



BRINGING LIGHT AND HOPE TO DARK TIMES

I was having breakfast by myself on the back porch, when a little hummingbird came and perched on a bush near me. She was looking at me, so I thought we might strike up a conversation. I told her what I was thinking about. This country is in chaos and getting worse every minute. Instead of leading us into healthy ways of living together, it seems as if our supposed leadership is encouraging division and hatred. The hummingbird looked interested. So I repeated my main point. "This country is in chaos!" Then she opened her beak, and I was close enough to see her remarkable multi-tongue as she gave forth a soothing simple chirp, which I interpreted as her saying, "Yes, the country is in chaos, but you are not!" I thought this was a very wise observation.

I'm unaware of any scriptural text indicating hummingbirds serving as celestial messengers



but I could have missed something along the line.



I wrote something a while back which I would like to share with you again.

Long ago Rabbi Nachman of Bratzlav (1772–1810) wrote;

*May it be my practice to go outdoors each day
among the trees and grasses, among all growing things,
there to be alone and enter into prayer.*

Where I live, I am surrounded by “the trees and grasses” Rabbi Nachman mentions. But I have become aware that many with whom I share this planet do not have the options with which I am blessed. It impresses me how, even though confined by sickness, poverty, or other circumstances, people do find ways to use nature as a connection to what is sacred to, as the hummingbird advised, avoid being in chaos.



I have been in cramped rooms and noticed the care given to a little pot with something growing in it. Sometimes when I follow Rabbi Nachman’s guidance and go outdoors, I do not head for my usual beautiful spots — the rose garden, the edge of the forest, the olive grove. Instead I sit on the steps, next to a small potted geranium my daughter Holly gave to me when I was a bit under the weather. In that pot I am learning to find everything needed to remind me of what is holy in me, in you, in life.

Memories come flooding in of sitting next to a potted plant as a very young child in the hot Mississippi sun, or by one on my desk in my law office, or in the corner of a dank concrete Romanian building at a very bad time. And looking forward, I know there will be times when only a small piece of the wonderful life growing on this planet will be all that connects me to what is important. But that little piece will be enough.



It is essential to select what we think about. Let me give you an example.

1) The present occupant of the White House, aka #45, attacked a Congresswoman who is calling people to resist many of his actions. She is African-American and I had the privilege of working with her during the AIDS pandemic when she was a member of the California legislature. In a White House tweet, it was said she was a person of low intelligence. I objected to this in a recent Friday Reflection. A priest from the Bay Area responded to my Reflection calling the Congresswoman a “bitch” and signing off to me with a “fuck you.” His sermons must be quite colorful!

2) Let us switch over to a beach in El Salvador. It all started when one of the nearly extinct sea turtles was observed laying her eggs in the sand. Young people, some as young as five, began watching where eggs were being laid by sea turtles so they could protect the eggs. It's not unusual for a turtle to lay over 100 eggs. Killing the turtles is now forbidden, but a great deal of poaching goes on and they are killed in a most



cruel way. Their numbers were dropping alarmingly. On the more positive side, proper hatcheries for the eggs have been established and last year 100,000 tiny sea turtles were released back into the ocean in El Salvador alone. Most of this activity is handled by students who in the process learn a lot about conservation and our responsibility to the other creatures inhabiting this planet.

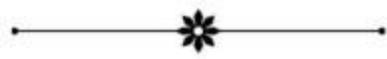


I saw the wonderful picture at the top of the page of young people in swimsuits and shorts on a beach in El Salvador. They were placing the tiny turtles on the sand and watching them immediately find their way to their ocean home. The turtles are so small that it took quite a while to reach the water but their sense of direction was never in question. The young people would laugh and applaud as each turtle arrived at the ocean. Sometimes they would follow “their” turtle into the waves to make sure she or he had no trouble, wading beside them before saying goodbye.

I saw the picture of the young people on the beach and received the message from

the, hopefully unique, priest in the Bay Area on the same day. It was my choice as to what was to occupy my attention. It was a simple choice. I frequently thought of the youth and the little turtles, and dumped the priest, and #45, into my mental trash can.

That's what we have to do in so many ways, on so many days, if we are to protect what is good and healthy about the communities in which we live — indeed the life we each live.



Are we going to have to fight for the humanitarian values that we thought defined us as a nation? Yes, there will be a time when every one of us has to stand up in some way to fight for those values. The situation is grave. Hate crimes in our country have dramatically increased under the present administration. As one friend of mine put it, “America First, really means white supremacy first.”

Even in the peaceful and bucolic county in which I live, hate crimes have jumped 17.4% in the past year. Recently there was a video that went viral documenting a man disrupting a family in this county who was celebrating the Fourth of July. The mean spirited man pounded on the door and loudly protested hearing Spanish music coming from their house. Sometimes we forget that Caucasians took California from Spanish speaking people. Spanish music was heard here long before the “Star-Spangled Banner” was written.



We've come to a point where too many of us believe, first, that it is somehow traitorous to think that people coming from different cultures can make a loving and productive community together, and secondly, to believe that they have a green light from Washington, D.C. to act out any hatred they have within them.



As I wrote, I believe there will be times when each of us will be called upon to stand up and fight for the values that are precious to us. But at those times when we are not called on to fight, it is necessary to practice in our own lives those same values, for

the good of our communities and ourselves. If we do this, these vicious times will pass.

If you don't believe me just go listen to a hummingbird near you, or to whatever other angel might be flying around your backyard — or crawling toward the ocean!

Brother Toby
