

London Calling

Peter Merry, 7th July 2005

I was in the kitchen preparing lunch when the phone rang. My Dutch wife answered it. I didn't hear the conversation. She came back into the kitchen and told me that there had been a string of bomb attacks in London. Her father had called and said it was serious.

I kept making my sandwiches. I felt no urge to run to the TV. The pit of my stomach tensed up, and my mind seemed to slip into neutral. It did not feel like a surprise. It was to be expected, and there would surely be more to come. It was the knowledge that there were casualties and fatalities, grieving families and friends, and tearful eyewitnesses that was causing the sensation in my stomach. I felt the wave of grief and compassion sweep over me for a moment, and then it was gone.

When I got to the TV, the same images were being repeated over and over again. Journalists were pushing for casualty and fatality figures which were not yet forthcoming. Images of the roof ripped off the double-decker bus promised bad news. My heart was touched again by the stoicism and commitment expressed by Londoners and the rescue services, as well as a clearly moved Prime Minister.

It seemed like the casualty figures were going to be relatively low, compared to Spain and certainly 9/11. One of the more insightful experts said it was unlikely to have been the full Al-Qaeda organisation as it didn't have the impact that their activities usually do. He thought that they were currently not up to producing anything on a 9/11 scale outside of Saudi Arabia.

After fifteen minutes of TV coverage, there was nothing new to digest. It was clearly the same pattern we are becoming all too familiar with. We had better get used to it, as there is sure to be more, and with heavier loss of life than today. It struck me that it probably is no exaggeration to say that we are at war. A war of a kind never fought before of course, but still a war. That's what it feels like. A war between cultures and societies living a life embedded in values of freedom, opportunity and respect, versus cultures and groups living a life embedded in a belief that any way of life which contradicts the rules of living described in their sacred texts has to be eradicated and replaced with their own societal form. It is really the very first true World War as like no other before it transcends national boundaries

and plays out in transnational space. During war time, we have to expect casualties on all sides. It is the same here. And this war may run on longer than any war before.

In a way it all feels so futile, as from a historical and developmental perspective we know that the worldviews underlying the fundamentalist mindset will evolve over time into more pluralist and open systems. Our societies had their own crusades, centuries ago, murdering innocent civilians and plundering as we went. These belief systems are in our genes and memes, whether we choose to recognise them or not. In the intervening years our brains and minds have layered on greater complexity of thinking and breadth of compassion that would not allow us to hack off the enemy's head and broadcast it on the internet. Imagine the damage we Crusaders might have done all those years ago if we had access to the technology that today's fundamentalists have. That's why it feels like there is much worse to come.

There is great power in fundamentalist / crusader mindsets. They truly believe in their cause, and are willing to die for it. How many of us would be willing to die to protect the relative freedom and opportunity that we have developed in the Industrialised world? It is a powerful question which has set me thinking before. Howard Bloom sets out an essential challenge in a recent article entitled "Reinventing Capitalism – putting soul in the machine", in which he points to the way we have become so critical and unappreciative of our own civilisation, due partly to some of the negative spin-offs it has had, and in doing so have lost touch with the core of what we have developed. He invites us to stand up passionately for the deeper values we so often take for granted, quoting Paul Berman from the New York Times Sunday Magazine: "The terrorists speak insanely of deep things. ... [We] had better speak sanely of equally deep things".

In our development of powerful values such as freedom, opportunity and respect, we seem to have slipped into a sort of relativism that makes it very hard to stand up for anything. When respect means respecting each individual for their own truth regardless of how compassionate it may be, then we lose our moral compass. We don't feel we can stand up and proclaim the values we hold dear for fear of imposing ourselves on others and being branded "oppressive" or even "fascist" – a deadly weapon in the hands of the Politically Correct.

Well it's time to snap out of that reverie, and days like today are helping us to do that. If we do not start to "speak out sanely of equally

deep things” then we will be doomed to a sort of blandness that no aspiring and ambitious youngster is likely to be drawn to. We need to stop navel gazing and moaning about all that our materialist mindset has destroyed in this world, wallowing in a self-absorbed guilt that handily prevents us from standing up and taking responsibility for our own lives and that which we care about. We need to remember what the Enlightenment and Industrial Revolution liberated us from, remember the core values they represented, reconnect to them, and whilst facing clearly the excesses of the current system, redesign our way of life to take the best of the past with us into a more promising future that is worth shouting from the rooftops about. As Bloom says:

We have to retell the history of Western civilisation in a way that hints at the rich core beneath the slopes and plains of our history’s terrain. We have to peel back the lumpy outer skin of capitalism and show the beating heart within. A semi-brain-dead capitalism has given vast new powers to humanity – powers like the ability to light our homes at night with electricity and add five hours to the normal human’s working life. A capitalism that knows its mission, a capitalism propelled by the troika of empathy, passion, and reason, can work far greater wonders.

So do we really need to be ready to die for this? Yes, I would argue, but in quite a different way to how a fundamentalist / crusader would have us die. Whereas that pre-modern mindset requires physical death, there is even more power in an enlightened concept of dying to our identity with our individual separate selves, and surrendering to the being that we truly are – interconnected with all life at once, and a powerful individual expression of universal forces. In that perception, we are indeed no longer afraid of our physical death, as we understand it as just a change of state. We are released to be who we feel we truly are, and to stand for that which we feel is right at every moment. As Martin Luther said: “Here I stand. I can do no other.”

The clarity and passion that emerges from that space would be more than a match for the passion of the fundamentalist. It is the birth of a being that would not hesitate to use appropriate force to protect the flow of life as a whole. The picture is bigger, the context is clearer, the intervention is more focused and powerful. The consciousness matches the technology. How do we know this is different from the fundamentalist? We recognise in us the traces of our fundamentalist past, have embraced and reintegrated that energy, and both know and feel ourselves to be the whole that arises before us at every moment. In the same way that we might need to take an anti-biotic to knock

out a serious bug in our body, we also know that you sometimes have to knock out dangerous viruses in the planetary human body that we are.

Our challenge is to develop and manifest this consciousness before the passion of the fundamentalist / crusader meets the technology of the 21st century to potentially globally catastrophic effect. There's only one place to start, and that's with ourselves, in communities of others committed to the same journey – whichever specific path you choose. Just start. Never any guarantees, but there's nothing else to do – and who knows, maybe the bacteria will get us first anyway...

Peter Merry is the Co-Director of the Center of Human Emergence (Netherlands) – www.humanemergence.nl - and a Managing Partner of Engage! InterAct (www.engage.nu/interact)

The Hague, 7th July 2005

References

Howard Bloom, *Re-inventing Capitalism*, What is Enlightenment? Magazine, Issue 28, March-May 2005

Dr Don Beck, *The Global Great Divide* (see http://www.humanemergence.org/essays/the_global_great_divide.htm)