

Cultural Daily

Independent Voices, New Perspectives

Bridging the Chasm That Divides Us

Karen · Wednesday, October 14th, 2020

Unity is the only way we can keep our country from splintering. Reaching it is the challenge.

17 years ago I made the decision to leave religion. Although raised in it, it wasn't until I left the institution that I saw more clearly how others experienced it. Things like rigid thinking and an inability to understand or accept other points of views, excessive moralizing in the absence of love, and a need to convert those outside of the tribe.

As I've watched the [deepening polarization](#) of our country, I see the same "religion" cropping up in atheists, secular-leaning folks, and those on the far left. The same self-righteousness and hyper-judgement of people who don't fall in line with a particular set of beliefs.

This restrictive worldview is not the sole domain of religious fundamentalism. It is a part of humanity that surfaces across all ideologies and disciplines. If unchecked, it becomes a rigid block to understanding any perspective but your own

I recently reached out to an old friend on the other side of the aisle. We hadn't caught up in over a year, having moved to different geographic locations. I knew she didn't agree with many of my views. She'd felt the need to write me an email saying so after I wrote a blog post concerning the proposed wall with Mexico and advocated compassion for immigrants.

But, I had seen via social media that she'd recently launched a business and I wanted to send her a congratulatory message. I was happy for her success. Her email back was short and abrupt, almost curt. And no effort was made to reconnect or re-establish a sense of camaraderie.

I was saddened by this because I knew it wasn't just physical distance obstructing our connection. It was the radical division of our country into left and right, and the inability, or *unwillingness*, to find common ground. This dynamic was now rearing its head in what had once been a close friendship.

Exactly when did believing different things become an insurmountable barrier? And when did holding the same viewpoint become a prerequisite to relationship?

Plenty has been said about this. I recently watched the [Social Dilemma](#) on Netflix, followed by a PBS special examining the tribalization effects of social media (and Russia's [use of it](#) to skew our nation's responses towards divisive issues). Unfortunately, intellectual understanding alone has not kept the chasm from widening.

What will?

We can pontificate upon the underlying causes of our separation ad nauseam, but at the end of the day, the most fundamental thing we can exert control over is our own behavior. A mundane reality, yes, but surely an untapped one.

It's worth asking, repeatedly, how well we truly accept someone who believes the exact opposite of what we hold dear. Are we willing to entertain the idea that our particular views are not true for all people in all situations? And can we understand it is possible for someone who holds beliefs diametrically opposed to our own to be just as well meaning, earnest, and desirous of good for the world?

The only way forward is to put down the surety of our "rightness." We must lay down our arms and declare unity more valuable than conquering others with the validity of our viewpoint. We would be well served to consider humility an asset and practice loosening our own thinking whenever it drives a wedge between us and a fellow human.

Understanding and empathy are not signs of weakness. To the contrary, they are signs of true strength. They indicate a willingness to value "the other" above a need to assert our convictions. To elevate someone else's worth to match our own, regardless of ideology.

This is no easy feat. Perhaps it is why no one appears to be doing it. But it is the only option to keep us from fracturing. An "us over them" mentality may win in the short-term, but never in the long-term.

Let us do what is un-American and value the collective over our individual egos. It is the only way to take a step towards the dividing line that is tearing us apart.

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