

Our Hearts As A Bridge To Inclusion ~Kirk Hinkleman

Life Works is my work-home, and in many ways, is a representation of my heart. Committed to partnering and embodying the role of supporter and allies to not only people experiencing disability, but all who sit in a circle of support, regardless of role. We recently embarked on redesigning our website. What happens in this process is an unpacking of content and leaning into what we're communicating about ourselves. Our mission. Our vision.

Our tagline, newly created in the process of redesigning our website, emerged as ***Life Works: Community, Connection, Contribution***. Well, the **Community** part is obvious, right, that's what we're after here with Inclusion, our word from last week in Pathfinder's Studio. **Contribution** is one of the **5 Valued Experiences**, and a critical quality whose presence in one's life provides a sense of self-worth and purpose. **Connection** can be interpreted in a couple of ways. Humans are hard-wired for connection...we find connection in and with community. For me personally, I have found connection in the last few years in a Sangha of Mindfulness practitioners and teachers. Last week, which is why I have missed the first two sessions, I was sitting long retreat up at Spirit Rock Meditation Center as part of a teaching program, illuminating my path and deepening my practice. An element of **Connection** which lives in the dark too often, is this notion of Connection with our own hearts...so how do we shed light on this?

Many Insights came through my practice over these 7 days in silence...sitting, walking, working. Perhaps the most vivid insight, came through during the Brahma Viharra practice one afternoon. The Brahma Viharras are practices which cultivate qualities of the heart...and as one of the teachers present, Shelly Graf put it, the cultivation of these qualities ***creates a heart that includes***. The moment these words landed in my ears and made their way to my heart, the image of a bridge appeared. Words and ideas from our teachers here, past, and present... the **Heart of the Matter** and **Inclusion**, appearing on either side of the bridge.

This was one of the warmest and brightest insights gained while on retreat and I've sat in stillness and contemplation about **Inclusion**, this call to locate the **Heart of the Matter**, and the human condition. It feels like to me, this bridge exists at the intersection of two elements we work with consistently...**Ask More of Self and Open Heart**. I believe the inner work of cultivating qualities of the heart finds itself at the bottom of the U image of Pathfinder's Studio. In this stillness, with mindful attention, we cultivate **Compassion**...most importantly, **self compassion**. If we are to unlock the capacity to ask more of ourselves, we must first find space to hold ourselves with compassion, so we are able to hold more and respond wisely, with compassion to others.

These qualities of the heart, which when cultivated consistently, act as a bridge to Inclusion, are:

**In Pali first, followed by translation:

Metta: a heart that cares...Goodwill/Lovingkindness.

Karuna: a heart that responds...Compassion.

Mudita: a heart that delights in the happiness of others...Appreciative Joy.

Upekkha: a heart that allows...Equanimity.\

If we're to be practitioners of Inclusion, we truly do need to get to the heart of the matter; and the first heart we must tend to, is our own. Through the cultivation of these qualities of heart, we become the bridge to Inclusion with a skillful and Wise Heart. A heart able to Pause, Open and Relax. Wise hearts capable of walking side by side with the people we partner with, opening doors that lead to Community, Connection and Contribution.

If the Good Life is what we're after for folks, then let's cultivate these qualities of the heart. Hearts that care full of love, kindness, and goodwill. Hearts that delight in the happiness of others. Hearts that allow for life, just as it is; and with this awareness of life just as it is, hearts that respond with compassion. Hearts fortified with these qualities become enveloped with a **Wisdom** gleaned from our individual practices and our collective embrace, here in this Sangha... this Community. With our fortified hearts, we then apply our wisdom and energy to our organizations, the people we partner with and contribute to the communities we call home in bright and vibrant ways.