

In September and October, **MARK NEPO** will be teaching at The Sophia Institute in Charleston, South Carolina, The Omega Institute in Rhinebeck, New York, the Changing the Odds Conference in Dallas, The Unity Church in Vancouver, and The Open Center in New York City. See [MarkNepo.com](http://MarkNepo.com) for details.

## Bending or Loving the World

**I WAS AT THE AIRPORT**, traveling to New York, waiting to go through security with my passport out, when I noticed for the first time that most pages have quotes on them. And two of them, back to back, capture the way we work with and against community in our American culture. On page 20, Lyndon Johnson says, “This is what America is all about . . . Is our world gone? We say ‘Farewell.’ Is a new world coming? We welcome it—and we will bend it to the hopes of man.” On the page before, Dwight Eisenhower says, “Whatever America hopes to bring to pass in the world must first come to pass in the heart of America.”

Johnson reveals the dark arrogance of our American will over centuries to bend whatever we encounter toward our desire. Of course, bending by itself is a creative skill and, done with care, has released the potential of the world. But bending others to the point of breaking has led to tyranny and atrocity across history. In modern America, consuming is a form of bending resources till they break. We bend things to innovate; we bend animals to make our labor easier; and we bend people to make ourselves rich. But along the way we’ve bent and consumed the Earth until it’s become dangerously out of balance.

Yet Eisenhower reveals the core of what has made America at its best the beacon of the world: our ability to change the world around us by embodying our values. When we can let who we meet and what we aspire to pass through the heart of our community, we cooperate with life and relate to things, animals, people, and the Earth—much like the Native Americans who cared for this land before us.

Since our Founding Fathers conceived of a free society while also institutionalizing slavery, America has struggled between bending the world and loving the world. Today, we hide in isolation until we’re jarred into letting the world pass through our heart. When we bend things to the point of consuming or breaking them, we manufacture a world of tools and debris and are seldom satisfied. When we cooperate with what we meet, we animate a dynamic world of living things we can love. If blessed to be broken of our arrogance, we can face what’s before us humanely and inhabit a deeper sense of security.

Often, the difference between arrogance and humility is whether we insist on our self-interest above all else or accept that our welfare is mutual. Our insistence on self-interest has plagued the human experiment since the beginning. Robert

From Mark Nepo’s new book, *More Together Than Alone: Discovering the Power and Spirit of Community in Our Lives and in the World* (Atria).

Kegan, a pioneer in the dynamics of adult life development, calls the insistence on self-interest centrism. Centrism of any kind—whether egocentrism, gender centrism, religious centrism, national centrism, or family centrism—can hinder our understanding of others and the world around us. Kegan defines *centrism* as installing what is familiar as true and sacred, accepting what is comfortable as foundational. Then we base our experience of the world on what is familiar and not necessarily true. When we assume that what is familiar is true, we start to push away new experience. Centrism is the seed of fundamentalism and prejudice.

Still, we can choose to see things as they are and cooperate with life rather than consume it. Working with her husband in Nicaragua, a young activist was nursing her newborn on a strip of shore along the Pacific where magnificent turtles lumber up from

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the sea to lay their eggs. The young couple was spellbound as these ancient creatures slowly came and went from the sea, leaving their unborn young in sand-nests just out of reach of the surf. And even more astonished to see poor young men steal these magnificent eggs to sell to restaurants as delicacies.

To take inventory of our centrism in any given moment, we can ask ourselves: Am I an egg-collector or an egg-nester? Am I snatching and selling the life I see or helping things be born? Of course, if you're one of the poor young men needing to feed your family, it's not that simple. Desperate enough, and we'll do anything to survive.

Though the opposite is also true.

It was the kindness of many, which I felt compelled to return, that helped me survive cancer. Since both are true—we *will* do whatever is necessary to survive *and* give all we have left to keep others alive—the more telling questions are: At what point in our suffering are we opened to share whatever we have left? At what point of desperation are we reduced to finding a way together? How close to death before we realize that helping each other—which has more to do with lifting than bending—is the best way to survive? Ultimately, our fear leads us to believe that self-interest will save us, while our suffering lets us discover that we are more together than alone. **S&H**

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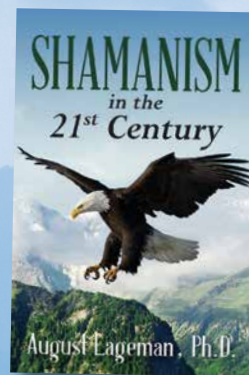
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### About Dr. Lageman, Professional Lightworker & Shaman

- Dr. August Lageman is a retired Colonel of the U.S. Army Reserves and is trained to work with Veterans suffering from PTSD
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- Reiki Master

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