

March 19, 2017

The Golden Rule and the Balance Between Light and Dark

Musical Prelude

Greeting: When We Come to It, Maya Angelou

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Musical Postlude

Greeting Good morning Friends. In 1995, at the commemoration of the United Nations' fiftieth anniversary, Maya Angelou composed and read a poem she

titled “*A Brave and Startling Truth*,” dedicating the poem to the hope for peace, which lies, sometimes hidden, in every heart. *We, this people, on a small and lonely planet Traveling through casual space Past aloof stars... To a destination where all signs tell us It is possible and imperative that we learn A brave and startling truth And when we come to it To the day of peacemaking When we release our fingers From fists of hostility And allow the pure air to cool our palms When we come to it When the curtain falls on the minstrel show of hate And faces sooted with scorn are scrubbed clean... When we come to it We, this people, on this minuscule and kithless globe Who reach daily for the bomb, the blade and the dagger Yet who petition in the dark for tokens of peace We, this people on this mote of matter In whose mouths abide cankerous words Which challenge our very existence Yet out of those same mouths Come songs of such exquisite sweetness That the heart falters in its labor And the body is quieted into awe We, this people, on this small and drifting planet Whose hands can strike with such abandon That in a twinkling, life is sapped from the living Yet those same hands can touch with such healing, irresistible tenderness That the haughty neck is happy to bow And the proud back is glad to bend Out of ,,,such contradiction We learn that we are neither devils nor divines When we come to it We, this people, on this wayward, floating body Created on this earth, of this earth Have the power to fashion for this earth A climate where every man and every woman Can live freely ... When we come to it We must confess that we are the possible We are the miraculous... But That is when, and only when We come to it. Tomorrow, at precisely 6:28 AM, the entire planet will come to one of the two places in our annual revolution around the Sun when the plane of Earth’s equator is aligned with the center of the Sun. In the Northern Hemisphere, we call this the Spring Equinox. On an equinox, day and night are of approximately equal duration all over the planet. Light and dark are balanced, because the centers of two of the celestial bodies most crucial to our existence -- the Sun and the Earth -- are calibrated, heart to heart, across the great distance of space. So as we gather this day, before the Sun and Earth bow to one another in a moment of such balanced convergence that the light and the dark are partnered, let us pray for such harmony, and such union in ourselves and in our world. Let us begin by singing our first hymn: ***God of Grace and God of Glory, Green 158.****

Readings

What to Tell the Children, by Rachel Kann, and found on a website called Hevria, which is a combination of the words "Hevreh" and "Bria" in Hebrew, meaning "group of friends" and "creation." This is a long poem, so I have taken the liberty of excerpting it.

Tell them that this is the great awakening. Tell them that we humans have made some huge mistakes And that's how we now find ourselves in this tenuous place. Teach them that hate is the poison. Teach them that love is the remedy, That it is better to be readied for what comes next, Even if the revelation is painful. Tell them that this is the paradigm shift, That the old is collapsing in on itself, That this death rattle is simply a temper tantrum; The last gasp of a dying goliath. Remind them of how they get wild When they are most tired, And then pass out, That this is what it's about, That this is what is happening to a decrepit and ineffective empire. Tell them that everything is not ok, And knowing that is ok. Tell them that pretending That what is unacceptable is fine Is what got us to this sick and dysfunctional spot on the timeline. Teach them to practice discernment... That they must align themselves with kindness, That there is no more time for divisiveness.... Tell them love will win this war, But only if we remember That love is not just one unending cuddle puddle, But fierce as a mother bear protecting her cubs. Tell them that although this existence is damaged beyond repair, They must not despair, There is still possibility, And we will willingly and willfully open ourselves To new ways of being because The old way is not working, Has never worked, And the world deserves better, And we're worth it. Tell them they are not free While another suffers under enslavement. Teach them that we are all limbs on one body And we cannot chop off our own arm without deep suffering. Teach them humility, But also to re-learn to trust their intuition... Tell them their gifts are useful. Tell them they are beautiful. Tell them ... the truth.

Bowing to the Adversaries

You, who speak untruths, you show me how much I value what is honest, what is generous, what has been clearly thought through, what expresses the deepest truth of our kinship. Because of the clarity with which you help me to see the truth, I thank you.

