

# UNCONDITIONAL LOVE IN POLITICS

Or, Have You Hugged a Republican Today?

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This is a long essay (over 25,000 words) that I felt compelled to write in order to address things I saw coming up in myself and others that didn't feel good to me. I expect that it will eventually find a home in an upcoming book.

I endeavored to be fair to both the right and left, but since my own worldview is progressive, there is an inevitable tilt to the left in the examples I give. However, I hope that even if you're more conservative, you will still find this to be a worthwhile read. It's not about left versus right, but about what unites us all.

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“It is easy to love those who agree with you. Loving those whose views you strongly disagree with is a greater challenge. Yet, it is the nature of love to connect from your soul to the soul of all others, without judgment. When you allow love to be in its natural state within you, it transcends differences in opinion.” (Michael channeled by Shepherd Hoodwin)

Can there be unconditional love and truth in politics, or is that an oxymoron? Thus far, it’s been a rare commodity if it’s ever been there.

There is good in everyone, and decent, well-meaning people in every field. However, we live in a world dense with ignorance, and nowhere is ego and maya (a Hindi term meaning the illusory nature of the physical plane) thicker than in politics.

Politics has always been famously rife with hypocrisy, corruption, secrecy, greed, lies, etc. Today in the U.S., it is especially divisive, with both parties increasingly disparaging the other harshly and often unfairly, and more and more citizens taking sides. It has always been a minefield rivaling religion, and people have always liked to think that God shares their political views. However, now that fundamentalist religion has become so intertwined with it, politics is particularly full of charged emotions and defensive “I’m right, you’re wrong” postures.

Recently, this divisiveness has been widely discussed—it seems that we are collectively becoming uncomfortable with it and are trying to find our way to a new modus operandi.

## **THE YIN/YANG SYMBOL**

In the yin/yang symbol, the masculine and feminine are shown as being two aspects of one whole, with each being the core of the other. This illustrates the relationship of all true opposites. The political left and right are similarly two aspects of one whole, not separate entities. Seeing them in a circle demonstrates their interdependent relationship, how they swirl into and anchor one another, and how one cannot exist without the other. Progressivism can be expansive without flying away because conservatism anchors it; conservatism can be stable without stagnating because progressivism challenges it to grow. Each is relative to the other. Conservatism is like the roots of a plant; progressivism is like the foliage. If they’re seen in a linear rather than circular way, they are still two ends of the same stick. Opposites fighting each other is like our right and left legs working against each other; how much better when they complement each other—then we can move forward.

Another analogy is the brain's left and right hemispheres. Some people are more right-brained, some are more left-brained and some are balanced. However, all people can benefit from better integrating their right and left brains, allowing for a free exchange of information between them so that the brain as a whole can function more effectively. The political left and right can also benefit from integration. Extremes result when one side tries to function without being balanced by the other; they require excluding a large part of reality. Extremes distort; the path of evolution is one of integrating opposites and thereby reducing extremes.

Paradoxically, opposite extremes are similar to each other, and the yin/yang symbol shows why. In politics, fascism is the extreme right and communism is the extreme left. They are arch-enemies, but both are oppressive in their totalitarianism. Far-right radicals sometimes adopt the tactics of the far left, and vice versa. The extreme right moves into the left, just as the extreme masculine (the "tail" of the white half of the yin/yang symbol) moves into the feminine (the dark half). If a person tries to move away from the feminine by becoming hyper-masculine, he tends to meet the feminine again on the other side. For instance, highly aggressive men sometimes become highly submissive in the bedroom in an effort to balance themselves and find relief from their extremity. A majority of male cross-dressers are heterosexual, and many are macho in their usual persona. People into BDSM (bondage and discipline, sadomasochism) often switch roles. Bullies sometimes become crybabies when they go off the deep end, and victims sometimes commit violence when they can't take it anymore.

The yin/yang symbol represents the whole, including both sides; to be whole individually, we need to honor both sides within us. Collectively, we need the best of both the right and left to be whole and to move forward constructively. The truth is a collection of all individual truths, assembled in proper proportion; we need everyone's truths to make up the truth.

In our house-divided state, both right and left tend to paper over or leave out important facts that don't support their arguments—neither side is whole. There's an unwillingness to grant the other any points, to give credit where it is due. If we're open-minded and value truth and fact over doctrine and partisanship, we can find points of agreement with those in other camps and come closer to assembling a true and complete picture.

It can be simplistic to classify people's political perspectives as being either right or left. Like other stereotypes, this generality works part of the time, but people who think expansively aren't likely to have such easily classified views. Even people who are heavily left- or right-brained still use the other side. Left/right seen as a line looks like either/or, differing only by extremity, but as a yin/yang relationship, it looks less cut-and-dried; every point within the circle has a different, complex relationship to the whole. Much "us vs. them" conflict could be neutralized if we switched from a linear to a holistic yin/yang paradigm (way of looking at things).

I try to approach each issue thoughtfully, weighing the facts, but most of my views fit within the progressive framework. (That's also true of most of my friends and most new agers in general). However, some of my views concerning personal freedom might be considered radical and agree with the Libertarians (for example, I don't believe in drug laws, the draft, or compulsory jury duty), although, in general, Libertarians are right-wing and voted for Bush in 2000. I can also agree in my own way with some basic Republican tenets such as leaner government that is fiscally responsible and more efficient. (All those who are for inefficient, wasteful, and spendthrift government, raise your hands.)

Still, for convenience, let's look at the political landscape in the simple terms of a linear left-right spectrum, and explore some metaphysical and psychological factors involved in why someone may

fall predominantly right or left. Of course, many people are in the center, but we can view that as a combination of factors.

## **FEMININE AND MASCULINE**

The most obvious influences in our political orientation are our imprinting (how we were raised), life history and circumstances. People raised Republican or Democrat are more likely to stay that way than to change. Someone who feels he unfairly lost out on a promotion due to Affirmative Action might vote Republican; someone who lost his job due to outsourcing might vote Democratic. We tend to move right when we become more affluent and want to conserve our gains, and left when times get tough. We tend to move right when the world seems chaotic and we seek stability, and left when it seems stifling. However, there are many other less-tangible factors.

For one thing, right/left is roughly parallel to male/female. Men are more likely to lean right than women. The masculine is more about picking yourself up by your bootstraps, overcoming, taking aggressive action, etc., and those are also conservative themes. The left is more aligned with the feminine, which is about succoring, nurturing, creating atmosphere, etc. Obviously, we need a balance of both in politics and in life in general.

All creation, from physical reproduction to the expansion of consciousness, involves the interplay of masculine and feminine: masculine vitality (sperm) catalyzes the feminine vision (egg) to develop; when it is ready, the masculine delivers it into stable form (birth). Together, the feminine nurtures and the masculine guides it into maturity (child-rearing).

Every energy can manifest constructively or destructively; in the Michael teachings (a channeled body of metaphysical information about how we, as souls, set up our lifetimes), we speak of traits having positive and negative poles. In their positive poles, the masculine and feminine serve each other; in their negative poles, they war. In their positive poles, the feminine radiates possibility, which the masculine grounds through right action; both are strong because they are centered in the divine (the whole). In their negative poles, the masculine is a bully and the feminine is a victim; both are weak because they are self-centered, wrapped up in their own ego agendas and therefore cut off from the whole. We each have both male and female energies that we can draw upon as needed, and we each experience both positive and negative poles.

Humanity is not yet mature, mentally, emotionally or spiritually. Therefore, history has swung between matriarchy and patriarchy, with one usually dominating the other rather than there being balance and integration. Whichever side has too much power, because it is not adequately balanced by the other, becomes corrupt and out of control. Our society has been in a long-term cycle of patriarchy.

Political cycles that swing between left and right are much shorter. The right is currently heavily dominant in the U.S., gleefully in its negative poles, trudging with hobnailed boots through flower beds and telling the left to get over it, sounding like a stereotypical arrogant male “jerk.” The left took it for a while, being a victim, sometimes compliant, sulking or complaining, but it has become increasingly angry and hostile. Just as the right has dismissed the left as weak, bleeding-hearted, and lily-livered, the left is starting to dismiss the right as “they’re all just a bunch of jerks and we should get rid of them,” sounding like early feminism. (It’s no accident that the U.S. was more liberal in the heyday of feminism.)

Some right-wing talk radio hosts strike me as bullies, and many people abroad currently view the U.S. and the Bush Administration in particular, as a bully. Like Gore before him, Kerry is running a cautious, defensive campaign, to some degree embodying the victim: he reacts rather than setting the tone. Only a victim is defensive. Sometimes defensiveness is defiant, but that’s not the same

as owning our masculine power and taking the lead, nor is it radiating possibilities, the positive feminine (sometimes referred to as the Goddess). This is a lesson that many women are working on.

Not all those on the left dominantly embody the feminine, not do all those on the right embody the masculine. Perhaps Gore endorsed Howard Dean earlier this year because he began to recognize the negative-pole-feminine weakness of his own campaign and saw Dean not making his mistakes; however, Dean embodies another version of the negative pole masculine: the bulldog-angry fighter. John Kennedy continues to inspire Democrats because, whatever his private life or actual accomplishments were, he was a symbol of the positive-pole masculine: strong, centered and kind.

Kerry has been trying to sell the American people on his macho strength, but he hasn't been entirely convincing because he is doing it in reaction to the right's attacks, and reaction is negative-pole feminine behavior. Also, he is trying to beat the right at their forte rather than emphasizing his, which might be described as creating a vision and imbuing it in the American psyche. Modern Democratic Presidents each did this to some degree, but it's hard to think of a Republican other than Reagan who did; Bush, Sr., was especially plagued by the "vision thing," the perception that he lacked vision. The Republican Presidencies have been more characterized by providing a sense of stability and safety, which they can be good at.

In a growth cycle, there is what might be called the progressive phase in which the growth visibly manifests as an upward surge, and then a conservative phase, a period of stabilization and preparation for the next upward spurt. The progressive phase brings changes that are integrated during the conservative phase—we have to get used to and comfortable with the new ways of being, learning how they work and taking a breather from the stress of change. Nonstop upward movement would be disorienting and ungrounding; nonstop stability would be stagnating and boring. We tend to choose more progressive, visionary Presidents during surges, and more conservative, stabilizing ones during integrations. Middle-of-the-road Presidents like Clinton have had significant elements of both: his instinct to track with public opinion kept his progressive side from dominating. President Johnson was highly progressive domestically but conservative relative to Viet Nam.

Eisenhower was a reassuring presence during the height of the Cold War, after the tremendous changes of the FDR era. However, he lacked the vision to speak out against Joe McCarthy's bullying—the negative side of stability is not rocking the boat.

During the Eisenhower years, people were terrified of the Soviets and nuclear war; today, people are terrified of terrorism. Fear causes us to cling to perceived safety and leaves us vulnerable to manipulation by bullies who repress freedom in the name of preserving it. McCarthy "defended the American way" by chilling free speech, silencing critics by making them fear for their livelihood if he cast them as un-American. Bush similarly froze free speech by casting his critics as being for terrorism, and restricted freedom with the Patriot Act. He explained 9/11 as the act of people who hate our freedom; perhaps he was projecting. His off-the-cuff joke in Congress that it would be easier if he were a dictator may have been a Freudian slip. Most people want freedom for themselves but not necessarily for others: letting others have the maximum possible choice may cause things to go in a direction one doesn't like, and may seem too chaotic.

Fear freezes us. It took time for a critical mass of Americans to finally revolt against McCarthy, as it later did relative to Viet Nam. Since the trauma of 9/11, many Americans who haven't felt comfortable with the Iraqi war have been hesitant to question it or speak out against it. However, we are slowly coming out of our frozen shock, and the left is rallying to try to balance the right and stop its abuses.

History shows us that the “red under every bed” threat advertised by the McCarthyites was false, whether or not they sincerely believed it. America was not in danger of being taken over by Communists or by those in Hollywood who had briefly joined the Communist Party during the Depression in a fashionable pique of misguided idealism. Similarly, the fall of Viet Nam did not have a major domino effect, and the Iraqi threat advertised by the Bush Administration was false, whether or not they believed it. Being governed by fear is never useful anyway; we can take intelligent precautions without being motivated by fear. Only by honestly facing our inner demons that exaggerate dangers can we break free of fear’s control.

## **THE MICHAEL TEACHINGS**

In addition to the male/female polarity, the different perspectives of the roles (soul types) in the Michael teachings can help us understand the right and left, and avoid jumping to conclusions about other people’s motivations. People really do operate differently, rightly so. (See <http://summerjoy.com/JourneyWhatsYourRole.html> for an introduction to the Michael teachings.)

We refer to warriors, kings and scholars as the solid roles because they have a more solid feel to them. They have a low frequency, in the sense that their energy vibrates relatively slowly, like a low musical pitch. They resonate more with the earth than the sky, so they tend to be more grounded—”down-to-earth” can be used almost literally to describe them. Sages and servers are mid-frequency roles. Priests and artisans are high frequency; they have an airier quality, and are more likely to be visionaries and dreamers. We refer to the latter four as the fluid roles.

Each soul also has an individual frequency independent of its role; there are some relatively low frequency, grounded, “laid-back” artisans and some relatively high frequency, fast vibrating, “out-there,” warriors. Still, every warrior has a fundamental earthy, solid feeling, and every artisan, an airier, lighter feeling.

What is more solid is also slower or more resistant to change. Conservatives, by definition, also resist change—they want to conserve things as they are (or make them again as they were). Some resistance to change is necessary—it’s like the tread on tires that resists sliding off the road in random directions. If there were only progressives, things might change faster than people could integrate.

So the solid roles (which are also considered masculine) tend to be more drawn to the right, and the fluid roles (considered feminine), to the left—the archetypes of right and solid, and left and fluid are roughly parallel. Of course, there are numerous individual exceptions, especially among scholars, who tend to be intellectually analytical and align with the argument that is most convincing to them.

It also depends on whether we go with our tendencies or seek to balance them. Artisans, for example, who tend to live with a lot of flux, would naturally gravitate to the left because it embraces change. However, an artisan who feels off-balance might go to the right because it offers an anchoring sense of safety. Conversely, warriors are the most grounded of the roles and have a natural affinity with the stable right, but might be attracted to the left for some excitement or a cause for which to fight.

