

Russell Delman October 2015

## The Challenge of CARING: Who Do You Cast Out of Your Heart?

Hatred never ceases by hatred, but by love alone is healed. This is an ancient and eternal law.

-Buddha

In my opinion, humanity has a daunting task in the fulfillment of our ultimate potential which is: extending our field of care to include all of Life.

Human beings live between two poles: our sense of connectedness to all of life called "love" and our sense of separation. We can sense ourselves both as "a part of" our world and "apart from" our world. Without forgetting the importance of healthy autonomy, this "a part of" and "apart from" is the essential difference between true joy and depression, between being at home in one's life or alone in this universe. Please take a moment to notice, in your bodily felt-sense, the difference between these two.

Often these two poles live in a state of compromise where our care, our love, is extended beyond ourselves to distinctly defined groups called "us". The world becomes divided into "us", the one's who live in our field of care, and "them" those who do not. "Us" can include our families, our pets, our gender, our football team, our gang, friends, wherever we choose to define the limits. We are inclined to extend care to our tribe, our family, those who look and believe like us and exclude those who seem different. Different seems implicitly dangerous. There is a neurological bias for tribalism. For humanity to survive, this is no longer an option. The good news is that we have the capacity to rewire our predilection toward exclusion of "other". Our self-identity can move from narrowly defined fields to, in the words of Buddha, include "all sentient beings".

As I look around the world today, this means that:

all the refugees seeking a safe homeland for their children and themselves are my family

all the people in the countries who are afraid of being overwhelmed by the needs of so many are also my family.

the African-American man walking down the street whose blood pressure rises upon seeing a policeman is my family

the policeman who is scared from both unconscious learning and some life experience is also my family

the fighter for IS is my family

the people fighting to disempower IS are my family

that man who feels entitled to abuse that woman is my family  
that crying woman is my family  
people drilling in the Arctic are my family  
those opposing this drilling are my family

ON and ON.....

I imagine that this is difficult to read. I am not suggesting a "flatland" in which all points of view are equally valid. We need to have both the courage to stand up to power AND to relate to the hurting, confused human being who acts in unacceptable ways. A profoundly human challenge is to separate the person from the behavior while simultaneously holding ourselves and others responsible for actions. Even with our own compulsions and negative behaviors, can we hold ourselves accountable AND maintain a warm heart toward the inner pain that is driving our action?

Said another way, can we open our hearts enough to see that it is always "hurting people who are hurting people". Just as your right hand will not intentionally hurt your left hand, when you have the inner sense of connection to life, you want to take care of the world and all of its inhabitants. They are your family. When we do not sense this interconnectivity, when we are "apart from", we are hurting. Always...

Striking out at others is a convoluted, ultimately unsuccessful way, of attempting to ease our own pain. Almost all child abusers were abused as children. This does not excuse the behavior but maybe allows our hearts to open, even as we hold the perpetrator responsible for their actions. The unconscious urge to dominate others or the earth itself comes from deep and painful disconnection. This is true whether we are hurting another or ourselves. Separating the actor from the action is why so many thoughtful people consider forgiveness the highest of human virtues.

To adopt this way of living and seeing, we need to withstand the discomfort and dissonance of seeing that everybody makes sense from their life experience and biology. Many years ago, while working in a fairly tough drug rehabilitation facility, I learned that whenever I heard the painful life story of anybody, including rapists, child molesters and killers, my heart opened to that human being, even as I despised their actions. There was always a hurting human being lingering in there.

Everybody is doing their best at any moment to find fulfillment and meaning in their life, given their personal history and capacity at that moment.  
EVERYBODY.

Moshe Feldenkrais taught the importance of paradoxical thinking. When I told him of my deep interest in Zen, he said that if he didn't have his own teaching he would study Zen because, like the great Talmudic scholars, they understand paradox. He often said "you do not really understand your opponent's point of view until you can argue emotionally from their perspective." In his recent address to the U.S. Congress, Pope Francis spoke to the necessity of overcoming our tendency toward polarization. We need to walk in the uncomfortable shoes of those we can not understand to really see from their point of view. We can no longer afford "us and them" as an ideology. The world has gotten too small and is too fragile for this paradigm. Can you sense the great challenge that I am addressing here? This capacity of extending our field of care can only happen one person at a time. That means you and me. "Who have I cast out of my field of care?"

To widen our hearts to this degree requires great inner security, courage and love. It is not helpful to try and force ourselves into this perspective. Healing takes time and when our heart cannot forgive, it is important to respect our current limits. Still, to have the flexibility to change our perspective when we have a new insight, the courage to maintain our position when it is aligned with our deepest understanding, AND the ability to take in the perspective of people with whom we strongly disagree, are requirements for the future of humanity. My deep prayer is that this is our collective destiny.