

FREEDOM COMES AT THE COST OF ACCOUNTABILITY

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"Forgiveness and compassion are always linked: how do we hold people accountable for wrongdoing and yet at the same time remain in touch with their humanity enough to believe in their capacity to be transformed?" - bell hooks

The first time I recall processing internal accountability was when I found myself in a situation pointing my fingers at others, during a critical time in organizing, but failing to hold a mirror to myself. Where was my compassion even when I disagreed with strategy in social movement spaces? Will I have forgiveness if the outcomes the community wants aren't achieved in the way I believe they should be? And how will I hold myself accountable to my values during the process? Thinking back into my call to activism work, it truly came naturally. I was always advocating for myself and the people around me regularly. I never thought of myself as an organizer or an advocate during this time, I was just doing what was fair and

just. Even during elementary school I found myself getting phone calls home because the teacher treated someone wrong and I felt the need to say something. I never understood why I felt like I had to, it just always felt like it aligned with who I was and ultimately who I was becoming.

Speaking out can be scary. Sometimes, it can be down right dreadful. When the internal disruption happens it can trigger the whole fight or flight response. For me, it was always the need to do a quick assessment and then to fight. I think that brief internal assessment was actually my core telling me to be accountable. In those moments, I had a line of questions for myself; Do you see what is occurring? Does it sit well with your values? And If it didn't, what was I going to do about that? And I would spring into action. Sometimes it was just a need to point what had been done or said out, sometimes it led to further discussions, and there were even times where I would throw my physical body

in between folks, to protect someone more vulnerable than I. It was like I felt the need to be Wonder Woman and throw my cape on and go. Accountability, no matter where I was or who I was with, my values led me to act.

I believe that the work that we do here for our communities should be rooted in revolutionary love but in order to truly move the work forward we must continually come back to ourselves and evaluate our purpose in doing this work. This type of love of self and others that causes us to act unapologetically, boldly, and with pure intentions. Accountability is the sibling in that. Not just when the crowds are watching, but also in one to one conversations with our peers. In social justice spaces, we do a lot of what we call one to ones which are meetings with others to get to know their self interest and how we may align. There are also times where it is needed to meet with people we may necessarily not align with at all, including people in power. During these times, it's very easy for folks to put on performative acts and forget the purpose of why we are showing up in these spaces. Fear sometimes lead us to not show up as bold as we should. We get lost in being in rooms with people in suits, with titles, and resources that we forget that we are leading with revolutionary love and we must be accountable to our people and not waiver in these spaces. And in many cases we forget to

hold ourselves with a standard of integrity and accountability.

Oftentimes I get posed the question of how do we activate new voters, new activists, new bases of people to mobilize, and honestly it is beyond just being strategic during polarizing moments. It is really about finding the thing that connects people to their core values and giving them tools to help them stay accountable to themselves. We can hold meetings and use tactics at the center of them, but if a person isn't going to be rooted in their own level of accountability and alignment that won't work either. If the goal is collective liberation, rooted in revolutionary love, accountability serves a meaningful purpose in the work we need to do. The fight towards freedom will be won at the cost of accountability and we have to start with the internal work first. It is going to take a radical shift in how we organize moving forward to stand firm in this believe which is subsequently rooted in our values. But what will our community look like if we don't?
