

Michael Lerner

Michael Lerner and I met in psychology graduate school at the Wright Institute in Berkeley in the fall of 1975 almost 45 years ago. Michael was a grizzled 32 and I was only 28 at the time, and we were both getting our second graduate degrees, both seeking a new path to understanding how the psychological distortions which we felt were so everpresent in American culture and which had helped to create the lunacy of the killing of 58,000 Americans and 3 million Asians in Vietnam, could be understood and integrated into the critique we already had of the injustices and inequalities of capitalism as a social and economic system. We wanted to know more fully how the psychological and the socio-economic aspects of life were connected to one another and how could we shift our life's work to focus on healing and repairing this broken world. And this perspective almost immediately made us two of the school's main critics of what we were being taught, in particular the idea that psychological distortions and suffering could be explained by problems in the isolated nuclear family. As joint veterans of the social movements of the 1960s-- Michael as a leading political activist and me at that time as a counter-culture rebel--we felt we knew that the problems in the family were but expressions of distortions in the wider world within which families were incubated and shaped; and Michael and I became fast friends as the two people in every class who would never accept the supposedly self-evident things we were being taught about normal development and the normal explanations of psychological difficulty. We came to love each other through our common role as outcasts and trouble-makers, and we have stayed together as a couple for almost 45 years.

Since that time, Michael has made an incredible contribution to the effort to heal and repair the world—writing over 15 brilliant books including his most recent manifesto entitled *Revolutionary Love*, which I urge all of you to read; starting and leading and being the main writer and orator of *Tikkun* magazine, which has made such an important contribution to deepening public discourse about the psychospiritual dimension of politics, culture and society; speaking all over the country and really the world about how to integrate deep psychological and spiritual insight into the building of a transformative and healing politics; and giving voice to a complex and empathic understanding of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict and articulating a path forward that could, if followed, allow both peoples to heal their traumatic histories and live together in peace and mutual recognition of each other's humanity.

But this list of accomplishments only enumerates what Michael has done in its “outer” aspect; it fails to capture what I think is Michael's most significant contribution in what I would call its “inner” dimension—namely the moral courage that he has demonstrated throughout his life to publicly show the way toward actually being a totally committed spiritual and political being, modeling for others how to bring about a spiritual-political transformation of the world. In synagogue and High Holiday services, we recite the sh'ma prayer which says we must every day write the spiritual-political truth upon our doorposts and bind it upon our arm and talk about it in the public square, but in my lifetime no one has actually done this more constantly and more visibly and publicly than Michael, no matter how resistant the context is, how uncomfortable it may make listeners, and no matter how “unrealistic” it may seem to a group of a few people sitting around a table at a restaurant or coffee shop, or as has fairly often been the case, to thousands of people gathered at a conference or listening on the radio or on CNN, or even to

millions of people as was the case when Michael spoke two years ago at the televised memorial service for Muhammad Ali.

The point I'm making here is not just that Michael has shown moral courage in being willing to speak deep and important truths to people who at first think they don't want to hear it...more important than that, he has shown those of us who DO believe in what he is saying about the possibility of creating a loving and caring world that we too can insist upon this in public, that we can ourselves believe fully that the world we think can be brought about can actually be brought about, and that it is little shmo's like us who can and must say so wherever we are so that we can pass on to others the confidence that they too can dare to believe in what is in their own hearts, no matter how much they conceal their longings behind neutral facades and pleasant demeanors masking their own secret frustration and pain that the loving world they know they deserve does not yet exist in reality.

In this respect especially, Michael has been my mentor throughout my adult life, showing me how I can be, and how I ought to be, in fighting for a truly loving, caring and just world, no matter how momentarily despairing I may be feeling peering out at the vast replication of injustice in the world, no matter much I may be tempted to seek some private solution to life's challenges "bankin off of the northeast winds, sailin on summer breeze, skippin over the ocean like a stone," to cite one of my favorite escapist rock and roll songs. No matter where he is or what he's doing, Michael always manifests the moral courage to stand at Armageddon and battle for the Lord, and we all thank him for it and love him for it, and rely on him for it in summoning our own power to make the world the healed and beautiful place that we know it can actually be.