



Julia Volkman

Taking a stand for sanity

When the bombings happened at the Boston Marathon, I was just leaving the class I help teach at Harvard Extension School: Mind, Brain, Health, and Education.

Harvard Square is just across the Charles River from the finish line but I heard nothing. I noticed nothing. Everyone was walking about just like any other day. It wasn't until my phone started buzzing with texts that I learned what had happened and that my family was frozen with fear about me.

Just a few days later, the Harvard police texted me (and all the other faculty and students) again and again to tell us that there were shots fired at MIT. There was a gun battle in Watertown. We were told to stay inside, to shelter in place, to stop living our lives because it was not safe to do so.

How could this happen? How could these young men come to be so easily led to atrocity? How could they turn against their apparent intelligence and sociability to undertake such horrific acts? How did they become sheep who followed insanity like their shepherd?

There is no self-confident, logical, thinking human who could perpetrate such callous acts of violence. This is what Montessori knew. Aiding children to independence along with developing their logical minds are the most urgent intentions in Montessori education.

This is why her movement is critical now. There can be no terrorism if there are no people conditioned for illogical, other-dependent thought.

Every time an adult stepped in and told those boys what to do instead of guiding them to figure out a skillful path, they were trained to follow what those in "authority" said.

Every time they were corrected while trying to accomplish a task so it would come out "right," they were conditioned to believe they could not do things properly without help.

Every time they were told what to do in order to learn, they were prepared for a life where they relied on others for direction.

And every time we blamed their family or society instead of focusing on our own role in the children's lives, we modeled how to deny responsibility and create scapegoats.

The world we are currently living in, the world of terrorism and wars and bulleted lists of what we are supposed to be able to do in order to be deemed competent is insane.

Insanity, as Einstein described it, is doing the same thing again and again and expecting a different result.

We see the minds of children weakened by too much media and too little time in nature so we create computer games to train their brains and "exercise" their bodies.

We see that teenagers can't think for themselves so we increase homework and out of school requirements so they must constantly follow direction.

We see that adults can't manage the daily requirements of our society so we create drugs that subdue the agitated parts

of the mind.

Again and again, across domains, we tighten the grip and remove freedom instead of preparing people to master it. In such a world, it is a radical act to prepare children to think and act independently.

Do not forget for one moment that we are leading a revolution in the history of humanity. Do not forget for one moment that we are freedom fighters. We are urgently called to help children and each other realize the underlying sanity of our species. We must create a new culture, a new world grounded in the core knowledge that all humans have value and are innately intelligent. We must create a new culture, a new world where all children are prepared and then allowed to exercise and develop their capacity for logic. We must create a new culture, a new world peopled by shepherds.

Today's culture does not support this grounding in the innate, profound potential of each individual. This culture controls. The common pedagogy of our times is to keep everyone so busy, so distracted with obligation and requirement and "have to's" that we have no opportunity to pause and notice that we are perpetuating insanity.

We must stop!

We must allow our old, dependent ways to be destroyed by our grief at the atrocities we are witnessing again and again in every neighborhood across the world. This is not an American issue. This is not an Islamic issue. This is a human evolutionary moment. It is right now that we can change it all.

It is right now, in this moment, that we can pour all of our attention into the cause of sanity, the cause of peace in every corner of our lives. It is right now, at this moment that we can move beyond our fear and forcefully, compassionately, and with great intelligence behave as we all must behave.

It is time to recondition ourselves.

To reform ourselves in the mold of soldiers of sanity so that our children do not have to. It is their birthright. It is ours. And this is the moment, every moment for the rest of our existence, when we must have the courage to embody the revolution.

I am so humbled by our weakness, by our foolishness. And it is in this state of naked honesty that we can be transformed by our overwhelming strength.

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