

Daily Meditation 10-20-25

Beyond Kings—and Beyond Führers Too?

Good morning.

In today's meditation, we are reflecting on what I call "Beyond Kings and Beyond Führers Too," reflecting on yesterday's marches and the meaning behind them.

They say about 7 million Americans were protesting yesterday, by marching in large cities and small cities all over the country — any number of people abroad, as well, in Germany and England and Canada, posting their signs and their concerns about what's happening in America today.

So in my town, which is rather small, about 125,000 in Vallejo, there was a "No Kings" March yesterday, and I was there for it. Six months ago, they did not have: we did not have our own No Kings March. But it was well attended. The plaza was full with lots of interesting characters and signs and masks and costumes. And for the first hour, people spoke. Short speeches, thankfully, including the mayor, who is a youngish, middle-aged woman, and a representative of the ACLU in the area I live in, and a representative of the LGBTQ+ community, who especially emphasized the attacks on trans people today, and how that is really a sad sign of the presence of scapegoating that goes along with authoritarian movements, of course.

But the one that most impressed me was a courageous man who represents an organization that is open 24 hours a day, seven days a week, to alert people about ICE, the coming of ICE people to neighborhoods. And I thought that was very courageous of him to stand up and tell his story.

Oh, and then there were the musicians, and they would intersperse themselves with the speeches and would sing a song or two, some of them from movements of the past, including South African songs, and also songs from America's protests of old, and songs that we could all join in on, in the choruses and so forth. And that was very effective, I think, and very moving. And it was good to be there was such an assortment of people of many ages and ethnicities. Though, to tell the truth, I think that the older people over-represented themselves, with a higher percentage of older people than young ones, from what I could tell.

So there were these talks and musical sharing, and, of course, holding up the signs, for about an hour, and then we marched. And in the march, I just happened to link up with a fellow, a middle-aged fellow. And I opened the conversation saying, “Have you done a lot of marches in your life, or something like this?” And I was struck by his immediate response. He said his father, when he was four years old, he remembered it, took him on a march on behalf of the farm workers in California. They lived in Los Angeles at the time. And it’s so interesting to me that he remembered that. But I simply asked him, “Do you march a lot?” And this was a powerful memory for him, that he carried it all those years, all those decades. And of course, he talked about other marches in his life, but he said that was in the 1970s when he was four years old, his father did that.

I said to myself, that’s an enlightened father: bring young ones along and notice how long memories like that last. And of course, marching is a bodily memory, and that’s one thing that makes it powerful.

And of course, I told of some marches I’d done over the years in Paris in 1968, the events that brought the De Gaulle government down, and also in Munster that year in Germany, and several other occasions. And then we had a very fine conversation for our entire march. I think it was about two miles.

But it was interesting because he was talking about the origins of the cruelty going on in America today, cruelty coming from our government. And so we both got into that conversation, and about the woundedness of our leaders: how wounded someone has to be, to have to grab so much power and to use it be cruel to others, as ICE and the jailing of 175 American citizens by ICE, the torture and everything else all that represents.

So I invite you to reflect on your experience yesterday, if you were part of marches, or if you weren’t, and how it all went down and felt for you.

Oh, and I want to say, when we ended and said goodbye, he made a point about how for the last 40 years, he’s been reading Thich Nhat Hanh, that Thich Nhat Hanh has been an important resource for him, very important. And that was fun to find out. And I wasn’t altogether surprised actually, by the way his values had been honed. And of course, I shared with him a few stories I had with Thich Nhat Hanh, personally. He had never personally met Thich Nhat Hanh, but I’m sure I told him that he chose well, in choosing Thich Nhat Hanh as his favorite poet and obviously a spiritual guide.

So all this is very far from the accusations from the Speaker of the House and so forth, that marchers were people who hate America. And I know of no arrests or violence that

happened any place yesterday, maybe there were a few minor incidents, but I've not heard of any of them.

But signs that were shown, for example in New York City, a sign that said, a chant, "this is what democracy looks like" was one of their chants. And another sign, "no one paid me to be here," "release the Epstein files," and "ICE out of New York City." Another, "our democracy is under attack." Another, "no kings, no hate, no fear, immigrants are welcome here."

A marcher saying "I care a lot about New York City. It gives me hope to be out here with many, many other people." I felt that too, in order to be shoulder-to-shoulder with others we do not know, we're strangers, but with whom we share common values.

In New York, there was a 60-year-old, retired electronic engineer from New Jersey who grew up in Italy. And he said he was here because he feels the US is following the same path that his home country went through, Italy, in the 20th century under Mussolini.

So we cannot count on the Supreme Court, that's for sure. We cannot count on the government, cannot count on Congress. We have all the legislative, executive and judiciary that are against the American people right now, so we are fighting. And many people found that in various parts of the world, that this is what democracy is about, and being able to protest.

So with that, I leave you with your own experiences and your own meditations on this day of protest, not of hating America, but loving it enough to stand up and to criticize certain interpretations of how power is used in America.

Thank you. We'll see you next week.