Clinton is a sage and Kerry is an artisan; those are the two expression-axis roles. Bush is probably a scholar (the assimilation-axis role), although he’s not stereotypical—according to my channeling, his scholarliness is masked by aphasia due to an early head injury and substance abuse, and being in the physical part of the moving center (he’s centered in his body rather than his intellect). Cheney and Ashcroft look like warriors; warriors and kings are the action-axis roles. Scholars and warriors are a classic combination, so Bush aligning with Cheney and Ashcroft is not surprising.

(There isn't always agreement on celebrity roles and overleaves among Michael channels; I present here what seems right to me.)

Scholars, warriors, and kings are one-input roles, meaning that they're more focused—they receive and process one piece of information at a time, as opposed to five for artisans and three for sages, who are more diffuse. The solid roles are inherently simpler people, with fewer moving parts, you might say. On the other hand, no soul type is more complex than artisans are, and sages come in second, because of their multiple inputs—a lot goes on in them at the same time.

Warriors and kings especially, but also scholars, tend to have a more black-and-white view of life, including what constitutes integrity and loyalty (“You either supported me or you didn't”). Their view is like digital information: it's either a 1 or a 0. They tend to see artisans and sages as being slippery, which is also the Republicans' common accusation of Democrats.

The expression roles, on the other hand, see themselves as being flexible and appreciating subtleties lost to the more black-and-white action roles, which is the defense of Kerry against those who accuse him of waffling. Artisans' motto might be Emerson's quote: “A foolish consistency is the hobgoblin of little minds, adored by little statesmen and philosophers....” Their view is like analog information, consisting of continuous variation. The expression axis is home to the intellectual center. The intellect can both obfuscate and illuminate. A subtle intellect can understand how apparently contradictory ideas can both be true.

Some people come off better in private, among friends, than in public, and with others, it's the opposite. Artisans are a highly ordinal role, meaning that they focus on the immediate and mundane; unlike sages, who are cardinal, they don't often seek the spotlight and aren't that comfortable in it. (Scholars are neither ordinal nor cardinal, and can go either way.) Artisans tend to be introverted and shy, preferring a few close one-on-one relationships. Kerry must have other traits and a life task that impel him into the public eye, but clearly it's not easy for him. There have been artisan Presidents, such as Ford and probably Carter. The sage Presidents, such as Clinton, Reagan and FDR, were more natural campaigners. Kerry's highly saturnian body type also contributes to his stiffness. It makes the bones prominent, without softness, and can impart a paternalistic, disciplined, and severe quality. Being so tall can give an impression of aloofness, being above it all, and artisans tend to be aloof anyway.

Bush, on the other hand, has become a skillful and charming public speaker. However, there have been insider reports that his private behavior has become increasingly unhinged.

Seeing leaders in terms of their roles alone isn't foolproof. Ronald Reagan was a sage, too (“the Great Communicator” could describe many sages). He started out as a Democrat, but by the time he was Governor of California, he was set as a conservative Republican; still, his switch perhaps demonstrates the increased mutability of the expression-axis roles. Tough guy conservatives Arnold Schwarzenegger and Clint Eastwood (mayor of Carmel, CA) are artisans, albeit with some warrior traits. Of course, all three came to politics via Hollywood, a magnet for the expression roles that has a number of other conservatives, such as Mel Gibson and NRA President Charlton Heston, although there are more liberals.

Gore is probably a scholar, yet he was tarred by the same brush as Clinton, as being slippery, partly by reason of his association with him. John Edwards is also a scholar, probably with some artisan traits.

We are all complex. Knowing a person's full Michael teachings profile, including secondary role traits and overleaves, in addition to astrological and other factors, might shed more light. The information here isn't meant to be cut-and-dried; it just points to tendencies.

In addition, explicating someone's tendencies in metaphysical terms doesn't imply that criticisms aren't valid. We all can go too far in one direction. Simplicity can be a virtue, but being too black-and-white isn't. Likewise, subtlety can be a virtue, but being wishy-washy isn't. Balance in all things.

According to the Michael teachings, each of us has an attitude, or intrinsic way of viewing life. I have a Libertarian friend who emails me conservative columns. Like many conservative talk show hosts, these writers tend to see themselves as iconoclasts, champions of the hard truth that others don't want to face, and they get off on smashing illusions, as they see them. They tend to ridicule those who don't agree with them. They make some valid points, but the underlying caustic anger and smug self-righteousness often distorts them. It's reminiscent of denigration, the negative pole of the cynic attitude. My friend is a cynic, so that is probably part of why he's attracted to these writers. Cynics have an acidic quality. The positive pole is contradiction: cynics are tire-kickers who test things for soundness.

There's plenty of self-righteousness on the left, too, although it comes more from the anger of victims or of sympathy for them—those on the receiving end of raw deals. It lines up more with the skeptic attitude, whose negative pole is suspicion. There seem to be more conspiracy theories on the left, for example. Skeptics have a rigorous quality. The positive pole is investigation; skeptics ask a lot of questions.

Skeptic and cynic are the two attitudes in the Michael teachings (out of seven total) that are argumentative. Both can be curmudgeonly. Skeptic is a more intellectual attitude—like the high-frequency artisan role, it's on the same side of the same axis as the intellectual center. Cynic lines up with the physical center—it comes from the guts; it lines up with the low-frequency warrior role. The left tends to be more intellectual, and the right, more earthy; the only modern Republican President who was known for his intellect was Richard Nixon.

The Michael teachings delineate five soul ages through which we progress on the physical plane: infant, baby, young, mature and old. These roughly parallel human development: newborn, toddler, youngster, adolescent and college-age young adult. The younger cycles (infant, baby, and young) focus outwardly; the older cycles (mature and old) focus inwardly.

The right tends to be younger souled, and the left, older souled, although, again, this is by no means cut-and-dried—it would be a mistake to assume that there are no old-soul Republicans (or that the older perspective is more correct or better). Also, many people manifest younger than their actual soul age, in some areas or in general, so a mature or old soul could manifest baby or young relative to politics.

The younger cycles are about increasingly developing individuality, knowing ourselves separately from the whole; the young cycle is the apex of separateness. We begin in the infant cycle already connected with the whole, but not yet as conscious, fully formed individuals; our sense of self is somewhat amorphous, like that of a newborn. The baby cycle is about community, with an emphasis on conforming to it, beginning to take an individual shape by taking on the shape of the community. It is an outward/in process of being imprinted. Not all baby souls are conformists—for example, kings at any soul age are less like to conform than to imprint others—but there is a tendency to go along with the crowd, since that fits with their lessons.

The young cycle completes the individuation. Its motto is “Do it my way” or “Let me apply myself to this situation” as it learns to impact its environment. Because it emphasizes success in the outer world, especially through career, many leaders are young souls or are manifesting young; they tend to have the drive, energy and discipline to get to the top. Especially in a late young-soul country like the U.S., politics tends to be a young soul game.



John Kennedy, a young king, brought idealistic young-soul “vigor” to helping those in other countries through the Peace Corps, illustrating the positive pole of the young cycle. In the selfish negative pole, it’s “every man for himself,” and young-souls impose themselves on others.

Similar to younger soul individuation, the right emphasizes rugged individualism. In the positive pole, it helps those who are less fortunate attain strength and self-sufficiency—that’s what “compassionate conservatism” would mean in practice. In the negative pole, the right is consumed with greed and doesn’t care about others.

The older cycles are about integrating that newly won individuation into the larger whole, knowing ourselves within its context. In the mature cycle, we integrate locally, with our community, however we define it. In the old cycle, we integrate universally, with the whole, seeking connection with all life. As infant souls, we blend with the whole unconsciously, like a drop of water in the ocean; as old souls, we blend consciously, being aware of our connection.

The mature cycle’s community orientation is inward/out rather than outward/in: it’s about impacting the community through developing and expressing ourselves within it, e.g., through the arts. Mature soul cooperation is about internal process, such as building consensus about what rules we’ll live by. Baby soul cooperation emphasizes outer form, such as having a bake sale to support the church. The young cycle doesn’t tend to emphasize cooperation beyond “I’ll pat your back if you’ll pat mine.” Its impact on the world focuses on external form rather than internal content. All these stages of development are needed; for example, if we tried to build a mature soul inner life without having first built a young soul outer structure, it would collapse. It would be like trying to drywall a house without having finished framing.

Like the older cycles, the left is more concerned with connection than separation. Its emphasis on social programs parallels the mature cycle’s desire to help empower each community member so that the community can progress together. The left’s environmentalism resonates with old souls’ desire to harmonize with all life, although even positive-pole young souls can appreciate the value of an unspoiled environment. Teddy Roosevelt, a young warrior and staunch individualist, protected millions of acres of wilderness.

Incidentally, communism is a mature soul idea that has largely been applied by young and baby soul leaders who turned it into totalitarianism. It’s not a very workable idea anyway, because it doesn’t take into account human nature, but the mature cycle tends to be experimental with ways of ordering society. Utopian communities often have a mature-soul cast to them.

## **SINCERITY**

Those on the right tend to see Bush as a moral straight-shooter; those on the left tend to see him a moralistic, macho corporate puppet.

Those on the left tend to see Kerry, like Gore and Clinton before him, as intelligent and flexible; those on the right tend to see him as an opportunistic waffler.

There are shades of gray on both sides. Giving Bush the benefit of the doubt, he is probably sincere by his own lights (if highly unconscious)—most people are. However, so are Clinton, Gore, and Kerry; in fact, they seem to have genuinely high ideals of service, whatever their failings might be.

It’s also fair to say that Kerry, like Clinton, Gore, and most other politicians, lacks backbone to some degree and has sometimes changed his tune, not merely to respond to changing circumstances or new information but also according to what they thought people wanted to hear, to win support.

However, so has Bush—he's changed his tune many times—although being more solid, it's easier for people to believe he's consistent.

Most people agree that Clinton shouldn't have lied about Monica Lewinsky (although many on the left feel that it was unimportant and no one else's business to begin with). However, Clinton certainly isn't the first President to lie—most probably have—and his lies were probably not much different in essence from Bush's cover-ups about his DUI, drug abuse and military service. Bush refused to answer questions about his alleged cocaine addiction rather than outright lying, but that's not the same as telling the truth about it. Since there are a number of people (especially among poor minorities) doing prison time for the same thing, this is significant. His contentions that he fulfilled his military service have so far not been backed by evidence (some relevant records were "accidentally" destroyed) and appear to be lies.

Many people who tell falsehoods are not deliberately lying, at least, not consciously. Those who have not faced their blind spots with rigorous honesty can have some skewed and strange interpretations of events and can get the facts spectacularly wrong—our minds can be ingenious at rationalizing when we don't wish to take responsibility; we believe what we want to believe. Some people make things up and don't realize they're doing so, which is one source of rumors and urban legends. Many pass along falsehoods they've heard from others without checking them for accuracy, or blindly believe superstitions that have no basis in reality. There are those who have committed heinous crimes who are so fragmented that they are able to convince themselves that they didn't do it. In addition, all of us sometimes have plain faulty memory.

Falsehoods permeate politics. A number are consciously deliberate, but when people tell a lie often enough, they may start to believe it themselves. Certainly those who hear it often enough begin to believe it if they don't take the trouble to verify it. Behind many lies is the idea that the end justifies the means, that it's right for a certain candidate to win at all costs. One cost of falsehoods, especially those that are deliberate, is self-diminishment: person who spreads them turns himself into a liar; another is the diminishment of the whole political landscape: we elect people and collectively act based on lies. Ethically, those who need to lie or mislead in order to win shouldn't win. Such people certainly don't believe in democracy if they aren't willing to let people choose based on the truth. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for both sides to mislead.

No matter how sincerely we hold them, falsehoods are not truth. We each have a responsibility to be honest with ourselves and others, check our facts, and not jump to conclusions. Still, it's probably not fair to call someone a liar if her facts are incorrect but she doesn't consciously know it. However, what if someone has a vague suspicion in the back of her mind that her facts might be shaky but ignores it, like those who mindlessly repeat the party line in the face of hard questions, willfully refusing to examine other information? Most of us consider lying to be of the deliberate variety—is that deliberate enough to qualify?

In any case, it's not possible to go inside someone's mind and know with certainty that she was deliberately lying; we can only go by the evidence, which may be inconclusive.

When we think that someone has uttered a falsehood, it's usually safer to assume that it's not a deliberate lie. There are plenty of deliberate liars, in and out of politics, but far more who sincerely tell falsehoods (which can cause just as much damage). Calling someone a liar is likely to engender defensiveness and may not be useful, even if it's true; the point may be to just set the record straight.

Clinton's lies about Lewinsky turned out to be bald-faced, by his own admission; Bush's about WMDs in Iraq may not have been, but if the administration pushed intelligence agencies to tell them what they wanted to hear and then sincerely presented compromised information as being

solid, was it less egregious for being more self-deception than bald-faced lies? Which damaged the world more?

Here's a possible scenario that gives the administration some benefit of the doubt: Key members were obsessed with Hussein and utterly convinced he still had WMDs, despite the U.N. inspections, and were impatient to go after him, perhaps terrified of another 9/11. They may have sincerely presented their beliefs to the public, but were blinded by their obsession and weren't being honest with themselves about the real evidence. Those who are not honest with themselves cannot be honest with others; those who can't separate themselves from their biases in favor of the truth are bound to make many such errors. The problem is a lack of consciousness and self-awareness, not necessarily a lack of sincerity.

Similarly, media demagogues may sincerely believe what they're saying, but without self-knowledge of their motivations, they're oblivious to the ways in which their shadows distort their perceptions and cause them to mislead others. Throughout history, there have been people who sincerely believed that slavery was God's will, that women were property, that Jews should be exterminated, and so forth. There is often great resistance to letting go of pet prejudices. For example, many Christian fundamentalists persist in repeating ridiculous falsehoods about homosexuality in the face of sound, sensible, easily obtained knowledge that refutes them.

A behind-the-scenes documentary about the recent political conventions showed both parties having squads monitoring the other, ready to pounce on what they considered to be lies. Both sides were utterly convinced that the other was made up of liars. Both sides thought they had a monopoly on truth, and neither seemed to take time to consider if there was any validity to the other's statements—the goal was simply to shoot them down as quickly as possible. What's wrong with this picture?

