

2017-01-16 Martin Luther King And Love

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SPEAKERS

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So Good evening. And today is Martin Luther King Day. And it's my favorite holiday in the United States. And I'm very fond of the teachings of Martin Luther King, his speeches and his actions and what he did, and there's a volume not enough, I can hear, okay. So, and I love the fact we, we come around once a year, at least to, to him and get to, at least I get to, I go back and look at some of his speeches and some of his writings, and I'm inevitably quite inspired by by it all. And what I've been thinking a lot about lately, is the topic of love, and the importance of it. And, in fact, that this was one of the Martin Luther King was one of the great messengers of love. And he, in some ways, staked or Steven sacrificed his life, dedicated to love. And a lot of his teachings emphasize it in wonderful ways. And one of the things that inspires me about his teachings is that I see them as being timeless, in fact, that he, many of his ideas, he was catalyzed by or inspired by Mahatma Gandhi, by the Buddha, by a variety of spiritual teachers from around around the world over various areas. And, in fact, some of the teachings on love, for example, that you find in the teachings of the Buddha are found in, in Martin Luther King. And in other places, you know, a lot of it comes from Christianity and the Bible and his understanding of Jesus. And, but I think of it as being timeless meaning that is something that's relevant for all of us all cultures at all times. Because it has to do with one of the core issues of how we live as human beings. And that is, do we live a life where we harm others? Or do we live a life where we care for others, so we benefit others. And I think those are timeless issues that we try to find our way with. And it's not easy to find that way. And I think everyone prefers to think of them as themselves as someone who cares for others and doesn't want to cause harm. But it's a complicated issue of being human beings and the complicated inner life and ways in which we try to find our safety or well being in this world. And so it's so you know, something to negotiate to find, to find love, how do we live from a place of love? How do we value what do we value it is important for us. The and it's been said, and that the times we most need love is when it's the least accessible. Or we most need love in times of greatest darkness, greatest challenge. And some people feel that the world is going into a time of great challenge. We're kind of like the we turned a corner of certain kind, and 2016 and about ready to turn another one or two who knows, we'll go further on that corner on Friday. And then off we go, not just here in this country, but around the world. And a lot of people are afraid people are angry. And but I don't hear many calls for love. And seems that we should never forget it. And certainly we remember Martin Luther King, I think we should I feel that it's a time to remember love. Because of that's what his message was a tremendous message of love. And what he did for this country is just one of the great things that happened here. I think of him as one of the great bright lights of the 20th century. And the fact that he died, was assassinated. In the midst of this tremendous transformation that he was partly a catalyst for makes me feel even more inspired. Oh, we should really listen to what he had to say. And so I wanted to start off for one minute, letting him say it in his own words.

I've also decided to stick with love. But I know that love is ultimately the own answer to mankind's problems. I'm going to talk about it everywhere I go. I know it isn't popular to talk about it in some circles today. I'm not talking about emotional Bosch when I talk about love. I'm talking about a strong demanding love. I have seen too much hate. I've seen too much hate on the faces of sheriffs in the south. I've seen hate on the faces of two minute Klansmen in two minutes, white citizens, counselors in the south to want to hate myself because every time I see it, I know that it does something to their faces and their personality. And I say to myself that hate is too great a burden too.

Could you hear that? Okay? that come through. Okay. So a little different tone than usually get around here. And that's nice.

