

Notes for Week 2

There is a psycho-spiritual crisis in our society and it is fed by the capitalist ethos in which we are steeped. The Left does not understand that people have deep needs for meaning and purpose, for connection, for a sense of belonging and community. Instead of speaking to these fundamental needs, the Left speaks about economic entitlements and political rights, using language such as, it's the economy stupid and/or says that everyone who is not with us is either racist, sexist, homophobic, anti-Semitic, anti-immigrant, Islamophobic or just plain stupid. However, what they largely miss is the psycho-spiritual crisis we all experience living in a culture that tells us that if we are not who we want to be, as rich as we want to be, as powerful as we want to be (or think we should be), then it is our own fault. The Right addresses this pain in a deceptive yet powerful way – rather than point out how the capitalist ethos and neoliberal policies are the cause of people's pain, the Right points the finger at some demeaned other of our society. And now they have a whole slew of people that they point their fingers at – women, African Americans, LGBTQ, immigrants, Muslims, Jews, and even the entire Left. By doing this, the Right acknowledges the pain of people (yes, largely white people, but also people of color, women, and others), and it acknowledges that we live in a selfish, greedy world. How can you see it? By the calls for marginalized people and their supporters to get what they call “special” advantages or rights. They say things like, they are only looking out for themselves, they don't care about you – which is exactly how the marketplace works. You have to fight with others, including your friends, to get on the top because if you don't you will be on the bottom. We live in a world of scarcity and if you don't maximize your efforts, even at the expense of others, you will end up left behind. And they feel awful living in this world and awful about themselves as do we all. Yet, by placing blame on marginalized groups and their supporters who are rightfully seeking to remedy past wrongs and discrimination, the Right relieves the self-blaming and shame that is so deeply prevalent and harmful in our society.

And the Left is not even in the ball-park. It does not even begin to acknowledge the pain in this psycho-spiritual crisis. Instead the Left focuses its efforts on economic entitlements and political rights – all of which we fully support and are important, but on

their own, they are not enough. In the coming weeks, you will see this more explicitly in readings.

What we are trying to do in this training is to help you understand this crisis and to be able to speak about it so you can help others understand it. This is part of the consciousness raising that we need to do on the Left. To help the Left understand this crisis and be able to speak to it in a powerful and transformative way so that people will have a sense that the Left understands them and cares about them. Because the Left is beholden to the ruling elite and economic establishment in our country, it is unable and unwilling to take on that establishment and the ethos of that establishment. So rather than talk about major overhauls of our society, the Left offers a place at the table, some crumbs if you will. But no meaningful change and it leaves people feeling like they have to fight over the crumbs available. So, where are we now? We are fighting to resist the continuing assaults on rights and advances we won years ago and never imagined would be questioned and yet they are. Simply pushing back is not enough. We need to reflectively ask how we got here and what can we do to create a sea change.

As I mentioned last week, the Left needs to do a number of things differently.

1. Stop demeaning of those who are not with us yet

This happens in two ways and they end up hitting people from both sides.

- a. First, putting down of those who don't agree with us. Examples: Hillary's comment about the deplorables and whole discourse that has been going on since the election about how all those who voted for Trump are racist, sexist, homophobic, Islamophobic, etc.

People in small towns in society don't feel attracted to the culture of the Left and even people earning what some would consider a good income voted for Trump. [Tell story of woman who told her friend she's not deplorable] (NYT article) (try to find article I sent ML re: the Christian person who explained why he voted for Trump)

- b. Second, dismissal of people's suffering who are not a member of a marginalized group.

This includes the way many on the Left put people on the defensive and call them privileged – emphasis on male and white privilege to people who are not experiencing themselves as privileged. If you are a working class white person, you do not experience yourself as privileged and when the Left tells them that they are, they feel enraged because they also want to be seen and understood for their struggles and for those to be recognized, valued, and held important as well. Rates of alcohol and drug abuse among white men is rising – they are literally killing themselves – given the pain they are in.

2. Overcome its religiophobia – dismissal of anyone who identifies as religious or believes in God or some force in the universe beyond ourselves and science as on a lower plane. This is not only applied to people on the Right but also to those on the Left. The majority of Americans identify as religious and the majority say they believe in God and go to church, synagogue, mosque or other spiritual center/community at least once a month. So as long as the Left continues to be dismissive of people who identify as spiritual and/or religious we will not be able to attract them to our movement.

