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by **D. Patrick Miller**

I experience a distinct uneasiness whenever I see Republican presidential nominee Donald Trump speaking. It's not because I disagree with his policy positions, insofar as he has any that are coherent or consistent. And it's not because he has a radically different vision of America's present condition, and where it needs to be going, than I do — although I definitely disagree with his apopleptic message of disgruntlement and fear.

No, what makes me uneasy is that Trump's childish bravado, relentless bragging, and wandering enmity feel a bit familiar. I recognize a man struggling wildly with his own unconscious misgiving that there's nobody at home inside — or at least, nobody he can live with. I understand his self-hatred, and the horror of facing his own deadly emptiness, because I have both feelings sometimes. I suspect that we all do.

Trump has been variously diagnosed as a narcissist, a sociopath, even a fascist. These are all aspects of the human ego that can gain dominance over anyone's consciousness, given the right formative conditions and social stimuli.

What's unusual about Trump is not these personal excesses; blowhards, bullies, and demagogues have always been with us. What's disturbingly different is that such a deeply unbalanced individual has tuned into the psyches of enough Americans to bring him close to gaining enormous power. History has shown that this can be a catastrophic attunement. A little less than a century ago, another self-hating individual found the frequency of enough depressed and fearful psyches in Germany's Weimar Republic to enlist them in creating the Third Reich. So it's



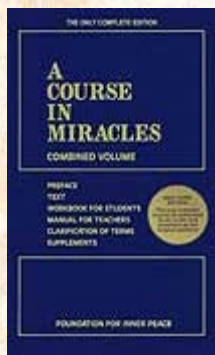
crucially important to recognize what's really driving Donald Trump and drawing his followers.

It's equally important to realize that, no matter how much one may dislike Trump or fear his potential power, neither he nor his fans constitute an "other" who must be destroyed, persecuted, or walled-off (as he **threatens to do** to his own perceived enemies). That can never work because **they** are part of **us**, and for better or worse, we share one mind. I don't mean this in a metaphysical way; I mean that any society or culture collectively represents the all the beliefs and attitudes of the individuals who comprise it. Just like any individual constantly experiences a huge range of thoughts, from bitter and demonic to loving and selfless, so does a society. Donald Trump currently embodies an especially unhealthy aspect of our society's thinking.

Each of us has a role to play in reinforcing the healthy energies of our individual and collective mind, and stopping the unhealthy energies from getting out of control. Some of this work can be done in therapy or spiritual discipline, but some of it is necessarily done in politics. We can deliberately attune ourselves to a different kind of consciousness than a demagogue like Trump unthinkingly promotes — as well as a different kind of consciousness than that which usually animates our political discourse, media punditry, and Facebook wars.

"Struck with horror"

A powerful clue as to what ails Donald Trump, and threatens to infect our culture at large, can be found in the contemporary spiritual teaching known as *A Course in Miracles* (ACIM):



You think you are the home of evil, darkness and sin. You think if anyone could see the truth about you he would be repelled, recoiling from you as if from a poisonous snake. You think if what is true about you were revealed to you, you would be struck with horror so intense that you would rush to death by your own hand, living on after seeing this being impossible.

These are beliefs so firmly fixed that it is difficult to help you see that they are based on nothing. That you have made mistakes is obvious. That you have sought salvation in strange ways; have been deceived, deceiving and afraid of foolish fantasies and savage dreams; and have bowed down to idols made of dust — all this is true by what you now believe. — *from ACIM Workbook Lesson 93, "Light and joy and peace abide in me."*

Needless to say, this revulsion against our own inner reality is not something that most of us are consciously aware of every day. But if you have ever touched the depths of suicidal despair, or experienced chronic depression in yourself or witnessed it in someone close, you know what this passage is talking about. ACIM's radical diagnosis of the human condition is that **a murderous self-loathing is the baseline of our individual consciousness**. It's not the aberration of a few strange people, or a sign of clinically defined mental illness. It's who we are whenever we are trapped entirely in the sense of separated self called "ego," and cannot see beyond the need to defend and amplify ourselves. Elsewhere the Course notes:

The death penalty is the ego's ultimate goal, for it fully believes that you are a criminal.... The death penalty never leaves the ego's mind, for that is what it always reserves for you in the end. Wanting to kill you as the final expression of its feeling for you, it lets you live but to await death. It will torment you while you live, but its hatred is not satisfied until you die. For your destruction is the one end toward which it works, and the only end with which it will be satisfied.

