

Larry and Barry Discuss The Folly of Belief ©

Arthur Lipper

Larry: Of course, all of us need to believe in something bigger than ourselves.

Barry: Why? What personal deficiencies are you trying to accommodate?

Larry: The belief in some higher thing is the only way we can explain the unexplainable coincidences we all experience. Why do we meet some people? Why are we successful and also unsuccessful in so many of our efforts?

Barry: Are you suggesting that our actions do not cause the results experienced? Do you mean that you and I are destined by some thing's determination to win or lose? Do you mean that decisions either of us makes independently or in unison are not determinative of a result?

Larry: What I am saying is that people, including us, need to have a belief that good actions on our part in terms of benefit to others will ultimately produce a good result for us.

Barry: That is how the capitalist system works. We produce a good product or service and people buy it and we make a profit. So it is good for them and good for us.

Larry: Yes, but our motivation should be to do good for others and not just to make a profit.

Barry: The specifics of motivation are not what make a profit. A profit is made if we make available something which is beneficial to the customer. If that is the case, the customer's purchase produces a profit for us and those in the manufacturing and distribution channel.

Larry: If we made the product or service available to people free, that would be a greater service. That way more people would use what we are offering and more people would benefit.

Barry: Sure, but who is to pay for the raw materials and people necessary to both produce and distribute the goods? Do you expect them to work for free and to contribute the parts, etc. because it makes them feel good?

Larry: Some will and lots of people will benefit.

Barry: Putting aside the minor issue of how we feed ourselves and our families without making a profit on what we sell or otherwise distribute, what you are suggesting is the utopian image of perfect socialism or perhaps more directly a barter system with no money being involved.

Larry: How would that work? I like the idea of no money being involved as it is the constant demand for profit which makes so many poorer.

Barry: Wrong. It is the quest for profit which enriches all in the cycle, creates employment and provides vast social benefit. Without the earning of profit the motivation to succeed is empty as self-satisfaction is neither nutritionally fulfilling nor transferable. It is all egocentric.

Larry: So how does barter work and could it work?

Barry: Theoretically, our suppliers could trade us their goods and services in return for some of the products or services we are offering. This could work if our suppliers were farmers growing apple trees and they harvested the apples and traded them to us if we were in the business of making applesauce and apple candies. That would require that we give them less than all of that which we produce so we can barter the apple products to those who own the building we are in of those who create the electricity we use.

Larry: You make it seem very complicated, as we would have to keep most of the that produced and then find and negotiate with the suppliers of things we need.

Barry: Yes, you get it; barter can work in simple transactions between those who have and those who need. It is called sharecropping, trading labor for retaining part of the production.

Larry: So using money is really easier and more practical than trying to barter goods widely. But what about the decision making about our pricing or personnel policies. Isn't there a higher power involved?

Barry: Sure, we can decide to be fair and honest or unfair and dishonest in all aspects of our business and personal dealings. We can be good or bad people. As we both know and believe, it is better business to be good people and certainly the better way of living our lives. It's just that all we need is common sense and an ability to observe what works and doesn't. We don't need to believe in anything except that which we decide based on our own knowledge.

Larry: All that you say makes sense, but what about the people who lived thousands of years ago when they didn't and couldn't know as much about the world and the reasons why things happen as we do now?

Barry: Sure, those people needed to both find a reason for weather changing and how to prepare for a lot of things like diseases. They didn't have knowledge about most of the things which controlled their lives so it was easy for those having leadership skills to anoint themselves as having insights and powers as the representatives of some unseen higher being or body of powers.

Larry: Right, there were sun gods, moon gods, gods of this and that all with idols and human "leaders" using the lack of knowledge of people to take control of the people. They created what we now call religions, which were really an exercise in the power of using crowd ignorance for the benefit of speakers.

Barry: Yes, it was like franchising with territories from which to extract benefit, sometimes in the form of a crowd willingness to do battle against those having different beliefs. The appointment of sub-representatives of the power became local monarchs of the belief system of the populace.

Larry: I get it. Then the so-called religious leaders or self-proclaimed communicators to the higher authorities made deals with the political or military powers. The deals being essentially to keep the people who had less in check with a belief system involving a life after death, where good things happened to those doing the bidding of the communicators and bad things to those who did not.

Barry: Yes, and hoping for things became praying and the faiths gained strength from the fact that no one came back from the afterlife to give a report, so whatever was preached from an elevated platform or pulpit was accepted by the uninformed.

Larry: Ok, so why are there still strong religions when there is knowledge of the weather, diseases and other things which used to be mysteries?

Barry: Because there is still and will always be those who desire and need more than they have and need to have an explanation that it is not their fault that it isn't happening for them. None of us wants to admit that we could have worked harder, done things differently, accepted or rejected advice, all of which played a role in where we find ourselves today. Many people need an answer, which is not self-condemning, and many religions offer such comfort.

Larry: Can belief be positive for people? Is there a good side to the equation of "believe and it will happen"? Can belief be used constructively by a society?

Barry: Yes. Belief can be positive and it can be based on societal and personal experience without any input from a higher authority. The belief that the application of sustained effort is more likely to produce a positive personal result is more valid than expecting good things to come from an absence of effort. Yes, the application of realistically based belief in oneself is socially constructive, as the more successful people there are in a society the better it is for all in that society.

Larry: So it is OK to believe that becoming a winner is or can be good for a lot of other people as well as just the winning individual. So it is OK for me to wear my Rolex when we are having a good period in business?

Barry: Sure, as long as you know and let others know that you didn't become a winner because of you alone, but needed the help or a lot of other people, as well as a bit of serendipity. Let's not ever forget good fortune, even if it awakens the prospect of there being something we still do not understand about everything.

Larry: Do you mean there could still be a God, even after we know so much about the universe?

Barry: Sure, but there is a difference in believing that a power wants us all to do good things to and for each other and a power which can or will make it happen for any of us based on begging or praying to an unproven and unprovable power.

Larry: Ok. Work hard and work smart and good things can and most likely will work out.

Barry: Be a good person and do good things and profits should follow.

Larry: I will follow you my Lord.

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