

# American Morality - A Glimmer of Hope on the Horizon

By Thomas Sullivan

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Has the United States lost its basic principle of morality? Has the United States moved away from the guiding principles that this country was founded on? A single line from the Declaration of Independence describes these basic principles, and it is the meaning of these words which provided the foundation for the formation of the United States:

"We hold these truths to be self evident: that all men are created equal; that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable rights; that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness." - Thomas Jefferson

All Americans are created equal and life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness is a right granted to every citizen of the United States. Our founding fathers acquired these principles from their religious beliefs, and regardless of what people may think, the United States was founded on Biblical principles. Our founding fathers did not use certain aspects of the Bible just to satisfy what they wanted in a country. They used the Bible as a whole in order to create an understanding of what the basic rights are for an individual. They concluded that these rights are from God and are given to all individuals.

One of the unalienable rights given by our creator is the right to live our lives. Our creator placed each individual on this earth for a reason. Is it not true that other people in the world have that same unalienable right to live and fulfill God's purpose? So, if this is a founding principle for our country, does it not follow that we as a country should help others less fortunate than us? Should not others, who were born in underdeveloped countries, have the same right to life? In this article, I will address some of these questions, with the hope that by examining these issues, we can as a society, move in a direction our founding fathers had envisioned. Americans have lost sight of the fact that excess without giving is not really what our founding fathers had in mind. Let's examine some examples which are symbolic of this immorality that currently exists within the American society.

Before presenting this first example, we need to have a clear definition of what morality is. From WordNet, a lexical database for the English language, developed at the Cognitive Science Library at Princeton University, morality is concern with the distinction between good and evil or right and wrong. This first example of immorality may be considered by many as one that does not have anything to do with morality, but if you give it more than cursory thought, you would most likely consider it a morality issue.

This first example has to do with Americans and their relationship with their automobiles. Yes, immorality can be seen at such a insignificant level. More importantly, this example shows the pervasiveness of immorality within the American society. Most Americans, if typical, need an automobile for basic functioning within most areas of the United States. The automobile has become a perfunctory status symbol. Many people within the United States can barely pay their rent or mortgage, but they will shovel out money per month on an automobile they really can not afford. They spend money per month in the form of a car payment or lease, just to have a "nice" car.

The American obsession with the sport utility vehicle is one I still do not understand. One basic argument of the SUV owner is that by driving a SUV, they feel safer. If your driving skill is so poor that you can not avoid poor drivers, try working on your driving skill. This to me makes more sense than driving a tank (SUV) which consumes large quantities of fuel and concomitantly contributes to an increase in fuel demand. This increase in fuel demand drives fuel prices upward. With Americans so reliant upon their automobiles, higher fuel prices mean less extra money in their pocket. Money that could be used to help feed those dying from starvation throughout the world.

The American car companies for many years pushed the SUV on the American public, and now these car companies are suffering the consequences. The thinking as to why these companies offered these vehicles to the American public was that they thought Americans would continue in their mind set that excess is better. The American car companies today are doing poorly as a business. They have continually laid off workers in order to maintain a level of viability. They have been very slow to innovate and the federal government has had to mandate fuel efficiency. Because of their sluggish response to the need for fuel efficient vehicles, American car companies are now suffering the consequences.

On the other hand, Toyota and Honda, companies which have put fuel efficient hybrids out into the market place, are now doing very well. Toyota is now the number one car seller in the world. Toyota and Honda have always placed fuel efficiency as a higher priority. A glimmer of hope lies in the fact that Americans are starting to create the mind set that excess is not good, and frugality is the way of the future. Simply put, driving SUVs is not intelligent.

Driving an SUV when it really is not necessary is an example of overindulgence in the United States. Granted, there are situations where an individual needs a SUV such as Alaska or any area of the country where road conditions are poor or winters are severe. Or, there are occasions where material needs to be transported in a SUV because of its increase carrying capacity. In these cases, there is a legitimate reason to own a SUV because of its utilitarian value. But the majority of SUV owners are not in these situations or extreme conditions frequently enough to warrant owning such a fuel wasting vehicle. Driving a hybrid is an example of intelligent frugality. In order to buy a Toyota or Honda hybrid, you will have to be put on a long waiting list. This is a good sign that Americans are starting to develop the mind set that having less is better and frugality is the way of the future.

Our society has been through a period of excess and overindulgence but changes, hopefully, are on the horizon. Morality in the form of giving needs to be reincorporated back into our society. It makes more sense to drive a more fuel efficient vehicle, and use some of the saved money to contribute to the world hunger problem. For most morally conscious individuals, this type of sustained and continual activity leads to greater long term happiness.

