

Stories to Transform a Divided World

I AM
BOOK
NOT
DISCUSSION
YOUR
GUIDE
ENEMY

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Foreword by Ishmael Beah

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A DISCUSSION GUIDE FOR I AM **NOT** YOUR ENEMY

A Note from the Author

When I decided to write and publish *I Am Not Your Enemy*, I hoped this book would become a conversation starter. I knew as I conversed with remarkable people across Palestine, Israel, Northern Ireland, and South Africa, that these stories needed a wider audience than only me. And I wanted that audience primarily to be people back home in the United States. Particularly, I wanted white people to read these stories. Because I tried to listen deeply to the people I met, and the words I heard offered wisdom for our wounds.

With each story I encountered, I tried to ask myself, "What does this speak to back home?" Because for me, it felt irresponsible not to connect what I learned abroad to what is alive and real in my home places. The work of justice and reconciliation is not "over there"; it is *here*—right where you are. Right where I am.

I invite you to begin your discussions on *I Am Not Your Enemy* with this framing question: *how do the pain and possibility of the stories in this book show up in my own corner of the world?* It is very worthwhile to engage the particularities of the stories, to learn about the divided societies through which I traveled, and consider how you might be supportive of the healing efforts in those places. And still, I believe we must consistently turn our attention back to our homes. That is where we can often do the most.

In this guide for group discussion, I offer some general questions that can be used for any of the chapters over any length of time. I also suggest some questions if you only have one session to discuss the book, as well as one key question per chapter. And finally, I recommend a series of five questions per chapter if you are able to take your time with the book. If you've never run a discussion group before and need some guidelines for facilitating conversation, see some recommendations on the final page. This guide is not meant to be an agenda-setter. It's filled with suggestions to get you started. Deviate from it wherever and whenever you like.

Thank you for reading *I Am Not Your Enemy*, and for making space in your life to discuss it. If you would like me to visit your group (whether virtually or in-person), please get it in touch. I'm eager to be in conversation with you all.

Toward a world beyond enemies,

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DISCUSSION GUIDE

GENERAL QUESTIONS

These questions can be used for any chapter or reading.

1. What captured your attention? Why?
2. What challenged/inspired/frustrated/confused you? Why?
3. Where was the weight or heat for you?
4. Where did you see yourself in the reading?
5. What did you learn?
6. What line/theme/word/phrase do you find yourself wanting to explore further?

ONE SESSION

Try these if you are only meeting once to discuss the book.

1. What would you say are the major themes of this book?
2. What do you think are the book's strengths? What are the shortcomings?
3. Michael repeatedly discussed the connection between reconciliation and justice. How would you articulate the relationship between them after reading this book?
4. Which chapter/story drew you in deepest? Why?
5. Michael titled the book *I Am Not Your Enemy*. Who in your world might you say that to, and who do you think might want to say it to you?
6. Did reading this book inspire you to take any action or shift something in your life? If so, what and why?

ONE QUESTION PER CHAPTER

1. Ali Abu Awwad said that dialogue cannot be the goal. How did you react to this? What would you say is the role of dialogue?
2. Dr. Zoughbi said they have "no PTSD" because the trauma is never "post." Where do you think this is true in your own communities?
3. Moran Zamir realized that something was wounded in his country that he needed to tend to. What is wounded in your country/state/region/town, and what might it look like to tend to it?
4. What do you think of Robi's choice to pursue forgiveness and peace in the wake of her son's killing?
5. Where are the Al Basmās in your communities—the places of healing, resurrection, and hope?
6. Michael compares the road to reconciliation to a "place of lumpy crossings"? What do you think of this metaphor? What new insight did you gain from this chapter?
7. What do you imagine you would say if you met the person who killed your father?
8. Eleanor du Plooy suggests that reconciliation means nothing unless built on a foundation of social justice? What do you think of this claim?
9. Themba Lonzi worked hard to rid oppressive poisons from his life. What poisons should we rid from our own?
10. Where do you see cracks of hope forming in the walls of division in your communities/countries?

