

*20th Annual
World Peace Meditation
"An Interfaith Peace Gathering"*

Saturday, December 31, 2005

6:00 am

Rime Buddhist Center

700 West Pennway

Kansas City, Missouri 64108

816-471-7835

Remarks

By

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Good morning! Blessings on everyone who is here. Blessings on everyone who is awake. And a double portion of abundant blessings on the sacred ones among us who can claim membership in both of those groups.

But not only "Good Morning" and "Blessings," but, more importantly, "Peace!" And also, "La Paz," "Mir," "Salem," "Shalom," "Shanti," "Ereine." Yes, especially this day, "Peace!"

I'm honored and humbled by the invitation to proffer some remarks this august morning on the back side of the back side of the passing year and the dawning of a new one. And on the occasion of the 20th anniversary of this sacred meeting.

I'm honored and humbled by the task at hand- the praying in and breaking in and welcoming in of Peace. I'm honored because there is no greater cause for citizens of the world. I'm humbled because of the daunting nature of the task.

Allow me, if you will, for just a few moments, to say what I believe is a crucial connection between "*Peace and The Prophet's Heart.*" For if we are about peace, it is surely a prophetic task. And if we take seriously the prophetic calling on the cusp of a new year, we cannot help but focus on peace.

It has seemed to me of late that a prophet's heart is a distinctly beautiful, four-chambered organ.

One chamber is for righteous anger in the face of gross injustice.

Rather than an emotion to be avoided at all costs, anger is always one of the purest and most appropriate responses to a violated value.

For example, anger – at our disregard of the earth.

Anger at the abuse of children.

Anger when we are in the situation which Sister Corita describes from her perch at Operation Breakthrough in the heart of the heart of Kansas City: *“How strange that we collect aluminum cans and yet throw away children.”*

Anger at our ceaseless clutching after things and more things when we already have so much – too much!? Maurice Sendak is really right, isn't he, when he says *“There must be something more to life than just having everything.”*

Anger over the disallowance of freedom wherever people yearn to be free.

Anger because the earth is soaked in the blood of war and the winds are choking with the stench of disease and the rivers are fouled by indifference.

Anger at the idiotic irony that there is enough food for all people, but not enough political will to see that the food gets to the people.

Yes, anger is one chamber in the four-chambered organ of the Prophet's Heart.

And there is also one chamber for compassion to the point of sorrow in the face of unthinking cruelty and (even worse) willful, mendacious snaky evil.

Of all the virtues the prophets embody in the Hebrew scriptures – including especially Isaiah, Jeremiah, Amos, Hosea, and Micah – compassion is the premier, signal characteristic.

Richard Lischer has recently identified this key characteristic of the prophets for me in his new book *The End of Words*. He says we too often stereotype the prophets' dominant tone as that of anger. But Lischer says “No,” the dominant tone of the prophets is not anger but sorrow.

We could do with a lot more compassion to the point of sorrow.

Compassion for the ones blinded by ambition and blindered by provincial perspectives.

Compassion for the most vulnerable. (We all know the “seventh law of thermo-spiritual dynamics,” even at 6:00 o’clock in the morning: *Parents always play favorites among children; a mother or father always loves most the child that needs them the most at a given moment.*)

And compassion to the point of sorrow even for those who succumb to stupidity like xenophobia, or the cynicism that leads to despair, or the hurt that leads to hate and even greater hate. Compassion even for ones like Fred Phelps.

And then there is one chamber for ecstatic joy in the presence of holiness and the triumph of truth. Peacemakers always have an impish joy in them, don’t they? Consider: the Dali Llama, or Thomas Merton, or Will Campbell, or William Sloane Coffin, or Dorothy Day, or Lama Chuck Stanford.

Yes, joy in the presence of holiness, holiness like arising early enough this morning to be here by 6:00 am for a worship service in an interfaith gathering.

Holiness like fresh, warm bread broken and blessed by the words, “*Baruch atah Adonai, Eloheinu....*”

Holiness like a wise child who laughs out loud because the king has no clothes on.

Holiness like Mohandas K. Gandhi possessed when he said, “*When I despair, I remember that all through history the way of truth and love has always won. Oh, there have been tyrants and murderers and for a time than can seem to prevail. But in the end they always fall. Think of it. Always.*” And I believe he said that somber sounding phrase with a bit of an impish grin. I treasure the definition of peace that Rev. Veronica Goines provided for her congregation at St. Andrew Presbyterian Church in Marin City, California, “*Peace is joy at rest, and joy is peace on its feet.*”

Finally one chamber in the prophet’s heart is always reserved for hope. Always hope. Hope is and always must be the fourth and final chamber of the prophet’s heart.

Hope is the dynamo at the center of peacemaking that drives the engine of activism.

Hope is the kernel of every faith worthy of the name.

Hope is what moves us forward and raises babies above the floodwaters and shines a piercing light into the reckless rubble rendered by the too-quick earthquake.

Hope, the motivation for every person who wants children to grow, cultures to prosper, music to be magnified, and truth to triumph.

Hope, that innate given, that incessant impetus for the beating of the heart, your heart, my heart, every heart, and the reason we will continue praying and meditating for peace until the cows of Bashan come home and the way of war grounds down into silent uselessness and every person inherits the possibility of experiencing their tremendous capacities for beauty and attainment and grace and love.

Yes, remember today the connection between peace and the four-chambered capacity of a prophet's heart:

- (1) One chamber for righteous anger in the face of injustice;
- (2) One chamber for compassion to the point of sorrow, in the face of unthinking cruelty or (even worse) willful, mendacious snaky evil;
- (3) One chamber for ecstatic joy in the presence of holiness and the triumph of truth; and
- (4) One chamber for hope, always hope.

And when our hearts beat in rhythm with one another, we will see that day come 'round when peace will be at the heart of the world and anger will dissolve and compassion will be everything and joy will color the skies and hope will be fulfilled.

So, again, "Good Morning," "Blessings," and "Peace" upon all of our little prophetic, four-chambered hearts. May there be abundant improvement in our cardiac care in the new year. Amen and may God bless you. And.... Peace!