

Don't Be Too Sure, the Power of Maybe
UUF

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The power of maybe. Imagine those words written on the wall in the dressing rooms at the Super Bowl! Or wafting through the air at the Olympics. Or as words emanating from the mouth of a brain surgeon.

Sometimes, maybe, is not the word we want to hear; not the concept we want to focus on. "Maybe" can often sound feeble.

Then there are times when "maybe" can be a sign of optimism or encouragement. "Maybe" we can find the key! Maybe we can fix it! Maybe we can go out for ice-cream. You "may be" on the verge of a scientific discovery.

The concept of being sure works the same way. Being sure puts us on solid ground. It allows us to feel safe. Being sure is often associated with intelligence and knowledge. Being sure is... manly!

On the other hand, being sure can be a delusion. It may exist only in our mind. Placing a bet on a "sure thing" can have devastating consequences. I'm sure, many of us have taken apart a piece of equipment, sure we'd be able to put it back together again.

Given the multiple interpretations, the varied implications, I didn't know what to do with the words when Kathy came to me with her chosen sermon title. "Don't be too sure" sounded, well, almost un-American. And the "power of maybe"...didn't seem to have much good news in it...and sermons are always supposed to have a good news message.

I suspect she thought I was rather dense as I asked her to explain her idea for this sermon several times. During her second or third try, she quoted Ghandi... "it's not possible to shake hands with a clinched fist".

I couldn't connect shaking hands with a clinched fist with not being sure or the power of maybe. The look on my face must have been a dead give-away.... She tried again.

She told the story of the monkeys and the coconut trap. My mind began to thaw. The monkeys trapped themselves by hanging on to what they thought was a sure thing. I was beginning to get it.

When we latch onto a sure thing, it's as if nothing else exists. It's such a sure thing we have no need for other considerations. It's as if, closing our hand around a sure thing simultaneously closes our eyes and our minds.

But in a way, doesn't that make sense? Why should we constantly question what we think we know, what we think we see? Constantly questioning everything seems a colossal waste of time and energy. It could keep us running in circles, never making any progress.

So while I think I'm beginning to 'get it", I'm not at all sure I understand this notion of not being too sure. I want to know, which house is mine, which car, which partner is mine! There are some things you don't want to get wrong.

But as I gave it more thought, I came to see that not all things fall into the same category. While I want to make sure I know which is my house, maybe I don't need to be so sure about an idea, a concept or point of view.

Even when I think I'm right, or have the best idea, is there a way to believe in myself but not need to tighten my fist around it? Is there a way of knowing that allows for the possibility of "maybe not"? Or... yes/and? Is there a way to know and still be open to possibilities that differ?

I began to see the significance of the concept of not being too sure, the significance of the question... "how to know something but not tighten one's fist around it, at exclusion of all else"?

I said, hummm, this could work! I thought of what's become one of my favorite sayings of late: "there is no learning from a place of knowing". I didn't make it up, I read it somewhere.

We all need a north star, a compass point to live by, that points us in a direction of our choosing. We need a chosen definition of who we are and what's important. But how do we not let a chosen direction, goal or objective, trap us because our hand holds it within a closed fist?

I thought of a model that I learned from colleagues, many years ago. It was a four box model of how to live a well rounded life. The model called for us to have people in our lives that (1) comforted us, and people who (2) celebrated with us. It said we needed people in our lives who helped us (3) clarify our thoughts, beliefs and feelings .

And lastly, it had a category for people who would (4) confront us. The model said we all need people in our lives who will challenge us. Challenge us to do our best, challenge us to try again. We need people who will confront our behavior, our thoughts and beliefs. We need people who will confront us when we are wallowing in “poor me”, confront us when we are holding on too tightly to being right, to being sure.

Often a simple question will do: “Have you lost your mind!?”
“What are you doing!?” “Have you gone crazy!?”

It sometimes seems the more we age, the more success we have in life, the more education or intelligence we have, the greater we are at risk of getting trapped in our rightness. I sometimes fear, we UUs are at particular risk.

Until the last few years, we UU's were the denomination with the highest level of education, per capita, of any other religion in the US. Our average level of income was also relatively high. Now combine that with a high percentage of us who reject the existence of a supreme being and we can easily find ourselves claiming ownership of the land of rightness and goodness.

Call in the clarifiers!!! Ask them to help us navigate the boundaries of knowing for sure, being open to "yes/and", and finding stability in standing in the land of "maybe". Ask them to help us recognize where we need more balance in our lives and how to loosen our grip on knowing.

Kathy wants us to consider that there's power in "maybe". She wants us to consider that when we loosen our grip we can free ourselves from the trap of being sure, the trap of knowing for sure. Perhaps her knowledge of the subject comes from years as a mediator. She's seen that opportunities open up if we can sit in a place of "maybe".

If we can be open to the possibility that someone else may have a legitimate perspective, may have a point worthy of consideration. If we

can make space for others' viewpoint, feelings, needs...our world almost magically gets bigger.

I want to take you back to your meditation this morning. Where you able to let go of a burden, a worry, a weight on your psyche? [If not,] were you able to see the possibility of relating to a constraint differently? Where you able to experience or recognize the possibility of feeling lighter, more at ease, more grounded, more whole? Where you able to make room for "maybe"?

Learning how to adopt a mindset that's not fixed can make all the difference in the world. Learning to live in the "maybe" can open up a whole new world. Opening a closed fist from around surety, letting go of the need to be right, can transform our lives.

And the good news is: we do not need to starve just because we let go of a handful of rice. We will not shrivel up and blow away if we are not right. Our world will not collapse if we share territory.

We often fear it will take great effort to do things differently. We often fear we need to go through some arduous process of learning something new and different in order to let go, grow or change.

A powerful lesson I learned a number of years ago---and all too often have forgotten—is that you don't necessarily need to learn something new in order change or make progress. Often, all that's required is to **stop** doing what you are doing, or stop believing what you believe.

Another admonition says: when you can't reach your goal, don't change the goal change your action steps.

The power of maybe is that it enhances our vision, what we can see, it maximizes our options and it increases the likelihood of a richer, healthier life. So, don't be too sure, for there is power in Maybe.