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

FOREWORD

1. Ishmael Beah says that "stories are medicine." How have stories served as medicine in your life? And what other uses of story can you name?
2. Beah references of a story from Desmond Tutu about a man whose bike was stolen. How do you respond to Beah's interpretation of the story? What other ways might the story be interpreted?

INTRODUCTION

1. What were a couple of key takeaways for you from Michael's introduction?
2. How have you seen stories of fear perpetuate harm or division in your life?
3. How would you articulate the role storytelling can play in healing and building peace?
4. On page 27, Michael discusses Pádraig Ó Tuama's practice of saying "hello." What in your life are you needing to say hello to right now, and why?
5. Michael uses two stories from the New Testament to talk about the importance of seeing the world in new ways. In 1-2 minutes, describe a moment when you began to see the world in a new way. What happened?

DIALOGUE IS NOT THE GOAL

1. What was your reaction to the Palestinian professor's email saying that the conversation on reconciliation was "inappropriate"? Why do you think you reacted that way?
2. Discuss the paragraph on page 33 that begins "This was my late arrival..." What's your response to Michael here?
3. Michael claims that reconciliation entails a "radical shift in unjust power structures." Do you agree? Why or why not?
4. Ali Abu Awwad said that dialogue cannot be the goal; it must be a carrier to freedom. How did you react to this? What would you say is the role of dialogue?
5. Ali said he is looking for a change in *behavior* from Israeli settlers; not just to see the humanity of their identity. What changes in behavior are needed in our city/region/country toward people surviving oppression and injustice?

WE HAVE NO PTSD

1. On page 52, Michael writes, "Without trust, or the willingness to risk for trust, there can be no peace." What are your thoughts on this?
2. Michael interprets his conversation with Asher as a moment of empathy. When have you had a moment of empathy for someone you didn't understand that led to a change in your relationship?
3. Dr. Zoughbi said they have "no PTSD" because the trauma is never "post." How did you react to this? Where do you think this is true in our own communities?
4. How did Dr. Zoughbi's description of the work of Wi'am match your perception of Palestinians?
5. Michael names walls as "self-fulfilling prophecies." Do you agree? And where do you see walls in your own communities?

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

SOMETHING IS WOUNDED

1. What did you takeaway from Moran Zamir's story? Did you find yourself connecting to it or resisting it? Why?
2. Where did you see yourself in his story?
3. Moran spoke of how he began to feel uncomfortable with Israel's Memorial Day. What's your relationship to patriotic holidays?
4. Moran realized that something was wounded in his country that he needed to tend to. What is wounded in your country/state/region/town, and what might it look like to tend to it?
5. Michael compared Israel's occupation to white supremacy in the United States. How do you feel about that?

YOU MAY NOT KILL IN MY SON'S NAME

1. How would you respond to some of the questions about forgiveness listed in the final paragraph on page 80?
2. Michael quotes Pádraig Ó Tuama by saying that "some people's theories are other people's traumas." When in your life have you treated other people's pain—or had your pain treated—as something theoretical or abstract?
3. How did you react when you read what Robi said to the military officers who told her David had been killed?
4. What did you make of the section on the "culpability of victims"? Was this a new idea? How did you feel reading what Michael and Robi had to say about it?
5. Michael says that "building empathy for the sake of empathy isn't enough." Do you agree? Why or why not?

FORTUNATELY, IT WAS PARADISE

1. What did you feel reading Abdullah's story?
2. Which part of the chapter drew you in the most?
3. Where are the Al Basmas in your communities—the places of healing, resurrection, and hope?
4. Michael writes on page 102 that "all one really needs for soul connection is presence, attention, and affection." What do you think of this?
5. In many ways, this chapter is about hospitality and welcome. When have you given or received a powerful welcome?

