

After the Rage

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Many years ago, Saul Alinsky was a leader in the world of Community Organization. The essence of his approach built upon the shared rage in a community to bring everybody together solveing a community problem. The approach worked (I've used it), but there is a distinct downside. After the problem is solved you are left with the rage – and what do you do with the rage?

The story has continued with much the same approach, even if the credit for its genesis is not given to Saul Alinsky. The premier of Israel, Netanyahu, has effectively united the Israelis in their rage against Hamas -- thereby saving himself from almost certain removal from office and probable incarceration for criminal activity.

Here in here in the USA a similar phenomenon with “The Donald,” who has more counts against him than I can remember, and losing an election he has yet to admit, he is sailing to nomination by the Republican Party for the presidency. All on the basis of hate and division. Unbelievable. But current reality.

The saga is not limited to politicians, but extends to all sorts of people. In Yemen, Ethiopia, Northern Ireland, and here in the USA with Black Rage, and White Rage. All this rage does the same thing with equally destructive impacts for all parties. *What do we do with the rage?*

When rage drives people apart they can be reconnected if they join together in a common task that arouses their passion and commands their sense of personal responsibility. It may happen slowly or quickly, but it happens all over the planet. We have had some fifty years' experience with this phenomenon in the Open Space community – and our experience is not unique. Happens everywhere ... which is a major reason that *Homo sapiens* is still here.

The reconnect is an automatic feature of our existence, however it may be reenforced when certain principles are followed, and one law observed. I say “automatic” because it is driven by the ongoing of process of Self Organization – which has produced us and everything else. However, the process can be disconcerting and painful for many people because it reminds them that they are not in control, and never have been.

Self Organization is the source of our being, and the means of our sustenance. We need not “*do anything*” because everything happens all by itself... as long as we do not get in the way. Unfortunately we often do get in the way, attempting to maintain the sense that we are in control of our lives. Were we to acquiesce in the fact that we, along with all the rest of the Cosmos are the manifestations (creations) of this external, immutable force – we would definitely be “out of control” – at least *our* control, but our lives could be profoundly richer.

Self Organization was first described in its modern form by Belgian Physical Chemist, Ilya Prigogene in the late 40's with his work on Dissipative Structures – for which he received

the Noble Prize. He noted that when apparently stable physical structures (molecules, compounds) are subjected to major environmental changes (freezing, warming, etc) they lose their stability (go far out of equilibrium) and either dissipate – go poof – or reorganize (self organize) at new and higher levels of complexity which is able to deal with the changed environmental circumstances.

Subsequently, the general scientific community has been finding the same mode of operation in virtually all aspects of our existence. Neuro Scientists find it operational in the organization of the random brain cells in our heads, Cosmologists see it again in the evolution of the Cosmos, and everyday citizens experience the effect in such mundane activities as eating in a large city, New York, for example. The feeding system in New York was organized by nobody – nobody would dare. However 8 million people eat just about anything they want, any time of day, and the system as a whole maintains a 2 week supply in reserve. It happens all by itself. Nobody planned it ... nobody organized it.

Self Organization is actually a very old story, told in different ways in different times and places. In essence it is an ongoing dance between chaos and order – never pure chaos or pure order but an interplay of the two, productive of new ways of being. In India it is the story of the Dance of Shiva, the creator and destroyer, In ancient China it is the Yin and the Yang, In Babylonia the story is of Tiamat and Marduk who collectively bring new worlds and new creatures from the abyss.

In order for us, the 8 billion of us here on planet earth, to take full advantage of the marvelous gifts of Self Organization, we do have to keep our fingers out of the pie, and let go the delusional search for control. This may be hard for many, and impossible for some, however Five Principles and One Law can help us along the way. The five principals are not something to be *done*, but simply to be noted as they pass by. They all will happen if we don't get in the way and somehow try to assert control.

I understand the process that is unleashed to be *Birthing*, if only because there is nothing else in my experience that evidences the creative and destructive forces that manifest in Birth. And births, all sorts of births, are greeted by predictable reactions. With the birth of a baby, there is certainly Joy, but also feelings of anger at the interruption of life as it used to be for both the man and the woman. With the birth of a new thought form or way of understanding our world, anger is also part of the emergent package. Examples would include the reaction to Galileo when he had the audacity to claim that the earth was not the center of everything. Or Albert Einstein who offered the General Theory of Relativity. Or Igor Stravinsky when he turned the Music world on its head with The Rite Of Spring. There was general anger and fear in all quarters, followed by a cry to “stop the Music” and let's go back to the way things used to be. And stopping the music/stopping a birth is called abortion, a word that is also used, strangely, in the computer world when a program is aborted.