The documentary showed a clip from the Republicans' reply to "Fahrenheit 9/11," a montage of excerpts from various Kerry speeches they thought illustrated his "flip-flopping" about Iraq. (They played the theme song from the 60s television show "Flipper" in the background). I didn't see flip-flopping in those excerpts; obviously, those who compiled it saw them differently.

We each inevitably interpret (and often misinterpret) what we hear through our unique filter. When the same general set of facts are observed, which ones we think are important and which we ignore has a lot to do with the conclusions we draw. Sometimes that is derived from what we want or expect to see, but more fundamental is our habitual way of viewing the world. Often, we interpret what others do and say based on "If I had done that, such-and-such would have been my motivation," not understanding that others might "tick" differently than we do. As with Rorschach inkblots, the way we interpret can say a lot about us.

Therapists who work with couples often have the partners repeat what they think the other said, giving each a chance to set the record straight. This is necessary because our interpretations can be so off-base. I am sometimes astounded at what others think I said or wrote, no matter how clear I thought I was (and having it in writing is no guarantee we'll be understood). The problems of human communication are multiplied in politics, where there can be millions of people involved, each with his own filter.

Let's suppose that we are fortunate enough to have a competent candidate who puts unconditional love first, and in an interview, she happens to mention that she tries to practice kindness. A sizeable number of fearful people would be likely to hear that as, "I wouldn't use force when it was needed" even though elsewhere she said that she would and had demonstrated it through her votes. (People make leaps like this all the time). If predictable, her opponent would then tout her as weak to seize the advantage, even though, in fact, she is quite strong. It would be an uphill battle to set

the record straight, taking time away from discussing the real issues. She would lose the election based on a falsehood that started because some people could not conceive of a kind person also being strong and decisive. Through the “miracle” of political spin, kindness is now a bad thing.

No wonder politicians package themselves so carefully (and phonily)--it's a matter of survival. Kerry's mere use of the word “sensitivity” got him in trouble (even though Bush used it, too) when Cheney took it out of context. Communication is nearly impossible when others react to individual words rather than the whole of what is said. Candidates can constantly censor themselves to avoid possible distortions, but those intent on distorting will find a way regardless. It's probably better for them to speak their minds and set the record straight as necessary. If the media consistently called candidates on distortions, they would probably stick to the facts more. For example, they might have shown back-to-back footage of the Kerry, Cheney and Bush comments on sensitivity.

The debate over who's more sincere misses the point: The Presidency is probably the most challenging, difficult job there is. It takes far more than being a sincere, nice person to be a good President: intelligence, integrity, vision, wisdom, maturity, depth, groundedness, strength, and so forth, are also valuable assets in leadership. Voting for someone simply because he seems more likeable or has charm doesn't take into account the whole person. It is also naive, since people's public personas can be carefully manufactured to look different from who they really are. Unlikable traits such as a foul temper may be well hidden. A candidate's consciousness—what he's conscious of, and what he's not (which is more than just his positions on issues)--can help tell us if he is likely to do a good job; being sincere but off-base due to a lack of consciousness isn't much help. We can evaluate that more from his unscripted comments, anecdotes about him from people who know him, and what he's actually done, than from his speeches and commercials. In other words, it takes more than sound bites to get a feel for candidates.

## **POLITICIANS**

Being sincere and practicing unconditional love are two different things. Could a politician who practices unconditional love be elected? Someone who doesn't play the negative games, who is scrupulously fair, kind, and wise, who is straightforward and doesn't spin or obfuscate?

It is said that we get the leaders we deserve. They reflect our consciousness, the values we actually hold, not necessarily those to which we pay lip service. Petty politics on the grand scale mirrors the petty politics in our offices, schools, families and other institutions.

Many of us do the best we can, but because we live under a thick blanket of human unconsciousness, we tend to have a lot of blind spots, and it can take a great deal of inner work to overcome them. At our current level of evolution, rarely do we objectively seek the truth without an ax to grind, rarely do we seek to see the whole picture that transcends our self-interests or personal hurts, or examine our biases and put them aside for the greater good. Therefore, rarely do our politicians. There are some altruistic ones, but they generally “get eaten for lunch,” or end up compromising their values to survive.

To be fair, being a politician isn't easy. Politicians have to balance their own views with the demands of the electorate, and it is easy to fall into trying to be all things to all people. There are usually hard compromises to be made; rarely does one get to vote for the ideal, but must instead often choose from the lesser of evils, requiring the wisdom of Solomon. With all the demands on their time, keeping well informed can be a challenge. They can quickly become a lightning rod for a touchy public, and must walk a fine line.

It's a positive development that we have less tolerance for racist and other mean-spirited, inappropriate remarks. Although “political correctness,” like anything else, can be taken to an

extreme, its spirit is to increase respect for all people. On the other hand, although we support free speech in theory, we seem to be unable to shrug off frank, reasoned yet impolite or controversial statements. Instead of simply saying “She’s entitled to her opinion” and dropping it, a tempest in a teapot sometimes ensues, and there are many ready to pounce on any statement they can distort into political capital. We claim to want honest politicians, but if they say what they really think too much, they’re out. So they learn to be guarded, talking in that annoyingly canned, general and evasive way. Similarly, the mainstream media have become increasingly bland and afraid to stick their necks out, to the point of not doing their job and questioning the questionable. Ironically, this allows those in power to get away with some truly outrageous statements and actions as long as they package them smoothly.

After 9/11, President Bush called the perpetrators cowards. It occurred to me that whatever they were, they weren’t cowards; after all, they took their own lives along with many others, not something a coward would do. Maybe it was picayunish to quibble over a word choice, but it’s interesting that when “Politically Incorrect” host Bill Maher said the same thing, he was crucified in the media and lost his job.

It might be possible for practitioners of unconditional love to be successful politicians, but it would require extraordinary wisdom and internal balance to navigate the minefields. They would be more likely to be successful, and to be elected in the first place, if there was more unconditional love in the populace to change the atmosphere and vote them in—like attracts like. Therefore, the more relevant issue for those of us who are not candidates is how we can be more unconditionally loving and bring that quality into often-heated political discussions and activism.

We tend to associate unconditional love with being sugary and uncritical, but we can be kind and compassionate and, at the same time, call a spade a spade—it’s a matter of how we do it. A key is to fairly criticize actions and policy without attacking or denigrating people. In politics, most people are more concerned with winning points than being fair. Some candidates win points by belittling their opponents in ways their supporters find humorous. Their opponents had better be quick with a good comeback, but this kind of nastiness dumbs down political discussion to a high school level; one can almost hear a jock making fun of a nerd while the crowd snickers. (Reagan’s famous putdown of Carter comes to mind: “There he goes again.”)

It was gratifying that at the Democratic convention people were encouraged not to allow their anger to degenerate into mean-spirited attacks. Perhaps it was part of their strategy, feeling that a more positive campaign would sell better to undecided voters. Still, it was a step in the right direction.

## **NON-ATTACHMENT**

A fact of life is that most of us assume that our perceptions are right most of the time. If we didn’t start with the assumption of the basic correctness of our views, life would be too disorienting. Thinking we know what’s what, even if our beliefs are excessively narrow and limiting, anchors us, keeping us from falling into the abyss of the universe’s enormity. The more secure we are, the more doubt we can handle about our views of reality, but we each have a limit. This is true of both the solid and fluid roles, even though the latter have a more fluid view of reality to begin with (especially artisans).

However, part of the spiritual path is the recognition that we are eternal, unlimited beings. We inhabit a mind/body unit, but we aren’t that. We have thoughts and feelings but we are not them. We are not our opinions—how could we be if we’re able to change them?

This awareness of our true identity allows us to let go of excessive attachment to our opinions so that when others disagree with them, we don’t feel that they have disagreed with who we are. It

also allows us to see others as being more than their opinions, so that we can love them even if we perceive their opinions to be false.

Buddhism has a lovely concept called “non-attachment.” Non-attachment is viewing things from a calm, centered place. It’s not the same as detachment, which can be cold, distant and uncaring. In non-attachment, we can be completely engaged, caring deeply, but not invested—our sense of self doesn’t hinge on getting the results we want. We simply deal with “what is” without wasting energy doing what won’t do any good, such as arguing with people who are closed. We might have opinions based on our current knowledge and perspective, but have no need to defend or proselytize them. We share them where there is openness, and, in turn, listen with openness to others so that we might learn and expand our view.

Buddhism views attachment as the root of suffering. It’s easy to see why. If we’re attached to a particular person loving us, having a thin waistline, or getting a promotion, and it doesn’t happen, we’re unhappy. On the other hand, if we want those things but in a relaxed way, balancing doing what we can to have them with knowing that we can be happy without them, we aren’t devastated if we don’t get them.

When we’re attached to our opinions and invested in others sharing them, we inevitably slam into the brick wall of others who are similarly attached to their differing opinions. This is largely why so many people argue a great deal. Attachment prevents us from connecting with others soul to soul when they disagree with us.

Those who shout instead of speak, who have a sense of desperation about getting through to others, who are shrill and strident, may be recognizing some serious problems while others have their heads in the sand. Imagine living in Germany in 1933 and seeing the writing on the wall. Today, some of us see oil running out, the environment being ruined, terrorism spreading, the poor becoming poorer, diseases spreading unnecessarily, our liberties being stripped away, corporations and religions taking over government, etc. Aren’t such things of huge importance? If, for example, the environment is ruined (a real possibility), humanity won’t survive. How can we be calm?

It is extraordinary that the Dalai Lama and his followers in Tibet experienced atrocities at the hands of the Chinese, yet endeavored to view them with love, compassion, and gratitude for the spiritual lessons they provided. They did all they could about the situation, which wasn’t much, and then those who could, escaped to India.

In Nazi Germany, there was similarly little those of integrity could do to stop the tide of horror. Speaking out resulted in death. Their options were to try to escape, become invisible, or work underground in a willingness to sacrifice themselves if necessary.

Things in the U.S. are obviously not comparable to Tibet or Nazi Germany, but some of us still have felt like the “voice of one crying in the wilderness.” “Where there is no vision, the people perish,” and there is certainly a great lack of vision creating a lot of unnecessary problems. There always has been, but to some of us, it seems worse now than it has been for a while. However, although passion is a virtue, people tend to turn away from the strident voice. Shouting fortifies the resolve of perpetrators, and people in the middle often assume that those who are strident are exaggerating and are unnecessarily rocking the boat. A calmer voice, with reasoned arguments backed up by facts and illustrated by people’s experiences, tends to be more effective in reaching people.

Some critics said that Michael Moore’s “Fahrenheit 9/11” is less strident than his earlier films, and, as a result, more effective. On the other hand, his brave Oscar acceptance speech was booed down because it was confrontational and directly pushed people’s buttons; a more subtle approach, speaking from his heart, might have been more effective in reaching them. “I statements,”

speaking from our own experiences, are more effective in communicating with others that “you statements,” which point the finger and put others on the defensive.

When a situation is desperate, there’s all the more reason to speak with eloquence and truth rather than with shrillness. When we’re centered in ourselves as eternal beings, we are able to respond with stillness and a large perspective rather than just reacting emotionally to the immediate situation.

One of the paradoxes of the spiritual path is the lesson that everything is important and nothing is important. On the one hand, even if we destroy human life on this planet, although that would be enormously unfortunate and a big setback, we, and the universe as a whole, will go on. It would not be the first planet to be destroyed by out-of-control sentient creatures, nor would it be the last. On the other hand, everything we do, every choice we make, is important as an opportunity for blessing and growth, not to be wasted. Therefore, we do what we can and let go of the rest, not throwing away energy bemoaning what is beyond our control.

However, doing what we can do isn’t merely physical. Consciousness is the most powerful thing there is, and, in the long run (sometimes, the very long run), love trumps its absence (hate, fear, oppression, etc.). Holding the highest consciousness available to us while letting it keep growing is the greatest gift we can offer the world. Words are important; speaking to those with ears to hear may be part of our service. However, holding the vibration of love is all of it. The more people who love and the higher the quality of the love, the more powerful a force love is in human affairs.

Also, a large perspective reminds us that, while it behooves us to be honest about where things seem to be heading, we never know for certain how they will turn out. Probabilities can change on a dime in this chaotic free-will world. In addition, we never know what tricks the universe has up its proverbial sleeve. Some say, for example, that the earth could heal itself of the wounds of pollution with amazing speed if humanity reached a high enough consciousness. So it doesn’t pay to get too bent out of shape about what hasn’t happened yet. People sometimes make major life choices based on gloom-and-doom predictions of things that never occur, leaving them with egg on their face. The best approach is to trust our intuition, use common sense, do all we can to change the course of things, and then let go.

In non-attachment, we flow like water. We speak what others can hear when they are open, and are otherwise silent. We choose the words that communicate clearly and honestly without unnecessarily triggering the defenses of others. From centering in love, the words we **can** say, that flow cleanly, are the right ones. When nothing can be said or done, we can still always work with energy, channeling the eternal and uplifting the darkness that comes our way. This is what it means to be a lightworker.

## **TRUTH**

Have you ever seen a movie you loved, and then read a scathing review of it? The movie on the screen was the same, but the movie we experience is the one in our head. We each see things differently, sometimes very differently. Decent, intelligent people can strongly disagree with each other.

Michael refers to personal truths, as opposed to world and universal truths:

What works for one person may not for another. Many conflicts arise from confusing personal truths with larger truths.

A personal truth might be “Cabbage gives me gas.” A world truth is “Cabbage is a food that causes gas for some people.” A universal truth is “Cabbage is a food on Earth.” All of these are

indisputable truths; someone who objectively sees the whole picture could agree with them. However, if a person assumes that her personal truth is universal and asserts, “Cabbage is a bad food,” it is no longer truth. A law banning cabbage would unnecessarily impose some people’s personal truths on others. A religion might teach that cabbage is evil after observing that it causes gas in some people that could catch fire and singe them, “surely the work of the devil, since we all know that hell is fiery.” That would be the religion’s right, but it’s also a case for the separation of church and state!

