



Battles Big and Small

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Greetings, and Salutations Everyone!

It is wonderful to be here, in this space, together.

In the few short weeks since last we gathered, so much has happened. We have seen fires rage in Oregon, California, Montana, Washington State, and Colorado. Massive hurricanes, mudslides and earthquakes wreak havoc and destruction. We have seen the Rights we as Americans hold sacrosanct come under attack. We have seen Hate personified storm the campus of a sleepy college town in Charlottesville, VA. We have watched the number of Anti-Semitic crimes, as well as the temperature of the oceans rise to alarming and unacceptable levels. We have seen young, hardworking Dreamers be told by the US Attorney General, you aren't good enough to be Americans anymore. Have we seen enough? I hope so. But, what can we do? How do we fight all or even one these big battles? How do we begin? Where do we start? How can we as a faith community guide our actions, big and small to promote our values of Justice, Dignity, Inclusion, and Acceptance?

Our ongoing dialogue indicates, in my mind, we have already begun. This is the beginning.

We Unitarian Universalists are by nature, a curious, questioning people. We ask questions. Then we ask more...and then a few more. Many of us left our Faith of Origin in part because our questions could not, or would not be answered. We are seekers; after all, we each found our way here, to this Beloved Community. Our Fourth Principle speaks directly to this. 'We covenant to affirm and promote a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.' I really like this one. The verbs jump out at me, this is a principle of action, of seeking and of asking questions. Asking questions is the first crucial step of many in spurring action. It is imperative that we dig deeper with our search for what is true. This applies to the individuals' spiritual journey, as well as general truths that affect us all. As we are all too aware, that there are multiple injustices occurring in our country and the world today. We must find ways to promote the truth we have found, that Love is the key. Love is what gives us all meaning; it heals the scars left on our collective consciousness by hate and greed. It gives us courage when we feel we haven't any. It is in the threads that connect us to one another. Our Seventh Principle states that, we covenant to affirm and promote Respect for the Interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part. Some take the seventh principle and apply it to the environmental movement. I think that's correct, but that's not all. It can also mean the social fabric that holds us together, that human connection that makes us want to reach out and help our fellow people. Here comes a question. Or two. How do we strengthen bonds with those close to us in order to affect our world for the better? How do we tackle all these Big Battles? I don't have "The" answers. I can, tell you a couple stories that I hope will help get to the meat of the matter.

My Mother and I have a little tradition of sorts where at the close of school and beginning of the year we go for lunch at this little restaurant in Groton. We like to sit outside, have some really good food, and some uninterrupted conversation. It's a treat. So, we get our food, we're chatting, and despite my best efforts not to mention it. It comes up The Current Administration. Now, really, I tried to talk about anything else, but it was no use. We discuss DACA, and agreed it was a bad move both societally and economically. Let me take a moment

to say, my Mother and I agree on 99.9% of things politically speaking. We agree enthusiastically. We are impassioned. It also sometimes sounds like we're fighting. We were in public, so we were managing to keep it to a dull roar, when a couple was seated next to us. We continue, but softer. After a little while, the gentleman at the next table leans over and says, "I'm sorry, I couldn't help but overhear..." I gulp, because this could go a few ways. "But I agree with you ladies 100%." That was the beginning of a hour long, deep conversation about the current atmosphere, Racism, White Privilege, the school to prison pipeline, reproductive rights, How Obama's election influenced our culture, the current push back against the gains made, to how things were then vs. now. He shared his perspective as a mixed race man, navigating different spaces. How one must shapeshift, in order to get along. We spoke of the brave actions of those with disabilities demonstrating in favor healthcare. It was amazing to have such a respectful, thought provoking conversation to have had with someone you have just met. As we all talked we found there were many connections between all of us. The Gentleman had lived around the same area my Mother and sister had, respectively in MA and NY. I was familiar with some of the groups that the woman was involved in in her advocacy work for disabled individuals. Another interesting connection was, Unitarian Universalism. The gentleman's Mother is a UU minister not all that far from us. Overall, it was a very unique moment that stayed with me for days. My takeaways were what a small world, and what a gift that "chance" encounter was. That conversation, the meeting of the minds and sharing of our truths, was activism. Sometimes just having a real and respectful open conversation is a powerful tool. Social justice is forged by education, and the sharing of who we are with each other and the world. By listening with an open mind and heart, I was able to hear the truth that this man and this woman were speaking. This is learning. We are in this together. This is a start.

