

Silver Linings: Approaching Election Day: Through the Looking Glass

Politics, viewed through the lens of Byron Katie's "Work" process, becomes a tool for transformation

By Kathryn Dixon



So many of us have our cherished and conclusive ideas about what changes this country needs right now. We have no shortage of opinions these days.

"The world is certainly going to hell in a hand-basket unless _____ (fill in the blank) is elected in November." "If it weren't for _____ (fill in the blank), we would be well on our way into the Rapture/Millennium by now, I'm sure of it." "If only it wasn't for that loudmouth Rush Limbaugh/Michael Moore (choose one) people wouldn't be so confused!"



On and on it goes. Consider this possibility: that the countless problems and imminent disasters we see "out there" have more to do with what is going on between our very own ears than we ever imagined possible.

We've been trying to change the world by insisting other people change. (You know, "them" - appearing as parents, other cultures, other political parties, other religions, other income brackets, other points of view.) "Somebody out there had better change/reform/see the light - and do it soon!"

We've been playing the game of trying to change other people since around the time we discovered fire, probably. Consider the results: At best we irritate and alienate; communication fails. At worst we go to war, annihilate and then wonder why this world feels and looks like such a scary place to be.

Wanting others to be different just doesn't work. Furthermore, it's hopeless. We have copious amounts of substantive evidence that the harder we try to get other people to change, the more they stay the same. Have you noticed?

So now what? If it seems like such a great idea that "they" change, and that hasn't worked (at all), maybe it's time to take a dose of our own wisdom-medicine and change ourselves instead. Could it be that the source of our pain and suffering is actually our very own thinking and our confused beliefs, rather than other people "out there"?

How does one do that? One method is called self-inquiry. The most potent and straightforward method I have found for the 21st century mindset (mine, anyway) is The Work of Byron Katie (www.thework.org). The Work of Byron Katie is essentially a new rendition of the Socratic dialogue for you history/philosophy buffs. Its simplicity is radically powerful. It's about taking a look at our own perceptions and seeing if they really serve us. Most often, cherished though they are, they don't.

Here's one explanation. What we see "out there" is a mirror. Our experience in this world might just be nothing but a projection of our very own unexamined thinking. We keep trying to get the mirror to change the reflection without ever changing the subject reflected!

It's like noticing a spot on your shirt while standing in front of a mirror and frantically spraying the mirror with Windex to get rid of the spot. The mirror can only reflect what stands before it, and it can never change one looking into it. The mirror is the effect. And this world, this universe, is just one big multidimensional mirror in our face.

Does that mean that all of the mess "out there" is actually inside us? Well, yeah, pretty much - that's the bad news, especially for all of us heartfelt, well-meaning people who see so much wrong with the world. However, there is also good news here - perhaps for the first time, we can change in ways that actually do make a real difference in the world. Put

away the Windex, and let's give self-inquiry a try.

Here's how it goes: I will facilitate myself through the self-inquiry with one of my sacred and beloved knee jerk beliefs. If you happen to be a George W. or Nader fan yourself, feel free to inject your own statement about Kerry, Democrats, or the neighbor down the street. Any story that hurts will do.

I invite you to turn reading this article into an experiential adventure into a kinder and more loving Universe. To do so, simply stop after each question, and answer the question for yourself. Ultimately only your answers will bring you to a greater awareness. Mine, while catalytic for me, are purely entertainment for you. Got it? OK. Here goes:

The Bush Administration is taking this country straight to Hell in a hand-basket.

1. Can I really know that it's true? It sure looks like it! Let me count the ways: Well, there's the invasion of Iraq, the missing WMDs, the erosion of civil liberties, the blatant disregard for the environment, the administrative connections to corporate questionables such as the Carlisle Group, Enron, Halliburton, and of course the infamous Patriot Act. God help me, it sure looks true, and I do notice that I am both storyteller and judge here. Could be a conflict of interest. Actually, I can't know that in fact we are really headed for Hell. Only God could know that. All I know is things don't look the way I'd like them to. (Those are some very nasty stains on that shirt in the mirror.)

2. What do I get when I hold the belief that it's true? Well, frustration, outrage, anguish, terror, night sweats, high blood pressure, and headaches. I glue myself to my favorite blogs and read 'em, weeping. I worry for our children and our children's children. I fear for our civil freedoms and in my mind already have us chained to the wall. I treat all Republicans like total idiots who can't see the forest through the tree and mindless representatives of the Enemy. I get to feel like I know more than George W and his cronies about what's really going on in the world, and so I'm not only better informed than the presidential administration, but far superior intellectually and morally.

