

Alice Walker- Being a Love Activist



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7 Steps to Become a Love Activist

Alice Walker is a poet, author, activist world-renown speaker for peace, justice, anti-oppression, anti-racism and women's issues for nearly 40 years. Today I am going to look at what Kelle Walsh, a blogger posted online- titled 'Alice Walker's 7 Simple Steps to Being a Love Activist'. As we explore her steps I suspect you too will come to see that the steps are brilliant, simple in terms of clarity and purpose but incredibly complex in terms of living out. Debra challenged me, just before she went to tend to family matters for a couple of weeks, to prepare a worship service on those thoughts. After today I will send Debra this text and challenge her to respond too.

The first book I ever read by Alice Walker, many years ago, was *The Third Life of Grange Copeland*. Then the one she is probably most known for, *The Color Purple*, and *The Temple of My Familiar* became two that I read over a few times. *The Color Purple*, still contains some of the most riveting and painful scenarios about young black women, and some of the wisest words spoken by Shug in the part of the book known as, *The Gospel According to Shug*. One statement that still speaks strongly to me is "Helped, [she uses the word helped instead of blessed] are those who love the entire cosmos rather than their own tiny country, city, or farm; to them will be shown the unbroken web of life and the meaning of infinity." [i]

Walker is an inspiring woman and role model. I have two of her books of poetry and prose. One, *Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling poems 1965-1990* [ii] and *We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light In A Time of Darkness*, which I quoted from this morning. She has never been afraid to stand up to and for justice, never been afraid to speak out, to write shocking words.

Such as these:

Love is not concerned
With whom you pray
Or where you slept
The night you ran away
From home

Love is concerned
That the beating of your heart
Should kill no one.

These words became a mantra for many gay, lesbian, bi, trans people. They are words that our youth in 15 West Coffeehouse resonate with as they struggle with their identity and with the rejection they have experienced from family, so called friends, teachers, pastors and politicians they had thought would stand with them in their fight for recognition and respect.

Or these lines from “A Few Sirens”, reminding us to look beyond our own cares and concerns.

Today I am home
Writing poems
My life goes well:
Only a few sirens herald disaster
In the ghetto
Down the street.
In the world, people die
Of hunger.
On my block we lose
Jobs, housing and breasts.
But in the world
Children are lost;
Whole countries of children
Starved to death
Before the age

Of five
Each year;
Their mothers squatted
In the filth
Around the empty cooking pot
Wondering:
But I cannot pretend
to know what they wonder -
a walled horror
instead of thought
would be my mind.

Let me launch into Alice Walker's 7 steps. Her first is: Recommit Every Day

When you're on a mission of peace, your commitment to nonviolence is tested daily. So every day, you're called to recommit to who you are, to keep your heart open and to stand your ground.

and the second is:

Protect What Matters Most

Know what you're defending. What's within you that's worth protecting so you don't become just like the people who are trying stop you? Guard it dearly and use it as your inspiration for nonviolence.

Few of us will face death at the hands of terrorist after being captured by them as did a young love activist named Kayla Mueller. Kayla was 26 years old when she was killed in Raqqa Syria, allegedly during a Jordanian air strike. Though we might not be like Kayla who after graduation from North Arizona University, worked helping HIV/homeless victims, before heading off to work with war victims in Aleppo Syria. Yet, we are challenged each day to bring peace to a troubled world. We might do that through teaching, through working with the disadvantaged and ill, through writing and serving others. Each day Alice Walker reminds us, we must recommit to our purpose. If our purpose is to be kinder and gentler to other beings, if our purpose is to walk lightly upon the earth, if our purpose is to provide a home for our children, if our purpose is to provide transportation for those who ca not drive, if our purpose is to act as healer and teacher and mentor then we should take a moment each day to remind ourselves of what we are committed to and why we are committed to protecting that which we value.

I have a small daily practice that helps to remind me of my purpose. Each day as I am sipping coffee I look at my calendar and see the appointments and events that are scheduled for the day. I say a few words aloud to remind me to focus on each person or task that is written there and I remind myself to bring my best self to each meeting. It might not be earth shattering but I find sometimes that this small daily habit can bring holy times to my consciousness.

Alice would say to become a love activist, which I will define as person filled with compassion, commitment and concern for all of life, a person willing to take risk, to speak out and up, then we must learn to embrace joy. "Embrace our joy" is what Alice Walker says. I quote, "Peace is not just the cessation of war. It's also the act of embracing JOY. To have peace is to be fully awake and vibrantly alive!"