You, who speak hateful words and twist loving words to serve your own ends, you arouse in me a love that knows no bounds. Because your disconnection from others with whom you share this time and planet awakens my awareness of powerful connection, I thank you.

You, who ignite the power of my anger with the perpetuation of injustice, you who show me that my grief and outrage are expressions of love for resilient communities and thriving people, because of the strength with which I resist your actions, you have shown me how strong and deep my passion for justice really is, and the breadth of integrity in this community that rises in defense of what it holds Sacred. So I thank you.

You, who deliberately engage in the destruction of our life-bearing planet's soil, air, and waters for profit, who cut yourselves off from the needs of the present and the generations of the future, you show me how much I love, respect and honor our planet home and fellow beings, how deeply I revere Wholeness, Cooperation, and Mutual Care. Because the pain I feel when I witness the fear of the vulnerable and the suffering of so many is no less than the pain of your fear, greed and alienation, I thank you.

Matthew 7:12 A teaching which has been called The Golden Rule: ¹²“*In everything do to others as you would have them do to you; for this is the law and the prophets.*

Second Hymn A Song of Peace, Green 304

Prayer

God of Grace and God of Glory, on this your people, here, please, pour your power. Grant us wisdom, Grant us courage, for the facing of this hour, this day, this time. Fears and doubts bind us, all around us the false idols of our time declare a gospel rich in things and poor in soul. We come before you with longing to Free our hearts, to free our lives, to sing a song of peace. hear our song of peace, please, O God of all the nations. Make our hearts one in thee. Consecrate us to your purpose, that our lives may be a prayer -- for mercy, for Love, for kinship in Christ. Grant us wisdom, grant us courage, grant us peace.

Benediction

When We Come to It, That Day of Peacemaking, Darkness and Light will be sisters, equals. When We come to It, That Brave and Startling Truth, we will Do Unto Others As we would have them do unto us. When We come to It, we will bow to our former adversaries, thanking them for the light they called forth in us. When We come to It, We will tell our Children, This is the Great Awakening.

Message

At my children's school, there are three rules called Paw Laws, because the school's mascot is the Caroline Cougar. The Paw Laws are simple: Be Responsible, Be Respectful, and Be Safe. They work, in just about every situation. Generally kids and adults, parents and teachers buy into the general premises, and behave accordingly. Cruelty and bullying are kept in check, people seem to broadly agree on parameters for acceptable behavior, and work together. Of course nothing is perfect, but enough kids and adults accept these simple guidelines that the community mostly runs smoothly, in agreement that on a very basic level in every situation it matters how we treat ourselves, how we treat one another, and how we treat what we hold in common -- our shared spaces, the learning community, mutual trust. I understand the Golden Rule in the same way. It's actually pragmatic, useful, workable advice for weaving

together a strong social fabric, a resilient community that holds efforts and environment in common. It is a maxim of altruism seen in many human religions and cultures, from ancient and indigenous religions through the abrahamic faiths, humanism, modern ethics, Buddhism, Confucianism. The concept is found in some form in nearly every religion and ethical tradition. It has also been explained and verified as a foundational principle from the perspectives of psychology, philosophy, sociology, human evolution, and economics. It undergirds empathy, the integrity of the selfhood of others, and sociological dynamics between individuals and groups. In evolution, the concept of "reciprocal altruism", is seen as a distinctive advance in the ability of human groups to survive and reproduce, as their exceptional brains demanded exceptionally long childhoods and on-going provision and protection even beyond that of the immediate family. One economist, Richard Swift, suggests that "without some kind of reciprocity, society would no longer be able to exist." The verse where this rule is found in the gospel of Matthew is delivered by Jesus during the Sermon on the Mount, and is considered by some scholars to be the summation and culmination of the entire sermon. It is also an explicit reference to Rabbi Hillel, a famous Jewish sage whose life spanned the turning of the century from antiquity to the Common Era and who died when Jesus was a child. Hillel the Elder, as he was known, was renowned for his development of the Mishnah and the Talmud, and Jesus would have been familiar with his teachings, especially his famous statement "that which is hateful to you, do not do to your fellow. That is the whole Torah; the rest is explanation; go and learn." Jesus concurs with Hillel that the whole tradition can be distilled in this one practice, a practice that doesn't require any special training, no elitist schooling; this is a Rule that excludes no one. Not fancy, not complicated, not above anyone.

