

LOVE EVERYBODY

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*The more you understand, the more you love;
the more you love, the more you understand. They
are two sides of one reality. The mind of love and
the mind of understanding are the same.*

—THICH NHAT HANH

A FEW YEARS AGO, I met Myles Horton, who founded what was then called the Highlander Folk School (now known as the Highlander Research and Education Center), a training center for the civil rights movement, whose students included activist Rosa Parks. Myles asked me what I did, and when I told him about teaching lovingkindness meditation, he said, “Oh, Marty”—as in Martin Luther King, Jr.—“used to say to me, ‘You have to love everybody.’ And I would say, ‘No, I don’t. I’m only going to love the

people that deserve to be loved.' And Marty would laugh and say, 'No, no, no. You have to love everybody.'"

Sometimes when I tell this story, people reply, "Well, look what happened. He got assassinated." As if this were a case of cause and effect, and King would not have been killed if he hadn't tried to love everybody. But how do we know that? If Martin Luther King had been hateful, vicious, and small-minded, would he have been safer? Would we be safer? How far would the movement have gotten if he hadn't insisted on meeting hatred with love?

Neither Myles Horton nor the friend who raises an eyebrow whenever I talk about love for all others is alone in their skepticism. A student once told me that she hates lovingkindness practice because it seems so phony: "It reminds me of a forced Valentine's Day when we're actually angry or fearful, but cover over our true emotions with false sentiment." I explained that true compassion requires honesty and insight. It's not a matter of feeling sorry for someone or denying our own emotions.

Many other people regard wholesale kindness and love as signs of weakness. They think, *If I love indiscriminately, I'll lose my agency, my power. Other people will take advantage of me and I'll be seen as a pushover. Worse, I'll become a pushover.* Why should we send wishes for happiness to those who oppose us, disagree with us, and stand in our way? Hasn't it been drummed into our heads that we should stand up for ourselves, whatever other people think?

The answer is yes—because this is what we've been taught and conditioned to believe. There are no popular TV shows, movies, or books that depict heroes who respond to villains non-violently; we are taught to think about ethics of good/bad, wrong/right in terms of force, power, and often clear-cut violence. We don't have many contemporary role models of cultural figures who have been able to come up with peaceful models of opposition, ideological approaches to protest that are backed by powerful forces, other than violence.

Loving everybody is part of the lovingkindness practice, and

certainly something we can think about when it comes to dealing with difficult people in our everyday lives—a cranky boss, a demanding friend, an unfriendly server at a restaurant. But this chapter is meant to show outstanding examples of love for all, people who have found a new vocabulary, approach, and set of behaviors for how to respond to urgent and real instances of violence and threat. Happily, in forty years of practicing and teaching lovingkindness, I've discovered that instead of turning us into pushovers who lack clear boundaries, this practice makes us stronger so that we live more in tune with our deepest values. Loving all others asks us to open our hearts and embrace our shared humanity with people we don't know well (or at all). However, it does *not* require getting personally involved with everyone we meet. It does *not* require us to agree with their actions or views—or to confess our love to strangers on the street. It *never* requires that we sacrifice our principles or cease standing up for what we believe. The primary work is done internally, as we cultivate love and compassion in our own hearts.

I'd also be the first to acknowledge that this work is never done. After the publication of *Lovingkindness*, people often said to me, "It must be incredible to love everybody all the time!" I had to tell them that although I believe that universal love is possible, I don't live every day overflowing with love. I remember complaining to a friend about someone we both knew, and she said, "Haven't you read your own book?" Recognizing when our actions don't match our aspirations can also be an act of love.

Inspiring figures don't have to be used as cudgels against our own sense of worth, though we may veer toward that kind of conditioning and need to be sensitive to that tendency. Inspiration points us to a bigger world than the one we may have been inhabiting, where we suddenly can see that human beings can go through so much and still be kind. They can create, or care, or act in a way that belies an ordinary sense of constriction or limitation. They can know love is a power, and work toward being free. We

can see a path, a way, and say, “If there is a path, I, too, can walk on it.”