We each have a unique set of base assumptions about life; it’s as if we each had a different operating system in our computer. Some operating systems are buggier than others — some crash more often, some are more limited — but none of them is perfect. We can all use occasional upgrades. Just as our computers have many hidden or invisible files, many of our beliefs are unconscious; to change them, we often must first become aware that we have them. We can become aware of some of them by observing what we’re unintentionally creating in our life over and over.

Our computers also have different software and data. In other words, we have different abilities and knowledge. The Michael teachings discuss overleaves, combinations of personality traits that slant us in particular directions (we already discussed attitudes, one of the overleaves), along with different body types, imprinting and so forth, in addition to our roles, which might be considered part of our operating system.

It’s easy to dismiss those whose views seem off base to us, but there are always reasons people believe as they do, and they are often logical in light of their beliefs and knowledge. Getting along with others requires being respectful of their views. For example, we might say, “I disagree” rather than, “I’m right, you’re wrong” leaving the door open to change or expand our own views. Even if we find certain views insane or horrifying, we can still respect people as human beings and their right to believe as they choose.

No matter what operating system, software and data we have, we can seek truth if we are rigorously honest with ourselves and others, valuing it more than winning arguments. No one can possess truth in its totality, but we can each move ever closer to it if we are willing to install upgrades as they come available.

“Truth” may be the most important word in our language. The truth sets us free. Truth is what is; knowing truth frees us from maya and gives us peace and clarity. The more our words and energy accurately reflect truth, the more spiritually powerful they are. Although truth is compassionate because it includes the whole picture, is also a sword that cuts through b.s. In unconditional truth, there may be discretion and diplomacy. In unconditional love, there are still boundaries—we don’t have the same distance from everyone. However, with both, we don’t hold back out of fear or to protect egoistic interests. We let our energy freely flow like sunshine upon the just and unjust alike, in a desire that the highest good of all be served. Others receive what they wish to and can. Love and truth don’t force themselves on anyone—they just are.

We cannot have unconditional love without truth, and vice versa. If a view is not compassionate, it is not truth. If love doesn’t honor what is, it is not unconditional. People tend to think of unconditional love as toothless, but since it is inseparable from truth, that is not the case. In unconditional love, we may be meek, in the sense of being humble, lacking egotism, but we’re not weak. On the contrary, love is the only true strength. Bullies do great damage, but they are also profoundly insecure and often tumble like a house of cards when their chips are down.



Facts are part of truth, but not its whole. The truth emerges when there is the clear vision to see facts with their proper weight and place. We cannot have this vision without inner clarity and balance, which can take a great deal of work to attain.

It can take much research and fact checking to determine what the facts are. It's not easy to sort out what's real and what's spin in the world of politics. Being fully informed on every important issue is impossible; all we can do is our best with the time, resources and inclinations we have.

It's easy to understand the appeal of just assuming that politicians know better than we do and that we can trust them to do the right thing, even though that's a fallacy—they mostly get the same news we do, and, in fact, may be less informed than we are. Any inside information they might have may be tainted or seen in a biased way. More importantly, few politicians are consistently concerned solely with doing the right thing, without political considerations. Today, we have unprecedented access to alternative and international presses, especially through the Internet, that report things that our mainstream media doesn't. We can take responsibility for our world like never before.

However, even if one has time to read extensively, it's not always possible to conclusively know the facts in the middle of the "he said, she said" of politics. In the face of contradictory versions of events, for example, whose version do we trust? We weren't there, after all. We often end up just believing what we want to believe, what fits with our views and is palatable to us. It's important to keep an open mind and recognize when we don't have enough information to be certain of the facts. In tests such as the math portion of the SATs, a scenario and question are sometimes presented; occasionally, the right answer is that there isn't enough information to answer the question.

It's said that a little knowledge is a dangerous thing, because when we only have part of the picture, it can be misleading. "Judge not by appearances." To "judge righteous judgment," we have to look deeply into a situation. Taken out of context, almost anything a person does or says can be made to look bad or good. Facts are "the enemy of truth" when they are not seen in their proper relationship to the whole. Jumping to conclusions, filling in the gaps in information with our imagination, can be highly damaging.

Many movie and television courtroom dramas have stories about someone innocent convincingly being made to look guilty, and vice versa, in part because people on one or both sides manipulate, lie, or jump to conclusions from circumstantial evidence. As often as we watch these shows, we forget the lessons and still continue to jump to such conclusions in real life. Tragically, many people have been sentenced to prison and even death who were later found to be innocent. The juries or judges had been convinced that the person was guilty "beyond a reasonable doubt." That should be a sobering reminder that things aren't always as they seem and that none of us are infallible. Prosecutors often want to convict regardless of innocence, and defense lawyers often want to acquit regardless of guilt, just to "win"—in those cases, neither care about truth if it doesn't serve their purposes.

People are entitled to a good defense, but that doesn't include deliberately distorting, falsifying or suppressing evidence. How would a trial lawyer feel if he got a killer acquitted who went on to kill his own child?

Ferociously prosecuting like a gunman seeking another notch in his belt, often to satisfy a political need for a conviction—any conviction—is unconscionable. How would a prosecutor feel if the roles were reversed and he were unjustly being put away by an overzealous prosecutor?

In politics, candidates often accuse their opponents with a similar disregard for truth if they think it will benefit them. How do some of them feel when they lose because their opponent was a better

liar than they were, making people believe falsehoods about them more effectively than they did about their opponent? Of course, most probably don't admit to themselves that that was what happened.

Clear intuition can alert us when information seems logical on the surface but something's amiss—it doesn't add up or ring true. When the pieces of the puzzle are laid out before us, it can help us perceive which facts are at the crux of the matter when dry intellect alone could miss the point and fixate on another. It can also help us sense what's behind someone's words: honesty or dishonesty, straightforwardness or evasiveness, pain, dreaming, manipulation, hollowness, and so forth. Few people speak from their heart in politics; taking words at face value can lead us astray, and often does. If we like politicians, we want to take their words at face value, but their words, especially those that are scripted, tend to be carefully crafted to manipulate us, to stir our feelings in their direction. We collaborate in our deception when we don't scrutinize; it's probably more important to scrutinize the politicians we support, since we are more likely not to.

If we reach a critical mass where we get enough accurate facts and then see them proportionately within the whole so that the picture comes into focus, we experience that famous ring of truth. When it is a particularly profound and penetrating truth (deeper than, say, "Cabbage is a food."), it is like the Liberty Bell resounding throughout our being. We **know** the truth in this area, and it sets us free; it isn't just intellectual theory—we feel it physically, emotionally, and spiritually as well: it resonates with our essence. It is as if all our senses are engaged: we hear it, see it, feel it, touch it and taste it. It can then be transmitted to others with eyes to see, ears to hear, etc. When we know the feel of truth, others can more easily transmit it to us as well: when we hear it, it resounds, whereas untruth rings tinny; when we see it, it is clear, whereas untruth is unfocused.

Sometimes people think they've heard the truth because they have an emotional response to what is said. This is different from resonance on a soul level, which is more subtle and full-spectrum. Religious services sometimes stimulate the emotional body, even bringing euphoria, but that's not the same as a spiritual experience, which opens us on higher levels. An emotional group high may be enjoyable, but the words spoken to help generate them don't necessarily accurately represent truth. They may help stimulate people to open up and move in the direction of truth, but if people keep growing, they will see if what they heard passes the test of time, whether the words indeed set them free to experience more of their soul, enslaved them to limiting dogma, or landed them somewhere in the middle. Truth isn't words anyway, but the soul-level understanding they may awaken in our hearts. Two people can hear the same words and interpret them in entirely different ways: one person may hear the truth while the other hears only support for her pre-existing beliefs. We can hear truth only if we connect with our soul: only our soul can know truth—personality is but a husk.

When we speak truth, people consumed by fear and defensiveness may not be able to receive it, but it is always our best shot. Sinking to the level of those who attack may seem expedient in the short run, but that mires us in their world, and we lose the love vibration characteristic of truth. However, the answer isn't in being impotently nice, but in finding the potency of the precise truth. If it isn't setting us free, we haven't found it yet.

"Perfect love casts out fear." In any moment we open to unconditional love, internally or externally, false fear is neutralized. True fear is designed to keep us physically safe in the presence of a real threat to our survival by increasing our fight or flight response and heightening our senses. However, when fear becomes chronic or associated with things that aren't genuine threats, it prevents us from dealing with things effectively. Perfect love is love married to a clear awareness of what is. Opening to it is the only antidote for fear engendered by a false threat. For example, if we make a mistake that we perceive as embarrassing, we can open to the truth that we won't die

from it, even if our habitual thinking tells us we will; if we “grok” the truth that everything is really fine, it sets us free. If it won’t matter a hundred years from now, it may not really matter that much now; only love will matter a hundred years from now. Love is the highest truth, the central “what is.”

Although ignorance has always been with us, and likely will be for a long time, there have been periods in U.S. history when people read, debated, and voted more than we do now. Part of the reason is that our lives are so busy and stressful, with many distractions. However, knowledge and participation is essential to a healthy democracy. The biggest problem in American politics today is that so many people do not invest the energy to go beyond sound bites and commercials, which usually truck in meaningless and misleading generalities; candidates are sold like toothpaste because we are willing to buy them that way. We aren’t taking responsibility for our government, which is a symptom of not taking responsibility for ourselves.

There have always been “dirty tricks” and smears in politics, although sometimes they are more brazen. They seem worse today than they have been in a while. They work when there is insufficient interest in finding the truth. The mainstream media, now less competitive and investigative, is not as helpful in sorting out the facts than it has sometimes been. Candidates throw dirt because no matter how devoid of truth it is, some of it sticks.

A better-informed populace would likely prefer better-informed candidates. Before the current war, I channeled Michael as saying that if Bush went ahead with it, it would turn out to be far messier than he had anticipated. Recently, Bush acknowledged that. However, it didn’t take a channeled entity to foresee it; a well-read person might have figured it out. Shouldn’t the world’s most powerful leader understand the Middle East before plunging into a war there? We cannot make good choices without being well informed.

Michael also said that Bush would discover that he was in way over his head; there have been insider reports that this is also the case, and that he has been coming apart at the seams, despite his well-packaged public persona. This illustrates one of the problems of electing charismatic people who don’t read much and aren’t curious, analytical or well educated: they are easily misled both by their own passions and by others with agendas. They don’t have the knowledge or experience to know what they’re getting into. Bush’s perspective on the war and many other things seems simplistic. Although his intelligence is probably not as low as his mangled syntax suggests, he is clearly not a deep person or a thinker of substance. Beyond all the specific questions about the choices he’s made and even his honesty, the underlying question of his competence may be the one people should most be asking.

All candidates are flawed to some degree; many elections are a choice between the lesser of evils. Some people will make a reasoned evaluation that Bush is a better choice than Kerry, and some will decide the opposite; in a democracy, that is obviously our right. However, choosing a flawed candidate knowing what we are getting is one thing; taking the ads and rhetoric at face value is another. Surely choosing a President deserves at least as much research and thought as buying a car.

Companies pay huge amounts of money for advertising because it works. Unconscious people are like sheep that are easily manipulated. As we become more conscious, we take responsibility for more of our choices. Rather than buying products solely because of advertising, we might do research in publications like Consumer Reports and on the Internet, perhaps applying standards such as environmental friendliness. With candidates, there is a wealth of information available besides what is in the sound bytes.

Bush and his administration are being who they've always been. If one feels that our current state of affairs is a mess, the primary responsibility is with those who voted for him, especially those who did so without looking past the surface or questioning the questionable. Even if one believes that the 2000 election was stolen, there were enough people who voted for him to make that possible; a less-close race couldn't have been stolen.

Most candidates endeavor to manipulate unthinking voters their way. In an unconscious world, the best manipulators win. Until that blessed day when we can choose among candidates who love truth more than winning, it's caveat emptor (buyer beware). Our own passion for truth, coupled with a willingness to be at least minimally informed relative to key choices we make, mitigates against being manipulated.

If we do not love truth in all aspects of our life, we cannot fully love it in any aspect. Any shadow we avoid hovers over everything we do. Loving truth, especially when it's not convenient or comfortable, is true integrity that shines a light that may inspire others to do the same.

## WISDOM

Unconditional love might bring to mind Jesus' comment about turning the other cheek. That is often understood as signing up to be a victim, allowing bullies to walk all over us. Hardly anyone consistently practices this in politics (or elsewhere), even if they pay lip service to it or consider it to be the ideal, because it usually doesn't work very well. However, the Gospels suggest that Jesus could also be tough, so what gives?

Wisdom is the application of truth. Wisdom perceives what would be the most beneficial action in a given situation. Sometimes, absorbing a blow, physically or verbally, and raising the energy of it through love, may result in the highest good possible in a situation, especially when alternatives are limited and fighting back is futile.

However, there are other ways one might turn the other cheek. In martial arts, one is taught not to resist attacks, but to receive and redirect them, using the energy of the attack to neutralize the attacker. In other words, one doesn't fight back in the manner of the attack, but lets the attacker, in effect, defeat himself so that no one is seriously hurt. Turning the cheek here is, in effect, turning to the side and letting the attacker whiz by or otherwise thwarting his expectations. Most attackers want and expect us to react in a like manner, so surprise can be a potent tool.

Spiritual literature also gives examples in which killing someone is the most merciful or highest act, to spare him pain or the creation of karma that would take him many lifetimes to pay back.

Martin Cecil, a spiritual teacher, was once asked what he'd do if someone tried to mug him. His answer was that it would be interesting to find out. In other words, if we live in wisdom, we freshly evaluate each situation to see what the highest action would be, rather than trying to second-guess it ahead of time or follow rigid rules. If it were his time to go, maybe he'd let the mugger kill him. In some instances, talking to the mugger might neutralize him. In others, spraying him with pepper spray or shooting him in the leg might stop him without killing him, and that might be the best possible outcome. Perhaps killing him would stop him from killing many others.

Rigid rules cannot fit every situation. Rules are not a substitute for wisdom; people in the throes of maya can always find a way around rules, but a genuine desire to take the path of integrity and love seldom leads us astray. If we hear our intuition and spiritual guidance, we will know what to do. However, in general, the universe practices a conservation of energy—it seeks the biggest “bang for its buck”—so we would seek the most effect for the least effort and cost, including keeping

violence to an absolute minimum. Wisdom and creative thinking give us access to many alternatives to brute force. This has obvious application to the affairs of state.

