

Donald Trump: homeopathic remedy... or poisonous snake?

By Liz Day



In this article I explore the rise of Donald Trump to the office of president elect of the world's (arguably) most powerful nation. With a little bit of help from prophets ancient and modern, I consider the question: what is the higher wisdom at work here? In following this line of enquiry I have arrived at a surprising proposition: that these events are potentially the catalyst for a healing ritual of sorts and, if we choose, a global wake-up call.

The outcome of the 2016 US election seems to me to be a major leap forward in the unravelling of the global neo-liberal political and economic status quo. So is this good news, or bad? In reflecting on these events the biblical image of the bronze serpent that Moses holds up as a healing symbol to his frail and faithless flock has been emerging strongly for me (check it out in the book of Numbers, chapter 21). Perhaps it might give us some prophetic clues. Here's my retelling of the story.

The Israelites are in the middle of their long 40-year exile in the desert. Having contended with various triumphs and adversities, long arduous years punctuated by large doses of miracles, grace and the odd disaster, they are weary and impatient, and their faith is at an all-time low. Despite receiving bread from heaven and water from a rock, they are anxious about survival - where is the next meal coming from? What is there to sustain them? They complain about the food they are given - it is as miserable as they feel. They start to question the whole project. What was the noble calling that led them out of Egypt, in search of the Promised Land? Who was it that had brought them this far, and, more to the point, who was going to bring them home?

They are casting around for someone to blame. Moses, their leader and prophet, bore the brunt of their increasingly vociferous complaints. And as for God – who is this God that has given them nothing but trials and persecution, insecurity and strife? No thanks, they say, no

more. Negativity spreads like wildfire through the community. And then, to top it all, nature seems to withdraw its support for their plight and, instead of manna, they are sent poisonous serpents. Soon they are struck down with snake bites, and many people die.

From the vantage point of acute suffering and loss, and with the benefit of hindsight, they realise that despite their many setbacks, the journey so far had been marked by a relentless flow of goodness and grace, even though they scarcely appreciated it at the time. They become aware that their self-defeating actions and negative words – their cursing - have somehow stemmed this flow, this mercy.

On their knees now, they are sorry for having spoken bad words against the Sacred Name and they repent of their lack of faith. They ask Moses to commune with the Great Spirit on their behalf to bring an end to their blight. Like the great shaman of the Sinai desert that he is, Moses retreats into the wilderness in prayer and receives instructions for a healing ritual. Moses is to make a bronze statue of a serpent and to raise this on a tall pole for all to see. This he does, and henceforth everyone who looks upon the figure of the serpent is healed of their affliction.

Like the Israelites some three and a half millennia ago, the United States of America carries the same ambiguous - and possibly unwarranted - status of a chosen people in the global psyche, or at least in the many corners of the world colonized by the ideology and culture of Western civilisation. There is a sense that what happens in the USA is a sign, a portent, of the destiny of the whole human family, such is the mythic power ascribed to this volatile ragbag of a union descended from immigrants, slaves and dispossessed indigenous peoples; it is an uneasy alchemy of poetry, subjugation, individualism and idealism. The American people seem to represent in our imagination all that is best and all that is worst of human nature; and the potential divinization of history hangs in the balance. No wonder the eyes of the world are turned towards this current political drama: it is a crisis (and opportunity) not just for the American Dream, but for the Dream of the World.

I'm not sure who the Moses figure is in this drama – Barack Obama perhaps?! But it seems to me that the figure of Donald Trump on the world stage is functioning very much like the bronze serpent – a shocking symbol that has been lifted high for all to gaze upon, compelling us to look at what is toxic, ugly, life-denying and unsustainable within ourselves, in our society, and in our politics and economics. Like a homeopathic remedy, swallowing this medicine means exposing all that needs healing and redemption, and bringing it into the light.

If we carry on the same-old, same-old game of projecting the poison outwards, then the snakes in our path will continue to have deathly power. Donald Trump isn't the problem, he is merely a symptom of a deep-seated dis-ease, the root of which is a wounded humanity

habitually trying to purge itself of its toxicity through violence and by dehumanizing, objectifying and cursing the 'other'. The trouble is that there is no other - there is only us: you and me. And the only power potent enough to break the cycle of violence is the power of love.

