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Radical Love

Comments Written by Rivera Sun

"I used to think of love as a side dish to social political change – the green beans next to the meat and potatoes of power and struggle. But, the more I live in the gritty world of honest humanity, the more I suspect that love is the essential mineral lacking in our nation's veins. We've got deficiency symptoms: tremors, shakes, deliriums, rages, madness, fits, addictions,

and lashings out. Every cell in our collective and individual bodies is screaming for this nutrient called love. And because we can't get it, we crave paltry substitutions such as power, domination, money, and violence."

Quote from Rivera Sun's novel, *The Dandelion Insurrection*

Privilege provides no shelter from this deficiency. In fact, it tends to make it worse. For the structure of success in the United States of America has been built on a centuries old devil's bargain in which we cut out a piece of our heart to secure money, power, and position. From the early colonists massacring Native Americans to ensure their place on this continent to contemporary politicians giving tax breaks to the wealthy while cutting healthcare funding for the poor, we see the trade off of love over and over again. Our compassion atrophies in the dog-eat-dog version of reality that we've created in the United States. It shrinks down to a peanut-sized organ capable of loving only one's family, or dog, or the people who look, act, and think just like one's self. The withered hearts sold piecemeal for wealth and power have lost the capacity to love boldly and widely, in broad and inclusive ways that extend to their fellow citizens or even to the whole of humanity worldwide.

When our souls cry out in shakes and rages from lack of love, we lash out to the extent our power permits. The poor hurt each other. The rich pass policies that hurt millions of people. Some pull guns on one another; politicians drop bombs on foreign countries. We start fights in our families; our military wages war overseas. A child steals candy from a younger sibling; the wealthy steal trillions from the rest of us. The neighbor refuses to help us when we're sick; our Congresspersons cut funding for healthcare. Rich, poor, powerful and marginalized, wherever this deficiency of love arises, cruelty and suffering

abound. Beneath the screaming torrent of other rationales and excuses are broken human beings shuddering in the grips of a multi-generational deficiency that is slowly – or rapidly – killing us, our nation, and the earth.

Hundreds of campaigns are launched on all sides of the political spectrum to “save the world” or the whales or the workers or the economy or family values or civil rights . . . everything! Most of them deliver a right-left punch to the other side that essentially shouts, “you bad, evil people, stop that at once!” Every time we attack each other in such a manner, our mineral deficiency drops lower on both sides of the conflict.

Perhaps people in the social justice movements don’t notice. The feelings of solidarity that can arise within movements can mask the ways hate for one’s opposition depletes the soul. More obvious is the effect within the opposition. Sensing hate from the movement, their hearts close off, the deficiency of love drops further, and they lash out violently, entrenching in defense of their actions. It’s ironic, because the very behaviors or policies the movement objects to came about because the people involved in the injustice sought to satisfy their aching craving for love through greed, domination, control, power, violence, or discrimination. By attacking them, we’re sowing the seeds for more of the same vicious cycle.

Vilifying people often fails to address the root of the problem, the deep hurts and wounds, fears and insecurities that people carry. There are thousands of wounded people in positions of power, millions waiting in the wings to take their places, and a whole nation raging and moaning for love, hurting one another in large and small ways.

So, I propose a radical approach: that we bring love into our movements for change, adopting Dr. King’s principle to be against injustice, not against people. We cannot condone destructive and harmful behaviors and policies. However, we can learn to see each other with the eyes of love, to look at our fellow human beings with compassion and sorrow over such actions, rather than hate and fury. In so doing, we can begin to replenish that mineral deficiency that is killing our nation’s soul, not to mention the bodies of our brothers and sisters, and the vitality of the planet. We can recognize the underlying void in the cells and marrow of people that causes them to behave in such destructive ways. We can begin to satisfy the deep craving for respect and understanding – which are often ways that love is expressed in public settings.

I believe we will go further in our efforts toward justice if we break down the walls of hate and fear that have arisen between factions of our populace. I think bringing groups who currently stand opposed to one another into face-to-face encounters is as radically transformational as protests, boycotts, and strikes. Creating situations where people must listen to each other’s viewpoints, hear each other’s stories, and deal with real humans not just statistics can be as positively confrontational as direct action. And, I have faith that approaching one another with basic love and respect even in the midst of opposing unjust policies and practices allows the humanity that exists in all of us to resurface. It helps those who have made devil’s bargains to reclaim pieces of their hearts. It prevents us from making the same mistake and cutting off a part of our broad

love for humanity in order to hate our opposition. I think this approach is complementary to a movement's use of firm, strategic, nonviolent action to stop injustice and harm. In addition, it offers us a powerful path toward healing in a deep and profound way.

Our other option – the one we've been using – is to hate each other more, attack more, despise one another in increasing cycles of animosity and division. We are locked in modes of trying to overpower our “enemies”, prove them wrong and punish them for their bad ways of thinking. In response, they attack us back, defend their positions, and try to dominate us in response. We have dug ourselves into a deep and dangerous hole that has led to horrific suffering, cruelty, and pain. I'd like to climb out of that hole. If that requires a radical act of love against impossible odds, I'm willing to do it.

How about you?

<http://www.riverasun.com/radical-love/>