

Ashland Culture of Peace: Sowing seeds of compassion

By Bob Morse Ashland Culture of Peace Commission

Posted Sep 18, 2016 at 1:14 PM

Updated Feb 24, 2017 at 10:49 AM

What does compassion mean to you? What happens inside you when you ponder this question?

The Ashland Culture of Peace holds the space so that compassion may develop in relationships and in community. The Culture of Peace is collaborating with Global Force for Healing and Unity in Ashland in bringing David Breaux and his Compassion Tour to our city from Sept. 26 to Oct. 17.

David Breaux is known for having stood on a street corner in Davis, California, with a notebook in which people recorded their sense of what compassion means. His multi-city tour began as an inward journey about a decade ago.

Looking back, Breaux refers to 2008 as a time of spiritual inquiry which manifested in “chosen” solitude. His companions on this inner exploration were books and YouTube videos acquainting him with mystic masters and spiritual philosophies.

Inspired by a TED talk on compassion, Breaux responded by writing a paragraph full of ideas. While his own concepts on compassion were “marinating,” he ended his seclusion and ventured outside in pursuit of a collective definition.

Breaux found engagement. “I was learning that none of us remains strangers after speaking with one another.”

Reflecting on Peace Pilgrim’s multiple peace walks across America as an elder, Breaux pondered what he could do as a young adult. His still, small voice directed: “Do thy will.”

Breaux surrendered and rid himself of material possessions. He set the intention to take good care of his body while dedicating his life to compassion, his “votary.”

Just as Ashlanders in their exploration into a culture of peace recognize that the path starts in one's own heart, Breaux acknowledges that his unusual life purpose is grounded in the inquiry of "Who Am I?"

Breaux has noticed that his coming from a place of self-inquiry and reaching out to others by inquiring about their relationship with compassion attracts many others who are seeking their own purpose.

Similarly, Peace Ambassadors, who are Ashlanders ushering in a culture of peace through such practices as holding listening circles on the commons, experience the power of curiosity expressed through asking inviting questions.

Open heartedness begets open hearts. Passersby often surprise themselves by their ease in responding and by addressing more than just a description of compassion. Outdoors and without walls, David Breaux and Peace Ambassadors create "containers" where it just naturally feels safe to share what's on one's heart.

Now no longer standing on the corner holding a notebook but sitting holding the presence of love and peace, Breaux's collection of reflections on compassion has grown and his own relationship to compassion has deepened. He has come to see "recognizing essence" as a vital aspect of compassion.

On a practical level Breaux honors the interdependence of people and nature. Our need for daily eating is universal. Seeing someone in need, my caring surfaces, which elicits my compassion.

On a subtle level Breaux finds answers to the "Who Am I?" question in realizing how each of us is a beacon of life. He sees his own and others' essence as love. Recognizing love is a healing.

Aligned with this subtler understanding of the web of life, compassion emerges from the oneness that unifies all living beings. Peace Ambassadors view all people as being of equal worth, as well as a wealth of stories to be told, not an accumulation of problems to be fixed.

For Breaux, compassion begins with listening. He contends that we become acquainted with a tree by listening to its seasons, with the planet when it speaks up through climate change. We get to know people through listening to their specific story. Understanding can't take place in a vacuum.

Breaux's experience parallels that of the Peace Ambassadors: We listen with open hearts so that others may hear themselves.

Bob Morse is a Peace Ambassador with the Ashland Culture of Peace Commission. Email comments and questions to ashlandcpc@gmail.com, or drop by the commission office at 33 1st St., Suite 1. The ACPC website is www.ashlandcpc.org; like the commission on Facebook at www.facebook.com/AshlandCultureofPeaceCommission.



SIGN UP FOR DAILY E-MAIL

Wake up to the day's top news, delivered to your inbox

