

Poplar Ridge Friends Meeting
Sunday Service
October 7, 2018

Good morning

The Torah instructs us:

First, love our neighbor as we love ourselves

Second, love the stranger

Third, love God with all our heart

Rabbi Sheila Weinberg teaches:

By learning how to love ourselves, we learn how to love our neighbor.
By learning how to love our neighbor we learn how to love the
stranger. By learning how to love the stranger we learn how to love
God.

Hymn – “There Is Nothing I Can Give You,” #180, Green Book

Reading 1: “If we are not happy [content], we are not peaceful.” Thich Nhat Hanh

Reading 2: Matthew 5: 38-45 – ³⁸“You have heard that it was said, ‘An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth.’ ³⁹But I say to you, Do not resist the one who is evil. But if anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also. ⁴⁰And if anyone would sue you and take your tunic, ^[a] let him have your cloak as well. ⁴¹And if anyone forces you to go one mile, go with him two miles. ⁴²Give to the one who begs from you, and do not refuse the one who would borrow from you.

⁴³“You have heard that it was said, ‘You shall love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ ⁴⁴But I say to you, Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, ⁴⁵so that you may be children of your Father who is in heaven. For he makes his sun rise on the evil and on the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust.

Reading 3: From my recently published book of poems, “Dancing in the Light” –

Unguarded

Sometimes thoughts

Of militant domination
Momentarily flood my soul,
And I become convinced
That victory brings peace.

The thoughts cause me to shutter
The ideas, out of sync
With my ardent pacifism,
Come when I am unguarded
Against the evil that can overwhelm.

Hymn – “A Garden Of My Own,” #187, Green Book

Joys and Concerns
Prayer –
Spirit of peace,
Quiet our hearts,
Heal our anxious thoughts,
Free us from our fretful ways.

Breathe on us your holy calm
So that in the stillness of your presence
We may open ourselves to trust
And be transformed.

Hymn – “Simple Gifts,” #271, Green Book

This morning I want to share some stories, experiences, and struggles in my peace journey.

When I was young (late teenage) I came to the realization that war and killing were wrong. It was not the Jesus path.
The Vietnam War raged
I had a college deferment. Then suddenly unbeknownst to me the deferment was canceled. I discovered the change when notified to report to KC for induction into the US Army.
I refused and appealed the decision.
The local draft board denied the appeal so it was appealed to the state draft board where I was granted the right to be a CO and serve alternative service

– which set me on my career path of working with emotionally disturbed; behavior challenged children.

Out of this experience I developed an ardent stance for nonviolence and pacifism.

I also have a love for genealogy. When researching Kay's family I uncovered an interesting story of the Mennonites who to avoid persecution fled from Holland to Prussia then to Russia at the invitation of Catherine the Great to settle the Ukrainian plains. Perhaps the story is legend, nevertheless it is true. Catherine offered them freedom to settle in segregated communities and worship (and believe) as their conscious dictated which included exemption from serving in the armed forces. One hundred years later another czar changed his mind and demanded that the segregated communities integrate into Russian life including service in the armed forces. Before concluding that migration to America was the answer, the communities of Mennonites in Russia sent a delegation to meet with the czar's representatives and attempt to negotiate some relief from the czar's edict. In the negotiations a representative of the czar asked, "What would we do to defend our Mother land if everyone believed as you do about refusing to serve in the armed forces?" Mr. Unruh, a member of the Mennonite delegation quietly answered, "Sir if everyone believed as we do, there would be no need for armed forces in this world."

It's a great story – illustrating the belief in peace and nonviolence.

As I began my career I noted that the children with whom I worked experienced a lot of violence in their homes and neighborhoods. I saw what it did to them. I came to abhor the neighborhood violence and domestic violence they experienced.

Early in my career at a conference I heard John Valisic speak. A psychologist from Kansas University he is the author of "People are not for Hitting, and Children are People Too." He was a strong advocate for banning the use of physical punishment with children, i.e. spanking, slapping, etc. He explained, that in his studies, what is learned by the child in the process of such discipline is "might makes right." In other words, my victory (as an adult) over you (a child) brings peace in our relationship and that is the way it should be. He also noted a progression of violent response in human social interaction: when people want to make a point using physical violence the open hand slap comes first; if that doesn't work then

the fist is used; if that doesn't work then the stick is used; if that doesn't work then the gun is used; and if that doesn't work then the bomb is used.