These days, when I drop off my children at their school I am happy to see the Paw Laws still prominently displayed, still actively followed and endorsed by everyone from the principal to the custodian, still central to the culture of the school. Because elsewhere in our culture at large, it feels as though The Golden Rule's *rule* has come and gone, and is now considered, if it is considered at all, an outmoded code from a hopelessly unsophisticated era, an invitation to get taken advantage of, or worse.

As I have thought about the celestial balance and harmony of tomorrow's equinox, this turning point between the seasons when dark and light align in equal measure, I have had to admit that my internal world has been wobbling a bit on its axis, and that my inner imbalance reflects a world that feels off kilter. There was a moment in February when I really felt it. It was almost 70 degrees,

geese and red-winged blackbirds were migrating home more than a month early, and I was listening to a radio account of a young woman explaining the philosophy and operating principles of so-called internet trolls at the Inaugural Ball -- dubbed the Deploraball -- which celebrated the role it was believed that trolls played in bringing our current president to power. If you don't know what trolls are, here's the quick Wikipedia definition: *In Internet slang, a troll is a person who sows discord on the Internet by starting arguments or upsetting people, by posting inflammatory, extraneous, or off-topic messages in an online community (such as a newsgroup, forum, chat room, or blog) with the intent of provoking readers into an emotional response or of otherwise disrupting normal, on-topic discussion, often for the troll's amusement.* The young woman I heard interviewed allowed that racist and hurtful comments were intended to point out the target's hypersensitivity, that a reaction was the point, and a hurt reaction, funny. Hurt feelings meant trolling success, because the hurt person shouldn't take themselves so seriously, or be hurt so easily. Political correctness curtailed free speech. That was the moment that gave me a jolt and a feeling of dread, that was when I felt I could hear the stitches of social cohesion as they tore, just a bit. Trolling clearly wouldn't stand at Caroline Elementary. Not Responsible. Not Respectful. Not Safe.

Since the November election, the surest way to achieve disquiet and imbalance is to read the news, which I do, every day. Not only that, but I read it online, which feels like entering into another time and energy sucking dimension. And not only that, but I often can't seem to resist going into comment threads -- those dark caves of anonymous unkindness, bullying, and belittling. An hour later, I claw my way out, blinkered and gasping. Because I discover each time that there is a great, gaping deficit of decency in there. Trolls revel in the capacity to cause pain and disruption; non-trolls offer insults, and scathing dismissal of differing viewpoints. I come away from these forays feeling an urgency to ***act in defense of humanity*** so fierce it feels like I've surely discovered a new renewable energy source ***and*** a hopelessness so vast I am certain that all is already lost. I discover whole legions of enemies I didn't know I had, and comrades whose sorrow and anger burns hot enough to melt the mirror in which I see my own reflection.

The Golden Rule does not rule in these forums. The Golden Rule also seems to have been suspended recently proposed public policy, economic policy, environmental policy, educational policy, legal policies, health care policy. Perhaps it was never the law of the land in foreign policy. And perhaps there were always gaps in its application across all of these forums. Certainly there have always been those who scoffed at its naivete, who questioned how it could

ever work in real life, who said that when Jesus gave that particular teaching he was pointing to a lofty ideal that we could only hope to vaguely aim toward as a generally stated but often not adhered to intention, and it was never meant to be an actual practice. As if it's a nice idea for elementary schools, but not for the real world.

Tomorrow, the Earthly and the heavenly will bow to one another, center to center, for a moment, before the revolution continues. the dark and the light will once again face each other as equals for a time -- the dark calling forth light and light calling forth dark in equal measure. And I wonder what is asking to be called forth in us, in this time? Sufi poet Rumi once wrote: *"If God said, 'Rumi, pay homage to everything that has helped you enter my arms,' there would not be one experience of my life, not one thought, not one feeling, nor any act, I would not bow to."*

Perhaps that is the wisdom of bowing to the adversaries, of thanking those who perpetuate injustice, who do not do unto others as they would have done unto them. Because the possibility, the miracle, the truth is that such darkness **can** call forth light in equal measure, such abrogation of responsibility to the commons **can** awaken sacred duty to uphold its integrity. Perhaps that is the brave and startling truth we wander toward, as planetary pilgrims, wobbling as we have for millennia on an invisible internal axis -- our inmost core turned, however fleetingly, toward the center, the source, the S(o)n.