

Daily Meditation 02/19/22

The Role of Toxic Masculinity in Gun Violence Unveiled

Good Morning.

In today's meditation we're discussing the role of toxic masculinity and gun violence, based on a recent story this week on some of the victims of Sandy Hook Elementary School killings, 20 children and six adults, 10 years ago.

And there being a court settlement, which in fact, got Remington, who created not only the gun that killed these people, but the advertising -- and that's key, the advertising toward young men, the kind of young man who was 20 years old, who killed these people. And that was a legal basis for releasing all the documents of the history of Remington and the Bushmaster for people to see.

And the most important linchpin to all this was advertisements such as "Report your friend for not being a man," because they didn't own a Bushmaster. Not being a man. Another advertisement to get this gun as a "card to be a man." And so I raise the question, obviously, whether it takes an AR-15 to be a man.

And as the father of one of the six-year-old boys who was murdered says, the advertising was all about targeting those who want to appear more intimidating, more powerful, and more masculine for their use of the AR-15s.

So clearly this resonates with our theme of weeks, we've been on for weeks about "what is the sacred and healthy masculine, and what isn't?"

Then, in the conclusion to my book, *The Hidden Spirituality of Men*, I take up the important topic of messages of false masculinity in our culture. And a few of them are these.

One, back when I wrote the book, was that "Real men eat beef." Now notice that that phrase, which of course, is catchy and advertising-like, says that there's real men and unreal men.

And, of course, this raises doubt, if there's any shame in a child, or young man: Which side am I on? Am I real or unreal? Well, am I eating enough beef?

I mean, it's laughable, except it's very serious, because also it relates directly to the issue of climate change, doesn't it? Because in fact, raising beef is at tremendous cost regarding water, regarding land, and regarding the raising of food for the beef, so a lot is wrapped up in the whole beef consumption that's going on, that's directly related to the climate change crisis we find ourselves in.

But the idea that beef is for manly men, for masculine men: if you're a real man, you will eat beef. And you'll know who you are, because the rest fail the beef test. So it appeals to a man's self doubt, or even shame. And so spreading several lies and several distractions. And there's an insidious assumption or presumption that only masculinity of a certain kind, beef-eating kind, makes a man.

And this feeds male fear of the divine feminine. That makes any closeness to the feminine a threat to one's status as a man.

Now another advertisement that was very much omnipresent was the Marlboro Man who was seducing young men for generations to smoke. To be a man means that you smoke a Marlboro cigarette, usually riding a horse.

But the fact is that the very poor actor who played this rough and tumble macho Marlboro Man in the ads died of lung cancer, young and painfully and prematurely. So another real man illusion.

So we humans, and men in particular, have to take back our understanding of what it means to be a male and to be authentically masculine. And we can't leave it to the advertisers, who are of course sponsored by the corporations, whether it's smoking, or gun-toting, to give us the definition of manhood. But when you don't have rites of passage, you get this instead, you get false advertising.

And another shibboleth that was very common 10-15 years ago was, "Anyone can go to Baghdad, real men go to Tehran." That was a political slogan, when America was destroying Baghdad, and the far right in America was saying, we shouldn't stop here, this is going so wonderfully, for so many people, that we should move on to Iran. Real men go to Iran.

But notice the message behind it: that people who are doubtful of their manhood, have to destroy one city after another. So the issue of being doubtful in manhood is a serious one, and a dangerous one. And this is why offering the alternatives of what healthy manhood is, is so important.

Thank you. We'll see you tomorrow.