Lest one think this existential diagnosis is too harsh, it's worth contemplating some big questions: Where do all the wars, genocidal holocausts, and terrorist attacks of human history actually come from? What really is the root cause of suicide, homicide, rape, and domestic violence? Why are we so often dissatisfied with our bodies, sometimes intensely so, and why do we get in the habit of guilt and self-punishing thoughts about them? Why does Western religious culture have a powerful attraction to the notion of "original sin" at the same time it ascribes demonic evil to other cultures? And why have human cultures throughout history killed other cultures to claim their territory, only later to fear the advance of violent and rapacious immigrants?

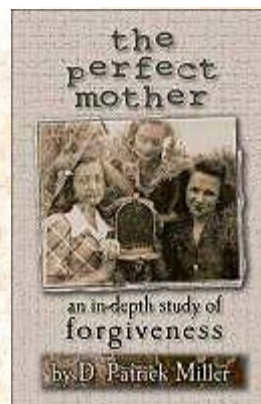
On a daily basis, we are tempted to forget that the world's superpowers remain armed with enough nuclear firepower to wipe each other out in a matter of minutes. Such an Armageddon could still be set off by an unlucky series of computer malfunctions — or by the momentary rage of an unhinged demagogue who can't get enough satisfaction through his enraged tweets.

In America, countless suburbanites not remotely close to urban violence feel the need to arm themselves with small firearms while powerful semi-automatic weapons, normally the rapid-fire dogs of war, are allowed to flow freely into the hands of urban street criminals, suspected terrorists, and the emotionally disturbed. The result is a domestic casualty rate that reached nearly 13,000 in 2015 from gun homicides, unintentional shootings, or murder/suicides. In fact, more Americans were accidentally killed by toddlers with guns than by terrorists last year. This is sheer, raging madness. Yet we accept it as a culture and irrationally fear demented terrorists more than the dangers we willingly bring into our own homes in the name of self-defense.

All this because, at a level so deep that it's usually blocked from daily awareness, ***we hate ourselves***. If we are brave, we can recognize this hatred whenever a terrorist attack sickens and dismays us. We are struck with horror not just because someone else has acted out their own cruelty and viciousness. We are struck with horror because we are seeing our own minds at work.

Meaning to hurt anyone

I grew up with a bipolar parent who provided me with a recurrent opportunity to view the destructive cycle of egocentric self-hatred, depression, and blaming up close. I've written the story of my mother and my relationship to her elsewhere, but one episode from her tumultuous life illustrates that dynamic more clearly than any other. When I was in my early twenties, one of my mother's several suicide attempts nearly succeeded. In fact, she had to be revived twice, and when she came out of a brief coma she was understandably groggy and unable to speak. But she



indicated that she wanted a pen and paper, and when she was given them, she wrote out in a wild scrawl:

I did mean to hurt anyone

Standing shakily in her hospital room at that moment, I remember that my first thought was how embarrassed my mom, the former English teacher for vets starting college after returning home from WWII, would be to see her unintended error in syntax. But what then wrenched my heart was the realization that she had inadvertently told the truth. In the depths of a murderous self-loathing, there does arise the desire to hurt *anyone*, beginning with oneself and then extending to anyone else who cares about you, and then to anyone within striking distance. So in her first desperate expression of consciousness after choosing self-destruction, I saw my mother trying to lie about her real intentions while accidentally letting out the truth.

