



Ruminations on Darkness and Light

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This is an invitation. An invitation to take the hand of imagination—both public and private—from the cerebral, where it loves to dance, and to lead it, spiraling, deep into the most tender and true place in your own heart. Readers of this promising series on “public imagination” are without exception masters of the mind. You know how to think, creatively and expansively, and most often, I trust that your thinking is fueled by a foundational passion for justice and dignity on behalf of every living being on the planet.

With this passion at the core of how the world is perceived, we are unlikely to find anyone in this community who is not alarmed by the turn of political events worldwide. Occasional high points, such as the recent election in Ecuador, are overshadowed by the looming Colossus, now steered by a small self-serving cabal which has been sufficiently empowered to do their worst by a populace seemingly gone mad. And of course, it makes sense to investigate the cause of the madness, to do what is possible to open the curtains and let more light into the asylum. Even to unlock the gates and offer the freedom of real facts and new ideas to those incarcerated within.

There are grave dangers threatening large numbers of those of us who live here, on this planet. Trump, his fawning domestic and foreign sycophants, and his fellow authoritarian rulers around the world are knee-deep in the carnage, and just getting started. Terrible suffering is already occurring as a result and more will no doubt follow. Some of us have to counter this race to destruction of all that upholds beauty and decency in human life. Some of us see no choice but to devote ourselves to finding new ways to cut through the deceit and manipulation that has been employed to en-trance and ultimately, enslave so many of our fellow humans.

This is essential work and it requires all the intellectual creativity and rigor that we have at our disposal. It is a time like no other. As many have pointed out, this is far from our first go-round with the collapse of goodness in society. But, it is the first time that the collapse is not to any degree contained geographically. If we are to confront the globally rising tide of fear, as well as the fear-mongering which has

cynically and deliberately engendered it, and the authoritarian, regressive and repressive reactions to it, we must tap directly into its opposite.

And its opposite—the antipode of fear—is love.

Which, though it can dwell in the mind, arises from the heart.

Too simple? Maybe, but fascination with complexity has historically been a means by which we distance ourselves from reality. From *feeling* reality, from knowing it through experience rather than observation and analysis. Both are legitimate paths to certain kinds of knowledge, but there are times and places where one or the other is more useful in terms of understanding and taking action that meets a designated need. For instance, an objective scientific study of pathogens will lead us toward knowing how to prevent the damage they might do, while a subjective experience of illumination—Maslow's peak experience, if you will—gives us entrance into realms that offer sustenance and confer meaning on the life that has been saved by, say, the antibiotic that halts the previously referenced pathogens.

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There is a call to respond to the cruelty both advocated and implemented by totalitarianism around the world from a place of deep love for the light that lives in each and every being on this planet, to respond in a way that fundamentally changes the dialog and upends the underlying assumptions. Fighting for peace is inherently an absurdity. And yet, the willingness of some human beings to disregard all bounds of shared humanity, to deprive others of every right including that of life itself, makes this a particularly difficult challenge.



