



Voices Without Violence – Building Pathways to Peace

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The young man, in his late teens, came and sat across from me. He told his story. He came looking for direction, not in terms of, “do you know the way to San Jose?” but rather, “What happens after the party is over? What am I supposed to do with my life?” “Why am I carrying around so much pain?” He told me he was going to quit playing video games. “All I’ve been doing is killing things on the computer for hours: this can’t be right.” The same Darwinian emotions getting stirred up: kill or be killed. He went on to say he doesn’t watch the news anymore because there is so much bad news. He turned off the television during the ongoing coverage of the Virginia Tech massacre so that his grandmother would not sit mindlessly watching the carnage and absorb it. It was an attempt to protect her and him from the pain.

Pain is the theme in this story and what we do with it. It has a way of awakening us to deeper truths about our family, our world, and ourselves if we can learn to stay with our pain. The young man had gotten into some trouble and he was awakening to issues of faith. His story was cosmically comical as a matter of coincidence, because it was so similar to my own. I could see myself in him when I was at his age and stage of life. The empathy bridge had already been built.

Our stories were similar, yet different. His parents had divorced after a lengthy marriage, primarily, I had gathered, because of their difficulty of ongoing unresolved conflict and the **inability to process toxic emotions**. You know the ones I’m talking about. They are hate, rage, disgust, and shame/humiliation.

Since the beginning of time we’ve tried to figure out what to do with these emotions. These were, incidentally, the four emotions that put Jesus on the cross. We’ve sacrificed people, sacrificed animals, symbolically spit on goats and run them over cliffs. We project these emotions onto other people, other nations, other races, and conveniently deny our own shadows. When these emotions are trapped in a family system often the child becomes the identified carrier of the toxins and looks for ways to escape the pain. Someone ends up as a family kidney, attempting to purify the poison.

“My folks, they love me, they are good people, but sometimes my Dad just goes off on me. He always comes back later and apologizes, I don’t really think he means it, but he keeps doing it over again.” Earlier in the week his Dad had awakened him and raged about a minor item, clearly reacting and over-reacting to a trivial incident. The son had left a few things in his car: a gym bag, empty soda bottle, etc. “He really has a thing about keeping cars clean. I just stood there and took it. That’s what I have to do.” After he had been the lightning rod for his father’s rage and rectified the situation with the car, he went back to the bathroom and noticed his Dad had left a mess in the sink with shaving materials, combs, brushes, etc. Seems like whoever said, “before you remove

the spec from your (son's) eye, remove the 2" by 4" from your own," makes a lot of sense.

If we project our pain, like this father did to his son, what we do is project rage, hate, disgust, and shame *on to* and *into* others. Without owning our own pain, we simply create more of it. When we scream at each other we temporarily release these intense feelings, and if we haven't dealt with them, they will begin to build again until there is another crescendo in a week or two. It will happen again. When we use the verbal club and we are screaming at the top of our lungs, we communicate these four words: "**I don't love you!**" You can't be *loving me* and *yelling at me* at the same time!

Sure, we all get frustrated, at times reactive, and in moments conflicted with our thoughts, feelings, and emotions. It's all a part of our collective human dysfunction. And we see what happens when humans become hijacked by these emotions: hate, rage, disgust, and shame. It is the common denominator with the not-so-funny comedian Michael Richards (Seinfeld's *Kramer*) during his stand-up routine. It is the common denominator with actor Alec Baldwin. His emotional hijacking was recorded on a phone message he left for his daughter insuring he won't win the "Father of the Year" award this year. We saw the common denominator on the campus of Virginia Tech last April when Cho Seung-Hui committed his massacre of rage, hate, disgust, and shame. His video-taped and twisted tirade spewed the carnage before it was committed. The face of rage and pain may be your roommate.

Verbal violence always precedes physical violence. Ten-year-old boys taunt a homeless man, spewing forth the same hate, rage, disgust, and shame before bursting open his head with a concrete block. The toxicity is contagious and may poison the minds of groups, tribes, clans, or nations and become embedded in the DNA for generations, as it has in the Middle East. No one is exempt from the collective human dysfunction. Not them. Not us. Think back to the prison pictures from Abu Ghraib and you will have a clear snapshot in your mind of what hate, rage, disgust, and shame looks like. No one is exempt from the collective human dysfunction. We are all infected with the same disease.

We will either **transmit** our pain or it will **transform** us. If you are a Christian, a Muslim, or a Jew, in whatever shape, in whatever expression, in whatever culture, in whatever form, authentic faith is not about the finger, but it is *the finger pointing to the moon*. Authentic faith forces us to face our shadows and to deal with our pain: not to project it on to others. Authentic faith, in whatever form, is about a heart transplant. Life in the global village means the entire cosmos is sacred space. We, and we alone, make sacred space profane. If we wouldn't dream of being verbally violent at church, synagogue, or mosque, why would we think it would be ok to be that way at home, school, work, or the roadways? Every space is sacred and even more so when we discover the sacred space, both without and within. Legendary golfer Bobby Jones once was quoted as saying, "The narrowest fairway we'll ever hit is the five inches between our ears." Why? It is sacred space.

How do we stop the madness? By seeing it for what it really is: It is insanity. It is our collective and individual dysfunction. Eckhart Tolle reminds us that we are the only species that murdered 100 million of our own kind in the last century. That is our collective dysfunction. Individually, we choose to decide whether to participate in the

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collective madness or not. Tolle has written, “What would you do if you held a hot coal in your hand? You would drop it!” We must find ways to **stop it** and **drop it!** We are called to a higher consciousness: not to resort to the Darwinian default of verbal then physical clubbing.

I'd like to issue a challenge to all parents – to Dads and Moms, single parents blended families, in all shapes and sizes. Let us pledge to be peacemakers! Habitat for Humanity seeks to eliminate homelessness one house at a time. Let us pledge to eliminate violence one hearth, one hope, and one heart at a time. We can no longer allow another human being to emotionally cannibalize another child or another human being. Let us put an end to verbal violence and all other forms of violence. Bullies become bullies because someone taught them how. Are you bullying your children? If it's not working, get help. Look within! Take a parenting class. Find healthy ways to de-escalate, detach, and de-stress. Take a yoga class, jog, or find your way to a gym. Make yourself accountable to others and pledge yourself to the pathways of peace. Build bridges of empathy. Cast the vision! Be purposeful! Lead the way! Communicate! Make your home a safe place. Target your home for transformation where love, peace, discipline, and nurture raise up children with confidence. Turn to a more excellent way, to *real* family values: Faith, hope, and love last forever, but the greatest of these, is love! Hate is not the opposite of love, for true love has no opposite, and creates no opposition. Make it real! Make it stick! Make it happen! Build pathways to peace. Make your voice a voice without violence!

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