I was unexpectedly reminded of this kind of insanity after one of the stranger moments of the nominating primaries season, when Donald Trump attempted to explain his growing popularity by boasting: "I could stand in the middle of 5th Avenue and shoot somebody and I wouldn't lose voters" (as reported by [CNN](#)). Pressed by reporters for an explanation, Trump refused to elaborate on this profoundly sick boast — which neatly maligned his own character as well as his followers — but his basic assertion proved true. He rode a steady stream of his own venom and vitriol, directed against women, immigrants, Muslims, journalists, his political opponents, and just about anyone else who came to mind, to a fairly easy victory as the Republican candidate for the Presidency. He *did* mean to hurt anyone, and it worked to get him what he wanted.

Facing the inner horrors



It didn't work so well for me. While I was never diagnosed with clinical depression, I fell prey in my early thirties to a serious illness that was eventually diagnosed as Chronic Fatigue Syndrome (known outside the US as [Myalgic Encephalopathy](#), or ironically, ME). This malady was only beginning to be identified at the time, and it remains poorly understood today, with no clear path to treatment yet developed in the ensuing decades. [I recovered within seven years](#), but only because I was led to face the depths of my own self-hatred. Then began the work of a genuine spiritual path — that is, the lifelong challenge of getting over ME.

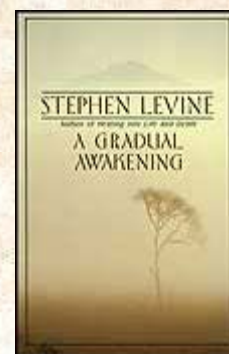
I would not wish the extremes of pain and bodily dysfunction that I endured — which included weekly migraines, a severe and perpetual stomachache, traveling joint pains, chronic sleep disturbance, recurring waves of mental foggy, and crushing fatigue for most of five years — on anyone. But in long retrospect, this dark sojourn in hell-on-

earth was the single most instructive classroom in the depths of the human psyche that I have ever experienced (or would ever hope to).

Angry at first that a senseless cruelty was somehow being visited upon me without explanation, I spent months seeking human and environmental targets to blame. This exercise of outraged fault-finding only seemed to make me more ill. As I grudgingly began to accept that my own attitudes and way of living might have had something to do with my physical collapse, I was ushered into a tempestuous spiritual awakening. And while I stumbled often and fought hard against changing my point of view, I gradually came to recognize that ***my illness was really a daily, symptom-by-symptom tour of my own raging self-hatred.***

Most humiliating of all was the slowly dawning realization that, up until the day I woke up with a bad stomachache and my world began crashing around me, a secret self-hatred had been my most faithful companion. Learning to disown that companion and find another kind of inner guidance was at the core of my nascent spiritual discipline, centered on study of the Course but encompassing a number of perspectives.

The late great teacher of insight meditation, [Stephen Levine](#), used to quote his teacher in suggesting that *"Real meditation is just one insult after another."* What this means is that any spiritual discipline worth its salt will lead us into the depths of self-confrontation. This journey into our dark, dank personal underworld leads us to face the unwelcome opportunity to take full responsibility for whatever madness we find there.



This process should not be mistaken for the conventional religious ritual of confessing one's "sins" and thereafter depending on the benevolent agency of God or Jesus Christ to absolve those sins and keep one safe from a hell-bound afterlife. In fact, that process tends to let people off too easily. It takes them partway into the work of self-confrontation, then gives them a way to duck the rest of the profoundly difficult inner labor — not to mention delaying the rewards of that labor until after death.

As the old saying goes, conventional religion is for those who fear going to hell; spiritual practice is for those who have been there. Veteran tourists of hell realize that the way out involves much harder work than letting Jesus Christ take over once you've faced your own faults, errors, and general psychosis and muttered in shock: *"Oh my God."*

That's not to say that there is no role for surrender to a "higher power" in genuine spiritual work, or that miracles cannot occur thereafter. As the Course puts it, "Miracles are everyone's right, but purification is necessary first." In this context, *purification* means the unrelenting process of recognizing every last shred of one's deeply defended and often subconsciously hidden horrors — and *then* asking for a surpassing guidance in learning different ways of thinking, feeling, and behaving.

