

Daily Meditation 01-27-25

Deep Ecumenism, Spiritual Warriorhood & Humankind's Future

Good morning.

We continue our meditations on the Spiritual Warrior today. And today, I'd like to deal with two traditions, if you will. The first is Hinduism, and the second is the practice of Julia Butterfly. Now previously, we've treated this archetype of the Spiritual Warrior in Judaism, the prophets, in Christianity, in Buddhism, among the Indigenous — and of course, Islam and Sufism. Now we're dealing with Hinduism.

The Bhagavad Gita centers on the story of a young soldier named Arjuna. He's overwhelmed by grief and compassion as a soldier, as friends and others die all around him. He wants to give up living. One could almost say the entire story is about instructing Arjuna on how to grow from being a soldier to being a warrior. The key is inner work: yoga, discipline and learning. The Gita says,

Therefore, the doubts which have arisen in your heart out of ignorance, should be slashed by the weapons of knowledge, armed with yoga of Bharata. Stand and fight. Stand and fight.

So the young warrior, the young soldier, is being instructed to move from fighting an external enemy, to dealing with internal ones. Very much like Muhammad talking about the real first meaning of jihad has to do with one's inner struggles.

The final Chapter of the Gita summarizes the work of the warrior this way: "Heroism, majesty, firmness, skill, and not fleeing in battle, also generosity and leadership. These are the natural born actions of warriors."

Kali, in the Hindu tradition, represents the Divine Mother. And she says, "Wherever there is oppression in the world, I shall descend and destroy it. I will descend and destroy oppression." And the Vedas offer many prayers for what they call valor, manliness, spiritual power, conquering power, wrath, fearlessness, vigor, and other qualities of

heroism. One prayer found in the Vedas says: “O hero, give manly vigor to all our men. Purge us to heroic power. I pray for soul force which none can bend. Fight warrior, strong in truth.”.

And clearly, Mahatma Gandhi, who comes out of this Hindu tradition, and his disciple, if you will, Martin Luther King Jr., were spiritual warriors, who drew on the traditions of both India and Hinduism on the one hand, and the Jewish prophets, including Jesus. Gandhi, was, of course, very taken by Jesus. And their whole commitment to non-violent leadership, this is a warrior commitment.

Now, Julia Butterfly Hill, when I wrote my book on *One River, Many Wells*, was 25 years old. She’s at midlife now. But she committed to sitting in a redwood tree in Northern California to protect it from the Pacific Lumber Company, who were threatening to cut it down and sell it. It was very cold there, damp, and very cramped. But she stayed for three years, until the Pacific Lumber Company promised not to cut it down. She says:

I asked God to use me as a vessel. So I guess you have to be careful what you ask for. My hope is people can learn to feel their connection to the magnificence of creation. Pacific Lumber talks about economics, but how can anyone place a price on a tree like this? They named the tree Luna.

Clearly Hill was a modern-day warrior, and she wrote about it in her autobiography called *The Legacy of Luna*. And she herself tells the story about the history of the soldier and the warrior. When she first climbed the tree to sit in there for a while, she was joined by a young man, but he only lasted three weeks. Why? She says, “because he was so radically angry at the loggers, who he saw has his enemies.” She says:

He just seemed to sink deeper and deeper into despair and anger. Day by day, he seemed to grow more drawn. His already deep-set eyes and his striking cheekbones and thick eyebrows were a part of him when I met him. But as the onslaught wore on, his cheeks and eyes sunk in more and more. He started looking like a skeleton. His skin stretched up tight over the bones underneath. His life seemed to be draining away in front of my eyes. After 25 days, this young man had to leave the tree.

How was Julia able to endure? She had a spiritual practice that took her beyond her anger. She says:

I began to pray. I knew that if I didn't find a way to deal with my anger and hate, they would overwhelm me. And I would be swallowed up in the fear, sadness and frustration. I knew that to hate and strike out was to be a part of the same violence I was trying to stop. And so I prayed, Please, Universal Spirit, please help me find a way to deal with this, because if I don't, it is going to consume me.

Julia was a warrior. Her companion was a soldier. And Julia comments,

You see that a lot in activists. The intense negative forces that are oppressing and destroying the Earth, wind up overcoming many of them. They get so absorbed by the hate and the anger that they become hollow. I knew I didn't want to go there. Instead, my hate had to turn to love, unconditional, agape love. One day, through my prayers, an overwhelming amount of love started flowing into me, filling me up. Filling up the dark hole that threatened to consume me. I suddenly realized that what I was feeling was the love of the Earth, the love of Creation.

And so I think Julia Butterfly is a marvelous example of a warrior in our own lifetimes, defending the forest like Sister Dorothy Stang did. And going beyond just the feelings and emotions of love and hate into a bigger world. The reason one is there in the first place. The reason one is undergoing the Via Transformativa, the work of the Prophet or the Warrior, is because of Via Positiva, our love of the Earth, our love of the forest. And that's bigger, that can absorb hate and anger, and give us that energy that is love. That renders us warriors and not just soldiers.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.