

Wisdom Circle – Disobedience March 2018



This powerful photo was taken by Reuters photographer Jonathan Bachman during the Black Lives Matter rally in the city of Baton Rouge, Louisiana. People had gathered to protest police brutality following the shooting of African-American Alton Sterling.

Chalice Lighting

A Spark of Hope
By Melanie Davis

If ever there were a time for a candle in the darkness,
this would be it.

Using a spark of hope,
kindle the flame of love,
ignite the light of peace,
and feed the flame of justice.

Check-In

As you feel comfortable, take 2-3 minutes to share whatever you need to share with this group in order to be fully present. This is a time for sharing, but not for discussion.

Business (approx. 10 min)

Use this time for any new business: Welcoming new members; Scheduling future meetings; Revisiting the Covenant; Answering questions about Wisdom Circle processes; Etc...

Spiritual Exercise

Share any insight, learning, lesson gained from doing or resisting this month's spiritual exercise. (Focus on your heart/emotions/spirit/personal experience). Because this is a section for personal sharing, attentive listening and no-crosstalk is recommended.

Choose one of the two following options:

- a) **Write a mantra** – Use the following reflection prompts and questions to come up with a mantra/prayer that feels meaningful to you. Use it as a spiritual practice for the rest of the month.

Think about the beliefs you hold more dearly. Think about the values that guide your life. What's going on in the world around you today that challenges your understanding of justice/peace/humanity?

What role, if any, does your spirituality play in your understanding of disobedience?

- b) **Reflection** – Take some time this month to reflect about your own history of disobedience. What rules did you challenge? How was your experience? As you look back, what did you learn? What wisdom did you gain from your experience? Find some quiet time to honor your experiences and the teachings they have left behind.

How was this experience for you? What insight did you gain?

Discussion of Reading and Words of Wisdom

Take turns reading the words of wisdom. Share about the one(s) that caught your attention. Discuss the reading and the questions below. Crosstalk can enrich your conversation here (avoid judging or wanting to “fix” things, and speak from your own experience, avoiding generalizations, and identifying who you mean when/if you use the word “we”).

Words of Wisdom

“The State is not armed with superior wit or honesty, but with superior physical strength. I was not born to be forced. I will breathe after my own fashion. Let us see who is the strongest.”

— **Henry David Thoreau**

“Disobedience, in the eyes of anyone who has read history, is a man's original virtue.”

— **Oscar Wilde**

“One has a moral responsibility to disobey unjust laws.”

— **Martin Luther King Jr.**

“It was civil disobedience that won them their civil rights.”

—**Tariq Ali**

“An unjust law is itself a species of violence. Arrest for its breach is more so. Now the law of nonviolence says that violence should be resisted not by counter-violence but by nonviolence. This I do by breaking the law and by peacefully submitting to arrest and imprisonment.”

— **Mahatma Gandhi**

“If patriotism were defined, not as blind obedience to government, not as submissive worship to flags and anthems, but rather as love of one's country, one's fellow citizens (all over the world), as loyalty to the principles of justice and democracy, then patriotism would require us to disobey our government, when it violated those principles.”

— **Howard Zinn**

“I have always looked on disobedience toward the oppressive as the only way to use the miracle of having been born.”

— **Oriana Fallaci**

“Never do anything against conscience even if the state demands it.”

— **Albert Einstein**

“When a man is denied the right to live the life he believes in, he has no choice but to become an outlaw.”

— **Nelson Mandela**

Reading

Disobedience: *not doing what someone or something with authority tells you to do: refusing or failing to obey rules, laws, etc.* (Merriam Webster Dictionary)

Obedience and disobedience are necessary to create a safe society where all people can dwell together. For example, obeying traffic rules (implicit or by regulation) creates safer transit environments for all. Their purpose is to keep us safe by creating a common understanding of what our behavior should be while on the streets. We don't appreciate the disobedience of people who feel they can disregard those rules to follow their own desires without any consideration of people around them. You know, like someone running a red light, cutting people off, etc.

So, it is easier to follow rules when we know that they are serving a purpose, that they make sense. And perhaps all rules are implemented thinking that they carry some universal value. That's not always the case and even rules and laws that may make sense to some, may be experienced differently by others.

History is filled with disobedient people. In fact, many of them were pivotal to bring about eventual change. Acts of disobedience happen in cultural, religious, and political realms.

While searching for words of wisdom for this reading material, I found two prevalent themes: civil disobedience and strong encouragement to obedience. As you can see, I chose the quotes that mostly refer to the first one and ignored those that referred to the latter.

Many traditional and more dogmatic religions rely on the obedience of their followers, on the adherence to the doctrines and expected behaviors. Those who don't can be cast out or repressed. Obedience, then, is necessary for some institutions' survival. Obedience in this sense, places the survival of the institutions above the individuals. Acts of religious disobedience have been known for millennia and they continue to happen all the time at an individual level but still disrupting institutions like families and churches.

Civil disobedience occurs in the public sphere. It is disrupting for it threatens the comfort of the privileged and powerful. For example, this past week, a letter sent to high school students in Texas from their school circulated online. In it, the administration of the school threatened students with disciplinary action if they were to participate in walk-outs in solidarity with the Florida students who are demanding stricter regulations for gun ownership. That's true for other students, but the threats of disciplinary action have not deterred students from showing off their dissatisfaction with the ongoing threat of violence in schools. In the walk-outs of these students we are currently witnessing a powerful act of disobedience led by our youth.

In short, disobedience occurs when an individual or a group of individuals perceive a dissonance between their beliefs and the expected compliance of the rules. There is

something at their core that tells them that the rule they are expected to obey is wrong and that it goes against their understanding of justice and humanity. And so they proceed to break it. When disobedience happens in the name of the greater good, it has at its foundation a message of hope and inspiration. But it is never easy. Acts of disobedience that challenge the status quo affirm need of those who know that their survival depends on their ability to live their truth.

Suggested Questions for Discussion

1. Do you have a favorite story of disobedience?
2. Have you ever challenged a rule you were expected to obey?
3. Is there something in your own set of values that calls you now to an act of disobedience?

Silence: You may take a minute of silence to reflect on the group's session.

Gratitude: Share 1-2 things that have been meaningful to you from this session

Extinguishing of the Chalice:

If we are neutral on situations of injustice then we have chosen the side of the oppressor (Desmond Tutu). So let us not be neutral.
Let us wrestle until we are living on the right side of history, wrestle until we overcome, until we make hell into beloved community, until we are given a new name. Let us be hungry for Peace and worthy of the blessing.
-Susan Maginn