

The One Suggestion

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by Steve Bhaerman

There are no sides, only angles -- and when we view things from the right angle, it's obvious we're all on the same side.

-- Swami Beyondananda

The three peoples of the Ten Commandments are in one holy hell of a mess.

At a time when we should be mobilizing the wisdom and reverence we share to cultivate miracles, we seem to be creating anti-miracles instead. Last week, an Israeli air strike killed and wounded young children in Qana, the Lebanese village where Jesus was said to have performed his first miracle by turning water into wine. Maybe the Dalai Lama was right when he reportedly joked that if we humans destroy ourselves, that would finally create the peace on earth we've longed for

The discourse has reached a new low as the predictable rationalizations come from both sides: "Look what they are doing to us!" and "We have no choice -- they MADE us do it!" From one side, I have received devastating photos of dead children (occasionally accompanied by a toxic anti-semitic screed). From the other comes the "logical" rationalization, "If the Arabs lay down their weapons, there'll be no more war. If the Israelis lay down theirs, there'll be no more Israel."

"The Arabs don't care about their children! They purposely put them in harm's way!" is the Israeli war cry. The Arabs, they tell us, celebrate when an Israeli child is killed. The Jews, on the other hand, are sad when they have to kill Lebanese children. Well, guess what? Those kids are just as dead regardless of the intention. And any time people say "we had no choice," that is already wrong. It is a failure of imagination, and a triumph of fear. It may be a reassuring rationalization inside the state of Israel or even the Jewish community at large, but outside those circles, it's transparent as hell.

Meanwhile, in the other so-called "religious" camp, we have a scorpionic culture where revenge itself is a way of life and people don't seem to mind stinging themselves to death.

After a century that produced Gandhi, Nelson Mandela and the Dalai Lama as examples for how to "overgrow" oppression, the best these people can do is blow themselves and innocent civilians up? The Arab world has never done a thing for the Palestinians except set them up as patsies in their oxymoronic "holy war" against Israel

The problem is, this is a tribal conflict, and tribal conflicts never really end, at least not through war. The only way they end is through an upwelling of moral authority from one side or the other or both which say "enough killing and enough dying, there must be another way." Sadly, there doesn't yet seem to have been enough killing or enough dying.

The other factor -- the real elephant in the living room here -- is that there is no congruent worldwide authority to stop the fighting and make it stick, and turn the tide toward building the infrastructure of peace. The United States' interest in the region is purely imperialistic, and this is apparent to just about everyone.

Given the Iraqi Horror Picture Show -- or what Jon Stewart calls "Messopotamia" -- we have zero moral authority in the Arab world or for that matter, in any world.

And while we excuse and justify everything Israel does in its "defense" (emboldening the militarists there, as here) our policy toward the Arabs -- as witnessed by the civilian death toll since we took Iraq out of the frying pan and tossed it into the fire -- seems to be "control burn genocide."

As for the rest of us -- those who understand the definition of insanity as "continuing to do the same thing over and over and expecting different results" -- what do we do? How do we handle the fear-filled positionality of those trapped on both sides of the issue? Is there a way we can change the level of discourse and help turn a tragic disaster into a worldwide learning opportunity?

The One Suggestion: We're All In It Together

We've had thousands of years to "live by" the Ten Commandments, and looking at history we'd have to sadly conclude that either those Commandments haven't done the job, or we haven't. Maybe the whole idea of "commandments" just engenders resistance. Or maybe ten are just too many of Æem. Maybe a whole new approach is in order, like maybe ... One Suggestion.

Actually, there has been one suggestion throughout history that has been largely ignored: Treat others as you would choose to be treated. When you take every religious path from African Traditional to Zoroastrianism, all of them have the same notion at their root -- some version of the Golden Rule.

One major problem with the invocation to "Love thy neighbor as thyself" is that most of us have learned from the cultural "field" to NOT love ourselves, but that is a longer conversation.

The Swami has said there are two kinds of people in the world -- the kind of people who divide people into two kinds of people, and the kind who don't.

