

Daily Meditation 04-20-23

Patriarchy and Shame, Roy Cohn, Mentor to a President

Good morning.

We're meditating on shame, and shame and aggression, they seem to go together quite readily, especially with men.

Dr. John Conger, a Reichian and Jungian psychologist, talks a lot about aggression and where it comes from. He says, "Aggression is primitive. It goes down to the very core of our animal evolution, in fact, to the evolution of life itself."

And he says that, millions of years ago, the development of the eye meant that

...once life could see, it started to eat. Fossils show that these early creatures suddenly developed claws and armor. And if you increase your protein, you develop diversity. Once life could see, it could get a better source of protein by eating each other, and then it developed. That's why aggression is the reason why we diversify, which is not such a nice picture, but it is the essential evolutionary understanding of why we diversify.

... to acquire a better source of protein. So aggression is very central to evolution, or what we do with aggression; that's the issue. And for many, many eons, humans became hunter gatherers; we did that with our aggression.

He points out that humans are both an image of God, although we're "images of God in our becoming; we're not there yet." It's an aspiration, to be an image of God and to be true to that spiritual insight.

But at the same time, we are descendants of the apes. So we're both images of God in process, and we are descended of the apes. And the apes can be very, very aggressive. They create kin with their nearest relatives. But other ape tribes, they will go to war with, they will torture one another, eat their fingers, eat their genitals. It's not a pretty picture, but this is part of our DNA. It is the chimpanzee side of us.

Studies have shown that a lot of young people who go to prison for murder at young ages and so forth, that they grew up as boys without attention. And so they have to fight to get respect. And "respect is money, money is power, power is masculinity. Violence defines you as a man."

That is a statement from people who have studied these youths who end up in prison for violent offenses.

The issue is belonging. We know that shame plays a large role in violence and aggression. And many inmates will say that drug dealers gave them their first sense of belonging. The same is true of gangs.

They often say that if they had had mentors, someone from the outside who could have shown them another way to be a man, that they would have gone a different direction from that of aggression and working out their shame or their not belonging in a different manner.

And this is where something like the martial arts are very valuable, because they allow young people -- well, people of any age, but especially young people -- to express themselves in aggressive ways that are not hurting others, but that are corralled by the rules of martial arts, and that require an inner discipline that keeps one from going overboard and projecting onto others one's blame and one's aggression.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.