

Can We Please All Be a Little Kinder to Our 'Enemies' in 2020?

Maybe I have overdosed on festive cheer as 2019 rushes to a close, but this New Year, instead of writing a saccharine message full of love and peace, I find myself longing to have a bit of a rant – so here goes.

Here is a key question to ask yourself as we move into a new decade of the 21st century. Would you rather be right, or would you rather be happy? I suspect most people in our society would still rather be right than happy. For example, you probably voted to remain in Europe and now that Brexit is happening, you would possibly rather be right about what a disaster it is going to be than happy that you might be wrong and everything will turn out to be just fine.

Not only do most of us cling extremely tightly to our fears for the future, we also cling to our negative judgements of those who do not share our political views, or our views about climate change, racism, sexism or whatever. Now I am not saying here that you should ever agree with someone who makes a racist or sexist remark, but you do not have to label them as evil for expressing a prejudice of some kind. We all hold prejudiced beliefs. For example many on the Left in the UK now seem to believe that Tory politicians are 'scum' or at the very least 'bad' people. If you would not dream of saying that about someone who holds different religious beliefs to yours, why on earth would you think it OK to say something extremely derogatory about someone who does not happen to share your political beliefs?

By all means do everything you can to fight for a fairer, greener, more peaceful world, but please do not demonise those who may not share your version of heaven on earth. As a Harvard professor said recently, 'No one in history has ever been insulted into agreement.' Calling those who voted for Brexit in 2016 racist or stupid for example does not appear to have changed their minds about voting for Brexit once again!!

As I read about so much anger and hatred now polluting our political landscape, I keep thinking to myself that there must be another way to be politically engaged and I recently found an activist who embodies the type of approach to our political enemies that I would love to see adopted more widely in 2020.

I am passionately against capital punishment and recently read the book 'Dead Man Walking' by Sister Helen Prejean who has now accompanied 5 death row inmates to their execution in the USA. Sister Prejean is totally against the death penalty, but what struck me most about her book, apart from her extraordinary courage, was that she befriended the father of a murdered girl who was determined that his daughter's murderer should be put to death and suffer horribly as he was executed. Here was a woman who was totally devoted to abolishing the death penalty, lovingly embracing her 'enemy' who was determined to thwart her every effort to save individuals from being executed by the state. I found her non-judgemental and loving approach to the other side of this extremely polarising and angry debate to be incredibly encouraging - if an almost impossible act to follow.

Imagine if after 9/11, Americans, and in particular the American government, had decided that rather than demanding an eye for an eye, they would demonstrate to the whole world the power of forgiving our enemies. How many lives would have been saved? Far, far more than were lost in the

Twin Towers. What if instead of demonising those who hold very different views to our own, we simply give them a hug – at least metaphorically. We do not have to accept their beliefs or their views, but in my humble opinion, we need to accept that everyone on this earth is equally a child of God and equally beloved by God regardless of their actions or beliefs.

Now you may object at this point that I could not possibly believe that Hitler was the child of God. Yes I do. He was clearly an *extremely* dangerous, deranged man who unleashed unimaginable horrors on this world, but I do not believe that he was evil, so much as insane. *A Course in Miracles* is so clear that all human beings are at heart the totally innocent children of God. But in this world, we are either totally lost in a nightmare ruled by a ruthlessly self-centred and cruel ego, or we are back home dwelling in the oneness that is filled with infinite love and compassion.

When, very occasionally, my consciousness soars upwards and I find myself dwelling in infinite love and nothing but love, I find that I can extend this love to any of my so-called enemies in this world with the greatest of ease. But in my normal, much more fearful state of consciousness I still have to make a big effort to extend loving compassion to someone like Donald Trump for example! But I still keep trying to do this on a regular basis at the end of my morning meditation session, because in my heart, I know that responding to any kind of greed, hatred or violence in our world with yet more hatred and violence – even if it is just a hate-filled or violent thought – simply adds to the dark energy that is already swirling all around us. Sadly, many human beings still hold so many thoughts of hatred in their minds and hearts (and today, more and more of us are expressing these dark thoughts on social media) that the energy of these hate-filled thoughts pollutes our whole energetic environment.

So this New Year, I wonder whether you would like to join me in a simple, but powerful spiritual practice. First, we commit to noticing when we are lost in thoughts of disgust, rage, resentment or simply disdain toward someone, or a group of people, in our world whose views or beliefs we abhor. Then, we consciously choose to replace these dark thoughts with thoughts of compassion for our so-called enemy or enemies. We pause, settle in our always loving hearts and silently say to those with whom we disagree so strongly, something like ‘May you be well. May you be happy and fulfilled.’

I am convinced that if we all adopted this core Buddhist practice of extending good wishes to our enemies, we could play a very small part in creating a more peaceful and harmonious world in 2020. Can we really do this by just spending maybe a few moments on a daily basis unconditionally blessing our enemies, or those with whom we totally disagree? Yes We Can!

Happy New Year!

Peggy Foster
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