

Daily Meditation 7-14-25

Heschel, the “Demon of Power” & The New Budget Bill

Good morning. In today's meditation, I share some really meaningful critique, I think, from both Rabbi Heschel and Thom Hartmann.

From Heschel, his statement that “the obsession with power has completely transformed the life of man and dangerously stunted his concern for beauty and grandeur. The obsession with power and man’s worship of power has resurrected the demon of power.” Powerful words, I think, that apply to our world today, and especially in this time of the demise of democracy in America.

Now, Thom Hartmann tells us a story that I share with you, the crazy group in America today who are going around destroying weather observatories. And this is just one example of the crazy violence that is literally killing people, as Thom Hartmann points out. He says, “The problem isn’t just gullibility, it’s that these lies are weaponized. When they take hold, facts become negotiable, science becomes suspect, and even saving people from storms becomes controversial.” A strange time to be living, indeed.

And what does this mean for democracy? he asks. *First, a shattered consensus on truth makes informed voting impossible. If voters can't agree on basic facts, like whether the atmosphere is heating up or whether a vaccine works, how can they make rational decisions at the ballot box?*

Secondly, weaponization of delusion breeds violence. Just like the January 6th attack on our capital, these radar attacks are fueled by conspiracy and by rage. They don't just damage property, they destabilize the rule of law. And what happens then, when the rule of law is destabilized?

Thirdly, when truth is optional, tyranny becomes inevitable. When truth is optional, tyranny becomes inevitable. Autocrats thrive in the fog of misinformation. The more confused and divided a people are, the easier they are to control. Thus the daily Trump reality show, the Trump reality show we’re now observing every day.

Fourth, public trust collapses. Scientists, educators, journalists and public servants all become suspect. That vacuum gets filled by cult leaders, armed militias, and political demagogues.

Seems to me, he's naming what America is today. Cult leaders, armed militias, political demagogues.

And finally, democracy becomes unrecognizable. Without a shared sense of reality, debate becomes pointless, compromise becomes impossible, and elections become battlegrounds, instead of ways to determine a rational direction for our shared future.

So what we can do about it? He says, *We fight back with truth, unapologetically, loudly, persistently. Secondly, we stand up for science, for journalism, for civic education, for basic decency. Thirdly, we hold platforms accountable to spread lies, tweak their algorithms secretly to promote anti-democracy messages, and reject the persistent mainstream media's cowardice of "both sides-ism."* There aren't two sides to facts. There is reality and there are lies, so says Thom Hartmann. *And we can support platforms, networks, media, newsletters, programs, writers, speakers, politicians, and movements that promote the truth and push back against the creeping fascism that is rapidly overtaking our nation.*

And I hope, among those movements, you include our daily meditations. He says,

We must loudly and persistently call this out for what it is: an attempt, which has so far been successful at destroying democracy in nations like Russia and Hungary and Turkey -- an attempt to engage in social and political sabotage, this radicalism, a form of domestic terrorism, whose target is democracy itself. And he says, *It's time to say Enough, because without truth, we don't just lose the weather forecast, we lose our nation.*

Wisdom, prophetic wisdom from Thom Hartmann, I urge you to read him. All this is found in the article that I footnote in my meditation.

Now I want to share with you another observation about our times that just came out, and I very much wholeheartedly support this as well. It's an article by Robert Reich, former labor secretary under Clinton, called "Sunday thought on being a warrior." And of course, for me, the word warrior is a synonym for prophet, and prophet is a synonym for warrior, and the Messiah and Christ has been called a warrior in the scriptures. So some people think they are above the word warrior because it has the word "war" in it. But I have a whole chapter on the spiritual warrior in my book on *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*. It's one of the archetypes of a healthy masculinity.

But here's what he says in this very fine article today, Sunday. (I'm recording this on Sunday.) He says, *A major part of not submitting to Trump's tyranny, is living our lives to the fullest. This includes hope and cheer in the face of all the struggle that's going on.* And he said he had a breakfast recently with a friend who's working on defending immigrants. *I expected her to be overcome with anger and sadness, but instead, she was happiest I've ever seen her. What gives? I asked her. You seem, well, almost joyful. Not exactly joyful, she laughed, but in a good place. How can you be, when you're surrounded every day by people who are being ruined by the orange menace, I asked. Because, she said slowly, I'm fighting on the front line, because I'm fighting on the front line, and that puts you in a good place, the very best place, she smiled. So you're a warrior, I said. Yes, and I'm so grateful to be doing this now, at this moment in history. And she smiled.*

So I think that's a beautiful story, a beautiful breakfast, that we need to keep alive our joy, the Via Positiva. And the fact that we're called at this time to do important work, to stand up to so many deeds of injustice, deeds of inhumanity, demonic deeds, as Rabbi Heschel calls them. Lust for power, power for power's sake, power-over, sadism, all this that is unfolding, rolling out in front of us, being paid for by our taxes, often being pushed by corrupt media owned by corrupt billionaires, all of it to make money, all of it to destroy democracy.

In the midst of all this, we can rejoice we're living in a time like this, an important time where we're all called to be warriors, we're all called to be prophets, to interfere therefore. And of course, there is joy in this. Jesus talked about this, about being joyful when you are being persecuted for justice's sake, part of his Beatitudes.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.