Summer Circle 2017-Compassion

On Sunday, July 23, 2017, The One Light Institute held its first event, a Summer Circle celebrating Compassion. The event was attended by poets and singers, writers and readers, social workers and government servants, mothers and fathers, and, most importantly, children.

The event began with a prayer of light, the link to which you can find here:  
[**http://www.onelightinstitute.org/prayer-of-light.html**](http://www.onelightinstitute.org/prayer-of-light.html)

The prayer was followed by an introduction from the founder of The One Light Institute, Sharmin Ahmad, who spoke about the theory of quantum entanglement, and how all living creatures are part of a beautiful web of life and light. The One Light Institute’s aim to foster unity builds upon the idea of light as a metaphor for the source of guidance that propels a seeker to pursue a higher purpose in life, while at the same time acknowledging light as the source of all creation. Sharmin shared her passion for the cultivation of peace and enlightenment through multi-dimensional education and experiential learning. To that end, the first event, the Compassion Summer Circle, was held, where every guest spoke as their spirit moved them, sharing song, poetry, science, personal experiences, and more.

The guests at the Summer Circle shared their reflections on the meaning and implementation of compassion in various ways. From singing songs that spoke about compassion, to the recitation of poetry composed for the occasion, artistic interpretations of compassion also encompassed a reading of Rumi’s poetry accompanied by flute and tambourine. Many wonderful insights were shared by members of the Circle. Participants spoke about how compassion – or the lack thereof – has impacted their lives, from workplace interactions to the importance of mentorship and guidance in one’s life. Parallels were drawn between Islamic legal systems and those of the United States; all based upon principles of freedom, equality, and a baseline of equity and justice that underpins a strong advocacy for implementation of the greater ideals of compassion and forgiveness.

Maliha Shaikh spoke of Thomas Jefferson’s Quran. Jefferson studied Shariah as a law student at the College of William & Mary. He was taught the three types of law prevailing in the world at that time: French Law, British Common Law, and Shariah Law. In fact, Shariah Law is built upon certain “maqasid” – or goals, which are preservation of and the right to: Religion/Faith (din), Life (nafs), Lineage/Progeny (nasl), Intellect (‘aql), and Property/Wealth (mal). These goals are strikingly similar to the Bill of Rights, an idea which is explored further in this article by Summer Circle participant Imad-ad-Dean Ahmad, of the Minaret of Freedom Institute <http://www.minaret.org/ih%20-%20liberty.pdf>

The idea of justice versus compassion was also explored. No one can fault the validity of the statement “an eye for an eye” – it epitomizes the principle of equality and entitlement of equal retribution. However, in order to create a compassionate society, there must also be an awareness that justice is the *bare minimum, or baseline* at which any society can exist, and that, at the same time, all efforts must be made to aspire towards forgiveness instead. A story was told of an ancient Afghani king, who in all cases in his kingdom where the death penalty was decreed – a death for a death – travelled to the home of the wronged family and begged them to forgive the perpetrator – as a means to fostering a tolerant, compassionate society.

Dr. Sahar Khamis, whose husband suffered for over six years before finally succumbing to cancer, took this idea even further, when she discussed tolerance. Tolerance, she said, is also a lowest denominator – we cannot have a society that functions on a level of anything less. However, it should serve as a beginning point for co-existence, from which one moves to acceptance and, finally, to embracing of the “other.” She spoke about the humbling, unifying nature of suffering. As a mother of an autistic child, she also shared the indiscriminate nature of pain, which does not choose between rich and poor, black or white. She talked of her experiences with other parents, and how through undergoing trial and tribulation, you emerge with a renewed sense of compassion for all of God’s creation.

Luby Ismail, founder of Connecting Cultures, spoke of her battle with multiple sclerosis, and the devastating day when her doctors told her she would no longer be able to walk. Her daughter, speaking with the wisdom and the clarity of the young, told her: “Mama, you don’t need your legs to walk. You can walk with your heart.” These words of wisdom resonated, as we resolved to move forward, walking with our hearts, not our legs, or even our minds.

Sharmin talked about an incident from her childhood, when her father was a powerful political leader and cyclone ravaged her native Bangladesh. Her father and his colleagues mobilized operations to aid the affected. One day, however, Sharmin saw him holding a dead bird in his hand, and weeping: “I was not able to save her. I should have thought more, planned more – I have a responsibility to the animals in the fields and the birds in the trees – I should have saved her.” She told us how this lesson has always stayed with her – genuine compassion includes compassion for even the smallest of God’s creatures. And genuine leadership is built on a foundation of compassion.

The event was concluded by several talented young participants, who had prepared skits, spokenword poetry, and speeches about challenges facing them and their peers today, such as racism and Islamophobia. They illustrated how a lack of compassion can foster a vicious cycle where the one who is bullied in turn bullies, and discussed how compassion and empathy can be integral in breaking that cycle.

Once the Summer Circle was concluded, the guests joined in celebrating the event with a feast of international cuisine, incorporating dishes from countries as varied as Iran and Bangladesh. Conversations continued, centered around the themes of compassion, inclusivity, and the need to involve in the greater community and promote positive change.

July 23 also marked the anniversary of the92ndbirthday of Sharmin’s father, Tajuddin Ahmad. He was the first Prime Minister of Bangladesh, who led the war of liberation for Bangladesh to victory. His birthdate marked an auspicious beginning for The One Light Institute, which aspires to incorporate his lofty ideals of liberation, social justice, unity, and above all, compassion for all.

Further events will be held soon, inshallah, and our upcoming Autumn Circle on October 22nd will celebrate “Giving”. We look forward to welcoming you to our events!

Summary by Maliha Shaikh