3. Put forth a positive vision of the world we want, one that is inclusive and visionary, not simply state what we are against. We discussed this last week and you have read a bit about this and this is what we are going to focus on this week because this is the easiest one to tackle first!

That is why we are starting with the New Bottom Line this week (and in later weeks we will be sharing our two more concrete proposals that are embodiments of visionary policies grounded in the NBL, namely the [Environmental and Social Responsibility Amendment to the US Constitution](#) and the [Global Marshall Plan](#)). Starting with the NBL helps people see the positive vision of what we are for and enables us to establish relationships with people that are not as challenging as the other three. It can build a foundation for community, connection, and even shared vision that will support our efforts in the other two areas. Then we will try to move to numbers 1 and 2.

The hardest of these is religiophobia because people on the Left believe that that view is totally justified because they see all the religions as completely messed up and that is buttressed by the way religion is co-opted by Religious Right. When people don't want to look at the problems as structural problems, namely the economic and political systems, they then point their finger at religion and blame religion for the problems in society. Religiophobia on the Left is analogous to the socialism-phobia on the Right because they both take a real problem that has existed (namely the problems with religion and socialism as practiced in certain places) and generalize it to all forms of religion or socialism. Their critique is right but it dismisses all the other people who are into religion and see it as a path to social justice or just a path to community (and so take the aspects that are sexist, racist, etc. because they are desperate for some form of connection).

Trying to change the culture of the Left is a long-term struggle. We can begin to reach out to those on the Right (and those in the middle) who would be with us if these three things are corrected.

If we want to build a world based on values of love, kindness, care, generosity, justice, sustainability, seeing each other as embodiments of the sacred and responding to the universe with awe, wonder and radical amazement, then we need our movement to embody and reflect these values. We will not build the world we want by using methods that more closely reflect the world we currently live in and are desperately wanting to change. A spiritual activist lends a moral voice and helps create a spiritually and morally grounded movement so that the means are in alignment with the end we seek. A spiritual activist understands the psycho-spiritual crisis in our society and is able to look at social change efforts and society as a whole from a place of compassion and can engage with people from a place of compassion that is deeply infused with a rich and complex intellectual, political and psycho-spiritual understanding of how our society impacts and influences people's personal lives and struggles.

To bring this understanding to more and more people, we need to create consciousness raising groups, in the form of chapters or people working together to bring these ideas

into your community, social justice organizations, and spiritual communities. We are hoping that you will be inspired to do this work after the training. And to do so, you need to have a community of people who will support each other in doing this kind of work because it will be very difficult work and over and over again people will be challenging you and saying this isn't what we need to do, all we need to do is capture some more votes and get a few new people in office. (This was discussed in the reading and recording regarding Surplus Powerlessness.) We need a whole new kind of Left to pass radical, transformative policies like the ESRA and GMP. Otherwise we will have a repeat of Obama again and that's what Hillary was offering and that is what the Democrats will do again. We need a lot more on our side than simply 55% to make the kind of changes we are seeking to make. We need to capture every state legislature, enough people so we can pass constitutional amendments to get rid of the electoral college and require the ESRA. We need 70% of the population voting for us. And we haven't had it because of the reasons mentioned – namely, what the Left is offering is not that attractive.

In this training, we are trying to give you a sense of some of the skills that need to be developed and some of the vision but we will need ongoing trainings, connection, and more time together – this is movement building. And it will take time - it is a long-term commitment. There is no magic bullet, it's a long-term process of trying to transform society. And you will have support along the way!

To that end, I want to let you all know about a private facebook group that we created after the last training for people who have taken the training. If you friend either David or me on Facebook, we can add you to the group or if you search for the group and ask to be added we can add you. The group is called – Spiritual Activism: Beyond Resistance. The other thing is that we have monthly calls on Sundays at 2:00pm PT the first Sundays of the month. So when the training is over, you can join those calls beginning in November. We will discuss this more in later weeks, I just wanted you all to know of the ongoing support and community available after the training is over.