

The Kornitzer Method

A sermon by Rev. Jackie Clement

Delivered at the Unitarian Universalist Church in Wakefield, MA

April 13, 2008

Good Morning. If you had a chance to glance at the sign on your way in this morning you know that I will be addressing the subject of the Kornitzer Method. No, we will not be learning a new time management system complete with three ring binder, colored tabs and a revolutionary alphanumeric system of prioritization. And, no, we will not be considering a new form of Pilates. And, OK, I did kind of make it up myself. That is, I made up the name. I didn't make up the method.

The Kornitzer Method is how I think about the many things my colleague and friend Betty Kornitzer taught me. Betty is the minister of the UU congregation in South County, RI, and I was lucky enough to study with Betty for several years while preparing for the ministry. I say "lucky" because what that girl doesn't know about love hasn't yet been invented. When it comes to love, Betty could have stood proudly with Gandhi, with Mother Teresa, with Martin Luther King. She could have matched Jesus, the Buddha, and the bodhisattvas word for word, love for love.

Now don't let this give you the impression that Betty is some otherworldly sainted figure. She's not. She's a fallible, struggling, confused and conflicted human being just like the rest of us. But Betty is kind and thoughtful and generous and all the things we like people in general to be, because she has something special, because she sees the value of one thing, because she puts one thing ahead of all others, because Betty knows about love—that it is the single most important thing in her life, in anyone's life. She doesn't just see it, she knows it; she works at it; she makes it a reality in her life.

Betty's own full joyous, grieving, struggling and celebrating humanity makes what she has taught me all the more powerful in my life. I have had few illusions of ever being Mother Teresa or emulating the loving power of the Dalai Lama but Betty's immediacy, her humanity and her ability to let love prevail in the midst of all life's messiness says to me that I can do it too.

I'll never be like Betty, but I can, in moments at least, hold on to the things she taught me. I say things because there are shades of meaning and application, but it is essentially one single thing—love, the most important thing in the world, *is* possible. Love is possible even when you are mean and hurting and stingy. Love is possible when you are angry and damaged and in conflict. Love is possible when you are happy and singing and joyful. Love is possible when you are in despair, when you are in pain, when you are annoyed to your last molecule. Love *is* possible.

You have to find it in yourself and you have to give it to others. And here's the thing Betty said to me, but I only truly understood when I tried it out for myself—when you give love to others, you get it back. Now, that is not a revolutionary teaching. Anyone

who hasn't heard a pop song that assures you that "you gotta give love to find love" hasn't been in an elevator or a supermarket in the last 30 years. And we've all experienced relationships where we loved someone else as a friend or as family or as a partner and it was easy and joyful. But that's not the love that Betty taught me about. She taught me about love when it hard to come by. The love that is possible when you are hurting or angry or fearful is another level of difficulty all together. I don't always achieve it, and frankly, I often forget to even try in the heat of things, but when I do, it's like the miracles they wrote of in olde. I swear, it can shift the entire world when I am able to step out of a conflict and out of my ego and my need to be right and just *love*. It changes everything. It changes most fundamentally my own perception of whatever problem is going on. But it also changes the perception of others I'm in the struggle with. After all, we can sense when someone loves us, and even when we are in fundamental opposition on some issue, love can carry us through.

The first time I put the Kornitzer Method into action when I was angry and in conflict with someone it was like a gate opened. Honestly, the entire situation changed in a moment. And it seemed to me that the change went beyond my own perception and my own heart. The love I put into the world met another person's heart and changed their perception, too.

Try it some time and see if it doesn't make a difference. Step out of the need to be right or the need for self-justification, the need to win, and just love someone who is not being any too lovable. It may not solve the issue; it probably won't. But it will make you much more likely to resolve the issue because the basis has sifted from disagreement to love.

The love may last for only moments; you may have to find it over and over again, but its doable when we can let go of the ego that overshadows that true core of self that holds not only love, but divine presence.

Now, don't get the idea that this idea of returning love for conflict immediately throws you into a position of powerlessness. That's one thing I want to stress. This love is not devoid of power, but indeed comes from a deep core of personal power that lets you choose love over more destructive and less constructive options. Martin Luther King said that, "what is needed is a realization that power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic. Power at its best is love implementing the demands of justice, and justice at its best is power correcting everything that stands against love."

We would hardly say that the work that Martin Luther King undertook was without power. It had an immense impact on the world, and indeed his work was so powerful and threatening to some that they felt he could not be allowed to live and continue that work. But everything King did was based in a deep, deep sense, a *profound* sense, of love, in his adherence to the idea of agape, love for all our fellow beings not based on their actions or their values, but on their existence as children of God as King saw them. On their inherent worth and dignity as we might voice it.

