

How to talk to a Christian – because we have to, whether we want to or not.

By Morgaine Swann

Part I: Tell it like it is!

The Democrats have now officially lost the second of two illegal elections. We've been licking our wounds, planning our protests for Bush's second inauguration/coronation, and trying not to think about what the next four years are going to be like.

Anyway, our problem has been that we won't use the **truth**. That is the most powerful weapon. If someone lies to your face and you're afraid to call it a lie, it doesn't matter how correct your position or how altruistic your values. You are a coward, and your cause will fail.

This will piss people off, but our biggest failure was not emphasizing **Bush's Nazi connections**. Not just the origins of his family fortunes, but the **Rove** playbook as well. "Tell a big lie and keep telling it." - sound familiar? 9/11 conveniently giving them an excuse for curbing civil rights, just like the Reichstag fire. Demonizing a particular group of people. And the real tip off - the nationalism and the religiosity.

"We need believing people." - Adolf Hitler.

Think about it - Americans were signing **loyalty oaths** to attend a political rally and Kerry never called it fascism. A grieving mother was removed from a campaign stop in handcuffs. One family was ejected for wearing t-shirts that said "Protect our Constitutional Rights". When did that become verboten in America?

Everyone is talking about the red states being on the dole, and about the connection to slavery, but they aren't pointing out the most obvious problem here - the poor educational systems. I'm in the South after living on the East Coast for many years. The one thing a Philadelphia Catholic from a poor neighborhood and a Dixiecrat in the rural South have in common is that they haven't been taught that America is not a Christian country. They were taught just the opposite at home, in school, in church. They don't know about **Jefferson's** wall between church and state. Half of them don't know who the hell Jefferson was.

Don't underestimate the change in pop culture created by new technologies either. We have over a hundred TV channels now. In the past, there were three, so odds were that most of the people you encountered saw the same thing you did on tv last night. At 6:00, everybody watched the news. Variety can not only expand your world, it can limit it, too. I know people who use satellites to watch nothing but rodeo, college basketball, and reruns of Andy Griffith and Leave it to Beaver. My point is that you don't have to learn anything at all if you don't want to. There's no **Walter Cronkite** anymore, and even if there were, he'd have to toe the party line to keep his job.

Our most effective tool is the internet - it's our only real source of news, and it's the way we spread the truth. Our next best weapon is numbers. There are a lot of us, and it's never been easier to make our presence known to power.

We won't get anywhere sneering at religion. They'll never listen to us if we make fun of them. I know it's tempting, and I know it's frustrating. Freedom of religion is one of my main issues, and I get really fed up with their bullshit. Telling them it's bullshit will just make them tune out.

End of Part I.

Part II: The Snake in our Garden: Meet your inner Reptile

Your Reptilian brain is all the rage lately. **Arianna Huffington**, **Tom Atlee** and **Thom Hartmann** have all published work recently that addresses the **Bush/Cheney** talent for getting into your primitive self and getting it to do what they want. This is important information that I first encountered reading the works of **Carl Sagan**. One of my greatest regrets is that I never got to discuss the Reptile self with him. As all those who have come after him have done, **Dr. Sagan** thought we should get over it. The Reptilian brain to him was something to overcome, an inferior part of our psyche that gets in the way of logic, so it must be suppressed. That's only partly correct.

It *does* get in the way of logic. The mistake is in thinking you can suppress it. That inner beast is coming out one way or another. You either work with it or it works against you. If you want to survive, you'd better make friends with it. We won't get around the Radical Right just by being who we are. In a very real way, we are acting as the "liberal elite" they say we are. **We are appealing to reason where no reason yet exists.**

Arianna put it succinctly:

"Thanks to the Bush campaign's unremitting fear-mongering, millions of voters are reacting not with their linear and logical left brain but with their lizard brain and their more emotional right brain.