PLACE OF LUMPY CROSSINGS

1. What did you find most helpful and most uncomfortable?
2. Michael talks about how there is "conflict about the conflict" and "conflict over language." Where is this true locally for you?
3. How did you react to Michael's section on the theory of peacebuilding on pages 113-116?
4. Michael compares the road to reconciliation to a "place of lumpy crossings"? What do you think of this metaphor?
5. Michael says that "being able to articulate the story of the other is an indispensable skill in transforming conflict into something that can help us." Do you agree with this? Explain.

CHAPTER QUESTIONS

I'VE JUST MET THE ENEMY

1. What images/ideas stuck with you from this chapter?
2. What would you say were the key factors in Jo's ability to meet, forgive, and befriend Patrick?
3. Have you ever met an "enemy"? What happened?
4. On pages 137-138, Michael explains the complications with rushing "bridge work." What did you think of this?
5. On page 141, Michael writes about the connection between the words *compassion* and *womb*. When in your life has an experience of compassion given birth to a new relationship, new direction, or new way of thinking?

WHEN RECONCILIATION MEANS NOTHING

1. What did you make of Michael's opening story about Saul?
2. How did you react to Eleanor du Plooy's articulation of the problems with reconciliation?
3. On page 152, Michael and Eleanor talk about the connection of reconciliation to *real change*. What do you think of this?
4. In short, this chapter claims that reconciliation means nothing unless built on a platform of social justice, equity, and real change. Do you agree with this? Explain.
5. On page 161, Michael and Eleanor discussed the difficulty of enticing white people to have difficult conversations on race and justice. What do you think could help bring reluctant people to the table to have tough and necessary discussions?

LIKE A POISON

1. What stayed with you from the story of Themba Lonzi?
2. What did you learn? What new insights did you gain?
3. What in Themba's story left you feeling uncomfortable? Why?
4. Themba worked hard to rid oppressive poisons from his life. What poisons should we rid from our own?
5. Michael writes on page 171 that "everyone who benefits from an unjust system and is not actively working to dismantle it is at least partly responsible for its harm." What do you think of this claim?

CRACKS OF HOPE

1. What did you find most surprising or compelling in the stories of Rami and Bassam?
2. If you could sit with Rami and Bassam, what would you like to ask or say to them?
3. Rami said his wife Nurit was able to look "not only to the mosquito but to the swamp." What are your thoughts on this way of understanding culpability and blame?
4. Bassam said seeing the humanity of his enemies was a "disaster." What did this mean to you?
5. Glance back at Michael's closing on pages 197-200. What resonated most with you? What, if anything, made you pause and think?



HOW TO FACILITATE A GROUP

PROVIDE A WELCOMING CIRCLE.

- When people arrive, greet them.
- Have name tags available if possible.
 - Note: If you can, get nametags that provide space for people to write which pronouns they use (she, he, they, ze, etc.)
- Snacks and drinks are excellent.
- Seat people in a circle.
- Be friendly and warm.

ESTABLISH SOME CONVERSATION GUIDELINES.

Things like...

- Be present. Put away phones.
- Keep this a dialogue, not a monologue.
- Don't generalize. Speak in "I" statements.
- Avoid interrupting. Show respect.
- Be curious about each other's perspectives. Ask for clarification if you don't understand.
- Be aware of your own prejudices and judgments. Work through them to be fully present.
- Listen to your emotions. Own them and name them. Don't project.
- Critique the idea, not the person.
- Lean into discomfort.
- Listen to understand, not debate.

KEEP THE CONVERSATION ALIVE.

- Read the room. Learn when to linger on a question and when to move on.
- Don't be afraid of silence. Some people need time to gather thoughts before speaking.
- Be open to moving on from a question if it doesn't seem to resonate with the group.
- Feel free to go off script. No need to stick to the questions in this guide if other more pressing or interesting ones emerge from the conversation.
- Have a plan in mind to deal with any offensive, prejudiced, or hurtful comments.
- Short breaks can be your friend, especially if meeting for longer than one hour at a time.
- Consider gently asking dominant voices to step back a bit, and encourage others to step out.
- Be mindful of your own sharing. It's helpful for the facilitator to participate in the conversation (otherwise it can feel like a power-play), but be careful not to take over.