A story told about Kayla Mueller is that when she went to Syria in 2012 she was working with the Danish Refugee Council and Support Life, a human rights group in refugee camps. One day a young father whose home and city had been bombed showed up at the site looking for his family - a daughter, son and wife. At the camp he learned that his wife had been killed. He found his daughter but he told Kayla that he could not find his son. She took a picture of the son and went from camp to camp until she found him and was able to reunite the 6 year- old boy with his father and sister. When she was asked about this, her reply was "I will not let this suffering be normal." One can only imagine the joy that all experienced as the children were reunited with their father. To be sure their mother had died but at least together as family they could appropriately mourn and grieve. When Kayla was killed, her family rather than focusing on her death and the dubious account of the cause [of her death] stated "She lived with purpose and we will work every day to honor her legacy." Joy is not life without sorrow, joy is not being happy and carefree, joy is not a life without loss and struggle, joy is finding meaning, being fully awake.

The fourth step to be a love activist is to Stand for Truth.

Alice Walker writes, "When you stand with, and for, the marginalized and abused, bring a kind heart, an open mind and a good conscience. This can only be achieved by acknowledging what has truly happened. The suffering must be seen and the wounded must be embraced."

Kayla Mueller was quoted as saying, "I find God in the suffering eyes reflected in mine, if this is how you are revealed to me this is how I will forever see you." Her statement speaks volumes to me of a person willing to enter into life with all its suffering with a kind and open heart. I can only hope that I will be able to do the same. As we approach the other, the oppressed, may we always be reminded to hear their story and not put our need to be helpful and a rescuer above their desire.

If we do this, I suspect we are well on the way to meeting the 5th step which is to be courageous. Alice Walker writes... be courageous, even audacious, speak up and share your unique gifts. The world needs your leadership!"

Kayla's parents said of her, that the common thread throughout her entire life was her quiet leadership and strong desire to serve others.

But of course we know that when we serve others when we are courageous when we dare to speak up and to stand for truth, we will be hurt, we will be slandered, we will be ignored and we will be belittled so the 6th step is to Spread Forgiveness.

Work with spiritual practices and spiritual leaders to find ways to forgive yourself and others and when you forgive others, feel it deeply. Alice Walker writes of the Buddhist practice called Tonglen where you breathe in pain and disaster as deep as you can, and then breathe out peace, prosperity and joy... spreading these good feelings out into the world.

Kayla was quoted as saying, "It's important to stop and realize what we have, why we have it and how privileged we are. And from that place to start caring so a lot can get done." I hear her saying, if we are honest with ourselves about our many blessings, if we are true to our values, if we forgive ourselves and others and begin again in love we can be a love activist. A person who is willing to step up, step out, knowing that if we love the earth and all beings in and on it the world would be a better place.

Alice Walker's seventh step is 7) Love the Earth. The blogger who started us on this journey of unpacking the 7 steps writes, "Nature is a vital life-giving source that we cannot take for granted. Be a conscious steward of the Earth. Treat Her with respect and nature will keep us happy and healthy in return.

I must in closing share one of Alice Walker's more powerful poems. "We have a Beautiful Mother." [iii]

We have a Beautiful

Mother

Her hills

Are buffaloes

Her buffaloes

Hills.

We have a Beautiful

Mother

Her oceans

Are wombs

Her wombs

Oceans.

We have a Beautiful
Mother
Her teeth
The white stones
At the edge
Of the water
The summer grasses
Her plentiful
Hair.

We have a Beautiful
Mother
Her green lap
Immense
Her brown embrace
Eternal
Her blue body
Everything
We know.

Without those like Kayla Mueller who dare to walk to the beat of a different drummer, without poets like Alice Walker, and those who would challenge us the world would not be transformed. Unitarian Universalism has a lot going for it, a lot that can be corrected and a lot to celebrate. A thought we can take away today is the there are steps to follow as we seek to be agents of transformation. And we do not have to do anything alone.

May it be so.

[i] We Are The Ones We Have Been Waiting For: Inner Light In A Time of Darkness. page 135

[ii] Her Blue Body Everything We Know: Earthling poems 1965-1990, pages 342 and 348

[iii] Ibid. page 459