



A Serious Guide to
REMAKING
the WORLD

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SOME YEARS AGO my daughter, then aged five, announced with satisfaction that her primary school class had decided to save the world. We all get that call at some point, usually before the age of 26. Perhaps we thought we would feed the starving, end war, save the environment. Even devote our lives to God.

There is a knock at the door of our imagination and we usually open it just enough to glimpse amazing and alarming possibilities for our lives. It always involves the invitation to serve the world and a purpose bigger than ourselves, but the door is most times quickly shut



and the vision lost, mothered, smothered out of us in the interests of career, security and the many temptations to self-interest.

At various times in their lives some people revisit that longing to have a calling more than a job. And during the proverbial mid-life crisis, it makes itself uncomfortably felt, when we ask ourselves yet again, 'What is life really all about?'

Mother Teresa referred to the call within a call. There is the universal call, which is common to everyone, and the specific call that beckons to each one's uniqueness.

Someone once commented that we find our unique calling at that place where our gifts and passion intersect with the world's needs. Abraham Joshua Heschel, Polish theologian and philosopher, wrote in *Who is Man?*:

'Over and above personal problems, there is an objective challenge to overcome inequity, injustice, helplessness, suffering, carelessness, oppression.

'Over and above the din of desires there is a calling, a demanding, a waiting, and an expectation. There is a question that follows me wherever I turn. What is expected of me? What is demanded of me?

'This is the most important experience in the life of every human being: something is asked of me. Every human being has had a moment in which they sensed a mysterious waiting for them. Meaning is found in responding to the demand....'

Frank Buchman, initiator of the life changing movement MRA, now Initiatives of Change, summed up that response in four steps: Change — start with yourself. Then, engage others — in the process of personal and social transformation. Next, with them, create answers for the community, and lastly, give hope to humanity. And all at the same time of course. He actually used slightly different words since he was speaking to an audience in the 1930s, but the meaning was the same.

Buchman's four steps may not be the political, philosophical and economic steps to the answers that we need in the world, but they precede and accompany them-or at least they should, if integrity is to be at the heart of the process. Ahh, integrity— that elusive key. 'Sometimes it is easier to serve humanity than it is to be good tempered at the breakfast table,' wrote Australian author Stephanie Dowrick.

STARTING WITH YOURSELF



DAG HAMMARSKJÖLD, the late UN Secretary General, once wrote, 'I don't know Who - or What - put the question, I don't know when it was put. I don't even remember answering. But at some moment I did answer "Yes" to Someone - or Something - and from that hour I was certain that existence is meaningful and that, therefore, my life, in self-surrender, has a goal.'

If, like Hammarskjöld, we have heard the call to serve a purpose greater than ourselves and said 'Yes' to being part of remaking the world, then 'change your self' is the logical, initial response. All real change starts in the heart and life of the individual. This self is the small 's' self, the ego self, and the change process is designed to liberate us to become our true Self, in partnership with Truth and God. We are not only human beings, we are also human becomings.

So what sort of change? Mostly it is a disempowering of destructive and limiting motives and relationships. We are caged by the cage we have made. We need to be set free from bitterness, fear and the anguished darkness that has led us into our many addictions. So we identify what has power in our lives. And we choose instead to empower compassion, selflessness, trust and forgiveness. Sometimes it is painful surgery that is needed: apology, forgiveness, walking away.... Sometimes it is a gentle healing of the hurts of the past, the discovery of love and acceptance.



Radical change, daily change, evolving change.

For me the first experience of radical change came when I was about to set off for India aged 21. Full of a sense of mission to spread a message of peace and harmony, I was smitten with a sudden disquiet about my qualifications for the job. I asked the Indian leader of the expedition what I could contribute. 'Come with clean hands,' he said, 'and a clean heart, and come and teach people how to listen to that still small voice of truth that speaks in every heart.'

I was left with an uncomfortable and overwhelming awareness of my own integrity gap. I talked peace but was at war with my own father. Also I was far from having clean hands (both a liar and a thief!) and was not in the habit of listening to that inner voice of truth, or God, as I understood it to be.

So I listened, and with alarming clarity realised that even if my father was 99 per cent wrong, my bitterness was my choice and I should apologize for that. It took some weeks to pluck up the courage, but amongst my tears and my inarticulate request for forgiveness, I began to see him differently and my bitterness melted. Some years later he apologized to me for the hurts of the past. We had a rich friendship from then on.

Since then I have attempted to choose daily change as a way of life, daily deconstructing the cage that, unchecked, reasserts itself through the quick lies and self-deception, meanness of spirit, greed and the jealousies that so easily take control.



Then there is evolving change and healing, which have occurred at deeper levels of my life over the years. This has impacted on my profounder sense of identity, the more hidden experiences and choices which have coloured my relationships and ways of being. A growing awareness and trust keep me permanently on the inner, spiritual journey, in eager anticipation of each new revelation.