At the risk of sounding like the former, I suggest there are two competing worldviews that are rapidly bringing the conversation to a head:

1. We're all in it together.
2. It's every man for himself.

While our religious institutions pay lip service to the "all in it together" view, our far more influential commercial institutions worship at the "every man for himself" shrine. We take the Darwinist (actually social Darwinist) credo at face value, "survival of the fittest."

Actually, more recent research in biology tells us that the real “natural law” is “survival of the fitting.” That which best fits the environment, survives. And in the current environment -- a world on the brink of either great disaster or great breakthrough -- “survival of the fittest” doesn’t fit. Why? Because we can no longer afford to spend the energy and resources protecting ourselves from each other.

I’ve been inspired recently working with cell biologist Bruce Lipton on a book where we seek to apply the wisdom of the body to the body politic. Your body is a “community” of 50 trillion cells closely cooperating to bring the world “you” every day. Cells may look different from each other, have different duties and needs, but cells and organs “understand” they’re all in it together for the good of the common organism. They’re in “competition,” only in the original Greek meaning of the word, “to strive together.” Each system is striving together with the others to create health and functionality. In other words, it’s not a normal state of affairs for the liver to invade the pancreas and claim the Islets of Langerhans for its own.

What if we looked at the nations of the world -- the peoples, the tribes -- each as an organ designed to make a unique contribution to the whole? Sound too idealistic? Contemplate the alternative, then. Consider that biology tells us that cooperation engenders greater efficiency, effectiveness and awareness. Or, if you’re into the Scriptures, consider that not even the religious right has been able to twist Jesus’s words into “Blessed are the war-makers,” or “the mightiest armies shall inherit the earth.”

It’s the Behavior, Stupid!

So how do we generate the “moral authority” to stop the killing and cultivate the forces of cooperation?

The first step is to make a distinction between people (or “a people”) and their behavior. Justice in its simplest form is applying rules fairly across the board. This would seem simple enough, but we’re conditioned by habit to exempt ourselves from the rules we make for others. A friend of mine who was a private eye in a city we’ll call “Metropolis” once attended a party where high level officials -- including a well-known judge -- were snorting cocaine.

My friend had the audacity to approach the judge and say, “Isn’t this what you send people to jail for?”

The judge replied -- without a lick of irony -- “Oh, well those people are criminals.”

The first important step -- and this can be undertaken by an alliance of existing peace and justice organizations in the world -- is to come to some agreement as to the appropriate behavior on this “shrinking world that could definitely use a good shrink.”

This is a conversation that should be taking place in every town and village on the planet, from exclusive suburb to primitive village.

Seriously. We have -- in the form of the World Café and other nonviolent communications models -- plenty of techniques for calling forth extraordinary wisdom from ordinary folks.

In ratifying a “Declaration of Interdependence” or whatever we call it -- from the grassroots up -- we are establishing “new rules” based on the One Suggestion of “We’re all in it together.”

This doesn’t mean some sticky co-dependent relationship where the working stiff support parasites.

On the contrary, it infers participation.

In the body, there is universal health care and full employment -- truly “no cell left behind.” But every cell must participate.

In contrast to the “death trip” our current regime seems to be on, guaranteeing us perpetual warfare, loss of civil liberties, environmental destruction and growing gap between rich and poor, what if we began to “feed” the “we’re all in it together” paradigm?

What would it look like to live for our countries instead of dying for them?

What if we declared a new mission for the world, to go along with the “new rules”:

We are here on the planet to re-grow the Garden from the grassroots up, and have a heaven of a time doing it.

By what authority would we or could we do this?

Well, by the authority of all we know in our heads and in our hearts.

Put another way, ancient wisdom and modern science BOTH can’t be wrong, can they?

Moral Authority -- From the Ideal to the Real Deal

What if -- as suggested earlier -- enough people around the world, influential and otherwise, ratified a standard of behavior that would apply universally?

What if this were presented to the United Nations -- currently a very flawed institution, but all we have internationally -- as a mandate? These are the universally-applied principles that we the people of the world agree to hold ourselves to.

Would this mean the military would “disappear?”

