

Documents from the front line

This section, an ongoing feature of the journal, is intended to include material of a non-academic, practical and immediate nature, representing ongoing psychopolitical process – including manifestos, course handouts, leaflets, petitions, round-robins and ephemera of all kinds. All contributions will be gratefully received.

AN OPEN LETTER TO THE PRESIDENT

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Dear President Bush

First, we would like to introduce ourselves to you. We are 75 and 65 years old and both of us are psychotherapists, writers, and consciousness teachers. We have over 90 years of combined experience working with people in many different settings and in many nations around the world. We have written five books together and one each separately. These have been translated into seven languages. We have five children, three grandchildren and a number of cats. We tell you all this simply to establish the fact that we are thoughtful, professional, competent people who have lived full lives and have experienced a great deal in this world – both separately and as partners.

We are not usually alarmists, but as professionals who have worked with people all our lives, we are gravely concerned about the current world situation and we feel that

this is a very special time. What happens now will carry consequences for many years to come. We have seen conflicts before in our lives; conflicts that looked extremely dangerous; but now we observe a frighteningly intense degree of worldwide polarization that seems to be accelerating at an ever-increasing speed. It is to the issue of this polarization that we wish to speak.

As the President of the United States you can feel this ever-intensifying polarization. The world leaders seem to be dividing into those who are with you and those who are against you. This letter is about what we feel can be done to begin to neutralize this polarization.

It takes immense courage to change one's consciousness, or way of being in the world. It often requires a crisis of major proportions to push people into this kind of change process; a major illness or accident that forces us to look at the possibility of

dying, a threatened divorce, financial reverses, or serious trouble with the law. We each have a choice about how to respond to the crisis. We are challenged to separate from our usual way of being in the world, broadening our view, and embracing something new.

From what you have said about your life, you have already gone through one major change of consciousness. All those years ago when you stopped drinking and changed the way you lived your life, you actually changed your consciousness for the first time. We do not know what crisis precipitated your change then, but something did. You rose to the occasion and you met the challenge successfully. Now it seems that you are being challenged to change again.

A change in consciousness – as you already know – results in a change in all our relationships. It changes our relationship to ourselves, to our families, and to our God. The same is true with nations. On an international level we are now experiencing just such a major crisis. This can bring change or it can bring war and catastrophe. The question is whether we can use this crisis to develop real wisdom, or whether it must automatically polarize the world into war.

We do not think that war is always wrong; there are times when it is the only solution to a problem. But those times are few and far between. Our concern is that the movement into war should be a thoughtful one in which the alternative of peace is also carefully considered. Our concern is that in the current situation the world has become so intensely polarized (an old pattern of behavior that divides the world into good guys and bad guys; with ourselves always being the good guys) that we are being led to act in a way that we will regret later after

the smoke clears and we see what we have done.

In our work, we call this ‘the slap’. When we look at something from only one point of view – from one part of ourselves – we literally cannot see any other. Later, when we realize that there was an opposite point of view; when we see what it was that we overlooked; we feel as though an opposite part of us has slapped us.

President Bush, what is most worrisome to us about you and your staff is your contribution to this polarization. In the history of the world, this kind of thinking has led to the most horrific behavior. When the polarization was at its height, the behavior seemed quite reasonable. But when people looked back at what was done, and with the help of others viewed the behavior with different and wiser eyes, they could see the ways in which the passion of polarization had blinded them.

Every day that passes someone in your administration reminds us that some person or some other country is evil. Using language such as the ‘axis of evil’ comes from a part of us that sees us as being good and living lives of righteousness and all darkness as living ‘out there’ in the world. That part of us doesn’t realize that each of us has darkness and evil – as well as good – within. It doesn’t realize that the battle on the outside is a reflection of the battle that we all must wage within our own souls.

We are less concerned about the issue of whether we go to war than we are about the issue of what parts of you and what parts of Mr Rumsfeld are moving us towards this war. What we hear from your core administrative group is a constant barrage of emotionally charged judgments of others. In psychological terms, you are disowning your own evil and projecting it out onto the world around you. This makes us

more and more distrustful of your judgment, and makes us wonder about which selves are operating in you in such an ‘automatic pilot’ kind of thinking and reacting.

This is having a terrible effect on much of the world. It pulls forth an equal and opposite reaction in others. The more they look evil to you, the more you look evil to them. It is a mathematical relationship. It is evenly balanced. It is a recipe for disaster!