What's more, people in a fog of fear are more likely to respond to someone whose primary means of communication is in the nonverbal realm, neither logical nor language-based. (Sound like any presidential candidate you know?)

Deep in the brain lies the amygdala, an almond-sized region that generates fear. When this fear state is activated, the amygdala springs into action. Before you are even consciously aware that you are afraid, your lizard brain responds by clicking into survival mode. No time to assess the situation, no time to look at the facts, just: fight, flight or freeze."

Tom Atlee asked if we can "move past reptilian logic". The simple answer is "NO". There is no "reptilian logic". There is only reptilian instinct and that instinct shuts down the part of the mind that has logic. It is entirely reactive. Note the tendency to call Bush's cohorts "*reactionary*". It's pre-verbal, so you can't talk your way around it. It has no language. It's ritualistic, fond of habit and suspicious of change.

Hartmann crafted a nice crash course in brain development, thus:

"We humans, being the product of a long evolutionary process, really have **three brains**. And, as the Bush psy-ops folks know, politicians who win campaigns do so because they speak to all three of those brains.

First there's the **most primitive** of our brains, sometimes referred to as the "**reptilian brain**" because we share it in

common with reptiles like alligators and komodo dragons. The reptile brain has a singular focus: survival. It doesn't think in abstract terms, and doesn't feel complex emotions. Instead, it's responsible for fight-or-flight, hunger and fear, attack or run. It's also non-verbal - you can stimulate it with the right words, but it operates purely at the level of visceral stimulus-response.

The **second brain** is one we share with the animals that came along after reptiles - mammals. The **mammalian brain** - sometimes referred to as the **Limbic Brain** because it extends around and off of the reptilian brain in a dog-leg shape that resembles a limb - handles complex emotions like love, indignation, compassion, envy, and hope. Anybody who's worked with animals or had a pet knows that mammals share these emotions with humans, because we share this brain. While a snake can't feel shame or enthusiasm, it's completely natural for a dog or cat. And, like the reptile brain, the mammalian brain can also be stimulated indirectly by words, and is also non-verbal. It expresses itself exclusively in the form of feelings, although these are more often felt in the heart than the gut.

The **third brain - the neocortex** ("new" cortex) - is something we share with the higher apes, although ours is a bit more sophisticated. Resting over the limbic brain (which is, in turn, atop the reptilian brain), our neocortex is where we process abstract thought, words and symbols, logic and time." [emphasis added]

The neocortex is divided into two hemispheres.

Your **right brain** operates in a **non-linear, pre-verbal** way that "thinks" in symbols and pictures. It works in conjunction with your reptile brain to form your intuitive abilities. It loves ritual and symbolism. Your hunches, your "aha" moments, your precognitive dreams, premonitions, ability to view remote scenes and other "psychic" abilities originate here, and are normal functions of the human brain that have been suppressed in our culture so that they are limited to the realm of the priesthood. A person in touch with these abilities is hard to control with laws or commandments and will trust their own intuition over any authority. One function of religion has been to direct and control these abilities toward a common goal. The tricky part is in choosing that goal. Knowing who made the choice and why is important. We'll talk about that in Part III

Your **left brain** is where you "think". It's the source of your ability to use sequential logic, your words and your ability to reason. Our culture is in love with it's left neocortex. The left neocortex likes things neat and orderly. It wants things to make sense. It enables us to think and read and plan, so there's a lot to love about it. The problem is that it isn't the only brain in town. Acting as if it were causes problems. The trick in life, as in politics, is to get all these brains working together. Neglect any one of them at your peril. Nurture them all, and you'll achieve more than you ever thought possible.

Back to politics now. **Hartmann** dissects **Cheney's** mastery in the campaign:

When Dick Cheney recently took John Kerry's comment about **sensitivity** in the war on terror out of context and spun it for his audiences, he was performing a **psychologically masterful manipulation of all three brains**.

Only **ridicule with a subtext of fear** has this power.

