

Integral Leadership Review

Volume X, No.4

August 2010



CODA

Moral and Ethical Passion

The CODA for this issue is inspired by two items, recently called to my attention by Jeannie Volckmann. The first was a recently posted TED Talks by Sam Harris. The gist of his talk was that there are practices and behaviors in this world that we should not abide. He was speaking directly to post-modernist relativism and to those of us who cherish integral, adult development psychology and evolutionary cultural and systemic perspectives. http://blog.ted.com/2010/03/22/science_can_ans/

Harris is urging us to take a moral/ethical stance at those behavior, practices and actions that do not further the well being of humankind and the planet. He is arguing against the cultural relativists who claim that we cannot legitimately judge these practices from the perspective of a different culture. He argues that for our sake and the well being of life on the planet we do need to take a stand and speak out against the practices.

The second item, also by Sam Harris, is a blog posted on The Daily Beast website: <http://www.thedailybeast.com/blogs-and-stories/2010-08-13/ground-zero-mosque/>.

Here Harris is responding to President Obama's recent comments about the building of a Muslim community center and mosque two blocks away from the World Trade Center site. Obama, as is Mayor Michael Bloomberg of New York, have each indicated that we cannot and should not stand in the way of this construction. Their argument is that to do so would be to violate one of principle values as a nation: freedom of religion—embedded in our Constitution.

Harris argues: "There is probably no legal basis to do so in any case—nor should there be. But the margin between what is legal and what is desirable, or even decent, leaves room for many projects that well-intentioned people might still find offensive." He goes on, "The erection of a mosque upon the ashes of this atrocity will also be viewed by many millions of Muslims as a victory—and as a sign that the liberal values of the West are synonymous with decadence and cowardice." And yet, the New York Times sees it as a "monument to tolerance."

Harris concludes,

At this point in human history, Islam simply is different from other faiths. The challenge we all face, Muslim and non-Muslim alike, is to find the most benign and practical ways of mitigating these differences and of changing this religion for the better.

It is both ironic and instructive that at the very moment that the path was finally smoothed for the construction of the ground zero mosque, the Hamburg mosque that nurtured the 9/11 hijackers was shut down by the [German government](#). No doubt there were German Muslims who felt their religious liberty was shamefully abridged. However, after a decade of treating this mosque as a monument to tolerance, the Germans were forced to admit that it was actually an incorrigible incubator of jihadism and anti-Western values. And so, the question must be asked: Which of these sister mosques represents the true face of Islam?

Before attending to the position Harris is taking on the mosque or on Islam, I want to point out his use of language in regard to President Obama. The headline reads that Obama is backpedaling. What does that mean? That Obama opposed the mosque and now favors it? On the contrary, Obama has taken the stand that our core values protect the right (as Harris acknowledges) to build the mosque. If he had a different opinion at one point (and I am not sure he did), why is that backpedaling and not rethinking the issue. What is it about our culture that demeans consideration and reconsideration of issues, even changing one's opinion?

In the header before the body of Harris' comments the site editor states,

After weeks of dodging the issue, at a White House Ramadan dinner Friday night, [President Obama came out in support of Park51](#), the planned Muslim community center and mosque two blocks away from the World Trade Center site. The President says he wasn't endorsing the ground zero mosque—only defending the right to build it. Sam Harris on his failure to acknowledge that Islam is different than other faiths. [Bold in the original]

It is likely that both headline and header were not written by Sam Harris, but even if they were, the point is that "dodging the issue" is a loaded term that is intended to appeal to the emotions of the reader and not address the issue itself. Both are blatantly overt smears of the President. I have come to expect this of the radical right, even the populist right. Here, I see a form of inflammatory speech and not the kind of perspective I have come to expect from Sam Harris. Which brings me back to the Ted Talks video.

Like most first tier folks centered in Green, as I believe I am, I find arguments in the stream of cultural relativism appealing. Perhaps, as Sheena Iyengar points out (http://www.ted.com/talks/sheena_iyengar_on_the_art_of_choosing.html?utm_source=newsletter_weekly_2010-07-27&utm_campaign=newsletter_weekly&utm_medium=email), a strongly held value in American culture is that choice is individual choice; we believe it is important for each individual to make their own decisions. This stance lends itself readily in support of relativism. If someone chooses differently than I, I can shrug it off and just say, "Well, it was her choice!" And we are not alone. Is it any wonder that the French phrase, "chacon a son gout," has some currency in the United States. It affirms that we make our decisions based on our "taste," our preferences.