The Story

I confess that I am a Story Teller. I say that with pride, but it can often be misunderstood. Story telling is the way we humans make sense out of our world. It is not a question of the truth or falsehood of the story – but whether the story works for you and anybody else. No story ever fully captures the reality spoken of. Language will not bear the burden, and we can never understand the complexity and diversity of the entities we encounter. We can't even think at that level, let alone adequately describe what we think we see or experience. But we do the best we can with the Stories we tell, and those Stories point us in a useful direction, indicating the head of the trail. In short, the story gives us a start – but we must take it along the way: Critique, rejection, improvement, add new features. Story Telling, like all of life, is an evolving, organic phenomenon.

My Story

This story grew out of my need to make sense out of the world I live in, for myself and my friends and colleagues. It has been a 60 year enterprise, driven most recently by the chaos, confusion and agony of the present moment, combined with interesting signs of renewal and new life. The painful aspects have doubtless gotten the most attention, but the signs of renewal are also there. Peoples long isolated from the mainstream of science and development are discovering new possibilities. Societies held hostage by colonial powers are now discovering their identity and strength. All of this together is creating a rich stew. As I savor the brew a single word came to my mind capturing both the pain and the joy, the destruction and the creation we are experiencing in the moment. **Birth**. Something very new is coming into our world. Like all moments of birth, it does not come pain free. The birth of the new displaces what was. And if you are attached to the way things were (as most of us are), this new kid on the block is not a welcome addition. But over time, the pain of arrival is assuaged by the joy of renewal. At least that has been the story.

If we are in a moment of birthing, in which the old is passing and the new is emerging ... not by our power and control but through the majestic force that has brought all of the created world into being, how can we restrain ourselves and allow the force to be with us? How do we keep our fingers out of the pie?

The Five Principles and one Law can help. The Principles and The Law grew out of the Open Space community's experience, but many have found they have broader application. Some have even suggested that they can guide a life, richly lived.

The Principles and the Law

The Principles: 1) *Whoever comes are the right people*, reminding us that we do not need the chairman of the board or the top obstetrician (for the birth of a baby or an idea) – Those who cared to come will be perfect.

2) *Whatever happens is the only thing that could have* – reminding us that that whatever happened **IS** – despite our hopes for something different. We can live out life with “might have beens” or embrace the opportunities present before us.

3) *Whenever it happens is the right time* – It is often said that no man can choose the time ... which is true for birthing a baby or a new idea. It happens when it happens. And for all those who compulsively insist that we start “on time,” they can take small comfort in the knowledge that nothing ever has, and nothing ever will. It starts when it starts. One can complain, of course, but that won’t change a thing. It is much more profitable to open our eyes to the new possibilities that have miraculously appeared even though the time of appearance wasn’t what was planned.. Those possibilities are there. Take advantage of them.

4) *Wherever it happens is the right place* – Inspired happenings can break out anywhere. Innovation happens at the water cooler, in the bar, at lunch, even though it is “supposed” to happen in the lab as result of carefully planned experiments. It is true that after the fact those involved will offer a creative story (retro rationalize) about how they carefully followed proper lab procedure, but the fact of the matter is that most of the real breakthroughs came about because of what many would consider a “mistake.” Penicillin, for example, came about because Alexander Fleming failed to wash his petri trays which grew moldy. Major mistake. *Major discover.*

5) *When it is over it is over* – Everything comes to an end, be that a way of life, mode of thinking, great institution, political jurisdiction, country, corporation... The one thing everybody knows at the moment of birthing – what has just arrived will depart. The German philosopher, Martin Heidegger once remarked, “Life is a joyful march towards death.” Shocking thought, but absolutely true. Every entity on planet earth will end. One might say, the goal of life is to die. However, there are definite advantages to this. Just suppose that everything that ever was on planet earth was still around...There would be no room for anything new. On a personal level, we would not be here if the Trilobites or the Dinosaurs still ruled the earth.