"America has been in too many wars for any of our wishes, but not a one of them was won by being sensitive," Cheney said, firing first the thinking brain ("too many wars") and then the limbic brain ("for our wishes[hopes/ideals]"). And then he went for the reptile brain: "...but not one of them was won by being sensitive."

The comment brought an instant response of laughter - an emotional and involuntary response, as Freud pointed out, that's the result of the neocortex thinking it's moving logically along in one direction (a discussion of too many wars) and then suddenly getting derailed ("but not one of them was won by being sensitive") from that thought. This sudden derailment - known among comedians as the "punch line" - *causes the thinking brain to be momentarily confused and triggers a response known as laughter that comes involuntarily from the limbic mammalian brain.* (This is why comedy almost always involves misdirection, like in the old Red Skelton classic, "I just flew in from Chicago...and, boy, are my arms tired!")

But then, in a brilliant coup de grâce, Cheney spoke directly to his listener's reptilian brain, the part that most powerfully controls our behaviors because it constantly is vigilant to maintain our survival. "Those that threaten us and kill innocents around the world," he said, arousing the reptilian awareness of threat, "do not need to be treated more sensitively, they need to be destroyed."

To reinforce this message to his listener's most primitive instincts, Cheney continued to invoke the word "sensitive" a half-dozen more times, always wrapping it in surprise and survival.

Not only is this among the most sophisticated of psychological warfare operations, in this case it was also one of the most immoral, since Cheney was quoting Kerry out of context and, thus, basing his entire premise upon what was essentially a lie.

But the deed was done, because all three brains had been touched.

No matter how much the Kerry campaign tried to argue to the thinking neocortex that his words meant we should be sensitive to the needs and values of our allies and not sensitive to our enemies, his response never reached the limbic or reptilian brains of his or Cheney's listeners. **Kerry's** response - "It's sad they can only be negative" - was one that *only reached the thinking neocortex*. It didn't provoke a laugh, driving it into the limbic brain, and it didn't address Bush/Cheney failures to keep Americans safe, the main issue of the reptilian brain.

The simple reality is that **issues framed in intellect will never trump issues framed in emotions**. And to have maximum power, those emotions must include the limbic brain feelings of hope and idealism as well as the reptilian brain instincts for survival and safety. [emphasis added]

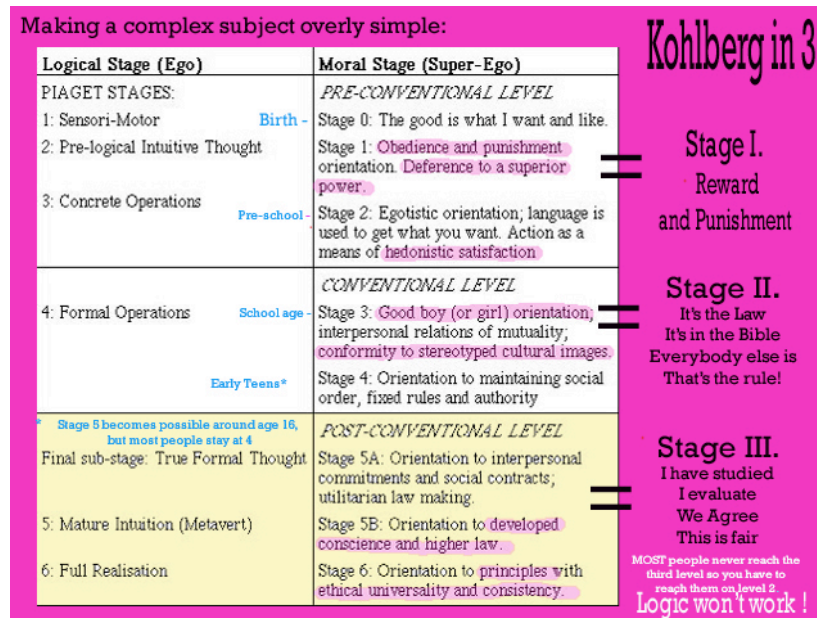
Framing is the key. **We have to learn to speak lizard/limbic/logic if we want to win.**

End of Part II

Part III

Why do you believe you believe what you believe?