CHOOSING LOVE OVER HATE

MALALA YOUSAFZAI IS the youngest ever winner of the Nobel Peace Prize. The daughter of an education activist and school owner in the Swat Valley of Pakistan, Malala began to speak and blog about education for girls when she was twelve. In 2012, when she was just fifteen, she was shot in the head by a Taliban gunman who boarded her school bus and asked for her by name. The Taliban explained that their real target was Malala’s father, but her assassination attempt was still a part of their larger plot to secure power in Swat by demoralizing advocates of education and peace—such as the members of the Yousafzai family. Fortunately, Malala ended up making a full recovery in England, and has since become an inspiring advocate for the rights of women.

In 2013, Malala appeared on *The Daily Show* with Jon Stewart to tell her story. Stewart asked her to describe her reaction when she first learned the Taliban wanted her dead. She replied: “I used to think that the Talib would come, and he would just kill me. But then I said, ‘If he comes, what would you do, Malala?’ Then I would reply to myself, ‘Malala, just take a shoe and hit him.’ But then I said, ‘If you hit a Talib with your shoe, then there would be no difference between you and the Talib.’”

Despite her young age, Malala’s wise heart already knew that “an eye for an eye” retaliation, even with those who sought to harm her, would only hurt her further. When we think, speak, and act from a sense of awareness and compassion, we see that there are many ways to respond to threats and accusations. It’s not as though Malala’s instinctual reaction to danger was necessarily to be loving and accepting of her attackers; but she had the perspective to recognize that hitting the Talib with her shoe would mean perpetuating

the cycle of violence and fear further, playing by the same rules as those who opposed and endangered her.

By recognizing that retaliation would both fuel the cycle of violence and cause her to carry the burden of pain, anger, and fear in her own heart, Malala gave herself freedom and courage, reinventing the rules of the game the Taliban tried to “play” with her. When we allow ourselves to consider the consequences of our actions with a wider lens, we also realize the profound link between how we relate to others and our own sense of harmony and well-being.

What is perhaps ironic is that the resolve of Malala’s non-violent emphasis on dialogue and education proved to be more disarming than any violent retaliation. Her goal was not to kill or harm those who were threatening her life as a result of the cause she stood for but to support the cause regardless of the outcome on her safety. Her peaceful form of protest showed the Taliban—and the rest of the world—that her activism had nothing to do with ego, but rather those who could benefit from her sacrifices. With stories like Malala’s, we have living proof of how such acts of love can be fiercely powerful.

INCLUSION IS THE FACE OF LOVE

SOMETIMES THE ACTIONS committed against individuals or a group of people are so agonizing that the idea of including the perpetrators in those we wish to be free seems not only impossible but an outrageous mockery of justice. Yet we can find people who show us that anger and compassion are not mutually exclusive in the brave and willing human heart. In these cases, a determination not to be defined by the actions of others does not sacrifice a fundamental loyalty to justice—it bolsters it.

South Africa’s Truth and Reconciliation Commission is a powerful example of this in action on a historic scale. The commission was established in 1995 under Nelson Mandela’s government to investigate

the violations that took place during apartheid, as well as to provide support and reparation to victims and their families. The chair of the commission was Archbishop Tutu. At the core of the commission's work was radical honesty—victims told what had been done to them or their loved ones in the presence of the perpetrators, and the perpetrators had to acknowledge what they'd done with the victims present. Now most people credit the commission with preventing a nationwide bloodbath of retaliation.

On his Web site, the Forgiveness Project, Tutu explains how this kind of letting go, or forgiveness, benefits those who have suffered: "To forgive is not just to be altruistic. It is the best form of self-interest. It is also a process that does not exclude hatred and anger. These emotions are all part of being human . . ."

Tutu further clarifies that forgiveness can bring about self-improvement: "If you can find it in yourself to forgive, then you are no longer chained to the perpetrator. You can move on, and you can even help the perpetrator to become a better person too."

