

## IMAGINE LOVING YOUR ENEMY

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Some years ago I picked up one of those free-be type magazines in a café where I was eating breakfast. I kept the article because it somehow plucked a string in my imagination. In the article mother tells her story to the reporter.

“When I was living in New York,” she writes, “I took my two young children to visit friends in the Canadian countryside. Once we’d seen it, we fell in love with it and I decided to rent a beautiful farmhouse from an American developer. We signed a letter of agreement and I went back to New York. I gave up my apartment and most of my furniture—you left it all behind in the ‘60s. I was going back to the land and brown rice. It was wonderful. And then the day before we were leaving, the car all packed up, the landlord called and said, ‘Oh, by the way, I’ll be coming up to the farmhouse most weekends. Save the master bedroom for me and you’ll have to cook and entertain for my friends.’ I said, “Excuse me. I have small children, we can’t! He said, ‘Sorry, you can’t have the farmhouse then.’ I said, “We have no place to live as of tomorrow.’ He said, ‘Sorry.’ We had no options, so we drove up to Canada anyway and found another place to rent.”

“I wanted revenge,” she writes, “but since this was the ‘60s, I had to deal with this problem spiritually.”

Now this is the part that pluck my imaginative string. I’m rooting for her. She’s going to deal with this terrible problem, this betrayal in effect, spiritually. She goes on...”We (she and her children) went out to the woods, by a river, and held a ceremony. We didn’t forgive him but we dug a hole and buried our hatred. We made images of him with sabers through his gut. We buried an old rusty pipe, hoping that his pipes would freeze in the winter. Then we planned to have the river wash all this animosity away.

Today, I'd handle things differently. I'd move into his house and sue his pants off."

Ah, what we are tempted to do at times in the practice of our inner spiritual journey while using that practice as a rationale for acts that run counter to it. And in some ways may, betray it. There is an outer spiritual journey to our lives that is as equally inviting and requiring our attention as the inner journey, the journey of mindfulness, centered on one's spirit, of the energy focused on the intent of one's life force, however you want to name it. This outer spiritual journey is best understood by the behavior which reflects the decisions we make in life as response to the inner spiritual values we hold. One of my mentors in life once stated, "I know enough about ethics to know that there are sound grounds for declaring almost every human act to be moral." I would add, especially when facing our enemies.

I'll not belabor this point, but I'm confident that those folks who stormed our nation's capital understood their act as moral, of a call to defend the values they hold dear. Values we hold in forming the way we think and behave are indeed important. But in an ethical norm they can and are often used to support whatever belief we might already hold or action we might have taken. That holds true whether voting districts are jerrymandered so people can stay in power and thus marginalizing others to keep them out of power or negating a woman's right to make decisions about her own body as male legislators amend laws in their state capitals as a way of getting around *Roe vs. Wade*.

Hans Kung, the noted theologian, states, "Even in fundamental questions as love and hate it is difficult to explain why I should love and not hate. Scientifically conserved, is hatred simply worse than love? There is no logically stringent reason why I should love and not hate, as long as this hatred, does not put me at a disadvantage in my social life. For, how can it be proved exactly that I should not hate if I feel like it?"

“Positivism,” Kung continues, “know of no authority transcending man which might distinguish between helpfulness and greed for gain, kindness and cruelty. Logic, too, is dumb; it gives no preference to moral dispositions.”

“As with the understanding of God, which is gained from the reality of the world and of man, the norms which are deduced from this reality are also ambivalent. They, too, are never immediately obvious, never objectively explicit. And so they remain ambiguous, in the last resort indeterminate, both for every individual and for society...”

In other words, friends, a heck of a lot of things, good and bad have been done in the name of science, logic, and dare I say it, oh yes, I will, of religion. You can read into the Bible, the Koran, the Upanishads what you want. It doesn't necessarily make our actions right or ethical, especially I would add, when it comes to how we face our enemies.

Allow me to share with you my experience last Christmas Eve just a few weeks ago. After our beautiful candlelight service I waited up to do my Christmas Eve tradition that I've done for years. At midnight I like to channel surf back and forth between the Mormon Tabernacle Choir's Christmas story and the Pope celebrating Christmas Mass. No worries, I'm not going over the edge here. I love surfing between the two at midnight on Christmas Eve because of the amazing music incorporated with dance that the Mormons do, along with seeing in the Vatican the most international coming together of worshippers in one place, at one moment in time, celebrating a hope, a love that being together from so many lands and languages is the promise that tomorrow will be a better day.

And so, as I turned on my TV anticipating the Tabernacle Choir and the Pope's Christmas Mass they weren't to be found. I tried every channel on my RUKU options, until I finally thought, “Well, how about CSPAN?” My last resort. And as I clicked onto CSPAN there being interviewed, among a panel of religious leaders and theologians, was Ronald Reagan Junior, our

go to Atheist, Agnostic (Freedom From Religion Foundation)...Alright! I've hit onto something here. And among the other panelists were Tutu van Furth, Bishop Tutu's lesbian daughter, who is an ordained Episcopal Priest, and Arun Gandhi, Mahatma Gandhi's grandson. Now if that isn't an unexpected gift on Christmas Eve, I don't know what is. Each had amazing, wonderful, provocative things to say and much of what Reagan Jr. had to say I didn't find in the least offensive. But the speaker that most caught my attention, the one I leaned into, and stayed up well past midnight, was Arun Gandhi. Arun Gandhi, whom Susan Gore once worked with years ago. When I asked her what he was like she stated, "Very quiet and tenacious." He spoke about the things he learned as a boy, and later as a young man, from his grandfather whom he affectionally called, *Bapuji*. When it comes to facing your enemy and the anger that enemy can evoke in us, not just how we feel, but the actions we take in response to that feeling, betray the inner spiritual self by the actions of our outer spiritual journey, not unlike, in truth, of that young mother back in the 60s. whom with her children blessed her revenge.