King's stand, as I believe all stands of peaceful resistance, came from two things—from power and from love. Dr. King and his co-workers did not hold a position of power in the world. Indeed, it is almost the definition of the kind of peaceful resistance he followed that you are in the position of the oppressed rather than in the position of power. But the power that Dr. King had, and that I believe is necessary to every movement of peaceful resistance and change, is a power grounded in coming from a position of justice, the knowledge that your cause is just, that you stand on solid moral ground. But as Dr. King said, that power unmitigated by love is no more than tyranny.

I've used Dr. King and the Civil Rights Movement as the example here, but there have been many successful movements where those in a just position spoke truth to those in a controlling position and were ultimately borne out. The method has been known as nonviolent resistance, nonviolent action, civil disobedience, passive resistance and peaceful resistance. The techniques have included boycotts, picketing, protest music and art, consciousness raising, political action, and more. But the fundamentals remain the same. Power: speaking from a position of justice. And love: acting from a position of concern.

Sometimes the acts may seem so symbolic as to be meaningless or ineffective. Congress didn't call a halt to the war in Iraq because I stood on the Andover Newton campus holding a candle from 4 to 4:30 every Thursday one spring. Anne Lamott, in the words for the meditation, declared her own belief that a small town march wouldn't change anything. But it did. It changed her own heart. And that's no small thing. Because one heart never stands alone.

At the Annual Meeting on Wednesday Diane gave me a copy of Liz Gilbert's memoir *Eat, Pray Love*, and I haven't been able to put it down since. There's a scene where Liz writes a petition to God to intervene in her ugly, messy divorce. She writes to God:

I recognize that you are busy with wars and tragedies and much larger conflicts than the ongoing dispute of one dysfunctional couple. But it is my understanding that the health of the planet is affected by the health of every individual on it. As long as even two souls are locked in conflict, the whole of the world is contaminated by it. Similarly, if even one or two souls can be free from discord, this will increase the general health of the whole world, the way a few healthy cells in a body can increase the general health of that body.

As Anne Lamott and Elizabeth Gilbert both point out it does make a difference when we can lessen the conflict in the world even within ourselves. It does make a difference when we bring attention to injustice. It does make a difference when we act to change the hearts of those in power. It makes a difference when we use our own power in love. Gandhi's march to the sea to make salt rather than paying the government's salt tax didn't bankrupt an empire, but it did inspire a country of people to resistance of foreign occupation. A boycott of municipal buses in Montgomery, Alabama didn't burn a city to the ground, but it did spark a fire that changed the country. Henry David Thoreau's essay

on civil disobedience didn't topple the American government or end slavery, but it inspired a few folks named Mohandas Gandhi and Martin Luther King, Jr.

I am conscious as I speak that I keep repeating but a few examples in a very large canon of peaceful resistance movements, so I need to open it up and acknowledge that many more issues and times and people have been touched by the power of peaceful resistance and nonviolent action.

My favorite example for the sheer size and audacity of it was the Danish resistance to the Nazis in World War II. When the Wehrmacht invaded Denmark in 1940 the Danish government realized that only loss of life would result from violent opposition, so they officially cooperated with Germany. In reality, however, the Danes did everything they could to stop the German war engine by slowing manufacturing production even to a standstill, by turning a blind eye to military saboteurs, by setting up such a bureaucratic quagmire that no German order could be acted on, and by consistently and loudly celebrating Danish heritage as a way of opposing tyranny.

I am sure you all have knowledge and respect for other movements that have peacefully changed the world. And I would like to ask you now to name a movement that you know of, that you participated in or that you admired.

[Time for Sharing]

American Revolution (1765 to early 1775):

- Tax Resistance.
- Boycotts of British imports.
- Petitions to the King and Parliament.
- Publication of Pamphlets and Newspapers.

Anti-apartheid movement in South Africa

- began as nonviolent action

Solidarity movement in communist Poland

- Began as trade union
- resulted in semi-free elections

Chicano Civil Rights Movement in US

Tiananmen Square

Plowshares Movement

- 1980s US
- against nuclear proliferation

Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia

- 1968

Buddhist monks in Myanmar

- Sept 2007
- Protesting repressive military regime

Olympic protests

- China's repression of Tibet
- Human rights violations

I think all these examples stand as markers, as reminders, and as inspirations to us who need to oppose and resist the actions of governments and groups in the world today. May they give you courage and guidance. May they inspire and inform all who come after. But may we not lose sight of the Kornitzer Method even within the confines of our own circle, our own homes. May we know that love *is* possible, that love will change the world. But that love without power is no more a solution than power without love.

May you know love. May you stand in power. May you live in justice.

Blessed be. Namaste.

© 2008 Jacqueline R. Clement, all rights reserved