

# *A LARGER VIEW*

*A Commentary On How Current Events Reflect—  
Or Not—Our Spiritual Search*

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*The pieces are reposted from some of the entries in The Inner Compass blog  
[www.innerlifedirections.com/blog](http://www.innerlifedirections.com/blog)*

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## **Hail The West Point Instructor**

--An old experiment revealing humans' ability to hurt each other has been replicated. Its warning is however being heeded by a West Point instructor--Back in 1963 a scientific experiment found that people were willing to administer an electric shock and cause pain to another because someone in a white coat had told them to. Then, it was used to help us understand the behavior of Nazi concentration camp guards and other war criminals who claimed they were following orders. For the first time in the intervening 45 years the experiment has been repeated, by Jerry Burger of Santa Clara University, and whether we like it or not the same results were obtained. More than 80 percent of the participants were willing to continue after administering the first electric shock, and 65 percents went all the way up.

Part of the answer professor Burger believes is to make the results of the experiment known so that hopefully in being aware of these tendencies in ourselves and others we can guard against them. Indeed, in today's context, Abu Ghraib comes to mind and it would be easy to argue that awareness of this finding could play a role in preventing the

abuses it speaks of.

All this would make for a rather ordinary ending if not for an instructor at West Point who contacted professor Burger to tell him she was teaching her students about the experiment.

Learning from our mistakes, compensating for our weakness and preventing undue harm are not only wise, they lead to progress. And that seems to be what this instructor is involved in--leaving one with a good feeling about West Point, the military, the future, the role of science and that of anyone disseminating information--perhaps not a bad way to start the year.<>

## Shouldn't We Honor Helpers?

--The California Justices recently ruled that someone who helped another during an accident is liable for any harm. We should honor helpers, not make them liable--The California Supreme Court ruled a few days ago that if someone renders help to someone else and the person who has been helped is hurt, then the helper is liable. Alexandra Van Horn was in the front seat of a car that slammed into a pole. Lisa Torti, her friend who was a passenger in a car that was following, pulled her out after the accident. Van Horn is now a paraplegic and claims that it is the result of Torti having "pulled her like a rag doll." Van Horn is now suing Torti and the California Supreme Court unanimously said Van Horn has a case and Torti is liable and can be sued. A trial will now have to determine if Van Horn is ultimately liable, if her actions did cause the paraplegia. It's difficult for someone who upholds spiritual values, values where other-orientedness is paramount, to see how Alexandra Van Horn would sue not only her helper but her friend. But the issue here is beyond the personal relationship of these two people. Laws are meant to make the society more just, supposed to smooth out the rough edges that usually stem from people's imperfections, flaws, even evil. And yet by validating Van Horn's claim that Torti is liable the California Justices are creating an environment where helpers will have to think twice about rendering help. Laws ought to honor our better angels, and this ruling does the opposite. In the end it may be that Torti will be found innocent of the harm she is accused of having inflicted, but that's not the point, the point is that acting in good faith to help another human being, she ought to be hailed, not punished.<>

## Making History

--By voting for Barak Obama, it is the American electorate which made history--As we reflect about the election, we can't avoid mentioning its historical significance. The idea is that as the first African American to be elected, Barak Obama made history. It may be that another perspective is far more accurate, the people who voted for him made history. Without each and every single vote the victory would not have been possible. It is an important distinction because it is We The People, though the we was made up of a different group in those days, who discriminated and insisted on Jim Crowe laws. It is We The People who perpetuated segregation and all its indignities. It was therefore up to We The People to undo it, and that is what happened last November 4th. For the karma believers it was a karmic debt created by We The People and therefore one that We had

to undo. For the more traditionally minded, it was an example based on the biblical notion that the sins of the father are visited upon the sons, a principle therefore enjoining us to take responsibility to redress the wrong of our forefathers. In that context it may have taken a few generations, but it was nonetheless accomplished. Either way it speaks for the power of the collective, for the relation of the individual to the whole, and for the importance each voice does hold.<>

## Re-Appreciating Our Freedom To Worship

--Seeing how the Chinese government can interfere with religious freedom helps us better appreciate our own--One of the reasons the Pilgrims came to the New World was freedom of religion, not only the freedom to worship whatever religion they felt called to, but to practice that religion without government interference. We all know that the Chinese government does not make religious freedom easy, and yet when I read recently about rules issued about the practice of Islam in a northern province where 46% of the people are Muslims, I was reminded of what we tend to take for granted in the United States. The rules aren't actually new but they were recently made more prominent, posted in mosques and public places. The imam's sermon cannot be longer than 30 minutes. Prayer in public areas outside the mosques is forbidden. In Khotan, one of the province's main cities, the residents are not allowed to worship at mosques outside of town. The passports of Uighurs, who are mainly Muslim, are being confiscated, to better control their going to Mecca for The Hadj, the pilgrimage which is one of Islam's five pillars, and also it is said to keep local Muslims from having contact with other Muslims. There were many other rules such as keeping students from leaving the university during Ramadan to prevent them from fasting and joining their families for the evening meal. The debate between the separation of church and state in the United States can sometimes take so many turns, it's helpful sometimes to reconnect to what government interference really is.<>

## Correction Note

A while back we featured a story about Eva Kor who forgave her concentration camp tormentors. Eva Kor called us a few weeks ago to let us know the story we ran was so incomplete it was misleading. The full details are of course very moving and more than we can cover in this short space. We invite you to go to her website, listed below, to read them for yourself.<>

## Website of Interest: [www.candleshocaustmuseum.org](http://www.candleshocaustmuseum.org)

A concentration camp survivor, Eva Kor has been actively working with forgiveness for a number a years. Her website details her story and her work. It not only speaks to issues that are vital to our society, to what one human being can do, it also is an example of how to handle evil, something we can all learn from.<>

## To Ponder On

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity."

*Albert Einstein*

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