



TOLERANCE

Escaping the Inferno of Hatred

We have many birds coming to Starcross for the first time. I think it's because of the fires. Even though the wildfires are some distance from us, the smoke travels and so do the birds — looking for a safe haven and finding it here.

In some way I feel that most of the people who read these reflections, and certainly myself, are emulating the traveling birds. We are searching for someplace where the country has stepped back from the savagery with which we are infected. A noted photographer went to a rally for the president and was extremely distressed by young children being urged to spit out their hatred toward those who thought differently or had a different color of skin or spiritual path. One picture showed a boy, about five years old, so angered that he was actually slobbering as he screamed. That haunts me as it did the photographer.

But I am also concerned about some other things people I respect are writing and predicting. Several statements I have seen in the past few days have in effect been saying, *we must win this next election. We must get out the vote. It is our last chance!*

I'm all for doing everything possible to have everybody vote. The thing that troubles me is the phrase "It is our last chance." I'm old enough to have seen that statement as a preliminary to revolution. No matter how well intended, revolutions are never nonviolent. Martin Luther King Jr. came close to creating a nonviolent revolution, so did Mahatma Gandhi, but both of these good men were assassinated and the results were and continue to be very bloody!



And so, to borrow a phrase from the Quakers, because I believe I am surrounded by people looking for a friendly persuasion to our problems, I say that "I stand against revolution." I feel that there is within us individually and collectively a wisdom that provides a path out of this destructive nationalism. The problem is how do we find and liberate that wisdom? I don't know, but we have been here before, and there are guideposts, some recent and some from centuries ago.



It was a year ago this month that a large number of white supremacists marched into Charlottesville, Virginia. Many people were stunned, and some people paid dearly. Young Heather Heyer and two law officers died in the violent demonstration.

The Southern Poverty Law Center identified the root of the violent display as "Hatred". They ought to know. The SPLC has been fighting hatred throughout its long existence. Exactly what is a practical way for the ordinary ethical citizen to fight hatred? As a result of Charlottesville the SDLC proposed 10 steps for all of us to walk.

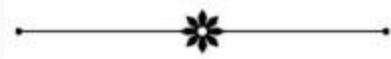
Here is a synopsis.

1. **Act.** Do something. Apathy is not an option.
2. **Join forces.** Reach out to others. Build a diverse coalition.
3. **Support victims.** Protect them. Offer small acts of kindness – notes, phone calls, etc.



4. **Speak up.** Expose and denounce hatred. Move toward unity.
5. **Educate yourself.** Look at the hate websites.
6. **Create alternatives.** If there is a hate rally, create a separate unity rally or parade.
7. **Pressure leaders.** Insist they take a public stand.
8. **Stay engaged.** Don't become discouraged. You are needed.
9. **Teach acceptance.** Kids learn stereotypes from a very young age. Teach them early and often, at home, at school, in entertainment.
10. **Dig deeper.** Acknowledge your own prejudices. Look for bias and work to overcome it.

If you would like to see the excellent video on combating hatred go to this link which I use with the permission of the Southern Poverty Law Center, <https://www.splcenter.org/one-year-after-charlottesville>



Now let's go back a few centuries in the quest for getting the wisdom to fight hatred. Ever heard of the word "Shekhinah?" No? I'm not surprised unless you are a rabbinical scholar. The word is not in the Bible, but it is a concept that is very important to Jewish, Christian, and Islamic heritage. It also popped up in the last century in the works of Carl Gustav Jung (1875–1961) and various Humanistic Psychologists using the term "Synchronicity." The secular concept is that there are no casual relationships among the events of our lives. They are all meaningfully related. However, here it is simpler for me to use spiritual imagery.



In Judaism, Shekhinah represents the feminine aspects of the divine. It primarily means a place where the divine presence settles in. That was strongly represented in the concept of settling into the tabernacle in the Temple in Jerusalem. But, it also means settling into the home of a married couple. The image most associated with the concept is a tongue of fire.

From earliest times this same concept of Shekhinah has been strongly present in the Tao of Jesus. It is usually referred to as the presence or indwelling of the spirit of God — or simply the "Holy Spirit." And, it is also often represented by

tongues of fire, which allegedly appeared above the heads of the followers of Jesus after his death.

In Islam the term used is Skinah, and it signifies the presence or the peace of God, “Allah.” It can be shortened into “Salaam” — the divine presence of Allah rests upon you.

So the point of this brief journey into Middle Eastern spiritual words is simply that a huge portion of the world’s population strongly believes the divine presence, by whatever name we use, rests within each of us. The wisdom to combat hatred and the other ills of our day is to be found within each of us. We only have to “Be still and know” as Psalm 46 instructs.

But we do have to be still for awhile! No trumpets. Just the sound of a gentle breeze.



In the Hebrew Bible, it is written that Elijah went to the sacred mountain of Horeb to learn the wisdom of God. (1 Kings 19:11–14)

There came a mighty wind, so strong it tore the mountains and shattered the rocks. But Yahweh was not in the wind. After the wind came an earthquake. But Yahweh was not in the earthquake. After the earthquake came a fire. But Yahweh was not in the fire, and after the fire there came the sound of a gentle breeze. And when Elijah heard this, he covered his face with his cloak and went out and stood at the entrance of the cave. Then a voice came to him.



It was the voice of Yahweh. The same voice that speaks within each of us. The voice of the divine presence that has settled in us forever. It is there that we will find the wisdom to decide what steps to take in these difficult times.



The wind has shifted. The smoke from the wildfires is coming our way. The brave little birds seem to know what's happening and managed to get here before the smoke. They've dropped down into safe, and clean air places. Just now they are congregating at the fountain in the cloister garden. As I walk by, I see about a dozen coexisting. There's three or four different species peacefully sharing the space. At the top of the fountain is one hummingbird casually drinking. Then she or he flies away for the adventures of the day.

Brother Toby