

# I AM YOU - THE POWER OF COMPASSION

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Being alive in these unstable, confusing, and occasionally terrifying times, there is one topic that, whenever I stumble upon it, does not fail to restore my hope and faith in humanity. I am talking about stories of how former members of hate groups have found their way out and into a peaceful and happy life that is better for them and for others. The overarching motive in each of these stories is that being shown love and acceptance by the people they least deserved it from has transformed former racists, neo-nazis, bullies, and other violent folk into friendly and peaceful human beings. I've been meaning to take up this issue for a while, but the intimidating magnitude of the message that lies behind it has made me hesitant to jump into it too quickly. However, I really want to share my thoughts on this so far, and would also like to draw some conclusions for the realm of art.

## **The Stories**

Hearing about Christian Picciolini, former skinhead who left because after opening a record store and "strik(ing) up conversations about music that led to deeper discussions, allowing (him) to humanize people that were once the objects of (his) hate", who founded Life After Hate, an organization dedicated to help people leave hate groups; about Angela King, former neo-nazi and co-founder of Life After Hate, who managed to let go of her hate by being befriended in prison by a group of Jamaican women and eventually falling in love with a black woman; or about Michael Kent, who turned his back on hate and recently had his swastika tattoos removed after his black parole officer encountered him with compassion instead of judgment - warms my heart.

The common ground in these and other similar stories is that the former haters have been shown acceptance and compassion by the people that used to be the focus of their hate. Love is the answer. Or, as Martin Luther King Jr. put it: "Darkness cannot drive out darkness: only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate: only love can do that." In situations we feel helpless about, may it be natural disasters, genocides, or personal trauma, we can find solace in turning towards love. Love for ourselves, love for other humans, love for a piece of art. It may not solve the situation, but it definitely eases our mind and helps us have a different outlook on life and its struggles. By changing our perspective, we change our reality. And by changing our reality, we are able to make a difference in our own and other peoples' lives. If we act from a place of love instead from a place of fear, any of our actions, no matter how big or small, will become endlessly more powerful, in a positive way. It is all a matter of choice. Are we rooting into fear,

and believing in the fear-based story society tells us about life, or are we rooting into unconditional love, which is probably one of the hardest and easiest things at the same time?

## **Taking Care**

Love requires integrity within ourselves. True, unconditional, pure love that is. It is easy to mistake attachment, fear, pride, or dependency for love. But the kind of love that is inherent to all beings, that is universal and void of any conditions requires that, first and foremost, we love ourselves. Because how we treat ourselves is how we treat others. Let's say we did a stupid thing - chances are we might project the anger we feel towards ourselves onto others - "how dare they?"; "they made me do it!". Because it can be quite painful and intense to fully embrace who we are. We might not necessarily act on these sometimes fleeting impulses of attack. But if somebody faces a chain of negative experiences, such as abuse, loneliness, bullying, or the loss of a loved one, the pain can become too much to bear with internally. So they project their entire pain onto the outside world - this, in a nutshell, is how haters are made. As cruel and inhumane the acts of violence are, and as much as we need to speak up against these injustices in the world - I think it is important to see the hurt, frightened inner child in everybody. We all have one. And the only way to heal these inner children within ourselves and others is to encounter them with compassion and forgiveness. That does not mean we approve of the past actions. But it means we let go of inhibitions and let everybody off the hook so we can create a mindful present - *now*.

I believe that self love is the most important thing. In any case.

## **Human Connection**

One major thought to keep in mind is that we are all more alike than different. If we took any human on this planet with the attempt to find at least one commonality, we would *always* find at least one. We may or may not have the same hair color, both know what heartbreak feels like, what it is like to miss someone or something, listen to the same music, be into baseball,...but the very least common ground is the fact that we are all human. From a buddhist point of view, the main thing that connects all humans is that we do not want to suffer. But even if we do not believe in this kind of spirituality, I think we can all agree that any kind of emotion feels the same to us. We all know what happiness, sadness, anger, grief, or fear feels like. Even though we associate these emotions with different situations, experiences, people, and sensations, the basic essence is the same. Emotions translate beyond belief systems, countries, religions, age, or social status. They are universal.

## Artists In Charge

This universal purview of emotions is what makes art so important, especially in these times of disconnectedness and uncertainty. Art is incredibly powerful. It heals. It connects people. But only if it is made with a genuine intention. Art should come from heart to heart, not from ego to ego. More than ever I think that we as artists have to take full responsibility for ourself and our craft, and really tune into our truth, so our output is not another mindless shed of the ego (which would just repeat what is already going on in politics and society), but a reminder for ourselves and others to be still and listen to our emotions and our intuition, and to be the best version of ourselves. Bettering ourself, meaning that we let go of the layers that cover our true, loving essence, should be the first priority. For anybody, not just artists.

As artists, we don't have time anymore to dwell on technical showoff. This is not a power game. It is a service for humanity. And the question we should ask ourselves is, how can we be of service for humanity? Well, to be of service for others we first need to be of service for ourselves. How can we heal our own inner child so others can be inspired by the inner light we radiate once we commit to healing, clearing blockages, and being the best version of ourselves?

How can our art remind people of what love feels like? How can it provide solace for the deeply hurt and traumatized little children within each and every one of us? How can our art be the soft fuzzy blanket people can retreat to when they feel lonely? How can our art be a mirror for others in which they see their own beauty?