“It isn’t what we say or think that defines us, but what we do.” Jane Austen, *Sense and Sensibility*.

It is not enough to be compassionate, You Must Act.

- His Holiness the Dalai Lama

You Must Act. I stood before you last year and urged you all to do just that. After all, our chosen faith requires it!

This summer, I saw swastikas, torches and angry self-entitled folks spewing venom, encouraging more hate, more violence, more division and animosity

I knew. In the pit of my stomach, I knew a few things. What was on display was repugnant, hate filled, misguided, and wrong. I knew that only Love can drive out hate. Once word of an opportunity to act on this issue presented itself close to home in Boston, I thought, I have to go. That was immediately followed by a tiny voice in the back of my head that said, ‘Oh, you really can’t’. I battled myself and my anxiety for days.

Let’s pause here for another question. What gets in the way of action? There are so many actual legitimate reasons not to stick your neck out. In our lives we have our commitments, and those can’t often be placed on hold or put aside. There are often people counting on us, in one way or another. Some of us cannot risk physical harm, others cannot risk arrest, and some simply cannot drop their life on a moment’s notice. That’s valid. When you have taken stock, if the only thing between you and acting upon your beliefs is fear, do it anyway. Dig deep and find the strength to push through the fear, and do it.

As some of you may know, a group of us, Betsy, Mark, Lauren and myself attended the “Free Speech Rally” in Boston to utilize our first amendment rights to speak out against the racism,

white supremacy, and hate being peddled as of late. This was a Big Battle, and we could make our intentions known. This was something important.

I came to the realization that the only thing preventing me from going to Boston was my fear and anxiety. I also felt as though it would be hypocritical of me to literally preach action, without practicing it. I was scared. I was scared that someone would do something terrible. I was scared that my anxiety would get the best of me, and I wouldn't be able to do what I felt so deeply called to do. My daughter had encouraged me to go, as did my son. I was so afraid to let them down. Being vulnerable in any situation is scary. I was petrified. Being able to trust Lauren, Mark and Betsy, was what enabled me to go. I cannot fully express how glad I am that we went, and how grateful I am to them for their support when I needed it.

In the end, the four of us were blessed to witness an outpouring of Love, Empathy and a strong vocalization of what justice and equality mean. This is what democracy looks like. In the midst of the tension of the day, we were front and center to witness the best of humanity. There were people passing out snacks, and water. Strangers were checking in with, and taking care of one another. There were moments when someone would go by with a sign that resonated with me, and we would lock eyes for just a moment, nod and the connection was there, it was a tangible thing. I know. I felt it. Love had won.

There is a difficult to attribute saying from the feminist movement, The Personal IS political. I'll include its inverse, the political is also personal. These Big Battles we are up against don't have to overwhelm us. They can all be broken down into smaller battles. Manageable ones we can fight. There are everyday ways we can promote our values of Justice, Dignity, Inclusion, and Acceptance. For example, we can't personally eradicate white privilege, but we learn what we can about it, recognize it when we see it, and speak up about it- even if your voice shakes. We can put ourselves out there, talk with others, and realize we are already connected; we just have to discover it. We can't change every prejudiced persons mind, but we can be actively

supportive and accepting toward folks who don't "fit conventional roles". We can be good examples. We can be there for each other, and build up our beloved community.

We can, we must, show Courage. For some of us, courage is speaking up, for some; it's holding their tongue and listening to someone else.

Our Faith is one that guides us toward a path of action. It provides us with a framework, a medium through which we can focus our attention. We can answer the call to fight the Big Battles, and we can also see validity of the small Battles we fight day to day. They are all just pieces in a bigger picture. A picture we, as a community can change for the better. I can't promise you much, but I can promise two things, 1. This sacred work will not be easy 2. It will be worth it.

Let's get to work.

We may need to be the squeaky wheel in order to get the grease.

Love without action is meaningless. Action without love is irrelevant.

-Deepak Chopra