Gandhi and his followers successfully practiced nonviolent resistance against the British in India in part because the British were relatively civilized. Nonviolent resistance also worked well in the U.S. civil rights movement. It probably wouldn't depose a totalitarian government in which the rulers have no conscience unless it were very widely and bravely adopted, although one might still choose nonviolence for his own spiritual reasons—the goal might be inner freedom rather than outer.

The Ten Commandments are, of course, rules. They were given to a primitive people who weren't yet mature enough to evaluate each situation individually—they needed simple guidelines they could understand. Many still do today, and the Commandments are still valuable. However, people who subscribe to them sometimes rationalize that they don't apply to their situation when they aren't "convenient." If there was a third tablet footnoting exceptions, it is now lost. :)

Some scholars say that "Thou shalt not murder" is a more correct translation of "Thou shalt not kill," and allowed for killing in war. One wonders if "okay" killing in war extends to the inevitable casualties who are not soldiers, or those who didn't need to be killed in order to secure peace. Killing in war may sometimes be a necessary evil, to prevent a greater evil, but it's well to remember that it is an evil: people are just as dead whether they're murdered or killed. All killing is devastating for everyone concerned; everyone killed in our name by our government diminishes us all, even if it is necessary. Those who feel inevitably grieve after taking another sentient life, even a despicable one. If our conscience is clear, the grief is clean, free of complications, but we still mourn the lost potential that every human life has, and have compassion for loved ones who suffer. Beyond that, we cannot help but feel that we have collectively failed by creating a world in which this ugly act was necessary.

This is not an ideal world, and some killing is necessary. Beyond killing violent humans in self-defense, many of us kill animals to eat. Like carnivorous animals, such as most cats and dogs, many humans languish on a completely vegetarian diet. Even killing plants to eat is less than ideal; plants have feelings, too. The ideal might be a fruitarian or even breatharian diet, in which nothing dies to feed us, but at our current stage of development, most people cannot make that work. The best we can do is keep killing to a minimum, and do it with honor and respect. An example is Native Americans asking buffalo for permission before killing them and asking trees permission before cutting them down. Another is to honor all lives lost, friend or foe. Surely, the lives of our soldiers are not more valuable than the lives of Iraqis; even the soldiers fighting against us believe they are fighting for something right and each of them have families and friends who care about them. Whether or not we need to fight them, we do not need to hate them or discount their lives. Surely, the lives of those who died in 9/11 are not more precious than those who die tragically elsewhere. We can honor them all.

The idea that a war is necessary is questionable when viewed in a larger context. World War II is usually viewed as a totally necessary war, since Hitler obviously needed to be stopped. However, would Hitler have risen to power in the first place if there had been the equivalent of the Marshall Plan after World War I rather than the victors being so punitive? Would Japan have become so militaristic had the West not forced it open in the 19<sup>th</sup> century? Both of these are examples of "What goes around comes around" with a vengeance. Every war demonstrates humanity's failure to create a just and sane world.

The single Golden Rule might be a good replacement for the Ten Commandments, assuming one isn't a masochist—most people want to be respected and not harmed, and the Golden Rule is

universal: there is a version of it in most of the world's major religions. Applying the Golden Rule to government would revolutionize it: For instance, would our legislators feel good about working hard and earning \$5.15/hr.? What if they were convicted of a crime, guilty or not? Do our justice and prison systems treat people the way they'd like to be treated? (A cartoon has someone carrying a placard that reads, "Do unto others," and another person asking, "Didn't there used to be more to it?")

An even simpler rule might be, "Thou shalt not unnecessarily harm." It assumes, however, the ability to envision alternatives to brute force; otherwise, a lot of unnecessary harm might look necessary.

Following rules might help keep people out of trouble most of the time, but to actually make a positive contribution, which is the only source of true satisfaction in life, we need the wisdom to know what would help.

Few issues are cut-and-dried. Was it wise for the U.S. to invade Iraq as it did? We each have our own opinion, but there are pros and cons on both sides. Most agree that getting rid of Hussein was positive; the question is whether it was worth the cost, whether the positives outweigh the negatives when it's all added up. Wisdom comes from being able to clearly see the whole picture, rather than focusing on selected parts.

## **THE SPIRITUAL PATH**

When we get on a spiritual path, it is common to try to ignore the political world because it's too distracting and ugly. Reading a newspaper or, especially, watching the news can quickly pull us off our center because it's so full of negativity and maya. Plus, who has the energy to focus on spiritual growth and, at the same time, sort through all the slippery facts and distorting spin of politics? Both seem like full-time jobs, and being politically well informed and active may seem like more trouble than it's worth.

Separating from anything to which we habitually react can be wise until we've sufficiently strengthened our centering to withstand the hurricane pulls of human drama, our own and others.' There's no rule that says that everyone has to participate in politics, relationships, or anything else. We must each find our own right and true path. There can be much spiritual substance generated by those who maintain a holy place apart from the hubbub of the world that can help the world reach a higher place.

On the other hand, there can also be much value in spiritually centered people taking on the responsibilities of citizenship, participating in discussions and voting, and otherwise being in the world but not of it (not dealing with it in the same old way). The world desperately needs the direct hands-on touch of higher consciousness. If one is naturally interested in politics (or anything else) that's a pretty good indication that one has gifts to offer in that field.

Although everything is spiritual, everything is also political. We live in one world, and everything is connected. Caring about higher consciousness automatically brings us to caring about how we're collectively investing our energy: is the government representing us creating the peace, freedom, and well-being that allows higher consciousness to thrive, or contributing to a downward spiral of increased suffering? We each need to find the level of involvement that is right for us, but spirituality and politics are not separate or opposed.

## **AWAKENING**

Humanity is inexorably awakening to a higher consciousness, but not all at the same time or speed. Our institutions such as our government and media can support it or slow it down, but the awakening is bigger than any institution.

Patience is helpful in those of us who are further in the process than the mainstream. The speed of change is relative, and there's no right or wrong speed, but to those who are ahead of the pack, it can seem like it is happening painfully slowly (or not at all). What is needed seems obvious and clear to us, so why can't others see it?

When we first wake up from a deep sleep, consciousness returns slowly, but the closer we get to full consciousness, the faster we wake up. Spiritually, awakening happens on an exponential curve: as we awaken, we learn how to awaken and become more flexible, so that awakening can occur increasingly fast.

The molasses-like density of our current level of consciousness results in realizations and changes tending to come much slower than they otherwise might, but it's already quicker than in the past. On the surface, especially in politics, it may seem like it's two steps forward, one step (or more) backward. (Did we learn nothing from Viet Nam?) However, the contents of bestseller lists today as opposed to thirty years ago are one indication that consciousness has, in fact, grown significantly. Although different parts of consciousness grow at different speeds.

It's rare for consciousness to actually regress; usually, it just hits a block in its forward motion, such as a patch of fear it had ignored or that hadn't arisen before, and needs time to process it. For example, someone may have been more adventurous when younger, but now is working on how to balance that with stability; she may look like she's regressed, but when she next returns to adventure, it might be on a higher, less reckless level.

People only change if and when they're ready, and only to the extent they can handle. No matter how wise or logical the explanation or argument, those who aren't ready to hear it resist it, ignore it, or pay lip service to it without much happening. Unless people are highly motivated, they usually change slowly, if at all. While humanity as a whole is progressing, individuals can choose not to progress. There are a sizeable number of people who will never, in this lifetime, give up their bigotry, for example; humanity just has to wait for them to die off. Rising consciousness most affects the young, because they are more open to change. How true that youth are our hope. How criminal that many young people are still being taught to hate not just at home but in their schools and religious institutions. This is particularly a problem in the Middle East. Still, with the Internet and mass media making the world smaller, negative imprinting from the immediate environment is not as potent, because it's not the only input young people are getting.

Individually and collectively, we have many long-standing limiting and destructive patterns that probably won't change overnight, and not without a lot of nurturing, education, and mistakes. As with planting a garden, the soil for change must be prepared: rocks and sticks need to be removed, and fertilizer, sunshine, and water added. Over time, the harvest will likely increase. Gardens show the most growth in their latter stages, when plants can seemingly double in size almost overnight. Humanity has not yet reached that momentum, but if it avoids self-destructing, it probably will at some point.

There also tends to be a time lag between changes in consciousness and changes in the outer world. Politics is the outermost layer of the world and, therefore, the last thing to change. It usually reflects more our past than our present, in terms of what's really happening spiritually in us in our core.

It's similar to the way we sometimes experience internal changes but don't intellectually realize them until the understanding emerges after the fact—something triggers an “Aha! I'm not the same

person anymore.” Our self-aware intellect is the outer layer of our consciousness, and, like politics, can be the last to know what has been emerging.

Even politicians who try to do the will of the people tend to act on yesterday’s will, not today’s, and polling may not reflect what’s going on in people internally if it hasn’t yet come into conscious awareness. A true leader is connected to what is arising, the growth the universe is seeking, rather than reacting to the surface.

This is the beginning of a new age. Ancient prophecies from many traditions point to this as a time of transition. The Michael teachings speak of a shift from young- to mature-soul perspective—that’s part of it. Astrologically, this is the dawn of Aquarius. Foreboding about the new millennium mostly came and went, but we can still feel that we’re on the cusp of something. It’s as if the cosmic climate is becoming sunnier and we can begin to move to a lighter density. We’re not out of the dark, stagnant swamp yet, but the sun is peeking through and the breezes are blowing.

The pressure to change, physically, mentally, emotionally, and, especially, spiritually, is mounting. We cannot go on as we have. We are collectively pregnant with new consciousness, and we cannot not be pregnant. Whether we have a healthy delivery or a stillborn, we can’t escape the discomfort.

On a physical level, our unprecedented population puts a lot of pressure on us, pushing our buttons. When we’re comfortable, we can coast. When we become crowded and our supplies of food, water, oil, etc., become threatened, our insecurities more readily surface. We receive far more stimulation today than in the past, which also increases the pressure: we are constantly barraged with aural and visual noise; we are overworked and under-rested in an attempt to keep up financially; traffic is increasingly congested and uncivil; our food, water, and air are increasingly degraded—stress of all kinds keeps rising. As unpleasant as this all can be, it can also serve the cause of growth as it stirs up unresolved issues and points up where we need to grow; when we seek to heal, grow, and become more skillful in navigating this challenging landscape, we become more mature, and, consequently, peaceful.

To use another analogy, we’re having growing pains; our body is growing whether we like it or not. We can resist and be miserable, or we can go with it, doing stretching exercises and breathing deeply, and be less uncomfortable. One way or another, we will grow.

We usually think of discomfort as a bad thing, but the pressure we feel is there for a reason. It is the life force of the universe bringing change, like the gentle yet inexorable force of a mushroom growing under a sidewalk that eventually cracks it open. If we resist the pressure, we crack. If we realize that the pressure is our truer, deeper selves pushing to come forth and make a new world, that we **are** the pressure, we can make peace with it and let it guide us on the path of growth. We learn to live with the discomfort until the pressure naturally resolves into the equilibrium it is seeking. If, instead, we blame others for our discomforts or try to distract ourselves or dampen them through things like substance abuse, we might abort and not get to the clean resolution.

## **PROJECTION**

In humanity’s habitual unconsciousness, we look for someone to blame when we’re uncomfortable, even when our discomfort springs entirely from internal forces or from external factors of our own making. Having someone to blame makes us think we’re in control without having to face or change ourselves; we tell ourselves that all we have to do is get rid of the blameworthy party, and we’ll be fine.

In politics, the right and left blame each other. In religion, Christians blame Muslims and Jews; Muslims blame Christians and Jews; Jews blame Muslims and Christians; Hindus blame Buddhists



and vice-versa, and so forth. Various ethnicities and races blame each other. Men and women, rich and poor, gay and straight, and all other manner of opposites blame each other ad infinitum. However, no amount of scapegoating will really make us feel better; on the contrary, it leads us inexorably into increased desolation.

We imagine that those we blame are our opposites, in an effort to keep them as far from us as possible, whether or not they are true opposites. True or natural opposites include male/female and light/dark. Different cultures, religions, or races are not opposites; they are just variants. Whether opposites are organic or imagined, they share far more commonalities than differences: less than three percent of genetic material is different between men and women, and far less is different among races. All religions seek God and, again, are much more similar than different. People of a variety of political stripes have similar desires and goals, even if they differ in their beliefs about how to achieve them. In polarization, we see only the differences; in integration (which brings integrity), we see them in the context of our commonalities.

We play the “blame game” when we are unwilling to take full responsibility for ourselves. Blame is an attempt to move our internal discomfort out of ourselves onto others. What exactly we blame them for depends upon our shadows. Shadows are the dark areas in ourselves where we lack consciousness that we deny or judge. They are frozen voids. We all have them—none of us has full consciousness. We project them onto others, in personal relationships, politics and everywhere else, when we are looking for something for which to blame them. We avoid dealing with our shadows by pretending that they’re “out there” rather than “in here.” To own them would be to face that the thing we hate is what we are.

How bitterly ironic that Hitler was probably part Jewish, as well as homosexual. He hated himself, so those groups were largely what he sought to destroy. In the end, he succeeded in destroying himself, but he took down millions of others with him. In a sense, he was a teacher for humanity, showing us important lessons if we have eyes to see them.

Here’s an example of how shadows form: People who have struggled with their weight and blamed being overweight for their problems tend to also be charged about others who seem overweight, whether or not they really are. In their minds, being fat equals being unloved. If they were ridiculed for their weight, they ridicule themselves for it, hoping to keep themselves in line so that they can avoid the ridicule of others and be loved. Therefore, they may be unable to love themselves if they put on a few pounds, and cannot love others they judge to be overweight; they may even ridicule them, too. Even when thin, their shadow is the ever-lurking fat person whom they must judge and deny, trying to hold it down. Those for whom weight has never been an issue don’t tend to think about it much either way. Those who have struggled with being underweight might be attracted to those who are larger. (Body types, part of the Michael teachings, also explain much about attraction. See <http://summerjoy.com/attraction.html>)

Anais Nin said, “We see the world not as it is but as we are.” One who has not become conscious of his shadows sees only his shadows.