I was struck by what he said. Until then I had no problem with spanking and other low level violent responses, e.g. allowing kids to strike back at their peers when taunted. He challenged violent responses at all levels. And I began to realize that all kinds of violent responses were harmful and wrong. Peace had to be a practice at the personal level. Peace is more than just a belief.

Slowly I realized that peace is not possible until we are at peace with ourselves – that means me as well. Remember Rabbi Weinberg taught “by learning how to love ourselves we learn how to love our neighbor?” Loving myself allows me to love and be at peace with my family and my community. My point is that peace has to be more than a belief; in our day to day living we must “be peace.”

Of course this is an ongoing journey. Does one ever arrive? I know I haven't. Rabbi Weinberg used interesting words, “by learning how to love...” It's a learning process that leads to the divine. And often I find it to be a struggle. It's what Jesus taught and modeled over 2000 years ago. The journey is seeking the spirit/heart of God (whatever you claim it to be); love/contentment/peace is the vehicle or byproduct of the journey. Love ourselves – love our neighbor – love the stranger – love God. Love – contentment – peace

I have found some suggestions from Thich Nhat Hanh seem helpful in addressing the struggles of the journey of peace –
It starts with me being aware and truly looking deeply at my own self centeredness, selfishness, and greed. I have to let go of my narrow mindedness and false attachments. As these negative attributes begin to fall away I find myself more loveable, more content, more peaceful. I work on becoming more open minded and accepting so I can respect the right of others to be different. I don't possess the absolute truth! Certainty leads to rigidity leads to being closed, judgmental, and unloving to others – a path I want to avoid.

Is my speech peaceful? I have to admit – not always – but when I speak in a compassionately constructive and truthful manner I cultivate internal peace.

We all experience anger, fear, and negativity. Sometimes it's difficult, but it is important to take care of these feelings. Anger, fear, and negativity can lead to violent responses. I can transform these feelings in myself to the positive through compassionate listening, understanding, and compromise before they overtake and destroy the peace within. That's not always easy and there are entire workshops, books, courses, and therapy interventions that address transforming anger, fear, and negativity. The point here is that it is important to work on addressing the negative that wells up within each of us.

In her book "Positivity" Barbara Fredrickson discusses the powerful advantages of being positive, but acknowledges that one must work to maintain positivity. A tipping point toward a good day she explains is when one maintains a ratio of 3 positive actions/interactions for every negative one. Try it; it works!

I also find it's important for me to take time to understand and be with those who suffer, for example working with troubled children and their families or working at the food pantry. The San Pedro sister community is another excellent example. Being with, accompanying, and becoming one with them not only brings love/peace within, but also love/peace between us.

Nom Chomsky once said that we must remember that our all luxury and comfort has been purchased on the backs of the oppression of others. We will probably never eliminate this problem. It has been with us since civilization came into being. But it creates turmoil within our beings. Living simply and sharing resources also addresses the struggle to be peace, as does taking a clear stand against oppression and injustice.

Living simply is such a matter of perspective. What is simple for me may be luxurious for another. I am reminded of the story of an African exchange student coming to study in America for several years. He was met at the gate in the airport where he disembarked by his host family (in the time when those without tickets to travel could actually go to the boarding gates). He carried a small suitcase off the plane. After greetings were exchanged the host began to direct to the baggage claim area. The exchange student said that he had no baggage to claim; all that he had for his several year stay in America was in his small carry on bag. This raises a lot of questions. How much is enough? Does wealth get in the way of peace? And how do I or should I manage my excess?

Remember Thich Nhat Hanh said when we are not happy we are not peaceful? There is much to be thankful for and to enjoy – the sun, the beautiful Finger Lakes, friends, etc. The Desiderata concludes, “with all its sham, drudgery and broken dreams it is still a beautiful world.” Positivity not only lifts me, but it also lifts the other. Smile it brightens the day.

Be peace.

Hymn – “Prayer of Saint Francis,” #15, Blue Book

Concluding prayer –

Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me
Let there be peace on earth
The peace that was meant to be

With God as our father
Brothers and sisters are we
Let me walk with you
In perfect harmony

Let peace begin with me
Let this be the moment now
With every step I take
Let this be my solemn vow

To take each moment and live
Each moment in peace eternally
Let there be peace on earth
And let it begin with me

Afterthoughts, introductions, announcements

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