The effect of allowing ourselves to connect with "the enemy," the Other, is a radical act of love, and one that is as much about peace as it is about self-love. I was moved recently by an article in *Haaretz* written by an Israeli mother, Robi Damelin, reflecting on the murder of her son by a Palestinian sniper. Damelin wrote her story in *Haaretz* in response to outrage in Israel, which was prompted by a national radio show host making a comparison between the grief of Israeli mothers and Palestinian mothers when their children are withheld by the other side. Damelin is a central member of a grassroots organization called the Parents Circle—Families Forum, which brings together Palestinian and Israeli families who have lost loved ones due to the conflict. In the article, she asks powerful rhetorical questions: "What makes you think that the tears on the pillow of a bereaved Palestinian mother are of a different color or substance than those of a grieving Israeli mother?" Her answer is that "grief knows no borders." These kinds of organi-

zations offer clues as to how we might go about recognizing the power of reconciliation—rather than revenge—amid real and urgent conflict.

Certainly, such brave acts of reconciliation shouldn't be used as a substitute for social change or as a Band-Aid to help sustain the status quo. Nor should we make overly idealized, unreal figures out of people who are able to go there or blame those who are not so able. But these stories show the hard work of justice when it is so much greater than merely a more polite way of saying *revenge*—and the role of the hard work of love, feeding it all the while. It's our own work.

CHAPTER 21 PRACTICES

Revisiting your role models

This exercise is about revisiting some of the role models you have had throughout your life—and adding some new ones to your list.

Is there someone in your life who has inspired you, who has opened your mind, perhaps gently or perhaps swiftly, so that you feel a different sense of possibility?

See if you can bring that person here. Keep in mind that just because you consider someone a role model doesn't mean that you necessarily follow his or her worldview at all times. And although we owe a lot of gratitude to those who have inspired us, it can also be an emotional trap for us to expect ourselves to follow in their footsteps at all times. To do so simply makes us feel inadequate—and goes against the expression of self-love and self-respect that we've been cultivating.

For this practice, you may want to close your eyes and softly visualize your role models, and feel the effects they have had on you. You may also choose to write their names down and perhaps reflect on a few admirable qualities that you associate with these particular individuals.

These names need not exist in isolation in your thoughts or in your notebook. By taking the time to reflect on the people who inspire you to act with more love and compassion, you are taking strides toward greater mindfulness in your own actions, thoughts, and words.

Visualizing togetherness

Robert Thurman, professor at Columbia University, uses a powerful (though admittedly humorous) image to teach how anyone can practice living with compassion. “Imagine you’re on the New York City subways and these extraterrestrials come and zap the subway car so that all of you in it are going to be together forever.” If someone is hungry on the subway car, we help get them food. If someone begins to panic, we do our best to calm them down. The truth is that everyone on the subway car is in it together—so coexisting peacefully and with a basic understanding of shared humanity makes it more pleasant for everyone.

You may choose to close your eyes or rest your attention softly below you as you consider this image. You may try introducing particularly challenging people into your subway community, to see what difficulties come up as you remind yourself again and again that you are all alike and deserve love and compassion. If your focus begins to wander, you may silently repeat phrases of lovingkindness to yourself, to all others, and perhaps to specific difficult people as you visualize the scene.

Meditation: lovingkindness for all beings

We offer lovingkindness to all beings everywhere in order to touch the immensity of life. This is an expression of our capacity to connect to and care for all of life, through focus on phrases like, “May all beings be safe, be happy, be healthy, live with ease.”

You can use these phrases or any phrases that are meaningful for

you. What would you wish for all beings everywhere? Remember the feeling tone is one of offering or gift-giving.

We offer the phrases of lovingkindness to all beings everywhere, then all creatures, all individuals, all those in existence. Each way of phrasing this opens us to the boundlessness of life.

And when you feel ready, you can end the session. Notice if there is a sense of spaciousness or expansiveness and how it affects you throughout the day.