

Rev. Kim K. Crawford Harvie
 Arlington Street Church
 3 May, 2009

What About You?

“What about me?”
 That's my first thought every morning.
 Has this gotten me any more love, more joy?
 I say this mantra every day, all day long
 Like the beating of my heart,
 “What about me?”
 I hope this new *x* makes me happy
 I hope this new *x*, new *y*, new *z* makes me happy
 “What about me?”

You're hearing from the cutting edge: Tibetan Buddhist teachings in spoken word poetry set to a photo montage and music; think rinpoche rap. I'll send you to the YouTube video for the full effect of this extraordinary transmission of the *dharma*; this is just the idea – just a taste – of the work of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche.¹

I hope this new *x* makes me happy
 I hope this new *x*, new *y*, new *z* makes me happy
 “What about me?”

You know what? None of it will make you happy
 Unless you do one simple thing
 Change *me* for *you*.
 Let's wake up in the morning and try something wild
 Say, “May you be happy”
 “What about you?”
 May you be happy, may you be happy, may you be happy

¹ Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche is the son of Chögam Trungpa Rinpoche and Lady Diana Mukpo.

And you know what?
 When you're happy, I'm happy
 That's the formula
 First you, then me
 That's all happiness is
 It's just the heart being free.²

Change me for you: this is at once one of the Buddha's most profound and simplest teachings ... simple, but not easy. When you're running out of options, out of luck, down and out ... when you're feeling like the world is closing in on you, try this out: *Change me for you*, and ask, *What about you?*

What does it look like, this spiritual practice, this formula that transmutes suffering into compassion, transforms compassion into happiness?

Change me for you. What about you?

We don't have to go further than the newspaper. Here are two stories about the response to the April 6th earthquake in L'Aquila, Italy.

April 10th. Tortoreto Lido, Italy. "Italy's breathtaking Adriatic coastline is usually a carefree playground, but not for the ... earthquake refugees ... seeking refuge in beachfront hotels.... Resort towns ... are scrambling to accommodate tens of thousands of weary survivors who have fled ... [from L'Aquila and other stricken towns inland]. Normally, [these places] cater to hordes of summer tourists, but they've thrown open their doors and hearts to their quake-battered country[people]."

"... [The] resort's forty hotels and forty other bed-and-breakfasts and campgrounds have pulled together to take in ... the homeless.... Two years ago, Tortoreto suffered deadly coastal floods that claimed several lives. Officials [say] that experience has ... helped them empathize with the plight of the quake survivors.... Police officers have been pooling cash to share with the refugees. [Officer Angelo Romagnoli] [is accommodating] several homeless people in his house.

"When people arrive here.... we feel close to them,' he says, 'because some of us also lost loved ones in L'Aquila. So everyone is doing what they can.'

"Tortoreto's year-round inhabitants [pull] up in cars at regular intervals ... to drop

2 To listen to Chewyguru's video, please visit [youtube.com/watch?v=FDSAAIrrqAHM](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FDSAAIrrqAHM). Also, please visit mipham.com.

off donations of food, clothing [and] shoes, blankets, plush toys, board games, and ... candy for the children....

“Giuliano Balestrieri, [a hotel manager], said all twenty-five rooms are packed with refugees, and a kitchen equipped and staffed to handle seventy ... is serving meals to three hundred.

“Asked who is paying for the rooms, Mr. Balestrieri [shrugs]. 'We don't know,' he [says]. 'We don't know who, we don't know how much; we don't know anything. But it's a human catastrophe – we have to respond, and worry about all that later.’”³

“What about me?”

Has this gotten me any more love, more joy?

I hope this makes me happy
I hope [these things] make me happy

None of it will make us happy
Unless we do one simple thing
Change *me* for *you*.
Say, “May you be happy”
“What about you?”

When you're happy, I'm happy
That's all happiness is
It's just the heart being free.⁴

April 14th. Fossa, Italy. “More than sixty-five years after villagers provided shelter to Italian Jews fleeing ... the Nazis, a group of those who evaded capture rushed to repay that sacrifice in rural communities hit by [the] earthquake....

“A delegation of ... twenty elderly Jews and their descendants, as well as community leaders, made their way to makeshift camps in the area around the mountain city of L'Aquila ... peering into tents in a bid to find their saviors....

