

As Bob Dylan would say... "*the times they are a changing.*" Recent events have given me pause to reflect on forty years of political activism. The movie "An Inconvenient Truth" focuses on our need to address climate change and global warming to prevent an environmental catastrophe. There is a "holy" war raging, seemingly out of control, in the Middle East. Our own Justice Department is prying into lives of ordinary Americans in violation of privacy laws. And the United States is preparing to deploy elements of a missile defense system in Eastern Europe, even though Russia and most of Western Europe believe it will introduce a new cold war era. So I got to thinking about the folks who protest in an effort to bring awareness to these issues.

Turning back the clock somewhat, I see there is quite a difference in the way we approach world events these days. Remember the anarchists, radicals and revolutionaries of the 1960's? Those same people were called eccentric and immature a decade later. But now we are referred to as Cultural Creatives who are politically "savvy." Remember the hippies and yippies, Black Panthers, SDS and other subversive groups? Now we have Friends of the Earth, Rainforest Action Network and other "politically correct social activist" organizations.

Remember all those colorfully dressed flower children and all the talk of peace, love, and "hell no, we won't go?" This year it's three piece suits, designer Rockport casuals, and topics that include low-impact aerobics, flax seed cleanses, and "*don't worry, the ITRAXX Crossover Index will*

straighten out and that sub-prime mortgage market meltdown is only a blip... I'm still long in the market."

Remember the VW bus, converted vans and school bus campers wandering around the country? The parking lot this year could be mistaken for Stuttgart or Tokyo. Remember the symbolic draft card burnings? This year's crowd has threatened to burn their American Express cards, even the Gold Corporate Card for gosh sakes, and start using real money again.

Remember long hair, tie-dyed shirts and faded blue jeans? This year it's hair implants and comb-overs, designer clothing and khakis. Remember Bob Dylan, Joan Baez, and Peter Paul and Mary? This year it's Bono, Alison Krause and American Idol. Remember the Velveeta cheese sandwiches, Oreo cookies and Vienna sausages? This year they have a portable generator to fire up the electric woks and microwaves. There's nothing like a little stir-fry after a hard day of protest. And don't forget the Newman organic cookies and Ben and Jerry's. Remember Quaaludes, LSD, and a myriad of other mind-bending drugs? One elderly hippie in downtown Asheville was asked where a person could buy an iPod the other day. He replied that he no longer used controlled substances.

Remember the spray-painted graffiti wall messages and protest signs? This year they will be text messaging on their Blackberries and e-mailing on laptops by wireless broadband. Remember the twist top wines,

American beers and soft drinks? This year they have vintage Chardonnay (chilled of course) and the wine bottles require a corkscrew. At one recent protest, they hired a sommelier. The beer is imported or from micro-breweries. And what's with this sparkling water shit?

Remember cribbage and Scrabble? This year it's game boys and Play Station 2... or is it 3? Remember Mad Magazine, National Lampoon and the Rolling Stone? This year it's Audio-Visual Quarterly, Forbes and the Financial Times. Remember the great issues of the 1960's: Vietnam, civil rights, corruption in the White House, nuclear proliferation and the environment? Now it's Iraq, civil rights, corruption in the White House, nuclear proliferation and the environment.

I guess some things never change...

But just maybe something else was also happening.

Clearly the 1960s were not just a jumble of exotic gurus and hot tubs and strange religions mixed with demonstrators marching in the streets. As we've seen already, the events of the time gave birth to significant cultural innovations. But where the new social movements' responses were urgent and out there and in your face all the time as much as possible, the consciousness movements' responses were quieter and more subtle (Ray 2000, 173).

Many of us don't feel at home in the old world or the new, we all tend to live in the creases. A lot of us are conflicted, and many have abandoned their activist past to hole up in gated communities and hold "salons" to discuss world issues... *"would you prefer red or white as we watch this DVD about the horrible situation in Darfur?"* It seems time we use insights from

the old morality and the new to forge a third understanding that transcends both and brings us closer to a more compassionate world community...

Rather than defending an old way of life, Cultural Creatives are bridging an old way of life with a new one. They seem to be unraveling the threads of old garments, cutting original designs and sewing together a new one. Many (though not all) want to carry forward what is valuable from the past and integrate it with what's needed for the future (Ray 2000, 87).

I too am conflicted at times. One of my great-grandfathers fought for the South and one for the North in the Civil War. One owned slaves and the other used the old homestead as part of the Underground Railroad. As a child I rode shotgun as my uncle delivered moonshine and bootleg whiskey through the hills of Eastern Kentucky, got a nickel for every police car I spotted, but have never had a drink of alcohol. I counseled drug addicts for years in group homes, and my "hook" was that I have never taken any drugs of any kind. It's a Buddhist thing I would tell them. I started out Pentecostal and passed through a number of religions before becoming a Unitarian Universalist. And I know I did my part early on in life. I worked for non-profits, lived off the land, marched for peace, rode buses to Washington and directed a Peace Consortium in that hot-bed of liberalism, the 4th congressional district in Indiana that produced Dan Quayle, Dan Coats and Mark Souder. I did my time, as did many people, and it seems like it should be time to rest.