The rewards of such authentic spiritual work are profound. At best, one can actually begin to experience the qualities of inner experience and relationship to others that characterize "heaven on earth," rather than delaying such sublimities for an afterlife reward. At the very least, the spiritual aspirant begins to suffer much less, and blame others less, in the course of everyday life. Not insignificantly, one becomes forever

immune to the perverse charms of a demagogue like Donald Trump. This is no small reward, for his bombast, blathering, and utter bullshit can obviously have a negatively hypnotizing effect on anyone who has not yet fully grappled with all the demons of deep self-despising.

To put it bluntly, ***living in thrall to secret self-hatred dulls our intelligence.*** To the degree that you haven't seen through your own internal bleeding, emotional abscesses, and insane self-destructiveness, you won't be able to see through these pains in others. And you will be lured toward joining other hurting souls in their campaigns of persecution, simply in order to relieve all the negative pressures inside yourself.

For it can feel like such a relief to conclude that someone else, *anyone else*, is to blame for your incomprehensible suffering, and for everything that's gone wrong with the world. In politics, any human being who's prominent, powerful, and readily identifiable as less-than-perfect becomes a favored target for the enmity of the self-hating. (If she looks like a mom — the kind of person directly responsible for your miserable existence — even better!) At that point, all normal political discourse and debate becomes irrelevant because the survival of the self-attacking, self-defensive ego is paramount... but not so much the well-being of society at large.



Grandeur vs. grandiosity

In a remarkable section entitled "Grandeur vs. Grandiosity," the Course compares what it calls "the grandeur of God" with the grandiosity of the untrammelled ego. One paragraph in particular reads like a concise summary of the Trumpian campaign strategy:

Grandiosity is always a cover for despair. It is without hope because it is not real. It is an attempt to counteract your littleness, based on the belief that the littleness is real. Without this belief grandiosity is meaningless, and you could not possibly want it. The essence of grandiosity is competitiveness, because it always involves attack. It is a delusional attempt to outdo, but not to undo. We said before that the ego vacillates between suspiciousness and viciousness. It remains suspicious as long as you despair of yourself. It shifts to viciousness when you decide not to tolerate self-abasement and seek relief. Then it offers you the illusion of attack as a "solution."

Even before he chose to run for President, Donald Trump the real estate mogul pursued a career characterized by grandiosity, with his name in huge letters on skyscraping properties that he built or owned or bankrupted— a self-proclamation that was not always well-received. And his dedication to competitiveness has never abated. It has been reliably reported that the self-proclaimed genius of "the art of the deal" has been involved in over 4000 lawsuits, which cannot remotely be regarded as a business laurel regardless of his win/loss record.

Years ago I had the life-changing opportunity to interview and study with the African shaman Malidoma Patrice Somé, a native of Burkina Faso who earned doctorates in political



science and literature before being appointed by his Dagara tribe elders to teach "[the ways of the village](#)" to the West. Malidoma told me a story about taking one of his illiterate elders to Ouagadougou, the capital city of Burkina Faso, to show him the advances that Western civilization had wrought in their country. When Malidoma proudly showed the old wise man the tallest building in the city, he just shook his head and frowned before muttering, "Whoever did that has serious problems."

Surprised, Malidoma asked his elder what he meant. His reply: "*You should never show your power that way.*" That story echoed intensely for me on September 11, 2001, when the twin towers came down in New York City, massive symbols of Western power brought down by terrorists hijacking Western technology. And the story resounds ominously today, when a candidate for the world's most powerful leadership position trumpets his grandiosity at every available opportunity, constantly bragging on the size of everything from his personal fortune to the height of his buildings to the dimensions of his genitalia.

The secret of Trump's perverse appeal is that his grandiosity appeals to those who, like himself, are inwardly persecuted by their own unrecognized self-hatred. They seek to relieve the pressure-cooker enmity inside themselves by projecting it onto others. One of many paradoxes of such projection is that it involves a gross inflation of one's sense of power in order to combat the intense powerlessness felt within.



