

Sermon

March 3rd , 2024

First Unitarian Society

Transformation

“I think of transformation from a personal perspective first and foremost because what we feel and think will eventually translate into what we do.

“The inner world of thought will eventually shape the other world of behavior and circumstance.”

- James Allan, *As A Man Thinketh*

Transformation is not a single stop on our movement through life, but a series of steps as we grow from one stage of consciousness into another. On a human social level, it involves a commitment to move into an entirely new state of thinking, a re-formation of what we need to do to live better, to live collectively, to live in a way that preserves human life and human dignity. It is a metamorphosis, to move or transmute from one form to another. We need a transformation, and as daunting as it sounds, it begins within us.

Transformation, Transformation, Transformation.

It reminds us of the metamorphosis that gives us the wonderful butterfly. We are all very aware that we are facing crisis upon crisis in this world

Climate Change.

Water contamination.

Mass starvation.

Despair that erupts into violence, suicide.

Human rights violation.

Global health issues.

Global poverty

Wars and military conflicts.

These are but a few.

Personal transformation can occur for many reasons - a deep, individual experience or from a collective experience as a family, a community or a nation, but we must understand that transformation is different from change even though we are used to using them as meaning the same. When I change my clothes, that is not a transformation, nor is it when I change my mind. Part of the difference is the ease with which change can be reversed.

Transformation is deep, deliberate by nature or by individual will and is not reversible. What we transform into can be destroyed, but left on its own, it is enduring.

As I think about the war that is presently on the forefront of our consciousness, I feel myself experiencing an extra layer of worry for this world, for who we are to one another.

Division between people, groups, countries, political attitudes, races, are not getting better. There are countless essays, articles and books underscoring the violence and hostility exploding everywhere, even on college campuses because one group does not want to hear any other opinion but their own, whether through classroom lectures or guest speakers. Violent mob attacks are rampant. How is that possible that our institutions of higher learning are internally warring?

I know the state of our world affects us all. We all care about this world and our fellow humans, we care about life. In the face of the present war, and with the mindset of knowing that we must stand against WAR in and of itself, a couple of weeks ago, I, along with a person very dear to me named Mark from the Savage Club and another person hosted a Ceasefire Poetry Reading at Buffalo Street Books. The three

of us originally agreed that we were hosting a sort of anti-war event and that poets, of course, could express whatever they felt about the specific war that is raging now or war as an enterprise of destruction across the world.

Organizing and holding this event was not an easy decision to do so because we knew how tense and divided politics can make us, even to the extent that some would want to disrupt the event or even do harm. These concerns were quietly mirrored those of the bookstore, but over the three week period of emails back and forth, the store took us in, and the event carried on.

I stressed, at the onset of the reading that, overall, we were poets for peace, against this war and the countless wars still taking place as we stand here right now.

There was a really good turnout. There was standing room only even after the 25 chairs were filled. About 12 or 15 poets read. You could imagine the array of emotions that laced each poem, and the images and experiences relevant to this particular war were countless.

(Later I will read the poem I wrote for this particular occasion.)

I and the other two organizers met a few days later to see what could have been changed, if anything at all. It was an interesting conversation for many reasons, but the most interesting part was that one of the organizers was angry and

dismayed that I and the other organizer made a statement about this reading being a peace reading, and anti-war reading, a Ceasefire reading, and that our motivation was not simply generated from this heinous “war” and genocide that is at the forefront of our attention right now, but for the countless wars that are taking place in the world every day.

In other words, the language of Ceasefire for me and the other organizer was a call for transformation - a change from the nature of our hateful, violent, unreasonable, spiritually impenetrable selves into something closely recognizable to what we share to mean as humanity, a transformation into something recognizable as compassion, as a willingness to come together as individuals and spend our energy developing a collective, deeper relationship and understanding that none of us will survive so long as even one of us justifies war, genocide, sociocide, ethnocide, and hate against our neighbors next door, or those across the globe. We must call for a transformation within ourselves and take the steps to spread out this call in loud and in active ways.

A day or two after the poetry reading during our “debriefing - funny word, right? almost military – anyway, during this post evaluation, what became eventually clear was that the third person who helped organize the Ceasefire, decided that she could not work with us because she needed people

who took a clear side, and so in our effort to plead for the closing of the divides that foment wars, we divided.

Sad, disturbing. Ironic.

The state of the world reflects a distortion of the human spirit, not its essential nature. Our goal must be to affect a transformation in both the inner life and external conditions of humanity. This transformation will only occur when a growing body of people, unite in principle. We need a divine precept, a covenant to live in peace. We need to hone our spiritual capacities to contribute to a process of societal change.

I think that any age in human interactions has seemed impervious to alteration, but all things fade away eventually; they can do so taking our hearts and hopes with them, or they can do so because our hearts and hopes called for transformation.

