

I like to believe that people in the long run are going to do more to promote peace than our governments. Indeed, I think that people want peace so much that one of these days governments had better get out of the way and let them have it. -- Dwight D. Eisenhower

MINEFIELDS & MIRACLES: Why God and Allah Need to Talk

By Ruth Broyde Sharone

Chapter 20: Citizen Diplomacy

“I’m just one person. What can I do?”

This is the refrain of most people who feel powerless as they sadly survey multiple conflicts happening around the world. Many point a finger at the powerful military-industrial complex and the new multinational corporations to prove the inability of a single individual to effect change.

We are all struggling to overcome our own personal impotence in the light of world events. Twentieth century history, however, tells a different story when we examine it more closely, because we have seen with our own eyes how one individual—such as Gandhi, Mother Teresa, Martin Luther King, Jr., Nelson Mandela--have transformed our world. Similarly, almost single-handedly, talk show host Oprah Winfrey transformed the world of TV and publishing. In their early days, before they were well known, all of them simply “did their thing,” or as Joseph Campbell would say, “They followed their bliss.”

When they started their journey none of them had access to the halls of power. But when they discovered what they cared about and what they could do best, they changed the world.

I heard a wonderful story recently about an elephant and a hummingbird. They were both aware of the fact that there was very little water left in their creek, where all the animals would gather daily to drink the nectar of life. There was a river, but it was a great distance away, and not all of the animals could reach it, so the only solution was to find a way to transfer water from the distant river to the creek.

The elephant, with his enormous trunk, and great capacity to hold water, began filling his trunk at the river. He would then shoot a powerful stream of water across the plain, and it would cascade jubilantly into the dry creek. He continued this activity for some time, feeling powerful and important, until he realized there was a tiny hummingbird nearby, totally absorbed in her own activity. With her beak she would take a tiny drop of water from the river and, at dizzying speed, her iridescent body moving like a phantom rainbow in the sky, she would fly from the river to the creek to deposit that drop of water, and then back again to perform the same task, over and over.

In amusement the elephant watched the hummingbird for several minutes. It seemed to him she was performing a completely useless task. What could she

possibly achieve by bringing one drop of water at a time? Her life would long be over before she had transferred even a spoonful, he mused.

He watched her, fascinated, as she continued to whiz back and forth from river to creek, bringing one drop of water at a time. Then he began to fill his trunk with even greater quantities of water. He projected the water in a huge arc which created a magnificent sparkling spray, checking in his peripheral vision to see if the hummingbird was admiring his feat. She didn't seem to be paying any attention to him, but continued on her own rapid trajectory, river to creek, river to creek, river to creek, one drop at a time.

Finally, he couldn't help himself. He stopped what he was doing and he called out disdainfully to the hummingbird:

"Little hummingbird, how foolish you are! Do you not see how powerful my trunk is, how much water I can transfer in one giant stream? How do you think your tiny drops of water can make any difference in bringing this creek back to life? Your task is impossible and you are a dreamer."

The hummingbird flapped her tiny wings at a dizzying rate as she buzzed close to the elephant's ear.

"I am doing what I can and what I do best," she said. Then she whizzed off on her rounds. River to creek, river to creek, river to creek. One drop at a time.

For those of us who are not heads of government, nor powerful clergy with large congregations, nor CEO's of multi-national corporations, nor venture capitalists with endless resources, the tendency to feel powerless is great, at times overwhelming. But it doesn't have to be so, especially in the world of citizen diplomacy.

In the eighties a group of private US citizens, on their own initiative, took a trip to Russia during the Cold War to let everyday Russians know Americans did not hate Russians. They were curious why the US government was calling the Russians their enemies; they wanted to meet some everyday Russians and see for themselves. While the heads of the two mega-governments were locked in a fierce battle of wills, everyday Russian citizens and everyday North American citizens unofficially met together. They dialogued together and formed friendships that lasted and outlasted the Cold War. They were citizen diplomats, with no portfolios or titles, just people who could imagine many possibilities for engagement other than war.

Another example of this type of citizen diplomacy is practiced by The Compassionate Listening Project, founded by Lea Green. They have taken many private citizens to visit Palestinians and Israelis, not to offer solutions and unsolicited advice to end the constant war between the two political entities, but

just to listen deeply and fully to the residents on both sides of the border. Everyday people meeting with everyday people: citizen diplomats.

