Exploring the Diversity and Spiritualty Connection

By

Angelo John Lewis

If there was one thing was apparent from the recent U.S. election, it’s that many of us live in silos.

By silos, I don’t mean the structures on farms for holding grains, but what Wikipedia defines as “information silos” -- insular management system incapable of reciprocal operation with other, related information systems.

There’s good news and bad news about living within silos.

On the plus side, silo-dwellers are more likely to be living alongside those who speak the same language and live by the same codes. On the minus side are the difficulties they have in productively interacting with those who may have different value systems or communication styles.

At best, cross-silo relationships tend to be warily tolerant and hands-off. At worse, they are totally adversarial. People talk past one another, and see those that aren’t like them as “other” – a group whose very existence poses an existential threat to their own.

Although it looks like the world is currently dominated by adversarial silos, there’s a contravening tendency that’s easy to overlook.

That’s the tendency towards universalism, driven at least in part by globalization and advances in information technology.

More than any time in history, there’s a growing cadre of people who more or less share the same values, are as much attuned to global trends as they are to what’s going on in their neighborhood. They are more universally oriented and less likely to take their counsel from the insular demands of their tribal tradition.

This cadre of people are inwardly directed, in the sense that the authority they respond to comes from within. Their relationship with authority is 180 degrees different than their tribal brethren, who adhere to the demands of outward authority, whether stemming from lineage, tradition or dogma.

But those who travel an inward directed path face challenges that are fundamentally different from those who do not. They lack the easy, pre-constructed sense of family of the tribally oriented and instead are inclined to pursue community through interaction with others who, while sharing universal values, have different identities and beliefs.

A positive side of this pursuit is a redefinition of “the Other.” Whereas the tribal group encounters the Other with wariness, the inward directed group tends to view interactions with others as essential aspects of growth. They know intuitively that each person is part of an all-encompassing whole and represents a piece of the larger puzzle. Each new encounter presents an opportunity to expand and transcend the limitations of the siloed self.

Of course, most of us have both tribal and inward-directed aspects within us. The trick is developing the fluidity to move between both worlds and to have compassion to whoever is encountered wherever they are on the continuum.

So what does all this have to do with diversity and spirituality?

From this perspective, both are sides of a single coin. The diversity aspect is the honoring of individual and group level differences. Spirituality is the belief that even though we express different identities, we are all part of an all-encompassing whole. Exploring how these factors influence one another is the work of the Diversity and Spirituality Network.

In my view, we are currently in the midst of a major transformation from tribal values to universal ones. It may take a generation or two for this transformation to be complete. In the meantime, we can practice what it means to be inward directed in an interconnected world.