matthew 19:16-22?
4. Have there been moments when you've considered stepping back from your involvement in racial and housing justice due to stress, challenges, or other reasons? How does the notion of receiving a reward for even the smallest acts of kindness, as described in Matthew 10:42, influence your commitment during such difficult times?
5. Michelle Mijung Kim and Rachel Ricketts argue that white supremacy not only harms BIPOC communities but also dehumanizes white individuals. How does the principle of loving your neighbor as yourself, as found in Mark 12:30-31, align with their perspective on reclaiming humanity and supporting marginalized communities?

## **PART 2: Anti-racist work as an ongoing effort**

Thus through two centuries, a continuous indoctrination of Americans has separated people according to mythically superior and inferior qualities, while a democratic spirit of equality was evoked as the national ideal. These concepts of racism, and this schizophrenic duality of conduct, remain deeply rooted in American thought today. This tendency of the nation to take one step forward on the question of racial justice and then to take a step backward is still the pattern. Just as an ambivalent nation freed the slaves a century ago with no plan or program to make their freedom meaningful, the still-ambivalent nation in 1954 declared school segregation unconstitutional with no plan or program to make integration real. Just as the Congress passed a civil rights bill in 1868 and refused to enforce it, the Congress passed a civil rights bill in 1964 and to this day has failed to enforce it in all its dimensions. Just as the Fifteenth Amendment in 1870 proclaimed Negro suffrage, only to permit its de facto withdrawal in half the nation, so in 1965 the Voting Rights Law was passed and then permitted to languish with only fractional and halfhearted implementation.

*Where Do We Go from Here: Chaos or Community?*  
*Martin Luther King Jr.*

### **Questions to Consider:**

1. What are the inherent difficulties in pursuing racial justice when there's no assurance of success, and how can we draw connections between this challenge and the enduring commitment highlighted in the teachings of Matthew 19:16-22 and Matthew 10:42?
2. How do you sustain your dedication to causes like racial, housing, and migrant justice, even when tangible progress may remain elusive? Furthermore, in light of the idea presented in Matthew 10:42, how does the prospect of a reward for even a minor act of kindness affect your commitment when immediate outcomes are absent?

### **PART 3: Internalized oppression**

“The oppressed, having internalized the image of the oppressor and adopted his guidelines, are fearful of freedom.”

“What are the tyrannies we swallow day by day and attempt to make our own, until we sicken and die of them still in silence?”

*Pedagogy of the Oppressed*  
Paulo Freire

“What are the tyrannies we swallow day by day and attempt to make our own, until we sicken and die of them still in silence?”

*Sister Outsider*  
Audre Lorde

“The most potent weapon in the hands of the oppressor is the mind of the oppressed.”

*Biko*  
Stephen Bantu

#### **Questions to Consider:**

1. How do you perceive the role of internalized oppression and pathologies within marginalized communities in shaping your dedication to racial, housing, and migrant justice? How might the teachings from Matthew 19:16-22 and Matthew 10:42 be applied to address these complex issues?
2. In what ways do you see a reciprocal relationship between internalized racism and internalized oppression, particularly concerning racial and housing justice? How can acknowledging the inherent value of each person, as suggested in Matthew 10:42, contribute to the fight against both internalized oppression and racism?