Interfaith engagement is perfectly suited to citizen diplomacy. Meeting with people of other faiths is just like meeting with people of another country. They both require great diplomacy. On the one hand, we should be knowledgeable about the faith or country we represent, our own customs and history, our rules and rituals. On the other hand, if we are to be successful and effective in our communication, we need to devote time and effort to learn about the other faith (country) as well, lest we offend. A generous portion of respect, in addition to natural curiosity, will go a long way in creating successful interfaith citizen diplomacy.

At any given moment, each of us has a chance to become a citizen diplomat. And once in a while fate may give us a chance to connect directly with an official diplomat and in the process create an opportunity to influence people of influence.

Bangladesh

My Bangladeshi friend, Omar Huda, called me one day and said, "Our Ambassador in Washington DC is coming to LA, and we are having a reception for him in the Bangladeshi Consul General's house, and I'd like you to come and meet him. He is an old friend of mine," he added. "We were POW's together in Bangladesh, so we got to know each other very well. He's a career diplomat, very intelligent and well-traveled, and I know you'll enjoy meeting him."

A few days later I was walking up to the entrance of the residence of the Bangladeshi Consul General in Los Angeles. Omar was waiting for me inside. I paid my respects to the Consul General, his wife, and several of the other guests whom I had met on other occasions at interfaith gatherings. Then Omar led me to the back garden where I met Ambassador Shamsheer M. Chowdhury for the first time.

A tall, broad-shouldered man elegantly dressed in a dark blue suit, robin blue shirt, and a yellow tie, the Ambassador was immediately friendly and accessible. Omar must have told him something about me, because straight away he launched into a discussion about interfaith engagement, wanting to know more about my film, *God and Allah Need to Talk*, and if I was planning to show it in Washington, DC.

We chatted about his diplomatic career and the time I had spent in Israel. He was very interested in the Middle East situation and had strong ideas about what would be needed to be an effective peace-broker for that troubled sliver of land. He was skeptical about President Bush's chances to achieve peace because he felt President Bush was too closely aligned with Israel, and the Arab nations

wouldn't trust him. Then the Ambassador began to share details about his life and asked about mine as well, especially about my interfaith activities.

I suddenly saw an opening in the conversation and an opportunity. Dare I ask, I wondered?

I dared. I asked if he would like to host an interfaith event in his Embassy. His face lit up. "We could, we could do that," he said considering my proposal. "Just what would it involve?"

At that moment Omar came back to the garden and joined us. I turned to Omar and said, "The Ambassador is thinking of holding an interfaith event at the Embassy in DC." Omar burst into laughter and, shaking his head incredulously, said to me, "Ruth, I only left you out here for a few minutes and you've already got the Ambassador willing to host an interfaith event at the Embassy?"

I smiled warmly at Omar and then at the Ambassador. They exchanged glances.

"I think it's a great idea," Omar said to his old friend. "I'll fly to Washington when you have the event."

The time was late, and other guests were waiting to meet with the Ambassador, so he gave me his cell phone number and suggested we meet once more before he was scheduled to leave LA the following day at noon.

We traded phone calls the next day, but never had a chance to meet or even speak personally. I left him a phone message, wishing him a safe trip home, and then I added: "This could be a very important event for Washington, and for Bangladesh. When an Ambassador hosts an event, it shows his commitment, and because I sense you are genuinely interested in expanding interfaith connections, I believe this could be a very important occasion to promote interfaith ties for the entire Washington community."

The Ambassador called me back a few days later and said, "Let me know when you're going to be in New York. I go to the UN often. We can meet nearby, have coffee, and discuss this further."

A few months later, in June, I traveled to New York City, with an infected spider bite in the middle of my third eye. I called the Ambassador and we made an appointment to have coffee near the UN.

When we met, he commented on my spider bite and told me to look after it. "It looks angry," he said. I told him once he and I set the date for the interfaith event at the embassy, the bite would begin to heal, "if you're serious about it," I added with a smile.

He laughed and said appreciatively, "You're good." Then he picked up his cell phone, called his secretary, and set a time for me to come to his Embassy in Washington ten days later.

I left New York City to go to *Elat Chayyim*, the Jewish Renewal Retreat Center in Woodstock, New York, where Eliyahu McLean and I were co-teaching a course called "Peacebuilding 101." At the final session, I asked each of our students to formulate and announce "one small, profound act" they would commit to carrying out when they left the class and went home. I told them I, too, was willing to make a public statement.