But my oldest brother Larry has convinced me I was right to never "abandon the cause." When I spoke to him one night this past Summer, he

was trying to figure out, for reasons we do not discuss, “how they got the snipers from Ohio” in Iraq. He had just run another flatbed truckload of armor from Texas to Dover, Delaware to be flown to Iraq for the Humvees. He arrived in time to unload his armor and watch another 14 caskets roll off an adjacent plane, and it was those soldiers from Ohio, and one from his hometown of Grove City. I was watching CNN News as we discussed what we are seeing, even though our lives and “political persuasions” may differ. He is being torn apart by this current war, just like many people.

Following is a list of bumper stickers on my guitar case:

I Support Greenpeace
Whale Spoken Here
Bread Not Bombs
Split Wood, Not Atoms
The Nature Conservancy
Food For People Not For Profit
Solar Power
Save The Whales
Stop Acid Rain
Watt Has Got To GO (yes... I have been at this awhile)
Conserve And Preserve
Live Simply That Others Might Simply Live
Think Globally Act Locally
Greenpeace
One Nuclear Bomb Can Ruin Your Whole Day

I believe myself to be a concerned citizen, a Cultural Creative, and I use my time in the pulpit of UU Congregations on Sunday mornings to encourage people to leave their gated communities, quit talking about problems... and become part of the solution. My guitar case sits quietly by the pulpit, so that every one sees that it is never too late to address

world issues, and that they have a responsibility, as voiced by UUA President William Sinkford, *“to bring witness to the world stage.”*

Likely the two most horrific events of the past century were the Holocaust and the bombings of Hiroshima and Nagasaki. When the Enola Gay dropped its payload and destroyed Hiroshima, even crew members were conflicted. While one person on the plane was happy because *“The war’s over,”* co-pilot Robert Lewis asked, *“My God, what have we done?”* Rolf Osterberg believes *“there was a “vibration” from Hiroshima— the knowledge that we can now destroy ourselves... this brought about the current shift of consciousness (2005, lecture).”*

Thirty years ago I accepted a position at the Jewish Home for the Aged in San Francisco, as a 24 hour a day, seven day a week live in counselor at Pinecrest, a small apartment complex, the home to twenty concentration camp survivors. On my “to do list” when I arrived was *“always have a fresh flower in each room.”* It was one of the simple wonders of nature, often taken for granted, sorely missed in the concentration camps. I often ask people to take a moment and consider what they believe to be the most important day of their life... and then, take a moment to recall what day had *previously* been the most important day of their life.

One of the gentlemen I studied Kaballah with at Pinecrest came out of his room every morning, and when he saw me, would wag his finger and say, *“today.”* I never paid much attention until four months in to my

tenure, when I headed down the hall in the middle of the night after hearing another loud scream. Like I said, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Bernard was having a bad night. As we sat and talked through this particular nightmare, I asked why he wagged his finger at me every morning and said “*today*.” He related how he had lost his four children in the camp. And how a Nazi officer had killed his wife as she stood next to him, turned to him and said, “*I will let you live, and you will remember today for the rest of your life.*”

Bernard said, “**Today** is the most important day of my life, for I am alive, and my family lives in my memory. And today I have a chance to make a difference... to make sure that what happened to us never happens again...”

Many people were responsible for the Holocaust, and the entire process was managed through the use of an IBM punch card system. Likely the individuals “only doing their job” never thought about the result of their actions. Jim Garrison reflected on one possible excuse, “*hey, I just fixed the pipes in Auschwitz... it was not my place to make the moral, ethical decision on the situation...* (2006, lecture).”

Today we must learn to treat each moment as the most sacred moment that has ever been given to us, a precious gift of time to share with immediacy, and treat each person we meet as the most sacred person on Earth. Today, we need to lift up our souls with purpose and anticipation and feel deep inside, in our “*quiet place*,” the very essence of

creation being realized through our thoughts, prayers and actions. Jim Garrison says *"Using one's consciousness to connect with Cosmic Consciousness is the ultimate act of human integrity and courage, for to do so is to identify not with oneself but with the Totality (2000, xlii)."*

A story that comes to mind is about a Navy jet pilot in Vietnam, Charles Plumb. After many flights, his plane was destroyed. Plumb ejected and parachuted into enemy lands where he was captured. He survived the ordeal and went on to give lectures on lessons learned from that experience. One day when Plumb was sitting in a restaurant, a man at another table came up and said, *"You're Plumb! You flew jet fighters in Vietnam from the aircraft carrier Kitty Hawk. And, you were shot down!"* "How in the world did you know that?" asked Plumb. *"I packed your parachute,"* the man replied.

