

A LARGER VIEW

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

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Who owns History?

--An announcement that Britney Spears will star in a concentration camp romance arouses the ire of German Jews--Britney Spears is slated to appear in "The Yellow Star of Sophia and Eton" the working title of a film about a concentration camp romance and many German Jews are up in arms. The Central council of Jews in Germany is horrified that someone like Britney Spears will be making a holocaust film. The president, Charlotte Knobloch, said "In films that deal with the Holocaust, the script should be carefully chosen and the cast picked with care...ethical considerations should have priority." Her objection brings up what looks to be an underlying question, who owns history? Isn't history something that belongs to every human? Can anyone lay claim to it and order how it shall be portrayed? I am no particular fan of Britney Spears and her brand of commercialism. To my mind her way of handling her career contributes to the vulgarization of our culture. Nevertheless she has the right to star in a story set in a

concentration camp just as Ms Knowbloch has the right to criticize the film whether or not she opts to go see it.

Looking At Ourselves

--A comment by an astronomer becomes a catalyst for thinking about looking at our culture--Frank Drake is a 79 year-old astronomer and astrophysicist, founder of the SETI project that looks for extraterrestrial transmissions, someone who approaches his field academically and not prone to some of the notions usually associated with ET seekers. In an interview with the German magazine Der Spiegel Drake said that daytime television might be aliens' first taste of life on earth and that he found that scary. Aliens or anyone looking for us in space are likely to first see the soaps because the transmitted signals go into space first before they reach one's TV set. The idea of those soaps and the notion they would give a scary image of who we are is provocative. We usually think of finding aliens, speculate on who they would be, but give little or no thought to what they might think of us. Extending that further, how often do we think of the image our culture projects? Are we as superficial as the image of daytime soap operas would indicate? Is that a picture of who we want to be? What would be a symbol of our culture? We watch so much reality TV would that be a better or worse image of who we are? And taking this exercise a step further, what is the idea of humanity we ought to cultivate and move towards?

Is It Really The Government?

--Government may be seen as inefficient, but GM and other corporations have shown themselves to be worse. Factoring in human limitations may yield better results--We often allow so called conventional wisdom to dictate our views with little thought that CW is not always based on fact. We, for example, hold on to the notion that government-run programs are inefficient, bureaucratic and wasteful. The question ought to be, are they more so than the private sector? Many say, yes indeed. And yet if that were so GM would still be the beacon of American industry and business it had been until its demise. And would banks have pushed sub-prime loans and doctor their books to make them look they were bringing in profits when in fact they were losing money? Our current economic crisis is the result of several corporations being inefficient (Bears Sterns... Lehman... AIG, GM et al.), bureaucratic (don't we hear how the GM mindset helped to defeat the corporation?) and wasteful (what about those bonuses to AIG and others)? When we now hear that government may play a role in the future of healthcare, many tremble and raise their dander. It would seem that the limitations of human nature are a far more apt culprit than government, and those are as likely to occur in government as in the corporate sector. The way to address the problem may not be to think in terms of what sector will do what, (how much and who will pay may be more relevant) but how to protect whatever new program from the known current limitations of our specie.

A New Trend among MBA's

--A trend among MBA's looks beyond making money to ethical and human concerns-- It's easy to miss news items that allow us to see the importance of values. Though small they do signify how real progress in some areas does happen. In this instance the item relates to a pledge by some 20% of the graduating Harvard Business School, one which essentially says that greed is not good. The pledge is voluntary but its mere existence is significant particularly when seen in context of a similar trend in other schools. At Columbia Business School, for example, all students must pledge to an honor code. At the Wharton School of the University of Pennsylvania, there are now seven professors teaching an array of ethics classes which are said to be very popular.

Following the practices of Enron and Bernie Madoff and in the wake of a recession triggered by the failure of financial institutions, the trend points to a generation, where some at least, are concerned about more than making money, and want to factor in the impact of their work on the community, the lives of the workers involved and the environment. Step by step, it does indicate that in the rather near future such concerns will be standard practice.

Our Responsibility to Acai

When it comes to the acai berry, are we being rapacious or just thoughtless?—We do our best to eat right. We also factor in the environment, and participate in the eat local movement, or slow food one whichever better suits our sensibilities. Accordingly, we try to limit the carbon footprint we leave upon the environment. But what thought do we give to the people involved? The question acquires a certain importance when it comes to the acai berry grown in the Brazilian jungle. It is the staple food for many living in the Amazon regions. It is a protein-rich nutrient they've long relied on, usually beaten, diluted in water and eaten with manioc or other foods. It has been so popular around the world, popularized by Oprah Winfrey, Nicholas Perricone and Mehmet Oz that there is now a diminished supply for those who depended on it for food, and given how it grows, on palm trees, the supply cannot be quickly replenished. Where it is available in Brazil, it is now much more expensive and out of the reach of many.

If we try to be ethical about how we eat, then we ought to factor in the consequences of what we consume upon the people and cultures where it is grown. Acai may be a super food, but for us, it is a supplement, something to make us younger, loose weight faster, age more slowly. For those in the Brazilian jungle it is a staple, often a necessity. While our abstaining from acai and the now many products that tout it, will not directly help those in the jungle, it will dampen the profits of those exploiting it and as it does, they may relent or reevaluate its uses. A decreased demand would in a round about way help those who have depended on it for generations. That is not only possible for us to do, it can be considered our responsibility.

Website of Interest: www.visionofhumanity.org

Most have never heard of the Global Peace Index. It is put together by the Institute for Economics and Peace, a non-profit organization with an address in New South Wales. For the last 3 years it has ranked nations along certain criteria in order to determine their levels of peace. This year New Zealand was first, Denmark and Norway tied for 2nd and

3rd place respectively. Japan was no. 7, Canada, 8. Finland and Slovenia tied for 9 and the United States was 83rd ahead of countries like Libya and Gabon. The last four in the 144 countries ranked are in that order Israel, Somalia, Afghanistan and Iraq as no 144. France was no. 30 and the United Kingdom 35. The panel of experts behind the index looks at criteria which are aimed at gauging levels of democracy, transparency, education and material well being. They also look at internal strife and conditions leading to internal or external problems. This year food riots in several countries affected the ranking as did the other consequences of the global economic crisis such as unemployment. Several indicators affecting security measure house pricing and pensions are also included, which could explain one of the reasons for the U.S. poor showing. But the point of course is not to engage in a contest of pride but to think through what peace entails and make us all more aware of what goes into making peace. While the index may be a news filler, an afterthought or even an interesting tidbit, it ought to be something for us to ponder.

To Ponder On

“Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.”

Albert Einstein

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