

Dr. Martin Luther King challenged us to go beyond our limited vision to work toward the "Beloved Community." This was the central theme of his teachings. What is this community, what keeps us from realizing it, and how can we work towards this community in our lives?

In this community he said "our loyalties must transcend our race, our tribe, our class, and our nation..."

This would be a community where love and justice prevailed. Love here is not sentimental affection, but the binding power that holds the universe together. In this community we would know that "we are tied together in the single garment of destiny, caught in an inescapable network of mutuality."

The ideal for the Beloved Community is not new. People from every culture and time throughout history have dreamed of this nonviolent and cooperative society. It has been called by many names.

Why haven't we developed the Beloved Community?

Our communities are divided by violence to the body, mind, and spirit. Each day we hear the same news about violence and other problems. Alone, these problems are immense. Together, they seem overwhelming.. Many feel powerless and numb.

Current approaches to solving community problems are not working. The reason: we are all divided into special interest groups, the new Tower of Babel.

These include racial, ethnic, religious, political, economic, civic, peace, social justice, and environmental groups, etc.

In the long run, the special interest approach can't be effective. All social problems are connected and have a common basis.

For example, look at how we deal with gang violence. We are kidding ourselves if we think brute force by the police or mainstreaming gang members will solve the problem. Dealing with gang violence in isolation from its interconnected root causes makes no sense. Why does a gang form?

Our society has not provided many youth with fellowship, love, a sense of purpose, relevant education or employment. A gang is an alternative society, a reaction and an indictment against the present one.

The way we have solved problems in the past, then, is like putting out small fires here and there, while the main fire rages out of control.

What is this raging fire?

Conflicts in communities are a mirrored reflection of the battles inside ourselves. As Pogo said, "We have met the enemy, and it is us."

Our little egos have gotten out of control, always grasping, "me, me, mine." Our own fears, insecurities, self-centeredness, and self-righteousness blinds us. Each day we harm ourselves and others. We are just too busy to notice . Ego-centered behavior becomes fossilized in social institutions. Greed and narrow self-interest have become the lubrication for our political and economic machinery.

Daily, we conform with these values, unquestioning, even though they are self-destructive. Look what we've become. We sing the virtues of materialism, consumerism, while hoarding greater profits, as the gap between the rich and poor increases. Then, we say we must use brute force, it's an "eye for an eye" trying to defend our way of life."

Think about the results of this way of life. We are destroying our life support system - Mother Earth -while poverty, hunger, wars, racism, and for many, hopelessness continues unabated.

Where do we go from here?

We must see that the raging fire is our ego-centered attitude and selfish lifestyle. This is the root cause of social conflict. Admitting this deep problem is a first step toward health and sanity.

There are many pioneers who taught us the way of going beyond self-interest. They taught practical means to help make our personal interest one with the common interest of all life. Dr. King is the most recent example. Great teachers of humanity such as Jesus, Buddha, Lao-Tse, Mahatma Gandhi and others were all saying the same thing.

Dr. King was killed because he was a non-violent revolutionary. He challenged us to be honest with ourselves. He saw that a radical change in our values, way of life, and institutions was necessary for there to be peace. He saw that in order to conquer the "giant triplets of racism, materialism, and militarism... we must rapidly begin the shift from a 'thing'-oriented society to a 'person'-oriented society. "

We have no choice today, but to follow on the same path. There is no time left for just talking about spirituality in the clouds, in the churches or in the ivory towers. We must live and practice it.

Now is the time to consciously develop a new society from the old, a Beloved Community based on love, justice, and fellowship. Begin with an inner attitude change. Dr. King spoke of an "inner spiritual transformation" that would give us strength to fight social injustice and lead us to "personal and social transformation."

The power to change our lives comes from within us and not outside. And, we don't have to wait for anyone else. We can start right where we live. Each day presents opportunities to practice love in action.

We can work locally, knowing that we are part of a larger global awakening. Humanity is leaving its childhood behind and is growing up.

We are witnessing the birth of a new world civilization. The truth is that we are one Spirit, one Earth, one Life, and one People. Every loving act that we perform, no matter how small fosters the awakening of ourselves, our families, then cities, nations, the world, and finally, the entire cosmos.

Working together and sharing ourselves, we can build a Beloved Community inside ourselves, with our families, anywhere we live. The dreamer may have given his life, but the dream lives on. The new dreamers are here, ready to carry the torch.