For me, as a follower of Jesus Christ, this has been nurtured through my relationship with him and study of both his teachings and those of many different religious traditions. If our lives are not reflective they will be reactive. Buddhists talk about ‘mindfulness’: a quality of being fully present in the ‘is’ and the ‘now’.

A set of coordinates, or friendly guides, can help in this personal freedom struggle.

Absolute honesty; that searchlight that reveals the truth about myself to myself. In its light I face my shame and name my shadows.

Absolute purity; freedom, of course, from lust and sexual abuse in all its forms, but also a quality of single-mindedness, cleanliness and non-attachment. The freedom to love without demanding anything in return.

Absolute unselfishness; the art of lateral living, with a mind and a heart for others. If we are to make poverty history, we will need to make greed unacceptable.

And all these three principles as prerequisites for absolute, unconditional love, the ultimate answer and the fundamental need of every person and of Earth itself. Love - that quality of compassionate and visionary acceptance that elicits the best from one another. 'Love is not a feeling, it's an act of the will' was a chorus I used to sing.

These values are all accompanied by absolute grace, that Divine understanding which makes up for our shortfall, that recognises we can't do it alone. Our transformation requires our full attention and participation, and then the Divine touch.

And then there is the practice of inner listening to that 'still, small voice' as practiced over centuries by the likes of Elijah and Lao Tse; Buddha, Jesus and Mohammed; Gandhi and Mother Teresa. It is a privilege to be employed and enjoyed by all. It speaks of connection, correction and direction. Connection – with the Divine as we understand it, the Almighty, the Source. This may happen for you through meditation, through the reading of scriptures or other inspirational material, through an encounter with nature, with suffering or joy. Correction – of an attitude or a relationship, a misunderstanding or a bad habit. This may involve a letting go, a moment of liberation as ego is faced and humbled. And direction – that whisper that reveals the next step, that sheds light on an entangled situation, that gives insight into care for another.

This voice can be recognized by its gentle clarity, its conformance to those four principles already mentioned enhance our discernment of whether what we are hearing comes from our false self or from God. 'The wisdom that comes from above is first of all pure, then peace-loving, considerate and full of mercy, without bias or hypocrisy,' wrote Saint James. The other voices that speak in my heart I also know well, voices that whine and complain and demand.

ENGAGING OTHERS

AS MAHATMA GANDHI said, 'Be the change you want to see in the world.' This is a radical agenda. When I write about 'remaking the world', I do so in the context of my belief that there is a Divine intention behind creation, both loving and dynamic. Remaking the world is about embracing that original vision and the transformation it will require of us all.

It means responding to the call, both personally and collectively, to create a new culture which replaces that of greed and growth, conquest and control, expansion and exclusion with one where justice, compassion, integrity and faith inform the doing and being of nations. Where forgiveness and generosity are the order of the day and no one starves because of another's greed or suffers because of another's lust or is rejected because of another's fear.

It means living as if the other person really mattered: being the change we want to see in the world. And it expects us to give everything to it. A friend of mine found himself sitting next to Mother Teresa on a flight. She told him, 'Do not ask young people to give their weekends, ask them to give their lives.'

So how do we ask another person to give their life? How do we engage others in this outrageous venture?

Every single encounter holds the potential for mutual transformation. Whether we like it or not, we have an impact on other people the entire time, for better or worse. In engaging others to become part of remaking the world we are becoming more intentional about that impact.

Krishnadas Shah was a young teacher when he joined Mahatma Gandhi at a Quit India Rally. He volunteered to keep the toilets clean at the site. Later Gandhi asked to meet him and asked him whether he would give the rest of his life to the digging of hygienic toilets through the villages of India. 'But I have a wife and family,' he replied. 'Can you start tomorrow?' responded Gandhi. And 40 years later, an old man when I met him, he was still doing it. And as far as I know his wife and family were right with him.

Many people are advocates of change, but only those involved in the process of personal transformation themselves can be agents of a change of heart. It's like the measles. You can talk about measles but you cannot actually give the other person measles unless you have them yourself!

The start is to create a hospitable space in our heart, home or schedule, where friendship and trust can be



built. Our caring and the humble and honest sharing of our own change journey, wherever it's at, can open the door to give a glimpse of new possibilities to the other person and be an invitation for their sharing in return. Asking the right questions, being willing to learn, and listening, for hours if need be, are primary tools of engagement. Sometimes the global context needs to be explored to highlight the relevance of personal change.

Transformation begins when any person faces, names and disempowers the destructive habits and attitudes that have control in their life. Healing and liberation follow as love and forgiveness are empowered instead and new relationships are built. Agents of change are created when that new life and liberation are put at the service of the community in teamwork with others.

