

Growing Beyond an Egocentric Worldview

By T.Collins Logan

On this day, ten years after September 11, 2001, many memories rush to fill my mind. The disbelief when a friend called me to say “Turn on the TV, we’re being attacked!” The horror and sorrow at the sight of death, destruction and chaos in New York. The strange sense of disorientation and numbness in the days afterward, when the skies were silent of planes, and fear of further attacks saturated public discourse. A newly felt solidarity with other Americans that crossed all sociopolitical divides. A confusing mixture of anger, sorrow and embarrassment when people began driving around with American flags strapped high on their vehicles. So many emotions and images. But what percolates to the foreground of my thoughts over and over again these ten years later is that many of the cultural precursors to 9/11 – the attitudes and habits that created this horrible event – still exist in the world. And this inspires me to identify a path to growth and healing that begins to transform those attitudes and habits.

To achieve this, we first need a lens through which to evaluate events in different arenas of action. In Integral Lifework, one of the ways we can do this is to examine our individual and collective level of moral development. This provides a window into how we orient ourselves to the world around us, and how our identity is shaped by that relationship. The chart below, excerpted from the book *True Love*, outlines a progression of moral valuations and correlating self-concept, beginning with “egoless raw need” and ending in “applied nonduality.” This is just one way of looking at moral development, and I think there are even more subtle distinctions and stages to explore, but it provides a general framework by which we can measure our reality and plan our progress. For even though moral development is a naturally occurring process, we can also encourage this evolution by providing a supportive environment for growth. That is, in fact, one of the goals of Integral Lifework.

SELF-IDENTIFICATION	STRATA OF MORAL VALUATION
<p>Formless Infinite Self Equates both Being and Non-Being (or Non-Identification) and Compassionate Integration of All Other Self-Identifications</p>	<p>Applied Nonduality Translation of mystical, nondual consciousness into an unfettered fluidity of being, where loving kindness harmonizes with spiritual understanding; a persistent, all-inclusive love-consciousness that integrates previous value orientations and current intentions into a balanced, purposeful flow</p>
<p>All-Being Identification with Progressively Broader Inclusion of Consciousness & Being Together with All Supportive Systems</p>	<p>Spiritual Universality Through intimate connection with an absolute, universal inclusiveness of being, moral function is defined by a guiding intentionality of “the good of All” as revealed by a successive unfolding of spiritual awareness, intuition and dialectic processing</p>
<p>Shared Spirit Identification with All Beings as Defined by Shared Spiritual Understanding</p>	<p>Transpersonal Holism Appreciation and acceptance of pluralistic value system and the necessity of moral ambiguity – as guided by discernment of intentional, strategic outcomes that benefit the largest majority possible</p>
<p>Earth Life Identification with Every Living System on Earth – All Its Individual Components & Supportive Environments</p>	<p>World-Centric Appreciation and acceptance of interdependent, globally inclusive systems and the need for individual and communal responsibility with compassionate effort in support of those systems</p>
<p>Human Society Identification with All People Everywhere</p>	<p>Principled Rationalism Commitment to a clearly defined set of reasoned moral principles that intend to benefit all of humanity, with a corresponding individuation of identity from affiliative and beneficial communities</p>
<p>Affinitive Community Identification with All People Who Share the Same Values or Experience</p>	<p>Cooperative Communalism Acceptance of communal role and necessity of collaborative contribution to human welfare without a need for competition or positional authority, with facilitative conformance to a community’s shared values</p>
<p>Beneficial Community Identification with All People Who Benefit Each Other</p>	<p>Competitive Communalism Acceptance of communal role to participate in mutually beneficial community, usually in competition with others for personal positional power and influence, and without necessarily conforming to that community’s shared values</p>
<p>Committed Greater Self Acceptance of the Identify of “Self” as Larger Than Associations with Group(s) or Ideas</p>	<p>Contributive Individualism Fully individuated from tribe and committed to own well-being and wholeness, and interested in efforts that appear “good” or helpful to others as framed by (morally relativistic) individual experience and interaction</p>
<p>Tentative Greater Self Identification with a Possible “Self” Larger Than Associations with Group(s) or Ideas</p>	<p>Opportunistic Individualism In the process of individuating from tribe, morally adrift except for a sense of obligation to own well-being and wholeness, with minimal concern for the impact of that process on others</p>
<p>Secure Tribal Position Identification with “My People”</p>	<p>Defensive Tribalism Championing correctness of primary social group(s) and propagating the distinct definitions of rigid rules (law & order, right & wrong, black & white) of the group(s) defines most moral function</p>
<p>Insecure Tribal Position Identification with “The People I Want to be My People”</p>	<p>Tribal Acceptance Conformance with and approval or acceptance from primary social group(s) governs moral function; what is “right” or “wrong” is defined by what gains or loses social standing within the group(s)</p>
<p>Ego Identity Identification with Ego</p>	<p>Self-Protective Egoism Acquisitive, consumptive, hedonistic patterns to protect and sustain ego in a self-absorbed and self-centered moral orientation with</p>