"The bar gets higher each time you take on more responsibility for continuing this work," I explained to them. "So you are continuously challenging yourself, like in a Pilates class, to stretch much further from your core each time."

Each member of the class shared his/her plans with the group, and then I shared my plans. I am on my way to Washington and, hopefully, I will be able to set a date for an interfaith event to be held at the Bangladeshi Embassy.

The Ambassador kept his word. We met, set a date, and chose a theme for the event, a Thanksgiving Interfaith Celebration that coming November. I would invite members of the interfaith community to come and participate, and he would invite members of the diplomatic community and from the U.S. government. The evening would begin with socializing and music and his welcoming the participants. I would show my *God and Allah* film, the Embassy would serve dinner, and then a government representative, perhaps even Karen Hughes, the Undersecretary of State for President Bush, would keynote. Finally, at the end of the evening, we would open up the event for discussion among the attendees.

I arrived three weeks before the event in Washington. The Ambassador generously offered me the Embassy conference room to serve as my office and headquarters to plan the event. My work was cut out for me. Washington DC was not my city, but I was not daunted. I realized I would have to contact representatives from every religious community, invite them to attend, and also make sure they would participate in an opening blessing ceremony, before we ate. The Ambassador believed we would have representatives primarily from the Abrahamic communities, but I told him we were also inviting Hindus, Sikhs, Baha'is, Buddhists and Native Americans.

"Isn't that too many religions?" he asked. "Aren't just Jews, Christians, Muslims and Hindus enough?"

"No, I am confident you can raise the bar on what interfaith engagement means in the capital of our nation," I replied. "Trust me, this will be a memorable event, and you'll be glad we invited everyone."

I made a silent prayer after my declaration. I hoped I would not be wrong about my prediction. I had come this far because I believed God had wanted all of this to happen. I was just doing my part as His earthly instrument--admittedly with a lot of Jewish *chutzpah*, I acknowledged to myself.

In my subsequent phone calls to various religious groups in DC, I knew I had been right in wanting to include all the communities, not just the "usual suspects." When I called the Sikh community, I was told they often felt excluded because they were not usually invited to interfaith gatherings. Most of the time the gatherings favor the Abrahamic religions, they observed.

"That is why I am personally inviting you," I responded. "Your voice is also needed in the interfaith family."

The event was a huge success. I teamed a Jewish *klezmer* musician with a Bangladeshi Catholic *bangra* drummer to play the opening music. With only one short rehearsal the day before, the two musicians sounded like they had been touring on the road together for years. Their interfaith harmonies filled the room with good cheer. Lush canvases from a recent art exhibit were on display throughout the Embassy and provided great ambience. The room was awash with colorful costumes of saris and turbans, overflowing with people representing many cultures and nationalities: clergy, interfaith activists, diplomats, press people, and officials from the State Department--but mostly citizen diplomats.

Ambassador Chowdhury searched for me in the crowds to tell me there were seven other ambassadors in attendance that evening, many of them from the Middle East. "Maybe you can get them to hold an event like this, too," he said, with a broad smile and a wink. "Maybe I can," I said, playfully rubbing my hands together in anticipation of that possibility. "But, remember, you were the first!"

Karen Hughes, the Undersecretary of State, scheduled to keynote that evening, had to cancel her appearance at the last minute because she was traveling with President Bush to Jordan. She sent a note of apology. Instead of a keynoter, after dinner we opened the floor to discussion. We heard a plethora of comments and suggestions, as well as offers and commitments to further interfaith engagement in Washington, D.C. The room overflowed with camaraderie and good will--confirmed through the wonderful feedback we received, verbally and in writing after the event.

Imran Sadiqqi, a producer/director from the Voice of America, was on the scene. While he was interviewing the Ambassador and me on camera, he asked how the event had originated. The Ambassador said without hesitation, "Ruth and I had a common vision we discovered when we met, and this evening is a result of that."

Morocco

My account of the Bangladeshi event might have ended here, but in the audience that night was Jamilla, the assistant to the Ambassador of Morocco. She came up to me afterwards and said enthusiastically, “This was so special. I had such a wonderful time. You must come tomorrow to the Embassy of Morocco to meet our Ambassador. He would love to do something like this.”

The next day I arrived at the Moroccan Embassy, to meet His Excellency Aziz Mekouar. He told me he had hosted a Hanukkah celebration in his Embassy several times. I asked him if he would be willing to host an interfaith event for the entire DC community. He eagerly agreed, but we left the time frame open.

