

Daily Meditation 02/05/22

Black History Month, Anti-Semitism, Ugly News, The Moan

Good morning.

Today we're offering a meditation on Black History Month, and the news that is pouring out these days, that includes some very ugly dimensions to human nature in our culture.

And I talk about the white supremacy that politicians are whipping up and in denial about; of course, the Ku Klux Klan and the anti-Semitism that is part of their package, as well as their, of course, racism against black people. And the notion that there were good people on both sides, when the anti-Semites and Nazis marched in Charleston a few years ago.

But I end with an observation by Adrienne Rich about how our world is becoming an "unmothered world" ...an unmothered world. And that is of course, part of patriarchy, to deny the mother, control the mother, in men as well as in women.

But the essay culminates with a beautiful statement by Barbara Holmes from her wonderful book, *Crisis Contemplation: Healing the Wounded Village*.

Barbara Holmes is a educator and a minister. And I love what she does in this book, because she really explores the via negativa, explores the darkness and both the positive element of darkness, but also the painful side. She talks about the eclipse, for example, of the sun and the moon that occurs. And as she points out, an eclipse isn't really an abandonment, although it feels like an abandonment; it's actually another object passing in front of the sun or in front of the moon: that it can be, if we learn to linger there for a while, we can perhaps bring about a rebirth.

And then I especially talk about the Moan. And she refers to an article by James Newell called "Call and Response: The Meaning of the Moan and Significance of the Shout in Black Worship." It is part of the Black culture and Black spirituality that the practice of the Moan, like the practice of the Shout, is good for the soul.

And here's a poem that Barbara Holmes writes about: she shares with us her poem about the Moan. And she says:

"The moon is the utterance that communicates the ineffability of the crisis --"

...ineffability of the crisis...that some shocks are so great, some crises are so great that we can barely talk about them. They are ineffable, just like the... that's one of the signs of mysticism, isn't it? William James talks about the ineffability of the experience, you can barely speak it, which is why we need art.

And the Moan is a kind of art form, to speak of the depths that that are struck, either by great joy or by great suffering. But here is Barbara Holmes' short poem.

*We moan to give birth,
to traverse non-linear time,
and to signal movement
from one state of being to another.
We moan as a sign of life,
to give notice to spiritual bystanders
that what looks like an ending
is actually a beginning.*

It's a wonderful statement about the Moan and about the deep experiences that we have that break our hearts, and as she says, it's about transformation, we're signaling "a movement from one state of being to another." It can be about a transformation. And then she goes on not poetry form but in prose form and says,

In similar fashion, the Holy Spirit groans the prayers for us that we cannot utter while the crisis continues." And she cites Paul in Romans 8:26: In the same way the Spirit helps us in our weaknesses. We do not know what we ought to pray for. But the Spirit intercedes for us through wordless groans. '

...through wordless groans. So even the Spirit in its creativity is groaning, but groaning without words, again, because groaning and grieving are deeper than words. They are ineffable breaths.

This is the practice we need at this particular time, and this particular month of Black History Month.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.