	indifference to the needs of others, as moderated by fear of personal gains being lost
Formative Identity Developing Ego and Ego-Identity	Self-Assertive Egoism Aggressive promotion of own wants and whims above those of others as a moral imperative in most situations, as moderated by fear of personal pain or punishment
Unformed Identity	Egoless "Raw Need" Naïve state: volition is centered around unrestrained basic needs fulfillment in every moment

Now I think it is important to note that, whenever we inhabit a new stratum of moral valuation as a consequence of maturing and evolving, it takes time for this valuation to percolate through every aspect of our being and all the various types of interaction and relationship with the world around us. Our first changes in thought and behavior will occur in relationship to our immediate sense of self, and then slowly expand outward to touch wider and wider arenas of intention and action. We will see our intimate relationships transformed, then our interactions with immediate friends, then our interactions in the workplace and immediate community, then our habits of spending and consumption, then our political and social activism, and so on. Who and how we are in the world will correlate with how we identify with that world.

But why is it even necessary to evolve? I think 9/11 provides a stark reminder of how, when we are arrested in the earlier stages of moral development, it can have disastrous consequences for the human condition. One hallmark of an egocentric worldview is an attitude that when conditions I create to better my own situation injure or oppress other people, such consequences are beyond the scope of my moral interest or concern. In egocentrism, my main concern is for the well being of myself, my immediate family, and perhaps those who share egocentric values that mutually benefit my exclusive group – that is, that allow my clan or tribe to continue to succeed. Unfortunately, this orientation can infect several strata of moral valuation, from “Self-Assertive Egoism” all the way through “Cooperative Communalism.” It may express itself in different ways, but it is nevertheless present in these strata. But to illustrate the deleterious effect of this orientation, let’s take a look at some enduring examples that relate to what took place on 9/11.

Osama Bin Ladin, in his 1996 and 1998 Fatwas, various interviews and taped announcements, made it clear that Al Qaeda was rebelling against a perceived enrichment of the United States and its allies at the expense of entire Muslim populations. As Bin Ladin saw it, Muslims all around the globe were being oppressed, imprisoned and killed in order to maintain economic and military security for the U.S. The governments of many predominantly Muslim countries were accused of being complicit “puppets” in this assault on Muslim culture. Although cast in religious and racial rhetoric, Al Qaeda’s mission was mainly to disrupt the oppression, humiliation and povertization of Muslims by attacking the U.S. in various ways. These included boycotting American goods and services, destroying U.S. military targets, and killing American civilians.

Although the means Al Qaeda has used to combat U.S. influence is abhorrent, the oppressive tensions afflicting the Muslim world expressed themselves in many different ways prior to 9/11, and continue to do so today. It is important to note here that Islam is by no means homogenous, and the cultures in which Muslims live are equally diverse. But when we take a high altitude view of Muslim experiences around the globe, some patterns and parallels do emerge. There was the 1979 Iranian Revolution. The Palestinian Intifadas. The Chechen Wars. And most recently the Arab Spring – popular revolutions in Tunisia and Egypt, civil war in Libya, civil uprisings in Syria, Bahrain and Yemen, and protests in other Arab countries. Although the specific grievances vary from one era to the next and from one region to another, nearly all of them center around similar fundamentals. On the one hand, there is the desire for greater civil liberties (freedom of speech, assembly, religion, etc.), better economic opportunity, freedom from the oppressions of the ruling elite, or more participation in self-governance. On the other hand there is a belief that the U.S., its allies and its “puppet regimes” have consistently created obstacles to those privileges for Muslims. In some cases – as was true in Iran, and before that in Libya – the proposed solution has included eliminating U.S. cultural, economic and political influences and replacing them with strict, conservative Muslim religious law. This occurred mainly, I believe, because those preexisting organizations provided a “turn-key” solution for revising and replacing dysfunctional civic institutions – they already had banking systems, justice systems, security apparatuses and so forth

