

Daily Meditation 03/04/22

Music as Prayer in Hard Times

Good morning.

We are meditating today on what I call music as prayer in hard times. And I'm offering a few pieces of music that I think speak to the cry of our souls at this time. We have to do what we can do to ground ourselves and to stay centered and grounded in the onslaught of bad news that seems to be hitting us at this time.

As I pointed out, regarding, of course, the war in Ukraine, the effort to destroy democracy there, the effort to destroy democracy in America, and of course, the bigger picture of all, the destroying of Mother Earth, the ecocide, the matricide that is going on.

And we have to be so careful not to let these more particular dangers detour us or distract us from this altogether global crisis of climate change, the way we treat Mother Earth. This is frankly what could bring - it seems to me, ought to bring -- the world together. The fact that we were all in this trouble, irrespective of ideologies or nationhood or race or even class, we're all in this trouble around the suffering of Mother Earth.

So music can surely help us. It has this power. William James talks about music, in his important book on mysticism, *Varieties of Religious Experience*. He says that

...it is music and not conceptual speech, not words, that is the element to which we are best spoken to, by mystical truth. There is a verge of the mind which these things haunt. It alone, music alone, has a keeping of the password primeval.

...the password primeval, powerful phrase.

Now he's talking about the mystical side of our souls, the "Yes" that we make. But of course, music also has a prophetic side. And we need both; we all need to be dancing between the Yes of the mystic; No of the prophet; the Yes of the feminine and the No of the sacred masculine. All of us are dancing between these modalities.

As Julian of Norwich says, there's both woe, and wonder. And there's mirth and there's suffering in our journeys to life; music can help us to tap into both in a deep, deep way. And I love this piece that I shared with you today about calling out to the Great Mother because there's a great anger in it; there's a great need, that's expressed, and so much of prayer is about a cry, it's not about getting something; it's about releasing something.

That's what grief is, isn't it, it's about putting our grief out there. And as big, as big as the sky sometimes. Certainly when you see these stories personalized of what people are going through in Ukraine, where you have children, children in hospitals, having to hide in basements, and mothers having to hold their children and not able to promise a positive future for them.

So the prophetic power of music cannot be denied. And certainly this was behind the spirituals in the Black experience, slave experience. Here is one writer talking about that:

"To the uninformed listener, the words spoke of religious longing--"

he's talking now about spirituals.

To the viewer all was piety and submission. The true meaning of the spirituals, however, vows a communication from one to another regarding plans for escape, hostile feelings toward the master, and a general expression of rebellious attitudes.

So music carries this energy, this empowerment as well.

I came of age in the in the 60s, and you look back at the 60s experience of civil rights and of anti-war. And where would we be without Bob Dylan's "Times They Are A-Changing?" Or Peter, Paul, and Mary's "If I Had a Hammer," or "Rich Man, Poor Man?" Or Joan Baez's protest songs including her protest song on the murdering of the children on a Sunday morning in church in Birmingham, Alabama?

So, we cannot underestimate, there are many ways to pray. One way to pray is through music. And of course, there are the church songs as well.

But there are so many ways to get down to the deep feelings occurring within us. And this is an important way to make it through hard times.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.