

**“Give me a place to stand and I will move the world:”
Inspiration from the Words of Archimedes**

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What I did above, others have done, which is to leave out the words “with a lever” when quoting the following words of the Greek mathematician/inventor Archimedes:

“Give me a place to stand and with a lever I will move the whole world.”

I have always been inspired by the restatement “Give me a place to stand and I will move the whole world.” Perhaps it is because Robert F. Kennedy, whose words have often inspired me, nuanced the meaning after stating,

“A young monk began the Protestant Reformation, a young general extended an empire from Macedonia to the borders of the earth, and a young woman reclaimed the territory of France. It was a young Italian explorer who discovered the New World, and the thirty-two-year-old Thomas Jefferson who proclaimed that all men are created equal.”

Kennedy then stated

“Give me a place to stand,” said Archimedes, “and I will move the world.” These (persons) moved the world, and so can we all.

What may have added to my inspiration of this rendering was reading it from someone that my Roman Catholic grandparents, parents, uncles, and aunts admired. What Roman Catholic would not admire a person who declared that it was his Catholicism that gave him the strength to re-enter politics after the assassination of his older brother John. What also added to the inspiration of Kennedy’s rendering for me was that I always liked to think of myself as an Italian/Sicilian explorer ready to discover new worlds.

Over the years, I have always appreciated learning new things. Upon doing so there has always been this inclination to share such things with others. When it came to learning new things about peace and justice issues I felt more of an urgency, than a tendency, to share. I would feel more like a young monk who wanted to begin a spiritual reformation, or a young person who wanted to reclaim a social issue such as affordable

housing or homelessness for a territory such as a county or city, or like a Thomas Jefferson proclaiming that all men and women are created equal in order to further societal equality.

Bobby's other brother, Ted, recited the full quote of Archimedes during a commencement speech over a decade ago. After asserting, "If you give me a lever and a place to stand, I can move the world," he added

"Your excellent education here has given you that lever, and I hope that you will use it to move our country to address the many challenges we face more effectively."

I feel inspired when I read these words. My own education has provided me with opportunities to become a lever among family, friends, neighborhoods, communities, and local jurisdictions. However, my education is only one thing among others that have helped me be a lever to others.

Thanks to Archimedes we have come to learn that a lever can be an object used with an appropriate pivot point to multiply the force or effort that can be applied to resistance force. We have also come to learn that a lever is also an object that can increase the distance and speed at which a resistance force travels. Within the context of peace and social justice issues, there are many experiences that can make us a lever that can be applied to a resistance force to effect positive societal change, and at the same time can increase the distance and speed at which that resistance force travels.

As previously noted, having a formal education can be one such experience. Often the experiences that were not learned in the academic classroom but in the proverbial "School of Hard Knocks" are others in which our everyday world becomes the classroom and wisdom that is imparted by life's difficult experiences which we often come to value as much, and sometimes more, than formal education. Another experience is compassion, which generally grows out of allowing the hurts and pains of others to impact us and mature us, particularly if we deal with our own hurtful and painful experiences as a result. The Dutch-born Catholic priest, Henri Nouwen, an author of more than 40 books on spirituality, describes such a person as being a "wounded healer" in his book "The Wounded Healer" and particularly in the last chapter of the book which is subtitled "The Wounded Healer."

The Wounded Healer was evident twice over when Robert F. Kennedy quoted another ancient Greek, Aeschylus, a poet and dramatist who is considered by many as the founder of Greek tragedy, during his speech on the night of, and concerning, the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr. After noting that he had suffered through the assassination of his own brother John, Kennedy declared that his favorite poet (Aeschylus) once wrote:

"Even in our sleep, pain which cannot forget falls drop by drop upon the heart, until in our own despair, against our will, comes wisdom through the awful grace of God."

Kennedy followed the quote with the following words:

"What we need in the United States is not division; what we need in the United States is not hatred; what we need in the United States is not violence or lawlessness; but love and wisdom, and compassion toward one another, and a feeling of justice toward those who still suffer within our country, whether they be white or they be black... Let us dedicate ourselves to what the Greeks wrote so many years ago: to tame the savageness of man and make gentle the life of this world."

As a result of all of the inspiration over the years, when I paraphrase Archimedes' statement and leave "with a lever" out of his quote, I am not really leaving it out because I believe that I am indeed a lever. So, upon substituting oneself as a lever, one can say, "Give me a place to stand and I will move the world."