

Weekly Teaching

August 31, 2018

Michael Angell saw the bright orange safety cones during an Ultimate Frisbee game. It amounted to a small marvel; seeing the extraordinary in something ordinary. But he saw it; like a poet perceives nature, “I can see the cones” was what he said when he viewed the wonder that was the color orange.

Michael Angell has suffered from color blindness his whole life. To go from not knowing what green, or red, or blue look like, to distinguishing them, must have truly been an experience of delight.

Don McPherson, a materials scientist, worked with two of his colleagues to engineer laser safety eyewear for surgeons that would help to distinguish human anatomy. During an Ultimate Frisbee game, Don loaned a pair of these glasses to his friend and teammate, Michael Angell, and a miracle of a change of perception occurred.

For all of us, when our perception undergoes changes and our horizons widen, our world and those we share our lives with become a delight to be discovered.

If we examine our biases, and as much as possible refresh our outlook with a new lens of empathy and understanding, we may achieve days with inner peace.

In examining our own biases, we should not forget our biases toward self. Many of us have harsh judging voices of indictment toward ourselves, hearing things like “you’re not good enough” or “you’re not worthy” in our minds. The self-condemnations not only hurt us; they tint how we see other people, and how we relate with them. They even impact how we live and how we love.

There is a story that’s about an African tribe that deals with wrongdoing in a way different than our society.

It is said that the tribe puts the wrongdoer in the center of a circle formed by the whole tribe. For two days, the tribe tells the wrongdoer good things about themselves. The tribe believes that people are good and they do wrong when they are disconnected from their good nature, so in this way, the tribe reconnects the errant member to their good nature.

A similar homily is told of how war was ended among ancient people of Alaska.

500 years before outsiders came to Alaska, there was a fierce Yupik warrior called Aganupik who was known as the bravest of his time. He lived during misery and war. Tribes fought daily shedding blood across the tundra. The Yupik tribe lived in underground homes to shelter from the cold. If they lit fires, another roving tribe would smell the fire and attack the Yupik people. They became afraid to light fires and sat alone in the cold darkness.

Aganupik predicted a life of constant war that would never be won. He announced that he would put down his harpoon, and never use it to kill another person. His people were shocked but they followed his example. They found new ways to disagree. All would gather and they would do singing and dancing contests and clever quips in front of everyone else to settle disputes. Now Alaskan people know peace.

Whether we war on another person with insult and hurt, or we war on another people, or even war within ourselves, our biases or indictments could instead become strengths if they are viewed with a new lens.

In recognizing our weaknesses, our wrongdoings and our behaviors hurt others, our small and large wars can become our strengths. It is not a trick of perception or a justification for biases, but a humble enlightenment. We nurse our biases. We reinforce our own blindness to other people. We also nourish our biases toward ourselves, whether they are critical or vain.

Like the color blind who realize they don't know color, we allow our own biases to spread like dust on a window pane that obscures our true view.

The delight of seeing true color and the delight of sharing true connection awaits us if we keep mindful of our biases and blindness. Each day we can become the active, open-minded, engaging people we hope to be.

The High Holy Days are approaching when we are again afforded the opportunity to take stock of our lives.

There's a powerful poem/lyric that echoes in my mind as I am "taking stock" of my life, my relationships, my growth. It is from a musical score of an early Helen Hunt movie called *Then She Found Me*. The lyrical poem describes life; the fantasy, the experience, the bruising, the buoying. This echoing song was written by Jon Leventhal and Shawn Clovin called *I'll Say I'm Sorry Now*.

The specific words that I often recall are the following, like a prayer to God:

*I'm gonna let you down
I know that now.*

*Make you cry,
I know, I will.*

*Why should you believe
I would never leave,
Or that I love you, still?*

*For all the Bye and Bye
And hard as we try,*

The bough breaks and the cradle falls...

*For everything I do
That tears at you*

Let me say I'm Sorry, Now...

And in Love and War

Through the rush and roar...

Let me say I'm Sorry, Now.

My prayers for us all—A Happy, Healthy & Peaceful New Year!

Shabbat Shalom,
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