

Greetings Beloved Tacoma Pierce County Community,

This March 2022 letter centers on the question: What do we believe?

It has been my experience that the set of lenses that focus my attention on particular things are created and interact based upon early foundational beliefs. The way we are socialized, some might even say programmed, creates predictable patterns of behavior. The socialization processes of the various groups with which we associate all have elements of belief systems.

Much like a red filter masks red objects, our life experience can nullify the lived experience of someone else. When we share lived experiences only within our social group it becomes nearly impossible to see another perspective. For instance, as a young child I had a defining moment watching the Evening News. The defining moment was triggered by specific grainy black-and-white TV images, that became permanently seared in my memory. The images; German Shepard dogs growling, snarling, snapping their teeth, and biting children. I'm not sure if I connected the fact that the children looked like me, but I identified with the children. However, a seed of belief was planted that day that grew and has been sustained through a lifetime. I was in my fifth decade before I was able to name the cluster of beliefs spawned at an early age. Nonetheless, when I began to tell my 7-minute story to a group of strangers, I had an aha moment that exposed of my most *enduring beliefs gathered by my young 5-year told eyes* .

This is but one obscure example of how early images and narratives can and do influence what we believe even if we are unable to consciously name the belief. Each of us have experienced life through our own unique family, cultural, education, economic, and faith lenses. I've been told, and I agree, that none of us are perfect. If that's true then the lenses or socialization process we have all experienced are less than perfect as well. Each of our, human made, lenses by definition, is imperfect. So I return to the fundamental question; What do you believe? Perhaps more importantly, what do you believe and act upon that may or may not be accessible your consciousness?

At our current worldview intersection the human race has a nearly infinite set of belief choices. Beliefs flawed by perception, logic, or irrational fear, but flawed, nonetheless. Unconscious bias *permeates what* is activated by light, darkness, sound, smell, or palpating heartbeat *all of which* is in the realm of autonomic brain function. Yet coding of such, what I call operating system bias, makes us all susceptible to acting upon unconscious bias while consciously thinking exactly the opposite. Which probably triggers a response like "I don't have a racist bone in my body"? Given that we all potentially are capable of learning something new about ourselves and others every day of our lives should prompt us all to conclude that our current state of knowledge, is at best incomplete. Therefore, I suspect, we all have our own unique set of ancient images or narratives that foster clusters or strands of ill-defined beliefs similar to my grainy black-and-white TV images, which falsely reinforce specific behaviors to this day.

For me, and I hope many with similar belief systems, practicing lifelong learning helps move us closer to a more perfect beloved community.

My goal was to argue the importance of reflecting on the question What do we believe? I have argued from my experience and understanding of human behavior that early learning and experiences have the potential of forming conscious and unconscious beliefs. Secondly, those early formed beliefs have a good chance of being flawed in a variety of ways. Living our lives on flawed conscious or unconscious inputs exemplifies the adage, garbage in garbage out. The solution, assuming we are not perfect humans, is to seek wisdom through lifelong learning. Not necessarily in a school classroom to know something, but by extending the hand of peace—an action step—to friends you have not met yet, by discovering fundamental common beliefs. It's not about what you believe, it's absolutely about what WE believe. The challenge this month is to take a little step, one that takes courage and a vision of a more perfect union.

What do you believe?

We believe all people deserve access to all forms of power including physical, emotional, intellectual, and political.

Jonathan Johnson
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President