Alberto Di Consiglio's “parents were sheltered here during the war.... 'I wouldn't

3 William J. Kole, “Survivors of Italy Earthquake Flee to Hotels on Tranquil Coastline,” *The Boston Globe*, April 10, 2009, p. A4

4 Quotes and paraphrasing of the work of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, mipham.com

be here if it weren't for these people. We have to help them....'

“[In mid-1943 when ... German forces began to take direct control of central and northern Italy,] at least five Jewish families, around thirty people.... left their native Rome [and] took shelter ... in the small [hamlet] of Fossa.... about ten miles from L'Aquila..... In October of 1943, ... Nazi troops swept in on the capital's Old Ghetto neighborhood, deporting more than two thousand Jews. Only a handful survived the death camps....

“When warned [that] the Germans had learned of their presence [in Fossa,the refugees] were forced to flee to ... nearby ... Casentino....

“We left at night. It was winter,' [says Emma Di Segni], 'and the snow was up to here' [She gestures to her waist.]. 'We stayed in a ruined house until a woman took us in.'

“[They] remained [in hiding] until the arrival of the Allies, a year later....

“Though [the refugees] had fake documents and [pretended to be] fleeing Allied bombings, [Mrs. Di Segni added,] their hosts knew who they were, and were aware ... [that,] if caught sheltering Jews ... they could be executed....

“[She recalls,] 'They knew what they risked, but they never said anything.'

“Mrs. Di Segni is in contact with descendants of her saviors, now living in Pittsburgh, but she came to the tent camp set up outside Casentino to look for their next-door neighbors.” Officials helped her make contact via cellphone. Mrs. Di Segni “cried into the phone as she made sure everyone was safe, and invited them to stay at her home in Rome.”⁵

“What about me?”

Has this gotten me any more love, more joy?

I hope this makes me happy
I hope [these things] make me happy

None of it will make us happy

5 Ariel David, “Italian Jews Aid World War II Saviors Hit by Quake,” *The Boston Globe*, April 14, 2009, p. A7

Unless we do one simple thing
 Change *me* for *you*.
 Say, “May you be happy”
 “What about you?”

When you're happy, I'm happy
 That's all happiness is
 It's just the heart being free.⁶

What does it mean to ask, *What about you?* What does it mean to *change me for you?* Hotel workers, police, townspeople, management, kitchen staff, the children of Holocaust survivors ... each and every one of them waking up each and every morning to that heartbeat: not *what about me*, but *what about you?* Not *may I be happy*, but *may you be happy*. And *when you're happy, I'm happy*. This is what it means to live the seventh principle of Unitarian Universalism, to know that our spiritual well-being depends on remembering our deep interconnectedness. This is what it means to possess the secret of happiness.

MIT's Buddhist chaplain and the director of the Dalai Lama Center, the Venerable Tenzin Priyadarshi, said this week that the financial recession in which the world now finds itself was clearly preceded by – and we might say brought to us by – a recession in ethics and values.⁷ It's high time for a revolution in ethics and values. To arms, my friends! As we hold one another in the embrace of this spiritual community, let us celebrate that our true wealth can be measured in love.

Not *what about me*, but *what about you?*
 Not *may I be happy*, but *may you be happy*.

Today is Covenant Renewal Sunday. We don't just join Arlington Street once, a long time ago. Every year, in one sacred rite, we give ourselves, once again, to this beloved community of memory and hope; rededicate ourselves to our mission to gather in love, service, justice, and peace; devote ourselves anew to dwell together in peace, to speak our truths in love, and to help one another.

Annie Dillard writes, “...[S]pend it all, shoot it, play it, lose it, all, right away,

⁶ Quotes and paraphrasing of the work of Sakyong Mipham Rinpoche, mipham.com

⁷ NPR, 4/28/09, morning news interview

every time. Do not hoard what seems good for a later place ... or for another...; give it, give it all, give it now. The impulse to save something good for a better place is the signal to spend it now. Something will arise for later, something better. These things fill in from behind, from beneath, like well water... Anything [we] do not give freely and abundantly becomes lost to [us].”⁸

My spiritual companions, my beloved congregation, these times are precious and precarious and full of possibility. May you be happy. May we be known for our courage and our generosity: the life-giving combination of our open hearts, open minds, and open hands.

8 Annie Dillard, *The Writing Life* (1989)