It's not enough to know what a person believes. You have to know why they believe it. In other words, you have to know the process that got them there. One of the best theories of moral and intellectual development was developed by **Lawrence Kohlberg**. His theory has been criticized by feminists as being a bit androcentric, but the variations found in later theories that account for gender are not pronounced enough to make a difference for the purposes of this discussion. As it is, I'm reducing Kohlberg's 6 levels of development to only 3. Here's a graphic that has the breakdown I'm using.



As babies, we do what feels good. As toddlers, we're all about reward and punishment, and we struggle with first deferring to a higher power (usually a parent) then resisting that authority. This stage is sometimes revisited in the college years, when a young adult lives and dies by their grades, so be aware of that. For the most part, around the age of 8 or so, we've developed a strong sense of us and them.

This School age level is the most important. It's when the rules become important. Fitting in means everything. We learn the rules of the herd/tribe/school/religion/culture and decide our position within - or sometimes, without- them. People at this level of moral and intellectual development never question authority in an abstract way. If you are born in a Christian (or Islamic, or communist or any other group) environment, you either accept it, or ignore it, but you don't question whether there is a different way. The second stage doesn't go looking for answers. The answers are already determined by someone else - an authority, like the law or government, a religious text, a parent, etc. You are a good person or a sinner. You are a good citizen or a "commie" or "hippie" or "terrorist". This is an either/or mindset and you have to speak its language or you are seen as outside the group and therefore subversive. Anything foreign is suspect. Conformity is more important than logic.

You have to keep in mind that **most** of the people you meet are functioning at this level. If you ask a person at Level 2 how they know their religion is the right one, they'll probably look at you as if you are crazy. They have probably never questioned its origin, will probably feel blessed to have been born into the "right" culture, and they'll have little knowledge or understanding of different groups even within the context of their own culture.

Now **I'm not saying that all Christians operate at this level.** It's entirely possible for a person to use 3rd level reasoning and still subscribe to Christianity, though they'll be of the more tolerant, truly Christ-oriented style Christian than the Bible-thumping, Old Testament stone-the-sinners style that has taken over our government.

The 3rd level of moral and intellectual functioning becomes possible around age 16 or so, when abstract thought is possible, but most people never reach that stage. Environmental factors, such as education, social groups, travel to other countries and experience with other cultures are all factors that contribute to this level of functioning. This is where the "Liberal Elite" label comes from. Level 3's get frustrated that Level 2's can't follow what we consider simple logic. Level 2's think we're uppity because we aren't following the program, and who the hell do we think we are trying to change the way it's always been. Sound familiar?

But wouldn't it be better to dispense with religion altogether?

End of Part III

PART IV: Religion vs. Reason

Why should a rational person use religious symbolism? For the same reason an American ought to learn Spanish. It makes it easier to communicate with someone who doesn't speak your language.

But do we really need religion? That's a subject for long debate, but my opinion is "yes". I love religion. I'm not crazy about the things people use religion for, but that doesn't mean that religion itself is bad. It just means that people who don't question authority are easily manipulated by governments and religious hierarchies. I actually believe that some form of belief system is better than no belief system at all. It gives the world context, and makes it easier to navigate. I believe we crave it psychologically. It gives people hope, and comfort, and it can bring out our best qualities: mercy, compassion, joy. Some people use science in the same way others use religion, to give structure to their perceptions of the world. There are times when that approach can be just as harmful as religion. Science is great, but it doesn't have all the answers, and thinking that it does can cause a lot of problems. Global warming, for example. But that's a different subject. I personally believe that science and religion have to be congruent, and mine are. That's a different subject, too -

I've written about it in my discussion of the Bright Movement titled "Looking toward a Bright Future" posted at The-Goddess.org.

