

Aequanimitas (peace of mind)—
Imperturbability in a troubled world.

Antonius Pius, beneficent Roman Emperor, described as the best of men, the wisest of rulers, summed up his philosophy of life as he lay dying in 161AD as aequanimitas (equanimity in current usage). William Osler, in his address with the same title, urged new doctors to find imperturbability , peace of mind in the challenges they would face in their lifetimes. We today, have troubled minds as we look out on a world which has undergone incredible changes.

We have gone from the horse and buggy into the space age and worldwide travel. We are an automobile society. Our health has improved with antibiotics, immunizations, vaccines, and chemotherapy. We have progressed from simple x-rays to CAT scans, magnetic resonance scans, nuclear medicine and diagnostic ultrasound. In the scientific world, we are unravelling the secrets of DNA and the double helix of life's secrets. The study of matter has led from the structure of atoms, the identification of new elements, and the incredible mass-energy connection to atomic bombs and thermonuclear devices. Peaceable applications of radioisotopes have included laboratory sciences, nuclear medicine and nuclear power. Computers, web sites and the internet have brought information from the world to our screens.

Politically and socially we have not done as well. We have experienced a shrinking planet where famine, injustice, cruelty and war have ravaged our brother and sister human beings. We are facing the aftermath of a terrible tsunami in the Indian Ocean. We have plundered and wasted the earth's limited resources. Our country pre-emptively has started a terrible war in the middle East. It is particularly painful when the justification for this war is built on lies and deceptions. Even the 911 events are in question- at least in regard to the warnings, foreknowledge, and possible complicity in the outcomes. We are bombarded with information, where truth is buried or replaced with lies. It is often difficult to define or recognise truth, but we do know that lies, deception, and dishonesty are not truth. Meanwhile the oil continues to flow.

To face the world squarely it helps to find guidance from principles of truth and admonishments from the past:

1. Thou shalt not kill is the first great commandment

2. Do unto others as you would have them do unto you- our golden rule has similar rules in other cultures and religions

3. Blessed are the peacemakers-----from the beatitudes of Jesus

4. Nonviolence as a policy liberated India from the British Empire under the leadership of Gandhi. As he faced his Hindu fanatical murderer, Gandhi said, " I understand you. I forgive you. I love you." .

Martin Luther King, jr in his Nobel Peace Prize Acceptance Speech said (excerpted here, though reading it's entirety would be best):

"This reward which I receive.....is a profound recognition that nonviolence is the answer to the crucial political and moral question of our time... the need for man to overcome oppression and violence without resorting to violence and oppression. Civilization and violence are antithetical concepts.... Sooner or later all the peoples of the world will have to discover a way to live together in peace, and thereby transform this pending cosmic elegy into a creative psalm of brotherhood. If this is to be achieved, man must evolve for all human conflict, a method which rejects revenge, aggression and retaliation. The foundation of such a method is love."

We have many challenges to face in our incredible, marvellous, sometimes terrible world. With courage, goodwill, vision, determination and love we can face the world optimistically. Our struggles, loving interactions and life together will lead us towards the best we can be, to acceptance, to aequanimitas.

I close with Reinhold Niebuhr's Serenity Prayer.

"God give us grace to accept with serenity the things that cannot be changed, courage to change the things which should be changed, and the wisdom to distinguish the one from the other. (1934).

Sermonette for the Unitarian Universallist Congregation of Whidbey Island
Jan 2, 2005 -----by member, Frank H. Allen