

Sayings of Leonard I. Beerman

(Left on the desk of his study)

1. We should know above all that war and the threat of war aggravate tyranny and provide the soil in which it thrives, while every effort made in the direction of peace relaxes not only international tension, but produces great liberty within each nation.
2. For . . . years we have sacrificed upon the altar of war and its preparation the greatest gifts of this nation, the gifts of mind and of technique; and in so doing, we have demonstrated a total contempt for man.
3. For . . . years, the angel of death has hovered over our civilization, fending off any serious endeavor to re-cultivate the waste places, to make a serious assault upon the problems of human anguish . . . The result of all this cannot adequately be measured, but we know it in the form of greater frustration and estrangement for us and greater poverty for the poor; for it is upon the poverty of multitudes that the unswerving, irresponsible dedication to defense and war is built.
4. Belief in the intelligent use of violence is the arrogance that bestrides the world . . . the nation shivers with insecurity; very few of us have any confidence that the political parties currently available to us have the leadership or the imagination and courage to liberate us from more of the same. Violence and the threat of violence abroad . . . violence and the threat of violence at home . . . the kind of violence that is shaking profoundly the inner life of all of us, as we see the traditional morality, the old religion, and the structure of family life, the relations between the generations crumbling.
5. We must not permit the terrible complexity of the problems of our society, or the resistance of confusion and fear, to deter us from our will to work for

- the achievement of full and equal human rights for all. Nor can we permit our confidence in the ultimate goal to shrink before the difficulties that attend its achievement.
6. It is a common responsibility of all Americans to bring an end to the discrimination and exploitation which have for so long enmeshed the life of the Blacks in a tangle of pathology. We must not let ourselves be driven from this quest, either by the bitter rejection of some Blacks or by the renewed and intensified resistance of Whites.
 7. Guilt . . . is the mark of a grand, profound struggle. It is the residue of the struggle between the conflicting forces of good and evil within us. It is the sign of our dignity as human beings, even as it is the mark of our failure to achieve the divine potential within us. To experience the awareness of our moral failure is, paradoxically, to experience the dignity of our own humanity.
 8. We need those who have the courage to be ashamed, who have the muscle to care. And more than caring . . . we need those who will preserve and cultivate an enduring vision of the good, who will maintain a vision of the future as a permanent possibility in the present.
 9. Not a day must go by without some expression of tenderness to those who are near and to those who are far off. Not a day must go by until we have used it to communicate our reverence for the despised, the humiliated, the unwanted. Not a day must go by unless it is good enough to be our last.
 10. The fulfillment of the task, the fulfillment of life is in the here and now. The solutions will not be found in heaven. They will be found here on earth. And the message of religion is not designed to make us comfortable but to make us alive to our responsibility.
 11. One either collaborates with the enemy, with whatever it is, with whatever is miserable or inhumane, with whatever is unjust, with whatever demeans the life of any of God's children, or one joins the resistance.
 12. What does it mean to be human? To be human is to love; but the other side of love, we know, is hate. That, too, is human. It is human to make mistakes and to involve others in our mistakes. It is human to be ignorant and to achieve wisdom slowly and painfully, to be humbled by our experiences. It is human to be confused and bewildered by the turmoil and complexity of life. And it is human to be distressed by one's own inadequacy. It is human to face the future with deep uncertainty and not to be able to see very far ahead. It is human to hurt and to be hurt. It is for us to keep alive our faith that man can be human, that he can glorify the earth.
 13. We will find ourselves not in solitude, not in escape, not in reliance upon myths of our own superiority, but by our capacity for compassion, our ability to care, our ability to develop a conscience broad enough to leap

- across the barriers of the little, little environment in which all of us live.
14. Isn't it a perversion of everything that is morally precious in our religious tradition to permit the military to set the priorities for our country and the world? How can we pursue human goals, how can we reckon with the decay of our cities, how can we care for the poor and the hungry and the abandoned, how can we pretend to reverse the dignity that is present in every human being, when our ultimate commitment is not to what is humane, not to God, but to this super Moloch in whose nuclear temple we have been prepared to sacrifice our children?
 15. How can we profess our faith and continue to depend upon nuclear weapons to save us? How can we erect a religious commitment on a foundation of the believable threat to kill a hundred million of God's children? . . . Is there any religious doctrine in any faith that can justify a nuclear war?
 16. The way to give meaning to our life is to do what we can to abate its misery, to heal its wounds, to be comrades in the only war worth fighting: the battle to extend the domain of love and reconciliation and justice in the world, and thus to declare ourselves for the continuation of life.
 17. Nothing is so hard to overcome as the will to be enslaved by our own moral inertia. Yet we know there is another power within us, a power that enables us to say no to the forces that have ruled over our thinking and feeling. It is the power of our own critical intelligence, or our own decency; the power of the human spirit; it is that spiritual power present in every person—and it can be actualized.
 18. The earth is too small and life is too short for anything to be more important than the quest for peace.
 19. Human social systems with their human beings, anxious, insecure, swollen with pride, driven by the will to power, corrupted by self-intoxication and self-deception, sooner or later sin against the laws of proportion and harmony and plunge into decay and self-destruction . . . Now our civilization may be in the process of making the same mistake.
 20. We hold life to be sacred, do we not? We have been taught to do so by the heritage of our tradition and even our nation; yet, paradoxically, we patiently accept our roles as victims and perpetrators of mass slaughter, and by what we do, by what we prepare, we convey the steady message that life is worthless, it is not sacred at all.
 21. To achieve national security by the threatened annihilation of whole populations is an evil I cannot believe any serious Jew, any serious Christian can countenance.
 22. Human existence is coexistence. Before I can realize my own freedom, my independence, my humanity, I must join the fellowship of others, my people, humankind.

23. From where, if not from this place, will come the call for peace? And the peace that we seek can never be the imposition of our wills on each other, but rather, the activating in each other of those forces which make for a common identity. Not by might and not by power, not by force and not by conquest can we transcend the dangerous, destructive imagery of victory and defeat that has been our human heritage.
24. We must understand the importance of a sense of dependence. And if we fail to celebrate this sense of dependence, no matter how far we reach into outer space, there can be no significant human life on earth. If we cannot cultivate a passion for what one human being owes to another, what are we?