A young African friend found this freedom when he was reconciled with his father and paid back money he

had cheated from the company where he worked. He is now on the cutting edge of an anti-corruption campaign across Africa and engaging other young people in it with him.

So what blocks us from engaging people in this way? I find that fear often holds me back.

The fear of rejection, of looking stupid, of having nothing intelligent to contribute.

The fear that I do not have the right to tell another how to live. (Of course, I don't, but I am gifted with friendship to offer and hope to share. And the other person is free to engage or not.)

The fear that my hypocrisy will be shown up. The fear of manipulation and mind control, of getting out of my depth.

These and many others. And, yes, they may happen. I may get hurt or even hurt others. I do make mistakes, but if my motive is love and I am honest with myself, fear loses its power and change and forgiveness are always possible.

And if at the same time I practice inner listening, in silence, to the voice of love and truth, seeking the wisdom of God, with no defences or pretences, I open myself to be corrected and led.

And I can engage with others in this universal practice which underlies all the work of transformation. The most effective tool of engagement is together to practice this tradition of listening to the inner voice in silence. It is the untapped reservoir of wisdom, of direction, the 'mother tongue of the universe'. Then together we can engage in a radical remaking.

CREATING ANSWERS



THERE IS no limit to what we can achieve if we don't mind who gets the credit.' I read that on a poster somewhere and began to dream of what it would mean in international diplomacy, in politics, in business, in colleges, in research institutes, in my own work, in my own life....

We have looked at the moral and spiritual prerequisites for effective social action — and not only prerequisites but accompaniments as we get down to answering the injustices, transforming the conflicts and creating the new working models that will feed, house and give hope to humanity.

The old debate about whether it is better to do the right thing for the wrong motive or the wrong thing for the right motive can be superseded by doing the right thing for the right motive! Creating answers to social problems requires at least three things: radical self honesty, divine inspiration and teamwork.

Answers are waiting not so much to be created but to be found, unearthed. Two long-time political antagonists from the north-east of India opened their hearts to each other and gave away their individual pursuits of personal power for the sake of their common desire for an independent state within the Indian federation. Their new relationship followed profound change in each of their lives. The first man

had faced his ambition and hypocrisy, talked honestly with both his wife and a political foe, and become reconciled with each of them. The second had apologized to the first for his jealousy.

As they sat together, trying to discover God's will, they felt that they were 'given' the structure for a settlement of the political impasse which they faced. Statehood was eventually granted without the expected violence and the State Governor, BK Nehru, commented, 'Seldom have such far-reaching political changes been brought about with so much goodwill on all sides.'

The challenges that face the world are so huge that inspired partnerships are needed at every level. Hope in the Cities, a community building programme of Initiatives of Change based in Richmond, VA, has pioneered honest conversations and team-building across racial and socio-economic divides. Their Call to Community in 1996 and their key operating principles include the following points:

- Listen carefully and respectfully to one another and to the whole community.
- Bring people together, not in confrontation but in trust, to tackle the most urgent needs of the community.
- Model within your core group the relationships and change that you are asking of the wider community.
- Be inclusive; don't cut anyone off in the process. Take the risk of approaching as allies even those who are different and difficult to work with.
- Honour each person, appealing to their best qualities, and refuse to stereotype people.
- Search for solutions, focussing on what is right rather than who is right.
- Build lasting relationships outside your comfort zones.
- Hold yourselves, your communities and the authorities and institutions accountable for what needs to change.
- Recognize that the energy for fundamental change requires moral and spiritual transformation in the individual.

Around the world groups are meeting in this spirit and learning to listen to one another, to the deeper needs of the situation and to God.

So often goodness is random and reactive. Those with destructive agendas appear more strategic, committed and passionate, qualities which are essential, also, for answer-building.

It is tough, often unrecognised work, being an answer builder. As one Swiss doctor working in Cambodia told me, 'In order to be creative, you have to keep on forgiving the absurdities.'

Don Quixote, the ridiculed hero of Miguel de Cervantes' book, *Man of La Mancha*, knew about absurdities. 'Who knows where madness lies?' he asked. 'Perhaps to be too practical is madness? To surrender dreams, this may be madness? To seek treasure where there is only trash? ... Too much sanity may be madness! But maddest of all is to see life only as it is and not as it could be.'



Forgiveness, passion and compassion are key attributes of agents of change, along with a good sense of humour. Dutch priest and author Henri Nouwen put a slightly different spin on it: 'The compassionate life is a grateful life and actions born out of gratitude are not compulsive but free, not sombre but joyful, not fanatical but liberating.'

GIVING HOPE TO HUMANITY



CARTOON CHARACTER Charlie Brown once said, ‘I love humanity; it’s people I can’t stand!’