If we realize who we really are, we can begin to neutralize the hatred of self we all carry to some degree, and work on bringing in the consciousness we lack to illumine our shadows. Our human flaws become manageable from the perspective of being a vast soul created from love. Like opinions, we have shadows, but we are not them.

Anger is the outward movement of our life force seeking to push away threat; fear is the inward movement seeking to retreat from it. They are two sides of one coin; when anger is on the surface, fear is behind it, and vice versa. The masculine puts anger on top, the feminine, fear; anger is aggressive, fear is receptive. True anger/fear (fight or flight) is a response to a genuine threat

existing in the moment; it's part of our survival instinct. False anger/fear is a response to an imaginary threat. Let's explore the anger-on-top scenario as it relates to blame and projection, which are also aggressive (a bullet, for example, is a projectile).

When anger, true or false, arises to protect us and is unable to do so, it can become bottled up and begin to fester. The more bottled up anger we have, the greater the pressure. It seeks release any way it can find. There are healthy, therapeutic ways to release old anger, but most people aren't familiar with them. Reacting to imaginary or exaggerated threats is a common way of releasing some of this pent-up pressure. However, it is ineffective because it doesn't heal the anger, so it comes up over and over. Old anger is the power behind the blame game: blaming someone gives us an excuse to temporarily let off steam.

Many people have legitimate grievances against others, and anger can also fuel the creation of proper boundaries when we're centered and control it rather than it controlling us. However, when we're self-righteous, we tend to assume that all our anger is valid, when much of it may not be. We can't sort out and handle our anger properly until we take adult responsibility for our internal state, being willing to fully face our own demons. Often, false anger results from others not fulfilling expectations that we have no right to demand; these stem from disappointments we have with ourselves.

Demonizing is like buying rather than renting: it gives us a permanent foe to blame, ensuring long-term "protection" for our shadows.

Blaming keep the spotlight off our shadows. It lets us tell others what their internal state should be than taking responsibility for our own. When our adversaries are doing the same thing, it gets to be like a funhouse hall of distorted mirrors: the criticisms we hurl come bouncing back at us ad infinitum. This describes the current acrimonious state of politics.

The right and left often have similar criticisms of each other, such as being knee-jerk and marching in unison. Both right and left sometimes react in a preprogrammed, knee-jerk manner, but the right is only willing to see it relative to the left, and vice versa. Each side projects its shadows onto the other. When we realize that what we accuse others of often reveals more about ourselves than about others, especially when we do it in a mean-spirited way, we are not likely to be so free with our accusations.

Let's say that two people are arguing, and both accuse the other of being stubborn. Maybe both are being stubborn, maybe just one is, or maybe neither is and they just have differing views. If they're projecting their own stubbornness, their accusations of stubbornness are likely to be highly charged and judgmental, not just weary and frustrated. Whatever is objectively the case, "You're stubborn!" "No, YOU'RE stubborn!!" could go on forever, so there's no point in continuing that conversation. If they are people of goodwill, they might agree to call a truce, examine themselves for stubbornness, and then try to find a solution that works for each of them.

Both left and right see the other as being misguided and ill-informed, if not downright evil, so what's the point in bringing that up? — It just adds to the confusion. No one likes to be told he's ignorant; it's better to just provide the information we think is missing and see if it takes.

We all have room for improvement, and no one sees the whole picture with complete clarity and inclusiveness. As long as we're projecting our shadows in the not-so-funhouse, the picture we see is distorted indeed.

## **HEALING DIVISIVENESS**

An acquaintance that has worked in Washington said that the right and left used to work together on friendly terms, socializing together and taking their differences in stride, good-naturedly. But no more — there's outright hate and segregation now. This can't be good for finding a positive path to a better future.

Studies have shown that counties are far less mixed in terms of the political spectrum than they were a generation ago. Birds of a feather are flocking together more than ever, because people have more freedom to choose where they live. So we have more heavily conservative and heavily liberal counties, and middle-of-the-road candidates are having a harder time being elected. Our winner-takes-all political system rewards extremism and divisiveness.

It's certainly easier and more pleasant to be around people who agree with us. Disagreements challenge us and force us to respond, either by thinking (God forbid!) or defending. In either case, it requires an expenditure of energy. When neither side has any intention of really listening to the other and considering altering its views, it's a waste of energy.

Still, we also expend a lot of energy letting off steam among our own, together ranting, accusing and attacking our favorite demons. It takes a lot of adrenalin to fuel righteous indignation.

Many people avoid this dilemma through apathy, but, in fact, most of us really do care about the world we in which we live. Apathy is just cutting ourselves off from our feelings, so that they go underground and emerge in other ways, harming ourselves.

The most energy-efficient approach is to calmly and rationally listen to each other. What a concept! When we feel heard by others, we tend to be more willing to hear others and compromise.

Of course, divisiveness is not confined to politics, religion or other famously charged areas; it shows up in every area where there are opinions.

The New York Times recently reported on a "civil war" within the psychotherapy field between those who want to force therapists to stick with techniques that have been validated through studies, and those who value an intuitive approach. It's another manifestation of the conflict between masculine and feminine, intellect and feeling. Much conflict resolves when we replace "either/or" with "both/and," finding the right balance of each. Shouldn't psychotherapists use both proven techniques and intuition? Why do some want to limit it to one or the other?

In politics, the "middle of the road" is sometimes a bland, milquetoast place that doesn't stand for anything. However, the center could also be a place of balance that reconciles opposites, blending the best ideas from all sides, in the same way our heart is located in the center of our body.

Similarly, the media increasingly equate journalistic neutrality with passivity, not saying anything, just reporting what others say. However, neutrality could also be active, impartially asking challenging questions of all sides and helping bring them together.

## **RESIST NOT EVIL**

"There are a thousand hacking at the branches of evil to one who is striking at the root." —Henry Thoreau

The word "evil" is bandied about quite a bit these days, more by the right, although the left is jumping on the bandwagon, too. Bush's "axis of evil" harkens back to Reagan's "evil empire." Casting people as evil (demonizing) makes them seem less than human. Ironically, making people seem less than human can make it seem okay to do evil things to them. We can't get rid of evil with more evil. Furthermore, knee-jerk dismissals of others as being evil, even if they legitimately

are, can be lazy shortcuts to avoid the work of trying to understand them and the situation surrounding them: the attitude is that if they are evil, they must be destroyed, end of story.

Einstein showed us that nothing can be destroyed — things can only be changed; matter into energy or vice versa. It is evil that tries to destroy in the first place. People who do evil generally have suffered profound wounds; to eliminate evil, they must be healed. Only light can dispel darkness, knowledge can dispel ignorance, love can dispel hate. Good doesn't seek to destroy anything, not even evil; it integrates and heals. Trying to destroy evil is really an effort to stamp out the evil within ourselves. It's true that sometimes armies can be defeated, destructive people captured, and new governments established, but, as we saw in Viet Nam and we're seeing in Iraq, these things aren't necessarily so easy to accomplish. In any case, they do not destroy evil; if underlying problems aren't addressed, it will emerge again.

Casting Saddam Hussein as evil seemed to automatically justify the war in Iraq, whether or not it actually made any sense or made things better overall. "He's evil, so we have to go in there and get him!" There have always been dictators as bad as Hussein and worse, so the reason for war wasn't that Hussein is evil, but the rhetoric implied it.

To most Americans, he is a two-dimensional comic book villain, not a real person. If he were real, he'd be scarier, in part because we might see something of ourselves reflected in him. For example, have we ever bullied anyone, physically, emotionally or intellectually? Keeping him two-dimensional makes things simple: just destroy him and wipe our hands of it, no questions asked.

Comic-book villains, to be worthy opponents, must possess great powers; otherwise, why bother with them? This one was imputed to have weapons of mass destruction. To be fair, he once had some, but so do other despots whom we haven't tried to depose. Even if he had them, why would he use them against the U.S. when retaliation would certainly be devastating? (And why does the U.S. get to have all the weapons of mass destruction we want, but nobody else does?) Many others have discussed at length the probable real reasons for the war. Whatever they were, the point here is to illustrate the good-vs.-evil card. The administration may have played it sincerely, manipulatively, or both, but they played it.

As mentioned, the left is getting into the act, too. Some on the left don't want to grant the Bush Administration any benefit of the doubt. "But this administration is evil!" This sounds suspiciously similar to the way the Clinton haters carry on to this day about him being "immoral" and read darkness into everything he did. Whatever Clinton is or isn't, he is certainly a shadow-catcher for some members of the right, a symbol of things in themselves they don't wish to face. Otherwise, they wouldn't be so charged about him. Who on the right (or left) has never lied to cover his ass or said what people wanted to hear? For the left, perhaps Bush represents, in part, selfish, bull-headed adherence to a path of destruction; who among us hasn't ever been guilty of that?

The Bush Administration is guilty of many things, but it is not as black-and-white as "evil" would imply. When we use hyperbole, we tend to turn off all but those already sold on our point of view; if we want to effectively reach others, we need to shed real light on the situation rather than using charged words that distort rather than illuminate.

Fundamentalism of any religion, political party or other belief system thrives on making someone else out to be evil; nothing rallies the troupes like a good bad guy. However, a childish comic book good-vs.-evil view of life makes us less safe. In a world in which most people think they're the good guys, it just leads to a confusion of finger pointing that gets ugly real fast. Putting others on the defensive is a quick way to start a fight. Sometimes we need to be tough, to make a solid wall

to stop trespassers, but that is never more than a temporary fix. In the long run, it is bridges that make the world safer, not walls.

Making war on terrorism, itself a kind of war, indicates a paradigm of conflict. Making war on war doesn't bring peace; making peace makes peace. Einstein said, "We can't solve problems by using the same kind of thinking we used when we created them." He also said, "Peace cannot be kept by force. It can only be achieved by understanding."

With the world teeming with bullies, there aren't enough soldiers and weapons to begin to tame them, and the soldiers sent to counter them too often become bullies themselves. Although it is sometimes possible and appropriate to step in and stop bullies, that is not the solution any more than controlling symptoms heals an underlying disease. Like filth breeding bacteria, an unjust world breeds bullies; the solution is a more just world. Most of our problems can be boiled down to a lack of love in the world; the solution is more love. Battling evil isn't the same as creating good. One can get so carried away with battling evil that there's no energy left to create good. One could fight the war against evil forever.

What might creating good look like?

A few ideas:

- Richer countries helping poorer ones with education, health care, agricultural self-sufficiency (especially through permaculture), etc.
- A foreign policy that supports human rights and not thugs.
- Respect for other people's cultures and feelings.
- An exchange of people and ideas.
- A willingness to acknowledge past violations and apologize for them.

Unfortunately, the U.S. has not been putting its best foot forward in its foreign policy for a long time, and many Americans aren't aware of it.

Some Americans now think that all Muslims, about a billion people (roughly a sixth of the world's population) are evil. That's like saying that all Christians (also about a billion people) are evil because of the crimes that have been committed in the name of Christianity.

To most Americans, the term "terrorist" automatically means "evil." We forget how many terrorists are children or young adults who have been brainwashed to think that suicidal self-sacrifice is a great gift to God that will be rewarded abundantly in the afterlife, or some such thing. Explicating is not excusing their actions, but if the label "evil" seems sufficient explanation, then the solution seems easy: just capture and destroy them all. That's like cutting off the head of a Hydra—three grow back in its place. In the meantime, their side is also playing the good-vs.-evil card, and in their action/adventure movie, the Americans are the evil ones. When, in our eyes, we're squashing evil, in theirs, we're doing dastardly deeds that warrant retaliation. A truly vicious circle, a circle of viciousness.

Squashing evil doesn't work: we push it down, and it pops up somewhere else. Those who focus on evil tend to become evil themselves (an example is abusive hellfire-and-damnation preachers). What we need is more good. If young Muslims were more exposed to the goodness, the humanity, of Americans, they would be less likely to demonize us. The reverse is also true:

Americans with Muslim friends aren't likely to demonize them, just as people with gay friends aren't likely to be prejudiced against them.

There will always be those who cling to hate no matter how exemplary we are. All we can do is take responsibility for our side of the relationship, living in integrity no matter what. That tends to minimize animosities if not entirely eliminating them.

Some say that 9/11 occurred simply because Muslim extremists hate our freedom. Certainly there is far more to it than that. It's true that they incite hatred for the West (and Israel) on ideological grounds—this is a big problem, and even if Americans behaved impeccably throughout the world, it would not sway those who cling to fanaticism. However, surely we have much room for improvement in both our actions and our communication. Perhaps if we could win more respect and trust from Muslim moderates, they would be able to temper the fanatics. That along with better security and intelligence might go a long way toward taming the terrorist threat.

Domestically, the right and left play the good-vs.-evil card against each other with less physical violence, obviously, but sometimes with as much vehemence.

Those who demonize the other side like to pick the most extreme or ridiculous examples of their policy, emphasizing the abuses (there will always be some in the implementation of any policy), and use them to paint the whole ideology with the same brush. This is polarizing, and reveals an ax to grind, a lack of interest in finding the whole truth. It's similar to how the media treats the new age, showing only the flakes in order to ridicule and try to discredit the whole thing. There are extremists and loonies on both the left and right, but it's disingenuous and manipulative to use them to characterize their whole.

Demonizers also tend to find fault with and twist whatever the other side says or does, however innocuous, and try to use it against them. They declare war and rationalize that "All's fair in war. They're evil, so everything they do is evil anyway." Their hate blinds them. This obviously puts a damper on reasoned discussion. It's reminiscent of a marriage nearing an acrimonious divorce, in which both parties blame the other as being wholly at fault, and cannot see any redeeming qualities in the other. Neither side takes any responsibility for the problems they had. Surely, the problems we face as a nation aren't totally the fault of either the right or left, even if one is misbehaving more than the other at a given time because they have the power to get away with it.

Adrenalin can be addictive. Those who rant about those they've demonized get a rush from it (I'm not necessarily referring to Rush Limbaugh here) and those who listen can be caught up in a kind of hypnotic trance as their own anger is activated. Demagogues manipulate the masses by appealing to their unhealed anger and prejudices, pushing their buttons, playing them like a violin. When we heal our anger, ranting holds no appeal to us.