And there is also a part of me that longs for greater clarity about morals and ethics. Perhaps this is what healthy Blue in the Spiral within can provide. And Sam Harris' argument in the Ted Talk is very, very appealing. Basically, he says that we need to argue for the position that certain acts are wrong. Genocide, female mutilation, worker exploitation, tax policies that enrich those who are well off at the expense of the poor, the luxury and opulence of the rich in the face of starvation and malnutrition for many, all of these would be examples of actions, policies, power dynamics that are oppressive and not designed to promote the well being of us all. And it is our responsibility not only to recognize this, but to take a stand against it, while not falling back on a cultural and value relativist position.

I was struck by Dorothea Zimmer's piece in this issue of Integral Leadership Review in which she identifies the value added brought by each political party in Germany, if they were to bring their values to bear on con-

structive interaction for the good of the many. Spiral Dynamics integral (SDi) is her lens, and it is one that has influenced many of us attracted to integral approaches. I respect Dorothea's prowess in presenting this material. It is the kind of thing that I read in the work of Don Beck and others who are engaged in using SDi to intervene in Iceland, Palestine, the Netherlands and elsewhere.

And it is still a struggle for me to get there. My own attachment to relativist stances in regard to many things in life has been long standing. True, it has been shifting in recent years, but the pull toward relativism is still powerful. I must be engaged with a struggle with shadow elements. Or is it that if I drop the relativist position I would judge my own life more harshly and I resist that? Whatever the reason, I believe Sam Harris' work is on the right track. He is anti-religion, particularly religious institutions. And so am I. He is committed to the well being of the whole. And so am I. He is living the passion of his position. And that is something I have much to learn about.

Jordan Luftig provided an insightful answer to my own dilemma and that of relativism in his presentation and paper at the recent ITC: "Movement Building through Metanarrative: *An Integral Ideological Response to Climate Change*," (*Journal of Integral Theory and Practice*—Vol. 4, No. 4). Jeannie went to his presentation at the conference and I have read his paper. He uses as his context the role of the integral approach as an ideology for addressing global issues. He raises the question of how we approach a population at multiple developmental levels and holding multiple ideological orientations:

"When faced with scenarios like this latter one, the knee-jerk integral response is to "meet people where they're at." Often times, this means we craft communications that speak the language of the person or group to whom we are speaking. Other times, it means we listen to that person or group express their needs, values, and perspectives, and we stand with them because we understand. Either way, we create conditions for the other to be recognized on their own terms and *find their voice*, something that is paramount to social movements. Still, I am after something else."(52)

He continues,

In a certain sense, our mode of communicating with people "where they're at" *is* our voice. And we can speak our hearts and minds through the conversations that ensue. However, if in these conversations or in other forums we communicate the integral vision that animates our being, guides our action, *is* our understanding— and we must—then let us not fail to recognize that we are speaking in a different voice. As I clarify below, the first voice, represented by the communicative action of meeting others on their own terms, is the voice of the content-free framework. I like to think of it as "choiceless awareness." The second voice is defined by choice, and gains expression through a narrative frame, in stories like Wilber's metanarrative of flatland. The point being, we must be of two voices, and we have fallen in love with the *content-free framework* to the detriment and relative decline of the *narrative frame*, which happens to be an essential lever for social movements.(53)

We are engaged with integral (or evolutionary, developmental, transdisciplinary) pursuits, because we *are* invested in addressing global issues. And that means addressing the challenges of cultural diversity *and* the accompanying practices that support movement toward attending to these issues for the well being of humankind. This is exactly the valuable point being made by Sam Harris: we can no longer rest on our sensitivity, understanding, appreciative approaches to the destructive activities of those who are imbedded in protective blankets of cultural ideologies that do not give a whit about the well being of humankind.

We need to stand with Gandhi who claimed that good ends cannot be achieved with evil means. The functionalist ideology within us can no longer claim that both positive and negative results can come from both good and evil deeds. We must stand against the degenerative acts of those who would take advantage of our tolerance. As integralists, as those who seek to fill leader roles, as a collective, it is our responsibility to put the “Good, the True and the Beautiful” to the forefront. We can no longer hide behind Luftig’s “content-free framework.” Understanding that, what do you and I do differently now?

Luftig states,

Certainly the change we seek, the new moral and social order we endeavor to establish, will not come easy. But, can we doubt that manifesting an integral vision will be made all the more difficult if we do not give serious consideration to the possibility that our efforts remain embedded in flatland and even perpetuate it, despite our best intentions? In service of this inquiry and the emergence of a post-flatland integral age, I encourage Forum participants, climate change activists, scholar-practitioners, community leaders, and all parties with integral inclinations to see themselves as participants in a social movement; sink into the mindset and morphic groove of ideology; and “look within, go beyond.

For me, this is indeed a glorious and seductive challenge. It is my belief that *Integral Leadership Review* is a manifestation of embracing this challenge. And yet, and yet, there is something missing. There is so much to do, so little time, so many excuses!

