

THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection

Activism

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“Elbows up!”—a phrase associated with hockey legend Gordie Howe’s gritty, defensive play—became an unexpected rallying cry of resistance this spring. When Scarborough native Mike Myers pointed to his elbow and mouthed the words during appearances on *Saturday Night Live*, it struck a national chord.

In the weeks that followed, digital creators and musicians across genres harnessed their platforms to bolster public resolve and raise awareness about the economic and sovereignty challenges facing Canada. Foreign leaders donned red and white in solidarity, and one patriotic pilot traced a giant maple leaf across the sky.

Millions of Canadians began educating themselves — and others — on how to shift purchasing habits toward local and domestic producers, starting with their weekly grocery run. Others reconsidered travel plans, leading to a measurable drop in cross-border traffic.

These are all forms of activism: intentional actions aimed at meaningful social or political change. Many who never considered themselves activists used economic pressure as a tool, with boycotts and ethical spending. Still others have risen to the moment, working tirelessly to support candidates in a federal election which saw record numbers of voters at advance polls.

Yet, lasting change is the work of generations. Today’s overlapping global challenges — what some now call the “polycrisis” — create a persistent sense of instability. Just as we “drink from wells we did not dig” and “sit in the shade of trees we did not plant,” so too must each of us bring our best selves to the legacy of justice and equity for those who come after us. Even if the path forward is unclear, it matters more than ever that we support each other in using our unique gifts and energy to make change.

This month, whether you’ve been a lifelong activist, have taken a break, or are just beginning to explore your path, regardless of age or status, may you find inspiration and encouragement in the readings and resources here and in conversation with your group.

May the Spirit of Justice guide you.

May the Spirit of Love – at the heart of this faith – protect and sustain you.

In faith and love,

Angela

Consider This...

Social Change Ecosystem Map- Created by Deepa Iyer, Keynote Speaker at the upcoming UUA General Assembly in June, this map is just one model that can help us identify the variety of roles needed to effect social change and those which naturally match our skills, strengths, knowledge and interests.

It can also help us to notice where we're stretched too thin if we're playing multiple roles in multiple contexts. Which role/s do you identify with most strongly?



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Weavers: see the through-lines of connectivity between people, places, organizations, ideas, and movements.

Experimenters: innovate, pioneer, and invent. Take risks and course-correct as needed.

Frontline Responders: address community crises by marshaling and organizing resources, networks, and messages.

Visionaries: imagine and generate our boldest possibilities, hopes and dreams, and remind us of our direction.

Builders: develop, organize, and implement ideas, practices, people, and resources in service of a collective vision.

Caregivers: nurture and nourish the people around them by creating and sustaining a community of care, joy, and connection.

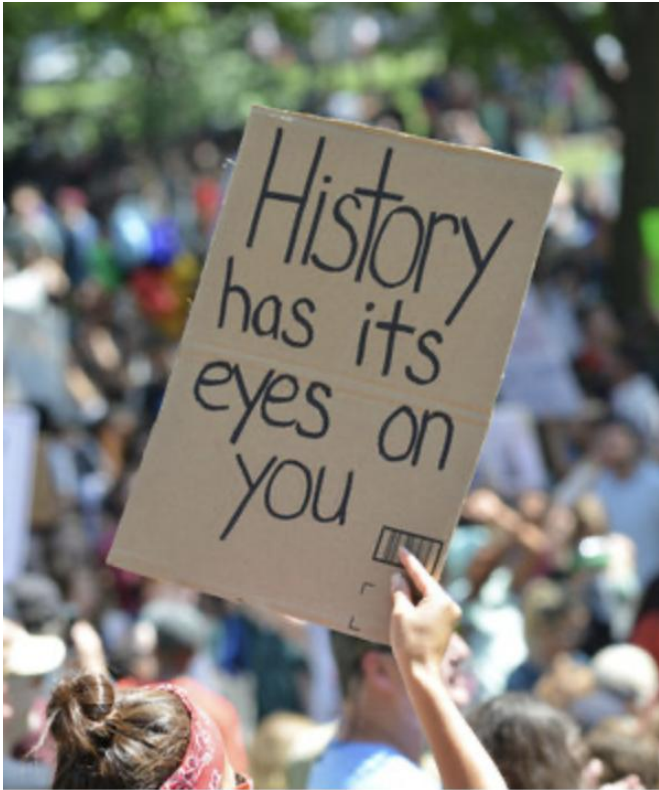
Disruptors: take uncomfortable and risky actions to shake up the status quo, to raise awareness, and to build power.

Healers: recognize and tend to the generational and current traumas caused by oppressive systems, institutions, policies, and practices.

Storytellers: craft and share our community stories, cultures, experiences, histories, and possibilities through art, music, media, and movement.

Guides: teach, counsel, and advise, using gifts of well-earned discernment and wisdom.

Questions to Live With



1. What does activism mean to you?
2. Author and social critic bell hooks wrote that “activism and spirituality go hand in hand.” On a continuum between spirituality and activism, where would you place yourself?
3. If you have been involved in social justice efforts, share what you valued and struggled with in those experiences?
4. How do art, culture, creative expressions, and symbols contribute to social change?
5. How do different generations approach activism? What can older activists learn from younger ones, and vice versa? Can children and teens be activists?
6. What are the roles and responsibilities of allies in supporting activist movements and marginalized communities?
7. If none of these questions address how you need to explore activism this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

I'm convinced of this: Good done anywhere is good done everywhere. For a change, start by speaking to people rather than walking by them like they're stones that don't matter. As long as you're breathing, it's never too late to do some good.

