

Vinyl 2010 Essay Competition

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Summary:

We must appreciate our fellow human beings, and change our attitudes and priorities, to reveal the already present energy and strength that can heal world hunger.

Essay:

Human Energy: Enough to Light up the World

Where is the real energy crisis? I am lucky to live in New York City. I'm lying on the world's best real estate. We are all lying. Everyday I pass beggars on the street. I used to tell myself I didn't have any extra money to give them. Yet I must have at least a quarter. What if everyone who passed by them each night gave just that much? Then would they have enough? Would that be enough for us, too?

New Yorkers don't give change to the homeless people, because "They'll just spend it on alcohol." When a friend saw me giving money to a homeless person, he said, "You're just doing that to make yourself feel better." But isn't that what we do, when we tell ourselves, they'll just spend it on alcohol?

After traveling to Istanbul, I made a vow to *always* give them my spare change. After experiencing hunger, I can *never* look away.

In Istanbul I walked with a Kurdish man, and on the steps of a mosque he swiftly bent down to give change to a beggar woman dressed all in black. I didn't of course, I was used to rushing past. I felt so embarrassed. The Kurds who come to Istanbul from the countryside are very poor, and work extremely hard to make a living. They help each other when they can, because they needed help too when they arrived. They have empathy.

When you're hungry you can't think of anything else. When I was hungry, I could look at food magazines for hours. When you don't have food, every thought is about food. You won't think of love, or art, or music, or dance. You won't think of politics, because the system has long since failed, and the victims don't make decisions. There is no room to become more human, no room to grow.

That is why an acknowledgement of our unique, beautiful, and infinite humanity, from the ones with food towards the ones without food, is imperative to ending hunger worldwide. I have heard the excuses we use about the Others. Whoever you are, wherever your country may be, you can find an Other. Someone with mirrored desires, priorities, and loves, but for historic, national, linguistic, or (can I dare say) racial reasons, your society has labeled them an Other.

American Segregationists argued "Separate but Equal." This was overturned because despite the pleas of segregationists, physical evidence proved that black children had inferior schools to white children, black water fountains were less maintained than white water fountains, and black movie theater sections had worse seats than white sections. We think hierarchically. Riane Eisler, author of *The Chalice and the Blade*, argues that this pattern of hierarchal thinking began with the advent of written history, when violent, patriarchal societies replaced peaceful, egalitarian societies. (She is not the only voice to point out that the degradation of women is

prevalent in societies plagued by war, hunger, poverty, or violence.) In the hierarchical viewpoint, if you have two things, A and B, then one has to be better, and one has to be worse. This is why “Separate but Equal” failed; separating *makes* unequal. Even an army of the most meticulous mathematicians and bureaucrats could not be able to go through the state of Georgia in the early 1900s to ensure that each pair of schools got equal funding, because they would be viewing the schools through a hierarchical, racist, lens. Their needn’t have been an official policy giving more money to white schools, the officials would do this automatically. Every single person who didn’t actively work against segregation was perpetuating the system. Every one who benefited from segregation, anyone who stood by placidly, anyone ‘following orders’, was guilty of segregation. Similarly, anyone who today stands placidly by, ignoring the plight of others, is guilty of hunger.

We need to stop looking at fellow human beings as Others. There is no you or I, only us. The real energy crisis is in us, in our lack of empathy. Famines are not due to a lack of food in the world, but to political reasons; corrupt officials become scared and will hoard the food that is donated to poor countries. In wartime the roads to deliver food are blocked. The earth can give us enough food. However we treat the earth like a machine, and plant crops to make the most money, when organic farming, or farming in circles instead of square plots so that there is less water run-off and less salinization of the soil would give us much more food in the long run. No one should be hungry. No one needs to be hungry. We would have enough food, if feeding the world were a priority over making more money.

I’ve never actually seen a drunken homeless person, the ones I have talked to are all sober, grateful, and kind. Maybe it would be more helpful, if I saved up my change, and gave one large contribution to the Salvation Army, as my friend had suggested. True, they could accomplish more for more people with increased funding. But that doesn’t address the problem of me walking away from a fellow human being who is *cold*, and *hungry*. Giving them change is acknowledging their humanity. Food allows them to live up to their full, beautiful, human potential.

We are all in this together. As travel guide author Rick Steves said, “There are 6 billion equally important people on this planet.” Until we address our apathy, our fear, and these stigmas, how will we have the energy to undertake famines in Africa, refugees from floods and tsunamis, and the millions of people living below the poverty line around the globe?

I do have hope, because I know that this energy is here. It’s just untapped. I traveled halfway across the world, to find my switch. Where is yours?