



Integrity Grows From A Humbling Realization, by Mark Gerzon

"The purpose of life is ... to know oneself. We cannot do so unless we learn to identify ourselves with all that lives." -- Mohandas K. Gandhi. I have never seen a conflict in which everyone could see the whole. On the contrary, I have only experienced conflicts in which some, and usually all, of the "part-ies" were identified with the "part." They were, literally, "partisan." This is the basic human condition, the natural worldview of organisms that are born, live and die as seemingly separate entities. When our bodies shout "Me first!" -- we listen. We are wired to survive, and to put our survival before others (an instinct which can be trumped by only one other: protecting our offspring). As a natural extension of our survival instinct, we tend to care more about the welfare of those near and dear to us than those who are, by whatever definition, far away. Our language provides convenient words for each: the first we call "us;" the latter, "them." The challenge of integrity -- or integral vision, which literally means "seeing" or "holding" the whole -- is to balance this very natural allegiance to the part ("partisan") with an allegiance to what it is but a part of. [...] This intention toward integrity -- from the Latin integer, meaning "undivided, untouched whole -- is our first, critical step toward transforming conflict. Because of our commitment to "hold" or to "see" the whole conflict, we can become part of the solution to the conflict rather than just adding our energy to it. [...] Integrity grows out of the humbling realization that there are many ways of seeing the world, and that we cannot take our worldviews for granted. Doing so blinds us to the possibility that our worldviews may be incomplete, skewed or -- to oversimplify -- "wrong." If this is so, then no matter how noble our intentions may be ("freeing the people," "creating jobs," "protecting human rights," etc.), everything we do will backfire. --Mark Gerzon