

Our Lost Heart of Light by Rich Norman

Last summer the process euphemistically known as "renewable resource management" was in its final phase, and the helicopter came in low for a nearly perfect pass, spraying poison in a smooth carpet over the denuded hillside, earth now packed hard as black and brown concrete, crushed and scraped clean from the heavy equipment used to "harvest" the timber, then burned, and now, sprayed with poison. The once living and beautiful land now a wound, and I can hardly look upon it. The people who do this harm, are good people, and skilled workers. Something is missing, something has become cut off... dissociated. A piece of our human puzzle, which once dislodged, leaves us thinking exploitation is a right, and harm, a human privilege and pleasure. I believe I have found it, found the element which is part of each of us, and, in its influence has formed many higher notions and ideas throughout the diversity of historical and spiritual tradition. Likewise, its dissociation leads down another pathway. I will share a piece of psychology I have recently discovered, a bit of psychology which is responsible for what the pretense and paradoxical murk of eastern thought has called "enlightenment," and I will simply call health, and balance. So from whence come optimism, connection, empathy, caring, kindness, health and happiness in our view of the world as a pleasure, a glowing and healthy part of ourselves, rather than a thing to hurt and exploit to carelessly fill our empty need?

There is a little known psychologist named Wilfred Bion, who in the most mistaken and painful philosophical tradition, insists on using obscure language to describe simple concepts. His most brilliant and profound idea is the notion of "alpha function." Although assigned a seemingly arbitrary Greek alphanumeric designation, we can gain a clue as to the foundational importance of this idea from the fact that alpha is the very first letter of the Greek alphabet. In turn, alpha function is the foundation upon which much of the evolution of healthy personality is based. As the child grows, he is entirely dependent upon the mother, and the mother is all but literally, his whole world. Her face, fills his vision to become his world, and she looks upon him and sees his needs and moods, and in turn, her face responds and she answers, anticipates, looks and provides, and so a circuit, a round is formed, a circle between the child's world, his mother's face and her action, and himself. In this, the boundaries between the child's external world and his internal self blur, and a connection is formed between the world, and the child, whereby the child's impression is one of the world being a loving extension of one's self, a responsive and integrated extension of his internal world, both nurturing and caring, and, indivisible from himself. It has been demonstrated that these interactions are fundamental and foundational for social development, and cause physical changes in the orbitofrontal and other connected areas of the brain initiating the maturation of the "sympathetic ventral tegmental limbic circuit." [Schore, as cited in Kaplan-Solms & Solms, 2002, p. 234].

Now we must remember that all of our experience of the world is subjective, colored and defined not by the particular experience itself, but in how we interpret that experience or perception. Think of how one person will find beauty in a desolate desert landscape, and another, an empty and barren view most uninviting. Perhaps here, we have found a non-

genetic developmental clue as to the mystery of optimism and pessimism, the expectation that the world will or will not be a welcoming place, whether it will be responsive to our needs, or cold and refusing of them. Here we may have a piece of the puzzle shrouding the source of ethics and morality as well, for throughout history laws and rules, many most pungent and barbaric, have attempted to enforce and create ethical sentiment and behavior as a function of external threat, to poor result. It seems that ethical sentiment and behavior are not born under threat, but instead the entire of ethical law is but manifestation of a single simple principle: Empathy. Perhaps we have found the source of empathetic feeling and hence, ethical action as well, might both be born in this golden moment, here where the world is the self and the self the world, and so, we can dispense with any external "golden rule" or "categorical imperative" proclaiming our actions must be reducible to a moral maxim, or equal to what we ourselves would desire. How could one desire to hurt or exploit the world, once connected to, and inseparable from it? How could one consider such a thing, to harm the world is to harm ourselves! The canon of ethics: threat and rule are ineffective because the truth which foster them is no longer available to *feel*. It is clear that morality and ethical conduct are not a function of threat, but of internal security, healthy connection and balance...ethics are never created as a function of threat and rule, they are born from within. Ethics are a manifestation of health, a function of happiness.

I believe this dissociation can be repaired, and that the source impressions of "alpha function" can be used to in a new way to accomplish this end.

So the question lays before us, we who have this golden feeling, and have lost it: The psychologist would ask, "How might we repair the dissociation, and again define our world and perceptions through this distant memory?" This question is no easy thing to answer, and each case has had the strings cut in various places, one made distant from the memory because they are "a Man," and men never accept, they never feel or accept love—or another is blocked from the memory because they have learned not to trust, and refuse the feeling because they feel vulnerable and afraid. Weakness always masquerades as strength. I can not help with this work, a battle which each must enjoin on their own. I can however, point the way, and give you a hint, a splash, a scent of the imagining, so that you may find your way, and find this blessed thing alongside me.

Can you picture it? The sun pouring down upon your face, shining and warm, golden and loving is this light, a light you are folded into, and have created, shining, pouring back up into the arch of heaven, spilling from your glad face, and again down to fill you, the trees nodding as you dream them, the sky golden and warm as you have poured it—and back around—for it has dreamt you...now as the world, of the world, nourished and warmed, our circle complete, a circuit of golden warmth and light spilling the world into being and returning again, unto you, and again, you unto it...and all the world is eternal, safe, now and again nourished and nourishing, the earth and life, now and again, but a single warmth, a round, a circuit, a circle of happiness, pouring down and returning, warm and sweet, the world now glad and warm, complete, born out and eternal, the human circle glowing, as life spilled round into warmth—and golden light.

Can you imagine?— Today the helicopter is prepped and loaded as before, filled with poison to spray upon the tender earth, and sicken her. But the pilot has changed, his mind and heart have again found a place within himself he had lost, but now, his glad heart is brimming over with warmth, and all his pain is free, now nourishing him and fueling the golden vision, this ancient place now alive within him, his ache and angry hurt now a warmth, and a gratitude to fill him up and return to life. The helicopter rises, and once aloft the pilot looks down and sees the glad emerald forest, her feathered fingers of shade and light stirring the distant breeze seem to call to him, at once known and new, familiar, aged and tender are the new hues and shades of this forest, and her heart of love and light so gladly spilled out before him, fill him with caring and happiness. He looks and wonders of this place with new eyes: Perhaps he has created this land, created her in this instant...just to look, or she him? A funny thought, and now, he is over the drop site, the ugly brown and black tear in the land, and he can not do it. How can he drop a cloud of thick poison upon her? The thought is as an insult, a pain, a sad and mistaken insult to the very heart of every good and caring thing. No, he can not, he will not. Tomorrow he will find another job, and today, he will treasure the earth rather than sicken her. Yes, this is best. How splendid is the day! Her golden heart of love and heat spilling down upon him from the arching horizon, sparkling with new hope and life, and he slips the stick forward and glides smoothly along the hills, over the ridge of folded green shade and life, light and silver light spilling over the pools of liquid and earth below, shimmering and glad is this new day, a perfect day in a perfect world, new and sultry is this day—just as he has imagined her!

So I will again state: Ethics are never created as a function of threat and rule, they are born from within. Ethics are a manifestation of health, a function of happiness.

Reference:

Kaplan-Solms & Solms, M. (2002). *Clinical studies in neuropsychanalysis*. London: Karnac Press.

Oregon resident Rich Norman, is a writer and musician with degrees in philosophy and music. Known as "The Laughing Recluse," he is the author of books spanning philosophy, psychology, and novels, with topics ranging from psychoanalytic theory to existential philosophy, verse and fiction. All text in this column is printed with the permission of, and remains the sole property of, the author, Rich Norman. Contact: rich@richnorman.com