The question is, how do you talk to someone who believes "God" spoke blank verse Middle English and wants you to stone your neighbors for working on the sabbath? Well, first, you don't laugh at their religion. Second, you realize that you need to know what their religion is, and study it. Then you speak to them in their own language. It makes them comfortable, it shows that you take their religion seriously and there are more points in our favor in the Bible than in theirs.

For example:

Matthew

Chapter 5:

- Verse 3** Blessed are the **poor** in spirit: for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.
7 Blessed are the **merciful**: for they shall obtain mercy.
9 Blessed are the **peacemakers**: for they shall be called the children of God.

NOTE: No mention that "blessed are the war mongers" nor does it suggest, as **Falwell** put it, that we should "blow them away in the name of the Lord".

Chapter 19:

- Verse 21** Jesus said unto him, If thou wilt be perfect, **go and sell that thou hast, and give to the poor**, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come and follow me.
22 But when the young man heard that saying, he went away sorrowful: for he had great possessions.
23 Then said Jesus unto his disciples, Verily I say unto you, That **a rich man shall hardly enter into the kingdom of heaven.**
24 And again I say unto you, It is easier for a camel to go through the eye of a needle, than for a rich man to enter into the kingdom of God.

NOTE: No dispensations offered for manipulating California energy markets and ripping off little old ladies, or stealing anyone's retirement fund. *Enjoy the heat, Kenny-boy.*

Luke

Chapter 10:

- Verse 29** But he, willing to justify himself, said unto Jesus, And who is my neighbour?
30 And Jesus answering said, A certain man went down from Jerusalem to Jericho, and fell among thieves, which stripped him of his raiment, and wounded him, and departed, leaving him half dead.
31 And by chance there came down a certain priest that way: and when he saw him, he passed by on the other side.
32 And likewise a Levite, when he was at the place, came and looked on him, and passed by on the other side.
33 But a certain Samaritan, as he journeyed, came where he was: and when he saw him, he had compassion on him,
34 And went to him, and bound up his wounds, pouring in oil and wine, and set him on his own beast, and brought him to an inn, and took care of him.
35 And on the morrow when he departed, he took out two pence, and gave them to the host, and said unto him, Take care of him; and whatsoever thou spendest more, when I come again, I will repay thee.
36 Which now of these three, thinkest thou, was neighbour unto him that fell among the thieves?
37 And he said, **He that shewed mercy on him.** Then said Jesus unto him, **Go, and do thou likewise.**

Chapter 14:

- Verse 13** But when thou makest a feast, call the poor, the maimed, the lame, the blind:
14 And thou shalt be blessed; for they cannot recompense thee: for thou shalt be recompensed at the resurrection of the just.

John

Chapter 8:

- Verse 7** **He that is without sin among you, let him first cast a stone at her.**
32 And ye shall **know the truth**, and the **truth shall make you free.**

James

Chapter 2:

- Verse 4** Are ye not then partial in yourselves, and are become judges of evil thoughts?
5 Hearken, my beloved brethren, Hath not God chosen the poor of this world rich in faith, and heirs of the kingdom which he hath promised to them that love him?
6 **But ye have despised the poor. Do not rich men oppress you, and draw you before the judgment seats?**
7 Do not they blaspheme that worthy name by the which ye are called?
8 If ye fulfil the royal law according to the scripture,
Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself, ye do well:
20 But wilt thou know, O vain man, that **faith without works is dead?**

The teachings of **Jesus** repeatedly emphasized **caring for the poor and the sick**. **The Republican agenda has done just the opposite**. It has benefitted the wealthiest among us, at the expense of the middle class and the poor. They are trying to wipe out social programs not controlled by the church. This is very **dangerous** for several reasons. First, class warfare can get ugly. Think **French Revolution**. Second, part of the reason we're in this mess is that our public school systems are failing. People don't understand that we are not a Christian nation; that, in fact, our government was *deliberately designed* to prevent a theocracy from taking over. Children who are home schooled or raised in parochial school will never learn this from those sources that we count on to create good citizens. **Why are Christian Schools and Universities accredited when we know at least part of their curriculum is false?** How are people going to develop higher levels of moral and intellectual thought if their misconceptions are never challenged?