As the *Houston Chronicle* — one of the largest newspapers in Texas, and historically a reliable supporter of the Republican agenda — said in its recent endorsement of Hillary Clinton: "Any one of Trump's less-than-sterling qualities — his erratic temperament, his dodgy business practices, his racism, his Putin-like strongman inclinations and faux-populist demagoguery, his contempt for the rule of law, his ignorance — is enough to be disqualifying....His convention-speech comment, 'I alone can fix it,' should make every American shudder. He is, we believe, a danger to the Republic."

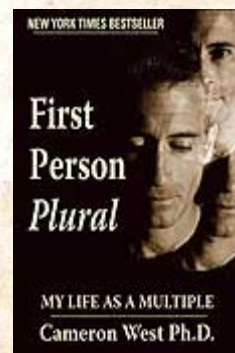
While editorial boards with a commitment to dispassionately weighing facts can be expected to put aside raw emotion, I don't think this is the case with the majority of Trump's followers. Because his political positions shift and he has historically exhibited a mix of liberal and conservative convictions, he is not appealing primarily to a "right-wing" political persuasion. He is not appealing to anyone on the basis of his public service record because he has none. He even dodged the draft in his youth, getting multiple deferments from military service during the Vietnam War era. (In 1997, he appeared on the Howard Stern show to memorably assert that "sleeping around" and avoiding a sexually transmitted disease was his "personal Vietnam." His more recent slights to military veterans and heroes such as John McCain are well-known.) His reputation as a successful businessman is now shot full of holes by his bankruptcy and litigation record; [the growing hostility of the banking industry](#) toward his MO; the [confession of the ghostwriter](#) who helped create the myth of his genius in *The Art of the Deal*; and finally, the absolute refusal to reveal his tax records —

normally a baseline verifier of success, legitimacy, and ethical transparency for any business tycoon, not to mention a presidential candidate.

Yet when Trump supporters are faced with all his thunderous negatives, their response often reveals that none of these issues matter to them — or at least, not enough to dissuade them from continuing support. *They just like him no matter what.* That means they are seeing themselves in him, and feeling a vicarious sense of relief when he vents his self-hatred with relentless attacks in all directions, on a huge public stage. At an unconscious level, it feels like Trump is venting for them.

Loving our subpersonalities

In therapeutic and spiritual circles, one often hears talk about the need for greater “self-love.” The prescriptions for generating it range from standing before a mirror and proclaiming affection for the person seen there, to repeating self-supportive affirmations, to indulging oneself with special treats. My all-time favorite demonstration of loving all aspects of oneself was described by my friend Cameron West in his best-selling memoir *First Person Plural*, which recounts his lifelong struggle with Dissociative Identity Disorder. Near the end of that gripping story, Cam recounts going out to a yogurt shop and ordering a parfait with a dozen plastic spoons. On each spoon he wrote the name of one of his alter personalities, and “one at a time we took turns sharing the parfait.”



However, managing that small treat with his various selves came only after Cam had struggled mightily to recognize the multiple dramas going on inside himself, and gained some control over the most destructive personalities who comprised the whole of him. Most of us don’t experience our inner conflicts to the extreme of having more than one distinct personality. But we all have passing moods and fragmentary mindsets that can take temporary control of our self-awareness, and lead us to say or do things we regret when we later regain our “right mind.”

If we Americans regard ourselves as one “body politic,” it’s useful to recognize Donald Trump as an anti-social, self-hating subpersonality — or at least a very bad mood, embodied — who represents a special danger to us all. If he takes over our collective sensibility, in the very literal sense of becoming the President, then he could well lead us into an equally literal Armageddon. Even for those who disdain his opponent Hillary Clinton because she may seem to symbolize “politics as usual,” the approaching election nonetheless represents a choice between politics-as-usual and a fateful lunacy.

