

MARCH 12th 2020

Memo to Gr.12 Families in Canada

TO: Gr.12 Families in Canada

FROM: Mr. D'Alessio

The following is required reading

Dear students:

As we get ready for the mock trial, we are also getting into the important topic of “The Influence of the Family” and communication. During this time, we will be watching some clips and you will be writing journal responses to *some* of these clips as well as this memo that you are reading. As you know, you are incomparably shaped during the formative years but throughout life, it is apparent, that people are influenced by the politics and religious views of their family members but also economics and philosophies especially if you discuss these directly with family members. Think about the conversations you have with family members. In my case, my father and I pretty much just talk about sports. There’s not much point in my talking politics with him because he is fairly conservative. In fact, when I was a teenager, I was quite conservative myself. I became increasingly liberal from age 19 to the present. Most people get more conservative the older they get. I am an exception. Nonetheless, my father has always been critical of government in general as am I. Furthermore, he is no fan of Doug Ford or Donald Trump, so we do enjoy scrutinizing them but neither of us judge our friends and family members who are supporters of Ford or Trump. I have two sisters and in the “sibling pecking order” I am the youngest. According to my parents and two sisters I was the most well-behaved child and teen. The question is of course, would I have been if I were not the youngest. And in that same sibling pack, my oldest sister is accepted/acknowledged by the family as the smartest. And she is. She would register as a 9 on the Beacom-Dolan scale whereas I am only an 8. That last sentence was a joke. There is a consensus among the three of us siblings that while we may have all been equally loved, we were not all treated equally. I was the one who got “spoiled.” Heehee. However, of course it can be argued that being “spoiled” can be a curse in disguise. Anyways, the three siblings are all left of centre on the political spectrum and are all in different religions and none of us share the same religious views as our parents. In the end, what matters more than any of that is we know that we have the unconditional love of our parents who set a good example when it came to compassion, empathy, manners, positivity, patience, and passion for life. I have also come to know that there is something beyond unconditional love. We are limited by language but in my own words, I think there is such a thing as transcended tolerance. For example, when I say tell my son, “You are so cute, I could eat you up!” And he looks at me weird, I am exaggerating. But when I say that I think my son is perfect, there is no hyperbole. I mean that more literally than anything I could say. In my universe, he is perfect. So in the philosophical debate, “is there such a thing as perfection?” I say, Yes. And that is why.

Communication:

Communication skills need to be worked on by the best of us. Miscommunication leads to stress, it drains us of energy, and takes up time, and ultimately can lead to arguments or feelings of resentment. Most people including those who implement strategies such as the practice of positive affirmations, underestimate the importance of communication skills.

Consider the following quote by Doreen Virtue:

“When listening to another person's troubles, keep your heart open and send them love. Lift them up to a high vibration where solutions exist. Do not allow yourself to absorb the other person's pain or drama, as that will pull you downward and reduce your efficacy as a healer. It's not helpful to join the other person in their misery. Instead, you help them by pulling them up to a higher vibration. Your high vibrations, peace, and joy are needed by the person in pain, and by the entire world. You can balance the action of helping another person while simultaneously maintaining your own inner peace, especially as you call upon the angels to bathe you and the other person in healing love energy.”

Communication skills dictate how well we manage conflict in our relationships. According to *A Course in Miracles*, relationships are "assignments" in which people are brought together for maximal and mutual growth opportunity. Our relationships can be trips to Heaven or trips to Hell, depending on how we ourselves choose to interact with another person. Recognizing the spiritual lessons afforded us by each encounter will give us skill and even mastery at this basic human experience. We communicate so much better when we are happy, we all know this. It's that simple. So, we can always gage if we are going with the flow in life, as we should, by how well we are communicating. And how well we communicate is linked just as much to our emotions as it is to our intelligence and knowledge of effective communication techniques. Abraham-Hicks said in *The Astonishing Power of Emotions*: "...your emotions are literally your indication of how *you* are blending with *You*." Yes, "you" is capitalized there by Hicks because I assume it refers to "your higher self" (self that is a "spark of God" and we capitalize "God" or any pronoun of Him). Lastly, we all know how much unhappiness we invite into our lives when we argue and respond to someone who is being confrontational by being confrontational ourselves. Responding to confrontation with confrontation is all fine and well in a rare situation of self-defence and it can be necessary, for example, if you are a mammal in the wild such as a male moose and want to reproduce... But 99% of the time, humans are better off not fighting. Try saying "I respect myself too much to tolerate this affront." More often than not, there are no winners in arguments anyway. The simple fact is that you don't get rid of darkness by throwing more darkness at it. Never make communicating a *competition*. The smartest person in the world can't win every argument. To paraphrase Abraham-Hicks, when you manage to stay connected to your energy stream, you always win. That's what's important. Somebody else doesn't have to lose for you to win. There is always enough. However, positive thinking is not enough, sometimes, there is a time and place to be pessimistic and/or have realistic expectations of the other person you are communicating with. Just remain committed to not arguing. When applicable, bow out. Live to fight another day. Communication should be based in love; if it is based on intellect alone, we will always get into trouble because without even noticing, we will be communicating, thinking we are right about something, forgetting that we are being a bit inconsiderate and forgetting the role love has in us and in the Universe: All ignorance is just memory loss.

