

READING

I Used To Try to Be Good

I thought no one wanted me as I was, so Good was my go-to. But Good got me nowhere. Not like Truth. Truth, She tore me to shreds, devoured me whole and spit me out shaking and new. Truth keeps a box of matches in my pocket. While Good made me afraid of transformative fire, Truth keeps me real, even if it makes everyone in the room uncomfortable. And Truth, unlike Good, doesn't let me bow down to bullshit or undeserving soapboxes. Truth doesn't let me give in to bullies, misguided and fear based criticism or cowards. Truth is a queen and a humanitarian, while Good, she's a silent, scared little sheep. Truth knows that Good dulls my already radiant, fierce and loving soul. Good showed me how to hide my wings, my words, and angel vision. Truth taught me to be brave. Truth taught me how to respect myself. Truth allows me to hold impenetrable space for any story, but first and foremost for my own. And Truth, well, she changes everything, and friend, she's coming for you too. - Tanya Markul
Thug Unicorn

STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Great Council of the Grandmothers is a group of indigenous women from all over the world who have been teaching, modeling, and promoting justice for all - human and non-human animals and our Mother Earth - for generations. Just after the 2016 election they were asked "what can we learn from this time we are living in?"

"First," they replied, "let us explain some things. You have elected, not a man, but a 'moy' to lead you. He is a boy in an old man's body. Moys are a combination of man and boy, but mostly boy. They are large and have loud voices so people mistake them for men, but they are not men. A man thinks of the common good while a moy has not learned to think of anyone but himself. He has not fully developed and is still a child."

And they continued:

“The time you are living in is called the age of destruction, the Kali Yuga. It is the lowest point. At this time evil rises to the surface to be destroyed. This dark-age takes place just before the arrival of the in-coming Golden Age, so today you are watching out-of-balance Yang energy creating destruction all over your planet. This IS the Kali Yuga. You have heard and read about it and now it has come.”

“Your country has just elected a moy to be its next president. Russia as well as Syria are already run by moys, while Africa is overrun by them, each moy creating havoc in his area of that continent. The Philippines is run by a moy and so are several other countries. Is it any wonder that the world is lurching from crisis to crisis?”

“This is what is happening on earth now and because it is, you must learn to cope with this energy. You cannot reason with it because it is entirely destructive. Instead you must hold steady within yourself and observe its wild behavior from a position of power. If you do this, it will not be able to feed on you. Your steadiness will help contain its rapacious energy and it will not be able to do as much damage as it would otherwise. Call on us, call on the Net of Light and hold Sacred Space. Be mindful of who you are! You are a great being, here on earth to occupy a steady place in an unsteady world. You can do this! You are not weak and helpless. Within yourself you carry the great holding power of Yin. Call on it now. Live with it. Be as you were born to be.”

“We ask one more thing of you. At this time reach out to one another in service. Many are suffering now. Feed the hungry, visit people in hospitals and prisons, provide shoes to those who need them, help the animals. If each of you plunge into one activity of service, together you will do great good, turning many hearts to light. Find a service project for yourself. We ask this of you because we know who you are. You are our hands and hearts on earth. You are greatness itself.”

MEDITATION

“Do not be hardened by the pain
and cruelty of this world.
Be strong enough to be gentle,

to be soft and supple like running water,
gracefully bending around sudden turns,
lithely waving in strong winds,
freely flowing over sharp rocks,
all the while quietly sculpting
this hard world into ever deeper beauty,
gently eroding rigid rock into silken sand,
tenderly transforming human cruelty
into human kindness.

Remember, true strength is not found in the stone,
but in the water that shapes the stone.”

L.R. Knost

SERMON

This may be the most difficult sermon I have ever tried to write - and this is why. During the latest government shutdown there was an article about a family here in FL and the extreme hardship that the shutdown was for them. They were already suffering the effects of the damage in the Panhandle from the latest severe storm. So while they were trying to recover from that with no help from the government, insult was added to injury when the prison the wife was employed by was shut down. She had to drive 7 hours to another prison, find childcare, and be away from her children all week for several weeks in a row. And all without pay. This family was already living hand to mouth and trying to figure out how to pay for the gas for a 14 hour round trip drive every week to work. Both the husband and wife voted for Trump in 2016. In deep frustration the woman exclaimed to the journalist that “Trump is not causing the right people to suffer.” When in our country’s history has causing a part of your citizenry to suffer been considered not just normal but admirable? When did punitive, cruel, and ignorant arrogance become the new normal for leadership? And most importantly of all questions is how do we meet violent communication, belief systems, and punitive priorities with non-violence, let alone with kindness?

