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Mover of Energies

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The first time I encountered Rahuldeep was at an academic interfaith conference hosted by California Lutheran University in collaboration with Interfaith America (formerly known as the Interfaith Youth Core). He was speaking on a panel focused on energizing college campuses with curricular and cocurricular programming that fosters interfaith engagement. The only thing I remember from any speaker that day was something Rahuldeep passionately proclaimed. He preached the idea of making the everyday commitment to “radical experimentation” when it comes to building bridges across religious difference. His spirit of radical experimentation in pushing the boundaries, trying new approaches, and welcoming others into the process, continues to guide much of what I professionally strive for today. Rahuldeep enthusiastically articulated this commitment in his own life and energetically modeled it in his relationships, teaching, scholarship, and professional duties.

In his undergraduate course syllabi, Rahuldeep described his teaching style as a “mover of energies” rather than a lecturer. A few years after my first introduction to Rahuldeep at California Lutheran University, I had the pleasure of hosting him on my own campus in Minnesota to speak to both our undergraduates and staff about engaging our university’s mission to foster religious inclusiveness. His presence that day was intense, warm, inspiring, and most certainly a mover of energies, as he challenged students, staff, and faculty to personally reflect on their values in conversation with the institutional mission. I have no doubt that Rahuldeep’s energy inspired and moved others to identify and recognize their own energies that day. His energy continues to reverberate throughout ours to this day.

In my course syllabi, Rahuldeep is the only person I quote. Every semester, on the first day of class, my students and I read his words together as we set out to co-form our classroom into a resilient space. Rahuldeep preached,

Resilient places are safe enough for students to feel brave in. ... Resilient places are not places where bad things do not happen or where significant contentious issues are not discussed in sometimes terrible ways that people will regret. They are locations that host those experiences, as well as the experiences of healing and the discussion and dialogue to revisit the most contentious fights in ways that are transformative.¹

Rahuldeep continues to guide my students and me as we strive for the values he championed and lived so beautifully.

The last time I saw Rahuldeep was at an intimate interfaith pedagogy workshop in Chicago. The first thing Rahuldeep said to me was, "How are the kids?" A smile struck across my face, for Rahuldeep was speaking my language. He beat me to it. I was about to ask him the same thing. Rahuldeep and I had earlier discerned that our children were of similar ages, as we shared in the challenges and joys of fatherhood. Rahuldeep didn't first ask about my work, research, publications, teaching, or any of the usual academic stuff. He went straight to the heart by asking about family.

Rahuldeep Singh Gill's energy will forever be in my life, on my syllabi, and in my academic, professional, and personal orientation. We are blessed to have had him touch our lives.

¹ Rahuldeep Singh Gill, "From Safe Spaces to Resilient Places: A Role for Interfaith Cooperation in Contentious Times," *Journal of College and Character*, vol. 8, no. 3 (2017): 206.