

# PROTECTING OUR CULTURE - LESSONS FROM LIFE

By Robert Lunaburg



Throughout my life I have experienced an innate need to protect what I perceive to be my way of life. I sense this same attitude to be general across the many lives I have come in contact with through time and experience. As I age, I conclude that there is both an upside and a downside to this phenomenon. But, in either case, a basic and interesting question begs for an answer, “Why is it important for us to protect our culture, and to defend it against intrusion and change?” I have always had a felt need to do this, but not always so when it comes to a reasoned need. In fact I conclude that without a reasoned need, I would never challenge my felt need and thus never accept or tolerate other cultures. Now how’s that for a way to start this article?

I find it also interesting to see how reflexive it is for me to put my protective *cultural shield* up, so to speak. In the face of cultural intrusion my felt culture, unthinking behavior, can be likened to the blink reflex my eyes demonstrate when my unconscious mind perceives danger to them. I don’t question and really don’t reason the value blinking has. I just accept it to be a good thing, and get on with life. I exhibit the same kind of reflex whenever I touch something hot. Before I feel the heat, consciously, I find I have withdrawn my hand.

I wonder if there is any connection between these two sensory experiences and that of preserving one’s felt culture? Is cultural preservation at some level driven by an unthinking reflexive action? It would be interesting to find the answers to these questions. I don’t have those answers to postulate here. Now, hold on a minute, just because I raise questions I can’t answer doesn’t mean I have nothing to say on the subject. I do suggest you read on a bit to see if you have had similar life experiences regarding this subject as I have had.

I have postulated in times past that culture is a very broad concept, but that it is rooted in some extremely basic and personal notions. I look on the word *Culture* as a word we use to describe the sum of all the knowledge,

emotions, values, and sustenance we as individuals perceive necessary to ensure our personal survival. Notice too that I have made the definition dependant on the individual not the family or the community. Now that's a lot to assign to a single word (culture), and you may have another definition or definitions for it. I looked *Culture* up in Merriam-Webster's Online dictionary and found six very good definitions; none of which exactly matches mine. Not to be deterred, I plod on...

I first perceived my culture in the womb. It upset me to no end when that culture was rudely destroyed. On that very occasion I was thrust into a cold jostling environment where something I couldn't see was emoting sounds I didn't understand, "It's a boy!" There I was stripped of one culture, and thrust head long (yes that was a pun) into another.



Without words to think about or express it, I began to experience things. I began to develop a primitive knowledge of my extremely limited new world.



I used the language of emotions to say when I agreed with an experience, and when I didn't. I didn't think about it, but I generally smiled and laughed when life was good, and you know how I reacted when things went wrong. I had an innate value for things that gave me



comfort and reacted accordingly. I would say I was a bit self centered...well maybe a lot, not a bit. Thankfully that has changed over time.

I grew up and into my sixth year while living in a community of families that shared many life sustaining practices in common, the passage from my nuclear family into the local environment was not dramatic nor was it profound. I did have to learn about sharing, which in itself was shocking enough. But, like most of my early cultural altering experiences, the changes I opted for brought rewards that far outweighed the costs. Having a playmate, to me, was more important than having two cookies. So life went on, and I continued to make tradeoffs. These changes were generally caused by uncomfortable (felt) circumstances, that were alleviated by reasoned behavioral changes. And too the cause and effect were very immediate.

Formal education brought with it more challenges to my personal comfort. It was during this time that I discovered the only real reward for adaptation was the absence of discomfort. Like pulling my hand away from a flame, following school rules didn't have to make sense. I just did it; perhaps because the thought (not reality) of what would happen if I didn't was more uncomfortable than breaking the rules themselves. Anyway I became skilled at assessing situations and adapting to them. I found this to be a good culture modifying behavior.

I grew up beginning in the nineteen thirties. I was born into a white protestant family and community. Differences in color, religious beliefs, and community practices, for me, did not exist. I learned that the police were good, and that firemen, telephone linemen, mailmen, and the corner store shopkeeper were all my friends. I could trust their friendship to be as nurturing and supportive as that of my family and friends.

Then, when I was seven I moved into a new neighborhood about a mile, within the city, from my old neighborhood. My new best friend lived right across the street from me. We enjoyed all things boys do together. We were inseparable. I found more friends. We played ball together. We walked to school together. We were a family; my second family. Life was good. Cultural challenges still came with more benefit than not.

Then I was made aware, in a rude way by several schoolmates, that my best friend was Catholic, another was Jewish, and a third was Irish. Somehow this new information was intended to demean me and my friends. This was a dilemma for me. Reason could not solve the problem. On one hand I would have to give up



my best friends, on the other I was to be ostracized by my schoolmates; a no win situation for a reasoned solution. I asked my mother about this. She said my schoolmates were prejudiced, and that they were not right. I kept my friends. I rejected those schoolmates. My mother explained the reasoned benefit for me. Thus I learned that it was possible for an intelligence superior to mine to make cultural decisions for me, not all, but some.

It wasn't until the chemistry of my teen years kicked in that I discovered mom and dad didn't know anything. Those were the days when my peers

held superior wisdom when it came to all things cultural. Parental reason often seemed flawed.

Fortunately my chemistry changed again, but those transitional years taught me two profound things: 1. I had to be the source of reason for myself in life, and 2. It is better to adapt to socially acceptable ways than to remain opposed. I also conclude through living that these two profound things for me are not shared universally. Both of these attitudes are the underpinnings for reasoned change in my culture.

My culture is built around felt factors perceived when I was very young, and reasoned factors, not all of which are perfectly right for me, and I don't know if there is or ever could be reasoned factors acceptable to everyone.

I do know this though. I know I will resist both felt and reasoned intrusions upon my culture. I also know that it is through reason that I accept and adapt, and that reason is based on knowledge that I *trust* to be valid and true.

So maybe it isn't enough to be told knowledgeable things. Maybe trust, validity, and truth, as I perceive them, are very important too.

And then there is Santa Claus and the Easter Bunny. They are true tests of how, in the face of violated trust, no validity, and lies instead of truth we still accept and preserve them. Now there's a paradox worthy of thought. When I understand that, I might be able to begin to understand why some cultures not only legitimately conflict with others, but also war on each other.



\*Editor's Note:

We welcome readers to write their views on this thought-provoking topic and contribute their submissions to the Readers' Forum.