

Just One...

The other day I was looking at all the books I have and pulling out some of my older classics, the ones I have read more than once and from which I still draw inspiration. I thought of all the other books I have read both for my own interest and because the books came in for review. I realized that I have probably read, or in some cases skimmed, thousands of books over the past 26 years, and that doesn't count novels.

I realized how much easier life would be if there was just one book or system or teaching or belief to follow instead of having a smorgasbord of ideas and processes to choose from. Of course, I realize there are people who think there is only one way to think, one way to believe, one way to behave. For those people, life is certainly very safe because no real thinking is required. You sally up to the buffet and know exactly what to choose, no decisions necessary.

That's how many of us who were raised in traditional religions were taught to think. No need to question, to analyze, to look at the variety of belief systems in the world. Today there are many people who find all of their answers in the Christian bible or the Jewish Tanakh, Islam's Qur'an, or the Avesta of Zoroastrianism.

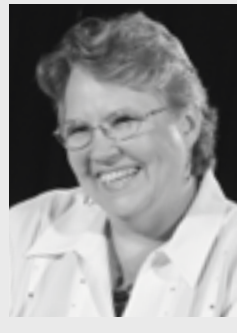
“When is the last time you listened to a talk radio host with whom you disagree? When was the last time you watched a news program with a different political bent to your own?”

Although each of these belief systems agree with one another on some points, each also has their own way of viewing the world and each has their own religious practices. There is great comfort in belonging to one group with which we can agree, one which gives us guidance in our daily lives. Structure gives us a sense of security and that can be a very good thing. It is unfortunate, however, when one belief system is followed to the exclusion of others when it can become fundamentalism. This can be dangerous because as we have seen so graphically, it can lead to violence against people who do not hold the same beliefs as the fundamentalists.

According to Wikipedia, “The term fundamentalism was originally coined to describe a narrowly defined set of beliefs that developed into a movement within the Protestant community of the United States in the early part of the 20th century.” Now, however, the term is used to describe any sort of narrowly defined beliefs that keep us from being

Living The Good Life

by Krysta Gibson



open to the ideas and opinions of others.

For instance, Republicans and Democrats who believe that their party or leaders hold the key to solving all of our country's current challenges. Some hold so tenaciously to these beliefs that they aren't even open to listening to ideas other than their own. Who amongst us hasn't felt that way when we honestly believe our way is the right one?

In and of itself all of this is fairly innocent, I guess, except that it keeps us separated from one another. It keeps us organized into camps of belief, camps opposed to one another instead of interested in each other. I wonder what would happen if people who disagree with one another were able to sit down and discuss their beliefs while viewing one another with respect?

When is the last time you listened to a talk radio host with whom you disagree? When was the last time you watched a news program with a different political bent to your own? In the Seattle area, we have a radio program called The Commentators with John Carlson and Ken Schram (www.komonews.com). Although I am not available to listen to it frequently, when I do listen I enjoy it.

John Carlson is a self-proclaimed conservative while Ken Schram is a self-proclaimed liberal. Each of them is very opinionated and vocal in their beliefs.

During their show they choose a topic and each gives their opposing views on it. Then they open the lines to callers who express their viewpoints.

The reason I am impressed is because I can listen to both sides of an issue and actually hear the two opposing viewpoints

discussed. It really does help me be more open to both sides of an issue and helps me clarify my own viewpoints. Imagine a world where everyone took the time to really hear both sides of an issue before making up their mind about what they believe.

Are you fundamentalist in your thinking about something? Would you be willing to be more open and receptive to the opposing viewpoint? If so, try these ideas.

Instead of listening to your usual news/opinion source on television, radio, or the Internet, deliberately choose to listen to the source you are most in disagreement with. Just listen. You don't have to agree.

If you have a friend or relative who holds beliefs very different from your own, the next time you are together ask them if they would be willing to have an open discussion about some issue you disagree about. Take turns talking and expressing your beliefs and positions. Maybe use a stopwatch so each gets the same amount of time to talk. Don't interrupt each other while speaking. You don't have to agree. Just truly listen to one another and attempt to understand where the other person is coming from.

Sign up for the Facebook or Twitter account of a politician or religious figure you don't agree with. Read their posts and those of their followers and attempt to open your mind to their viewpoints. I signed up for Sarah Palin's Facebook page after she made her statement about resigning her post

as governor of Alaska. I really want some insight to what I perceive to be a disastrous political move. Her page makes for some very interesting reading.

If you go to church, go to a different church sometime, preferably one that holds really different views than your own.

Read books, publications, or online web sites that don't agree with your viewpoints.

Try one or more of these and see if it doesn't help you have a more open mind and heart. Maybe if we can all start respecting each other's opinions a little more, the world can move towards solutions more quickly.

Krysta is the publisher of New Spirit Journal and the author of books and CDs. You can find out more at www.krystagibson.com. You can hear her interviewed the third Thursday of each month, 7-8 a.m., on the Conscious Talk radio show, www.conscioustalk.net.

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