Communication skills, interpersonal skills, leadership skills and intrapersonal skills are crucial to a healthy love life or friendship. Lao Tzu once said: "Being deeply loved by someone gives you strength. Loving someone deeply gives you courage."

Lodro Rinzler once wrote an article called: "4 Qualities You Need For True Love - The Buddhist Perspective." From the Buddhist perspective, true love is said to consist of four major qualities, according to Lodro, here are two that I want to talk about:

1. Maitri, Loving-Kindness

It's never going to be as easy as when we are 6 months old and look in the mirror and realize for the first time in our life that the person we see in the mirror is us and we light up with a killer smile and laugh and think we are amazing. That's because no matter how blessed we are with our physical appearance, we age, and we make mistakes and so on. If you can respect all people, you can respect yourself.

2. Karuna, Compassion (Lodro states:

"Compassion, in this case, is the desire to relieve the suffering of others. The notion of the word karuna is that having related to our own suffering we know how scary the darkest parts of our mind can be. We then see others grappling with similar afflictions and our heart goes out to them quite naturally. We have empathy for them. And, thankfully, because we have learned to befriend ourselves, we know how to skillfully help others do the same thing. When we realize that we can help others because suffering is the universal affliction, we can...").

This can be taught. If I can attend a motivational assembly and cry because of what the speaker is telling me what s/he has been through then I know it can be taught. The state of the legal system in Canada and the USA and the election of Donald Trump is possibly an indication of the role that lack of taught empathy and compassion in the

education system plays in our world. I will make references to Donald Trump in this course. If you are a fan of his, you are entitled to like Trump, I used to watch *Celebrity Apprentice* and was a fan of Trump then.

I am cognizant of a line from *All Quiet on the Western Front* that I teach my ENG2D (Gr.10 English) class: “It is very queer that the unhappiness of the world is so often brought on by small men.” Do we teach enough empathy? Compassion? What do you think? To put this in perspective, consider the fact that the #1 cause of death among teens is car accidents. These “accidents” sometimes could have been avoided in lieu of smarter choices. It’s not that we don’t teach students about drinking and driving, speeding, and texting while driving (etc.), if we didn’t, there would be even more carnage but a) compassion and empathy are connected to making smarter choices and b) the more we teach our students about an issue, the more that they are going to know about the issue. The fact that almost half of all eligible voters did not vote in the 2016 US election, for example, is a strong indicator that while some people truly don’t care or may be anarchists who don’t vote, the majority of these people have either not been taught the importance of voting or they have been taught the opposite. As a high school teacher, I sit through drinking and driving assemblies each year. If a teen could be exposed to the equivalent of all those assemblies that I have seen, it would be even more effective than the one or two that they do see. By the way, out of all the ones I have ever attended, the one that hit me the most was at the OSLC Conference in Niagara Falls on Nov.14th, 2016 where Cara Filler spoke. Cara’s favourite person in the whole world growing up was her twin sister. At the age of 18, she witnessed the car accident that took her sister’s life. She got out of her car and went over to the wreck and watched helplessly as her sister died. **Her family was torn apart.** Her parents divorced. **Most marriages end where one or more of the children in that family die** 😞. Her world was gone. Her sister was in a car up ahead in the passenger seat while her boyfriend drove speeding at 160 km/h in a 50 zone when he lost control and he walked away from the wreck with an injured elbow and a lost tooth. He never apologized to the sister or the family. Today, she is an amazing motivational speaker. There is a saying that “misery loves company” and although there are some people who would want to hear someone like Cara talk to make themselves feel better that they haven’t been through what she has (the classic compare and contrast mentality that President Johnson referred to when he said that if you could convince a poor white man that he was better and more deserving than a black man, than that white man could be counted on to vote against his own interests). And there are people out there who would sit and listen to someone like Cara tell their story and not be moved. Not just the psychopaths of the world (which we will learn about) but people who aren’t happy and have been unhappy for a long enough time that they don’t want to hear anything sad. They may have lost too much compassion and empathy. They want true love more than anyone but it will elude them.

