

The omission of the question mark on my headline is deliberate. It's not a question. It's a statement, and here is my full rationale for it: Michael and Tareq Salahi.



These two “beautiful people” wannabees, blazers of a trail of unfunded high living, running from bill collectors, mounting debt, objects of lawsuit after lawsuit, liars and cheats and lousy examples of good human beings leapt to national prominence overnight with their crash of the State Dinner President Obama was hosting for his Indian counterpart and, this being America, version 2009, the story's not about lax Secret Service work and worse White House management.

Nope, it's about our media chasing these two losers for interviews; about their canceling a Larry King gig at the end of November to see if they could get a better deal on another network (after all, what bankrupt liars need most is more money) and about their attempts get on a reality show. And, we the people, lap it up, to the point of obsession.

What the heck are any of us doing watching these stupid reality shows in which people embarrass each other, threaten and shame each other, and reveal their worst ugliness for the world to see? What motivates us? Is it a “there-but-for-the-grace-of-God -go-I” sigh of relief? Or is it the horrible, frightened giggling thrill of the dumb Roman spectator watching the lions tear the Christians apart? Before you think that too outrageous a metaphor, when's the last time you watched an “Extreme Fighting” bout on your flat screen, waiting nervously for the stronger to sit astride the weaker, his ungloved fists pummeling the loser's face to a bloody pulp. Oh, right, I know, it was just curiosity.

Maybe it's the stupid economy. Maybe we need escapism just to escape from the knowledge that our houses are worth half what we thought they were, that our deficit is becoming incalculable, that we elect people because of charisma instead of competence and then wonder what went askew. Or, maybe (and I hope I am wrong) it is because we have finally succeeded in transforming the magnificence of our individual liberty into pure, unadulterated selfishness. It's not such a hard line to cross: You're with friends in a fine restaurant; one of you gets a cell phone call in the middle of a mouthful and, of course, takes the call. Suddenly, we all have to listen to the audible half of his/her conversation – and it's loud, of course – instead of the called party getting up, walking outside and disturbing just his or her own individual freedom. Yeah, maybe it seems a silly comment, but it's part of this weird human paradigm shift we're undergoing as we iPhone, Blackberry, text, Tweet, network and Facebook our way to becoming 330 million multi-tasking androids who are better and better at connecting in the two dimensional bandwidth of this contrivance called “Social media” while simultaneously losing more and more of our capacity for meaningful, personal connection.

I can almost hear it: The 20, 30, 40 and 50 year olds out there saying, “Ah, he's just getting old and crotchety, just waxing nostalgic, another fool against progress and betterment who ought to lighten up. He's taking this way too seriously...”

Well, here's my standpoint. I believe that “Vision” is a thing some people actually have, not something you can copy out of a business book. I believe that “passion” is something you feel inside and know you have, not something you declare in an ad for a product you're selling. I believe that a bank should have people who talk to you, not a collection of 800 numbers you have to call where you never talk to the same person twice and it doesn't matter anyway, since whomever you get just reads a script and, when they screw up royally and detect your anger, say something like, “I'm sorry you feel that way,” I believe that “family values” shouldn't be a

political catch-all slogan uttered by fallen governors who mess up their own families. I believe that in my adoptive United States of America, we have to learn that the common good is as important as individual freedom (I didn't say we need to legislate it; I said we need to learn it) or we risk ending up like the Roman Empire.

I believe, as another Christmas approaches and we seem more concerned with messages about \$29 laptops available at 5AM than we are with the simple message of Christmas (no matter your personal religious practice), that it's worth looking at our priorities in a rapidly changing world and thinking for a moment what might happen if we really practiced the values we claim to hold so dear and not just pay them lip service.

Were that to happen, none of us would even know what a Tareq or Michael Salahi is.

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