Moses was a servant of love, stepping out into an empty land, leading a people to an unknown but promised and longed for destiny. When his people were on the verge of giving up, he looked within himself for the wisdom that only the intuition of the heart can give. He knew that life must be a conscious choice, that by default we are run by fear and a perception of scarcity, and that we turn our fear into anger and blame and look for an enemy to fight. Sometimes we need to see the choice set out before us starkly, and to be fully conscious of the alternative: the image of death and degradation that our scapegoating leads to.

Some 15 centuries later, as told by John's gospel, Jesus evoked the symbol of the bronze snake as somehow prefiguring his own life and mission, "As Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness", said Jesus, "even so must the Son of Man be lifted up: that whoever believes in him should not perish, but have eternal life."

Who is this Son of Man that calls for our allegiance and, in return, gives us life? For me, as a Christian, it is the man Jesus who utterly refused to meet violence with violence – even at the cost of his own life. He refused to hate, he forgave his enemies. In the words of one of my beloved teachers, he opened wide his arms and with a loud YES of acceptance and surrender *he loved evil to death*. To gaze upon the figure of the crucified Christ is to meditate on the power of love to undo our own destructive compulsions, and to expose and disarm our desire to put all the dark and ugly stuff within ourselves onto someone else.

The Son of Man – or Child of Humanity - is also I believe, every one of us. It is the True Self within each of us who knows that the way home is through our broken humanity, through touching the earth and descending rather than ascending. It is the wisdom child who understands there is no easier softer way – that being human, without an anesthetic, in all its agony and ecstasy, in intimate relationship with other annoyingly flawed and wounded human beings and with our messy ailing planet – this IS the easier softer way.

Jesus revealed this path of redemptive non-violence in such a dramatic way that the door was blown wide open for all with eyes to see. By embracing our experience, however dark and unwanted; trusting in the force of life to win through in spite of our attempts to subvert and control it; dancing with the miracle of this wondrous earth and our own noble human nature, there is a way to stop the cycle. Tragically, the human family as a whole has stubbornly continued to miss the point time and again, fearing, perhaps, that walking through that door will cost more than we can give, not realizing that the gift is already given.

Our doubting minds push away such generosity - surely it can't be that simple, that open, that inclusive?

If Donald Trump is a bitter tasting medicine revealing all that is broken within the unified field of our One World, there is a deeper wisdom at work calling us to make a choice. The invitation is to raise up an alternative vision of at-one-ment, of what it means to be whole and holy, in compassionate solidarity with ourselves, with each other and with our beloved planet; indeed there is evidence already of a spontaneous co-arising of affirmations and actions to uphold what is Good, True and Beautiful. We are being called to pour out our lives, as Jesus did, in service of love: the one true thing that can make all the darkness and violence and degradation of this world disappear.

Alternatively, we could take the less demanding way and demonise and blame Donald Trump for all our ills, and in so doing completely miss the point - yet again.

Here's a paraphrase from some well-known lines from Deuteronomy (chapter 30, verses 15-20) which speaks to the crossroads we are now faced with.

See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. If you listen now and are obedient to the command of the heart, loving the One who is all in all, diligently observing the demands of the voice that emanates from your Deeper Source - then you shall live as truly generative and creative beings on this earth, and the Great Love that formed you will richly bless you.

But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, if you give your allegiance and your toil to lesser gods, to the quick fix, the misguided desires of the small self, I declare to you that you will prolong the suffering of the planet and its people, and many will see death, and the land that you so long to reclaim as your true home will once again be lost.

I call heaven and earth to witness to this today: that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and the future beings may live, loving what is Good, holding fast to what is True, walking in Beauty; for that means long and full life for you and for all your relations, human and non-human. It means finally coming home to your inheritance as a child of the Universe, and as a son and a daughter of this Earth.

There is a prayer, an awakening that is gathering force in our times: *we are the ones we have been waiting for*. It's time now to stop the cycle, to bring the truism that hatred cannot be cured by hatred from awareness into practice. It's time to step up a gear and recognize that we're all in it together – Trump supporters and Clinton supporters, Remainers and Leavers, liberals and conservatives, black and white, gay and straight and everything in between. We need to turn and re-turn to ancient ways - listening before speaking, and truly

seeing the humanity in another person's eyes no matter how much we may disagree with their opinions or life choices, even and especially the Donald Trumps of this world.