There is a wonderful quote that goes like this:

“Personal transformation can and does have global effects. As we go, goes the world, for the world is us. The revolution that will save the world is ultimately a personal one.”

- Marianne Williamson

Let us begin, today. Let us pull together all that is inside us, the glorious love of life, the unmutable cry for peace, the deep yearning for change for a new way to live together and create something enormous and spectacular for this world.

Let us begin today, to transform our inner world and push the sadness and pain of the outer world out of reach.

I will end this sermon by the poem I wrote for the event:

Letter Poem for Cease-fire

(Poetry reading at Buffalo Street Books. Organized by Mark Zuss, Peaches Gillette, and Melissa Tucky, February 18, 2024)

My beloved Maryam,

We have known one another for over 40 years - you are my dear poet friend.

Your activism is long-standing, well noted, even documented by the FBI - during the '60s and '70s.

You were a young adult and part of the freedom riders fighting for peace and the cessation of war even way back then when I was just a child.

Well, once again, the world of war sits with us in our homes and in our minds, taking up the spaces we reserve to feel at peace or to be at rest.

We cannot stop it from entering.

You send me daily TikTok and Instagram clips of overwhelmed peace activists overseas,

journalists whose families were murdered,

the teary, vacant eyes of the disconsolate

and the despairing,
standing stunned amid barren fields,
their homes gone -
entire communities, gone,
generations of families
annihilated,
hope rinsed away,
coagulating and blackening
in the sand and dust,
along with the blood of uncountable victims.

You send me newsreels of the International Court of Justice hearings drawing war parallels of now, from South Africa's genocide, and the dovetailing effects of catastrophic hunger, disease. And the death that always follows.

I often sit quietly at the dinner tables of friends and family during their conversations, listening to their anger and dismay as they grapple with what amounts to oversimplified answers and quick fixes to the world's problems.

Conversations laced with unexamined explanations of why these types of heinous occurrences come to be.

Explanations that never focus on who we are as people.

I think differently.

Big pictures of war are made up of the pixels of the smaller battles we create.

I see the history of attitudes
that made those “not like us”
disposable and dispensable,
the egregious horrors of war
the consequences
of our collective inhumanity,
the swelling
of the way we quietly seek revenge;

They are the vices of
our classism,
our racism,
our anti-religiousness,
our criticisms of how others live,
even when they live in search of love like us.

War is the predicament of our cultural intolerance,
our casting,
our need to feel superior
and to view others as obstacles

halting us from having
far more than we need.

I see war in the everyday of how we treat one another,
in our inability to forgive “those who trespass against us,”
in our road rage,
in our fights over property lines,
in our indifference and cowardice
toward defending against what is wrong,
in the way we attack one another in the name of justice,
in our obsessive, ill-tempered, language policing,
in the words and the categories we use to turn our friends
against someone we don’t like.

I see war in how we rationalize our deficiency when it comes
to being kind.

The machinery of war is part of the landscape on which
voracious profiteers build their lavish abodes.

The global arms trade -
a casual business game
for Mega corporations like
Boeing,

Lockheed Martin,
Ordinance General,
Honeywell International,
BTX,
Northrop Grumman,
Rolls Royce,
Airbus

and countless others,

whose CEOs and shareholders proudly discuss the clever difference between “dumb bombs and precision bombs, as if the ends and the means of either are a measure of great success.

War is the enemy of life.

The gears of the arms trade are well-greased, like the hands of innumerable bankers and politicians.

I remember the YouTube video you sent of the children buried beneath the rubble of what was once their village - most of them simply dead.

Children!

Dead!!

Some with their little hands and faces reaching out and looking for someone or something to lift them back to their

memory of being safe, of being held, of being fed and loved,
their precious lives once cradled by the adoring and
embracing reality of family and community, gone.

I see each of them -

They are the children of all of us.

I am merely a poet, Maryam,
who uses words to bring us closer together.

I am merely a preacher,
who uses scholarship and compassion, faith and love
to lay the foundation of who we should be to one another.

I am merely a peacemaker,
who wants to invite every face,
every race,
every religion,
every person I meet
into my home
and into my heart.

I am merely a teacher,
who never believed that
“They hit me first,”

was an acceptable excuse
to pummel another.

I am a follower of those like Dr. King, who said:

“It is not enough to say we must not wage war. It is necessary to love peace and sacrifice for it. We must concentrate not merely on the negative expulsion of war, but the positive affirmation of peace.”

He also said unequivocally, “War is an evil.”

I take this all in and I have one question and one conviction.

My question:

“What is it about this human animal that is so given to hate and violence?”

My conviction:

We must not stop rallying against these atrocities, these crimes against humanity.

We must, with every breath we have, call for an end to war, and do so –

Vehemently,

loudly,

and consistently.

With all love,

Peaches