One of the things that Martin Luther King was not afraid of talking about was power and having power. He didn't see power as being an evil thing or a bad thing to have. But he but for him, he wanted to bring love and power together. And as you know, he didn't think that love was something for the weak, but really for the strong. And he said about this, he said, What is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive. And that love without power is sentimental, and anemic. Power at its best, power, power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice. And justice, at its best is love correcting everything that stands against love. And this is what we must see, as we move on, you know, to find you know that his authority to speak about these things that are kind of astounding, you know, given what he was about, far from being the pious inject injunction of a utopian dreamer. This command is an absolute necessity for the survival of our civilization. Yes, it is love that will save our world in our civilization, love even for enemies, he gave a very famous speech called loving our enemies in 1957, and his church in Montgomery, Alabama. And he goes through various points about how to love your even your enemies. And the Buddha talked about this also, that the love for the Buddhist language is loving kindness, metta, that this is something that we don't just do for the people close to us and our friends and family. But it's something that we do for everyone we encounter, including our enemies. And that's a tall order. It's not easy to do that, of course. But that's the call, the call to love is to really develop ourselves and grow to this capacity. So he goes through this famous speech, he goes through a number of different points about this. And the first one is how do you go about loving your enemies. And the first thing he says is that Remember, the mindfulness movement hadn't come to the west yet, really. And I think 57 if it had, he would have maybe he used slightly different language. But he said, in order to love your enemies, you must begin by analyzing yourself. So that's pretty good. I think maybe nowadays you said, Be mindful of yourself. But analyzing is more probing. It's really kind of mindfulness, sometimes a little bit to playing or to kind of just just being aware with what is without really probing deeper and really getting to the bottom of what's going on for us. So maybe an hour analyzing itself. But the first thing he says, if you want to really love your enemy is to understand yourself really well. And then he talks about that for a while. But then what's great about Martin Luther King, he can scuzz he swung so easily between talking about the individual, and talking about our society, like they're almost there to where for him are integrated together. They weren't separate things. And so he talked about analyzing oneself. And then he talks about us for doing it as a nation as people. And he says this way to beacon to Americans. Democracy is the greatest form of government, to my mind that man has ever conceived. But the weakness is that we may never actually touch it. Isn't it true? That we have often taken necessities from the masses to give luxuries to the classes? Is it true that we've often in our democracy trampled over individuals and races, with the iron feet of oppression? Isn't it true that through our Western powers, we have perpetuated colonialism and imperialism. And all of these things must be taken under under consideration, as we look at Russia. That's kind of timely. We must face the fact that the rhythmic beat of the deep rumblings of discontent from Asia and Africa is at the bottom revolt revolt against imperialism and colonialism, perpetuated by Western civilization all these many years. The success and it goes on.

The success of communism in the world today is due to the failure of democracy to live up to the noble ideals and principles inherent in its system. And this is what Jesus means when he said, how is it that you can see the dust in your brother's eyes, and not see the pole in your own the beam in your own eye. And this is one of the great, this is one of the tragedies of human nature. So we begin to love our enemies and love those persons that hate us, whether in collective life or individual life, by looking at ourselves first. The second thing that individual must do in seeking to love his enemy, is to discover the element of good in his enemy. And every time you begin to hate that person, and think of hating that person, realize that there is some good there and look at those good points, which will overbalance the bad points. That's a great point too. This is another Buddhist principle is we are looking for the blessings looking for the good. And the people that we encounter. Part of the ways of developing love and Buddhism is execute exactly that is to look for that which is the Buddhist word is what's beautiful. In others see what's precious or valuable in people. And that's an art form. To learn to do that. It's not easy. But because sometimes we so quickly put people in categories, we look at them through our hurt through our anger, through all kinds of things that we have often myopic vision, when we look at people. So he Martin Luther King goes on to say, I've said to you on many occasions, that each of us is something of a schizophrenia ik personality. We're split up and divided against ourselves. And there's something of a civil war going on within all of our lives. There's a recount recalcitrant south of our soul revolting against the North of our soul. And there is this continual struggle within the very structure of every individual life. There's something within all of us that causes us to cry out. I see and approve the better things of life, but the evil things I do anyway. There's something within all of us that caused us to cry out with Plato, that the human personality is like a charioteer, with two headstrong horses, each wanting to go in different directions. Or the Apostle Paul, I see and approve the better things of life, but it's the evil things that I do. So somehow, the isness of our present nature is out of harmony with the eternal oddness that forever confronts us. And this simply means this, that within the best of us, there is some evil and within the worst of Us, there is some good. When we come to see this, we take a different attitude towards individuals, the person who hates you most, has some good in him. Even the nation that hates you the most has some good in it. Even the race that hates you the most, has some good in it. And when you come to the point, that you look in the face of every person, and see deep down within him, what religion calls the image of God, you begin to love him in spite of it. No matter what one does, you see God's image there, there's an element of goodness that he could never slough off, discover the element of good in your enemy. And as you seek to hate, and as you seek to hate him, find the center of goodness, and place your attention there. And you will take a new attitude. That's kind of nice, looking for the good in people, and tall order, with people are much more complicated than our simple judgments of them. And sometimes we can kind of spend time not only analyzing ourselves, but analyzing others, we see them in some way. And the advantage of that is that you can see the good in people, they respond better, generally, and it kind of brings that out. If we meet with hate with hate, it just perpetuates more. Here's another powerful statement about a way to love your enemy. When the opportunity presents itself, for you to defeat your enemy, that is a time which you must not do it.

