



NEIGHBORHOOD UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH

Global Covenant

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Have you ever had a thought or idea consume you? So much so that you think about it constantly? While you shower, while you eat, while you lay awake in bed at night. And then when you finally do sleep it seeps into your dreams? I had that once. In the early 2000's I became consumed with the idea of what our new century would look like. We had just ended the most violent and bloody century the world had ever seen. The 20th century was marked by not one, but two World Wars, numerous smaller wars, our cold war, and the invention of vast weapons of mass destruction including the atomic bomb – with nations with arsenals so great they could create mass destruction on a global scale.

What would this new century bring? Would we double-down on violence or would we turn the corner? Could we learn from our past and use it to shape a brighter future?

The terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001, were horrific. Yet, in the days following them we saw much of the world come together in a unity defined not by hatred, but *compassion*. There was a moment of hope. For just a few days that followed that brutal tragedy we gathered at churches, fire stations, and in the streets to console one another, place hands on shoulders, and hold candlelight vigils. Horror turned to love. And we seemingly held each other one long embrace.

But soon, our nation's War on Terror began and we (along with our allies) were thrust into a possibly decades-long war with no borders, innumerable battle fields, and enemies spread the world over.

And still, the thought of what our century was becoming pulled at my brain. I agonized over it day and night. What of that moment of hope? What if we could rebuild that spirit of compassion and togetherness?

"Be the change you wish to see in the world." These are the words of Mahatma Gandhi, the leader of the nonviolent liberation of India whose prophetic words I've often looked to for guidance and inspiration.

"Yes!" I thought. I will be the change. And so over the course of the following years I started with an idea that became a website and evolved into a nonprofit organization dedicated to spreading compassion through service. Its name: Century of Compassion.

Darn it! If it was to be then it was up to me! I was going to help promote compassion as a defining principle of our new century and I invested all of my free time into organizing service events for our numerous volunteers, running board meetings, and writing articles for our website.

The organization was highly active from 2005 to 2010 and during that time I received a powerful postgraduate level, in the trenches education on compassion. It was wonderful, it was transformational, and it was exhausting. By the time our twins arrived in August of 2010 I knew that I was not going to be able to sustain the level of volunteer work I did with the organization and be the kind of father I wanted to be. So, we put the nonprofit in mothballs and I still posted inspirational updates on our social media accounts from time-to-time to keep the spirit of it alive.

In 2015 I pitched the principal of my children's International Baccalaureate elementary school the idea of me volunteer teaching classes on compassion. This developed into a class we named ARTitudes where I used

visual art as the vehicle to drive curriculum about the International Baccalaureate Attitudes, which the children are expected to learn and exhibit, which includes 12 principles like empathy, tolerance, respect, and cooperation.

Then, in 2017 I felt the call to go into Unitarian Universalist Religious Education, where we teach classes based upon our Seven Principles and Six Sources. I created a motto for our Youth Religious Education of “Here there is safety, here there is love.” I encouraged our YRE teachers to embrace the idea that everything we do is Religious Education, because how we treat the children and each other models our Seven Principles, which encourage compassion in human relations.

What I am trying to draw for you here is the arc of my own transformation into a more deeply compassionate soul and show you what led up to an epiphany I had in early September of 2017. I was sitting in my office right next door in Neighborhood House reflecting once again upon what our century was becoming. It had been a particularly bad week in the news with reports on mass shootings, neo-Nazi marches, violence in various parts of the world, and outrageous things our President was saying and doing.

Once again, I was deeply concerned about the direction our still young century was heading in. What was it going to take to turn the tide? There had to be a way to change hearts and minds. I’d learned a lot about compassion over the years, and when I really thought about it I realized that there were three major lessons I had learned; they are:

1. **You can’t achieve compassion without empathy.** First, you must feel the suffering of the person or people you aim to serve and then you will feel driven to relieve that suffering. Absent of empathy, acts are empty gestures, but with it – you can create real and lasting change in people’s lives.
2. **How we treat one another matters. It Matters.** Our President is wrong about a lot of things, and he is *especially* wrong about this. Every action he takes or tweet he posts seems to say that it doesn’t matter how we treat one another. I say, tell that to the abused and neglected child living in their fifth foster home in four years. Tell that to the homeless man or woman or child who is hoping to scrape together enough money from the kindness of strangers for a simple meal or a bottle of water on a hot day. Tell that to the migrant children *still* separated from their parents! How we treat one another matters, and you know who has it right... the Dalai Lama has it right. Maybe no surprise there. He says we should treat one another with *Loving Kindness*, and I agree that kindness rooted in love has the power to create meaningful change. Be kind to everyone you meet for everyone is fighting a great battle... The battle to survive. The battle for wholeness. The battle to live their best life.
3. **What people long for more than your compassion is your respect.** People can be brutal to one another. People in society at large treat one another with such disdain and apathy and hatred that it’s appalling. Over my years in Century of Compassion, I interacted with people who had been made by society to feel like less than dirt, and what they longed for more than anything else was just to have someone respect their inherent worth and dignity (our first principle). Show them compassion and they would look at you with suspicion, but treat them with respect and their faces would light up like the sun and they would look back at you with love and appreciation. Respect is something we all long for and need. I need it. You need it. And those suffering the most among us need it more than anyone.

And so my big epiphany: Ultimately, it comes down to this... In order to create a more civil society – one rooted in equality and valuing the life of every person – there are four vital ingredients: **Respect. Empathy. Compassion. Kindness.** These are the four core ingredients for real, lasting, and transformational change in our world. The four values that could reshape our century into one truly rooted in compassion.