Something happened to you on September 11, 2001 that we don’t think you understand. Something that felt wonderful. On that day you were taken over by the hero archetype. Throughout history this archetype has operated in many people. This archetype acts like an infusion of super-powerful energy. It gives us the power to do very heroic things. It is a part of us – or a self – that comes from a different place in the psyche, from a different place in the brain. It is like a psychological instinct.

The hero archetype doesn’t just operate in presidents and generals. It can help anyone behave heroically in life. It helped our firefighters and policemen on September 11th. It can help any of us get through a difficult time or help us work long hours for a new idea or cause. It can help us do things that go against our fears. These are the good sides of the hero archetype. Clearly after 9/11 you became stronger as you were carried more and more by this kind of archetypal energy. It made you stronger and it gave you the power to lead us. It was a wonderful gift to you and to our country!

The down side of this energy is that it isn’t personal. It gives us the hero’s strength but not always the wisdom to balance it. We often tend to run over people when this power is operating in us because we feel

only the power and we no longer feel our own vulnerability. That is the key issue of the dark side of the hero archetype. We lose our vulnerability! We have to do things more and more heroically.

Being identified with the heroic energy is very heady stuff and it usually starts out well. But it often goes sour as time passes because we lose clarity when we are in the hands of this archetype and the super-hero energy continues to rush through us. Our colleagues get caught up in this as well; the same hero myth gets activated in them and serves their own power needs. It is to their advantage to support this archetype in you and they just add fuel to the fire.

There are many archetypes waiting to jump into the driver’s seat of our ‘psychological cars’ and run our lives for us, especially when our situation is dangerous. It seemed to us that about a year after 9/11 a new energy began to take over in you and join with the energy of the existing hero system. This new archetype is ‘The Savior’. It has a distinctly religious quality. The Savior must save the people from evil. There is evil and darkness in the world and some one or some group must save the world from this evil. This archetype would make you feel that you are the anointed and appointed son (or daughter) of God whose job it is to rectify this dangerous situation. This puts us back to the days of the crusades and a holy war.

Now we know that there are some very dark forces in the world today and we feel you are being completely honest and sincere in your desire to do good and chase away evil. Here, though, we have a problem and a very big problem at that. We have been psychotherapists and teachers for 90 years between us. Both of us led complex lives before we met and they have become even more complex during the past 30 years of our time together.

We have had the opportunity – the profound privilege – of working with the human soul in hundreds upon hundreds of clients. We have worked with their dreams, with their fantasies, with their depressions and rage and anger and love and lust and heroism and greed and warlike nature and loving sensitivity. I wish we could share with you, President Bush, some of these dreams and inner realities.

Do you know what our conclusion has been to all this? Our conclusion is that it is all inside as it is all outside. Each human being is a microcosm of the macrocosm. Just as in our world there is good and evil and light and dark, so it is within the human psyche. Our conclusion is that each one of us lives with a most amazing combination of good and evil. And each one of us is challenged to deal with this on an inner level as best we can, so that we do not add our disowned evil to the very real evils outside of us, causing them to spiral out of control. That is the work we are challenged to do and that is the work you are challenged to do.

Saddam Hussein is a man ruled by dark forces. We have no issue with that. Our deepest concern however is not the Saddam Hussein that lives in the world. It is the Saddam Hussein that lives in the hidden recesses of your own heart, of our own heart, in everyone's heart. If we don't ultimately recognize that this kind of energy lives in each of us, we keep projecting it on the outer Husseins and this makes it impossible to deal with the darkness in the world in any way other than war.

We are afraid of what is happening now! But we are not afraid primarily because of the prospect of war. We lived through World War II and the Korean conflict where Hal was a psychologist treating casualties from this war. Sidra worked in

the Veterans Association, treating veterans from as far back as WWI. We lived through the Cold War, the Chinese intervention during the Korean conflict, the Cuban missile crisis, Russia exploding the 50-megaton bomb, Vietnam, and Desert Storm. We lived through 9/11. We have seen many frightening times. We are much less afraid of war than we are afraid of the total projection of darkness and a narrowing of perspective.

We are concerned that the Savior and Hero archetypes are increasingly dominating your life and that our world is being led into a holy war that we don't want and that we fear will end very badly.

We are concerned that you have lost contact with your vulnerability and that you are unable to feel the consequences of what is being unleashed. We are concerned that you listen only to people who agree with your way of looking at things and that you are becoming increasingly unable to feel other possibilities. We are concerned that a savior mentality is becoming ever more deeply involved in your decision making process and – perhaps – that of your administration.