Some politicians face the dilemma of wanting to conduct a positive, clean campaign, but once their opponent starts slinging mud, it seems necessary to do the same in order to survive. Unfortunately, negative campaigning, with its attacks and innuendos, sells well. Attacks need a strong response; however, it need not be in the same spirit. There is nothing more powerful than the truth stated clearly, fairly and pointedly.

Jesus taught to love our enemies. That's not easy, but it's essential if we're going to rise out of this vituperative morass. Better yet would be to not have any enemies at all, to truly understand that we're all in this together and that we need to create a world that works for everyone. If we love our enemies, maybe they're not enemies anymore, even if they're causing harm. Again, sometimes those doing harm need to be stopped, but we don't need to make them enemies to stop them, no more than we need to scream at a child who is acting out to stop him; we just stop him.

Or maybe "enemies" here simply refer to those who oppose us, those whose views we strongly disagree with. If we love them, we may still disagree (they're still "enemies" or adversaries), but we have goodwill toward them, wishing them well and being open to hearing them. What if

political candidates loved their opponents? Debate could still be vigorous, but it would be decent, without Machiavellian tactics and deliberate distortions.

Evil acts, of which we're all capable, are different from evil people. We might define evil acts as those that are highly harmful, usually stemming from great ignorance and deep unconsciousness. Evil people, on the other hand, are those with hardened malice who delight in deliberately harming others. There aren't many truly evil people in the world.

Bush's administration has done some evil things (as most have to some extent) along with some good (constructive) things. What percentage of its influence has been destructive, constructive and neutral, and how that compares to previous administrations, looks different depending on where we stand, but no one could legitimately claim that any administration is 100% good or evil.

However high the percentage of his influence that has been destructive, Bush isn't an evil man. His wife and daughters seem like lovely, happy people, which would probably not be the case were Bush evil, and Bush has a good sense of humor, a trait that is likely to be lacking in hardened, cruel people.

Psychically, his energy doesn't feel very good; many people with current or past substance abuse problems are overrun with parasitic entities, and this seems to be the case here. Substance abuse pokes a lot of holes in our energy field, and tends to go hand-in-hand with not being very present, which allows other energies to more easily get in. To some extent, Bush is controlled both by these entities and by other people. His own energy is rather blank and neutral, so the heaviness in his energy field is from the energies controlling him. On the other hand, he has charisma that is able to charm many people and make them want to like and go along with him when they otherwise disagree with him. It's as if the entities using him have cast Harry Potter-ish spells to create an aura around him that helps him get what he wants—they feed off his power, so it behooves them to help him get it. You might say that their charms magnify his personal charm.

The Cheneys and some others in his administration seem personally darker and more dysfunctional, but none seem to have totally extinguished their light.

Even a truly evil person can do constructive things, and basically good people can do evil things. The validation that an act is evil is in the readily discernable harm it causes, not in who did it. Finding fault with everything a person does because he's apparently evil is a lazy way to avoid really looking and intelligently evaluating his actions.

Rarely does someone sit down and say, "I think I'll do something evil today." On the other hand, although the road to hell is sometimes paved with good intentions, it's rare for the truly well intentioned to do a lot of harm before recognizing it and changing course. Of course, apparently good intentions may mask other agendas; if someone feels the need to say that he's doing something for another's "own good," it likely isn't. (An exception is keeping a child safe and healthy when she can't understand the reasons.)

Acts that do harm are most often spawned by insensitivity, heavy-handedness and impulsiveness. What are known in the Michael teachings as "chief features" or "chief obstacles" are usually involved, especially arrogance, greed, impatience, and stubbornness. The three ordinal chief obstacles, self-deprecation, self-destruction, and martyrdom, are inward directed, yet they, too, cause harm because under their influence, we take others down with us—no one is an island.

Most of us are dealing with one or more of these as part of our life lessons. They are our Achilles' heels, our primary blind spots. They are the false beliefs that most skew our perceptions and cause us to do self-defeating or karmic things. An impatient leader, for example, might abort negotiations just before a breakthrough would have occurred; his greatest fear is missing out, but through his

impatience, he (and his country) does miss out. An arrogant leader might refuse to listen, putting himself above others, perhaps leading to a disastrous defeat; his greatest fear is being found wanting, but through his arrogance, he blunders badly and is found wanting.

The seven obstacles have built-in protection mechanisms that falsely convince us that they're essential to our survival. For example, in arrogance, we believe that if we're vulnerable, we'll die. Rather than objectively reviewing their destructive actions, those in the throes of their obstacles justify them. Evil's central justification is that the end justifies the means, that doing harm is all right if it's for a "good cause." That belief is the surest guide to the presence of evil. In truth, what characterizes the means also characterizes the end; brutal means create brutal ends. The real motivation behind harming usually isn't a "good cause" anyway, but the chief obstacle's warped survival urge.

Like blame, evil acts are fueled by repressed anger that seeks to come out any way it can, since holding it in is highly uncomfortable. Less-hardened anger may erupt like a geyser, demonstrating its pressurized nature; more-hardened anger tends to emerge in calculated ways, since it's slowed down.

One of the world's biggest problems is that few people know how to deal constructively with their anger. Most of us either repress it or express it in a violating way; few have the knowledge or inclination to express it in a clean way when that's called for, and otherwise heal and release it. People who inappropriately express their anger just make others angry, who likewise act on it and on it goes in wobbling circles.

No doubt, Saddam Hussein is a very angry man who thinks he was avenging wrongs done to him. Perhaps he sees the U.S. as a former ally who turned on him. But then, Bush has also referred to Saddam as the man who tried to kill his father, so perhaps there's an element of revenge seeking in him, as well. There's no end to revenge seeking; it's an inexorable downward spiral until everyone is dead or someone is willing to break the cycle, saying, "The buck stops here."

Hussein is close to what I'd call evil, but he's still probably good in his own eyes, as most of us are. Perhaps he thinks that his oppressive rule was necessary for creating a strong country, his version of tough love; the current chaos in Iraq suggests that it tends to be unruly. According to my channeling, he's a young warrior in dominance and power, a cynic in the moving center, with arrogance and stubbornness. It's easy to see how the negative poles of this profile could result in ruthlessness. If he is evil, as I've defined it here, or close to it, why was he once considered America's friend? Why did we help arm him? Did he change, or is he classified as evil only now that it's convenient?

Hussein supplanted Osama bin Laden as America's Most Wanted bad guy. Bin Laden doesn't seem to be an evil man, but a fanatic who believes that his war against the West is holy and justified by his understanding of scripture. Many other evil acts have referenced scripture. The Bible has been used to justify slavery, wars, prejudice against gays and women, the Crusades and Inquisition, and more, so this isn't a new problem or one limited to Islam. If an act needs justification, it's probably not constructive.

With 9/11, bin Laden and his minions did something that nations have been doing in war as long as war has existed—they attacked a stronghold, a symbol of the enemy's might, in an effort to weaken its resolve. The night before, a friend of mine had a vision of two towers with dollar signs on them going up in smoke; of course, he didn't know what he was seeing. To some, the World Trade Center represented U.S. economic imperialism. Prior to 9/11, most Americans weren't very aware that some terrorists had, in effect, declared war on us, but the World Trade Center had previously suffered a small attack in 1993 by bin Laden's minions, so this wasn't totally new, either.



Americans don't tend to be as well informed as we might be or compared to other educated nations; our reliance on sound-byte television news highlights the flashiest ("news flashes") and most recent events, at the expense of a longer view. We forget the past all too quickly. Like those suffering from Alzheimer's, we react to the moment with little sense of context or continuity.

Terrorism is simply war carried out by groups that aren't nations; it is similar to guerrilla warfare in that it's more chaotic and unpredictable than war involving large armies. If our son or daughter is killed, we probably don't care much about the technicalities of whether it was a nation or a scattered group of religious extremists who did it; war is war, and death is death. It also probably doesn't matter much to us if they died on home soil or in a foreign country. It is more disorienting when it's unexpected, but warriors have always prized the element of surprise.

There are always innocent civilian casualties in war, and it could be argued that most of the soldiers are innocent, too: they tend to be quite young and naive. The least innocent are the leaders who direct wars, but even they are sometimes ignorant, duped, or brainwashed. Innocent, guilty, or in between, the dead are still dead. We are all the victims when it comes to war and violence, even the perpetrators: the hate with which they consume others consumes them, too. Love is a burning bush that is not consumed. Is it naive or irrelevant to emphasize the importance of love in politics?

There has always been terrorism, but not on this scale before. Until it came into the spotlight because of 9/11, Americans counted on a certain order. If a nation attacked us, we could attack back and defeat them. Now, it's a world where anything can happen—the apparent security has evaporated. People can attack, and we don't know where or how to fight back. Insecurity and pressure mount.

Bin Laden accomplished what he set out to do: he instilled fear in his enemy. Fear makes an enemy more vulnerable; it causes it to act irrationally, exposing itself to further damage. America has acted irrationally since 9/11 in many ways. Limiting our own freedom in the name of preserving freedom is one such way. Invading Iraq to fight terrorism when it would obviously increase it is another. By damaging our ties to other nations, we've left ourselves still more vulnerable. I suspect that bin Laden has been playing us like a violin, that he had a pretty good idea of how we'd react, and we walked right into his trap, providing him with far more recruits than he could have gotten on his own. Wouldn't it have been nice if, instead, we had surprised him by not taking the bait and took the high road? That probably would have kicked the wind out of his sails.

9/11 was much more a psychic blow than a physical one. About three thousand people were killed—a tragedy, but not a large number as wars or catastrophes go. About three thousand people are dying every week in the current genocide in Sudan. The financial cost was high, but again, not relative to major earthquakes or wartime bombings, for example. However, the psychic toll was huge. Most Americans, regardless of their beliefs, experienced a shattering loss of innocence, like a hard kick in the guts. Israelis live with the threat of terrorism on a daily basis and therefore cope with it relatively well, but Americans had lived in an ivory tower of geographical safety unknown by most of the world. 9/11 knocked down that tower as much as the Twin Towers.

9/11 proved to Americans the existence of the collective consciousness, whether or not we realized it. The feelings were so strong that we each felt what the whole was feeling. Those who normally don't care much about the news or the outside world in general suddenly felt a part of it all. Most of us desperately wanted to do something to help, in part to alleviate an overwhelming sense of impotence. The extreme stress temporarily put us in touch with what Michael calls our higher centers: we had a heightened awareness and sense of unity. We weren't necessarily feeling our personal feelings; we were feeling our collective feelings, which many mistook for our personal

feelings. Some of us grew from the experience, some of us succumbed to fear and many of us did both.

Just as the McCarthyites in the 1950s got people worried about “Reds under every bed,” people are now worried about terrorists at every mall, especially Muslim terrorists. Never mind that since 9/11, there have been no more attacks. Never mind that the second largest act of terrorism in the U.S. was by an American (in Oklahoma City). Certainly increased security is sensible under the circumstances, but living in constant fear is not justified or useful. These enemies don’t have the wherewithal to wage a full-on war. Americans have a far greater chance of being killed by junk-food obesity or a car accident than in a terrorist attack.

Those in the New York area are especially on edge, understandably, but there’s no reason to assume that if there were another attack, it would be there. Security efforts have focused on airports, but there’s no reason to assume that another attack would use airplanes just because 9/11 did. The reaction to 9/11 has mostly been knee-jerk, without much real thought. There’s never been a better time to remember that the only thing we have to fear is fear itself, or, more correctly, that we need not live in fear at all. For one thing, it’s not helpful—it doesn’t make things better; on the contrary, it increases our danger because it clouds our thinking.

There is no way to fortify every possible target; we cannot be safe that way. Someone bent on doing harm can always find a way to do it. This has always been so. That there seems to be more people today who want to do harm than in the past suggests a breakdown in society’s restraints; long-suppressed rage is coming up, like it or not. From a spiritual vantage point, it is coming up in order to be healed. We could not go on forever with all this buried rage.

If a child frequently flies off the handle in a tantrum, he may need to be restrained to prevent him from doing damage to himself and others, but sensible adults see it as a sign of a problem that needs attention. Maybe it’s a physical problem, something miswired in his brain, for example, or maybe the child has been abused. In any case, no matter what the proper specific diagnosis and treatment is, only love can heal. Controlling a problem is better than nothing, but it isn’t the same as healing it.

Every individual has his own issues and is responsible for dealing with them. Even a government that was somehow a sterling example of unconditional love could not fix everyone’s problems. Still, in the long run, a loving, generous (and pragmatic) approach on the part of government and of all people of goodwill is the only one that stands a chance of working.

Morality is a simple matter: don’t unnecessarily harm others. Harming others unnecessarily creates karma, an energy imbalance that will be repaid, so it is ultimately in our self-interest to avoid harming others. Eventually, all souls will learn the lessons of cause and effect; sooner is always better than later, in the sense that the sooner we learn, the less we suffer.

Harm refers to real, objective harm, not an offense to someone’s sensibilities or a disappointment of his expectations. The harm that some think would occur to the institution of marriage if gays were allowed to marry is imaginary, an abstract harm to an abstract idea. Married people would lose nothing if others were allowed to marry. It’s the same kind of imaginary thinking that has allowed Christians down through the ages to torture and kill perfectly nice people who weren’t hurting anyone as heretics, witches, etc. Good government sticks to what is real and objective.

Now that it’s come to light that some of our prison guards could speak of their torture of others with smiles on their faces (and prison abuse is much more common than most people realize, including in our domestic prisons), maybe we can begin to understand that evil isn’t just “over there”—it’s “in here,” too. A better-informed populace would also realize that American soldiers committed atrocities in Viet Nam and in other wars as well. In fact, probably most armies have, to

some degree — it's part of the nature of war; violence easily gets out of hand. America is a decent, well-intended nation, but not pure as the driven snow; no country is. And self-examination isn't self-condemnation. When we truly love ourselves, we love who we really are, and are eager to let go of what is not true to our highest selves. We can afford to pierce our shadows and acknowledge our errors, because they aren't who we are. Flag-waving nationalism is defensive and divisive, different from true love of country, which is not at anyone else's expense. Unconditionally loving, whether ourselves or our country, accepts our warts but also brings to them a vision of what we could be, initiating change.

