

ONLY LOVE OVERCOMES FEAR

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We stand on the side of love and gradually we overcome its greatest obstacle--fear. There is incredible power in love, and incredible gentleness as well. Love flows, persists, and dares just like that tiny rivulet that begins with melting snow high in the mountain. A slowly gathering stream, it seeks out every crevice and is sought by every thirsty plant and animal. Its nature is to discover every opening, to fill every void, to delight every sense, to enable life's flourishing.

Fear is the seemingly impenetrable boulder that the stream simply flows against and around. Not only is the boulder not a barrier to love, it is ever so gently worn away by this rubbing. What was sharp becomes gradually softened, what was solid begins to crumble, what was compressed becomes loose. Love is this constant and gentle pressure. It is the only way to counteract fear. Love will do its gentle and powerful work, against the barriers fear erects. It may be a wall, it may be armed guards, it may be unjust laws, and it may be rigid attitudes. Love flows past all of them, wearing them away in time.

In the wise words of the Tao Te Ching: What is softest in the world overcomes what is hardest, and in water we find this quality. We stand on the side of love by being as soft and as powerful as water's flow. We stand on the side of love by being as persistent as that melting snow. We stand on the side of love by being as daring as the stream that finds its way to the sea. Only when we adopt the ways of love and move in the manner of love will fear be overcome. Only love casts out fear, nothing else has the power and gentleness to do the job.

It is not easy to trust that love will overcome fear. It requires a level of faith, like that of a Rabbi and his wife who opened their hearts and home to a young man, a bigot. Emboldened by his group of friends, he had hurled hateful insults at them, leaving them feeling hurt and afraid. In spite of this, they found a way to reach out, and eventually he had dinner with them. They discovered he knew very little about them or their religion. What he did know was a mountain of hurt and fear, and group of friends willing to lash out. Over a period of years the Rabbi and his wife welcomed him into their lives, and watched his transformation. With love's action, what had been hard became soft until this young man was also a champion of love, not fear. Had this couple let fear overwhelm them, an opportunity for softening would have been missed.

Love is not proud, it does not boast. Love does not puff itself up and make demands. Instead it seeks and finds, it admits and reveals, it deepens and spreads. Its task is never separate from its soft and persistent nature. Only when we remain in the flow of love is its nature our own. To do so does not mean we are better than those frozen with fear. It only means we see the fear and know *it* is the obstacle. As human beings there are times we are frozen in fear, and there are times we are awash in love. Fear develops into hatred, or love reverts to fear when we forget that we are sometimes the boulder and sometimes the stream. Compassion is this admission.

There was an amazing woman who lived up the street from me when I was a child. She had a daughter who seemed “different.” I was the same age as Jenny, in the same class, and it scared me to see how mean people could be to her. She was very smart and very nervous and didn’t dress like the rest of us. She missed a lot of school, probably because she was afraid. Every once in a while I would play with her because she lived close by, but I wouldn’t talk to her at school for fear I would be bullied too. Her mother was so sweet to me, to all of us. She gave us rides, invited us to outings, and brought cookies for the class to share. She became a Girl Scout Leader who volunteered her house for special events, and readily supplied baked goods—the way to our hearts.

I could see how this woman’s sweetness, her loving way, gradually softened that bullying behavior. We became less afraid and more aware. It was hard to be mean and unyielding in the face of that kindness and care. I wish I could say, that after a while, all the bullying stopped and all of us were kind and sensitive to Jenny. That’s not what happened, but her mother’s love did transform all of us to some degree, and made her daughter’s situation better. How much do we change the world when our response is love and kindness rather than fear and anger?

Through the generations we have created and maintained categories of “otherness” that later need to be worn away. Historically, we are sometimes the boulder when we need to be the stream. For UUs “standing on the side of love” means we now have that awareness around issues like marriage equality and immigration status. Here we have embodied love’s movement and we are coming to know love’s transforming effect. We do this by supporting the immigrant worker’s dedication to live in this country and raise a family here—just like the rest of us. We do this by securing marriage between two men or two women, and honoring the families their love creates. Joseph Campbell writes, “The part of us that wants to become is fearless.”

Fear is the only obstacle to love, but never for long. In the words of one great spiritual leader, “True love casts out fear.” Let’s remember the teachings of Jesus, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr. With their vision and leadership mountains of resistance were worn away, with a force both palpable and invisible.

We have seen how great leaders and amazing individuals respond to fear with love, and influence those of us around them. We look to and are guided by those who flow with love, persist in love, and dare as only love can. They look at the mountain, and the tiny rivulet formed by its melting snow—and they know which of these has the power to transform. Love is that simple. Love is that amazing. Love is our movement.