There will come a time in many instances, when the person who hates you the most the person who has misused you the most, the person who is gossiped about you the most, the person who spread false rumors about you the most, there will come a time when you will have an opportunity to defeat that person. It might be in terms of recommendation for a job, it might be in terms of helping that person to make some move in life. That's the time you must do it. That's the meaning of love. In the final analysis of is not to sentimental something that we talk about. It's not merely an emotional something. Love is creative, understanding goodwill for all people. It's the refusal to defeat any individual. When you rise to the level of love, and its great beauty and power, you seek only to defeat evil systems, individuals who happen to be caught up in that system you love. And you you seek to defeat the

system. And then he goes through an SMS speech to talk about different reasons why you should love your enemy. One is this, that hate for hate on the intense intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. If I hit you, and you hit me, and I hit you back, and you hit me back and go on, you see that goes on forever. It never ends. Somewhere, somebody must have a little sense. And that's the strong person. The strong person is a person who can cut off the chain of hate the chain of evil. And that's the tragedy of hate. That does that it doesn't cut it off. It only intensifies the existence of hate and evil in the universe. Somebody must have religion enough, and morality enough to cut it off and inject within the very structure of the universe, the strong and powerful element of love. There's another reason why you should love your enemies. And that is because hate distorts the personality of the hater. We usually think of what hate does for the individual we hate or the individuals hated or the groups that we hate. But it is even more tragic. It is even even more ruinous and injurious to the individual who hates just begin hating somebody, somebody and you will begin to do irrational things. You can see straight when you hate, you can't walk straight when you hate. Your vision is distorted. There is nothing more tragic and to see an individual whose heart is filled with hate. He comes to the point that he becomes a pathological case. The person who hates you can stand up and see a person and that person can be beautiful and you will call them ugly for the person who hates the beautiful becomes ugly and the ugly becomes beautiful. For the person who hates the good becomes bad and the bad becomes good for the person who hates the true becomes false and the false becomes true. That's what hate does. The final reason for loving your enemy is this love has within it a redemptive power. That is, it continues to transform the other person. And there's power there that that eventually transforms individuals. Because if you hate your enemies, you have no way to redeem and to transform your enemies. But if you love your enemies, you will discover that it you will discover that the very root of love is the power of redemption. You just keep loving people and keep loving them, even though they're mistreating you. Here's the person who is a neighbor, and this person is doing something wrong to you and all that. Just keep being friendly to that person, keep loving them. Don't do anything to embarrass them, just keep loving them. And they can't stand it too long.

