

A Call for Revolution

a sermon by

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In his book *A Call for Revolution*, the Dalai Lama, from a Tibetan Buddhist perspective, talks about the absolute necessity for an **ongoing transformation toward compassion**. It's a transformation is from isolated Ego to humble identification with All things Living. It's a transformation from isolated mind to integrated mind and heart. From fear to love – From attack behavior to healing - and From angry judgment to compassion.

The need for this transformation in our individual lives and in our world is obvious. The Dalai Lama is 83 years old. In his life he's seen the Nazi Holocaust and the nuclear firestorms in Japan. He's been driven out of his own country and has seen many other people driven out of theirs.

The Dalai Lama says- "You and I have seen conflicts in the Middle East that have devastated a region that was once a major cradle of human civilization. We've seen the waves of the Mediterranean Sea carrying bodies of men, women and children who died while trying to flee the violence and hunger of their homelands. And now we are witnesses to the immanent breakdown of the earth's ecosystems. So our job now **(before it is too late)** is to transform our human behavior away from greed, conflict and war toward the ways of compassion, peace, healing and dialogue." (adapted)

This job of transformation is, of course, both individual and systemic. And the challenge for us human beings is to embrace this transformation (both individually and systemically), to persist in the endeavor, to nurture our faithfulness and to not lose hope.

The Dalai Lama's recent book, *A Call to Revolution* is addressed specifically to young people because the future is theirs. But it is also addressed to all of us (regardless of age) who hope to be part of the revolution! – The Dalai Lama talks about that revolution as freeing ourselves from **the "mean world syndrome."**

Mean world syndrome is a term coined by the late Dr. George Gerbner professor of communications at the University of Pennsylvania to describe the world view that inspires so much of the fearful, violence-related content of our economic system and mass media. **Mean World Syndrome** makes people believe that the world is much more dangerous than it actually is.

In his research Professor Gerbner found that people who watch a lot of television (and now consume information from many other forms of media like Facebook and Twitter) tend to think of the world as an intimidating and unforgiving place. He said: "You know, **who** tells the stories of a culture really influences human behavior. It used to be that parents, teachers, religious leaders and community folks told the stories. Now it's a handful of global conglomerates and they have nothing to tell us- but a great deal to sell us. This is complicated because, if we are not mindful, stories of conflict (like bright, shiny objects) always grab our attention. Then we buy not only the soap, but also the notion that we should be very afraid." (adapted)

The Dalai Lama suggests that the revolution we need begins by freeing ourselves from this "mean world" story and centering ourselves on another story – a story of compassion and collaboration. He, himself, approaches the compassion from a Buddhist perspective. But he also grounds his views in the findings of cognitive science and social science.

The Revolution of Compassion is a life-long journey and our step by step discipline makes a difference. The Dalai Lama works with scientists like Professor Richard Davidson of the University of Wisconsin to validate scientifically that regular, step by step practice of compassion helps. Over several decades since the 1990s Dr. Davidson's research has shown the people who practice peaceful spiritual disciplines have increased activity in the "insula" and the "parietal juncture" of the brain which have to do with empathy and loving-kindness. Practice makes a difference.

The Dalai Lama himself practices compassionate meditation based on the Metta Meditation of Buddhism: *May I be filled with loving-kindness may I be well. May I be filled with loving kindness, may I be well. May I be peaceful and at ease, May I be whole. May I be peaceful and at ease- May I be whole.*

He does not sell this particular cultural practice...but he does make a plea that each person (following their own tradition) find the "compassion growing practice" that moves them away from fear – away from the mean world syndrome – away from reactivity - and toward inner peace. The Dalai Lama does not promise instant relief or a quick trip to Utopia. But he does promise steady growth if we engage in steady practice.

Lopon-La was a Tibetan monk and colleague of the Dalai Lama. Lopon-La spent 18 years in a Chinese concentration camp. In that setting, he practiced Metta Meditation with great discipline. After he got out, he came to live with the Dalai Lama in his compound in Dharmasala in India. Lopon-La confided in the Dalai Lama that he had one great fear while he was incarcerated. The Dalai Lama asked him if that fear was a fear of death and Lopon-La said "No. It was the fear that I would lose my compassion for my torturers and then lose my love for all things living. But I didn't. I practiced – and thank goodness I didn't" (adapted)

Many of the great revolutions in human history have ultimately failed, the Dalai Lama says, because, they have perpetuated the “mean world” syndrome. They have opposed oppression but they have used violence and oppression in their struggles. They have pitted “Our Side” against “The Other” Their leaders have not understood the profound truth that violence is our common enemy.

In his meditation practice now, the Dalai Lama says, he carefully reminds himself every day that the Chinese who oppress his Tibetan people are not “other.” They are just human beings like him and everyone else. He reminds himself that he is one of 7 billion people on the earth and that the 7 billion are one. We all experience different cultural and religious details, of course, and we all have different skin colors, body shapes and gender expressions – but we were all born of a mother and we all were vulnerable and totally dependent on our mother and other people for love and care when we were born. We are vulnerable. We need one another and we are never going to “fight” our way out of current challenges. Our only hope is that we will soon learn how to love our way through and collaborate our way through.

