



SEASON OF DARKNESS OR SEASON OF LIGHT: IT'S YOUR CHOICE

John L. Hart, Ph.D. author of *There Will Be Killing*

As we all enter “The Holiday Season,” whether we want to or not, the one thing we can be sure of, whether we like it or not, is that we all will be inundated with advertising. One of the hottest ads so far in this very chilly winter has become a surprising source of controversy. As Jessica Durando of USA Today writes on November 25:

The new [Sainsbury's grocery chain Christmas advertisement](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWF2JBb1bvM), (<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=NWF2JBb1bvM>) made in partnership with The Royal British Legion, is inspired by events from a century ago.

The three-minute, 40 second ad shows the 1914 Christmas Truce, where [British and German soldiers](#) met in no man's land, put down their guns and celebrated holiday. The Brits and Germans start playing football.

The commercial features snow, choruses of 'Silent Night' in two languages and shows how war is transformed to a moment of peace.

But the ad has also caused at least 240 complaints to the Advertising Standards Authority over promoting a company through the use of war as a backdrop, according to the AP.

So far, it has been viewed on YouTube over 12 million times. It was posted on Nov. 12.

The message is "Christmas is for sharing" with the common prop being a chocolate bar in blue wrapping, which is being sold to aid the Royal British Legion.

According to Business Insider on November 27 (<http://www.businessinsider.com/asa-will-not-investigate-sainsburys-christmas-ad-2014-11#ixzz3KVLW68eL>), those YouTube hits keep on coming while complaints have ratcheted up to 727 due to claims the ad is “offensive because it uses a World War I tale to promote the brand, and misleading because it was not clear from the outset that the spot was an ad.” Apparently a major source of discontent is due to that vintage-looking chocolate bar that has subsequently sold at 5,000 bars an hour with a portion of the proceeds going to the Royal British Legion charity.

And this has caused over 700 complaints to the ASA because of people not being happy about using war to promote a company or products? Come on. Every time we have war, and even when we are not at war, we have advertising/ propaganda about it all the time. At least in the Sainsbury's commercial there is actually something to feel good about. And, it gives us much to think about. Given the enormous popularity of this ad—13 million hits and counting on YouTube since it was posted on November 12th—it has to be touching something we should all think about beyond the outrage of “using war.”

For me, a Veteran of one of these endless wars, the idea of meeting your “enemy” on the battlefield and sharing something, which basically is each other’s humanity in a moment of peace, is poignant. Apparently those moments in WWI that are celebrated in the ad really happened. Amazing. People who were fighting with one another for years just stopped. Could it be even remotely possible that the same thing might happen in Ferguson, Missouri (link: <http://www.foxnews.com/us/2014/11/29/photo-boy-hugging-officer-at-portland-ferguson-protest-goes-viral/>)? Could people meet in Jerusalem? Or Syria? How about in our own households?

When it comes to home and holidays, the season often elicits strong emotions and memories, both joyous and sorrowful, and has a way of augmenting them to a higher pitch. Some families draw closer together while others punish each other with distance, grudges, refusals to forgive incidents from the past. They can range from petty arguments to major damage inflicted on a loved one. While there are certainly situations that call for accountability, even possibly mediation or therapy to sort through deep seated issues and emotional distress, it’s important to remember that the ability to forgive provides more healing for the one doing the forgiving than the recipient of it.

On November 11, just the day before the Sainsbury ad premiered, John Meroney from The Atlantic magazine published a portion of his interviews with the remarkable Louis Zamperini, who died this past July. The WWII survivor, an icon of courage and endurance, is the subject of the wonderful book *Unbroken: A World War II Story of Survival, Resilience, and Redemption* by Laura Hillenbrand, on which Angelina Jolie’s film *Unbroken* is based. When asked about forgiveness, here is how he responded:

Zamperini: When you hate somebody, you don’t hurt them in the least. All you’re doing is hurting yourself. But if you can forgive—and if it’s true—you’ll feel good. It’s chemical. White corpuscles flood your immune system, and that’s a secret to good health.

Meroney: What kind of response are you receiving from *Unbroken*?

Zamperini: Ninety percent of the letters I get are from people who’ve been hurting, and they contact me for advice or counseling. I had one this morning—a woman with three little children, divorced. She goes to church, says she’s a Christian. She can’t forgive her former husband. She said, “I read your book and what it says about forgiveness and I broke down and cried.” I quoted Mark Twain for her: “Forgiveness is the fragrance that the violet sheds on the heel that has crushed it.”