Oh, they react in many ways. In the beginning, they react with bitterness because they're mad because you love them like that. They react with guilt feelings. And sometimes they'll hate you a little more at that transition period. But just keep loving them. And by the power of your love, you will break down they will break down under the load. That's love. You see, it's redemptive. And that is why Jesus says love. There's something about love that builds up and is creative. There's something about hate the tears down is destructive. So Love your enemies. And then finally, in this speech, he gives three ways that individuals who are oppressed can deal with their oppression. And this is a very important that he kind of he ends this speech because one of the common criticisms of this kind of emphasis in love and loving your enemy is that oppression will continue the oppressor won't really succumb to love or break down to love and love and return or something. So he gives three ways individuals can deal with being oppressed. So the first which is to rise up against their oppressors with physical violence and corroding hatred. But oh, this isn't the way for the danger. And the weakness of this method is its futility. Violence creates many more social problems than it solves. And I've said in so many instances, for color people all over the I've said so many times for color people all over the world struggling for freedom, that if they succumb to the temptation of using violence in their struggle, unborn generations will be recipients of a long and desolate night of bitterness. And our chief legacy to the future will be an endless rain of meaningless chaos. Violence isn't the way another way of dealing with oppression is to acquiesce to it, and give into it to resign oneself to the oppression. Some people do that. There's another way. And third way and this is the one that he champions. And that is to organize mass nonviolent resistance based on the principle of love. It seems to me that this is the only way as our eyes look to the future. As you look out across the years and across the generations, let us develop and move right here. We must discover the power of love, that power, the redemptive power of love. No, and when we discover that we will be

and when we discover that we will be able to make this old world and new world we will be able to make people better. Love is the only way. So this morning, as I look into your eyes, into the eyes of all my brothers and sisters in Alabama and all over America and over the world. I say to you, I love you. I would rather die than hate you. And I'm foolish enough to believe that through the power of this love somewhere. People have the most recalcitrant bent will be transformed.

There's a famous photograph. Maybe it's John Lewis news these days. visiting us George Wallace and George Wallace is not spittle, George Wallace was one of the one of the prominent racists in Alabama civil rights time. And they met in the hospital. So the power of love, and what many people look to for Buddhism, maybe the strength of Buddhism is not these kinds of ideas in some ways these ideas are, have more of a spark and more speak to the human conditions in some ways, then, then Buddhism does, Buddhism sometimes is a little bit not focused enough on the issues of social justice and the traditional teachings. And you don't go back to the Buddha to find really strong teachings about how to deal with oppression and nonviolent civil disobedience and such things. So I think it's a great contribution for Buddhists to encounter teachings like this. But what Buddha's was strengthened Buddhism is practices that can help us to develop self understanding in a very deep way. So we really understand what's going on in all the corners of our hearts. So we have the skills and the ability to notice when we have hostility or anger or bias, and somehow we can find another way to live with it, that doesn't, doesn't spill out and cause harm into the world. We learn to recognize what's beautiful in ourselves. So we can come in and tap into that more often. And so that can be the basis for how we live in the world and act in the world. As we do the practices of Buddhism, meditation, mindfulness, concentration, loving kindness practices, and we discover depths of beauty and men love within ourselves, we develop the eyes, where we can see it in other people more than Martin Luther King talked about, everyone has good in them, but the art is learning to see it. If we can do these deep, contemplative practices that Buddhism has to offer, it'll give you much better eyes, you'll recognize it in people, when they don't recognize it in themselves, you'll see that spark of divinity, that he would call it maybe the image of God. And so Buddhism has these practices, and a systematic approach of practicing and being mindful from oneself. And also has practices for developing Love, Love doesn't have to be an accident, you know, just wait until just, you know, it just happens. But there's ways of developing loving kindness, metta, compassion, sympathetic joy, as a way of developing these in a ways that has a certain purity to it. And that is not tied up in our wants, or desires, or self centeredness, where the popular idea of love often is, and so to kind of have have regular practice, or systematic practices, we really kind of are exploring and developing our love purifying our love clarifying what it is for us, so that we can tap into it at a moment's notice. so that it becomes a regular companion in our lives. And it occurs to us regularly. Oh, yeah, love. But it'd be nice to be reminded every hour. So you don't kind of forget, so that when you're with someone who's challenging, oh, yeah, there's that love thing. No, no, this is the wrong time. Not now. You know, you know, I, you know, I'll just be taking advantage of you know, I, this is what I have to be strong and firm. I can't do love now, as if love doesn't. Love can't be firm and strong. It can.

