

What is ... Beloved Community?

Within Unitarian Universalism, Beloved Community has been described as taking place when “people of diverse racial, ethnic, educational, class, gender, abilities, sexual orientation backgrounds/identities come together in an interdependent relationship of love, mutual respect, and care that seeks to realize justice within the community and in the broader world.” <https://www.8thprincipleuu.org/what-is-beloved-community>

This depends on a “sacred promise of meaningful relationship” (a covenant) that is developed through an inquiry into the values of a community, along with “restorative practices” that can be used to return to shared values and relationships when disconnections occur within the community. <https://www.uua.org/leadership/library/embodiment-beloved-community-and-covenantal-relationship>

Described in this way, Beloved Community is a cornerstone of the 8th Principle, adopted by BUUF during 2019 that calls on us to affirm and promote:

Journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions. <https://boiseuu.org/about-us/our-beliefs/uu-principles-and-sources/>

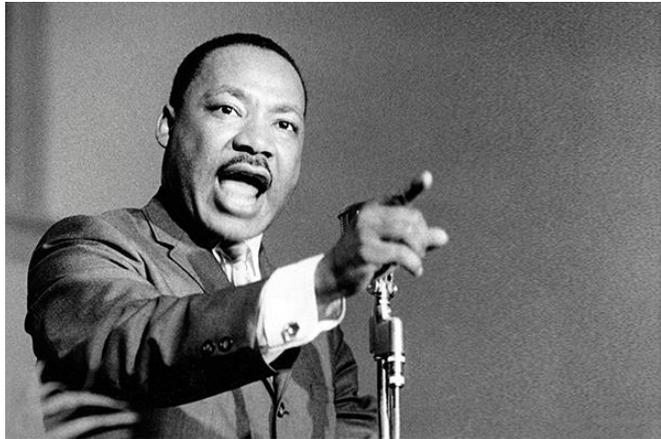
The idea of Beloved Community can be traced back at least as far as Josiah Royce, an American philosopher during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Royce argued that individuals’ identities are closely tied to the communities they belong to. But communities are not simply collections of individuals. According to Royce, a community exists when individuals are in communication with one another to the point that their feelings, thoughts, and desires are, at least to some extent, congruent with one another and, as a result, they develop loyalty to one another.

Some communities are characterized by true loyalty, referring to a situation in which the individual makes a moral commitment to both a community and to a shared cause. When that cause is loyalty itself, they form a Beloved Community.



Source: [Josiah Royce \(Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy\)](#)

While Royce coined the phrase “Beloved Community”, The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. popularized it and used Beloved Community as the cornerstone of his philosophy from the 1955 bus boycott in Montgomery, Alabama to the 1968 Poor People’s Campaign (Goodloe, 2021).



As a way to honor the legacy of Dr. King and add to our understanding of Beloved Community, we offer the following brief summary of Dr. King’s views. The primary sources for this information are:

- The King Center. The King Philosophy – Nonviolence 365. <https://thekingcenter.org/about-tkc/the-king-philosophy/>
- Kenneth L. Smith & Ira G. Zepp, Jr. (1974). *Search for Beloved Community: The thinking of Martin Luther King, Jr.* Chapter 6: The Vision of the Beloved Community.
- Dr. Marcus “Goodie” Goodloe (2021). The Beloved Community: The Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday and Our Reality. Institute for Global Engagement, Dallas Baptist University. <https://www.dbu.edu/ige/resources/2021/01/the-beloved-community-the-martin-luther-king-jr-holiday-and-our-reality.html#:~:text=The%20Beloved%20Community%20is%20a%20concept%20nested%20in,and%20compassion%E2%80%94all%20key%20attributes%20of%20the%20Beloved%20Community.>

Where relevant, other resources are included within the text.

In his most famous speech, delivered on August 28, 1963 from the steps of the Lincoln Memorial in Washington, D.C., Dr. King said “I have a dream that one day this nation will rise up and live out the true meaning of its creed: ‘We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men are created equal.’” <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/mlkihavedream.htm>

Dr. King’s dream was of a Beloved Community, a “global vision” in which, according to the King Center:

- all people can share in the wealth of the earth;
- poverty, hunger, and homelessness will not be tolerated because international standards of human decency will not allow it;
- racism and all forms of discrimination, bigotry and prejudice will be replaced by an all-inclusive spirit of sisterhood and brotherhood;
- international disputes will be resolved by peaceful conflict-resolution and reconciliation of adversaries, instead of military power;
- love and trust will triumph over fear and hatred;
- peace with justice will prevail over war and military conflict.

This global vision would eliminate all forms of violence, summarized as the “triple evils” of poverty (in the form of unemployment, homelessness, hunger, malnutrition, illiteracy, infant mortality, slums...), racism (in the form of prejudice, apartheid, ethnic conflict, anti-Semitism, sexism, colonialism, homophobia, ageism, discrimination against disabled groups, stereotypes...), and militarism (in the form of war, imperialism, domestic violence, rape, terrorism, human trafficking, media violence, drugs, child abuse, violent crime...).

But Beloved Community was not only an abstract vision. For Dr. King, it was a realistic, practical goal that could be achieved through the over-riding philosophy and strategy of nonviolence.

According to the King Center, nonviolence:

1. is a way of life for courageous people;
2. seeks to win friendships and understanding;
3. seeks to defeat injustice not people;
4. holds that suffering for a cause can educate and transform people and societies;
5. chooses love instead of hate;
6. believes that the universe is on the side of justice.

It's important to note that Dr. King believed that achieving Beloved Community goes beyond desegregation to achieve true integration. This is critical because the limit of desegregation is that it is essentially negative in that it emphasizes eliminating, in law, discrimination in areas of society such as education, housing, public accommodations, and employment. In Dr. King's view, desegregation results in “a society in which men are physically integrated and spiritually segregated.” True integration, in contrast, is essentially positive and more inclusive. It means the “positive acceptance of desegregation **and** the welcomed participation of Negroes in the total range of human activities.” This form of integration cannot be achieved solely through legal means but requires a change in attitudes and the loving acceptance of both individuals and groups. True integration, instead, will result in a different kind of society, one in which brotherhood is a central feature in every aspect of social life – Dr. King's “dream” of a nation living out its true creed.