

“I don’t give a hoot about pronouns,” said a sibling recently. We were discussing two individuals in our family who identify as neither male nor female. They are nonbinary. My heart broke to hear these words once again. This time, it wasn’t a friend, acquaintance, or stranger, who said it but someone I grew up with, have known my whole life.

To me, when someone says this and refuses to *try* to use the pronoun “they/them” or the one for which an individual identifies, it sounds as closed minded as the old 1950s mindset whereby a woman was expected to be “in the kitchen and not in the workforce.”

When I tried to talk about it with my sibling, he shook his head and said, “Nope. Not going to do it!” I said, “These are people we love. Why wouldn’t you respect them and honor their wishes? It’s such an easy thing to do.” I was raging inside and aching with so hurt for the two family members I dearly love and with great disappointment in my sibling.

So I shut my mouth to avoid the wrath of Kali that might roll off my tongue! Kali is a Hindu Goddess who destroys in order for new creation to arise.

Recently, there was an article in the UUA Newsletter titled, “Support for Having Difficult Conversations.” It reads, “What tools do we already have that we might not think of when conversations in our congregations and communities become difficult?” The authors Connie Goodbread and Kathy McGowan list some approaches to use when attempting to have tough conversations.

When I spoke with my sibling, I was definitely having a tough time. During our conversation, I could feel that I was on the verge of tears too, so I went “silent” to gain my composure. I paused before speaking again so I wouldn’t lose control.

Silence is the first tool on the list.

Then I tried “curiosity.” (This is next on the list in the article.) I asked my sibling why such as firm stance? His answer was, “I am not going to change. It’s too hard to keep track of everyone’s pronouns just because people decide they choose to change.” I acknowledged it is hard and said, “Isn’t the gift of respect worth it?”

Next, I intuitively used “Humility.” (This is the third tool on the list.) I said, “These are family members we care about. It’s ok if you get the pronoun wrong sometimes like I do but it would show that you are trying, that you are coming from a place of love. Could you at least try to honor them?” He shook his head “no.”

Finally, I used the last tool listed. I simply chose to “stop” talking *for now* “for the sake of deeper understanding and relationship” with my sibling. I will admit, like all of us, I wrestle with change. It’s not easy to acquire new skills. That is, to learn to switch old speech patterns in order to show love for others, but I would rather err on the side of love than on the side of apathy.

- *With gratitude always, Rev. Amy Kindred*