In fact, that's what Martin Luther King is saying. Then if you listen to his speeches, they're strong speeches, this these are these other. This is a talk of a man who is powerful. And it's a power that I think is quite inspiring. So how can we become powerful for ourselves for the world we live in? The power that's infused with love power, that is love of that is power, so that when we're faced with challenges, we won't say, Oh, we can't do that because it's weak. I can't do that, because, you know, I'll be taken advantage of. But in fact, it's the opposite. If you succumb to hate and hostility, then you've been taken advantage of, then you're not in control of yourself, then then you've succumb to the conditions around you, that has triggered you. And I think that it's you know, normal enough to get angry, normal enough to be hostile and angry and all that. I thought a matter of not Having these things,

but it's a matter of learning how to be with them in a wise way, learning how to not to be caught in the grip of them. But rather, to learn how to keep the hand open. So the soft, open hand of love can be how we meet them meet the world. But affirm love, strong love. And I don't, I don't know the, you know, the full Christian biblical meanings of this expression, I don't know so much about Christianity. So I apologize if I probably get it wrong, but I'll use this as a, just as a teaching, the idea of turning the other cheek. So it probably makes a lot of sense in the context to do I think it's kind of inspiring teaching in its own way. But the Buddhist kind of parallel to that is you never turn an offer the other cheek, what you do is you look the person right in the eye. So you have the ability in the presence to stay put, stay calm, stay strong. And you look, and you say, maybe say nothing, saying, You can't do that. But you don't do it with hate, but you do with love. You don't you don't walk away, you don't hide. You don't give up, you don't give in. But you hold your ground. And you look. And it's powerful to do that when someone has to look you in the eye. You know, something happens, it's very different. So I'll end with two stories that I heard from the 1960s people who were there. One is Blanche Hartman, who was the Abbess of San Francisco Zen Center. And I think there was probably an anti-Vietnam War protest at San Francisco State University. And so there were all these protesters, and there were all these police officers in riot gear. And so they were kind of, you know, probably somewhat antagonistic kind of thing. And she was kind of some point in the protest, she was pushed up against the line of these police officers and rightcare. So she was like, right up against a face to face. And they looked each other in the eye. And when she looked into his eye, something in her change forever, that maybe for the better, she saw him as a person or saw some depth, she saw something that, you know, changed her. And she would tell that story over and over again to how she was transformed by that kind of seeing. I don't know if she's changed the police officer. But she, you know, she was changed by seeing into the humanity of another person in deep way. And it's not easy to be willing to kind of really stay present and look someone deeply and see the depth of their humanity. Many people will shy away and turn away. And it's frightening to get to know people that intimately. So that we see how beautiful they are. The other story was someone on a retreat, that was teachers teacher for the retreat. And this person told me that she went down to the south, the white person went down to the south, from the north, I guess, and would stand on a street corner in protest of segregation and the horrible prejudices and they were going on in the south. And so they were seeing one of their kind of people protesting and there's a group of people that stand in the corner and protest. And then they were standing there and these young white men showed up in a pickup truck.