ready for deployment. In other cases – such as what seems to be evolving out of the Arab Spring – reforming or overthrowing regional governments and instating more democratic freedoms is the hopeful, but as yet unproven, remedy. In still other situations – such as in Chechnya and Palestine – efforts at political self-empowerment and liberation from poverty have, for the most part, failed.

But has the U.S. really been an exploiter, oppressor or puppet-master in the Muslim world? Certainly there is room for debate about the unique political, military and economic intentions in each circumstance, but the injurious outcomes to Muslim populations as a result of U.S. policies are painfully clear. The U.S. has certainly been a reliable supporter of Israel as it has expanded into the Occupied Palestinian Territory, waged war against Lebanon, and shot or bombed unarmed Gaza civilians in retaliation for Hamas' largely harmless missile attacks. At one time or another, the U.S. has supported and strengthened blatantly oppressive governments in Muslim countries, from the Shah of Iran's brutal dictatorship, to Saddam Hussein's megalomaniacal atrocities, to the "emergency law rule" of Hosni Mubarak. At different times, the U.S. has supported oppressive governments in Algeria, Nigeria, Pakistan, Indonesia, and throughout the Arab Peninsula – all with mainly Muslim populations. Further, when we look at U.S. reaction to the ethnic cleansing of Muslims in Bosnia-Herzegovina by Serbs in the 1990s, we see a shockingly sluggish effort to halt the genocide. By the time the U.S and NATO were substantially involved, tens of thousands of Muslims had already been killed or displaced. The U.S. similarly did little to intervene in Chechnya, where tens of thousands of Muslim rebels and civilians lost their lives. Nor did it make substantial or successful efforts to intervene in the genocide in Somalia, once again a mainly Muslim population. More recently the U.S. has also turned a blind eye to the plight of Muslims in Balochistan, who are being systematically kidnapped, tortured and murdered by the Pakistani military's security services.

Most of this history is of course staged against a backdrop of the U.S. pursuing its economic and military interests. The repeated decisions to ignore the plight of Muslims and support dictators who oppressed them were not unconsidered, but strategic. Some were made to counterbalance power and influences hostile to the U.S. – such as the

Soviet Union, Arab nationalists like Gamal Abdel Nasser and Muammar al-Gaddafi, and governments promoting Islamic revivalism such as post-revolutionary Iran. In cases like Somalia, they seem to have been made because there was an absence of any clear strategic benefit to intervene. In other situations, like Chechnya and Bosnia, there was the possibility of antagonizing a newly birthed relationship with post-Soviet Russia. In Pakistan there is the obvious importance of befriending a nuclear power in this volatile region, a power who also happens to allow us – albeit under protest – to conduct anti-terrorist military operations within its borders. And, of course, there is always the issue of oil.

The U.S. vulnerability due to its dependence on foreign oil became acutely evident during the 1973-74 Arab Oil Embargo. This embargo was a direct response to U.S. support of Israel at that time, and in particular weapons supplies to Israel during the Yom Kippur war, when Syria and Egypt launched an offensive to regain territory lost to Israel in the 1967 Six Day War. The embargo ended only when the U.S. secured a negotiated settlement in the Arab-Israeli conflict, and this set the stage for a central U.S. role in brokering peace agreements for years afterwards. This would eventually lead to the Camp David accords, and Egypt's Anwar Sadat and Israel's Menachem Begin sharing the Nobel Peace Prize in 1978. In 2002, Jimmy Carter would also be recognized – in part for his efforts at Camp David, but also for twenty years of other conflict resolution efforts – with a Nobel Peace Prize. Today, the tenor of relationship between the U.S., its European allies and the Middle East continues to be defined by the triangular tension of a steady dependence on Arab oil, a desire to maintain a positive relationship with Israel, and a strong, self-preservational inclination to maintain peace in the region at all costs.