To give hope to humanity we may just need to find a love for people. Take a leaf out of Saint Theresa of Avila’s book. She once prayed ‘Oh God, I do not love you. I do not want to love you. Help me to want to want to love you!’ I have definitely been in this situation. ‘Oh God, I don’t love people. I’m not even sure I want to love people. It’s a lot of work and I am happy as I am. I don’t really want to be bothered. Help me to want to want to love people.’ I can recommend this prayer for all sorts of issues.

Talking of saints—Theresa not me—they were all known more for their passion than their successes or failures. The greatest threat to the world is indifference. The greatest hope lies in our making a difference. Peter Howard, the English author, once appealed to the congregation of Martin Luther King Jr’s church, ‘I do not say be patient, I say be passionate...’

Rajmohan Gandhi, author and grandson of the

Mahatma, once challenged a crowd of young Indians: ‘I do not wish to insult the youth of this generation by assuming that they do not want to sacrifice.’ Passion, sacrifice, we are capable of both.

So it is time to leave home. We have embraced our calling to remake the world, and opened our hearts to the possibility of personal and social transformation starting with ourselves. We now enter every encounter with the anticipation of engaging the other person in this process while becoming more deeply engaged ourselves. We have started to create a team who are working on finding answers to their communities’ needs.

Now it is time to take this hope to the world. Put it



to music, sing it, dance it, write about it. Sometimes the world may be the other side of town, the home of someone from another culture or class, maybe even a neighbour. Sometimes it means travelling the globe. And while there is power in a team, ‘If no-one responds to your call, walk alone,’ as Rabindranath Tagore, Indian poet and philosopher, once said.

Above all, live it. Hope can be given to a dehumanized humanity even while we cook, fix a puncture or pay a bill. It’s in the way we relate to every person and circumstance, even in the daily routine of life.

And be strategic. Be led. This is one gift of inner listening—clear directions can be received from the Creator in the silence of our hearts.

‘Hope has two lovely daughters – anger and

courage. Anger, so that what must not be may not be, and courage that what should be, may be.' So spoke another saint, Augustine.

After 12 years of civil war, a group of Muslim and Christian Lebanese have worked through their antagonisms and bitter memories to a point where they can express publicly their shame and pain and subsequent forgiveness and healing. They are now working to bring different communities together in their country. A rare currency and much in demand in a hope-deprived world: invitations to share their story have come from Australia, Europe and the USA.

News of a grass-roots, clean election campaign in Kenya, through widespread public commitments to



honesty and rejections of corruption, was shared at an international conference. This triggered a conviction in Solomon Islanders to start the same campaign in their country, just coming out of a protracted violent struggle. The Kenyans had got the idea from the Taiwanese who had got the idea from Australia.

With a world of crisis, cynical exploitation and shameful poverty, our great hope, perhaps only hope, is the fact that people can change, and that there is a source of power and inspiration available to help it happen.

The awareness we must act out of is the relationship between the intimate and the global – my life choices and those of six billion others matter – and the perspective of our actions in terms of the immediate and the eternal.

As Reinhold Niebuhr wrote:

Nothing that is worth doing can be achieved in our lifetime; therefore we must be saved by hope.

Nothing, which is true or beautiful or good, makes complete sense in any immediate context of history; therefore we must be saved by faith.

Nothing we do, however virtuous, can be accomplished alone; therefore we must be saved by love.

No virtuous act is quite as virtuous from the standpoint of our friend or foe as it is from our own standpoint.

Therefore we must be saved by the final act of love, which is forgiveness.

Remaking the world is probably not your regular mealtime conversation, but it may be the most important conversation you will ever have (with or without a meal).





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Jean McAll Brown is an Australian, born in the UK. She has worked for 40 years with Initiatives of Change mostly in India, but also in the USA and Australia where she and her husband have been part of the reconciliation movement, aiming to bring honesty and healing to the relationship between indigenous and non-indigenous people of that country. She is a coordinator of the Creators of Peace programme of IofC, a writer and mother of two.

Initiatives of Change (IofC) is an informal, international network of people of all faiths and backgrounds working to change the world by first seeking change in their own lives. These moments of personal transformation often mark a new direction in a person's life. Some of them have resulted in the various initiatives of change currently being undertaken by this global network. They include Agenda for Reconciliation, Caux Initiatives for Business, Clean Africa Campaign, Creators of Peace, Farmer's Dialogue, Foundations for Freedom, Global Indigenous Dialogue, Hope in the Cities, and Action for Life, an international leadership development programme. All these have grown through networks of empowered individuals. IofC works on the principle that changes in people's motive, attitudes and behaviour are not only possible but are the only sure basis on which wider lasting change in society can be brought about. This is the experience of millions of people, whether involved in IofC or not, who have decided to start the 'change process' in their own lives.

www.initiativesofchange.org



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