Mr. Zamperini should know about forgiveness more than most after being tortured in a Japanese prison camp by a sadistic guard for over two years (this was after his B-24 crashed into the Pacific where he floated on a raft for two months in 1943). And he remains in good company with fellow veterans from other wars who have sought their own healing, often accompanied by a search for forgiveness, by revisiting the people they once regarded as enemies.

If you go to Google and type in “veterans returning to Vietnam” what you’ll see is a phenomenon revealing itself in countless interviews, articles, videos, and organizational sites such as Soldiers Heart, Veterans for Peace, and more. There were many sites that caught my eye, including coverage by Brian Williams on the NBC Nightly News (<http://>

www.nbcnews.com/id/43155385-nbc_nightly_news_with_brian_williams#.VHedeWd0yM8) when two former adversaries on the battlefield met after 40 years. What it mostly comes down to, though, is a search for inner peace and closure; to ask “who are we now?” instead of remaining entrenched in “who we were then.” To reconcile the past with the present.

Times change, people change, and I think one reason the holidays can hit us so hard is because it earmarks a yearly time to reflect. As a psychotherapist, I’m compelled to ask: What about you right now? Are you tormented by something that happened 20 years ago, 10 years, last year, an hour ago? Though guidance and direction in a brief column like this is simplistic, there are steps you can take to proactively get in a better place. The link between our minds, emotions, and bodies is incredibly powerful and I would like to offer what I believe is some information we could all stand to benefit from.

Dr. Marilyn Mitchell wrote an article, “Heart and Soul Healing” (Psychology Today, January 14, 2013), wherein she explains, “Forgiveness is an important action that can lead to a place of greater healing and peace. Forgiving, and letting go of anger and resentment, has even shown to benefit a person’s physical health. Studies show that forgiveness can bring about lower stress hormones, strengthen the immune system, lower blood pressure, and reduce gastrointestinal and other body pains. However, as we all know, forgiveness doesn’t come easily.” Dr. Mitchell then goes on to introduce us to 9 Steps to Forgiveness, from Frederic Luskin, PhD, director of the Stanford University Forgiveness Project. Indeed, Dr. Luskin’s steps can provide us with essential tools to forgive others in order to move forward with our lives:

9 Steps to Forgiveness

1. Know exactly how you feel about what happened and be able to articulate what about the situation is not OK. Then, tell a trusted couple of people about your experience.
2. Make a commitment to yourself to do what you have to do to feel better.
3. Forgiveness is for you and not for anyone else. Forgiveness does not necessarily mean reconciliation with the person that hurt you, or condoning of their action. What you are after is to find peace. Forgiveness can be defined as the “peace and understanding that come from blaming that which has hurt you less, taking the life experience less personally, and changing your grievance story.”
4. Get the right perspective on what is happening. Recognize that your primary distress is coming from the hurt feelings, thoughts and physical upset you are suffering now, not what offended you or hurt you two minutes – or ten years – ago. Forgiveness helps to heal those hurt feelings.
5. At the moment you feel upset practice a simple stress management to soothe your body’s flight or fight response.
6. Give up expecting things from other people, or your life, that they do not choose to give you. Recognize the “unenforceable rules” you have for your health or how you or

other people must behave. Remind yourself that you can hope for health, love, peace and prosperity and work hard to get them.

7. Put your energy into looking for another way to get your positive goals met than through the experience that has hurt you. Instead of mentally replaying your hurt seek out new ways to get what you want.

8. Remember that a life well lived is your best revenge. Instead of focusing on your wounded feelings, and thereby giving the person who caused you pain power over you, learn to look for the love, beauty and kindness around you. Forgiveness is about personal power.

9. Amend your grievance story to remind you of the heroic choice to forgive.

The poet William Stafford once wrote, “the darkness around us is deep.” True as that is, I believe the depth of our common humanity goes even deeper, as it did in a sliver of time on a foreign battlefield in 1914. That’s the timeless message responsible for over 13 million hits on YouTube for a commercial that touches the heart of what we all yearn for —reassurance that in the middle of the deep darkness all around us, there is the overriding human capacity for compassion and understanding through the connection of each other’s humanity. Reminding us that if we all could just somehow stop and come out of our dark mental trenches and foxholes to more clearly see those we have been fighting, despising, and labeling we might call it a truce and share some common good in this Season of Light.

Happy holidays.

Other suggested reading:

<http://www.csmonitor.com/USA/Society/2013/1110/Why-US-veterans-are-returning-to-Vietnam>

http://www.amazon.com/Warriors-Return-Restoring-Soul-After/dp/1622032004/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1417122486&sr=8-1&keywords=the+warriors+return+tick