Anger-Fueled Suicides – A Society Without Dreams

Contributed by Sharif Abdullah
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[Editor's note:
The onslaught from industrialized, militarized society, where the vast majority is in some kind of "free slavery," is even worse than Sharif Abdullah identifies in his latest Currents and Futures column which follows. But he's right on target, pardon the expression.

As for me,

I Am Untamed

I Am Not In A Zombie Majority

Nature Is The Only Reality

In other words: heck, may as well enjoy yourself and not hurt anybody. Sorry if you don't like my speaking up, but we can share the favor of tolerating our peaceful attempts to communicate and live. Tanx, not tanks, in advance.

- Jan Lundberg, www.CultureChange.org, www.SailTransportNetwork.org]

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[Someone once said that my writings were “too negative”. He said, “It seems like Sharif is the only one at the party not having any fun.”

Then, someone walks into an elementary school and opens fire. And it doesn’t look like a party anymore.

I started writing this article with the Oregon Mall shooting on Tuesday. It is based on an article I wrote on the Kip Kinkel shootings, 14 years ago. I then had to modify it with today’s shootings in Connecticut. I wonder if I’ll get this posted before it happens again…

I’ve been saying the same thing for over 20 years. I really wonder if we’re ever going to pay attention to the real issues…

Sharif]

Anger-Fueled Suicides: A Roll Call of Infamy:

" Adam Lanza (Sandy Hook Elementary), 26 dead, unknown number of wounded. Suicide.

&#8226 ;Jacob Roberts (Clackamas Mall), 2 dead, 1 wounded. Suicide.

" James Holmes (Aurora Mall), 12 dead, 59 wounded. Captured alive.

" Wade Page (Sikh Temple), 6 dead, 4 wounded. Suicide.

"Harris and Klebold (Columbine High School), 13 killed, 21 injured. Double suicide.

" Kip Kinkel (Springfield High School), 2 dead, 24 wounded. Captured alive.

Unless we start doing things differently, the list will get longer. For every shooter that acts, there are 100, or 1,000, who are suiting up and getting their guns. Unless we respond to the real motivations, the real pain, generated by a society that does not work, these anger-fueled suicides will become as common as traffic jams.

Who is to blame? They certainly did not start out bad. These shooters, in 16 to 20+ years, went from being cuddly, happy, laughing babies and smiling children to homicidal and suicidal maniacs. WHAT HAPPENED?

They committed these acts because they were starved. Soul starved.

Starved, not in the sense of lacking food, but in the sense of an inability to obtain the real nutrition they needed – emotional and spiritual. In reading his tortured journal excerpts (published in a local newspaper), it was clear to me that Kip Kinkel had the experience of constant soul pain, a profound aloneness, a pain that we find hard to identify but is none the less real.

He didn't start off life as a psychotic. None of them did. They don't have "bad genes". They were in pain, dying inside from a lack of experience of the Transcendent.

No, I don't mean that they needed to go to church, or read a particular holy book. The Transcendent is all around us – and our children are not taught how to connect with it. When I say that the shooters lack the Transcendent, I mean:

" A lack of experiences of community with other beings, including but not limited to other human beings.

" A lack of experiences of depth, of meaning. Moving through the ordinary world, but not having an awareness of beauty, of love, of meaning, of aliveness — inherent in everyday activities.

" A lack of awareness of Life and Death. A knowing that goes beyond Hollywood movies and first-person shooter video games.

" The lack of a Dream – not just the sleeping kind, but being aligned with a concept, an idea that goes beyond your personal life.
The shooters were in pain. Soul pain is real. Our culture, in its ignorance of spirit and soul, cannot recognize their pain (and society's role in causing it). Soul pain is real and important — obviously, it is more important than life itself for those who suffer it.

THEY DON'T NEED "THERAPY". They don't need pharmaceuticals. They don't need counseling in how to function in a dysfunctional society. This is not a "mental health" issue. This is a societal health issue.

I say this from experience. I was clearly in the single digits when I recognized that something was fundamentally wrong with the world. Like the shooters, I had no language to articulate the emptiness that sat in my chest like a gaping hole, the sense that I was in the world completely alone.

Unlike the shooters, I was lucky. Part of my “luck” was being raised poor and black in Camden, NJ, America’s underbelly. Being raised in the Sixties, a time of “black consciousness”. I could label the emptiness in my chest “racism”, and therefore had a focus for my anger and rage.

The shooters, raised as white, heterosexual, middle-class males living in middle-class towns, had no readily available labels for their anger. They had no focus for the emptiness, the gaping holes in their chests. They had no consciousness movement. They had no ideology. There was nowhere for the emptiness and anger to go – but out. (Important note: The labels are irrelevant. There was NO DIFFERENCE between my emptiness and that of the shooters. They just had different presenting symptoms and different explanations for their behavior. Or, no explanations at all. Trying to put labels on societal emptiness (calling it “racism” or “sexism” or “mental illness”) simply continues the problem.)

Societal Dreaming…

It is important for us to dream. Research has shown that if a person is denied dreams, they go psychotic really, really quickly. We live in a psychotic society because we have been denied our communal dreams. We’ve been denied the dreams that we hold in common, we have been denied our experience of Transcendence.

At one point, our societal dream was called “The American Dream”. That dream has become a fantasy, obtainable only by ignoring the suffering of others. Our young people know this. Even though the American Dream is dysfunctional, we haven’t replaced it with anything. Not having a “life dream” is debilitating… ESPECIALLY FOR MEN. Without a dream, you are just going through the motions of living.