The Law of Two Feet, says simply and directly, “If at any time you find yourself in a situation where you are neither contributing nor learning – Go to some other place. There is no need to apologize, or sit there feeling bored and miserable. You are doing nobody a favor, only polluting the atmosphere with your attitude. Go where you can be useful to yourself and others.

Griefwork

When the Five Principles are remembered and the Law followed, the birthing process becomes a natural affair -- with all the joy and pain of such a process. Dealing with both, the joy and the pain, is handled by yet another automatic mechanism in the tool box of *Homo sapiens*, ***griefwork***

First identified by Elizabeth Kubler Ross as it plays out in the lives of individuals facing ending/death, my work has found that the same process operates across the human spectrum from individuals to nation states – and it seems the planet may well grieve as well. Based on the work

of Elizabeth Kubler Ross, I have changed the wording slightly in order to more accurately describe the operational process in the broadest terms. In my words, the steps are: 1)

Shock/Anger – This the first step after the assault. I call this an *Oh Shit Moment*. When the end comes, be that the end of a life, movement, country, way of thinking...there is a great deal of shock and serious anger. It can be very noisy and to onlookers, it might seem that it is all overdone – but there is a serious purpose. When people experience shock, they often hold their breath – stop breathing. That can be very hazardous to ones health. However, when the words come out – *Oh Shit* in whatever language, it is noisy, but there is good news – the patient is breathing.

2) **Denial** – Ordinarily Shock and Anger will pass, although we all know people who live the rest of their lives afflicted by both (Incomplete Griefwork). With the passage comes a new phase: Denial. In Denial, those afflicted are unable to recognize that the end has come. This may take many forms ranging from a total inability to acknowledge the changed state of affairs to a more moderate form, which I call, “The If only’s” – If only I hadn’t gone to the market, bought that stock, listened to that politician, taken that trip – then “this” never would have happened. To the onlooker, Denial seems a total waste of time... Admit the obvious / get on with the business. But Denial, as indeed every step in the process, has a positive purpose. The Ending is painful, perhaps excruciatingly so – and relief is essential. Consider Denial anesthesia for the pain. In most cases, Denial will eventually pass, however once again, we know people and institutions for which that never happens. Old battles, old wounds constantly relived. Griefwork aborted.

3) **Memories** – With the passage of Denial, the next phase emerges, “Memories.” At this point, the fact of ending is acknowledged – and the memories set in. For individuals it can sound like, “Do you remember when we all had that great party?” For an organization/corporation/country, the words are a little different, but the thought is the same. “Do you remember when “We made that great invention?”, “Landed on the moon?”, “We were a great worldwide empire?” Some might take this as pure sentimental recollection, but there is a positive purpose. As the great events are recalled, there is a stocktaking going on. The fundamental question is – that’s what we did, and now what do we want to take to the future?

4) **Open Space** – In time the Memories end, and the remainder is pure Open Space. All the hopes, dreams and plans are gone. All that is left is an empty void of possibility – Open Space. For the first time, in perhaps a very long time, there is nothing on the “To Do” list. For individuals, companies, countries – it is all *Possibility*. This can be a very scary moment, but it also can be quite peaceful. I’ve found it is best to savor the moment. The “To Do” list will shortly reappear. Unless it is really the end, and it is time to let go.

It is actually a time of choosing, and the choice is sharply posed by a question, “What are you going to do with the rest of your life?” The question may be asked by a friend or a neighbor, concerned about your well being. Or it may be posed by an event or set of circumstances such as the rising of the sun, or the smile of a child.

Nature abhors a vacuum and a question is, by definition, a vacuum awaiting fulfillment. When the question is posed to a person, company, country, or planet -- probing the possibility of

renewed existence... that question will either be met with a blank stare (It really is all over) or it may excite the search for possibilities.

The search will be announced with the words, spoken or thought... ***“I wonder if...”*** We wonder if... we can find a new life partner? ... live in a renewed country, company, way of thinking, theoretical framework?

When wonder and imagination powerfully unite they produce Vision – the spark that drives a new enterprise forward. A strong Vision will be attractive, drawing others into the vortex.. A shared Vision..bringing new life.

Birth is accomplished. New life has suddenly appeared. And curiously enough, it happens all by itself if we don't get in the way.

End of the Tale

My tale is told. If it works for you, use it, replicate it, improve it... It is all yours! The greatest reward for a story teller is that his/her tales take on new life of their own. Enjoy.