



Amazing grace -- We are changing the world

by Irene Kai Monday, July 27th 2020

We are going through a collective awakening amid a pandemic and protests against racism.

Uncertainty is the new way of life with upheavals in an unprecedented magnitude on all fronts. We are now forced to face the history of our country to understand what is happening on our streets and in our homes.

How do we view our neighbors and co-workers? Do we judge them out of habit, or do we see them beyond the illusion of stereotypes? When we are less thoughtful and operate on autopilot, our actions stem from learned experiences, which were acceptable in our own environment, which we learned from birth.

Culture is defined as shared patterns of behaviors and interactions, cognitive constructs, and understanding that are learned by socialization. The culture of racism in our country was cultivated for over 400 years. Changing our current culture takes all of us.

The United States is founded on the foundation of exploitation and annihilation of the Native American from the colonization by Europeans that settled in America. The massive slaughtering of the Native Americans began in 1610. The European settlers aggressively dominated the new territories with their own rules by force while exploiting and enslaving non-Europeans to amass wealth.

The first slave ship from Africa landed on the North American soil in 1619, the African slaves were sold and traded as laborers and owned by the colonist for generations.

In 1850, the Chinese were imported for cheap labor to build the transcontinental railroads and mine for gold. Once the railroads were built and when the Chinese began building their own enterprises, they were pushed out and were driven underground. The Chinese Exclusion Act was written into law in 1882, the only piece of legislation barring migrants entering this country purely based on race. The Japanese Internment Camps were set up in 1942, the mass incarceration of Japanese living in this country during World War II, many of

them American citizens. To this day, we can find wealthy white exclusive neighborhoods in all American cities by keeping the lower class — the non-white Americans out.

Throughout American history, Americans of European descent keep Americans of other heritages separated from them by design and by laws that are written to bar non-white citizens from having the same opportunity in education and economic advancement. The exploitation and enslavement of non-white Americans are still very much alive today but in different forms.

In 1772, an English slave trader named John Newton was on one of his voyages to transport slaves from Africa and encountered a violent storm. His vessel was battered so severely that he called out to God for mercy. He had an awakening, became an Anglican clergyman and wrote the hymn "Amazing Grace." He led a movement to abolish slave trade in 1788. The hymn became the most influential and popular song in America.

The message is that forgiveness and redemption are possible regardless of sins committed: "I once was lost, but now am found, was blind, but now I see. ..." The inspired moment and self-realization are the most powerful motivation to activate change.

I am an immigrant. I came to New York Chinatown when I was 15, not speaking English, my sole focus was to learn the new language and culture, go to school and just to survive.

I was given a benefit concert ticket to Madison Square Garden in 1971, I had no idea what it was about, but I went. John Lennon and Yoko Ono came on stage and he sang "Imagine." "... Imagine all the people, living all in peace. I hope someday you will join us, and the world will be as one."

The meaning of the words seared into my being. It changed my life. My orientation to the world no longer based only on survival, I see myself as a part of one world. In every situation I find myself facing, I gauge the situation with the principle of the Golden Rule.

Compassion, justice, and equality take precedence. We are one. When we encounter the moment of inspiration and awakening, the impulse that acutely changes our view, seize the moment and begin the journey of our higher calling. Together, we are changing the world to create a culture of peace. It takes all of us.

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