Similarly, Gala Darling wrote an article called, “Rules For Building A Lasting Friendship.” She said that If 80 percent of success is, as Woody Allen once said, just showing up, then 80 percent of building and maintaining relationships is just staying in touch. She wrote, “Friendships require upkeep. Unfortunately, you can’t just hang out with someone a couple of times and expect to remain friendly. It just doesn’t work that way. People are busy, and we are all constantly meeting new people, so if you don’t make an effort to stay on someone’s radar, they will start to forget about you.” This is so true! This one can’t be easily taught. I realize this truth now, and I am 41 years old, in ways I doubt I could have comprehended at the age of 23. And if you go through life with never having very many friends it is also a difficult concept to grasp. But if you can get friendship right, it’s an amazing thing. Friendship is as amazing a part of life as is the true love spoken of a moment ago. Gala wrote:

“I have a friend who sits down every Sunday to connect with his friends via e-mail. Sometimes you’ll find that you need to be the person who keeps things moving. You need to make the phone call or organize lunch or call up just to say hello. Think of fun activities and invite your friends. My friends are an infinitely busy bunch, but it’s not hard to stay in touch. We send e-mails back and forth, ask advice, plan activities and vacations, and plot evil schemes!”

She offers six tips for friendship, the most important of which now more than ever if you ask me is: “Avoid Jealousy and Competition.” To young people I say, when you are my age, you do not want to look back on life and realize how much of your life you have wasted with jealousy. Jealousy is plain stupid.

Further reading: *Quantum Love* by Laura Berman, Ph.D.

Second Part: Some people are fortunate enough that they rarely if ever have to communicate with someone who is consumed with hate. And some people engage in communicating with such a person even though they don't have to, as most commonly seen on **social media**. Some professions, however, make it unavoidable. These include teachers, lawyers, police officers, social workers (etc). In the workplace you should be very forgiving of the people you are dealing with because you are being paid to deal with them and if they cross the line to harassment, your employer is legally obligated to deal with them and support you. You of course need to be willing to be assertive and practice patience mantra responses to their rants such as "Got it." And "One of us is mistaken." In your personal life, however, sometimes you may wish to try talking to them in a language they understand. While you never have to resort to coming down to someone else's level, i.e., you can be fully committed to placid, pacifist mindfulness and in the long run, it will serve you well but once and a while more immediate results are an option. It doesn't always work. It's comparable to talking to a five-year-old. You talk to them in a language they understand and sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't. In the case of dealing with childish adults, it will either work or it won't, if it does, great (but don't then make the mistake of thinking that you can always do that. It will make it impossible for you to be mindful if you are being negative as often as the negative people you are dealing with. Think of Donald Trump. He used what seemed like ridiculously childish and dangerous rhetoric against the leader of North Korea in 2017 into 2018 and instead of nuclear war breaking out as some feared, the two "leaders" started getting along and met with each other. But Trump's similar speak directed at Justin Trudeau resulted in a trade war between Canada and the US). If it doesn't work, no big deal, you go back to being mindful in your communication and in the long run, your end result is still going to be the desired peaceful resolution.

My hope is you never have to go through the worst-case scenario in communications. If you are mindful enough, you reduce your chances of ever being in such a situation in the first place. I think it's a good idea to emulate people you know who have really good communication skills.

I believe in something called the "passion card." A lot of people in the mindfulness community avoid all talk of politics. They tend to profess that complaining should always be avoided. There's nothing wrong with that philosophy because it is not negative. However, my favourite Marianne Williamson quote is this, "One of the most dangerous platitudes ever devised is the idea that what you focus on expands, so you should never look at anything negative. Often, it's what we do not look at that expands, such as things like cancer and authoritarian regimes. Our willingness to see is our power."

