

Daily Meditation 3-10-25

Senator Blows Whistle on Putin-like Corruption in First Weeks of New Administration

Good morning.

I am pleased to offer you in the meditation for today, a very positive story of one of our senators, from Connecticut, proof that there is some morality and integrity, and courage therefore, in some of our senators, in spite of everything these days.

So I share with you his speech that he gave this past week in the Senate about the unparalleled corruption that has been happening for six weeks since the new administration took over. And several times, he compares it to the corruption of Putin. This is how oligarchs operate: They take over their levers of power, judicial, economic, legislative, and carry on from there.

I think it's really encouraging to know that this senator, in his job and his vocation, is standing up and speaking truth to power. And all of us, whatever our role as citizens and workers and members of various communities, have such an obligation and responsibility as well.

I think it's interesting that the comparisons being made between Putin and Trump and Musk, these are three powerful people, and we have evidence of the damage that bad fatherhood — one word for it is patriarchy — has wrecked on some people in history. Some men, especially.

Now in Donald Trump's case, we know that his father was a member of the Ku Klux Klan, and went out of his way to deprive black people of the possibility of moving into his apartments and so forth, that he created. And that his son, our President, had participated in this as a young man. And also that Donald Trump was tutored, mentored by Roy Cohn, a very dark figure in the McCarthy era, who taught him to always fight back and never concede, in court or out of court, among other things.

We also know that Elon Musk had a very negative relationship with his father, growing up in South Africa, and accused his father of many things, which were without esteem. We also know that Hitler had a real problem with his father. Alice Miller, the German psychologist, has researched this, and developed a whole theory of psychology,

especially for men, based on the chaos and suffering that always undergoes, sometimes at the hands of the father. Hitler's father beat him daily.

So these are some hints where some of the needs of men come from, part of the overall picture of sickness and cruelty that come forward. Because these people grow up with the cruelty of wanting to do away with Medicaid, the cruelty of wanting to fire 80,000 people at the Veterans Administration who want to help, and are helping, to relieve the suffering that veterans often undergo as they grow older, physical suffering and mental suffering.

But what I want to emphasize is that the medicine that we look for, for healing for ourselves and others, especially at a time like this, a lot of it can be found in the basic teachings of spiritual traditions. I refer in the meditation today to a reader of my meditations, who wrote me a blistering letter recently telling me I should, in fact, shut up about Donald Trump, and remain on the path of writing about spirituality. Well, I don't know what her definition of spirituality is, but spirituality includes shedding light on evil. And she said that I'm calling Donald Trump names. But clearly, she's not read this little book on MAGA and Trump, that it's not just Trump, it's MAGA. It's a whole movement. It's not calling someone a name, to point out that there's an archetype for the way they are acting. That's not name calling.

So I invite people who have that initial response, to read the book. And in the book, I draw on artists and saints, like Hildegard of Bingen who was both, and other religious figures including Martin Luther and the whole Protestant Reformation of the 16th century. And Luca Signorelli, also early 16th century, who have employed the archetype of the Antichrist to understand what's going on in one's time.

This is not name calling. This is journeying deeper into the presence of evil. And this is very much part of my vocation as a spiritual theologian. You don't just talk about the good days and the Via Positiva, as important as that is. We also have to talk about evil. Of course, this is what Liberation Theology does too. In both cases, Liberation Theology and Creation Spirituality, forces of evil tried vehemently to silence both.

And I turn you to a short chapter in this book, called Jesus and Democracy, where I point out that in many ways, the heart of democracy is an echo of basic teachings of Jesus. And the primary one being that, as the psalmist in Psalm 8, says, *You have made them (meaning humans) a little less than God, and crown them with glory and honor. You have given them dominion with the works of your hand and putting all things under their feet.*

Now this is not to be taken as we're given power over other creatures, so much as we're capable of power with other creatures, and we need to be careful of the temptation to have power over others. But the key is that, in the biblical tradition, we are all royal persons, you see. We all have this inherent dignity, and this inherent dignity is expressed well in the Constitution. All humans are created equal.

Now, rarely has our history led up to that promise. The person who wrote it, Thomas Jefferson, had slaves and all the rest. But there has been, I think, a gradual effort to broaden and implement the insight. Even the Civil War was part of that, and the liberation of slaves was part of that. Of course, it also stepped backwards during the Jim Crow years. We needed an entire non-violent revolution, the 1950s and 60s Civil Rights movement to bring it forward in laws that were passed in the 60s to make it real — many which have been watered down and taken back in our lifetimes. Meister Eckhart understood this in the 14th century. He says,

We need to practice equality in human society. Since then, Christ's whole nobility belongs equally to us all, and is equally near to us, to him as much as to me. You must understand that if someone wants to come by this gift equally, to receive this good and the common nature, which is equally near to all people, you must practice the same equality in human society. Be no nearer to yourself than to another, just as in human nature, there is nothing alien, nothing farther or nearer. We are to love, esteem, and consider all people like ourselves. What happens to another, be it good or bad, shall be for you as if it happened to you.

So Eckhart is grounding our civic life, the common good, in this promise of people caring for themselves and one another equally. That kind of bonding and that kind of community, is necessary, that we survive as individuals and as communities. I think Senator Murphy's talk is essentially saying the same thing.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.