Guess racist probably must have been. And they jumped out of the pickup truck stopped and jumped out and started beating up the protesters who are on the sidewalk. The next day, those protesters went stood in the same on the same sidewalk, same place. The next day, the same thing, same thing happened. The same guy showed up, jumped out of the truck and beat them up. So what do you do? The next day, you go back on the same sidewalk. So this is the kind of this is the kind of spirit that Martin Luther King was teaching people to do. I mean, it takes a lot of courage. It takes a lot of strength, and a lot of dedication to the wisdom of meeting the oppressor that way, and willing to sacrifice willing to die even because of this higher calling that that seems so important. So when that person told me Well, the third day came, and they were standing there, and the same thing happened. These guys jumped out of the truck. And this guy towered over her, and he lifted up his fist and looked down at her and was about to hit her and their eyes met. And he said to her, What in the world are you doing? And then they had a conversation. And that was the end of the fighting, and being beat up. So I don't know how much he was changed. But he was changed enough to stop what he was doing, and to and to kind of reconsider and be started conversation. Is that ridiculous? To do that, might you might feel it's ridiculous for you. But I'm so glad there's someone who's willing to do that, in this world, someone is willing to even sacrifice their lives. There are we don't doubt we don't, we don't say that many of us, some of us don't have been our society sometimes. You know, will will see that as being a weakness,

we see that as being ridiculous to sacrifice your life, your well being in that kind of way. But we don't see it the same way. For a young man or a woman who goes off as a soldier, to another country to fight and be blown up or to fight there, there's a very different kind of attitude there, about the danger, what's going on there, it might be even more risky to go fight with a gun, than to stand the sidewalk and get beat up. Who's the more brave soldier who's the one who's going to create more or less thing good in the world? I've told that story a number of times about the sidewalk. I like to tell it because what those people did, then still lives. 50 some years later, and you know, it still influences me affects me and maybe it'll kill us to keep going on. There are examples like this. So the power of love. Martin Luther King was a messenger of love, talked about it repeatedly the importance of it, he lived it the best he could I think and the Martin Luther King Day, one of the great things you can do is to really reflect deeply about what's your relationship to love? What's your understanding of it? What's the depth in your capacity for love of others? Not just the people that you love romantically. But the people who, you know, who are in your neighborhood, in your communities and beyond your communities around the globe? Is there some kind of universal love loving kindness? goodwill, where you can extend yourself in goodwill to everyone that you encounter? Is there that kind of love in you? Is there interest in it? We're going to look like? Have you ever been the recipient of it? What's the value you have it? how easily you dismiss it? How easily do you forget about it? How easily do you think there are more important things that so you Don't you know that? Would that push push this in the shadow? I think all these questions are powerful questions. And if you explore those questions really deeply for yourself, then I think this has been a good holiday. So thank you all very much. So before we end there's a few people here who were probably adults or older children. In the civil rights time.

I think Didn't you see Martin Luther King? Right, America you saw? Yeah, you want to tell us what you what you use the mic. If you don't mind. You don't want to do it. You were pretty young. So one person here who? Anybody else? Yes. Don't tell us.

I was 13 or 14 years old, and a Quaker kid from Philadelphia. And in our Quaker meeting, my mother's first cousin was going to go on a march on Washington. And she wanted someone to go with her so I volunteers.

not really knowing

what I was about to see. And I remember going down in the bus and on the interstate, going through Maryland. They're young men on the bridges over the interstate throwing eggs at the buses. And that was a little strange. That was the most violent violence that I saw in that experience, but the day on the wall,

listening to that speech

was transformative in my life.

Thank you. Anybody else? Yes. Can you pick the mic up there on the stage?

I was a child. And I lived the experience. I was in fifth grade when Martin Luther King was assassinated. The whole school shut down.

Everyone cried.

I was there when the protesters came from Chicago. I lived in Cincinnati at the time, they would come down from Chicago to gather us all, as we would march through the streets. And we were protesting, the violence. We had curfews, it was like living in another land. It still makes me tremble to think about it. So

I'm glad to see that his legacy lives on.

Thank you.

So I think that we don't know when we're, we don't know when we're going to be called on in this world of ours, but it's good to be ready with your love. Strong love, powerful love that can stand up and be a champion for justice, social justice. And I'm sure that you don't have to wait too long to receive that call, because I think it's already here. So thank you all.