

Beginnings

By Samantha Thomas

...the whole ship goes by and then comes the rudder. And there's a tiny thing on the edge of the rudder called a trim-tab. It's a miniature rudder. Just moving that little trim-tab builds a low pressure that pulls the rudder around. [It] takes almost no effort at all. So I said that the little individual can be a trim-tab. Society thinks it's going right by you -- that it's left you altogether. But if you're doing dynamic things mentally, the fact is that you can just put your foot out like that and the whole big ship of state is going to go.

R. Buckminster Fuller, February, 1972

The mastery of anything in life, including making a difference in the World, begins with telling the truth. This is not the capital-T "Truth," the elusive and perhaps non-existent Absolute that has been evading humanity's curiosity and understanding since before the time of Socrates. This is about telling the simple truth: giving up the persistent lies that we tell ourselves in an attempt to maintain a sense of self-esteem, and simply being genuine when one has been a fraud.

For instance, everyone knows (almost as though it were the "Truth") that the individual Human Being is relatively small and weak, against the backdrop of an expansive and expanding, unfathomable Universe. When we look at the World and see suffering, starvation, war, exploitation and slavery, disease and all manner of profound needs left unmet, we tend to feel small and powerless. We want to make a difference and we have some idea of what that might look like, if it were possible. But there is no possibility. Usually we have to admit that the problems are huge and we are small, and we're left clinging to hopes and values and ideals. There is no possibility. There are just hopes and values and ideals. Ideals are possibilities that have lost their power and succumbed to resignation and cynicism. Ideals are dead possibilities, although resurrection remains a possibility for them.

To begin to approach the matter of really making a difference in the World, we will have to tell the truth. We have been purposely, albeit unconsciously, pretending to be small and weak. The purpose of our pretense is simple. We don't have to do anything, if we can plausibly deny our capacity or worthiness to do something. It is plausible, and we get a lot of agreement on being too small and weak to make a difference. Presidents, Senators, Prime Ministers and even Popes and Emirs join in the pretense. They don't think they can really make any real difference, either. They *try*, really try very earnestly, to make a difference from their various points-of-view. Trying to make a difference is not making a difference, and most of them never do anything that is really worth doing, and the changes that they wrought usually just make more trouble.

The truth is, when we give up trying to make a difference or pretending that we cannot, we do make a difference. We can't help it. Making a difference is part of who we are as Human Beings. If you do something — anything — you make a difference. If you do nothing, you make a difference. The contribution comes from who you are Being. When we give up the pretentious game of "the small and alien

individual in a large, hostile Universe,” we can immediately recognize that all Human Beings make a difference, just by virtue of Being Human. Then we may begin to live life authentically.

In that moment, the question of making a difference is no longer framed by “if only I could.” It is a matter of what, when and how. The concern for one’s condition (small, helpless and weak) is replaced by an intentionally created context of possibility, along with an opportunity to commit. The commitment to the possibilities created in this context is analogous to scaling a sheer rock wall. Climbing a high rock takes full commitment. If you find yourself on the side of a mountain, a concern for your condition will not get you to the top of the mountain, although it may get you (rapidly and disastrously) to the bottom. The commitment will express itself in a heightened state of consciousness, as you to look for small cracks or openings in the stone that you can use as handholds. These small cracks are all you want and need to lift yourself along the way. Living according to one’s commitments, rather than one’s preferences, is energizing, exhilarating (and risky). You may have to risk looking like a fool. You may have to risk “being used.”

Over thirty years ago, R. Buckminster Fuller, known to his friends as “Bucky,” a diminutive and elderly gentleman with sparkling eyes, a hearing aid in each ear and a lifetime of engineering experience, offered another analogy to illustrate the matter of making a difference. This little guy — huge of heart and brilliant of mind — invented the geodesic dome, rethought geometry, inspired new thinking in the fields of ecology, economy and energy usage, and coined the words, “synergy” and “dymaxion,” along with the social, scientific and engineering principles to which they refer. He knew a lot about making a difference. As a mechanical engineer, he distinguished difference-making as a matter of leverage, of course. He spoke of trim-tabs on the rudder of an ocean liner.

Bucky pointed out that on the trailing edge of any control surface, such as the rudder of a ship or the ailerons of a jet, there are small tabs, known as “trim-tabs.” He observed that exerting any achievable quantity of force on the front of a large, ocean-going ship (such as the R.M.S. Queen Mary, or metaphorically, the great “Ship of State,” the government or established institutions) would not deflect it. The ship’s pivot is at the front. Steering happens at the back, the stern of the ship, where the rudder is — that’s where the action is. Additionally, the rudder is immersed in the wake of the ship, so it has the incredible forces of millions of gallons of water rushing against it from both sides. These immense forces keep the ship going steadfastly in the direction it is heading. To steer the ship, with very little strength, a trim-tab is required. The trim-tab is very small in area, and has very little force holding it. Turning the trim-tab slightly into the flow creates a pressure deficit on the opposite side, and this vacuum force naturally and effortlessly pulls the rudder in the desired direction.

The way for an individual to make an intentional difference, consistent with the commitments to the possibilities one creates, is like operating the trim-tab or finding handholds in a sheer stone wall. In the matter of Peace, for example, look for the trim-tabs and be glad for the little openings you find in the stone face, right here, where you are now. Begin to create Peace with the people in your family: the parent you’ve been resenting, the sibling that bothers you, the child who didn’t turn out the

way you expected. Look at the people you love, and who love you, find out what they want and need and commit yourself to providing exactly that.

What is wanted or needed may not be what they *think* they want and need, so this is another opportunity to tell the truth. Wanting has a lot of pretense attached to it. People want what they believe (as though it were the Truth) that they don't have or cannot have. What we believe we want is often symbolic of what is authentically wanted. For example, the teenager who wants a motorcycle may really want something that a motorcycle cannot provide — a sense of purpose or independence, perhaps. What is truly wanted, will always be contextual, in the domain of Being. In other words, it will be a way of Being that they don't imagine they can ever attain. Getting a sense of what people want will take inquiring into the concern that underlies the expressed desire. The access to it is through complete communication — listening for what they have to say.

Needs are simpler. Human Beings need adequate nutrition, hydration, sunlight, rest and very little else. Attachments to inauthentic beliefs are typically what gets in the way of people getting their needs fulfilled. We make believe that there isn't enough time, talent or resources — the false assumption that in this gloriously abundant Universe, there is a scarcity of anything. Could cooking healthy food, washing the dishes or mopping the floor really make a difference in the World? If it contributes to the fulfillment of your possibilities, absolutely.

When you've created Peace in your home, it will begin to affect other homes. Then look at what your coworkers want or need. Provide that. By this time, Peace will be showing up everywhere around you. Your community will express Peace and begin to influence neighboring communities, then outlying communities. You will be masterful at making a difference. The World will be moved...

... and to begin, all you need to do is tell yourself the truth.