Christians strive to "hate the sin and love the sinner." Sometimes that's a ploy to manipulate others into subscribing to their ideas of what sin is:

"We'll love you if you denounce your evil ways," which, to some means dancing on Sundays or masturbating. However, there is value in that sentiment. We all sometimes do genuinely destructive things, usually out of blindness rather than malice, usually thinking at the time that what we're doing is right, or at least, justified or out of our control. That doesn't excuse the behavior, but if we view the doers (whether ourselves or others) with love, or, at least, neutrality, we can begin on the road to understanding. Full understanding brings both forgiveness and the basis for dealing with the problems in a helpful way.

## **BEYOND DOCTRINE**

Subscribing to a set of principles, whether political, scientific or spiritual, can give us a framework, a starting point for looking at the world. However, if we view them in a literal, narrow way, as rigid absolutes, they can block insights and obscure the real world. Doctrine can be way to avoid the hard work of engaging with how things are and thinking in fresh, perceptive ways about them. It can leave no room for discussion, resulting in stalemates. Being dogmatic about any issue prevents finding win-win solutions.

By definition, doctrines are generalities. They only come to life and have meaning when applied to real-world situations, but real world situations tend to defy easy generalities. The more specific we are in our discussions, getting down to cases, the more chance there is that we'll transcend our doctrines and find some common ground with others who don't subscribe to them. We may be able to agree on solutions that emphasize different principles to us. For example, conservative supporters of states' rights may be able to agree with gay activists that a constitutional amendment banning gay marriage is a bad idea, but be looking at it through different philosophical frameworks. The more we can stick with the question of whether something in particular is helpful, the more likely we are to build consensus.

Doctrine should not be mistaken for truth; a doctrine is a set of ideas about truth that is subject to human limitations, whereas truth itself is not. Our loyalty is rightly to truth, not to doctrine.

An example of doctrine on the left is the attitude toward Social Security that makes it a sacred cow, so that Democratic politicians aren't willing to even discuss the possibility of further raising the retirement age (it's already slated to rise to age 67 in 2027) or making it needs-based in order to save it from bankruptcy. Part of it is the fear that voters would tar and feather them, but if there were a problem, it would be better to face it now. The population is aging, with relatively fewer people paying into it, so something's got to give: there either has to be more funds or fewer benefits.

An example of doctrine on the right is the belief in the efficacy of tax cuts. Taking it to its logical conclusion, there would be no taxes. That sounds great until one starts dealing with the reality of no services. Sometimes, tax cuts help, and sometimes, they hurt. The question is, What would

bring the best result in this particular situation? Would a tax cut bring us to a higher overall good, or lower? Execution is always a key; in this case, which taxes should be cut or raised, and how?

We need all the sound information and creative ideas we can get. Ideology can only take us so far; blindly adhered to, it tends to make us ignore what's really happening as a result of policies in favor of what we think should be happening. We need to stay grounded and not stuck in our heads. We especially need objective knowledge about what has worked well in the past and what hasn't, to give us a basis, along with vision and intuition, for figuring out what choices might lead to the best possible future.

Ultimately, no matter who is in charge, a country (or any other collective entity) makes those choices collectively, in consciousness. We process the information, mainly unconsciously but consciously, too, to some degree, and decide what kind of future we want. Eventually, the government follows (sometimes kicking and squealing). If we're going to have a better future, the left and right must work together in a spirit of cooperation and respect. "Come, let us reason together." Until we do, we'll keep veering back and forth on screeching tires, one administration seeking to undo what the previous one did, instead of moving forward.

Fear induces rigidity (We say that someone is "rigid with fear.") and there is often fear behind rigid doctrine. Those who hold the doctrine of tax cuts tend to fear that liberals want to take away their money and therefore their financial freedom. They imagine that liberals love high taxes and big, inefficient government, which is a fear-engendered exaggeration. It's true that Democrats tend to fund more social programs, but Republicans tend to fund the military more.

Many Republicans imagine that they're for fiscal responsibility, and Democrats want to spend irresponsibly. Yet, as has been often pointed out, the biggest deficits in U.S. history were run up under Reagan and the current Bush, and we had a balanced budget under Clinton. The stereotypes may have once been more true—in past generations, Democrats funded some expensive social experiments; some worked, some didn't—but most are more fiscally cautious now.

Most of us on both the left and right are trying to find the balance between necessary spending and reasonable taxes, although we each have a different idea of what is necessary and reasonable. One has to wonder if the politicians who still accuse Democrats of being "tax and spend" really know that that's not fair and just use that smear to try to inflame voters and gain political points.

Some on the right would like to eliminate social programs altogether. The apparent simplicity of it is appealing, but the results might be far from simple or utopian; life has not been so wonderful for most people throughout history when governments did little to help. Certainly some programs such as those designed to fight poverty have not worked well and, in some cases, have helped perpetuate problems. However, characterizing all government as bad is vastly simplistic; like most things, it can also be a force for good. It can level the playing field in a way that no other institution can, and it's the only one that can stand up to large corporations, which are in danger of usurping government altogether.

No one likes excessive bureaucracy and rules. The art of government is in true pragmatism, finding what works the best and helps the most, and eliminating the dead wood. Social programs that increase the prosperity and well being of the populace are in the best interests of the rich in the long run — they create more customers. Again, we're all in this together. Most people today would not accept a government that did nothing to help them, so that's not on the table.

Government certainly can become ridiculously rule-bound and full of red tape, but so can private bureaucracy. Medicare has actually been shown to be far more efficient than private health insurance companies. All bureaucracies can benefit from a strong dose of objectivity and common sense. Perhaps we could have volunteer citizen oversight boards for every governmental entity, to

which people can challenge rules and procedures. Checks and balances are a key to democracy, and balance is a key to all things. Too small or too little is as bad as too big or too much, in government and everything else; like Goldilocks, we're in search of "just right." Rigid doctrine tends to overshoot the "just right" point. There is bound to be disagreement about where the "just right" point is, but it won't be found arbitrarily, because some doctrine says so. It takes careful observation to adjust a balance. Indiscriminate slashing of programs or anything else can be damaging. If some programs aren't working well, maybe they can be improved rather than throwing out the baby with the bathwater.

It's wise to create incentives for initiative and encourage people to pull themselves up by their bootstraps, but it's not always that easy. Sometimes people have problems or bad luck beyond their control, and it's in no one's interest to simply let them starve on the streets. Reagan's cuts of mental health funding unleashed a torrent of homelessness and other social ills that cost us far more than just taking care of those who needed help. Private charities can't handle it all, and there is no particular advantage to simply shifting costs from one governmental level, such as the federal government, to another, such as the local level.

In general, most conservatives today accept the necessity of programs that would have appalled conservatives a few generations ago: the baseline keeps moving up. Today, for example, the argument isn't about eliminating Social Security, but about allowing individuals to control part of its investment. (Some would love to eliminate it, but most know that that's not going to happen). So, conservatism is relative to the status quo of the day; for most, it's not an absolute. The further right, the further back they would like to turn the clock, but most only want to go back so far. In spite of the drag that excessive conservatism creates, in the long run society does progress.

## **FREEDOM**

Both right and left often believe that it alone stands for freedom and the American way. However, the left tends to emphasize freedom of personal conduct, and the right, a lack of government interference with money and property. Many right-wingers, especially the fundamentalist Christians, think it's perfectly fine for the government to regulate consensual adult sexual conduct or abortions, for example. Still, some abhor such interference, particularly Libertarians. In any case, if we transcend doctrine, we can see that most of us want freedom—we just define it differently.

One kind of freedom comes from a void, having little government of any kind, like the old Wild West; a problem is that in such an environment, the strong prey on the weak, so although the strong feel free, the weak don't. Another kind of freedom is being given the tools to prosper, such as education and loans that might otherwise only be available to the rich.

Our Founding Fathers considered banning corporations because of the way they shield owners from risk or responsibility; if corporations lose money, the owners aren't liable beyond their investment—their personal assets remain intact. Corporations are, by design, mindless, soulless machines motivated only by profit. They may have value as efficient ways of delivering goods and services, but they are rightly the slaves of society, not the masters.

If an individual poisons someone's well, he can go to jail, but generally, when corporations poison the environment, no one goes to jail; if prosecuted at all, corporations typically pay a fine that is a fraction of its profits. Fines aren't seen as a punishment but as a cost of doing business. If more CEOs went to jail, there would be less corporate wrongdoing.

Most individuals have no bargaining power with corporations—it's not a level playing field. Only government can keep them in line. Just as we need a separation of church and state, we need a

separation of corporation and state. Yet, some mistakenly equate personal freedom with freedom for corporations to do whatever they want to. Without the responsibilities of individuals, they are not entitled to the rights. The more “freedom” (license, actually) given to corporations, the less freedom individuals have. Excessive or convoluted corporate regulation isn’t helpful, but there needs to be enough oversight to protect the rights of individuals and maintain a level playing field. Few corporations will voluntarily reduce its pollution, for example; only government regulation will reduce pollution.

The goal of good government is to find the sweet spot where we have the maximum possible individual freedom on all fronts and policies that do the most possible good for the least possible cost (of all kinds).

An example of the dilemma we face is zoning, which every community solves differently. One end of the spectrum is the idea that property owners should be able to do anything they wish with their property. The other end gives total control to the community. A junk-filled yard is an eyesore that affects other people’s property values and can breed vermin. One could argue that if neighbors don’t like it, they can move, but why should they have to? On the other hand, people should be able to express their individuality in a way that isn’t necessarily pleasing to everyone else. In some cases, a win-win compromise might be a tall fence, but finding what gives all parties a fair balance of freedom is not always easy.

Seatbelt laws for adults are an unnecessary infringement on our rights—wearing one or not doesn’t directly affect others. Still, seatbelts are highly effective in saving lives. The most enlightened approach might be to use creative public service announcements that address people’s objections to them. Imposing penalties is an old-paradigm, government-as-parent approach. If we wish to have the freedom of mature adults, our government can’t play the role of parent, policing our actions when they don’t affect others. It’s like parents telling their grown children what to do. However, government can be useful as an educator and catalyst without infringing on our right to choose.

A common argument supporting seatbelt laws—that we collectively pick up the bill for unnecessary medical care and accident clean up — is true but weak. Indirect costs, or the perceived good of the whole, can justify all sorts of repressive laws that cost people precious freedoms. Although the right not to wear a seatbelt is a minor freedom, to be a truly free society, it’s better to err a little on the side of too much individual freedom rather than too little.

If someone wants to take drugs, it’s his body and his business; throwing him in prison for that is far worse than any ill effects that might accrue to society. Plus, as we’ve painfully seen again and again, prohibitions don’t work. All addictions cost society, but if freedom is worth the trillions of dollars we spend on the military, surely it’s worth any added costs that real freedom brings. If we truly value freedom, we can’t try to dictate what other people do with their body. Government **can** offer education and health care for those who have a substance abuse problem and want help. That would be an example of increasing people’s choices rather than reducing them, which, in Michael’s term, is “good work.”

Trying to trade liberty for security is folly: it can’t be done; with less liberty, we’re less secure. Not only do we have to worry about violations from terrorists, which aren’t necessarily reduced, but we also have to worry about violations from our own government, without the protection of due process. It’s a Faustian deal with the devil. And totally unnecessary. Intelligence agencies that are truly intelligent and resourceful don’t need unethical shortcuts. We’ve seen again and again that without checks and balances, people’s rights are abused.

## **CO-CREATING OUR FUTURE**

We can't move productively into the future and leave half the country behind. Liberals wish that the conservatives would somehow just go away, and conservatives wish that about the liberals, but no one is going away. Human history is the sad record of those in power trying to eliminate their shadowy opposites, and despite the misery and destruction this has caused, it has never been successful.

We all basically want the same things. There's at least a grain of truth in most points of view. Respecting other people's views increases the chances that they'll respect ours.

Putting down others is unloving and doesn't help. We don't have to make others "less than" (ultimately, less than human) and make ourselves "more than" in order to bring change—we can be centered in the truth and let the facts speak for themselves. Even when we feel that someone's actions have been harmful, we can express anger without denigrating him as a person. If we come from our heart and see him as a fellow human being, we can look him in the eye and speak our truth in a compassionate way.

The truth is genuinely fair and balanced; each valid point receives its due. The truth has a settled, peaceful feel about it. A charged, contentious atmosphere isn't conducive to developing a fair and balanced picture.

When we hear what we consider to be falsehoods and start to feel angry, it's a good idea not to take the bait and become triggered — that is a common trap that perpetuates divisiveness. It's not easy to remain centered yet strong in relationship to a corrosive person in attack mode, but it's a major growth opportunity. We can remind ourselves that we're all here on the physical plane doing our thing, working through our issues singly and together. People who attack have their own path of learning and karma, and we don't necessarily have to engage with it. We all have distortions, and see things subjectively to some degree. We're each entitled to our views, and don't need to react to someone else's.

People who are ranting are not open-minded and there's no point in talking with them in that state. They are in the throes of fear, whether it manifests aggressively or passively, and fear plugs our ears and covers our eyes. Countering fear-based rhetoric with more of the same just raises the volume. There's also no point in explaining to them that they're acting from fear, because they wouldn't be able to see their state after they've stepped out of it.

However, there are people of goodwill on both sides capable of listening and sharing reasoned arguments. Our task is to offer whatever light we have, letting others do with it as they will and refusing to participate in mudslinging and stereotyping.

So, fellow granola-eating tree-hugging Bush-hating big-government peaceniks, let us offer love and light to Republicans. For how can we love trees and hate Bushes? Let us go to our nearest country club or boardroom and give warm, lingering hugs to some rich, white, middle-aged, imperialistic, exploitative, war-mongering males—they need love, too. Or, better yet, smack wet, juicy, same-sex tongue kisses on some uptight, hypocritical homophobes. When we spread love to others, we feel so much better ourselves!

Just kidding.

We seek to live in unconditional love and truth because that is the only thing that allows us to be who we are. It's not about other people; it doesn't matter what others do with it or think about it—we cannot exclude love from any being without diminishing ourselves. The sun would have to stop shining to exclude anything. We each inevitably see things differently than others do, but we don't have to stop letting energy circulate among us, no more than we need to stop breathing, in the presence of someone with whom we disagree. We love because love is who we are.

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