

## **Try a Little Tenderness** a sermon by Lori Staubitz May 17, 2009

### **Prayer of Renewal**

Let us come into the peace of this moment to draw from deeper reserves of strength, understanding and compassion....

For we yearn to be filled by the sure knowledge and truth of our unity as we struggle to be whole.

Spirit of life, love and renewal, let us open to the possibility of personal growth in this season of blossoms.

May we begin this day anew; cultivating healthier ways of being with those we love and cherish.

Let us let go of old fears and patterns of behavior that stand in the way of new ways of living, loving and being.

Let this be a season of expanding our capacity to embody a love that is life giving so together we can live well beyond our personal struggles and limitations.

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Respect for the Inherent Worth and dignity of each life is our first principal. Interestingly, the word love is not used. Respect, valuing the worth and dignity of others are high values....but they be done at some distance...love requires engagement of the heart as well as the mind.

Historically, our religious ethics emerged out of the struggles for human freedom and justice inherent in Judaism...they are expressed as justice and universal love through the teachings and life of Jesus. As Unitarian Universalism evolved to consider the wider vistas of teachings and wisdom found throughout the world's religions- it is the golden rule that is the common thread.

Love of self and neighbor is foundational to not only the human spirit, but is the building blocks of our most intimate relationships and our most complex social structures. The health of our nation and world community is at stake and it will be our ability to love that can save us.

So important is this ability that The "Declaration Toward a Global Ethic"[\[11\]](#) from the [Parliament of the World's Religions](#)[\[12\]](#) (1993) proclaimed the Golden Rule (both in negative and positive form) as the common principle for many religions.[\[13\]](#) The Initial Declaration was signed by 143 leaders from different faith traditions and spiritual communities.[\[13\]](#)

"Empathy" - Who's Got It, Who Does Not Written on May 2, 2009 – 12:06 pm | by Daniel Goleman | Originally published at [Huffingtonpost.com](http://Huffingtonpost.com)

(However) "When President Obama tells us he wants a compassionate Supreme Court justice with ["empathy"](#) for people's struggles, he's wandered into arguments within psychology of what we mean by the term.

There are at least three varieties of empathy, each with very different implications for spotting the right candidate.

The first, cognitive empathy, means that we can understand how the other person thinks; we see his point of view. This makes for good debaters, sales people and negotiators. On the other hand, people who have strengths in cognitive empathy alone can lack compassion - they get how you see it, but don't care about you.

The next variety, emotional empathy, refers to someone who feels within herself the emotions of the person she's with. This creates a sense of rapport, and most probably entails the brain's mirror neuron system, which activates our own circuits the emotions, movements and intentions we see in the other person. This lets us feel with the other person - but not necessarily feel for the other...a prerequisite for compassion.

That requires empathic concern, the third variety of empathy. Empathic concern means we not only understand how the person sees things and feels in the moment, but also want to help them if we sense the need."

(If you are sitting here right now feeling a little low on the empathy scale of ability....do not distress...)

"Empathy can be strengthened - You can learn to detect super-fast facial tics that reveal a person's true feelings "(with the understanding of course that a downward glance does not mean the same thing for an Asian at it does for and Anglo)- "Dr. Daniel Siegel, a child psychiatrist at UCLA, that suggest these are essential human abilities we should be teaching every child. Since empathy is the basis of concern and compassion, it shouldn't be just a requirement for Supreme Court Justices."

The ability to empathize with another has profound implications for the possibility of growth and maturity. It is not only essential to national and religious leadership, it is a hallmark of spiritual development.

When Jesus is quoted as saying "What you do to the least of these you do to me" he was standing in solidarity with the other...and uplifting the deeper meaning of the golden rule...that in truth...the boundaries we create between ourselves and the other are constructs of our own making.

Intellectually we understand the ethic of universal love and respect of others.

We may struggle at times with sexism, racism, classism, nationalism and homophobia but we strive to transcend these limiting prejudices. We work hard to "get over" these limiting forces in our lives and meet our neighbors on a level playing field of mutuality. We do our best to approach others with an open mind and an open heart....

Do unto others as we would have them do unto us.-we get it.....at least in theory!

We do pretty well at loving others until we are challenged....to truly listen to a disgruntled spouse without first lashing in defense or walking away in anger. We find it difficult at times to problem solve with our children without making quick judgments. It is a struggle to let go of the off putting remarks or behavior of a neighbor or church member and respond with kindness and generosity.

But why? Why do we, we who are people who strive to do good, we who are individuals who yearn for peace and understanding in the world; we, who seek to alter the course of events in our lives and in the world to bring heaven to earth....Why do we struggle so much to live out this ethic of ultimate love in our most intimate relationships with one another?

Perhaps we have not yet perfected our ability to see the power inherent in these day to day opportunities to create peace and justice. When we think of inherent worth and dignity....we seldom see that the work of transformation might be waiting to find expression right in our own homes.

But it goes without saying that we have different interpretations of the meaning of the golden rule:

An outgoing, enthusiastic spouse looked forward to pleasing his mate who was quite reserved and preferred a quiet, intimate evening over large social gatherings.