However, we can also trace a “Christian West” being in conflict with a “Muslim Middle East and North Africa” quite a long way back into world history, with repeated holy wars – the crusades – occurring over some three hundred years of the Middle Ages. Long before oil became important, there was an apparent necessity to recapture Jerusalem and the Holy Land from Muslims on behalf of Christendom. As part of this effort, Christian crusaders also attacked Islamic cities in North Africa to prevent Saracen incursions into Europe and to strengthen the Christian hold on Palestine. Eventually Islam reasserted

itself with the rise of the Ottoman Empire, which held European influence at bay for some four hundred years, maintaining Islamic religious orthodoxy and sharia law along the way. By the 19th century, however, the dominance of European colonialism returned, and Christian missionaries with it. The Muslim world was gradually divided up and bordered according to Europe's political and economic whims. Even after the eventual liberation of these colonies and shifting of some of these borders, the arbitrary slicing up of geography with little regard for native ethnic, tribal and religious distinctions became a source of lasting conflict. Muslims were yet again subjected to a "Christian" rule that – whether it intended to or not – humiliated their cultures and opposed their beliefs.

Before the British relinquished their colonies, the British Mandate of Palestine went into effect in 1917, with its sympathetic view of a "national home for the Jewish people" in the Balfour Declaration. Because of this Mandate, and because of the increasing immigration of Jews from European countries who were persecuting them, the Christian West once more seemed to be imposing its will on Muslims. Riots and attacks on Jewish settlements in Palestine were common. As a final incendiary straw, the United Nations ratified a Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947, the first clearly defined boundaries for a proposed State of Israel. Once that happened, conflict between Arabs and Israelis intensified immediately, and, as the British presence finally withdrew, escalated into full scale war. This was Israel's War of Independence, the first of many in the Arab-Israeli conflict. Although the U.S. and Britain had banned arms sales to the Middle East at the time, U.S., Canadian and British WWII Veterans helped smuggle bombers out of Miami and England for Israel, and then fought for Israel during the war. Once Israel had defeated its Arab foes, European countries (West Germany and France) provided military hardware to Israel to help it defend itself, with the U.S. eventually taking on that responsibility. In 1967, the Six Day War became a proxy of the Cold War, with the Soviets supporting anti-Western Arab military forces and the U.S. backing Israel. By now, it was clear that Israel and the U.S. had become committed allies against Arab countries.

When taking all of this together and filtering it through a subjective Muslim perspective, it is not difficult to conclude that the U.S. has been just another part of a centuries-long

“crusade” against Islam. If not as a deliberate antagonist to Muslims in the Middle East and North Africa, then as a disinterested onlooker and military facilitator to their oppression, exploitation and humiliation. When combined with the presence of U.S. military bases in many Muslim countries, the conditions were ripe for some Muslims to embrace the Al Qaeda agenda as part of a justifiable jihad. So when the tragedy of September 11, 2001 occurred at the World Trade Center, the Pentagon, and Flight 93 as it flew towards the U.S. capitol, many compassionate Muslims were of course appalled and grief-stricken, and most Arab leaders condemned the attacks, but there was a diverse cross-section of the Muslim world who felt this attack was justifiable retaliation for centuries of violent invasion, subjugation and oppression of their culture. These were not arbitrary targets, after all, but emblems of commercial and military imperialism, and in the eyes of the oppressed this was just recompense for repeated imperialist “crusades.” Then, in an unfortunate choice of words, President George W. Bush repeatedly used the term “crusade” to describe his war on terror after the 9/11 attacks, further enhancing a perceived continuation of this historic clash of cultures.

Finally, almost as if to fulfill an imperialist stereotype, the U.S. unilaterally invaded Iraq on false pretenses, claiming Saddam Hussein was somehow linked with Al Qaeda and the 9/11 attacks, and further that Iraq had continued to develop weapons of mass destruction after the 1991 Gulf War and subsequent UN sanctions. Both of these claims have since been proven false, and in fact were well on their way to being proven false at the time of the U.S. offensive. I myself will never forget watching Joschka Fischer, the German Foreign Minister, desperately beseeching Donald Rumsfeld at a news conference for some sort of proof before the war. But the neoconservative Bush administration insisted on an immediate invasion without conclusive proof. If only America’s aggressive act could be excused as an angry, misinformed child lashing out after being wounded and aggrieved. But, on the contrary, it fits in neatly with previous efforts to conform many Islamic countries to America’s will. Once again, hundreds of thousands of innocent Muslim lives would be sacrificed so that the U.S. could exercise its domination. Regardless of the Iraq War’s strategic benefits – the removal of Saddam Hussein as a military loose canon in the region, the possibility of lucrative oil agreements for U.S.