3. Can I see a reason to drop the thought? (And no one is asking anyone to drop anything here - we are all very welcome to hold any beliefs we choose; even if we're in shackles, nobody can control what goes on in our heads. The question is, "Can you see a reason to drop the belief?") I guess I can see reasons to drop it, but I'm afraid that if I do, I will be creating certain Hell. Can I know that for sure? Seems like, but I guess I can't know the future. OK. Yes, good reasons to drop it are my anxiety and related health challenges, as well as my automatic animosity regarding all things Republican.

4. Who would I be without the belief? Without the belief, the muscles at the back of my neck and shoulders would relax for the first time ever since the last "election" four years ago. Without the belief, I would be more open and kinder to Republicans. Without the belief I wouldn't feel like such a victim of George and friends. Without the belief, I would be a little more humble and trust that we are all in the sacred hands of a Higher Power instead of George and his wild cronies. Without the belief, I would still speak my

truth and write letters and carry on discussions, but I would do it from a place of openness, with more love and trust behind my words and actions, instead of moving from reactive terror. Without the belief, I would feel an authentic gratitude for the many civil liberties that are currently in place, and work toward expanding them to serve the rights of the everyone - not just the freedoms of my beloved liberal patriots, but also the freedoms of the conservative right wing to speak and live their truths as well. If we don't all have freedom, none of us have freedom. Now we'll do what Byron Katie calls the "turn-around." This is the part of the process where you turn around the original statement and discover some other, often deeper (and certainly more personal) truths. This is where instead of looking at the mirror, you get the spot remover out and start dabbing.

The Bush Administration is not taking this country straight to Hell in a hand-basket. . . . Could be true, I guess. Maybe they are actually waking us up to a new level of consciousness by demonstrating exactly what doesn't work anymore, so that we can see it clearly, and choose new ways to be in this world and with one another. Huh.

I am taking this country to Hell in a hand-basket. That is certainly true every time I tell this story to myself or some hapless victim around me. I am doing exactly that - in my thinking! And not just this country, thank you very much; I am happy to take the whole planet there! And not just once or twice, I can pull it off at least five or six times a day, easy. No wonder I'm so tired and sad sometimes.

Doing the turn-arounds is like panning for gold. Spin the sentence around and around and see what shows up. Keep looking and stay open, even when it looks like nothing is happening. The turn-around is where you can really strike it rich. Turn-arounds can be a) the total opposite of the original statement, b) switching places with the "other" and c) making all of the statement about you.

So, let's give it a try: I am taking myself to Hell in a hand-basket. "But only totally" as Katie would put it, with this divisive and violent thinking! I feel miserable, I act miserable, I see only a miserable future when I think the country is going to Hell. To my ego, divide and conquer solves everything. In reality, divide and conquer only divides and conquers us.

I reiterate: This inquiry about George W. et al in no way implies advocacy of complacency. To "love what is" does not mean becoming a couch potato. To the contrary, "loving what is" is all about the total freedom to be moved by our deepest passions and commitments in life, yet the movement sources from love instead of fear. Actions are based in honesty, trust and compassion instead of terror, reaction and outrage. Interestingly, the outcome of actions borne of an open heart always brings me much more of what I want in this world than I've ever been able to produce from anger and resistance. Go figure.

Only an ego would convince us that we will lose everything if we drop our war with George (and with reality - "what is"). Maybe the truth is that until we drop the war inside

of our hearts, with George or any other enemy in our lives, we've already lost everything.

Could it be that whatever happens in our lives is always for our highest good? Could it really be that with George and his band of not-so-merry men that we are learning something far more important than having a balanced budget and keeping our civil liberties? If having George W re-elected in November is exactly what it would take for you, for this country, for this world to really wake up, would you be willing to see it happen? Maybe that's what God/dess, Higher Power is actually up to here, gifting us in ways that help us to see ourselves more clearly and make new choices - not about the "other" but about ourselves.

Now I don't have a clue if George W will be doing a re-run or not; it's anyone's guess - especially with these new electronic voting machines. But what I do know is that I trust whatever happens will be the perfect opportunity for me to expand and deepen my awareness of myself and my world, and my ability to live as loving truth. I'm good with that.

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