Lend Me a Breath

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<http://www.huffingtonpost.com/satpal-singh/lend-me-a-breath_b_6272206.html>

The grand jury decision regarding Eric Garner's death reminds me of a man I met briefly a few years ago. The last thing I wanted to do was talk to him. Admittedly, he was the only one who had offered to drive me to the airport an hour away, with a fierce snowstorm en route. But three nights of almost no sleep had sucked away all the courtesy out of the air around me.

However, almost immediately he had me drawn into an animated conversation. From the freak snowstorm, the tsunami in Japan and the earthquake in Haiti, our discussion veered into how we kill our own neighbors in the name of religion, caste and skin color. I brought up the example of James Byrd, Jr., an African-American man who had been tied behind a pick up truck and dragged along a road for three miles by Lawrence Brewer and his two associates. When I lamented that such horrifying incidents occur despite the fact that we are all children of the same God and are all born equal, my friend went silent -- stone silent.

After several seconds of inconvenient silence, he posed a question. If Mr. Brewer were undergoing surgery, would he refuse to be saved if the only available blood needed to save him came from Mr. Byrd -- the same blood that Mr. Brewer had so mercilessly shed?

It would be disingenuous of me to compare what was done to Mr. Byrd to what we saw in New York City or in Ferguson. However, the issue is still larger than Mr. Eric Garner and Mr. Michael Brown. What we saw in New York City and Ferguson are just symptoms of a cancer that has metastasized all over humanity.

Our main issue is that we do not see all humans as equal. In a sense, we are not humans at all. We are either black or white, high caste or low caste, Hispanic or non-Hispanic, and men or women. We are not humans, but Christians, Muslims, Jews, Hindus, Buddhists or Sikhs. Whatever aspect of human relationship and interaction we look at, it is the same underlying affliction with only slight variations among symptoms, depending on the particular aspect of life we focus on.

For centuries, we have divided the human race into segments that we label "superior" and those that we label "inferior," whether that division is based on skin color, gender, caste or religion. The "superior" segments of our society are often blinded by the gun power they wield against the "inferior" segments, whether it is individual incidents that we see routinely, or large-scale ethnic cleansing, or the widespread violence against women. It is ironic that the fiercest proponents of such indefensible divisions defend their "superiority" in the name of a God, who they claim to be compassionate and all loving.

While in the light of gunshots and chokeholds we need to take decisive actions at the legal, political, educational and societal levels, those actions can

succeed only if we realize the intrinsic oneness of all humanity. Along with these forenamed sections of our society, religious leaders must also play a critical role in delivering this message emphatically, for it does not matter to our Creator (if we believe in one), or to the laws of physics, chemistry, mathematics and biology, what someone's religion, race, caste, skin color, nationality, or gender is.

We must accept, with firm and inviolable conviction, the oneness of the Divine Light that dwells in all of us, and thus the oneness of our blood. Let each and every one of us ask ourselves a question: If I were on a surgeon's table, would I accept blood donated by Eric Garner to save my life?

We cannot be saved from tearing ourselves apart, unless we understand that today we are not dealing with the individual cases of Mr. Garner and Mr. Brown, but with a phenomenon of our own creating.

What part of **"I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe,** I can't breathe, I can't breathe, I can't breathe" do we not understand?