

**For January 2009**  
**Spirituality, Reflections ([seasonalreflections.asp](#))**

Sticks and stones may break your bones, but names will never hurt you!" You probably heard that saying at least once in your childhood. In fact, a broken bone may heal rather quickly as compared to an ego deeply bruised by name-calling.

When I was a child, a family from the South moved into my neighborhood. I was curious about this family when I heard adults discussing the "briar-hoppers." Something told me this was a negative term and I determined to investigate just what was wrong with this new family. Setting aside the suspicions I had heard, I began to play with the new kids. Their mom and dad graciously invited me in to play with the two who were my age. In no time at all I discovered a loving and caring family. My parents and neighbors very soon began to appreciate our new "southern neighbors."



What is it in us that makes us so judgmental? Do we need to put others down to increase our own self-image? What makes us quick to resort to name-calling of persons who are different from us? Can't we step into their shoes and let that experience lead us to new awakenings and understandings?

We are not born with prejudice; we learn it from those around us. Suspicion of those who are different from us slowly grows into the kind of racism that has become an underpinning of our society. Racism on a personal level is an evil that can be overcome by education and openness to others. Institutional racism, however, is more complex and allows some to benefit from being privileged, while for others even wealth, position, education do not seem to provide privilege. How tragic that we so often think in terms of "we" and "them"-- when in truth we are all "us."

Both personal and institutional racism must be faced, understood and remedied by each of us and all of us. If not, how can we state that we are working at "right relationships" in our small world and in the whole of our global community?

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