

ONE FAITH

PULSE OF SPIRIT
MAY 1, 2019



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(From the keynote address at the Cape Town Interfaith Indaba)

The interfaith movement calls us to qualities of understanding and compassion for those who practice different faiths. We are called to practice tolerance, and then understanding and appreciation, which allows us to learn from another person's faith.

Do you think that, ultimately, there is something beyond our individual faiths? That behind your faith and behind my faith, there might actually be one faith? That if we are people of real faith, that we share a faith in common? What is that common faith?

(People in the audience offered their suggestions.)

Love

Respect

Hope

Kindness

Compassion

Acceptance

Great Spirit

We hold in common an appreciation for a Great Mystery, for the source of all goodness, for the source of love, for the source of our own life.

For some people there is really only one faith. *My faith is the only true faith*, they say. *My faith is better than your faith*.

I was thinking about the original teachers of our faith. Can you imagine the first teacher of your faith? Jesus? Buddha? Moses? What happened for these first teachers? Did they wake up one morning and decide, "Oh, I think I'd better teach everybody about my faith"? Of course not. They awoke to something themselves that they wanted to share.

Buddha didn't start his spiritual journey

by teaching. He first had a profound awakening under the Bodhi Tree.

The same is true for Moses. He was in the desert when a burning bush appeared before him. The bush was not consumed by the fire, and a voice spoke to him from out of the bush. It spoke to him and asked him to fulfill his calling.

There was an experience at the root of all our faiths. Following that experience, there was a desire to share what came to be known with others. Moses brought the Ten Commandments, and Buddha brought the Four Noble Truths.

Imagine yourself with a profound awakening. And then what would you do? When you experience something devastatingly beautiful, something true, something that's empowering, something that's meaningful, you want to share it with people. But how, when the essence of what you want to share is not something physical?

Moses developed a teaching so that he could share what he had experienced and help people experience it for themselves. Jesus knew a profound love and freedom. So he encouraged the people around him to have the same experience and to share the same knowing. Sometimes, when you read the stories of Jesus, you see that he was almost pulling his hair out because

people didn't understand the simple things that he was trying to tell them.

It can be like that for us as teachers when we attempt to share what we know. How do you share the simple essence of things? How do you guide people into an experience? Perhaps you teach some noble virtues. Perhaps you bring them guidelines for living. Or perhaps you write a book.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition, we have the Bible; we have the Quran for Islam. Lao Tzu wrote the Tao Te Ching. What happens when the writing that was meant to bring people into an experience is used as an instrument of tyranny? *You better follow this teaching! You are a bad person if you don't follow this teaching. You must believe what is written here.* It becomes about the teaching and the writing, not the experience that it is pointing to.

But what was the teaching for? It was about the experience. If you have your teaching and I have my teaching, and it's about your teaching for you and my teaching for me, now we are in conflict. Interestingly enough, when you go and look at what the original teachers said to their followers, they said it's not about the teaching—that you need the teaching but it's not about the teaching. It's about the experience.

Lao Tzu said, “The Tao that can be told is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal Name.” He taught many things. But he was saying, *The things that I have taught are not the Tao. The Tao is the Tao.*

The Chinese philosopher Confucius says, “When the wise man points at the moon, the fool looks at the finger.” It’s not about the finger, and it’s not about the teaching. The teaching is pointing to an experience.

I don’t care what you believe. I care if you love. I care if you act nobly. I care if you’re serving other people. I care if you are being a light in the world. I want that for myself, and I want to be with people who are being that. I want to be in a world that is being that.

Our teachings can divide us. Our beliefs can divide us. But when you look to the original teachers of our faith, they were asking us to be humble about what we think we know. Sometimes a religious person can be an arrogant person. They think they know better, and now they’re going to teach everybody else.

The original teachers say, *Stay humble about what you know.* You may know a teaching that points you to the knowing. You may believe in that teaching. But what we believe about God isn’t God.

Realistically speaking, in the world in

which we live, is there more than one God, do you think? More than one source of all energy and all love and all Being? You and I have different names for that one thing and we have different stories about it, some of which are written down in books. The stories are different, the names are different, the way we think about it may be different. But surely there is only one common origin of all Creation. And so we can be humble about our stories and about our beliefs, and about our names for God.

Does that mean we shouldn’t treasure our faith? I don’t think so. I treasure the way I was taught. I treasure my teachers and I treasure the beliefs I was offered and the teachings themselves. Those are very important to me. But still, beyond all that, I aspire not just to appreciate the teachings. I aspire to be all that I can be as a man who honors what the teaching was pointing to, so that I can live in the reality of the one real God. That is not my God and it’s not your God—it’s *the real God*, the real source of everything, the reality we worship in common.

I believe that for us, as people of different faiths, there is no other way for us to come to a place of unity, harmony and common understanding. We can try to be tolerant, we can try to be nice to each other; but if I really believe that you’re wrong and I’m right, where is that going to go? We have to be humble about what

we think we know, or what we believe.
We can appreciate it, and hold it in high esteem, but be humble about it, nonetheless.

The one I look to as the original teacher of my faith, at least in this era, is a man whose name was Lloyd Arthur Meeker. And he had this saying that he often repeated to his followers: “Keep coming, Blessed One.” *What you know now is wonderful; what you’re experiencing now is wonderful, but there is more. Keep coming. Don’t accept what you think you know now as the ultimate knowing. It is good for now, but it’s not the whole thing. There is more to know.*

Do you think that might be true for each of us, that there’s more for us? And if we’re humble about that, don’t we relate differently together? I’m interested in what you are knowing and what you’re moving into. I’m more interested in the flow of what is real for you, known by you, what is real and known by me, and what we share in that, than I am about the things that we think we know that keep us separate.

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