In preparation for a lovely Saturday evening surprise, he called on all their family and friends to arrive at a set time, he ordered pizza and put out the board games.

After the party he noticed his partner was sullen and quiet....What's wrong he exclaimed, don't you appreciate anything I try to do for you....no wonder we can't seem to make things work in this relationship!

"Doing unto others as WE would like them to do unto us.....does not always have the desired outcome...

The golden rule asks first that we get in touch with what is essential to us in order to connect with the other.

It has been suggested that in this new era, that we move the bar even higher. Instead of the Golden Rule: "Treat others as you would like to be treated." Why not the following the Platinum Rule': "Treat others as THEY would like to be treated."

The Platinum rule requires us to acknowledge our diversity while responding to our unity. To acknowledge our uniqueness even as we are trying to close the gap of distance between ourselves and another.

We come to all relationships bearing both our gifts and our limitations.

The work of the mature adult is to get in touch with our own inner processes and dynamics, to become more conscious of our power and our limitations so we can participate in creating greater meaning and wholeness.

It is interesting that for ministers, religious professionals and those working in the field of psychology and social work that a great deal of training goes into cultivating self awareness as a prerequisite to being a partner to growth and transformation for others.

One of the graduate courses I attended in pastoral care required a very interesting task....to create a family tree.

Now if you have ever done even simple genealogy, you know this can get pretty complicated as to who begate who and so on....

But the unique task put before us once we had the blood line and adoption lines connected...was to take a look at our heritage through the lens of relationship and personality.

Who took risks and showed leadership, who had power and how did they use it? Where were the strongest emotional connections and why? How was conflict resolved or avoided? Who over-functioned...who under-functioned and why?

Charting our family tree through the emotional and behavioral patterns of relationship can yield some astounding insights into our own ways of being and doing.

The continuation of both the positive aspects and destructive patterns of human relationships showed themselves to continue from generation to generation right into our daily lives.

If we walked into that class feeling like independent human beings, we came out with a much fuller understanding of our selves inter-related through time to a continuum of human development.

Much has been done in the past twenty years to carry us forward from our understanding of the self as an individual to the larger concept of self as it actually exists in relationship to the whole.

It appears that we, in our efforts to live out the golden rule tend to

“Do unto others as we have had done to us.”

Try as we might ...the emotional reactiveness in our family goes from one family member to another in a chain reaction pattern. When we join other groups, we bring our patterns along with us...spreading the wealth....

We bring our anxiety and patterns where ever who go....beyond the family unit to friendships, jobs, neighborhoods, schools and yes...even our congregation.

Developing as a mature religious person, is to engage in self awareness, not only for our sake but for the sake of all others....

Systems theory, the idea that we are not isolated human beings but part of a continuum; an evolving integral part of life on earth helps us get beyond our personal limitations and moves us closer to the possibility of being able to bring about change.

On August 30th, a congregational retreat is scheduled. I will be working directly with our newly elected Board President and other leaders to develop this day long learning retreat, but I encourage every member to consider attending

Some of the morning workshops that will deal specifically with the development of self awareness in the context of systems theory for spiritual maturity.

To make this retreat especially meaningful and worth your time and effort,

I ask that during the summer months ahead that you chart your own relational family tree to serve to enlighten your path and affirm and empower your life.

Many books exist on Family Systems theory, but I recommend that reading

(or in my case-re-read...Extraordinary Relationships...A New Way of Thinking About Human Interactions by Roberta Gilbert.

We will post this sermon to the web so you will be sure to have the title and author should you choose to join in this summer adult religious growth and learning exercise. We will make time in the fall to share our findings and explore spiritual growth and maturity further.

While science may expose some bleak aspects of our human existence....real religion can point the way forward, out from what is toward what can be....

One of the hallmarks of Unitarian Universalism is that we are not bound to repeat the sins of the past....we are free to grow into the greater possibility of human love and relationships.

This is our hope...that one by one, age upon age...generation upon generation we are building a relationship worthy of each genuine effort- with our life we are forging ever greater bonds of kinship...made strong with the enduring power of love.

Close with these timeless words from Biblical Text: Corinthians 1-13: 4

Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the right. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres. Love never fails. –May it prevail in and through and among us this day and always- amen, so may it be...–sermon by Rev. Lori Staubitz 5/09

The Universality of the Golden Rule in the World Religions

Christianity      All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye so to them; for this is the law and the prophet    Matthew 7: 1

Confucianism      Do not do to others what you would not like yourself. Then there will be no resentment against you, either in the family or in the state. Analects 12: 2

Buddhism	Hurt not others in ways that you yourself would find hurtful. Udana-Varga 5,1
Hinduism	This is the sum of duty; do naught onto others what you would not have them do unto you. Mahabharata 5,1517
Islam	No one of you is a believer until he desires for his brother that which he desires for himself. Sunnah
Judaism	What is hateful to you, do not do to your fellowman. This is the entire Law; all the rest is commentary. Talmud, Shabbat 3id
Taoism	Regard your neighbor's gain as your gain, and your neighbor's loss as your own loss. Tai Shang Kan Yin P'ien
Zoroastrianism	That nature alone is good which refrains from doing another whatsoever is not good for itself. Dadisten-I-dinik, 94,