As any of you who have grown up with dysfunctional, abusive, and violent families know, destructive people rarely see that in themselves. They are convinced that their rule by fear, punishment, and gaslighting makes them

powerful. They operate through lies of omission and commission and pitting family members against each other. They believe that their overreach of control is not only their right but their responsibility. They are often unable to see the damage they are doing to others because their vision is clouded by their self importance and their misguided ideas of what it means to be truly strong. Many even delight in the fear others have of them; ridiculing, threatening, and intimidating everyone in their path. When we gain some clarity in our understanding of them as people, we see them as the fearful souls that they are. We see their aggression as similar to the very scared and wounded dog under the porch who charges everyone who tries to help them. And because this type of person is not trustworthy, they believe that all others are also untrustworthy. So they run scared, whistling in the dark, and shadow boxing their constantly growing list of enemies.

Indeed those who are now most loudly proclaiming their right to be racist, elitist, exclusive, and proud of it are very scared. They see that their rule by the white, entitled male fist is coming to an end. They see that we have figured out that the emperor has no clothes and that we will get up every time we're knocked down. They know that most of us see them for exactly who they are and that we know there is no true courage or integrity in the dominion over model. They know that most of us have long ago realized that **any** child is our child, **any** sick person without insurance could be us, **any** country is every global country. They know that many of us understand that divisions and borders are social constructs that are so transparent as to be laughable if so many innocent lives were not destroyed by them. They understand that a growing majority of us now know, and are trying to make amends to, all of those murdered, tortured, and robbed of their land. They know that we will not stand for a wall because the land that wall would traverse was once owned by those that we would now keep out.

Our current administration stands for everything that UUs stand against. And they stand against every value, virtue, and ethic that Unitarians have fought for over the centuries. They also have so twisted the teachings of Jesus that they are not recognizable to any authentic Christians. Every major religion teaches care for the poor, a version of the golden rule, that we are all interconnected and to be valued, and that none is above the laws of kindness, compassion, empathy, service, leadership, and integrity. Instead we find ourselves in the nightmare rise of an American Taliban that

would dictate to us what to think, how to act, and tries to assign us each the smallest box possible to live in regardless of our needs, talents, gifts, and personalities.

For the last two years many Unitarian/Universalists have been struggling with how to find common ground with those who believe that every fetus being born is more important than every living child having food, housing, health care, and education. We have struggled with those who believe that “all lives matter” is sufficient to address the murders of people of color, often children, in broad daylight and without consequence. This is akin to saying that if our neighbor’s house is on fire, the first responders should also take crucial time to hose our house down as well. When we see white children being murdered in the street by police, white rapists jailed at the same rate as men of color, powerful and unscrupulous white bankers, congressmen, celebrities, and presidents sitting in the same jail cells as petty thieves of color, only then can we begin to say with some authority that all lives matter.

And many of us have felt like we have been beating our heads against the wall for the past two years, trying to reason with those whom we thought we knew, whose hearts we thought were, if not benevolent, at least benign, whose compassion took leave on the day the disabled journalist was ridiculed. We have been striving to make sense of people who go to church every Sunday while supporting a man who brags about grabbing women by the genitals. We have been told to just not to talk about “politics”; as if our entirely divergent world view of what it means to be humane and human can be defined by the term and practice of politics. As if respect and rights for all people is now up for political debate rather than being the core principles which define us as Unitarians. As if our representatives are here to rule us rather than to represent us and govern for the good of all.

We have tried our very best to find a common language to talk to those who support an administration that calls the majority of its citizens “enemies.” Or to unravel the cognitive dissonance that allows some to turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to the torture and murder of the journalist Khashoggi. We have spent inordinate amounts of time trying to understand those who have no problem with spending sixty percent of our budget on the military while veterans go homeless, education is out of reach of a growing majority, and health care is considered a pipe dream that is

unattainable. Even though every other developed nation has managed to make it work and work well. We are absolutely stymied by someone's insistence that they would rather pay \$700, \$900, \$1200 a month for health insurance than an extra \$100 - 200 for taxes that would cover everyone.