Plumb gasped in surprise and gratitude. The man pumped his hand and said, *"I guess it worked!"* Plumb assured him, *"It sure did. If your chute hadn't worked, I wouldn't be here today."* Plumb could not sleep that night, thinking about that man. Plumb says, *"I kept wondering what he had looked like in a Navy uniform. I wonder how many times I might have seen him and not even said 'Good morning, how are you?' or anything. You see, I was a fighter pilot and he was just a sailor."* Plumb thought of the many hours the sailor had spent at a long wooden table in the bowels of the ship, carefully weaving shrouds and folding the silks

of each chute, holding in his hands each time the fate of someone he did not know.

We need to take note of all those people who pack our parachute. Everyone has people who provide what they need to make it through a given day. Too often in our daily lives we miss the inherent worth and dignity of every person we see. We fail to say a simple hello, please, or thank you, or to congratulate someone on something wonderful that has happened to them, or to give a compliment, or to just do something nice for no reason.

As we go through this week, this month, this year, our challenge is to recognize that we may indeed be a Cultural Creative, and we may be part of a much larger community of believers than we realize. We can reclaim all of that energy we used in the 1960's and 1970's, and take advantage of all the new technology to broaden our base and truly have an impact on the world we live in. We need to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of everyone who packs our parachutes. Then think about those people and remember that every person in the world shares countless similarities in our genetic make up, and remember that everything in the universe has led us to this very moment. We need to believe that we can manifest the world we desire. Each person has the unique ability to bring about a more compassionate world.

Paul Ray believes we are at “*a watershed in history as big as the Rocky mountains, that we cannot go on as before, and that we need a collective group process to deal with current issues* (2006, lecture).” If we in our community of faith strive to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person... who knows what kind of civilization we might birth. From the principles of the Unitarian Universalist Association, we are asked to acknowledge the inherent worth and dignity of every person; seek justice, equity and compassion in human relations; aspire to a goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all; and demonstrate a respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

We must learn to treat each moment as the most sacred moment that has ever been given to us, a precious gift of time to share with immediacy, and treat each person as the most sacred person on Earth. As Sufi poet Hafiz reminds us, “*How Do I Listen to others? As if everyone were my Master Speaking to me His cherished Last words* (Ladinsky. 1999, 99).”

One should never “need a reason” to practice compassion toward another person. We need to eliminate anything that prevents us from being compassionate at all times. We must first believe in our own inherent worth and dignity. We cannot turn our attention to others until

we first believe that we are worth something. And then, with a heart filled with compassion, we may follow our own spiritual path...

I was co-facilitator of a series of Interfaith Dialogue dinners in Asheville, part of the "Kindness Campaign." Though participants came from a variety of faith traditions, they realized that core teachings are similar, and compassion was an integral part of those core teachings. We need to realize that we can have heaven on earth, that we can awaken our minds to Wisdom teachings that will enable us to achieve a world of perfect harmony. Jim Garrison tells us, "*Civilization was humanity's attempt to create heaven on earth, to bring to the earthly realm and under human control the blessings of the gods* (2000, 36)." To care for each other and our world, we must immerse ourselves in the Holy waters of the Divine feminine, bathe in the light of her supreme Presence. "*Stand up, turn around, look at the light* (Garrison 2006, lecture)."...

Garrison related this reflection of Ben Franklin, "*the destiny of America is to be about life... not power* (2006, lecture)." Listen, for Our Holy Mother, Wisdom, continues to speak to us, and her message is about life, not power. We need simply open our hearts, embrace her message, and use all our resources to care for one another. I offer the following poem "Shoulders" by Naomi Shihab Nye, born of a Palestinian father and American mother to explain our challenge to love one another and bring about a world community fueled by compassion.

*A man crosses the street in rain,
Stepping gently, looking two times
north and south, because his son is asleep on his shoulder.
No car must splash him,
No car drive too near to his shadow.
This man carries the world's most sensitive cargo
But he's not marked.
Nowhere does his jacket say
FRAGILE, HANDLE WITH CARE.*

*His ears fill up with breathing.
He hears the hum of a boy's dream
Deep inside him.*

*We're not going to be able
To live in this world
If we're not willing to do what he's doing
With one another.*

*The road will only be wide.
The rain will never stop falling.
<http://www.panhala.net/Archive/Shoulders.html>*

In the words of mystic Andrew Harvey,

We must go on a radical journey to discover the divine self within...
to look within for what has never been destroyed. This current
apocalypse was created out of our lunacy... but could be a catalyst
to birth a new humanity (2007, lecture).

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