

BOUNDLESS WAY ZEN

Dharma talks, sermons
and teishos

WHO YOU LOOKING AT?

A Dialogue Sermon on Hate
by James Ishmael Ford

20 February 2005
First Unitarian Society
West Newton, Massachusetts

I understand simmering anger, bubbling hatred. Me, I understand it every time I see our president on television. In my opinion that man (as I understand many in a previous generation referred to Franklin Roosevelt) that man is trying to unravel the social contract out of which our modern American state has been woven. I think he is unable to distinguish the nation's interests and his family's intertwined connections with the oil industry, his fundamentalist religion and his quasi-Wilsonian neo-conservative vision of a world made safe for – well, I'm really not sure whether he wants it safe for democracy or big business. I deeply fear out of this unholy mix of conflicting interests he may well bring us a generation consumed within the churning jaws of global war. I really dislike him. I'm consumed with a visceral dislike for him. I don't like how he stands. I don't like how he talks. I certainly can't stand his smirk. Why, I don't even like his dog.

And so, today, I want to talk about hatred.

Let me make a quick distinction. There is anger and then there is hatred. Anger, I suggest, is a natural response to certain situations. It is not unlike pain, in that it is an immediate warning of danger, a red flag calling for focused attention. Hatred is stewing anger. Like napalm, hatred doesn't go away; it just keeps burning. Hatred is the anger that consumes us; that takes us to unreasonable and, I suggest, poisonous places. When I feel a deep revulsion for and a need to stand against a policy the president announces; my feeling of anger is part of the focus I need to have. When I hate the president's dog, however, that's a warning, too. Because hatred clouds clarity, it takes us to bad thinking; and leads to wrong actions. Perhaps you caught a bit of that in my rant about the president. I hope you did.

I suggest hatred is a fundamental cognitive error, an unfortunate side effect to the way our brains work. I suggest in the last analysis, hatred is based in the delusion that we're separate in some substantive way from the rest of the world. For me it is based in the feeling I have no genuine connection to the president; feeling he belongs to a different category of being; like a giraffe, and in his case a malign giraffe. But there's some very good news in noticing such a thing. We don't have to be stuck with such thinking, nor with the cascade of bad actions which can follow such thinking.

Today I bring a reflection of hope. Today as a bottom line I point to the truth of our radical interdependence. This reality is what one spiritual teacher calls interbeing, which I suggest is in fact what we really are: inter-being, interrelated so closely we are in some very true sense, one. I go on to suggest as we sort out the sense of separation and find the connections, we also find a way to peace, to joy, to possibility for ourselves, indeed for all who suffer

However, because this is a dialog sermon, there will be a space for you to react, to share your own perspectives, corrections, reflections. Within the warp and the woof of our shared consideration, I really believe we can show something of the truth of interbeing.

As I said I think hatred is simply a part of the human condition. For instance most of us are familiar with at least echoes of the 137th Psalm. Such a lovely and haunting song of the heart's breaking from the experience of exile and that deep longing for our true home.

"By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down, yea, we wept, when we remembered Zion./We hanged our harps upon the willows in the midst thereof./For there they that carried us away captive required of us a song; and they that wasted us [required of us] mirth, [saying], Sing us [one] of the songs of Zion." Then there's that great lament, one of the most heartbreaking lines in the world's spiritual poetry. "How shall we sing the Lord's song in a strange land?" Now that's where most citations of this psalm end. In fact it goes on. Following a few more sentences calling for punishment upon the singer if ever she or he forgets Zion, the poem then launches into a curse on Babylon and concludes with. "Happy [shall he be], that taketh and dasheth thy little ones against the stones." There's hate.

When I did an etymological search on our English word hate, I discovered something interesting. Most words find their origins in a metaphor. So, for instance, god derives from good. The Northern European sources for our word hate, however, all simply meant hate. This is a primary emotion. This is something that cuts dangerously close to the bone.

There's an ancient Buddhist pop-psychological model that suggests we're all composed in differing degree of three, as they say, demons. These are grasping, aversion and

as they say, demons. These are grasping, aversion and delusion. Some day, perhaps, we can explore grasping and delusion. But today I'm focused on one demon in particular. Aversion is, of course, the constellation of hate. Here I'd like to continue to distinguish it from anger, even though much literature, particularly spiritual literature, including Buddhist literature often misses that distinction. Anger burns clean, hatred persists.

Martin Luther King, Jr, observed "Hate is just as injurious to the person who hates. Like an unchecked cancer, hate corrodes the personality and eats away its vital unity. Hate destroys a man's sense of values and objectivity. It causes him to describe the beautiful as ugly and the ugly as beautiful, and to confuse the true with the false and the false with the true." To indulge hatred is to tie a corpse to your body. Today I want to suggest how we might avoid tying that corpse to our bodies. Or, at least, to notice it when it happens, to stop, to catch a breath, and then, if we're attentive and just a little lucky maybe untie that corpse from our bodies.

I have to confess thinking hateful thoughts about the president can be very satisfying. But, only for a moment. In fact it is delusive and leads only to piling hurt upon hurt. When I push, when I keep looking, I find at some moment I see through this illusion of separation. Through constant attention I find flashes of inspiration, flashes of intuition, flashes of really understanding how we are all connected. Perhaps you've experienced this, yourself?

Here's the difficult part. Because of the way we're hard wired, to separate stuff as a way of figuring things out, even as we have those intimations, those flashes of our interconnections, our interdependence as the truth of our hearts; all too soon, we forget. While a cognitive disorder, this sense of fundamental separation arises as a consequence of our natural need to divide the world, to make order, to accomplish things. So, no matter how

make order, to accomplish things. So, no matter how deeply we experience our oneness with all, in the very next moment we're going to naturally continue to divide the world. And because of that we're always vulnerable to the allure of hatred.

For me the process of fierce inquiry seems to be the solution; even though it seems we have to learn and relearn the lesson, over and over again – never turning away seems the heart of the matter. There is something magical about our human consciousness. If we look hard, we seem, often, able to see through a problem. For me this is spiritual practice disguised as a form of cognitive-behavior therapy. Relentless inquiry, complete honesty about ourselves, never turning away, reveals things about us to us, about our minds and hearts. And within that process we discover how we can change our minds and our hearts. It is the way through to possibility. This is so amazing. This is so wonderful.

Well, that's my thesis.

Now, what are your thoughts? Ever felt anger burn into hatred? What do you think about it?

Congregational Reflections

Another contemporary spiritual writer, Toni Packer suggests in her book *The Wonder of Presence and the Way of Meditative Inquiry* "The tremendous realization that there is no separation dawns at the moment that the whole emotional network of stories about myself is quietly in abeyance, as though a plug was pulled. Being here with a clear, undisturbed mind is seeing the whole world as myself. Not as *me* or *mine* but as nothing divided—one community of an infinite variety of ever changing living beings."

At that moment, where is there space for nature? At the same time, however, I suggest there is plenty of space for action. At that moment, at this moment, we find the gate of heaven thrown wide. Nothing less. All we need do is walk through.

Want to try? It's as easy as falling off a log. Just keep looking.

Amen.

[» Click to read](#)

[» HOME](#)