There are times when you have to shake someone's faith a little to get them to consider that other ideas might be as valid as theirs. I hate doing that, but if someone is ready to kill or be killed for faith, I'm going to question it. In the end, all we have is conjecture. If you must use logic, know your subject. When people try to recruit me, I point out that I'm not Pagan because I haven't studied Christianity, I'm Pagan because I *have* studied it and found it full of contradictions and philosophies I don't believe. For example, I will sometimes ask a person why they aren't a Buddhist. How do they know Jesus was the Savior? They never met him. The people who wrote the **New Testament** did so after his death, and **some of them never knew him**. Who told you Jesus was the Savior? How would they know? Do you trust that person or authority that much? Who says it's the word of God? How do you know the "Saints" weren't just a bunch of tribal hash smokers seeing "God" in the smoke. Maybe the Bible is what happens when a Nomadic people encounter UFO's. Have they read **Chariot of the Gods**? Why not? If a guy who looks like the blonde hunky Jesus in your Bible showed up at the door, would you invite him in or call the police? What if he looked like an actual Middle Eastern Jew, with dark hair, skin and eyes? Would he be welcomed in your house? Would his twelve companions? I doubt it. I doubt I'd even be welcome if my religion were known, and I'm perfectly charming- ha ha.

Most of the tenets of **Christian Legalism*** have nothing to do with actual scripture. Few of the most rabid legalists have actually read the Bible and even fewer have the education to understand it. What about the **Apocrypha**? Why did Catholic priests have the authority to leave books out of the original Bible? Are you going to believe the **Dead Sea Scrolls**, or the interpretation written by **Shakespeare** and a few others, who were under orders of a **King** and a **Pope** to alter certain passages to their liking? I have an uncle who says that the **Holy Spirit** worked through all of them so that the **King James Version** is the "literal word of God". How far is logic going to go with someone like that?

You can also point out that **Jesus said**:

I am not sent but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel. [Matthew 15:24]

- Gentiles weren't included in his teachings until after the death of Jesus.
- So does his work apply to them or can only Jews be saved?
- Why should you trust the word of someone who never knew Jesus to contradict "his own words"?

Do you use Rosaries? **Jesus said**: "But when ye pray, **use not vain repetitions, as the heathen do**: for they think that they shall be heard for their much speaking." [Matthew 6:7]

- Rosaries are Pagan in origin. The beads are the petals of a rose, which is a symbol for the labia of the Goddess.
- Are you a Christian or a Pagan if you pray the Rosary?
- If Jesus didn't approve, why are Christians doing it?
- Why did Bush appeal to the Pope for help when most evangelicals think Catholics are Pagans?
- Why did Catholics support Bush when the Pope said he might be the AntiChrist*?
- Doesn't anyone believe what the Pope says anymore?
- Why do Christians not object when **Bush** tells us a lie?

As I've said, though, logic will only get us so far. We have to address fear, include hope, and make sense. That's not easy. We are looking at the task of re-educating an adult electorate on our most basic American values. Short of buying ads on the Super Bowl, I don't know how we'll do it on the scale needed.

For a great discussion of Christian Legalism, go to <http://www.gotquestions.org/Bible-Christian-legalism.html> It's a Christian site that addresses Christians, but it's a good explanation of the difference in Legalism and Grace. We need all the Grace we can get.

End of Part IV

*Wayne Madsen, New Catholic Times, May 18, 2003 "Pope fears Bush is antichrist, journalist contends"
http://www.findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m0MKY/is_9_27/ai_108881880