What can any of us do? What do we ask of you? What do we ask of ourselves? One of the strongest indications of a mature personality is the ability to stand between the opposite viewpoints in conflict situations and to be able to hold both when making decisions. This doesn't mean that we become passive in the way we conduct our life.

It also doesn't mean that we don't have an ethical or moral sense! It means that we are able to feel the two sides of a situation. We must still ultimately make a decision about the situation. But the decisions we make are not made on 'automatic pilot', the decisions we make come from a deeper and wiser place within.

This is the reason – at least theoretically the reason – why executives have a board of directors and an advisory board. The idea is to get a broad range of differing (often intensely opposing) input from people. Then, after assimilating this information, the executive is better prepared to act and make the best decision possible.

This works in personal relationships as well. We have learned in our own lives that when one of us has a negative reaction to the other person we must stop and take that seriously. It is essential that I (Hal) feel the feelings that Sidra has and it is essential that I (Sidra) feel the feelings that Hal has. Either of us might still do what we originally intended to do, but by feeling the reality of the other person's point of view, our decision to act is made in relation to the other person.

Your decisions recently have moved farther and farther away from what we are recommending. You sound increasingly black and white on all issues. Not only don't you seem to care how other people feel but, instead, you seem to thrive on how tough you are and how little you do care.

This is why you are alienating so many people. People feel that you don't care, that you are going through the motions of debate with no awareness whatsoever as to what others are feeling. We honestly believe that if you took a vote, even amongst the non-Muslims of the world, you would find that more people are more worried about your warlike tendencies than about Saddam Hussein's. This does not have to do with your clear desire to go to war. It is because people feel that you do not give serious consideration to other points of view. And so they react to you as though you were a bully rather than a wise leader of a great nation.

If we must go to war, let it not be an action dictated by the archetype of a hero living out a John Wayne fantasy. Let the decision come from a wisdom, a depth, and a maturity that the world can respect.

We would like to make the following recommendations to you to help slow down this polarization process:

1. Spend some time alone. Try to get away from the constant pressure of the same voices that you listen to day in and day out.
2. Spend some quiet time with your wife. Listen to her. We suspect that she would have some interesting things to say.
3. Bring in some advisors that are different from the ones you have. Listen to this other feedback in addition to what you already have received.
4. Put a moratorium on public statements that are inflammatory in nature from any of your administration people. This would be particularly true of Secretary Rumsfeld who is one of the most polarizing politicians we have ever known. And this would include you because you have become increasingly polarized. Please think before you make any more inflammatory statements.
5. Pay attention to your dreams. What are they saying to you?
6. Pray for wisdom! Being wise is as important as being heroic. Being wise means that you are able to live with ambiguity; that you are able to feel the opposites in all the issues and conflicts that come your way.
7. Please catch hold of the hero/savior archetypal drama that is playing out within you. If you want to really be truly wise, you will begin to recognize that the war between good and evil is playing out inside you and inside all of us all the

time. The inner Saddam Hussein, the inner anti-Christ, is an archetypal energy that we must all deal with from the day we are born until the day we die. It is all inside you and us. Shooting the bad guy outside doesn't make it go away on the inside.

8. Please recognize that a 51–49% split doesn't mean that you win. It simply means that you have split the country in two and the polarization you have created will haunt you forever. We trust that there is a way for you to make this a win/win situation for the two sides.

These are the things that we ask you to do. Here is what we will do from our side:

1. We will do our best not to polarize against you, but will use any differences of perspective as a way of learning more about ourselves.
2. Whenever we begin to polarize against you, we will try to understand what it is that you are carrying that is disowned in us. We will 'step into your shoes' and stay there until we see your viewpoint. For instance, since you so desperately want to go to war, we will find that part of us that wants war and would like to eliminate Saddam Hussein from the face of the earth.
3. When we find ourselves polarizing

against the fundamentalist nature of your administration, we will examine this issue and try to make contact with our own fundamentalist nature. We will look at the world through the eyes of the fundamentalist part of ourselves.

4. When we find ourselves polarizing against the way in which you manipulate people by making them more vulnerable, we will examine our own manipulative selves. We will see how they operate in the world, and particularly how they operate in relationship to vulnerability.
5. We will continue to watch our own dreams and see what they have to say to us.
6. We, too, will pray for wisdom.

We are realists and we have no serious expectation that you will read this letter or answer it, but it was important for us to write it. If, by any chance, you should care to respond to this letter we want to make ourselves available to you or to anyone in your administration you would think appropriate. We would like to do whatever we personally can at this pivotal point in history.

Sincerely yours,
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