companies and increased energy security, drawing Al Qaeda into a more direct confrontation, the continued thwarting of Iran's influence, etc. – it declared loudly and arrogantly that the U.S. had no need to placate the Muslim world, and would continue to oppress and exploit Muslim populations however it chose. It should be no surprise, then, that Islamist militants flocked to Iraq to join in battle with “The Great Satan,” nor that they continue to terrorize the Iraqi population in hopes of undermining U.S. influence there.

All of this history demonstrates various manifestations of egocentrism on a global stage. In an egocentric worldview, it is perfectly acceptable to subjugate other peoples, impose borders on their lands, convert their faiths, and make war on them for economic gain. In an egocentric worldview, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of Muslims is an acceptable tradeoff for U.S. security and economic stability. The U.S. seems to believe it has a right to indiscriminately consume over 25% of the oil produced on the planet, even though it represents only 4.5% of the world's population, and that America can and will defend this right by any means necessary. However the U.S. chooses to insulate and protect “the American way of life,” it does not seem to matter who gets caught in the middle. It doesn't even matter what the commodity is – if Americans want it and value it, then the military-industrial-congressional-financial complex will ensure that they receive it. Consider that coffee is the second largest U.S. import after oil, but that coffee farmers in developing countries are some of the poorest people on the planet. Like clothing sweat shops in Asia, Central America and South America, or poverty and pollution in the oil-rich Niger Delta, or violence and child labor in the diamond mines of the Congo, or the devastation of anyone else for the benefit, comfort and pleasure of the U.S. population...it's just, well, a cost of doing business. So when innocent Muslims suffer at the hands of oppressive regimes that the U.S. supports, or allies that the U.S. protects, or economic and military policies that the U.S. executes, that is just a necessary sacrifice for America's self-centered view of success. And as long as Americans continue to consume so extravagantly within an egocentric bubble, these abuses and inequities will continue; people will suffer and die, and whole populations will continue to resent the United States as an understandable consequence.

We can also evaluate other prominent characteristics of egocentrism and arrive at similar conclusions. Egocentrists don't like to play by the rules, don't like to be held accountable for their actions, and don't like to admit to any weakness or mistake. After all, they, their family and their tribe are the only people who matter in a given situation. So of course they only appreciate strong government and the rule of law when it benefits their interests. They don't want to be taxed, but would prefer to keep the money for themselves. They don't believe in social welfare programs as long as they can remain in a privileged class. They refuse to recognize the horrific impact of industry on natural environments, human health, other species and global climate if it might have a negative impact on their personal wealth or freedom of choice. And while they don't like to be told what to do themselves, egocentrists are happy to lord it over people who aren't in their tribe. For example, those "others" who can't get married because they are gay, or can't have certain reproductive rights because they're female, or aren't allowed to receive education or medical care because they are illegal immigrants. In an egocentric worldview, it is completely acceptable to hold others accountable while avoiding responsibility for our own behaviors. It is reasonable to insist that I can own any sort of gun I please, and kill other people with it in situations I deem to be self-defense, while at the same time asserting that you not be allowed to smoke Marijuana, no matter how harmless that bit of weed may be, or that you a lesser human being because of your sexual orientation or immigration status. In an egocentric world, the standards are always double, the contradictions always plentiful, the hypocrisy always rife, and the harm always enduring.

A Solution

Now that we have identified some of the pitfalls of an egocentric worldview, what is a solution? How can we mature and evolve past this phase of moral development? In Integral Lifework, the answer is multidimensional nourishment. When every aspect of our being is nurtured in a balanced and sustainable ways, this stimulates healing, growth and transformation. Multidimensional nourishment creates supportive structures for

growth in every dimension, with each aspect of self supporting every other. These aspects include our physical body, our mental activity, our emotional self, our social interactions, our sense of purpose, our spiritual grounding, our overall confidence and self-concept, our memories, our sexuality, the flexibility of our consciousness, the legacy we leave behind, and the integrity of our actions with who we are. All twelve centers of nourishment are described in the Integral Lifework Overview, and in much more detail in *True Love*. They work together to strengthen our being and enrich our life, so that we can then enrich the world around us. The nurturing of these aspects occurs first in ourselves, and then ripples outwards from us into ever-widening arenas of interaction. What begins as personal transformation amplifies into relational transformation, societal transformation, global transformation.

