

A Tiger, A Vision, A Belief

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Have you ever heard the story of Mohini, the regal white tiger who lived at the National Zoo in Washington D.C.? For many years Mohini lived in the standard-type 12 foot by 12 foot cage used to quarantine tigers. Mohini paced relentless back and forth in her cage—I think you’ve know the scene. Then, the zoo staff decided they wanted something better for Mohini and set about to create an outdoor park for her, composed of hills and trees and a pond. However, when Mohini was released into her new home, she retreated to a secluded corner of the compound where she spent the rest of her life, pacing back and forth until she had worn an area, 12 feet by 12 feet, bare of grass.

Tara Brach, who tells Mohini’s story in her book, Radical Acceptance, remarks: “Perhaps the biggest tragedy in our lives is that freedom is possible, yet we can pass our years trapped in the same old patterns. . . Like Mohini, we grow incapable of accessing the freedom and peace that are our birthright.”

For me the Mohini story is about what happens when individuals no longer believe that they have agency in our lives. This is a story for our times because most of us have been conditioned by our culture to believe we are powerless to affect change. No where is this more apparent than among our young who have been born into a world which pocked with problems: political corruption, homelessness, pandemics, weapons of mass destruction, AIDS, pollution, child slave labor, genocide, terrorism, climate change... the list goes on.

For the most part, our young are fully cognizant of the ‘mess’ that they have inherited. Yet, they are not afraid to speak of their hopes for a saner, more peaceful world. I know. I work each day with young people. When I ask them about the world they wish for, I hear things like: “I want a world where people don’t die of environmental cancers. I want a world where there are no weapons, no wars, no hatred. I want a world where children are cherished and nurtured and where elders are honored and respected. I want a world where everybody is *family*, where people share rather than horde. I want a world where people have time to sing and play and dance and rejoice every day.”

Given the chance to give voice to the world they yearn for, our young do not disappoint. What is disturbing, however, is their response to my follow-up question: “Do you believe that your vision for a ‘better world’ is achievable?” Here, many of our young admit to hopelessness. They have lost their faith in humankind, lost their faith in the future. Like Mohini, many of our young—the very ones we depend on to create a ‘better world’—have been rendered helpless.

When I hear someone—young or old—complain that there is nothing they can do (about a certain problem), I sometimes ask: “How does this belief of yours--that there is nothing you can do--serve you?” This question is usually greeted with consternation but think about it. We do things for a reason.... Saying that nothing can be done about the state of the world gets us off the hook; it frees us from responsibility to act. It also, I believe,

spells our death warrant as a species because we have come to a point where we must **evolve or die**. And the evolution that we are called to is not so much in the realm of science and technology (though this is important) as in the realm of consciousness—awakening to who we are and our power to affect change. This means, first and foremost, realizing that we don't need to be victimized by disabling beliefs; we can choose what to believe; we have choice.

Gandhi, among others, pointed out that our beliefs determine our destiny. He was right. A powerful vision for a better world is of little use if we do not hold the conviction—**the belief**—that such a world is possible! Indeed, unless we overcome our conditioned helplessness, we will likely end up, like Mohini.

Goethe said: “Whatever you can do or dream you can do, begin it. Boldness has genius, power and magic in it.” Our times call for bold actions grounded in courage, creativity and love. This is not a time to play ‘small.’ As Marianne Williamson reminds us: “Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate; our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us.” May we all allow our light to shine fiercely in the New Year.