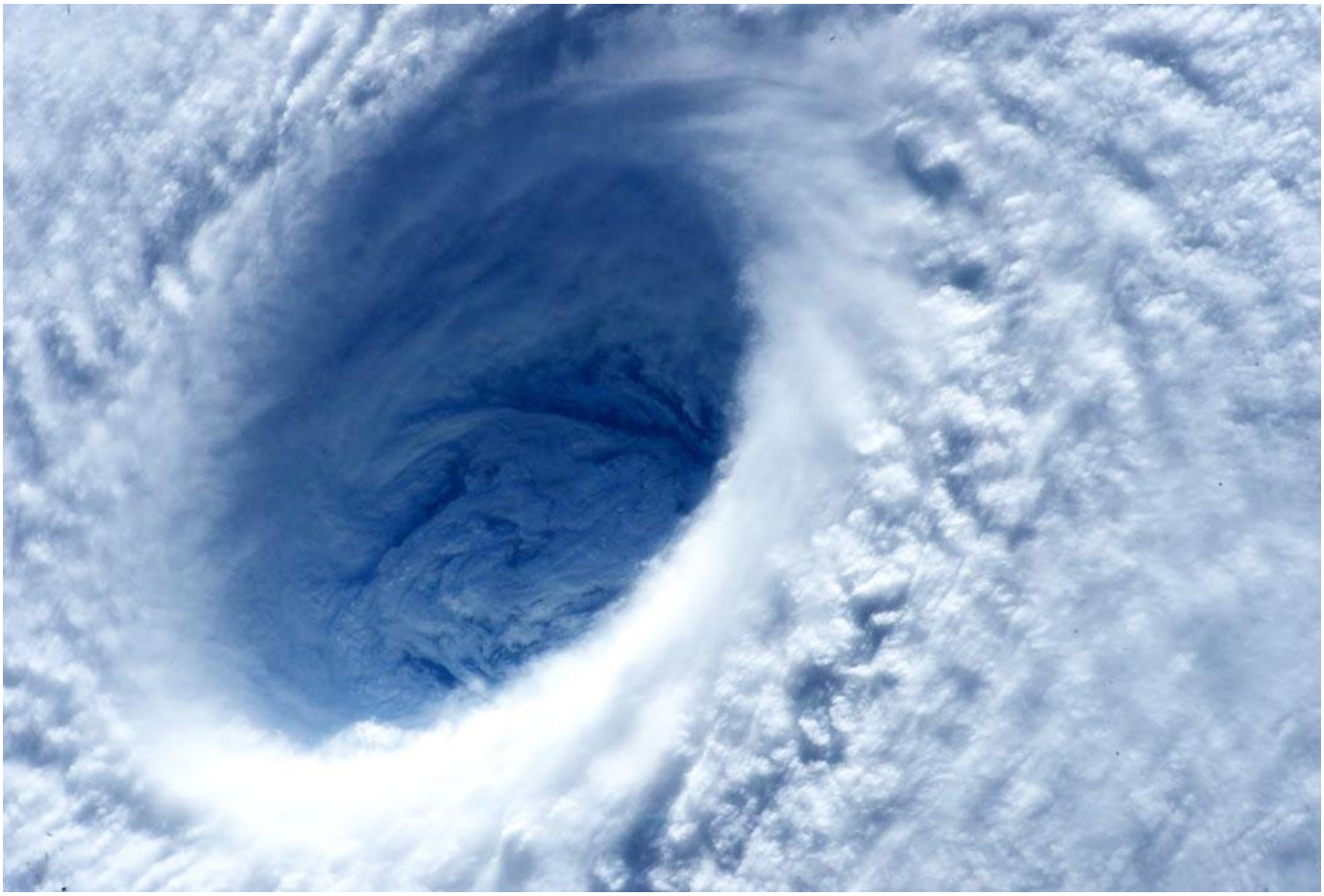
Street graffiti in Aleppo, Syria. Photo by Hala.

How does one prevail in a contest where the game is rigged? Where the very nature of the goal itself prevents the actions that seem most likely to achieve it? Many great minds have and will continue to contemplate these conundrums and sometimes, discover ways to slide in sideways, to see the puzzle from a different angle.

Herein lies the tremendous value of cultivating the sphere of public imagination in a time when the rights and lives of all living beings are endangered. The alchemical process of exchanging the inner expanses of personal imaginations in order to spark new thinking is essential if we are to halt, or even slow, the hurtling train of greed, domination, and concomitant widespread—and potentially nuclear—violence.

However, no matter how compelling this call may be, no matter how urgent it is to stand against these forces, there is another, even greater jeopardy which threatens every single one of us that we ignore at our peril. In fact, it is likely too late to change the course of environmental avalanche, at least in regard to outcome. The Earth's ability to sustain 7.5 billion homo sapiens (with all our attendant consumptions, constructions and waste products) was always questionable, but when so many of us insist upon living in a manner that is out of balance with the rest of nature, the question becomes one of 'when' and not 'if' a correction will occur.

Science is increasingly concluding that the ‘when’ is not so far off. How large a correction and exactly how distant? No one knows. There really is no precedent. But we all do know—whether we are consciously acknowledging it or not—that the life we live today is not sustainable for the long-term. The mind may rebel, but the heart feels this and it is my belief that it is this inherent knowing that fuels a great deal of the fear we see playing out in the political sphere.



Consider the future of the planet and the species: it is an excruciatingly painful exercise. If we allow ourselves to imagine into the future, there are scenarios that are so impossible, so unbearable to contemplate that the temptation arises powerfully to slam the door and return to crises that we may actually have the ability to ameliorate.

