

Daily Meditation 9-22-25

Humor Repressed, Savage Capitalism Alive & Well in the Media

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we are talking about the lack of humor among strongmen, and those who yearn to be strongmen. Fascists do not have good senses of humor, especially when humor is directed at them. We're talking about the price America is paying at this time, for a vision of the world from certain billionaires, who really are not impressed by democracy, and would like to be themselves running things, without being interrupted by the "hoi polloi."

So obviously, ours is a time for both critical thinking and critical response, and for developing our inner strength. Because these are hard times. And to help us develop inner strength, I want to call on a powerful parable given by Abraham Joshua Heschel, Rabbi Heschel, way back in 1969 at a Catholic conference that was dedicated to liturgy. And his talk is called simply "On Prayer."

And he begins by saying he's not going to talk about liturgy, which is public prayer, but he's going to talk about personal prayer that we bring to whatever we do, whether it's liturgy or whether it's acts of social justice and so forth. But it's such a profound theological discourse, so we can always use something like this at this time. It's full of insight and wisdom. He does criticize liturgy right off the bat, actually, before he gets into personal prayer. He says,

Public worship is an act of the highest importance. However, it tends in our days to become a spectacle, in which the congregation remains passive inner spectators. But prayer, he says, is action. It requires complete mobilization of the heart, mind, and soul. Renewal of liturgy involves renewal of prayer, he says.

And he also takes another shot at liturgy, what he calls a malady that is indigenous or congenital to liturgy. Although its purpose is to exalt the life which engenders it, it harbors a tendency to follow a direction and rhythm of its own, independent of and divorced from the energies of life which brought prayer into being. As liturgy unfolds, it enters a state of opposition, stubborn disconnection. Liturgy is bound to become rigid, to stand by itself, to take on a measure of imperviousness. It tends to become timeless, trans-personal. Liturgy for the sake of liturgy. Personal presence is replaced by mere

attendance. Instead of erecting a sanctuary of time and realm of the soul, liturgy attracts masses of people to a sanctuary in the realms of space.

And now he's ready to talk about prayer. He says,

Prayer is either exceedingly urgent, exceedingly relevant, or inane and useless, Our first task is to learn to comprehend why prayer is an ontological necessity, he says. And here's his answer:

God is hiding. And man, humans, are defying. Every moment, God is creating and self-concealing. Prayer is disclosing, rather than concealing. God is ensconced in mystery, hidden in the depths. Our agony over God's concealment is sharing and redeeming God's agony over humanity's concealment. Prayer must pervade as a climate of living, And all our acts must be carried out as variations on a theme of prayer.

So he's back to that theme, that our actions are our prayer. This, in Creation Spirituality language, is the Via Transformativa at work.

A deed of charity, an act of kindness, a ritual moment: Each is prayer in the form of a deed. Such prayer involves a minimum, or even an absence of outwardness, and an abundance of inwardness. So inwardness is at the heart of prayer, and inwardness is at the heart of what we choose to do, or refuse to do. Prayer is not a stratagem for occasional use, he says, or refuse to resort to now and then. It is rather like an established residence for the innermost self. All things have a home. The bird has a nest, a fox has a hole, the bee has a hive. A soul without prayer is a soul without a home. For the soul, home is where prayer is. Everybody must build his own home. Everybody must guard the independence and the privacy of his or her prayers. It is a source of security for the integrity of conscience, for whatever inkling we attain of eternity. So prayer is the source of security for the integrity of conscience: that there's no conscience without this sense of prayer.

What is a soul without prayer? he asks. A soul run away, or a soul evicted from its own home. To those who have abandoned their home, the road may be hard and dark and far, yet do not be afraid to steer back. How marvelous is my home: I enter as a suppliant, and emerge as a witness. I enter as a stranger, and emerge as next of kin. It is in moments of prayer that my image is forged, that my striving is fashioned. To understand the world, we must love my home. It is in the fight of prayer's radiance that I find my way even in the dark. It is prayer that illumines my way. As my prayers, so is my understanding.

Whenever I read Heschel, I'm moved. And one thing that moves me is that English is his second language. When he arrived in America, fleeing Hitler in 1930s from Germany, he didn't speak English. And here he is, speaking and writing English that is pure poetry, in my estimation.

Prayer serves many aims. It serves to save the inward life from oblivion. It serves to alleviate anguish. It serves to partake of God's mysterious grace and guidance. That ultimately we pray in order to pray. Prayer is a perspective from which to behold, from which we respond to the challenges that we face. Prayer is not imposing our will on God. It is seeking to know God's will for us.

So I think there's tremendous wisdom in this whole theme of resurrecting our understanding of prayer, and in heeding the teachings of a very wise mystic and prophet, Rabbi Heschel, at this precarious time in American history. I think there's real food here of substance to nurture us.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.