

Kasserian ingera~How are the children?

Among the most accomplished and fabled tribes of Africa, no tribe was considered to have warriors more fearsome or more intelligent than the mighty Masai. It is perhaps surprising then to learn the traditional greeting that passed between Masai warriors.

“Kasserian ingera” one would always say to another. It means “and how are the children?”

It is still the traditional greeting among the Masai, acknowledging the high value that the Masai always place on their children’s well-being. Even warriors with no children of their own would always give the traditional answer, “all the children are well.”

Meaning, of course, that peace and safety prevail, that the priorities of protecting the young, the powerless, are in place, that Masai society has not forgotten its reasons for being, its proper functions and responsibilities. “All the children are well” means that life is good. It means that the daily struggles of existence do not preclude proper caring for their young.

I wonder how it might affect our consciousness of our own children’s welfare if in our culture we took to greeting each other with this daily question: “and how are the children?” I wonder if we heard that question and passed it along to each other a dozen times a day, if it would begin to make a difference in the reality of how children are thought of or cared for in our own communities.

What might be possible if every adult among us, parent and non-parent alike, shared responsibility for the daily care and protection of all the children in our community, in our country? I wonder if we could truly say without any hesitation, “the children are well, yes, all the children are well.”

What might it be like ... if teachers began every class by answering the question: “and how are the children?” If every leader had to answer the same question at the beginning of every meeting: “and how are the children? Are they all well?” If every corporate executive had to answer the same question at the beginning of every workday: “and how are the children? Are they all well?” Wouldn’t it be interesting to hear their answers?

What might it be like? I wonder . . .

And before we can respond to one another “all the children are well”, what actions must we take in our classrooms? In our schools? In our community?

And how are the children?

Working together, may all our children be well.

Adapted from: Rev. Pat Hoertdoerfer (2004). Children, Family and Intergenerational Programs Director, Lifespan Faith Development. Boston, MA: Unitarian Universalist Association.