

Breaking the Cultural Hypnosis of Heart and Mind

Emanuel Kuntzelman, ITP International Board member



The staying power of an evolved, global community is dependent upon emergent norms. Large-scale evolution faces an inherent challenge in that emphasis is often placed on the cultural status quo. As societal behaviors have been primarily shaped by the culture in which they arise, they are given legitimacy based on the acceptance of shared common practices. The underlying beliefs of a given culture can obstruct new ways of thinking and behaving, which are perceived as threatening to their current way of living.

As a species, we are far too attached to our respective cultures, and this attachment tends to pollute the climate of global human relations. In many ways, the fears people hold about globalization lie parallel to their fear of—or inability to reconcile—their relationship with death. We might say that out of this fear we resort to a form of self-hypnosis, holding ourselves in a state of ignorance about the impact our behaviors have on ourselves and the world. It is important to make the distinction here that I don't equate globalization with monopolies or more power being given over to the elite. By "globalization," I am referring to enacting open borders, enforceable international law, and standardized cultural norms that pay respect to life.

Because cultures have arisen out of varied circumstances, such as the need for safety and community, the nature of this debate is both deep and visceral. When we are faced with changing the behaviors and beliefs that have provided us with answers to our most pressing requirements and allowed us to enjoy a sense of security, the results can be hypnotic, thus causing us to react fearfully against altering our ways. It is important to remember, however, that the ultimate end of a cycle of incarnation doesn't mean the annihilation of a soul any more than a global humanity would mean the disappearance of the best of our cultural attributes. Both shifting states, rather, indicate that we must awaken from hypnosis and open ourselves to embracing a wider system of possibility. That's a good thing; it broadens the ultimate parameters of who we are, on both spiritual and cultural levels.

Returning to the concept of emergent norms, it is of the utmost importance that we make ourselves aware of the difference between an emergent norm and contagion, individually and collectively. We are far more familiar with the experience of contagion, which can also be described as “mob mentality.” We see contagion exemplified in riots, violent protests, and currently in aspects of backlash populism. The emergent norm, on the contrary, is a steady motivator that stands as the skeleton of a cause as its body grows. Emergent norms based on human dignity allow our culture to coalesce around commonly shared high human values. In this singular moment, the lasting positive changes we seek must come from a profound personal and cultural awareness that becomes the emergent norm for cultural evolution.

If we are to have our evolutionary breakthrough, we must be committed to staying awake, and to finding and pursuing our heartfelt human values rather than falling into habitual patterns. While this work begins with the individual self, the lasting effects will dictate how we, as a species, will thrive in these challenging times.