And (the Dalai Lama says) we’ve some reason **for hope**. The Berlin Wall came down and there was not horrible blood-shed because people like Michael Gorbachev were developed enough to see that our mutual survival on this earth depends on collaboration instead of war.

Though it certainly still is facing many challenges, the Dalai Lama points to the European Union as an example of formerly warring nations working to understand that they truly do need one another.

When we are faced with cruelty and injustice, it’s not easy to turn away from anger and vengeance, the Dalai Lama acknowledges but he practices doing that himself and shares stories of others who have succeeded. One story he likes to tell is about a ten year old boy from Northern Ireland who (in the 1970s) was blinded by a rubber bullet fired by an English soldier. Several weeks later the little boy’s favorite uncle was shot and killed by another British soldier too – but somehow, this little boy (whose name is Richard Moore) did not fixate on anger and vengeance.

In his own voice, Richard who is now a man says: I could not have survived what happened to me if it were not for the love and support of others. Firstly I come from a good family. We are Catholic and we believe in the Love of God; Secondly I come from a good community where we all support one another, Thirdly despite everything that happened to me I still had choices and opportunities available to me, and Fourthly I became conscious I was not alone. I became conscious of children all over the world who suffered just like I did. As a result of all of these factors, after I became an adult I set up an organization called **Children in Crossfire**. Today (Richard Moore says) **Children in Crossfire** supports projects in Tanzania, Ethiopia and the Gambia. We work with children under 8 years of age who suffer as a result of war, violence, greed and poverty. Every day, children around the world suffer the most horrendous abuses because of the violence and greed in our world.

They are denied basic human rights. They lack access to education, to food, to clean water and to safety. I know what suffering is (Richard Moore says) so I have dedicated my life to trying to do something about this suffering. He continues.....

If we think about anger and bitterness, it's a self-destructive emotion. If I had become stuck in my anger, it would have destroyed me from the inside out. But I didn't get stuck and in 2006 I met the British soldier who shot me. His name is Charles. When we met, he and I talked for four hours about our lives and the world we live in. It was one of the most wonderful experiences of my life. Charles is the man who shot me and blinded me – but in the encounter we had....I saw him as just another human being caught in the crossfire - a husband, a father, a grandfather living in a complicated world.

I learned two things that day; **First** of all my forgiveness was first and foremost a gift to myself. Forget about Charles, if he wants my forgiveness he has it but that's not what's important for me. What's important for me, for my peace of mind and my happiness is that I forgave him. And a **second** important thing is understanding that forgiveness can't change the past, but it can and it will change the future. I genuinely believe that I couldn't have done all the things I've done if I had to carry the baggage of anger and hatred. There is no question, I **am** a victim of violence and I have no control over that but I **am not** a victim of my own anger and vengeance and I **do** have control over that.

I often ask myself, how it is that a 10 year old boy from Derry was able to survive such a traumatic experience the way I have? I've told you that the love and support around me made a difference but I **also think** there's another thing and that is the power of prayer. Not just my own prayers but also the prayers of my parents family and friends. Not just prayers for my physical recovery but also prayers for my soul, - And with our prayers to a God of love and compassion, we've been spared the burden of bitterness. We've kept our love for one another and for life.

I always say you can take away someone's eyesight but you can't take away their vision. With prayer and grace, my vision is of a world of peace and my method of working for peace is through Children in Crossfire. (adapted)

That's the end of the story but - I can see why the Dalai Lama likes it. It illustrates his whole notion of the revolution to which he calls us. It's a personal revolution. It's a spiritual revolution. It's a systemic revolution for our whole human society. For the sake of our own well-being and for the sake of the world, we need to know that we will experience anger but we will have to leave it behind, leave vengeance behind and leave the mean world syndrome behind. And to do that we have to start right where we are and take the steps right in front of us right now. **QUESTIONS**

So whom do we need to see as human right now? Whom do we need to forgive? Do you suppose on both of these counts we might need to begin with ourselves? How are we going to use our anger as a wakeup call but not as an organizing principle? How are we going to deepen our own sense of peace and compassion?

We're going to be answering these questions together for a long time to come. May the Power of Love be strong within us and among us as we right here at the Humboldt UU Fellowship continue to do our part in the Revolution.

PLEASE JOIN ME NOW IN SINGING "Winds Be Still" #83

Closing Words and Closing Song –

The Closing Song will be "Go from here in peace, Go with love."

And these Closing Words come from an old Unitarian Hymnal from the 1920s

Now – Spirit of Life – upwell within our hearts!
Wean us from fear – through all our pulses move.
Lead us from anxious ways – Teach us to trust.
And let us share your love with simple joy! – Go in peace.

Song: Go from here in peace – Go with love.