

WHAT DO I VALUE?

by Robert Lunaburg



I have often asked myself why I believe the things I believe, and am I correct in so doing? It's a mind game that, at times, can result in disturbing consequences. Most of the time, I confirm my belief and get on with life. Sometimes I don't.

The culture I call my own presents a wealth of things to be examined. Of late I have been curious about why I hold fast to my culture, and resist changes to it, and intrusions into it. I'll share some more of my thoughts and conclusions with you.

First, I believe my culture is based ultimately on values; my values, those born of my culture. This is why I am so protective of it. And now, it seems, I've stated my case. It's obvious I should protect what I value. But that's not the end of it. What do I value?

I've found five things I value very deeply, which my culture provides:

1. Personal Sustenance
2. Shelter From Adverse Natural Events
3. Protection Against Unwanted Human Intrusion
4. Mental Stimulation
5. Physical Stimulation

All five are uniquely colored by where I live, just as they are, I'm sure, for you.

Personal Sustenance

Food and water start this list. Food choice, preparation, and taste are unique to me inside my culture. Since these things are dependent on availability, and many peculiar to my location on earth, I conclude there could be enormous variations among cultures. Could it be that I value my forms of personal sustenance more than I value yours? If your's



are different I probably do. Should I? What if I've never come in contact with what personally sustains you? How can I value something I don't know? If I embraced your culture, what values I hold dear now must I relinquish, if any? If I embrace your food and don't like it, that means I could starve and die...right? Do you have super markets? How about your water? Drink beer instead. I don't like beer. What changes must I make to get what I need to sustain myself in your culture? "Oh, don't be foolish Bob. You will adapt." "But what if I die before I adapt?" "Nonsense," you say, and you are right, but that's logic and reason talking, not the emotions wrapped up in my values.



Shelter From Adverse Natural Events

If I accept your culture will I live in a house? I hate camping, and perhaps you live in a tent. It's a lot hotter or colder in your culture than in mine. I don't like those excesses here, and you don't have air conditioning. How do I protect myself when the mountain near you could



explode?

And of course, I believe the tornados that frequent my culture will never harm me. Will they? Will I, again,



have to compromise my values if I accept your culture?



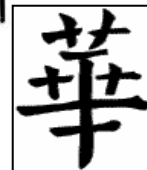
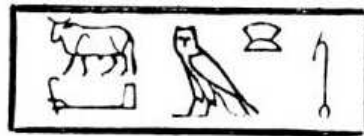
Protection From Unwanted Human Intrusion

Are your laws designed to protect me from harm the same way I understand mine to be? Can I behave in public the way I do now, and be treated the same as I am now by your law enforcement authorities? Will I stand out, and perhaps be ostracized, because I do something I'm not aware of that offends you?



Mental Stimulation

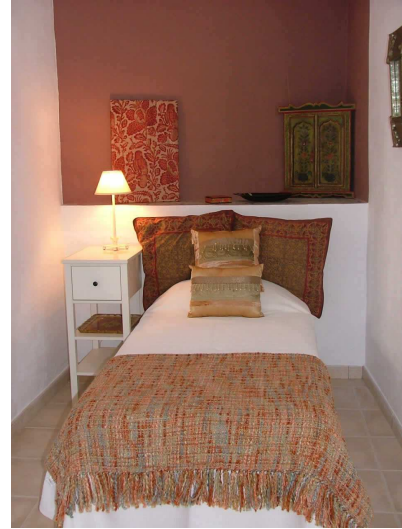
How can I live without my books? Yours are written in a different language. I don't understand you when you talk. I don't understand your games; your sports. I don't understand the arts in your culture therefore find difficulty in valuing them the same as I do mine. I feel isolated and alone without my familiar things around me. I'm in a sort of public solitary confinement when I'm in your culture. I surely don't value that.



Physical Stimulation

We don't sleep on the same kind of bed. Your clothes don't feel the same as mine. I like to swim; hard to do on a mountain. Your automobiles are too small, and you drive on the other side of the road. I'm very uncomfortable with the idea of men kissing each other as a greeting. I prefer a handshake.





So What Then?

Embracing another culture as my own seems quite frightening to me. At the core, it may violate many of my values. So, without effort, I probably won't. Accepting the right for another culture to exist holds no fear for me at all EXCEPT when the other culture wants *me* to ADOPT theirs. That's not fair. So, I can accept any culture as long as it doesn't violate mine. And lest we go off the deep end here, that is not to say other cultures can't influence mine. Influence is good. Violation is bad.

And now we come to two more questions. What about the shades of gray between influence and violation? How do we reconcile those? That's where understanding other cultures comes in. If ignorance enhances fear, then knowledge can do the opposite. At least I believe and value that idea, and it doesn't violate my culture to do so.

What must be done before I can become open to another culture?

Trust. I must trust that the members of another culture are not motivated to deprive me of mine. Knowledge. Next, I must know and understand why and how elements foreign to my culture are important. Wisdom. Finally, I must be intellectually and emotionally open and willing to experience other cultures.

Why is all this important anyway?

The barriers that separate cultures are falling. Awareness of, and being influenced by other cultures are unavoidable. If we are to live together on this ever shrinking planet, each of us must first be trustworthy, share our values and practices, and let others safely experience them. Then, secondly, we must learn to trust others; learn about others, and break bread, so to speak, with others.

These things aren't easy. No one said they were. But, in my opinion they are necessary.