

It's time to be gentle with ourselves and others. We have demonstrated resilience coming through the pandemic, even greater adaptability upon discovering that post-pandemic has little, if any, resemblance to pre-pandemic, and then, catapulted into the election year, we encountered unimaginable derision and divisiveness tearing apart relationships. We barely recovered from one cataclysmic siege before being thrust into the next iteration. Each of these seasons is a "bereavement event." Bereavement occurs every time we experience catastrophic loss. Catastrophic loss is experienced when life, as we have known it, no longer exists. These life transforming events range from death of a loved one to loss of employment, a fire or other natural disaster that deprives us of parts of our lives, amputations and rapes that permanently alter our perceptions of our world. Our lives are transformed when those practices and institutions that we have relied on are gone.

We may have felt torn apart by the pandemic and its aftermath, yet this political season has torn at us like vultures tearing at a carcass. Knowing that people hold views diametrically opposed to our own may have caused us to question why their views are so different. Very often, because of the fear of volatility, instead of asking and seeking connection, we withdraw and hide from conversations about such topics. Since they are ignored, they foment and get worse. Eventually, explosive words are spewed - words that may irreparably damage long-standing relationships. Chaos ensues.

Grief at times like this is natural. Feelings need to be acknowledged, and yet we each have within us greater strength, resilience, flexibility, flow and tenacity than we may have ever imagined. Since the election results are in, we have questions to ask and choices to make. We can choose to be the victim of circumstances and engage in what the Buddhists call *suffering*. This kind of suffering is the result of being attached to our desire for a specific outcome. It isn't the outcome that causes our suffering, it is our clinging. Yes, we need to be gentle with ourselves and others, acknowledge if we are feeling a sense of loss and then decide how to relate to the new set of circumstances. We get to choose our own course of action. I invite you to consider expressing compassion toward those who are immersed in their suffering. It is an opportunity to support them, without imposing our opinions, in awakening to alternatives. They don't need to stay in suffering. I suggest that you also consider expressing compassion toward those whose views are opposed to your own. It's time for us to be the initiators of reconciliation conversations.

Present times are "choice points" – moments to claim new possibilities. Each day, we awaken to situations we have never dealt with before. We get to step back and allow our deep values to make themselves known – to open to a world beyond opinions. Opinions are formed in response to external stimuli. Values - what really matters to you - come from within. Living our values requires that we draw on inner strength and, perhaps, courage to swim against the current – to be a stand for what we hold dear. The value of Oneness (that we are all in this

together) is a value that, alas, is not shared by everyone, yet it applies to everyone. We are all interconnected. Global systems cause us to be intertwined. More remarkably at the level of creation, cellularly and spiritually we are inseparable from one another. Because we are all occupants of one planet, we are accountable for the ramifications of our actions. I regularly ask myself, “What are the consequences of my choices?” I am asking myself not only how my choices affect me, but more importantly, what outcomes have I set in motion that affect others and more broadly, the world. Many people are not aware of the impact their choices have as they ripple out across relationships, communities and the world. We are more powerful, more impactful, than we may realize. Ask yourself, “What are the consequences of my choices?” Will they generate outcomes that are in alignment with your values?

Simply because someone embraces a different view does not warrant discarding them. There is a lot to learn about why someone holds a view. By sharing, by conversing, we can learn the basis for those opinions. We can meet in a middle ground that includes agreeing to disagree – embracing the healing power of Love. When we are willing to open our hearts and deeply listen, we may find commonalities. When we release our pre-judgements about others and their opinions, we are granted the opportunity to learn. When we learn we expand our capacity to love.

The poet, Rumi, suggests:

Out beyond ideas of wrongdoing and rightdoing,  
There is a field. I'll meet you there.  
When the soul lies down in that grass,  
The world is too full to talk about.  
Ideas, language, even the phrase *each other*  
Doesn't make any sense.

Listening deeply to someone, listening beyond their words, is one of the greatest gifts we can give one another. We can use present moments to connect heart to heart. We can heal the heart of our country, our communities – one person at a time. It is natural for human beings to hold divergent views. Some experience divergent opinions within themselves. They may be in turmoil, feeling pulled and pushed from within. Those chaotic emotions are experienced individually and collectively. Be patient with them.