- Maya Angelou, Poet, Activist

Start where you are. Use what you have. Do what you can.

- Arthur Ashe, American Tennis Athlete and Civil Rights Activist

...We are living in times that will demand courage. When people ask me how do I draw hope, how do I stay encouraged, how do I continue to show up? The answer is that I look back. I look back and I look at how my existence here today is owed entirely to the courage of people who came before me. And so, what do I owe myself in that moment and to those who come after me? To exercise courage in this moment.

- Bree Newsome Bass, Activist, Musician, Filmmaker

We dive onto the world and swim beneath the surface. We become activists moving out of electronic enclosures into the neighborhood, into the community acting to raise the consciousness of everyone we contact.

- Peter Block, Author, Speaker, Consultant

Many of us didn't choose to become activists. We were activated. We could not stand to sit on the sidelines while our people were brutalized so needlessly. At some point, we choose to accept police violence, or we don't. Where will you stand?

- Cori Bush, U.S. Politician, Activist, Nurse, Pastor

You don't actually have to do activism to make a difference, just like existing in a space.

- Stevie Boebi, Queer Disabled YouTube Influencer and Activist

It's the action, not the fruit of the action, that's important. You have to do the right thing. It may not be in your power, may not be in your time, that there'll be any fruit. But that doesn't mean you stop doing the right thing. You may never know what results come from your action. But if you do nothing, there will be no result.

- Mahatma Gandhi, Indian Independence Movement Leader

Every moment is an organizing opportunity, every person a potential activist, every minute a chance to change the world.

- Dolores Huerta, American Labor Leader and Civil Rights Activist

Faithless Works

They say faith without works is dead
So I worked for equality
Next to my queer friends who wanted to get married
And I worked for religious freedom
Next to my Muslim friends who were accused of
being terrorists
And I worked for racial justice
Next to my Black friends whose lives were affected by
police brutality

Yet I didn't feel fully alive even after working myself
to death
Until I let my work become a spiritual practice
Until I let go of my attachment to the outcome
Until I stopped chasing after political issues,
one
after another
I still believe faith without works is dead
But works without faith is just as lifeless

- Rev. Dr. Jonipher Kwong, Interim Lead Minister, First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto



Landscapes of Change, Jill Pelto

I cannot prevent anyone from getting angry, or mad, or frustrated. I can only hope that they'll turn that anger and frustration and madness into something positive.

- Harvey Milk, First Openly Gay Elected Official in California

Dripping water hollows out stone, not through force but through persistence.

- Ovid, Roman Poet

You are not obliged to complete the work, neither are you free to abandon it.

- From Pirkei Avot, Ethical Teaching from the Jewish Rabbinic Tradition

It is not happenstance or luck that Indigenous people and our lands still exist after centuries of attack. This is our strategic brilliance. Our presence is our weapon, and this is visible to me at every protest, every mobilization, every time a Two Spirit person gifts us with a dance at our powwows, every time we speak our truths, every time we embody Indigenous life.

- Leanne Betasamosake Simpson, Mississauga Nishnaabeg writer, musician, and academic

If you're new to advocacy or activism, look for groups and people who have already been doing the work and connect with them and ask them how can you support their efforts because they will already have...the experience, they already have the knowledge, they already have the infrastructure in place, and these are groups and people who always need more help....

- Dr. Nadine Thornhill, Sex Educator

Activism is not about waiting for the right moment; it's about creating the right moment.

- Ai Weiwei, Artist, Documentarian, and Activist

Belisa Crepusculario had been born into a family so poor they did not even have names to give their children...she herself had searched until she found the poetry of "beauty" and "twilight" and cloaked herself in it.

- Adapted from Isabelle Allende, Author

Micro activism ... teaches us that exactly who we are and what we bring to the table is precisely the kind of activism the world needs.

- Layla F. Saad, Author, Speaker, Teacher

Activism is my art. It's how I express myself and make a difference in the world.

- Shepard Fairey, Artist, Activist, Founder of OBEY Clothing



We are Human, Shepard Fairey

The day you were born, the world had a choice about what to teach you about your body. It could have taught you to live with confidence and joy inside your body. It could have taught you that your body and your sexuality are beautiful gifts. But instead, the world taught you to feel critical of and dissatisfied with your sexuality and your body. You were taught to value and expect something from your sexuality that does not match what your sexuality actually is. You

were told a story about what would happen in your sexual life, and that story was false. You were lied to. I am pissed, on your behalf, at the world for that lie. And I'm working to create a world that doesn't lie to women about their bodies anymore.

- Emily Nagoski, Sex Advocate, Activist, and Author

Optional Spiritual Exercise

So many of us would not call ourselves activists. But that doesn't mean we are not activists. Writing letters to political leaders, organizing a sit-in, boycotting certain products and businesses are all forms of activism. Even if what we do is small, micro-activism is important because it can and does lead to macro-activism. Social movements take time to grow and gain strength so every small action counts.

In her book *Micro Activism: How you can make a difference in the world (without a bullhorn)*, Omkari L. Williams divides activists into these four categories:

- Indispensables work behind the scenes to make change;
- Producers create the schedule and ensure that nothing falls through the cracks;
- Organizers keep things on schedule and address the various assignments; and
- Headliners are the face of the movement and inspire people seeking the same change as you.

Do these descriptions, or those in the Social Change Ecosystem Map on page 2 of this guide, speak to your current role or aspirations? Note which kind of activist you are and appreciate the ways you have made the world a better place through your actions.

That's it.

We don't always take time to acknowledge what we have done, that we are enough, that we do enough.

Feel free to share any or all of your list with your group.

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