So, with this in mind, I believe, if you want to support societal change via paradigm shifts, you have to sacrifice some inner peace temporarily and express your passion. And sometimes, this means confronting hate. When you are confronting hate, you can ignore it or you can express your passion to the world speaking to some of the people in it in a language they can understand. People jump to personal attacks on social media all the time but nothing good comes out of saying, "You're an idiot." But if you reply to someone conveying that what you are passionate about is more important to you than their feelings and you provide support for the stern language that you feel compelled to use.. well, think about it... For example, on June 19th, 2018, I reached a point, after several days of media coverage of children being put in cages separated from their parents and video and audio of them crying out in agony and endless footage of Donald Trump, Sarah Sanders, Jeff Sessions, and every person at *Fox News* defending the "law", I felt sick. I took to social media that day. I allowed it to be therapeutic for me, but I refused to let anyone make me feel bad for having compassion. We live in a world, where people are often shamed for having compassion. This is crazy! So, I posted: "To anyone who is placid about Trump because it is an American problem, not for us to worry about, please wake up! If we defend Trump or don't care about the atrocity at the border, it will send a detrimental message to Canadian politicians and judges across the political spectrum that we are OK with government doing whatever they want no matter how unethical. I think we've done enough of that for 150 years.... You've got to have a pretty cold heart if you're still trying to come up with reasons why children should be separated from their parents. I get that some people have a hard time conceding that their side has it wrong... but this is a humanity test you don't want to fail..." A former student, Jason, posted his supportive reply: The world is becoming more and more sick and twisted everyday... George Orwell knew what was up... #1984." I added: "Yes. Orwell talked about using language to make justifications. Anyone who hears or sees thousands of children crying in agony over being separated from their parents and who justifies it is truly lost in bitterness and hate. #dystopia I'm grateful that I am not a part of the blind contempt based moral rationalization. "High ranking government officials like the President

of the US, are above the law and always have been, so, when they go on every network and say over and over to anyone who will listen that something evil that they are doing is "the law" as if they don't have a choice, as if they can't use discretion... Trump may or may not be racist, he wants people to think that, so they are distracted from the bigger problem that he separates children from their parents at the border to get a pop from his base which is as racist as they are enslaved to him." To which a former student, Evan, replied, "Trudeau has more immediate power than Trump." I just clicked on the wow emoticon because I didn't even know how to respond to that. I guess he was saying that Trudeau in his mind was/is somehow worse than Trump? And then an acquaintance, Matt, replied saying "the media is lying" with a link to an article from a less than reliable source claiming the Fox News argument that the bigger story is that this has been going on for years and was worse under Obama. I replied, "Yeah. When you find a *New York Times* article that supports your Fox world view, let me know. Your article is from a source I never heard of and is #fakenews. In any event, "The media is lying" is like saying "the water is wet" or "the government lies". Any gr.7 student knows that. Duh. Two facts remain: 1. When you have zero compassion for children being separated from parents, there's something to be concerned about. 2. Saying "This horrible law and practice in place was put in place by the Democrats, so it's their fault", is not unlike the Conservatives circa 1990 saying "Well the Liberals put Residential Schools in place so blame them while we do nothing." ... Came the response from Matt, "So there is no responsibility on the parents entering illegally? I'm sorry just because they endangered their children we should just let them be? What's next? Can't jail that Meth cook because he/she has a daughter? If you want to quote the Bible & looking out for fellow man and all that jibber jabber. Well then u better keep reading to where it says to follow laws of the land.....it not no compassion for the children, it's enforcing the laws (sic)." So, I said, "How ironic and predictable that you are scrutinizing people who quote the Bible when Sessions and Sanders are the ones who quoted the Bible to support their actions. Of course, it is a reflection of lack of compassion. The law. The law. The law. You should Google what the great minds throughout history have had to say about absolutism! It is a reflection of racism too. To lump the 99% of refugees in with the 1% who are criminals to justify segregation leads to inequality and genocide time and time again throughout history because of people who lack compassion and think their race is superior for some odd reason, that follow and support God complex or psychopath leaders who will do anything for a vote. Oh well, everyone will be happy once the wall is up right? It will be Utopia I'm sure. Walls always work!..." Another reply from Matt arrived retorting, "Wow. Nobody said nothing about refugee. It's illegal entries that is being discussed. I'm all for legal immigration, hell my mom is an immigrant." I had the time to reply so I did, "In America, a refugee can cross at a border crossing and claim refugee status. If they cross where there is not a border crossing, they are being detained and separated and the Republicans are saying that is illegal. But it's not. It's illegal if they are coming to the country to work or commit a crime(s). Punishing 100% of a group to punish 1% of said group is 100% unethical." Yet again a reply, "So we just let them in? We don't investigate to see if they actually are a refugee? Just claiming that status doesn't make it true. I'm all for helping but the vetting process needs to happen to keep undesirable out." I said, "Let's detain them (not in cages) and keep the parents with the children." It seemed to me that we had reached the end of the discussion. There was closure in our tone. But, nope, the next reply read, "I'm all for the ethical treatment. From the sources I've read if they're caught "being in country illegally" they can be deported instantly with their children. If they make an asylum claim that's when separation happens as the wheels of government get moving. Now the nature of detainment would have families in with that 1% (sic). How long until it's trump's fault that someone in that 1% rapes, kills a kid (sic)?" He followed that up with a link to a *Newsweek* article that backed up his original link. I had enough. It was time for me to speak to him in the language he understood: "What is your point? You sound like Trump anytime anyone brings up ANYTHING, he cries "Yeah but Hillary! Hillary! Hillary this and that!" Because this to me is disturbing that instead of disavowing Trump and the thousands and thousands of children being subjected to suffering right NOW, you choose instead to say, "Well, Obama did it." Yeah, but Obama did it. Yeah but Hitler was worse... Do you see the disconnect!? Can I get pulled over for speeding and say, "Yeah, but the car in front of me was going even faster"? Even a growing number of REPUBLICAN elected officials are speaking out against this injustice and you, a Canadian, are defending it for some odd reason. You are defending the suffering of innocent children by deflecting blame to the previous administration who was awful too and I never said otherwise. Go ahead and say you are not defending it. You are! Any deflection of blame on such a horrific violation of human rights and decency is a shameful defense of aforementioned injustice. I don't even know what to say. I can't believe that there are Canadians in 2018 who respond to something this bad with.... "YEAH... BUT..." I can't believe my kid is growing up in a world where there are these kinds of attitudes..." I think on social media there are three types of harsh. 1) Troll (where your goal is to

