

Lord, what fools these mortals be!

*William Shakespeare (1564-1616),  
A Midsummer's Night Dream*



## **AUTOCRATS DO NOT TEND TO BE DECENT BUT MOST OTHER FOLKS DO**

Tonight is “Midsummer Night.” For those of us with ancestors in the Northern Hemisphere, this was one of the “thin times” when the wall between the mess we humans have made and the cosmic order is so transparent that we can hear and see strange things. Today our journalists are often replacing the sages of old in putting out troubling, but believable, messages. Here are some of the things I have recently read and pondered on.



A journalist gave a graduation talk in which she warned the Class of 2019 not to hope for too much. She said that she herself no longer “trafficked in hope.”

Her message was that “democracy is faltering.” Perhaps she was a bit oversensitive because the administration of this country had just arranged with another nation to manufacture high-tech parts for bombardments and in the process shared secret technology for precision-guided bombs. A ruler in that particular nation is rumored to be behind the murder and savage butchering of one of the journalist’s colleagues. It is also a nation that seems to employ brutal torturing in the treatment of female journalists in their prisons. But that country’s rulers are the friends of our country’s rulers and as Shakespeare’s Mark Anthony put it, *“They are all honorable men.”*

Another journalist reported recently that our honorable leader came from a golf course and appeared at the local church in a rather “disheveled appearance.” The congregation had gathered to pray for victims of a recent mass shooting. At the last minute the pastor of the church said he was told that he should instead lead prayers for the president who stood beside him.



The man left right after the prayer, presumably returning to his golf game.

And I hear rumors of people being worried that a war would be a good election strategy. Certainly I hope the vassals of our leaders would not remain supine in such a case. One thing I heard being whispered on the wind in our olive trees was that a U.S. Senator sitting next to another senator during the inaugural speech heard her companion quietly reciting the names of dictators during the speech. Having spent years

as a Prisoner of War this senator next to her, now sadly deceased, knew the true cost of military engagements.

I’m sure that you have also heard many voices. Some concerns are simply shocking to me. We will be having a different Fourth of July, one that emphasizes the importance of the country’s glorious leader, rather than our history and values. Other issues go to the fundamental moral compass of the

United States. We have always had trouble with those opening words of the Constitution “WE THE PEOPLE...” Many folks have been made to feel that they were not included in that “WE.”

Recently I was very troubled by the administration’s decision to eliminate supports, including educational and recreational activities, for unaccompanied children in custody who crossed our border fleeing from persecution. Among other things, their soccer games have been stopped. Why? Perhaps because that might lead the children to the mistaken idea that they could find a home in a land that was created for white males. This mean-spirited action really triggered the “old lawyer” gene in me and brought about a lot of disgust. Bear with me. Here is the background to this situation.

In 1987 a suit was filed, *Flores v. Reno*, against the government by lawyers on behalf of an immigrant girl in government custody. In 1997, at the urging of the courts, a settlement agreement was finally reached between the parties which became known as the “Flores Agreement”, and required that in addition to food and shelter the government must also provide: clothing, grooming items, routine medical and dental care, immunizations, medication, an individualized needs assessment for each child, an educational assessment and plan, a statement of religious preferences, an assessment identifying immediate family members in the United States, education services and communication skills, English language training, recreation [*like soccer!*], leisure time, and access to social work staff and counseling sessions, visitation and contact with family members regardless of immigration status and family reunification services if possible.



This settlement agreement has guided the government up until the current day when the present occupant of the White House decided he didn't like it and that he would “withdraw” from it, as he has done with all other

agreements he didn't like. All he would agree to was that children should be provided with food, water, and shelter. I have been told that at one time in private life this man was actually engaged in 4,000 lawsuits at once. If so this makes it peculiar that he hasn't grasped some basics about how the legal system works. As a friend of mine working in immigration legal matters put it, the administration's action is a breach of the Flores Agreement. I'm also advised by a human rights organization that lawsuits are already in the pipeline.

Even if the administration's position was legally authorized, it would be morally indefensible. I will say what so many others are saying nowadays, *"This is not who we are!"*

But the shameful process just continues on. As I was writing this Reflection news came through that a "hardliner" had been appointed "acting" head of the all-important office of U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS). The person appointed has no prior experience with this agency and will lead 19,000 employees and contractors charged with adjudicating requests for citizenship, green cards and visas. This is a man who has advocated denying citizenship to American-born children of undocumented parents living in the country — despite the Constitution stating otherwise. He has argued that migrants from Central America should simply be turned away. He once stated, *"You just point 'em back across the river, and let 'em swim for it."* A former chief attorney at USCIS wonders if this new appointment shows that the administration is simply trying to break the immigration system so that it doesn't work at all.

So much for those words on the Statue of Liberty,

*"Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to breathe free, the wretched refuse of your teeming shore. Send these, the homeless, tempest-tossed to me, I lift my lamp beside the golden door!"*

My maternal grandfather cried when he came through that "golden door." How

about yours?

OK, end of angry outburst.



I am very glad that a growing number of people including some young, non-white, women in Congress and other places of government have some very strong ideas about enlarging the concept of “WE THE PEOPLE.” In order to accomplish that goal they are going to need the help of a lot of people. Some folks my age might feel that we are too old for the struggle but there is going to have to be a spiritual revolution and no one is too old for that! I think of the words of President Franklin Delano Roosevelt (1882–1945), who guided the country during my early life. He once said,



*If civilization is to survive, we must cultivate the science of human relationships – the ability of all peoples, of all kinds, to live together, in the same world at peace.*

I asked our Sister Julie how she reacted to all these current events that trouble me. She said it was discouraging. I asked what did she want that we don’t presently have in the workings of our government. She instantly responded, “Decency.” I think that is what we all want — more decency, people who respect each other, and not just think of themselves, who rely on compassion not fear.



This morning 10,000 people gathered at Stonehenge in England to watch the dawn light touch the heelstone in the great circle of stone. Our ancestors felt this was a moment when the heavens and the earth were united. No matter how you see the Summer Solstice it does feel to many like a special time for moving with the cycles of nature and gathering strength from that awareness. People of a petty temperament come and go. What is authentic remains.



Our evening spiritual interfaith gathering will start with these words from the Vietnamese Zen master and peace activist Thich Nhat Hanh (1926 – ),

*Breathing in, Breathing out,  
I am blooming as a flower.  
I am fresh as the dew.  
I am solid as a mountain.  
I am firm as the Earth.  
I am water reflecting  
what is real, what is true.  
I feel there is space deep  
inside of me. I am free.*

The times call for people to be strong — to be free. And that means you. And that means me.

### ***Brother Toby***

*PS. A word about the pictures. The one at the top is of my daughter Holly exuberantly exploring the Arizona desert as a teenager. The fierce Hopi Kachina is So'yo'kw'uti who appears in the underground kiva during the ceremony when children are advancing to adolescence. Choices must be made in life. The warlike ogre represents what must be avoided. The carver was a*

*very gentle man living on Walpi, a village founded around 900 CE. The two hands are of a father and son. The little bronze statute was something my sculptor friend Jack Witt in Virginia put together to explain to me the “lost wax” process. He was going to throw it away but I liked it. The little man carrying two buckets was given to me by Sister Julie many years ago to illustrate a Zen teaching — BEFORE ENLIGHTENMENT, CHOPPING WOOD AND CARRYING WATER. AFTER ENLIGHTENMENT, CHOPPING WOOD AND CARRYING WATER.*