

Gay and Transgender Issues in the Workplace

Letting Go of the Monkey's Hand

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“Monkey Mind” is a term in meditative practice that refers to our tendencies to allow our mind to race from one issue to the next, like a monkey jumping from one tree to another, or from one window in the cage to the many others, getting very excited or agitated by what it sees.

My Monkey Mind races today from the window in which I see Out magazine's inane listing of the 50 most powerful gay people in America, including people who refuse to publicly acknowledge that they're gay, like Barry Diller, Matt Drudge, and Anderson Cooper, and excluding real movers and shakers in my gay life (other than those whom I know and love on Out's list) such as Chuck Wolfe, Bob Witeck, Kevin Cathcart, Nadine Smith, Nathaniel Frank, Gregory Maquire, Carol Dopp, Joe Kort, Kim Nelson, Kevin Hannan, David Norris, John Corvino, Selisse Berry, Kathy Marvel, Kate Clinton, Ralph Blair, Mary Breslauer, Ron Ansin, Eli Coleman, Susan Gore, Anthony Collerton, Michele Karlsberg, Evan Wolfson, Bianca Cody Murphy, Keith Kahla, Wes Combs, Richard Alther, Kim Cromwell, Steve Walker, Dotti Berry, Ron Robin, Greg Sampedro, Dan Brown, Christian de la Huerta, Mark Benson, Ray Repp, Tomie de Paola, Richard Friend, Ray Struble, Todd Sears, Howard Israel, Liz Winfield, Tom McNaught, Bill Johnson, Mark Leno, Richard Wagoner, Stratton Pollitzer, Daryl Herrschaft, Larry Wald, John McNeill, Paul Diederich, Larry Kessler, Jim Braude, David Mills, Larry Kramer, Mike Signorile, Mark Leach, Joe Kramer, Carson Kressley, Sharon Lynn, Ann Maguire, Sarah Peak, Chad Allen, Marty Moran, Philip Rafshoon, Mark Harris, Craig Wilson, Steven Tierney, Scott Pomfret, Nancy Wilson, Dan Woog, and those many others who I'm regrettably forgetting because of my agitation.

Out this window, I read about gay teenagers being mercilessly executed in Iraq and Iran simply for being gay. These sweet young men are being hunted down, hung, shot, and beaten because they had the very bad luck of being born into a country in the 20th century that is barbaric and primitive in its religious-based attitudes and laws about sexuality and gender. As my good friend Tom Roberts would say “Where's the outrage?” Agitation.

And over here, I'm listening to blowhard Bill O'Reilly, the conservative Irish Catholic TV commentator on Fox, who is so upset about the Iowa Supreme Court lifting the ban on gay marriage in the same week that the Vermont legislature overrode the Republican governor's veto of a marriage bill, that Mr. O'Reilly desperately focused his and his listeners' attention on Adam Lambert, the extraordinarily-talented leading contender on American Idol after Bill found an “embarrassing” picture on the Internet of the performer kissing another man. O'Reilly asks publicly if the country should keep Lambert on the show with their votes. Ridiculous. Dizzying Anger.

With all of that upset, can my Monkey Mind then focus on the experience we just had of four neighborhood children leaving an Easter basket at our gate with dyed eggs marked “Brian” and “Ray”? Is it possible to peacefully embrace the significance of that offering and of our friend Milton, who we introduced on Friday to the practice of dying eggs, who showed up on Sunday with

a giant chocolate Brazilian egg filled with candy, just as children in his homeland receive on Easter morning? Or can my Monkey Mind settle completely into the half-hour cuddle in bed that Ray and I enjoyed for the first time in many moons, or the hot chocolate that Ray so lovingly prepared to increase the pleasure of my reading the Sunday New York Times, or of the poached salmon and asparagus risotto I made for dinner?

Monkey Mind means forgoing the joy and beauty of the moment for the adrenalin rush of running from window to window to be stimulated by the major dramas of the time. It's not that the dramas (our own, or those of our family, friends, and others) aren't relevant to our lives. They are relevant, but not as important as the children's Easter basket, the exchanged eggs, the snuggle, the hot chocolate, and the smiles of contentment from Ray and Milton as they enjoyed the salmon. If given the opportunity to reflect and to choose, the fifty (plus) most powerful gay men and women on anyone's list, the young gay boys murdered in Iran and Iraq, Adam Lambert, and Bill O'Reilly would hopefully all opt to snuggle for a half an hour with the person they loved and receive baskets of candy and dyed eggs from children. But they too have Monkey Mind. We all do. It's what makes our lives feel so unsatisfactory, so exhausting, and so meaningless.

To stop running from window to window, we have to let go of the hand of the monkey. We have to stop letting it lead us around. And when we bravely do so, we can't beat ourselves up for once again grabbing the hand and running with the monkey to the thousands of windows in our mind. Even hermits and monks, who have isolated themselves from distractions, grab the hand of the monkey throughout the day. They are generally just more aware, as anyone on a spiritual path would be, that the monkey ceaselessly demands attention.

Multi-tasking is like having Monkey Mind. We fool ourselves into thinking that we're fully capable of giving sufficient attention to each issue, but in truth, we know that though we may get a lot done, we've done nothing as well as we might have had we focused our attention completely on the one task at hand.

Next year at this time, Out magazine will have another inane list of the "Fifty Most Powerful Gay People in America," and gay men will still be hunted down and executed in Iran and Iraq, and Bill O'Reilly will again come up with something outrageous to keep his ratings high, but next year I won't receive an Easter offering from the neighborhood children for the first time, nor be introduced to a Brazilian Easter egg for the first time. I'm grateful to say that this time around, I had let go of the monkey's hand long enough to focus on these moments of joy.