

BEING HUMAN IN THIS WORLD

A personal credo --- John Robbins

I am someone who works and prays for world peace. Perhaps you are, too. But our society is spending a billion dollars a day preparing for war.

I believe that inner peace is found when you love the world as it is, rather than faulting it for not living up to your expectations. I believe in forgiveness. I believe in accepting others for who they are. But I am part of a society that is spending far more on weapons of mass destruction and producing far more toxic waste than any other in the history of the world.

I believe in bringing a positive attitude toward life. I believe that love is stronger than fear. But our country now has more gun dealers than gas stations.

I have stood with my hand over my heart, pledging allegiance to this country and reciting the words "with liberty and justice for all." I want this nation to be the land of the free. But today a greater proportion of U.S. citizens are behind bars than any other country in the world. Many states now spend more money on prisons than on education.

I have been stirred to my core by the words and example of Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. I believe in this country's promise of equal opportunity for all. But young black males now make up 6 percent of the population of this country, and 50 percent of prison inmates.

I want to uphold the brotherhood and sisterhood of all people. I believe that how we treat each other says a lot about us as people. But how do you honor the dignity and inherent worth of every human being when shoe companies are paying basketball players \$20 million to endorse their shoes, while paying their workers 20 cents an hour to make them?

I believe that that every child is a precious treasure. I affirm that all children deserve to be nurtured and protected. But in this rich and prosperous country more than 25 percent of all children are living in poverty.

I have been proud of my country. But today, among the world's industrialized nations, our nation is number one in billionaires - and number one in children and elderly living in poverty. Number one in real wealth - and number one in unequal wealth distribution. Number one in big houses - and number one in homelessness.

I love the natural world, and do my best to honor the living Earth. Perhaps you do, too. But even as many of us do what we can, the tropical rainforests are being destroyed so people whose cholesterol levels are too high can eat hamburgers a quarter cent cheaper. Rainfall now often contains such high levels of pesticides that it would be illegal to sell as drinking water. And the tallest mountain on the east coast is a garbage dump.

I draw great strength from my kinship with animals. Some of my best friends have had four legs. Perhaps you, too, have had a relationship with an animal that has enriched you as a human being. But much of our food today comes from animals raised in factory farms that resemble concentration camps.

There is so much pain and death in our times. This is not an easy time to be a person of conscience and feeling. It can be terribly hard today to stay in touch with your deep soul. It can seem all but impossible to keep your love alive. The world has a way of blowing relentless hurricane winds at our little flickering candles of faith.

This is what I have to say at this time in history. I stand here in the face of the anguish of our time, and I affirm that it is possible to see it all, to gaze fully into the abyss, and yet not become bitter and broken.

I stand for this. We are not here to be defeated. Our hopes are not empty vessels holding no truth. I stand for this. Our dreams and prayers are rooted in something greater than the forces of death.

I stand for this. Our despair and fury at the world's brutalities are part of our awakening. There is something mysterious taking place in this world that is part of our healing.

I stand for this. This world is not a tragic and terrible mistake. With all its flaws, it is still a sacred path to our destiny as human beings. There is horror and agony here, yes, and it can be overwhelming. But there are also infinite opportunities for new life, beauty, and the learnings of love.

Bitter winds are howling. Let them howl. We can shelter each other and put our little flames together. Maybe then we will find ourselves better able to face adversity. Maybe then we will find that the pain we feared would destroy us rather brings us back to what gives us life.

I stand for this. There are sources of joy here, and we are here to protect them and cherish them.

I stand for this. If we meet the world with eyes that do not flinch and hearts that are open, we will find ourselves capable of what is asked of us.

I stand for this. We who are alive, with breath in our bodies and love in our hearts, have much to be thankful for.

I stand for this. In our connection with each other we are more than strong and brave. We are humble enough to be human in this world.