This isn't to say we should passively accept the impending assault by the new US administration on initiatives to preserve the environment and protect those who are vulnerable. Indeed, acts of non-violent resistance to hold back the forces of destruction will become more vital than ever, as will the prophetic imperative to speak truth to power. But it means approaching it all from a higher frequency of compassion and all-inclusive solidarity.

The death of modern day prophet Leonard Cohen, announced on 9th November - the day after the result of the US presidential election stopped us all in our tracks - prompted a deluge of tributes and commentary on the world wires and presented a curious contrast to the figure of Donald Trump. The timeliness of his departure was nothing less than poetic, ensuring that immediately after the apparent triumph of what for many is a malign force, a very different voice was heard.

In the title track of his newly released final album, ominously titled 'You Want It Darker', Cohen used the powerful Hebrew word 'hineni', which means something like, 'Here I am. Send me'. It is a performative utterance expressing an unconditional readiness to give oneself totally in service of Divine Becoming. According to the Old Testament writers, hineni is the word Moses used in response to the voice of God calling out from the burning bush, and by other giants of the Hebrew scriptures too, including Abraham, Isaiah and Samuel. These figures testify to the power of faith; and their message for those with the courage to make such a whole-hearted commitment: *beware, the Universe is listening and will respond by giving you a mission, and your life may never be quite the same again.*

'You want it darker: hineni, hineni, I'm ready my Lord' says Cohen. The song is at once a powerful anthem to a faith that continues to burn fiercely despite the gathering darkness of broken hope; and a protest against the apparent betrayal of the promise inscribed in the figure of the crucified Christ, the promise of a love more powerful than death. After more than two millennia of gazing on this figure – in the face of continued wars, of the misappropriation of the Christian gospel, of untold brutal conquests and the subjugation of lands and peoples, of the relentless conversion of our common wealth into private gain, and of a planet and people that now appears to be on the very edge of self-destruction – the promise is wearing thin. In Cohen's song of outrage 'a million candles burning for a help that never came' is the devastating image of hope betrayed.

And yet... Cohen's 'hineni' belies despair. Despite all appearances to the contrary, and even though it makes little sense on a rational level, the song records Cohen's readiness to surrender his life in trust to an underlying coherence, an ultimately benign force. This is

fueled not by fuzzy religious consolation, but by confronting the darkness of self and world head on.

Artists and mystics such as Cohen abide at a depth of existence that most of us only inhabit fleetingly; giving voice, on our behalf, to half-remembered truths that, if we have the ears to hear, can keep us anchored in what is real. The kernel of truth revealed in Cohen's final, and perhaps finest, work is that faith would not be faith at all without darkness. If God created both day and night, and our deepest intuitions affirm that this God is ultimately good, then darkness has its purpose too - to bring us into birth, awakening, light.

The path that Jesus walked - his words of life, his healing ministry, and his radical self-offering - was the ultimate 'hineni'. It echoed God's unconditional hineni to us and testified to a friendly and personal universe that, is not only ready, but which is forever running to meet us with open arms. This force for good responds to our faith with the divine *fiat*, the heavenly yes that brings new creation into being, and life out of death. In this circle dance of love there is no initiator, it is all one prayer: call and response, response and call. This combination - our willingness to step up to the mark, and the movement of God in meeting us there - is the alchemy of miracles.

Hineni, hineni. Are we ready?

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Let me know what you think! I would love to hear from you - - please leave your comments on my online blog, or drop me an email.

None of the ideas here are original! I've drawn inspiration from many different sources, intentionally and unintentionally - most notably of course the Bible. I'm particularly leaning on the wisdom of three of my favourite authors and teachers, all of whom have published commentaries on the presidential election, saying similar things in different ways - and with far greater eloquence and knowledge than I possess.

[Charles Eisenstein – The Election: Of Hate, Grief and a New Story](#)

[Cynthia Bourgeault – Post Election Reflection](#)

[Richard Rohr – Rebuilding from the Bottom Up: A Reflection following the Election](#)