We live in challenging times. Public discord is on the rise. Hate groups that used to lurk in the shadows are pushing their way into the mainstream. Political and ideological differences that have separated us for years are splitting us farther and farther apart. America, it seems, is ripping at the seams – and globally things don't look much better.

But **we CAN** make a difference. You can do something. I can do something. Both as individuals and as a group.

We can change the way we treat one another.

The way we treat one another matters. In both large and small ways, the way we think of, view, and interact with each other makes a difference in how our societies function and how the world moves. If everyone from the average citizen through heads of state would think of and interact with one another using these four important principles, we could reshape the world into one comprised of peace and mutual understanding. Respect, Empathy, Compassion, and Kindness. Each principle builds upon the previous one so that when taken in order they create a powerful force for good.

First, we need to start from a place of respect. We must recommit ourselves to valuing the worth and dignity of *every* individual being. Mutual respect lays a foundation upon which we can build mutual understanding. Without respect, people's voices cannot be heard. When we work to respect one another, we can achieve tolerance and even acceptance of one another.

Next, we must strive for empathy. By laboring to put ourselves in the shoes of "the other," we can develop real connection that simply is not possible when we distance ourselves from one another. Empathy is the spark that ignites the flame of compassion.

And so we arrive at compassion. To live is to suffer. When we connect with the suffering that each of us experiences, it motivates us to want to relieve that suffering. And, when we feel deep compassion for each other's suffering, it is not possible for us to want to hurt one another.

Finally, the icing on the cake is kindness. When we treat each other with loving kindness great things are possible. In time, trust develops out of kindness as well as genuine care and concern. When combined, these principles create an acronym: R-E-C-K: Reck.

One happy accident with RECK is that *reck* is already a word unto itself. It already exists. Its definition is "to have care, concern, or regard." It's the base word for words like *reckon* and *reckless*. I delight in the fact that a word that stands for "respect, empathy, compassion, and kindness" also means "to have care, concern, or regard."

Now, what if this idea of regard for all people could be given the strength of covenant? In our Unitarian Universalist faith we have varied beliefs and many differences, and it is our covenant of the Seven Principles that binds us together. "We covenant to affirm and promote" those seven foundation statements of our faith. What if people in the general public were bound to these four bedrock principles of respect, empathy, compassion, and kindness for all people through the power of covenant? Or, to use a more secular term – through a pact?

RECK Pact. That has a pretty nice ring to it. RECK Pact for all. A global covenant to help spread peace and understanding. To help people learn to love one another with the kind of love that prophets from Jesus to Martin Luther King Jr. have been teaching for centuries.

Through the power of a global pact based upon respect, empathy, compassion, and kindness we can put an end to much of the world's plight once and for all. We can encourage people to talk out their problems and work out their differences.

If everyone treated one another with RECK, just imagine the changes we could create:

Imagine a world without child abuse.
Imagine a world without sexual assault.
A world without bigotry and racism.
A world without murder.
Without genocide.
Without war.
And on and on and on...

All of this simply because you can't harm someone you respect, have empathy and compassion for, and treat with kindness. And we need to have those things for everyone.

True and lasting peace is possible. Each of us *can* make a difference. We really can change the world. "Respect, Empathy, Compassion, Kindness – Respect, Empathy, Compassion, Kindness" For nearly a year this has been my mantra. And it has made a fundamental change in my life. My relationships are stronger. I find it easier to form bonds with strangers. I am more invested in the world and in the future.

Here's just one example of a time when this philosophy reshaped an interaction I was having in a positive way. I was at my dentist's office and the person who happened to be a woman at the front desk was being particularly rude and dismissive of me as I attempted to schedule my next visit. Finally, I'd had enough, but to my surprise what came out of my mouth was not some terse comment, but a polite, "Are you okay?" Also to my surprise, she replied, "No, I'm not okay." And she went on to explain how her commute had been miserable, they'd been incredibly busy all morning, and the phone had been ringing off the hook. We commiserated for a few moments about LA traffic and stress and whatnot and then she finished up scheduling my next appointment in a little lighter mood and seemingly feeling a little better. I don't think it was my words, but my genuine concern for her – my RECK – that made the difference.

I can also tell you stories about how treating my children with RECK is helping me to gain their respect and empathy in return.

I can tell you about a million little interactions and conversations and how my new philosophy has helped me navigate tricky waters with greater ease. These values can become part of you. They can get into your very core and help shape not just your actions, but your thoughts, attitudes, and outlook on life.

I believe that RECK is embedded in our Unitarian Universalist DNA. It's all there in our Seven Principles when you look for it...

After all, what is affirming and promoting the inherent worth and dignity of every person (our first principle) if not a call for respect? Our second principle is a direct call for compassion: Justice, equity and compassion in

human relations. And you must have some level of respect and empathy for a person to gain the kind of acceptance that is demanded of us by our third principle: Acceptance of one another. For kindness we can return to the first principle, because treating people unkindly or dismissively denies them their dignity and diminishes their feeling of worth. RECK can help us achieve our sixth principle: The goal of a world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. And it is tied up in the seventh principle: the interdependent web of existence.

So, try making Respect, Empathy, Compassion, Kindness *your* mantra, prayer, and practice. You might be surprised how quickly they can change your life and the world around you.

I'll tell you: The concept is simple. The practice is hard. But results make it all worthwhile.

So join with me! Rise up in spirit! Rise up in hope! Rise up in RECK! And together we can help the world rise to new heights of prosperity, understanding, and cooperation. And with enough effort, maybe, just maybe, we can go from the most violent century in history to the most peaceful; the most loving; the most compassionate.

Amen. May it be so.