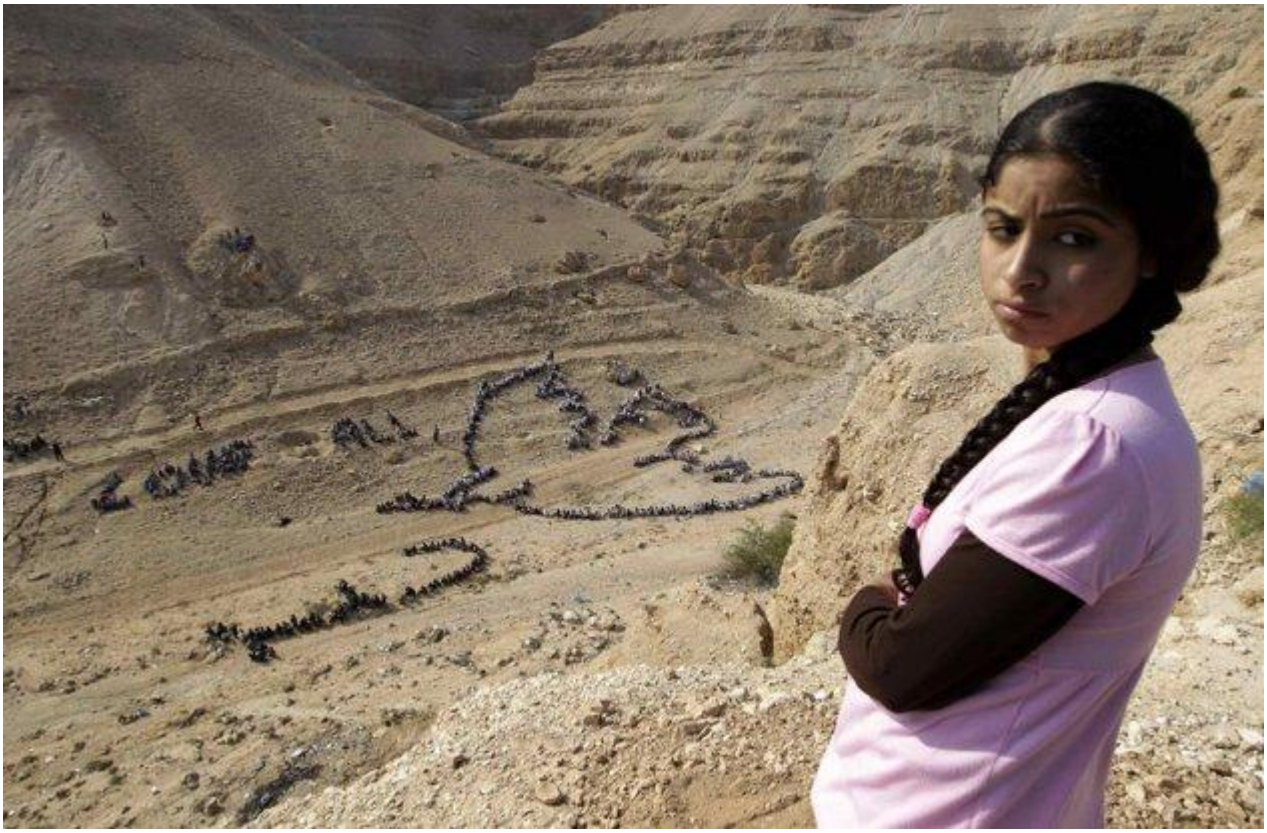
Is there any thing to *do?* Absolutely. Things in their thousands. However, it is quite possible that we can but alleviate some of the inevitable suffering. So, here is where the invitation to drop down into your heart becomes an appeal. As human beings, we are gifted with minds that are unequalled, as well as with hearts that truly know no limitation. If our time as a species is finite, which is beginning to seem credible,

then we must give our attention to how we want to live. This is always the case, as our sojourn is short no matter what.

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But facing the immanent end of life, or life as we have known it, there is a summons to take stock and make the most of each moment, each breath, each exchange, each dawn and each sunset. To truly *feel* the sorrow of our collective circumstances and to grieve it, to weep, and to rage.

And equally, to rejoice in the beauty and brilliance and unexpected innocence that continues to be so generously offered to us. Simple stuff sometimes: the quiet majesty of a newly unfurled iris, a blue heron standing attentively in the shallows, the unparalleled flavor of tiny spring asparagus, a fleeting instance of communion with another human being, the gentle call of doves nearby. There is no reward, no change in the course of events that is promised by allowing ourselves to be present in our hearts for this life, other than the gift we give ourselves of drinking deeply from the cup we have been given, and using our minds and our hearts *in concert* to partake of the fullness of what it means to be human.



1000 Palestinian children form Pablo Picasso’s Dove of Peace near Jericho in West Bank.

Surely Trump et alii need to be countered; the goodness of human nature longs to be asserted and made manifest. And while we must all find the means forward that reflect our individual inclinations, I want to conclude with a universal benediction that is also an entreaty: whatever we choose to do with the time that remains—no matter how long or how brief—let us embrace the entire range of human expression and experience. Let us reach into the passion and the courage and the particular wisdom that arise uniquely from the human heart-and-mind and allow it to live, fully, as us. Let us not miss out on the extraordinary reality of being all that we were born to be, regardless of the tenebrous times. We can’t know if by so doing we will alter anything other than ourselves, but as we live in and from our deepest glory, we cannot help but offer that magnificence as light against the gathering darkness.

Tags

creativity

activism



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