upset people as often as you can because you are addicted to it), 2) Pointless childish harshness not unlike school-yard bullying, and 3) harsh attached to a passion and the common good. Sometimes, it works completely, sometimes a little bit, and sometimes not at all. Is that not true of all methods of communication? In this case, I do not know if Matt gained more insight and compassion as a result of our thread, but his last reply was a concession as he wrote: “Wow I'm not disagreeing that it's not deplorable. I'm saying its nothing new. I understand your passion on the topic now and honestly didn't mean any disrespect.”

This week/next week:

All text work should be done in groups of 2-3.

1. Read about a) Reginald Bibby on p.32-33 b) Feminist Theory p.45-46 c) Development of schooling p.68-70 d) Entering work force p.78-80)
2. P.56 #1, 3, 4, 11
3. a) P.62 talks about the term adulthood. In your own words, what do you think defines adulthood and youth?
B) Pick one of the following quotes to offer an interpretation of: i) “You can judge a society by how it entertains itself.” ii) “It is the space between the bars that keeps the tiger in the cage.” C) In your own words, what is the difference between baby boomers and Generation X? Is Mr.D’Alessio a Gen X? How do you know? (You can refer to p.70-71). D) What do you think the legal drop-out age should be, why? (It is 18 in Ontario. Some provinces and states have it lower between 14 and 16)... E) It has been said that you can judge a society by its legal system. What is your general opinion/impression of the legal system in Canada and specifically, i) Do you think that it should be illegal to drink alcohol for someone who is 19 or older while mowing their lawn with a riding lawn mower? Explain. If yes, should the consequence be the same as driving a car while impaired? ii) As of January 2019, the police now have the right to enter any restaurant or bar, or pull you over without cause, or enter your home without a warrant if it is within 2 hours of your attending a bar or restaurant that serves alcohol, and administer a breathalyser test. Do you agree or disagree with this new law?

And iii) You are a juror in a murder case. The evidence against the accused is overwhelming, but many would consider it to be circumstantial. You are positive that this person has committed this heinous crime. The issue is that the body of the victim was never found. It’s time to deliberate. How would your morals and ethics differ in this situation? What would your decision be (guilty/not guilty)?

4. Text Work Part 2: p.80 #1-2; p.81 #1-2; p.92 Pick any 10 of the 16 questions.