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**Appeal To Virtue**

**By Phillip A. Ross**

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Appeal To Virtue

**Popularity and Responsibility**

Just about everyone knows that something is very wrong with the world in which we live. Problems are compounding everywhere. While we may be tempted to look for someone to blame, that effort, at best, will do nothing to alleviate the problems and, more likely, will only contribute anger and frustration to the mix. Blaming is not constructive. A better approach is to take personal responsibility for the situation, and look for opportunities to make a positive contribution to the solution.

Certain industries already occupy positions that have more opportunities than others. Advertising, marketing, public relations, and other associated promotional industries enjoy the privilege of having many such opportunities. This industry focuses on both capturing and shaping opinion, attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors. The work of this industry is not value neutral. While it appeals to commonly held values, morals and attitudes, it also works to shape them.

"In the traditional economy, products were manufactured and sold for profit to meet the demand of consumers who made their needs known through the market. In the new postmodern capitalist economy, needs are manufactured to meet the supply of producers who market products through promotion, spin, packaging, advertising, and cultural persuasion. From Democracy At Risk: American Culture In A Global Culture, by Benjamin R. Barber.

**Responsibility**

While it is true that the companies and manufactures are legally responsible for the products they make and sell, that does not mean that those who advise them about things like packaging, marketing and advertising are without any associated responsibility. Manufacturers are legally responsible for their advertising, and those who assist in the advertising effort are also responsible for their recommendations. However, the concern here is not with imposed legal responsibilities, but with voluntary moral responsibilities.

## Appeal To Virtue

The issue is not whether those who shape messages and place them before the public in someone else's name have a moral responsibility, but only how that responsibility is exercised. That responsibility can be accepted, or it can be rejected. It can be done intentionally, or it can be done accidentally. We can take the high road, or we can take the low road—or some winding road through the middle. But the bottom line is that moral responsibility belongs to those who shape public messages. And the advertising industry works to influence both public opinion and behavior.

We don't want to get sidetracked in a discussion about the products themselves, or the various ways, technologies or techniques of advertising and marketing. Rather, our concern is the character of the appeal that underlies the advertising, marketing, public relations, or promotional effort. To what values does the campaign appeal? How is it shaped? What are its implications, associations and suggestions? What is the moral currency of the campaign?

### Overt & Covert

The art of communication, which is at the heart of the advertising industry, is a many faceted endeavor. As we know—and know very well, communication has elements that are both overt and covert, both conscious and subconscious. There is a linguistic component, which simply conveys information about the product or company. In addition, there is an emotional component that often appeals to sensuality or sexuality in one way or another. And there is a social or moral component, that appeals to cultural mores, often understood as social acceptability or popularity.

Ad agencies and marketing companies cannot and do not ignore these essential elements of their campaigns. For instance, in our increasingly global society, campaigns—public messages—must be tailored to fit into the culture in which they are employed. Taking cultural mores into consideration can mean the difference between success and failure. But much more is involved than colloquial idioms and social faux pas. At stake is the integrity—even the viability and sustainability—of social order.

The moral logic goes like this: if everyone in a particular culture accepts something or some way of doing or saying something, then it must be okay. If they don't, appealing to it will be offensive. And if something is commonly loved or adored, appealing to it, suggesting it, or associating with it will illicit feelings of love and adoration. In addition, we find that advertisements are being used to change social values, ostensibly to make their products more acceptable. But the values and morals of the advertisers are being foisted upon the public in the process. What "makes sense" to the owners and advertisers is communicated through the ads. And it is being done through an appeal to popularity.

### Appeal To Popularity

The word popular literally means of the people, or by the people, and even for the people—the populus. Thus, an appeal to popularity always requires and carries moral and political overtones. That is to say that all advertising is necessarily political, as well as moral. The point of this discussion is to demonstrate that the advertising industry and its people are endowed with greater moral responsibility than the average bear, simply because of what they do for a living, like it or not.

We began by talking about the state of the world, the moral crisis that currently engulfs the United States of America. For instance, consider Enron and the unfolding fiasco of corporate scandal, graft and corruption at the highest levels of American society—the levels at which advertising is determined.

## Appeal To Virtue

Owners and CEOs establish or approve advertising polities.

Or consider the alcoholism and substance abuse that runs rampant in every community, large or small, urban, rural or suburban. Or consider the blatant sexual promiscuity that saturates both the media and the corporate world. What effect, if any, do you suppose that our moral crisis has in the minds of faithful Muslims? Or in the minds of anyone concerned about honesty, integrity or justice? Might this be related to our war on terrorism?

See *The Mosque to Commerce: Bin Laden's special complaint with the World Trade Center*, by Laurie Kerr, See *The Mosque to Commerce: Bin Laden's special complaint with the World Trade Center*, by Laurie Kerr, <http://slate.msn.com/id/2060207/>

### Responsibility

Regardless of who is responsible for the moral morass in which we find our nation, we can each take responsibility for not contributing to the problem. If we can't make things better, we can at least do everything we can to keep them from getting worse.

People in the advertising industry, and particularly the creative people—designers, artists, and writers—face a moral dilemma every day, just by the very nature of the work they do. To fail to recognize it as a moral concern is itself immoral or amoral, neither of which are morally neutral positions. As influencers of social morality, we can accept our responsibility and take the high road by appealing to moral virtues, like maturity, honesty, integrity, character, industry and excellence. Or we can take the low road and appeal to what we call in our house the adolescent values of bump and grind, values that imply, are associated with, or suggest sexual promiscuity, violence, destruction, dishonesty, lust, greed and laziness.

Neither list is comprehensive.

As the old saying goes, you can be part of the problem, or part of the solution. This is a free country. It's your choice.

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Phillip A. Ross, entrepreneur, freelance writer and owner of Business Specialties ([www.business-specialties.com](http://www.business-specialties.com)), lives in Marietta, Ohio, and provides identity products and promotional services to position companies and organization for substantial success.

## **Preksha Meditation—Contemplation of Amity**

**By Acharya Mahapragya**

Posture

## Appeal To Virtue

Recitation of the Mahaprana Dhvani

Kayotsarga

With your mind's eye visualise that everything around you, including the air itself, is coloured bright white. Take a deep breath and as you slowly inhale, visualise that you are breathing long streams of bright white air. Visualise that bright white air is entering into your lungs with each inhalation.

Concentrate your full attention on the entire forehead region and recite nine times loudly --

Everybody is my friend.

I will practice amity with everybody.

Now repeat the same sentences mentally nine times--

Everybody is my friend.

I will practice amity with everybody.

Contemplate on the merit of this virtue on the following line--

Feeling of enmity generates fear which, in turn, weakens the body and mind. Therefore, I must develop the virtue of amity.

Whenever one indulges in the feeling of enmity, his happiness is destroyed.

To perpetuate one's own happiness one must develop the virtue of universal amity.

Conclude the meditation session with recitation of Mahaprana Dhvani.

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Acharya Mahapragya is a founder of terapanth and expert in Meditation, for more Meditation related

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