Two years later the event we had spoken of began to crystallize while I was working on the staff of the Parliament of the World’s Religions. I met with the Moroccan Ambassador again in early 2009, just after President Obama’s inauguration. I suggested to Ambassador Mekouar he might like to host an interfaith event connected to the Parliament’s upcoming global conference in Melbourne, Australia. What an ideal opportunity to promote citizen diplomacy in Washington DC! The Ambassador immediately agreed, and I began to set things in motion.

I was reminded of something Dr. Harold Saunders, the former US Assistant Secretary of State once observed: “There are some things only governments can do, such as negotiating binding agreements. But there are some things that only citizens outside government can do, such as changing human relationships.”

I called my friend, Rabbi Marc Gopin, the Director for the School of Diplomacy and Conflict Resolution at George Mason University, and we met briefly over two cups of cocoa at a Georgetown cafe before I left DC. I suggested Marc be the organizer and contact person for the event in DC. I would introduce him to the Moroccan Ambassador, and they would take it from there. He agreed.

Within just a few weeks, a group of Washington interfaith activists whom I knew, along with university students, supervised by Marc, began planning together with the Ambassador. The timing was perfect because they were hoping to bring together the Muslim and Jewish communities of DC who were barely speaking to each other after the Gaza War.

As a result, two years after I first met the Ambassador of Morocco, he hosted an elegant interfaith dinner at his home. I flew back to Washington for the event. We each sat next to people we didn’t know—a requirement of the evening. The pleasant hum of conversation got noisier as the evening progressed. I looked around delightedly. Representatives of the local interfaith community, professors, and university students—citizen diplomats—all were engaged in animated conversations with the Ambassador and members of his diplomatic staff. It was a perfect evening, with abundant and delicious Moroccan fare, and with guests

who were deeply appreciative of an Ambassador's willingness to make his private home a site for potential miracles--just as the Bangladeshi Ambassador had done two years earlier.

Kenya

A third powerful example of citizen diplomacy took place during my trip to Kenya in April 2010. I had joined a women's delegation to attend a micro-finance conference in Nairobi. Marianne Williamson, well-known spiritual leader and best-selling author (*Return to Love, The Age of Miracles*) formed the delegation at the conclusion of "Sister Giant," a special weekend event for women she organized in Los Angeles. Her specific goal that weekend was to awaken and empower American women by first engaging their imaginations and then teaching them to become pro-active in ending hunger and poverty. "When American women get serious about a cause, they can move mountains like no other group of women in the world," Marianne assured the five hundred women in the audience.

She reminded us of how we run our own households. When a woman feels very strongly that she doesn't want a specific activity to take place in her home, her family knows she will not countenance any violation of her principles. "Not in my home," the woman will declare with authority. Everyone in the family will comply because they know she is serious. "And you don't dare tangle with her!" Marianne emphasized with a knowing smile.

"Well, what if all of us American women got together and decided to end hunger in the world? We would simply make the announcement, 'not on our planet,' and the world would know we meant business. President Obama--or any American president in office--would feel obliged to support the annual foreign-aid appropriations to end hunger in the third world because he would be afraid to go counter to the will of the American women," Marianne said confidently.

Next she introduced us to Sam Daley-Harris, founder and executive director of Results, a non-profit organization dedicated to fighting poverty and ending hunger across the globe. Marianne announced that Sam had invited her to attend the Africa-Middle East Microcredit Summit, and that he was also extending an invitation to us. Marianne then announced excitedly she had decided to form a delegation of women from the Sister Giant weekend to make the journey to Kenya with her.

I rallied to the call, even though I was totally new to the fast-growing phenomenon called microfinance. It wasn't just curiosity. I felt I was being called there by destiny. Though I couldn't quite grasp the urgency I felt in being there—and my financial situation absolutely dictated against my going—within two days, using frequent flyer miles, I had booked my ticket on Virgin Airways. Next, I arranged to stay with my son's two friends, Jenny Wilson and Sam Cole,

eliminating any hotel costs. Jenny and Sam were--luckily for me-- living and teaching at a private school in Nairobi, where they had also established an organization to help neglected slum children who live in desperate conditions on the site of the largest garbage dump in the world.

I wasn't sure why I was going to Kenya, but I instinctively sensed God had a plan for me there.

