

A Letter to My Students
Joseph J. Fahey

Dear Students,

Now that the exams are over and the grades are in I wanted to take this opportunity to thank you for a wonderful course that we shared together. In our course we examined some powerful ideas and debated some key moral problems of our time. At the end of a course like this it is understandable that one can feel overwhelmed by the complexity of the problems that face our small planet. “What can I do? I’m only a student.” many of you tell me. In a real sense, you have answered your own question: yes, you are a student and the most important thing you can do right now is to be a *good* student, an *aware* student, and a student who believes you have a *mission* in life. That’s what you can do right now: think, feel, and believe you can make a difference.

But there’s more. Here are several suggestions that I hope will help you as you discover your mission in life.

* **Believe in people.** Despite all of our problems and mistakes as a species remember that we simply could not have survived this long if kindness were not the law of our nature. Who has ever counted the millions of acts of kindness that take place on a daily basis throughout our world or the billions of acts of kindness and love that have taken place in history? Sure we’ve had violence and injustice in human history but we must remember, as Gandhi said, that “nonviolence is as old as the hills.” Human beings aren’t perfect but we are far better than we think are. Believe in yourself and you’ll have faith in others, hope for the future, and love for all. And love will make the difference, it always does.

* **We are one human family.** Scientifically, there is no evidence that human beings belong to distinct “races” that think or feel differently from one another. *Homo sapiens* is one race, the human race. Spiritually, we are all united by a common humanity that is far stronger than any ethnic or religious divide. Travel widely to experience our shared humanity; you will be surprised and delighted to meet so many wonderful people in every nation on every continent. Don’t be so small as to think that one nation or one religion is the essence of humanity; be bigger than that.

* **Have a sense of humor.** The medieval scholastic ideal was to teach each student to be a *homo ludens* – a playful person. An alert intellect is at heart a mind that can play with ideas and that understands the distinction between what is “essential” and what is “trivial” in any argument. A playful mind welcomes all ideas and treats each with respect while recognizing that there are great ideas, good ideas, silly ideas, and bad ideas. I have never met a playful person who did not also have a great sense of humor. A humorous person looks at life with wonder and awe and experiences an inner joy despite personal setbacks and the absurdity of the historical moment.

* **Work for Justice.** The ancients defined justice as “to render to another his or her due.” As you recall, we had quite a lively debate about what is “due” to human beings: Do workers deserve a living wage? Do people have a right to national health insurance? Is war a legitimate path to peace? Working for justice means working for human rights at home and abroad; make the UN *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* your steady guide as you seek justice for all. Choose a career that advances the cause of justice for people, for animals, for the air we breathe. Your destiny is intimately linked to that of others.

* **Be a peacemaker.** Don’t subscribe to the simplistic philosophy that divides the world into “good” guys and “bad” guys. Remember the Quaker saying, “There is of God in each of us.” Learn the majestic philosophy of nonviolence that, in Dr. King’s words, empowers people with a “sword that heals.” Practice the hundreds of methods of nonviolent resistance and reconciliation that can produce an authentic peace based on social justice. Work for a World Union that will outlaw war and safeguard the environment for all future generations. And learn to suffer: great and difficult causes are never achieved without a measure of self-sacrifice and sheer hard work.

Thank you again for the time we spent together. I often learn a great deal from my students and this class was no exception. Each generation stands on the shoulders of the one that precedes it. Let your grandchildren and their children live in a better world because you were here!

Your mission is to love all.

Cordially, Dr. Fahey

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