

Embodied Cause

A Message for All Faiths Unitarian Congregation

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There was a time in my life when I dedicated myself to the lives of turtles. Yes, turtles. Richard and I decided to move north to our summer home in the foothills of the Adirondacks. This venture only lasted a year because we discovered we enjoyed that life for the summer, but not year round. Also, we are New York City food snobs, and the closest restaurant was The Happy Cow. One can partake in mystery meat night and share your dinner with the flies just so many times. While living there I noticed a big problem with turtles crossing the road to get from one body of water to the other. Many didn't make it as driver's failed to stop or even swerve to spare the turtle it's life. This was a big problem for me and I began to make a stink and enlisted others in making a change. Today turtles are able to make safe passage through tunnels placed by Adirondack towns under the road. Their lives have been spared. And that's my turtle story. I saw the need for change and needed to be the change. I'm sharing this story with you not to tell you about my love for turtles, but to demonstrate the embodiment of compassion and action and the embodiment of a cause.

As Unitarian Universalists we are oriented toward a world where every sentient being is treated with fairness and is provided with equitable resources to reach and sustain an overall well-being rooted in life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, next steps include a continued commitment to social justice. Social justice within this context is a recognition of systemic barriers imposed or perpetuated by structures – governmental, institutional, and media-driven – that marginalize specific groups of people and privilege others. It is also action taken toward confronting and dismantling these inequities for the purpose of creating opportunities and ensuring access for those who have been disenfranchised, whether human or turtle. Social justice and action require us to embody a cause.

It is heavily documented that Gandhi once said, "Be the change you want to see in the world." Actually, Gandhi never said that. He said, "We but mirror the world. All the tendencies present in the outer world are to be found in the world of our body. If we could change ourselves, the tendencies in the world would also change. As a man changes his own nature, so does the attitude of the world change towards him. This is the divine mystery supreme. A wonderful thing it is and the source of our happiness. We need not wait to see what others do." We see here in this quote that Gandhi was pointing to the foundation upon which a lot of today's "spiritual" teachings draw their rationale. But we also see that he was directing us much deeper. He was guiding us to do the inner work that we often shy away from; the inner change beyond simply wishing or visualizing.

Reading the original quote, one could understand how or why we might paraphrase what he said down to "be the change you want to see in the world" but doing so only gives us part of the story. The real change comes when we go within and do the work of inner transformation. To

examine ourselves openly, honestly, vulnerably and to purge out any resemblance of selfishness, recklessness or insecurity.

Gandhi's power came from this inner work. When asked by a reporter "what his secret was" to gain such power over the ruling British empire, he responded: "I try to make myself zero." He was referring to developing such a selfless love that each thought, word and deed was motivated for the welfare and well-being of others, and not for his own gratification. When people come to me for pastoral care and ask me what they should do about different situations, I tell them, "ask yourself what is the most loving thing you can do right now?" Gandhi was able to have as broad of reach as he did because he went as deep as he did. He had purified himself so that he was motivated by love for others... One does not arrive here without a significant amount of inner work, but it is also requisite to creating a change of that scale. We can't create lasting change by teaching precept alone, but by embodying the precepts. There is no more important work one can undertake than to raise human consciousness, and to do so requires us to start within. Are you ready to be the change?

"Being the change" means both an embodiment (internal) and enactment (external) of social justice "Being the change," I have realized, begins with the internal work of exploring implicit and persistent biases attached to our identities, upbringing, and social conditioning. It is also externalized and seen through the manifestation of hard, persistent, and sustainable work discernable through specific actions, outcomes, or results. So, what does it really mean to be the change? If we want our loved ones to change, we **MUST BE THAT CHANGE**. If we want our kids to become a certain way: we **MUST LIVE** that way, we must **BE THAT EXAMPLE**. If we want people to live fully as themselves and not wear any masks to fit in with others: we must be that person, free from fear of judgement, and live as we **WISH TO LIVE**. If we want them to be giving, we must be giving. Giving of our time, our love, our spirit, our presence. If we want them to be healthy, we must live healthy... in every area. If we expect others to be grateful: we **MUST BE GRATEFUL FIRST**. we must show our gratitude. If we want others to **LIVE** the life they want to live: we **MUST SET THAT EXAMPLE** by **LOVING** the life we live. If we want other people to make happiness and love a priority in their life: we must make happiness and love a priority in our own lives. If we expect others to be **KIND**: we must be kind, we must be compassionate. If we expect others to listen and be understanding, we **MUST** listen, really listen, and really try to understand.

Here's an interesting story of the type of embodiment I'm talking about. Among the many individuals who were holding back to visit with Mahatma Gandhi were a mother and her young child. At the point when the ball was in their court, the lady requested that Gandhi talk with her child about eating sugar. Gandhi requested that she return fourteen days and said he would converse with the kid at that point. She asked why he didn't simply address her child when he was there, however she conformed to his solicitation.

In about fourteen days they returned, and in the wake of hanging tight for two or three hours, she had the option to move toward Gandhi by and by. Hearing her rehashed demand, Gandhi quickly talked with the kid, who consented to start attempting to take out desserts. Subsequent to expressing gratitude toward Gandhi for his savvy and empathetic words, the mother asked him

for what reason he needed them to return as opposed to offering his recommendation the first run through.

Gandhi answered, “Upon your visit fourteen days prior I also was eating sugar.” He clarified that he was unable to talk about or instruct her child to not eat sugar on the off chance that he himself had not taken that venture.

Whatever changes you would like to effect in our society has to begin with you. Let all your activities be an impression of your convictions. Let all your words be intelligent of your own contemplations. The best chiefs the world has ever known are the reformers who were responsible and answerable for their own change. The responsibility for change has no days off, and doesn’t take into account pardons. It’s a genuine responsibility—a guarantee to lead with a heart to increase the value of the world. Changing our face can change anything. But facing our change can change everything. Every single one of us can leave a stamp on this world by creating change in a thousand different ways and improving the lives of others than they at any point thought conceivable. If you want to see the change you must first start within. It’s that simple and that profound.

How do we do this? We accept the most ideal ways are to perceive that change is inescapable, that there is consistently the potential for positive change in each second and to remain grounded and in contact with our tranquility. There is doing and there is being. In being, we have to quiet down inside of ourselves. We have to anchor ourselves in spiritual wisdom, keep our love strong, and remain compassionate, even towards those who we do not agree with. While remaining centered in our own being, we need to do whatever actions we can to alleviate the potential negative effects of this new world.

A big lesson that we have learned is that social action is effective when spiritual quietness, listening, and the witness are present. With the cultivation of spiritual values like compassion, love and wisdom, all actions have the possibility of a positive outcome. We can’t make a difference when we are enraged. Thich Nhat Hanh once said, “We need enlightenment, not just individually, but collectively to save the planet. We need to awaken ourselves. We need to practice mindfulness if we want to have a future. If we want to save ourselves as a planet.” Loving is a tall order when we feel so oppressed by the dark shadows and implications for our way of life, including the health and sustainability of our planet. But as we know so well, embodying this love results in truly responsible social action.

So what choice do we really have but to do the work of love? Ask yourself, What gives my life meaning? Is there anything I want to change?

May it be so.