



An offer of radical inclusion

By Julie Akins, November 30, 2020

"Suffering can be fortunate, because without it there is no possibility for maturation."

— *Roshi Joan Halifax*

It's been a rough ride. We've been hit with incredibly divisive politics, a pandemic and the devastating impacts of climate change as expressed through the rapidly moving Alameda fire, which burned large swaths of our neighboring communities, leaving thousands without homes.

Driving by the charred remains of homes and cars on Highway 99, seeing the burned toys in yards that once provided safety for children, reminds us just how fragile we all really are.

But, as Roshi Halifax points out, suffering brings with it the gift of maturity. We have the opportunity to reach out and help, we have the chance to realize that we are strong enough to recover and bring others with us, we are mature enough to know that what we hold in common is greater than what separates us.

In this knowledge, we will be resilient.

We will find our way back from the hurt in this contentious time to our underlying goodness. We will find our higher purpose through determination to continue when it's difficult. We will arrive at maturity by being present everyday with an open heart and willingness.

A person is what they do repeatedly. So each day we are called to understand, to listen, to speak truth and to be open to the rewards that arrive for those who wait.

Patience attains all.

Give your friends and family time to recover and find their ease again. If you feel you are on the “winning team,” do not gloat, it takes everyone to make a community great. If you feel you “lost” in the political battle, take heart, your voice can and will still be heard.

If you struggle with the tangible loss of home or security — we as a community must meet you where you are and offer not platitudes, not advice, but a warm bed, a steady roof and good food to eat. Until we are willing and ready to provide the basics to our community members we cannot expect to truly heal.

This is what peace means to me. It is doing what needs to be done in that precise moment of hearing the call. When your heart is moved to offer warm food to a cold person, listen to that yearning. You are up to the task, you need not know everything to do something. Our communities are in need of all of us doing all we can.

I will ask you as your mayor-elect what you need and I will listen. Listening is an act of radical inclusion. Let's offer this to each other. And let's offer unconditional positive regard. After all, as Ram Dass says, we are walking each other home.

Peace is in the doing. Let's do peace together. Let's be peace as we go about healing our communities.

Will you join me?

Julie Akins is mayor-elect of Ashland. Akins is a co-founder of The Truth and Conciliation Council, Skoolie Home Foundation and has served numerous social justice organizations in Southern Oregon. She remains a freelance video storyteller and writer.