



DISCOVERING A NEW WAY TO BE HUMAN

by **Robert V. Taylor**

“It’s harder to be human than it used to be” is a refrain I hear often. It usually reflects exasperation and helplessness about a rapidly changing economy and culture. With it comes a yearning to be engaged with life. It is possible to embrace a new way of being human that results in becoming more fully alive that results in moving from passive complacency to animated engagement with life.

Beyond the confines of religion there is a spirituality of profound inter-connectedness between the inherent spiritual truths that exist within you and your own oneness with others. It is free of the dogma of organized religion while drawing on the spiritual wisdom that resides within the human consciousness and story. It is a transformative, liberating and enlivening path that includes these three pathways.

Connecting Stories

Within the arc of your own story significant experiences are more than simply “Aha” moments. Those moments shape you and reveal an invitation to see the sacred in your awareness of who you are instead of only defining yourself by what you do.

In learning to tell your story, while practicing attentive listening to the story of others, you develop an intentional way of discovering unexpected connection and oneness with others. Like many, I was raised believing that claiming my story was frowned upon. Learning to trust my voice and develop self-compassion about my story were stepping stones to unlocking the power of connecting stories.

As you accept the invitation to share your story out of gratitude for who you are a more finely attuned curiosity about the world emerges. Replacing a narrow consciousness of despair or disengagement you discover a path of new freedom in which feasting with others becomes a metaphor for your experience of life. On this new terrain you develop an expectancy and gratitude for the way in which your life is interwoven with others.

The world needs the unique contribution of your connecting story because it adds to the collective human consciousness of what it means to be both human and fully alive.

Beyond Enclosures

Enclosures are the expectations and boundaries drawn by others – perhaps family, religion or unexamined assumptions – that define and so confine a limited you. The enclosures you live behind result in squelching your voice and living with a cramped heart. Stepping beyond your own enclosures is a choice to embrace a new way to be human.

Testing and discerning your voice reveals that it is too important to your humanity to be ignored. The voices of those closest to you often offer bad advice – not because they are bad people, but because a freed you unsettles or disrupts their needs.

As you become present to yourself you move beyond the enclosures of those who say to you, “If only you were....” Instead of living someplace else – perhaps in your head and not your heart – you begin to embrace the reality of being grounded in the magnificence that exists within you. This is a life-changer because it allows you to show up for life each day with a new empathy for yourself and your place in the human story.

Discovering that you are “good enough” unleashes a life-giving energy that shifts your engagement with the world. Beyond your enclosures it becomes possible to experience life through the lens of compassion. When your circle of compassion joins that of others you join with them in the energy of creating a new narrative of what it means to be human.

Risky Invitations

Life is replete with invitations that are risky because they take us out of our assumed roles and beyond our cultivated comfort zones. They raise the stakes about what an enlivened life of meaning is about. You can turn back from them and trifle with your life or stop clutching at imagined certainties and discover the fullness of who you are becoming.

Many of us have experienced conditional love which keeps us from ourselves and the courage to love generously. None of us is a conditional human being and the risky invitations are a reminder that generous love is never about self-negation or the negation of another human being. Responding to risky invitations unveils a path on which your very existence is cause for thanks.

When we are mindful about the core human and spiritual value of each person’s belovedness we become aware and awake to life around us. Instead of despair about life our imagination and intuition is engaged. Cultivating your imagination nourishes the sacred in you and is essential to the well-being of the world. To be human is to be part of limitless imagination which allows you to participate in being a person of creative life-giving hope in the world.

The discouraging news of the world that saps the energy of so many shifts when, loved for your existence and grounded in imagination you become part of polishing the world. Not to gloss over the difficulties but to be an active participant in repairing and loving the world. Your response to a seemingly risky invitation is transformative.

Your own life is at stake in the choices about whether to choose to be resigned to life the way it appears to be or instead choose a new way to be human. This is no trifling matter because it becomes a choice of how to be fully alive. It is a choice that has life-draining or life-giving consequences for you and the world.

Robert V. Taylor is the author of *A New Way to Be Human: 7 Spiritual Pathways to Becoming Fully Alive* (New Page Books, April 2012) and Chair of the Desmond Tutu Peace Foundation in New York.