

# Preventing and overcoming humiliation;

## A compassionate loving understanding of human dignity

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The pervasiveness of authoritarianism in both our personal and public lives makes submission and humiliation both commonplace and indiscernible. Evelin Linder explains how we may become habituated and even addicted to humiliation.

Emmanuel Ghent and others explain that in Western culture, typified as alienating, competitive and individualistic, the notion of even mild temporary surrender is so foreign as to be barely comprehensible. The need to surrender personal control and venture to trust the Other and depend on him is a basic human need. Nevertheless, we find it difficult to comprehend it as a form of transcendence or liberation. Relationships of domination and subordination abound. Thus, it is difficult to discern submission from even mild temporary surrender. If we let go, if we surrender to influence, guidance and interdependence, we are lured, sometimes even culturally conditioned, to resign to submission and humiliation. It is as if they are inevitable costs of actualizing our longing for surrender.

Thus, blurring of surrender of control with submission to another's domination can bring about interpersonal, intergroup and intrapersonal conflict. The individual in our societies is often pulled towards humiliation of oneself, the other or both believing he must choose between resigning to submission, fighting for domination or doing both. The possibility of an intrapsychic and interpersonal space, free from submission, domination and control, is often not realized.

The freedom to be oneself is a fragile freedom. It is more than the freedom from dependence. It includes the freedom to bond. It is not protected as well as it may seem in liberal western societies. This lacking protection contributes to the pervasiveness of conflict and destructiveness.

One may claim that humiliation is freely chosen. The exercise of such a freedom is claimed to be derivative of human dignity. A liberal individualistic ethos easily supports such a claim.

I suggest the choice to concede to humiliation is never a free choice, cannot be dignifying and cannot serve authentic self-actualization. Such a suggestion is a nonrelativistic moral position and as such is threatening in a post totalitarian western world and runs counter to prevalent postmodern notions.

This paper draws on diverse sources including spiritual sources among them the writings of Emanuel Levinas, the writings and biographies of Mahatma Gandhi and the Dalai Lama. Based on these sources I offer an alternative vision of human dignity. I propose a vision of human dignity in public and legal discourse as proactive in both preventing and overcoming humiliation. It is proactive through creating space for letting go, for a temporary surrender of control. Giving compassion and love legitimacy as values in both public and legal discourses is a means of actualizing this vision.

A tie of the subject matter to images of manhood and masculinity is suggested. Implications for intrapsychic, family and national conflicts and for educating and parenting boys are explicated.