The first steps are surprisingly simple. First we inventory our self-nourishment efforts in each of Integral Lifework's twelve dimensions of self, to better understand what is in balance and what is depleted. Next we uncover why certain dimensions have been neglected or undernourished – to identify barriers to well-being and harmony within ourselves – and begin to remedy those imbalances. After that, we can consciously accelerate the nurturing of every dimension of self to a healthy and sustainable baseline. Then, as we continue to fine tune harmony and forward momentum, we can effortlessly expand that harmony into the world around us. None of this requires affluence, or an above-average IQ, or any special situational advantage. It just requires a little bit of willingness, some conscious intention and awareness, and a genuine and disciplined effort to follow through. All the power and knowledge and potential is already there inside of us, all we need are some tools to help us access that inner Light, and the courage to embrace what we encounter along the way.

Is there a clearly identifiable correlation between nourishing the twelve dimensions and advancing through successive strata of moral development? Yes, because the heart of all integral practice is compassion. And that compassion wants to grow, it innately desires to amplify itself. So we begin by developing compassion for each dimension, and then

discover we have ever-increasing compassion for everything and everyone. It's how we are wired, and every aspect of our being already knows that its energies are just variations of love, like voices that compliment each other to form a soaring chorus. Moral development is really a recognition of this truth as it applies to more and more inclusive conceptions of self. As a result, we relinquish previous, fearful and self-protective modes of being, and embrace each new horizon without hesitation. We exercise greater empathy and affection not because we project it outward, but because we welcome others into our most intimate circle – into our generosity of spirit and goodwill. Even as we do this, multidimensional nourishment supports us, creating a firm foundation for our ongoing healing, growth and transformation. There is also a skillfulness component as we mature – so that we can be wiser and more effective in our thoughts and actions – but that skill will always be subjugated to the guiding force of compassion. Love remains the magnetic North of our moral compass no matter how widely we travel.

There is more to this of course. There is an entire system of theory and practice behind these simple steps. But the point is to begin. To begin to care beyond ourselves. To begin to grow beyond our perceived limitations. To begin to improve our own lives and the lives of everyone around us in purposeful ways. It is likely that our progress will come in fits and starts, that parts of our lives will expand while others contract, and that we will need to integrate painful realities as we heal and grow. But once we begin the benefits of our efforts will sustain us and spur us onward. Once we have experienced what real nourishment tastes like, there is no turning back. That is the promise and challenge of Integral Lifework, and this is why we will inevitably arrive at each successive strata of moral development. To move beyond an egocentric worldview is simply to let go of an insecure, self-protective reflex and embrace a larger, more generous universe of compassionate being. As an experiential truth this can only be validated through practice, through being and becoming, but no amount of logic or persuasion can unlock the front door of this palace. The door is there before us, and the tools to help, and plentiful maps, and enough Light to beckon us inside and guide us. So there is always opportunity, and always hope, but first we must begin.

The horrific loss of life on 9/11 should never be forgotten. The stunning heroism and sacrifice of first responders and ordinary citizens should also remain indelible in America's memory. At the same time, we should also remember that the U.S. bears no small responsibility for inciting the anger, shame and hatred that fueled the 9/11 hijackers to commit such heinous acts. Our callous disregard for impairing the freedoms of others beyond our borders, and our tolerance for the tremendous suffering and loss of human life incurred to sustain our standard of living, have created a storm of resentment and rebellion that will continue to express itself if Americans do not curb their appetites and abandon their indifference. But there is a way out, and that is through transcending a self-absorbed, egocentric ignorance about the consequences of our consumerist culture. By maturing to a new self-awareness, by arriving at a more inclusive vista of humanity and a more compassionate role as part of the human experience, we will heal all wounds within and without. The first effort along this path is to achieve balanced and harmonious multidimensional nourishment – after that, the journey never ends, but we will gain courage and resilience through the breathtaking views and surprising insights at each new turn along that winding road.

