

Desperately seeking connection

BY THE REV. DR. KHARMA R. AMOS

Spirit of Life

I've noticed lately that a lot of people seem desperate for connection. Some are isolated and long for connection to alleviate loneliness. Some are troubled by dissonance between their deepest values and the painful realities of our broken world. Some are looking for ways to integrate diverse aspects of themselves into a more authentic and balanced whole. Some are caught in agonizing gaps between social service agencies and the scope of human need they are unable to meet. Some are frustrated because, while they are motivated to help or try to make a difference, they don't really know how or what to do. In these instances, and so many more, people are clearly looking for ways to make meaningful connections. So, why don't we do so with more intention and regularity?

There are a few characteristics of dominant culture that seem to routinely trip us up. I'll mention three.

- Our independence. The independence that has given us the courage of our convictions can also get in our way if we take it too far. For as much as we like to tout our ability to do it all alone, we are an interdependent people who need one another to survive. Every time we say "I'm fine" when we are feeling anything but, we communicate to those who might support us that we don't need them.

- Our perfectionism. Since when do we need to be good at everything to be a good person? We don't. Most of

us know this on some level. However, our culture of perfectionism immobilizes many of us. We worry that we will offend someone or be wrong, so we say nothing. When we are uncertain, we do nothing. If we fear rejection, we sometimes close ourselves off from the possibility of relationship. Growth and meaningful relationships thrive on vulnerability and imperfection.

- Our sense of urgency. As the protest chant goes, "What do we want?" (Fill in the blank). "When do we want it?" (Always the same: "NOW!") Of course, we need relief and change now! However, while immediate action is often necessary, sustainable transformation takes time. As poet Marge Piercy reminds us, "Connections are made slowly ... you cannot always tell by looking what is happening." We could usually use the reminder to breathe and give the big shifts we long for a bit of time. Bonus points if we use that extra time to nurture the relationships we must rely upon for collective liberation.

As humans, we naturally crave connection. We need to connect with one another in relationships of authenticity and accountability. We need to connect the dots between our common problems and our collective wisdom and resourcefulness. We need to bridge the gap between what we say and what we do. Let's be intentional about making these connections and more.

The Rev. Dr. Kharma R. Amos is the minister of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Brunswick, uubrunswick.org.

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