

## Daily Meditation 09-23-24

### A Sense of the Sacred — The Opposite of Evil, continued

Good morning, and Happy Equinox day, everybody -- today being the first day of autumn.

Autumn has always been my favorite time of the year. Growing up in Wisconsin, autumn is very dramatic: the move from the green of summer to the colors of the fall. It's always very meaningful to me. Of course, autumn also meant going back to school. And I enjoyed school. I loved learning, and I was blessed with many good teachers in grade school and high school. And fall was also football season, and this meant a lot in my family, because my father had been a football coach, and all of us boys played football.

And I just felt the journey from summer into winter by way of fall, was very mysterious, and indeed beautiful and spiritual. But a bit morose too, moving into the very severe winters we used to have, when I was growing up in Wisconsin, before climate change really hit with a bang.

And so today, in today's meditation, we are dealing again with the topic of the sense of the Sacred, and how Sacred is the opposite of evil, not the good. The opposite of good is bad.

Of course, there's a relationship between good and Sacred. But the Sacred is something greater than ourselves: that which makes us, rather than what we make. And we stumble for words and vocabulary, and language when we discuss the Sacred, because it is bigger than what we imagine.

And today's creation story telling us how the universe is larger than we ever imagined. By now, saying it's 2 trillion galaxies, each with hundreds of billions of stars. And of course, the whole 13.8 billion-year journey that has brought us here. All that is Sacred. It's bigger than us. It birthed us. It birthed our Earth. It birthed our Sun, and all the rest that makes life and our life possible.

So I cite this great passage from Rabbi Heschel, who talks about how a response to evil in the Bible is not the good, it is the holy. Because holy is a synonym for Sacred: what he calls “an attempt to raise humanity to a higher level of existence, where humans are not alone, and confronted with evil. Living in the light of the face of God, bestows upon people a power of love that enables them to overcome the powers of evil.”

Now, Martin Buber teaches that “we cannot wipe out evil, but we can work to turn it into good.” To turn evil into good. “If there are lessons to be learned from light, we find in darkness, that sense of wisdom and compassion, forgiveness, that are learned from grief and suffering and loss and betrayal.”

I was taught by Buck Ghosthorse, a Lakota teacher, that the good is a door. When he says that “fear is a door in the heart, that lets evil spirits in. You see, evil spirits, they dwell at a level of of the spiritual, and that's why they keep coming back.” We don't slam the door forever on evil spirits, do we? Racism was alive and well in the 50s. King and hundreds of thousands of others marched and went to jail, suffered to confront the evil of segregation and racism then; and laws were passed, etc. So in that sense, good overcame this evil. But it's back. Racism is back. Listen to these presidential and vice-presidential speeches, and these lies that are being told about Haitian immigrants and other immigrants, etc., etc. And it's all built around racism. They're not talking about European immigrants, when they're talking about immigrants. They're talking about people of color who are immigrants.

But if fear is a door in the heart, that let's evil spirits in, well, a strong door, a good door, lets goodness in. And we have in John's gospel, for example, statements from the Christ: “I am the way. I am the door.”

So it's important to ask then, “where is the good all around us?” First, it's in the universe itself. The blessing that the universe is, that the earth is, that our lives are, and all those beings with whom we interact, and befriend us and whom we befriend. To trees, to soil, to water, forests, to rivers and lakes and oceans, and all the critters that live in them. They feed us, they nurture us, they nourish us, and they're beautiful in themselves,

Then we can ask, “where is the good within us?” And there, I think the phraseology, the language of the seven chakras from the East, really helps. Because it names seven centers in our physiology, corresponding to centers in our spirit and psychology, our psyches. And these are points of energy and strength and love.

And then, “where are the doors of evil in us?” These doors that Ghosthorse talks about? Well, they too correspond to the seven chakras, when the chakras are off center.

Thomas Aquinas defines sin as misdirected love. And there really is a Jewish understanding of sin, because the word sin in Hebrew is an archery term. It means to miss the mark, to miss the bullseye. And ask what's in us that's a missing of the bullseye, of what the chakra when it's healthy, is all about.

And so this is a methodology that I carry through on, in my major work on evil, *Sins of the Spirit, Blessings of the Flesh: Transforming Evil in Soul and Society*. And I compare the seven chakras of the East and of our bodies, all of us, with the seven capital sins of the West. And I ask, do they correspond? And they do. So to me, it's an amazing practice to recognize the coming together of East and West, around this serious issue of humanity's propensity to evil.

And this can provide us with a new language, because I think the “sin language” of Western religion has been oversold. It's substituted sin for evil. Evil is much bigger than sin, just like the Sacred is bigger than good. It incorporates good, but it's something even more grandiose.

And so the doors of the seven chakras. The first is about vibration. And so it really is about the whole universe, because all beings are vibrating in the universe. All atoms are vibrating in the universe. And so all the efforts at tribalism, which includes racism and sexism and homophobia, all forms of arrogance and tribalism, are named, really, in that first chakra.

And in the second chakra of our sexuality, Sacred that it is, it brings new humans into life, into being. And of course, it also is an ultimate expression of human love and intimacy. If it's off center, it turns abusive.

The third chakra is in the guts. That's where violence is birthed. That's where we feel a kick of injustice when we hear about injustice. So you can go through all the seven chakras this way and realize, Oh, these are down-to-earth examples, that are comparable to the seven capital sins in the Western tradition. And here we have a new language for wrestling with evil.

Again, you want to wrap it all in the overall embrace: the sacredness of the universe, the sacredness of our existence, the sacredness of our bodies, and the sacredness of all our relations.

Thank you. We'll see you next week, and Happy Equinox.