As Arun Gandhi spoke, he referenced a book he had written, called, The Gift of Anger. With what all is going on, and has gone on, these past few weeks and months I couldn't wait to purchase his book, and so I did. I found it most helpful in addressing how we can go about the outer spiritual journey I began my sermon with, so that it is truly born out of the inner spiritual self that even draws us together in this hour. In it he writes of the lessons he learned from his grandfather about anger and how to use it rather than, in my words, be used by it. Donald Trump recognized the anger of his followers and tapped that anger so that they, by his direction, are used by it. They are people who have and are being used.

When I can Imagine those folks in that way am I then able to use my own anger as the engine, the force to create the kind of change reflecting my inner spiritual world as a means of loving them. Arun says that Mahatma told him, "Use your anger wisely. Let it help you find solutions of love and truth."

What did he mean by that injunction to use your anger wisely? First, he acknowledges that we have anger, it's what you do with it that truly matters. He espouses that you must use it intelligently or it will destroy you.

*Arun writes, "Sometimes we think we want to resolve conflicts, but our methods just make things worse. We turn angry and intimidating, thinking we will make people do what we want. But attacks and criticism and threats of punishment backfire with both children and adults. Our angry responses cause the battle to escalate. We become bullies, not realizing that bullies ultimately aren't powerful at all. Those who display meanness and berating style on the playground, in business, or in political campaigns are usually the weakest and most insecure. Bapuji taught me that being able to understand another's viewpoint and forgive is the sign of real strength."*

*He relates about his grandfather that, "In spite of police atrocities, he never referred to the police or the administration as enemies. His idea was to win the sympathy of everyone, including the police – not to hurt or embarrass them."*

The other night I attended on Zoom my monthly Enneagram group. The facilitator said something that resonated with me as a way to Imagine loving my enemy that has my outer spiritual self, Mahatma Gandhi action of non-violence, using my anger intelligently, with my inner spiritual world. He said, "To deal with conflict, one has to step into the middle ground, and you can't get there until you deal with your own stuff."

What I interpret that to mean is that to even step into the middle ground is to recognize in our own lives that we sometimes find ourselves as our own enemy, the anger battling in us over past or present injuries we've suffered and have not learned how to forgive. If unconscious of that, of any anger we hold toward ourselves, our own sense of esteem, worthy of love, is diminished, preventing us from genuinely, authentically stepping into the middle where only there do we have perchance opportunity to imagine loving

our enemy. Sam Keen, in his book, To A Dancing God, writes, “If internal censorship and repression develops, one part of the personality gains a temporary victory at the expense of the whole.” Isn’t that what enemies do, gain temporary victories over us at the expense of the whole? A very temporary victory crashing into, vandalizing the nation’s capital but at the expense of a whole nation’s sense of being firmly planted in a constitution governing the whole, comprised of different beliefs, age, races, ethnicities, gender identity and sexual orientation.

Once stepping into the middle things don’t always go as planned. Feelings still surface. But before there is that temporary victory at the expense of the whole Mahatma Gandhi told Arun to do something that can refocus his mind in such moments. What I would say, realigning one’s outer spirituality with the inner one. He told him to sit in a quiet room without any distractions and hold something lovely, like a flower or a photograph of a flower and concentrate fully on the object for a minute or more, then close your eyes and see how long you can hold the image in your mind.

I really like that idea. This morning I want to leave you with a way to imagine loving your enemy by offering you an image you can hold in your hand, in your mind before saying something you don’t mean or inflicting emotional harm on yourself or others. Maybe a way to begin stepping into the middle.

I heard a phrase for the very first time the other night when in conversation with a friend of mine. We were talking about how to manage children’s anxiety as it relates to racism. Maybe you’ve heard this phrase, especially if you’re from New York. It’s a phrase that young people today use all the time I’m told. It goes like this, especially when you’re feeling threatened, “Throw some shade on it.”

That phrase originated back in the 80s within the black and brown drag queen culture. It meant, and still does among many young people today, to ridicule, to be shady to someone, when you feel yourself being ostracized, demeaned,

devalued, attacked. Throw some shade on it. It's a defensive way by word or look, verbal or nonverbal to protect one's self from a threat. Throw some shade on it.

What I've learned from most black and brown drag queens, and I've met a few, is that they are fierce. They know who they are. Their fierceness has often been born out of having been attacked. But there is another way to think of throwing some shade that I believe rings truer with Gandhi and the flower. Shade is something we seek when we are hot, at edge, perspiring, needing refreshment. In a hot blazing Floridian sun, shade is not only welcomed but sought after. To throw some shade is also a way to cool things down. And just like a drag queen whose known more moments of being attacked, throwing some shade to cool things down requires affirming who you are, your inner and outer spirit working together, a fierceness in you to imagine loving your enemy by loving your enemy. Mahatma Gandhi, and Martin Luther King Jr, whose day we celebrate tomorrow were such fierce men.

If love is our goal, imagine we step into the middle, throwing some shade. Not so to degrade our enemy but to bring them respite, to cool their anger. Throw some shade not to think ourselves more worthy than they but so that they may recognize we have worth. Throw some shade not so much as to demonstrate the passion of our cause but to illustrate the compassion of our faith, our hope, our heart. I know too well there are times when the sun blazes hot. Throw some shade anyway. Choose it. Hold that image in your mind, concentrate fully on it for a minute or more, then close your eyes and see how long you can hold that image and then throw that shade where it can cool you and others.