
A Spiritual Covenant with America

by Rabbi Michael Lerner

1. We will create a society that promotes rather than undermines loving and caring relationships and families. We will challenge the materialism and selfishness (often rooted in the dynamics of the competitive marketplace) that undermine loving relationships and family life.

Every institution or social practice that encourages us to see others as instruments for our own advancement rather than as embodiments of the sacred must be reconceptualized and rebuilt so that it instead maximizes our capacities to be loving and generous and caring. We will challenge cynical attempts to reduce life to self-interest. And we will oppose the cheapening of sexuality that regularly occurs as marketers use sex to sell their products and seek to do so with teens and now pre-teens. Sure, we need full employment, child care, flex time, a coordinated assault on poverty, and many other economic changes, so we support all these elements of the traditional liberal agenda—but our spiritual focus goes beyond the normal liberal list of demands to insist on a fundamental change in the values that our society promotes: our society must be safe for love rather than fostering the qualities in people that make love more difficult to sustain: cynicism, harshness, individualism, self-centeredness, despair about ultimate meaning, insensitivity to the possibility of transformation, and fear.

2. We will take PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY for ethical behavior, reviving the sacred element in sexuality, shaping a purpose-driven life connected to our highest values, building an inner spiritual life, devoting time and energy to caring for each other as well as in self-development, affirming pleasure and humor and joyfulness and celebration of the grandeur of the universe and the mystery of being, and recognizing that government cannot replace our own efforts to build a spiritually grounded life.

We will be compassionate toward each other, recognizing that each of us is unlikely to be the fullest embodiment of our own highest ideals.

3. We will build Social Responsibility into the normal operations of our Economic and Political Life. The Social Responsibility Amendment (SRA) to the U.S. Constitution that we propose requires corporations to get a new corporate charter once every ten years which would only be granted to those corporations which could prove to a jury of ordinary citizens that it had a satisfactory history of social responsibility.

This is one step toward our larger goal of transforming the bottom line in our economy, government, and social institutions. While seeking support and endorsement of the SRA, we will encourage public officials to establish a Social Responsibility clause onto every contract-awarding process, so that corporations competing for public funds must present a detailed social responsibility report and private citizens and local community groups and unions can

challenge the accuracy of that report to the governmental body deciding on awarding of city, state and federal contracts of over \$100,000. To make this happen, we will also seek public funding of all state and national elections and instant runoff procedures for counting votes.

4. We will reshape our education system to teach the values of love, caring, generosity, intellectual curiosity, tolerance, gratitude, awe and wonder at the universe, democratic participation and environmental responsibility. We will emphasize education for these values without abandoning necessary reading and writing skills—and focus on learning respect, thanksgiving and awe for the wonders of the universe, and celebration of all the goodness that has passed on the cultural and scientific wisdom of the human race.

5. We will seek a single payer national health care plan and also broaden the public's understanding of health care. Our physical health cannot be divorced from environmental, social, spiritual, and psychological realities—and the entire medical system has to be reshaped in light of that understanding, focus on prevention, encourage alternative forms of health practice along with traditional Western forms, and insist that because human beings have many levels of reality, health care must reflect that rather than seek to reduce the human to the merely material.

6. We will be stewards of the environment. We will champion voluntary simplicity and ethical consumption while seeking to change the global economy so that it is ordered in rational and sustainable ways.

We will bring spiritual wisdom into daily life to change our addiction to endless consumption and challenge the media and advertising-driven belief that how many and how costly the things we own are the measure of our worth in the world.

7. Foreign policy and homeland security transformation: We will build a safer world and a rational approach to immigration through a strategy of non-violence and generosity that eliminates poverty both in the US and in every other country. The well-being of Americans depends on the well-being of every other person on the planet and the well-being of the planet itself.

We will support a Global Marshall Plan to use 5% of the GDP of the advanced industrial countries societies—each year for the next twenty years) to end global poverty, hunger, homelessness, inadequate education and inadequate health care. This will do more for homeland security and military safety than sinking trillions of dollars into wars and strategies of world domination that can never work and are immoral. Ending poverty both at home and abroad is both an ethical and security priority.

And we will challenge the globalization of selfishness promoted by Western corporations (and their clones in China, India and Japan) and promote spiritual values of solidarity, caring for others, and love as the most effective way to build a sustainable society and to

achieve “homeland security.” Our path to a world of peace must be a path of peace, social justice, sensitivity to cultural differences and to environmental needs, and non-violence. We will maintain an army on our borders and carefully search every container that comes into the country, and redirect the trillions of dollars that will otherwise be spent on military to ending global poverty and creating adequate education and health care. So while we support the immediate withdrawal of troops from Iraq and the creation of an international Non-Violent Peacekeeping Force to prevent conflicts from escalating, we do so in the context of a coherent global policy that immediately implements the Global Marshall Plan (not by dumping money into the hands of corrupt governments, but through cooperation with non-governmental organizations committed to human rights, democracy, environmental sustainability, and enhancement and respect for native cultures and traditions).

We seek full rights for all immigrants who have made it to our shores. And we will solve the immigration issue in the only possible way—by making the countries from which immigrants are fleeing much more economically successful. Instead of imagining new methods of repressing of the desire that so many immigrants have to live a life freed of extremes of from poverty and political oppression, we will support the Global Marshall Plan in ways that would build the economic infrastructure of the “underdeveloped” world, ensuring that its benefits flow to all people and not just to the economic elites of those countries. We seek a world in which open borders are the norm and there is no fear that the rich countries are being overrun by immigrants because their wellbeing has improved so much in their own countries.

8. We will seek the separation of Church, State and Science. We will protect our society from fundamentalist attempts to impose a particular religion on everyone, but will not fall into a first-amendment fundamentalism which attempts to keep all spiritual values out of the public sphere.

We will protect science from invasion by the state, religion or corporate priorities, but reject “scientism”-- the worldview that claims that everything capable of being known or worthy of our attention can be fully described in scientific terms.

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