

Daily Meditations 01/21/2022

Addressing Anti-Semitism, Asian Killings & Anti Voting Laws

Good morning.

We are continuing our meditations on awe, and how very often it is the cosmos and Father Sky that lead us into awe. And as Heschel says, an awareness of the Divine that begins with wonder or awe.

Today we're setting the question of awe in the context of its becoming a medicine to assist us in this time when democracy is ailing so badly.

Otto Rank was one of my favorite teachers, I think a really brilliant soul in every sense of that word brilliant, out of light in his teachings about the human condition. He's being called now the father of humanistic psychology, with good reason. But he made this very important statement, which I think is extremely relevant to our moment in time here, we're living through.

He says, "You do not cure an ailing democracy with more democracy."

Well, what if he's right? How do we cure an ailing democracy? It's kind of like Einstein saying that you don't solve the current problem by remaining in the same mindset, you have to step out of that mindset. So we have to step out of the mindset of democracy to cure democracy, and find another way of seeing the world around us. And I'm proposing that that way is the way of awe, the way of wonder. And this is called the *via positiva*, the way of gratitude and reverence. Then we can revisit the dimensions of democracy that are clearly failing us.

So awe becomes a medicine in this context. And here too, Rabbi Heschel and Meister Eckhart together, because I put them together in my book, *Meister Eckhart, A Mystic Warrior for Our Times*, in Chapter One.

In each chapter, this book puts Meister Eckhart into a room with another spiritual tradition, including today's science about cosmology, Thomas Berry, and Teilhard de Chardin, but also Thich Nhat Hanh and Buddhism, and Carl Jung and psychology, and Rumi and Ibn el-Arabi and Hafiz in Sufism, and Coomaraswamy and Hinduism and so forth.

So, here is Heschel. "The world is not just here. It shocks us into amazement."

What an amazing statement. The world is not just here. We're not just here to the world. It shocks us into amazement. Is that our experience? Have we all -- have you, have I -- been shocked into amazement by the world?

Well, this is where I think cosmology comes in. There's so much shock, in the things we're learning and the beauty, the vastness, the age of the universe, and the expansiveness of it.

It was just two summers ago that we learned the universe is 2 trillion galaxies big and growing, expanding! That's shocking! And it's part of awe, isn't it, to be shocked, it's part of waking us up.

And he talks about the grandeur that fills the human with awe: the grandeur of life, of existence, of history, yes, of the universe. It not only fills us with awe, it's literally filling us with atoms that are 13.8 billion years, that were born at the original time of the fireball. That's why the Webb telescope is so exciting -- one reason it's exciting -- is that it's going to give us pictures from way way back then, when the first galaxies were born.

But Heschel also draws a very practical conclusion. "The obsession with power," he says, "has completely transformed the life of humans, and dangerously stunted our concern for beauty and grandeur."

... dangerously stunted our concern for beauty and grandeur.

Power, the obsession with power. Isn't that with so much of the political battle is about today? He says, "We've achieved plenty, but lost quality --"

You achieve plenty. You have a lot of stuff... but we lost quality.

"We have easy access to pleasure, we forget the meaning of joy."

...forget the meaning of joy.

"But what is more serious is the fact that man's worship of power has resurrected the demon of power."

...Our worship of power is brought out a demon of power.

"When man looks only at that which is useful, he eventually becomes useless to himself."

I think that's what's going on today. The demon of power is let loose. I'm talking about the media, that they operate without values, without any parameters except one, make money, make money, make money. That's the demon of power, loose. And what that means is, they can publish anything they can say anything: lies? Bring on the lies, they get people excited. Fire, brimstone, anger, hatred, bring it on! It sells things. We learned that years ago with talk radio. And much media has picked up on that same lesson.

When man looks only at that which is useful, he eventually becomes useless to himself, and obviously not just useless, but dangerous to himself and to others. And that is the moment in time, I think, in which we find ourselves today.

Eckhart speaks to democracy when he says, "God loves all creatures equally, and fills them with his being. And we should lovingly meet all creatures in the same way."

So he's addressing both climate change here -- how do we treat other creatures? But it's also addressing human history, and our culture and our politics and media and education and religious and economics and politics. We are to greet ourselves with the same sense of love and equality. Are we doing that? Or are we trying to make

sadomasochistic relationships, power over versus power under? And isn't a healthy democracy precisely when it's healthy and lives up to its potential, and is about equality where everyone has a voice? Not just those in power, not those who are successful at seizing power.

Democracy is meant to be a space where equality comes more easily. Where, as Dorothy Day used to say, "a place where it's easier to be good." And Eckhart would say, easier to be friendly. To be welcoming one another, supporting one another, loving one another.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.