

"Love and Suffering: Dr. Marc Gafni Reemerges"

by Robb Smith and Ken Wilber

We recently began preparations for a new annual event called "Integral Spiritual Experience" in collaboration with integral spiritual leaders Swami Sally Kempton, Diane Musho Hamilton, Sensei and Dr. Marc Gafni. Ken Wilber and I both felt it was important to transparently investigate and address the current state of affairs as it relates to the alleged sexual misbehavior of Dr. Gafni from a few years ago. Indeed, in Ken's letter to the community of a few years ago he made a commitment that any new information would be examined.

In the past few months there has been an unveiling of what actually transpired amongst Dr. Gafni and his former partners. So as not to influence the discernment necessary in ethical matters of this kind, I won't detail the findings here, but instead point interested readers to look at what has more recently surfaced at www.marcgafni.com. The conclusions drawn on the website by the evaluators, rabbis, spiritual teachers and others are based on ample documentary material. Collectively, at various stages over a period of more than two years, all parties have been heard from directly and through their representatives and now through extensive first person documentation.

From the information that we reviewed, it seems clear that what was previously construed as illegal sexual misconduct was among other things a cauldron of badly-handled relationships and communication amongst adults. To be clear, we know it is not our place to judge a very complex set of perspectives, emotions, and intersubjective commitments. Dr. Gafni has taken ownership of his part of the poor judgment that contributed to the conditions surrounding the events, and we feel deep empathy for those involved and don't presume to fully account for what happened. But, put simply, the evidence is clear that nothing illegal occurred, and by the end there was real pain all around. So how do we move forward?

Integral living is, if anything else, about finding the transcending path through the pain and promise of human life. I have not been a practicing Christian for over 20 years, but as Integral Life began preparing its new documentary film “The Future of Christianity” for delivery this Christmas season, I was delighted to have an opportunity to read some of Father Thomas Keating’s work. In his small tome Transformation of Suffering he describes one of the greatest and most miraculous equations ever described: transformation = suffering + love. The greatest value that we at Integral Life hold, and practice, is love. As we considered the path forward, it was made clear by our commitment to practicing love, which in the end seeks to include, forgive and heal.

As Dr. Gafni reemerges into the integral world, after two years of a significant life review that included personal introspection, therapy and spiritual work, he will be included, as applicable, in future integral events that we sponsor. He is a talented scholar with a unique contribution to make to the unfolding human story. I believe that in this particular story of suffering of which he is a central player, love is the widest path to transformation.

This is why I have asked Dr. Gafni to begin preparing a program on integral love (which will be published on IntegralLife.com). I believe that because of his experiences he has a unique perspective to share, and that because his very presence will cause mixed reactions, this program will be among the best kind of integral engagements: one that invites us to become deeply aware of our own relationship to love, pain, suffering, judgment, forgiveness, and transformation. I have asked him to engage in this project in a personal and transparent way. I offer no promises about what the outcome will be. I am confident that greater freedom and fullness lie at the other end of suffering, and I am committed to fostering that in our community.

I think that this affair is a calling to love more fully and more deeply. That love has the profound power to transform our human frailties into unity that transcends our small stories and overcomes our deepest wounds is the greatest lesson life can teach. Free to be fully human is more than just a tagline for Integral Life. It is a pointing-out instruction, a gentle reminder that this greatest lesson lives within all of us as sinners, and all of us redeemed.

With deep respect,

Robb Smith

Ken Wilber