



## How's It Working For You?

**S**O, ON THE ONE HAND, people all over the globe are hating each other, vilifying each other and blowing each other up in the name of their God. The Middle East may get most of the press, but the joy of “ethnic cleansing,” not to mention hatred, knows no regional boundaries. Poverty and homelessness know no boundaries either. Nor does war or terrorism.

On the other hand, as an Interfaith minister I know that *all* of our varying spiritual paths teach us to reach out to others. Some people like to say that all of our religions are really the same. I think that’s foolish. Our varying paths are different. Christianity is different from Buddhism. Islam is different from Humanism. Hinduism is different from Judaism. But *what they all share is the call to compassion*, the call to think beyond ourselves, to recognize that we are all, *all*, connected. In other words, each path, in its own special and different way, calls us to love and to be loving.

The call is universal. More than 2,500 years ago, the ancient Greek philosopher and playwright Sophocles wrote,<sup>1</sup> “One word releases us from the weight and pain of life: that

<sup>1</sup> From the play *Oedipus at Colonus*, c. 406 BC.

word is love.” At virtually the same time, the ancient Chinese philosopher and spiritual leader Mo-Tse envisioned love as a universal calling shared by *all* the people of the world, not simply his followers, or even just the people of China. Similar sentiments may be found in the Bhagavad-Gita (Hinduism), the Sutta Nipata (Buddhism), the spiritual teachings of Black Elk and any number of African spiritual traditions, not to mention Hebrew and Christian Scripture. Love, compassion, community.

But if love is the answer, and every tradition knows it, why aren't we all happy? Why aren't we all at peace? We look at the world of a thousand years ago, five hundred years ago, a hundred years ago or today. We see the poverty and the homelessness, we see the hatred and the war, and we see the loneliness that invades our world, rich and poor, whatever our race or gender, and we are forced to ask: “Where is the love that everyone talks about?”

Or to put it more simply: How's it working for you?

Einstein and countless others have talked about the futility of trying the same thing over and over and expecting a different result from the first time we tried. So if our various spiritual and philosophical paths have been trying over and over again to teach us to love one another, and the message hasn't taken, maybe, just maybe, it's time to go about this a little differently — or perhaps *a lot* differently. Maybe dividing ourselves into righteous pockets of spiritual belief is not the best way to bring about love.

We humans have a propensity for division. We are great at building walls. We build walls between nations. We build walls between ethnic groups. We build walls between what we call “races.” We build walls between genders. We build walls between generations. We build walls between religions and then, still unsatisfied, we build walls between

groups *within* religions. If there is a way to divide ourselves, we have found it. And it must stop.

So what can we do?

For thousands of years we've divided and isolated ourselves into spiritual groups based on specific beliefs. Jews pray with Jews, Christians with Christians and so on. Perhaps it is time to end the divisions and stop the isolation. "But this is the way we've done it for thousands of years." Agreed! Agreed absolutely. We've done it for thousands of years. But again, how's it working for you? More importantly, how's it working for the human race?

"But what else can we do?"

An alternative to the spiritual quagmire humanity seems stuck in is Interfaith. To understand why, we'll want to look at the paradigm (the fundamental, organizing model) of "Right Belief," and how we have built our spiritual houses upon this paradigm. We'll look at the harm it has caused and how we got stuck there. We'll then explore how to change that paradigm and why it might be helpful, but also why it's so difficult.

A paradigm is indeed like the foundation to a house. We don't necessarily see it, but everything we *do* see is built upon it. If we want to live in a new house, we must build upon a new foundation. But that will involve a lot of digging and some hard work! Yet I believe the work is worth it. I believe a new spiritual house is truly worth the effort.

Later we'll examine the kind of community we can build, if we can muster up the courage to change the paradigm: to build a new house on a new foundation. But first things first.