It is important for us to experience Transcendence. We feel the yearning for us to become a part of something larger than who we think we are; we feel the yearning to become MORE. That yearning is what I call a “spiritual hunger.” That hunger for the Sacred is a good thing.

The “Hunger for the Sacred” is the thing that drives us to community with each other. The “Hunger for the Sacred” is the thing that drives us to communion with the natural world. The “Hunger for the Sacred” is the thing that drives us toward union with the Divine, whatever your concept of the Divine may be.

I believe the hunger for the Sacred is good, but not knowing how to feed that hunger is very much not good.

Most of us in this society have no idea how to be fed. We’ve created a soul-starved society. We’ve created a condition I call spiritual starvation.

This is how our society got to where it is right now, where so many people are filled with despair, anger and frustration instead of being filled with Spirit. Spiritual starvation happens when people are trying to satisfy their spiritual hunger with things that completely lack Spirit; with things that are not spirit-food. This is like eating Styrofoam. Shaping and painting the Styrofoam to look like food does not provide nutrition.

In this society, we are not able to truly satisfy our spiritual hunger. We are unable to recognize that it's not the new car that you need; it's that you need to BE IN LOVE, to receive and give love with another human being. It's not the bigger bank account that you need; you need to belong to and work for your community. It's not the second house that you need; you need to go out and be with nature.

Taking Action?

In the face of our youth dying inside for lack of soul and transcendence, what do we do? We commission blue ribbon panels to study the causes of youth violence, or we try to control the sale and ownership of guns. This is like trying to control the epidemic of youth suicide by outlawing razor blades. In short, the leaders of this society have no idea what to do.

Have you heard any Presidential candidate, Democrat, Republican or Independent, mention our out of control suicide rate? Even once? Have you heard any federal or state official acknowledge what is sitting right in front of our faces? As long as the suicides are quiet and solo, our "leaders" are fine.

Do you think that statement is too strong? Look closely at our youth; it may not be strong enough. We have created an entire society that revels in shallow materiality while denying soul, depth, mysticism, Transcendence. This society created the shooters and millions more like them.

So, what do we do?

1. Start dreaming – and not just while you're sleeping. What is the life dream that occupies you? What is the goal that transcends your life?

2. Analyze your societal dream. Is it worthwhile? Is it meaningful? (You may spend hours a day collecting cat whiskers… but does that mean anything to society? Yes, people do that…) My personal dream is to catalyze and live in a world that truly works for all beings. That dream keeps me young, alive and fresh. It's my reason for waking up every morning, and the reason why I can go to bed tired but satisfied every night. It is a dream worthy of my sacrifice, even the sacrifice of my life.

(Your dream must be more than "I want the world to be a better place". That statement is so non-specific, it becomes meaningless. Adolph Hitler wanted "the world to be a better place". What makes your dream different from HIS?)

3. Share your dream with others, especially your children (or the other youth who are around you). Let them know there is more to life than a new car and a full bank account. Let them know, from your own example, that you are not moved to act by fear, but by LOVE. More importantly: enlist their aid and support. Invite them to make your societal dream their own.

4. Practice your dream. Devote time to it. Practice it… out loud. Don't just talk to your "in group", the people you are comfortable with. "Out loud" means:

a. Go to the same places as the shooters (malls, movie theaters, religious temples that are not your own…). Yes… go to Wal-Mart!!

b. Pass out flyers that say “I LOVE YOU. I want nothing from you. My dream is to create a world that works for all – what’s yours?” (or however you formulate your largest, most inclusive societal dream). Consider it a holiday card that you are giving to a few thousand anonymous friends.

c. Make eye contact with each and every person you give your card to. SHOW people the power of a positive dream.

5. Introduce your children to Transcendent experiences. Regardless of your religion or belief system, look for traditions and practices that deepen your children’s connections to themselves, their world and the invisible forces at work all around us. Mediate with them, practice yoga or chanting or mystical dance. Walk in the woods with them, and talk to them about the psychological, emotional and spiritual ramifications of what they are seeing, smelling and feeling. Do the same thing with a walk down the street. (And, if necessary, introduce yourself to Transcendent experiences first.)

6. At the very, very least — send a copy of this article to every young person on your email list. And encourage them to pass it along…

Will these six steps stem the tide? Perhaps. Or, perhaps we will read words like this, but continue to wait – to wait until it is our child or grandchild who is the victim… or the shooter.

I end with words from the late Vaclav Havel, from his Introduction to “Creating a World That Works for All”:

Could this be a way to stop the blind perpetual motion dragging us toward hell? Can the persuasive words of the wise be enough to achieve what must be done? Or will it take an unprecedented disaster to provoke this kind of existential revolution – a universal recovery of the human spirit and renewed responsibility for the world?

Peace,

Sharif

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Sharif will be participating in an Inter-Faith Meditation on 19 December at New Thought Center for Spiritual Living. He invites you to attend.]

Sharif's previous article in Culture Change, too long ago, was Cuba's Energy Use in Political Perspective, in May 2009.

The Last Word (before comments): The name of today's infamous scene, Sandy Hook, is sort of ironic. Given that there

might be some relationship with the greater New York City urban area's having been slammed by Sandy and climate change, was the school violence a left hook from Mother Nature? She has become a formidable foe not just from outside of us, but perhaps from inside too as we malfunction as a society. - JL