The microfinance conference attracted fifteen hundred participants primarily from Africa and the Middle East. We Westerners were in the minority. Self-empowerment was the dominant theme discussed by a roster of distinguished keynote speakers such as Nobel Prize winner Muhammad Yunus, Queen Sophia of Spain, Princess Maxima of the Netherlands, and others.

The goal of the conference was to compare methodologies and share evolving organizational models from the last thirty years, which had been used to provide micro-loans to the poorest populations of the world, so the most marginalized and helpless would be able to lift themselves out of a vicious cycle of poverty and hunger. The solution to world poverty and hunger, everyone at the conference agreed, is not handouts, but an opportunity for self-empowerment. The idea was to extend small loans without any of the usual bank requirements of collateral or guarantors. The goal was to help families, in general, and women, in particular, to become self-sufficient and productive members of society.

Women who have benefitted from the micro-loans in countries like Bangladesh, India, Pakistan, and many countries in Africa not only have the reputation of returning their loans on time and in full, but also have been known to lift their entire community economically and educationally. First they feed their children and themselves, and the very next thing they do is make sure their children go to school to receive an education. Some of the "micro-loan" children have already gone to universities, become doctors and lawyers and engineers, and have returned to serve in their own communities. The key for success in all of this has been self-empowerment, not charity. As Muhammad Yunus so succinctly and eloquently articulated, those children prove the point that "the world will be rich when there are no more poor."

After my brief but intense education in microfinance in Nairobi, I was ready to return to the States to find new ways of engaging in interfaith work. I wanted to weave the global web beyond my original plan. I was now ready to create bridges between communities that don't often dialogue. The spiritual community has traditionally viewed the religious communities with suspicion, because they see the religious groups as being too dogmatic and exclusive. The religious community, on the other hand, is often disdainful of the spiritual group. They use pejorative terms such as "New Age" or "woo-woo" as a way to put down and marginalize people who are not affiliated with what they would consider a *bona fide* traditional, mainline religion. And then, of course, there are the agnostics and

atheists, as well as people often not deemed worthy of entering into the dialogue with believers. This, I decided, would have to change.

No one should be excluded from the dialogue.

At the end of my Kenya trip, I decided to stay an extra day after the rest of the delegation returned to the States. That turned out to be a momentous decision, because suddenly I found myself stranded in Nairobi. Almost all world air traffic came to an abrupt halt when Iceland's volcano re-awakened, spewing ash into the atmosphere. Air travel was considered dangerous and perhaps even deadly. Seven million travelers found themselves in limbo, I among them.

It was during this time that I met a fellow traveler, Alexander McLean, who helped load my suitcase onto the conveyor belt at the airport when we were originally scheduled to leave. We introduced ourselves and I thanked him for his chivalry. I also experienced an immediate affection for him because my own son is named Alexander, and they are close in age. In the ensuing conversation, I learned that Alexander, a young law student from Britain, half-Scottish, half-Jamaican, had founded the African Prisoners Project. It was created to serve the neglected and maltreated prisoners in African jails, to offer them legal representation, opportunities for education, and hospice care, he explained.

Alexander, twenty-five when I met him in 2010, had first worked as a volunteer in hospitals in Uganda when he was eighteen years old, during his "gap" year. By the time he graduated from university, he had decided he would devote his life to helping the destitute. He already headed a staff of fourteen in Uganda and when I met him he was in the process of opening up a new office in Nairobi. He was also planning to develop a halfway house for ex-convicts, and a hospice for dying prisoners on a plot of land in Nakuru, donated to him by a generous white Kenyan, the son of a wealthy colonial family.

While we were stranded in Nairobi, unsure of our departure date, Alexander and I became friends. Impressed by his passion and his humanitarian mission, I arranged for Alexander to speak to the congregation of the Nairobi synagogue during the Friday night Sabbath service, although I was also a stranger in town. On our walk to the synagogue, I explained to Alexander the Jewish concept of *Tikkun Olam*, the responsibility Jews feel to repair the world and leave it a better place than the way we found it. "You yourself are involved in *Tikkun Olam*," I explained to Alexander, "through the important work you are doing for the disenfranchised prisoners throughout Africa."

Before the service began, I secured the Hebrew/English Bible for Alexander, and I explained that Jews all around the world would be reading the identical chapter that week. The week's Torah portion, *Tezaraa*, dealt with leprosy and behaviors that alienate us from society.

