

An Interfaith Interlude

The over arching psycho-spiritual goal of these talks - indeed, of all of my work as a teacher, director or counselor - is that we each grow in our ability to experience and express peace, love and joy. Knowing about these - peace, love and joy - and growing in them is the authentic spiritual path regardless of what religion one chooses to practice.

The path to get from where we are to the place where we are aware of our growing in these things - peace, love and joy - may not be peaceful or comfortable at all. In order to live in a more spacious home and a bigger world, likely some walls have to come down and some containers that have been holding things seen as valuable, even necessary, for our well-being have to be deconstructed, be replaced. But, this is, I hope to show, an exciting, enlivening adventure.

I want to start with insights gained from one of the most unique gifts I have ever received. (In addition to the way this class gifted me!) This year I celebrated my 80th birthday and my two children gifted me with a book, a birthday book, made especially for me. I was born on September the 6th, 1937. This book contains the front page of the New York Times for every September the 6th for the past 80 years.

(You can find images of the pages I refer to on the Ordinary Life website.)

The New York Times on September 6, 1937 costs three cents. The headlines that day talked of violence marking Argentine voting, Japan opens big offensive on Shanghai front, a big Nazi rally in Nuremberg (we had something similar in Shelbyville, Tennessee this past weekend) and the U.S. warning Mexico over oil trade.

In 1957 the cost of the paper had increased to five cents. The U.S. is flying arms to Jordan to block a pro-soviet move, Eisenhower's playing golf makes the front page, Little Rock tries to block the move to integrate its schools.

In 1977 the cost of the paper was 20 cents. Headlines include corruption in politics where some are urging the removal of others for “illegalities” which the president resists. The F.B.I. is under fire.

In 1987 the cost was \$1.25 - a Sunday edition. The headlines, though, are pretty much the same: Israeli warplanes attack Lebanon, Chad reports its forces have entered Libya.

In 1997 the daily New York Times costs 60 cents. The Attorney General, Janet Reno, was bending on opposition to appoint a new special prosecutor. This was about irregularities in the Al Gore presidential campaign. More conflict between Israel and Lebanon.

This book is a fascinating chronicle of events over the past eighty years. New people have come on the scene, new technologies have benefited us, new challenges face us and so on. But, the headlines remain essentially the same.

You know what’s not on the front pages of the New York Times? You. And, other expressions of gatherings like this.

I’ve mentioned before: we are in the front edge of a great turning and that doesn’t get much press.

I’m thinking of things like the consistently sold-out Rohr conferences we go to where I first met Ilia Delio and, then, she came here.

I’m thinking of a men’s gathering some of us attended in New Mexico last year. Over 500 men from 48 eight states and four other countries who came together to share experiences in the work that do to help other men find their purpose, to know the difference between strength and power, to develop the capacity to love and to live with integrity. There are men in this gathering today who mentor other men, and boys. But that doesn’t make front page news.

There was a gathering that took place here this past Thursday. The woman I’m married to attended this gathering and came home saying, “This is one of the best

things I've ever attended." When she says something like that, I sit up and take notice.

Barbara Buckner was responsible for getting this going and I asked Barbara to come and tell us about how all this came to be. Then a couple of our own Ordinary Life women will tell of their experience.

Then Shazma Matin will speak to us for as long as she like. Then, the two of us will talk to each other with time for Questions and Answers from you.

This so fit with what I had planned to say today that its evolving to this point is an example, for me, of Divine Entanglement.

Barbara, I am so grateful to and for you.

(At this point Barbara spoke. As did Sherry Beeman and July Leatherwood Smith. Then, our burst Shazma Matin. You'll have to listen to the audio on the website.

In our dialogue I mentioned the bookmark Shazma handed out at the Thursday meeting that has a poem by Rumi on it.

Out beyond ideas of
wrongdoing and
right doing,
there is a field.
I'll meet you there.

When the soul lies
down in that grass,
the world is too full
to talk about
ideas, language, even
the phrase "each
other" doesn't make
any sense.

I asked Shazma to tell us her story and she did.

We talked about other matters.

I also mentioned a poem by Hafiz that I am fond of:

The small man
builds cages for everyone
he knows.
While the sage,
who has to duck his head
when the moon is low,
keeps dropping keys all night long
for the beautiful rowdy prisoners.

And, thanks Shazma for dropping keys in the arena of interfaith dialogue.

No matter where you go this week, no matter what happens, remember this: you carry precious cargo. So, watch your step.