Of course not, not anymore than you would want your immune system to disappear. But the role would change so that resources could be mobilized in times of need or disaster, and so that very targeted operations could be initiated against “sociopathogens.” From time to time, we might expect “preemptive non-force” to fail and a disagreement to degenerate into violence.

Or perhaps, a criminal gang needs to be defused and disarmed.

In these cases, there is a need for a completely transparent “police action” to see to it that the malignancy (i.e., toxic behavior in violation of the guidelines) a vast majority of

humans agree on) doesn't spread. If you consider the inventiveness of weapons makers, could you imagine "weapons" that temporarily immobilize without doing harm? Seriously. Or humorously, for that matter.

What would have happened had Israel dropped nitrous oxide on Hezbollah?

Fundamental to this new world view is the unwavering understanding that war itself is a "racket" good for "absolutely nothing."

At the same time, we must also realize the awesome opportunity -- that we humans have the intelligence, the imagination, and the technology to play and win what Buckminster Fuller called the World Game:

"Make the world work, for 100% of humanity, in the shortest possible time, through spontaneous cooperation, without ecological offense or the disadvantage of anyone."

So what's standing in the way?

Before we point to a group -- whether that be the neocons or Hezbollah or the "international bankers" or the reptiles from outer space -- we must understand one thing: The overwhelming majority of human beings -- when removed for a moment from fear-mongering manipulation -- would prefer to live together in peace, joy, health and prosperity.

Only a deeply-flawed individual would deprive themselves of that future just so they can deprive someone else. For people like that -- hey, where's Jack Kevorkian when you need him?

So again, what's in the way?

What's to keep 80% or 90% of humanity from having their way in spite of the small group of pro-death activists?

In response to the ominous thought that "the whole world is controlled by just a few people," I say "Great news!

"It means there are way, way more of us than there are of them.

Like the classic story of the Lone Ranger and Tonto being caught in an ambush. "Well Tonto," says the Masked Man, "We're surrounded by Indians.

Looks like we're done for."

And Tonto says, "What you mean WE, kemosabe?"

When we the people of the world look at the warmakers and say, "What you mean WE, kemosabe?" it will send a signal to the cosmos that there is indeed intelligent life on this planet.

So what do we do in the interim?

What part can we play to bring about that day?

First of all, entertain the possibility. One of the deadliest diseases of the spirit we suffer in our postmodern culture is what Michael Lerner calls "cynical realism," and what Swami calls "smartydom."

We are just too smart, too jaded to be hopeful.

To avoid the hurt of failing at something noble, to avoid being -- God forbid -- a fool for love, the cynical realist will wink and nod and say, "It's always been that way, it's always going to be that way, so I'm going to get mine."

And that's how those too smart to be a fool for love end up being a fool for evil.

Secondly, let go of your story. Part of the intransigence in the Middle East (and every other region where rivalry has turned to hatred) has to do with people so identifying with their stories -- or their "people's" story -- that they end up living a surrogate life based on something that happened generations ago.

The worst thing about it is that it begets more of the same, and stands as an obstacle both to learning and to making a real contribution to the world.

As a kid growing up in a Jewish family, I was well-immersed in Jewish history ("They tried to kill us, we survived, let's eat!").

Thank God we had no relatives that we knew of who died in the Holocaust, but the horror of that was always real for me, as was the slogan, "Never again!"

But at some point in my adult life, the question arose, did "never again" mean never again for the Jews?

Or never again for anyone?

If the lesson learned and the sacred mission arising out of that horror is never again will genocide be tolerated for anyone, then perhaps the awful suffering has actually made a contribution to the world.

Finally, we need to get off our head trips and join together on the heart trip. Just as surely as heart cells "entrain" to beat together, our individual human hearts are attuned to the same attuning fork.

It's our minds that keep us separated.

Now I know some hardheaded paragons of rationality are shaking their hard heads right about now, clucking about how I underestimate the power of reason.

Not at all.

I've seen the power reason has to provide us with all the rationalizations we need -- to act irrationally. Now we need the power of reason to be used in the service of the heart, to generate the yet unthought of solutions that will prevent the unthinkable.

May the FARCE be with you,

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