Giving does not have to be monetary, it can be in other forms, such as giving time or knowledge. This brings us to our next example of morality reduction that has been in existence in the United States. Many parents today are not giving enough time to their children. Children need to be nurtured. A parents wisdom, gained through a life time of experiences, needs to be imparted to their children. Parents need to impart to their children the value of giving and a feeling of concern for others. When I was a child growing up, school shootings where kids are killing teachers and fellow students, was virtually unheard of. Today, school shootings are occurring at an alarming frequency. To me, part of the problem is due to parents not spending enough time with their children. Again it comes down to giving. In this case, it comes down to giving time and knowledge. Parents not giving enough time to their children is another example of morality reduction within our society.

Another example of the immorality prevalent within our society is displayed by the films which come out of Hollywood today. I am sorry to say that most of these films really are to put it bluntly, garbage.

Most of these films lack the cerebral quality of the earlier films. From a technical perspective i.e. special effects, they are excellent, but from a cerebral perspective, they are lacking. Most of today's films rely heavily on special effects in order to appeal to the audience. The common theme for today's films almost always involves action sequences, sex, and violence. They are always trying to appeal to the dark side of human nature with very little thinking required of the audience. Therefore, most of today's films are lacking in moral quality. They are produced only to make money for those who are producing them, without any understanding to the implications they may have on society, especially younger people.

Creativity is basically gone from Hollywood and many of the movies coming out today are remakes of successful earlier films. Once and a while a good film will be presented to the American public, but generally speaking most are junk. Most of today's actors are not really household names. They come and go fairly quickly and lack the staying power of a John Wayne, Jimmy Stewart, or Humphrey Bogart. These actors displayed a level of integrity and they new about the personification they were displaying to the American public. They were not perfect, but they did display a higher level of morality.

Is our society spiraling downward into the oblivion of lost hope? I believe not. More and more we are seeing examples which display the positive value of giving. A case in point. Time Magazine finally got it right when they named rock star Bono, and Bill and Melinda Gates as the Persons of the Year for 2005. They were named persons of the year not because of anything that happened at Microsoft and not because Bono is a rock star, they were named persons of the year for their charitable work and activism aimed at reducing global poverty and improving world health. Finally a media organization is recognizing the value of giving.

Another sign of hope that Americans may be moving away from the mind set of excess and non-giving, can be seen in the enormous outpouring of giving monetarily in the wake of the worst hurricane season the United States has had on record. Americans have also given monetarily to the tsunami relief effort. Americans have not been giving readily to the current starving in Africa. In December 2005, the UN's Food and Agriculture Organization issued a warning that nearly 12 million Africans face the immediate threat of famine. Americans have not been giving to the Pakistani earthquake relief efforts.

This lack of giving is not really due to Americans not willing to give, but rather due to the lack of media exposure. CNN would rather spend hours talking about whether President Bush broke the law by wire tapping potential terrorists in the United States, then talk about the important world issues such as the thousands that are dying in the wake of the Pakistan earthquake or the starving in Africa. It is very important that the media expose these type of stories. You can not give if you do not know about the need.

The point is this. Giving on a continuous basis, produces feelings of long term happiness. For this country to get back to it's moral principles, giving to others in need is one way to move in that direction. Which brings me back to my original point. Americans need to fully get back to the mind set that giving and having less is of greater value then having more. We must move away from trying to produce short term happiness via artificial means.

Artificial symbols such as what type of car you drive, how fancy your clothing is, or how many vacation homes you can acquire should be of less importance to any one who has some substance to them. The next time you find yourself propagating one of these excesses, think of the 24,000 people per day that are dying of hunger. Think about the six million children under the age of five which will die of hunger each year. Think about the downtrodden, the abused, and the tortured. When you think about these things, giving makes more sense. Give what you can and when you can.

Albert Einstein once said "the value of a man resides in what he gives and not in what he is capable of receiving." What many people do not realize is that Albert Einstein was a deeply religious man. He knew that only a God could produce such a complex universe, and that such complexity could not have been produced by random chaotic events. He saw the order in the universe and the relation of the universe with God. He simply did not wear his religion on his sleeve. He also had insights beyond physics in that he realized what truly gives a man a sense of happiness and inner peace.

Einstein had it right in that happiness does not come from what you hold, but really from what you give. No matter what your religious belief, a life time of giving to those less fortunate than yourself, will result in long term happiness. Give it a try. You might be surprised at the feeling it produces. A glimmer of hope is on the horizon. The United States can move back to its Biblical principles. But we must all do our part.

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