We have been totally confounded and frustrated by our inability to connect with each other. The great thinker and journalist Bill Moyers described it perfectly a few months before the 2016 election. He said that "we have fallen down the rabbit hole and we no longer have a common language with which to speak to each other." Our minister at Tri-UU, Janet Onnie, answered a challenge a couple weeks ago by a visitor who said we should not be discussing politics in church. She made it very clear that our spiritual path and our politics are one in the same thing. Our spiritual beliefs in our seven principles require us to stand at every single challenge to our belief in liberty and justice for all. Not just the few of the right color, circumstance, fortune, and lucky draw of the birth lottery.

So we're still left with the question of how do we compassionately communicate with those whose beliefs we no longer even recognize. Especially those fellow UUs who seem to be actually putting politics ahead of the seven principles to which we all aspire. This is an issue tearing congregations and fellowships apart, just as abolition divided us so fiercely 160 some years ago. We've exhausted our toolbox of deep listening, mindful speech, logic, and reason. We've thought long and hard about how fearful some must be to completely abandon their life long practices of kindness and inclusion. We've sent metta meditation to those suffering under the delusion that it is other struggling souls who are their enemy, rather than those pulling all the strings and igniting the fires of destruction through divide and conquer. So we must go back to the grandmothers' advice. Do not try to reason with this force of destruction. Continue to live our lives of compassion, service, and care for the most vulnerable. Be the kind of warrior who serves first and eats last. Live in joy and creativity. Remember that the moral arc slowly but steadily moves toward justice and it is our blessing and responsibility to help that along. Our work in the world must now be to manifest our vision of a world that works for all and by so doing, to model a different reality that will invite those who are so fearful to join us. We must live in a way that is so different from theirs that they finally understand that love will always be stronger than hate; light

always more inviting than the dark, and integrity and courage are our only way forward.

We all know that arguing and debating rarely gets anyone closer to a point of agreement when the starting lines are in very different places. So we can instead approach with curiosity, as the Tibetan nun Pema Chodron teaches. We can ask lots of questions like “when did you start to feel this way?” “What do you think will happen if others ask for asylum?” “Why do you believe that immigrants are a danger when all of the research and evidence show that they add enormously to our economy and to the richness of our lives and communities?” Have you always felt that way? Tell me more about how your thinking got you there? Do you believe that every child should have the same opportunity to live free from fear and danger - hunger and homelessness? And so forth and so on.

We need to be curious about another’s perspective and how they got there. And we need to stop arguing. We have seen, and research supports, that people only become more entrenched in their beliefs when challenged with information that doesn’t fit their preconceived and unexamined notions. We all need to stop talking, fighting, struggling, arguing and begin listening, working, modeling, and manifesting the world we want to birth. If we use all of our energy trying to reason with those unmoved by logic and facts we will have none left with which to build the new world where everyone is welcome, fed, confident, cherished, healthy, and respected. Where the earth can recover from climate chaos, where guns no longer kill children at their school desks, and wildlife makes a turnaround and begins to repopulate. Congressman John Lewis said that the only way he emotionally survived the civil rights era and its insults, violence, and danger was to behave as if the new world of equality, dignity, and respect already existed.

The old world order is dying and it’s more than about time. We will not hurry this along by fighting with each other. Instead we can practice living in such a way as Arundhati Roy advises in “War Talk”. She says “Our strategy should be not only to confront empire, but to lay siege to it. To deprive it of oxygen. To shame it. To mock it. With our art, our music, our literature, our stubbornness, our joy, our brilliance, our sheer relentlessness – and our ability to tell our own stories. Stories that are different from the ones we’re being brainwashed to believe.

The corporate revolution will collapse if we refuse to buy what they are selling – their ideas, their version of history, their wars, their weapons, their notion of inevitability.

Remember this: We be many and they be few. They need us more than we need them.

Another world is not only possible, she is on her way. Maybe many of us won't be here to greet her, but on a quiet day, if I listen very carefully, I can hear her breathing." May it be so!