

# SATYA - TRUTHFUL IN THOUGHT, SPEECH & ACTION

Humble living does not diminish. It fills.  
Going back to a simpler self gives wisdom.  
*Rumi*



Where the mind is without fears and the head is held high;  
Where knowledge is free;  
Where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow  
domestic walls;  
Where words come out from the depth of truth;  
Where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
Where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way into the dreary  
desert sand of dead habit;  
Where the mind is led forward by thee into  
ever awakening thought and action-  
Into that heaven of freedom,... let my country awake.

*Tagore*

**What Is Normal?**

by Paula Hulet

With the roll out of the vaccines, with the growing number of people receiving them, with a sense that we are turning a corner (even though Europe is bracing for a 3<sup>rd</sup> wave), I am amazed at the increase in folks willing to venture out into public places. So many I have talked to, say they feel safe now that they are vaccinated. They are ready to relax mask etiquette, to frequent their favorite restaurants again, and to actually go into stores rather than depend upon curbside pickup. Visitors, who seem to have less concern about traveling, and locals alike, are shopping, eating, and spending, as if covid did not exist and the need for precautions archaic.

I am also amazed by the number of people talking about looking forward to life going back to normal. But what is normal? When I ask that question, depending on one's work or stage in life, the answer varies. For parents, it is having kids back in school without fear of the virus. For musicians it is about being able to play in live venues, both outdoors and indoors. For bar owners it is not having to serve food. For restaurants it is not having restrictions on the number of people they can seat inside. And for church folks it is about being able to rub elbows and hug their fellow parishioners during a time of worship and fellowship. People talk about singing in a group, going on vacations, hugging grandkids, not wearing masks, and not having to sanitize their hands after they touch things. Based on these responses, normal speaks to a return to passions and freedoms and interactions that we have been denied for over a year.

But there is another side of normal, one that goes beyond a desire for personal gratification, one we seem to forget about. What does normal look like for our society as a whole? We seem to be at such divergent perspectives on covid, economics, individual rights, immigration, health care, and so much more. We have witnessed states disregard covid protocols for the sake of economics and a feeling of normalcy. Over the last 5 years we have seen a surge in white supremacist activity. Suicides, depression, anxiety, among youth and adults has been rising. The homeless population is growing. We have too many earning less than a living wage and too many families continuing to live with food insecurity. And this was all before the loss of jobs due to covid-19. Life before covid meant rushing from work to home, to school, to cooking, to caring for children and with little time, if ever, to just sit and be.

When we think about these things, going back to normal is not ideal. And then there are those talking about a new normal. But what exactly does that mean? Is it a mix of covid etiquette and a reduction in restrictions on activities? Or is it something else?

If we take into consideration that normal is defined as maintaining a standard, and assuming that standard is applied to all of society, we, as individuals and as a nation, have never known normal. As author and activist Sonya Renee Taylor, said:

*"We will not go back to normal. Normal never was. Our pre-corona existence was not normal other than we normalized greed, inequity, exhaustion, depletion, extraction, disconnection, confusion, rage, hoarding, hate and lack. We should not long to return, my friends. We are being given the opportunity to stitch a new garment. One that fits all of humanity and nature."*

So what are we seeking to normalize in our society? Now is the time to establish a personal standard of caring for others, kindness, and compassion. Now, is the time to let go of greed, hatred, and the inequities of our society. Now is the time to work to ensure a new standard for our society, where all people are able to receive affordable medical care, all people are respected and accepted for who they are, all have access to a quality education, and all have the opportunity to earn a living wage. Now is the time to increase our standard of living by continuing to simplify the way we live. Then our society, then we, will have stitched a whole new garment. We will have established a standard a true normal that applies to all, so that all may live in peace, without fear of being without, without fear of oppression, or fear of those who are not like them.

Let us make it so.