The way through current emotional storms is to draw on the wellspring of courage within and enter the “storm” – willing to be within the storm without becoming part of the storm. From within the storm, we can begin healing conversations – conversations through which to learn other people’s perspectives. Their perceptions are not baseless. It is up to us to open and learn different ways of looking at the world. We are not asked to take on their perspectives as our own (although we might). We are only asked to open, learn and be willing to meet in the field that Rumi describes. We begin by embodying respect for spiritual essence expressing as

humanity. We embrace loving kindness so that when we engage in so called *difficult conversations*, we do so in ways that invite people into conversations.

This may not feel easy. Many things in life that are of the utmost value aren't easy. They require commitment and trust. They require the commitment of the participants to remember that relationships are far more valuable than opinions. Opinions may or may not change. Ultimate values such as connection far exceed any opinion ever embraced.

Big question: What really matters to you? Let's drop back to the pandemic and literally the loss of more than a million "loved ones" in the United States alone. We may not have personally lost a loved one, but every person who died was someone's loved one. Someone felt the devastating loss. What about those who didn't die but have been damaged by COVID and its aftermath. The cataclysmic loss they suffered may be in the form of loss of employment or the radical change of employment ... perhaps moving from being financially stable to being homeless, or may have compromised one's health - from being strong and healthy to being physically weak, emotionally challenged and dependent on others. How can we wrap ourselves around such things that may not have happened personally to us yet have happened in our community? How are we to respond?

We have within our communities, refugees displaced from their homeland. People have lost all the pieces of their lives, even their identity requiring that they completely start over. How open are our hearts to truly embrace and support them? Some people view refugees' relocation to their communities as a disruption. How are we called to ease their journey of those in major transition?

Nature is the most common deliverer of catastrophes: hurricanes, earthquakes, range and forest fires strike, often without warning, totally altering people's lives. Cataclysmic change is all around us. It always has been, and undoubtedly always will be. How flexible and adaptable are you? How do you respond to the needs of others?

In Ecclesiastes, in the Judeo Christian Bible, we are advised that there is "A time to be born and a time to die. A time to plant and a time to harvest. A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up". Within these major life events, our old way of being has been "killed" opening us to new possibilities – ways never dreamt we might experience when we were blinded by our old ways. Now is our chance. Now is the time to be born anew – to make new decisions that birth our new lives. Knowing that you have within you, right now, the power to totally change your life, what changes might you entertain?

*Now is our time to heal. Now is our time of reconciliation. Now is our time to learn new ways of communicating. Now is our time to build up - to exhibit compassion. This is the time to recognize Oneness.*

We begin by honestly evaluating what we believe we have lost and deciding how we are going to be with the new circumstances that are presenting themselves.

When the world no longer resembles the world we have known, it is time to draw on Divine Creativity – that resourceful spark that resides in each of us. Solutions abound within us, and it is up to us to give them voice. We are the bridge builders spanning the chasms. It's time to use the healing power of Love to reconcile breaches of relationships and chaos in our communities.

Here are some questions to ask yourself to become clear about what really matters to you.

1. Do you value your relationships or your opinions more?
  - a. Are you okay if no one else shares your opinion?
  - b. Are you okay allowing others to have their own opinions?
  - c. Are you willing to hold your opinion loosely so that you can hear and feel the opinions of others?
2. Do you want to be a catalyst - a healing presence in the world?
  - a. Are you willing to listen to others to learn why they think what they think?
  - b. Are you willing to share without trying to convince others?

If your responses to these questions reinforce your priority of relationships over opinions and you are willing to join with others as transformative presences in the world, then begin today. This approach is not for the faint of heart. The attributes of those who are willing include:

Being “Heart Centered” – remaining calm, engaging in conversations - the difficult ones and the ordinary ones - to learn with and from others

Embracing Oneness – knowing that we are all expressions of one creative source so we have far more in common than our differences – those unique distinctions that actually enhance our world

Being Courageous – willing to take a stand, to be a voice for those who have lost theirs, to be value-centered rather than opinionated

Mediating – willing to be a bridge between those whose opinions differ not only from our own, but from each other ... to be a reconciler

So, where are you with all of this? Are you committed to do your part to change the world for good, mending relationships and causing a tsunami of healing ripples across the world?

If so, I invite you to come change the world with me!