Alexander addressed the very same theme, describing how the prisoners he works with, the “lepers” of African society, are left to fend for themselves, without being offered any opportunity for rehabilitation or, at the minimum, a small measure of dignity before they leave this world. He related how they often die alone, unattended, in filthy overcrowded prisons across the continent. Some of them have been incarcerated for months or even years for the minor offense of stealing a mango, for selling alcoholic beverages, or for just being near the scene of a crime. And punishments meted out rarely fit the crimes. For example, one little girl he had met, four years of age, was incarcerated when the three-year old girl she was swimming with drowned. The four-year old was later charged with murder. The congregation shook their heads in disbelief, as did I. Where was the compassion of the judges who made these rulings? Where was justice?

In the days that followed, as we both waited anxiously to learn when we might return home, Alexander shared more details about himself and his family. He described how his Christian upbringing had informed his decision to volunteer in Uganda and then devote his life to serving the prisoners of Africa. When he found out about my interfaith activist background, he invited me to attend a Sunday church service at the All Saints Anglican Church of Nairobi.

We attended the 11:30 A.M. service in a high-ceilinged stone cathedral. The cold gray of the stone walls was softened by the colorful stained-glass windows depicting the life of Jesus and his disciples. The majority of the worshipers were black, Kenyan-born. I was certainly the only Jew in attendance.

I had an epiphany at the church, as I was wondering about God’s purpose for me in Kenya. Why had I been stranded these extra days? I have learned that, regardless of your religious orientation, you can have an epiphany in any place at any time. Mine had just transpired as the only Jew in an Episcopalian Church in Nairobi, not unlike the epiphany I had experienced at the Strait-Way Church in Watts in Los Angeles.

It occurred to me I was uniquely positioned to introduce Alexander to a variety of individuals I recently met while I was in Kenya, individuals who could aid him in his mission. My responsibility was only to make those connections, to weave the additional strands of the web, and thereby enhance his efforts so he could achieve his goals more quickly.

Prabhudas Pattni, national chairman of the Hindu Council of Kenya, said he would be happy to help Alexander.

Ajit S. Ghogal, a Sikh from Mombasa, a former civil engineer who ran an orphanage for children with AIDS, said he would gladly apply his engineering skills to help Alexander design the half-way house, hospice and gasoline station being planned for the ex-convicts.

Dr. David Silverstein, a leader of the Jewish community in Nairobi, who had established the cardiology department for the Nairobi hospital thirty years earlier, agreed to help Alexander recruit doctors to staff the hospice. Dr. Silverstein had served as the personal physician to the former President of Kenya, Daniel Arap Moi, and is considered a leader in the wider community in Kenya.

Bishop George Mechumo, the Episcopalian pastor I had met at the airport when air traffic was halted, also agreed to help Alexander.

On our fifth day in exile, the Virgin Atlantic agents called us at 5 AM and by 6 AM we were all packed tightly, but gratefully, into the shuttle heading for the Nairobi airport. I found myself laughing at the uncanny series of events of the last five days. A *chance* meeting with a young man who helped me with my luggage. A *chance* meeting in an airport waiting room with the Bishop and his wife. A *chance* exchange in the hallways of the hotel with the Sikh and his family. A *chance* meeting with a Jewish doctor who turned out to be the son of my mother's physician in Chicago. A *chance* meeting with a Hindu who was in the hospital when I arrived but whom I was able to meet in person when he was released because I had been stranded an extra five days. . .

I laughed because I realized I had just witnessed another miracle. The minefield created by the volcanic ash had rendered up a miracle. Alexander was now connected to a network of committed individuals who had agreed to help him: a Sikh, a Christian, a Hindu, and a Jew.

Was this all random?

"Nothing is accidental. It is only God's way of remaining anonymous," said Albert Einstein. That quote has become the leitmotif of my life.

And then it dawned on me. We have looked to God for modern-day miracles. We have prayed, beseeched, importuned, begged, and yearned for miracles. But what if, in this new era, we are being groomed to bring about miracles by our own thoughts, our own acts, and our own deeds?

What if God's ultimate plan is not micro-finance, but micro-miracles? Perhaps the greatest gift we have received is that we are created in God's image, God the Creator, God the Miracle-Maker, God the Kind and Merciful, Benevolent and Wise, full of Grace and Compassion. I am delighted with that thought. As Margaret Mead once said, "You only need four or five dedicated individuals to change the world." I am sure she must have been talking about citizen diplomats when she said that.