But if we attempt to quell this dangerous presence within the body politic simply by hating it, we have adopted the troubled candidate’s own strategy. That means we have to find a way to love such hostility into submission. While that may seem like an impossible or absurd objective, there are already models for such political self-mastery. After up-and-coming Democratic Senator Cory Booker (NJ) made a rousing speech at his party’s national convention, Trump characteristically attacked him via Twitter, saying “*If Cory Booker is the future of the Democratic Party, they have no future! I know more about Cory than he knows about himself.*”

Interviewed afterward on CNN, Booker’s response included



these remarks: "He wants us to be speculating. It sounds so sinister.... I don't care, I love you Donald. I pray for you. I hope that you find some kindness in your heart, that you're not going to be somebody that spews out insults to your political opposition, that you're going to find some way to love.... I'm just gonna keep loving on him. I'm gonna tell the truth about him but I'm going to keep loving on him. That kind of vitriol, that kind of meanness has no place in

the presidency....

"Bring it on Donald. Show your truth. I'm gonna show mine. Love you, brother."

Why sanity requires vigilance

On a daily basis, we are all a mixture of love and fear, healing insight and blinding insanity, the sublime and the ridiculous. The first key to an authentic spiritual discipline is to recognize the constant variability of our thoughts and feelings. The second key is to develop the inner agility to choose the best among them. When we lapse into feeling sad or self-destructive, however, it can be difficult to remember that we even have a choice. The negative hypnosis of our own egos can be exceptionally powerful. Whenever we are captivated by it, the emotional hell of self-hatred is not far off.

In a chapter entitled "The Illusions of the Ego," *A Course in Miracles* makes the case for a positive vigilance in managing our own inner health:

When you are sad, *know this need not be*. Depression comes from a sense of being deprived of something you want and do not have. Remember that you are deprived of nothing except by your own decisions, and then decide otherwise.

When you are anxious, realize that anxiety comes from the capriciousness of the ego, and *know this need not be*. You can be as vigilant against the ego's dictates as for them....

Watch your mind for the temptations of the ego, and do not be deceived by it. It offers you nothing. When you have given up this voluntary dispiriting, you will see how your mind can focus and rise above fatigue and heal. Yet you are not sufficiently vigilant against the demands of the ego to disengage yourself. *This need not be*.

As I write this, Americans are facing the last few months of a chaotic and largely dispiriting national election campaign. We have seen major aspects of our collective ego-mind surface in broadcast and online media: compassion and hatred, idealism and cynicism, hope and depression, purity and corruption, and many more opposing qualities. We are all "bipolar" — but that means we always have a choice of what to think, feel, and believe.

As powerful as the currents of fear and hatred may be in our minds, we can always choose to swim against them. We can rise above our own fatigue and find ways to heal. Sometimes healing may be assisted with a little yogurt parfait, but more often than not

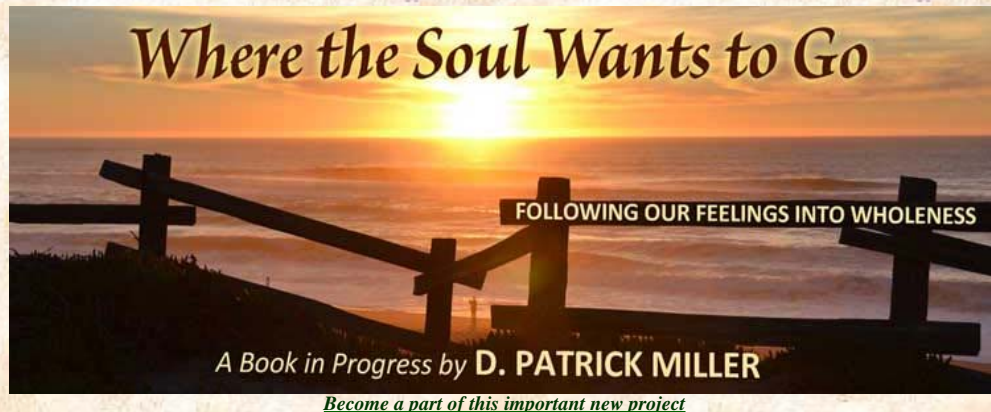
it requires maintaining vigilance against the darker powers of our minds. That means choosing love over fear at every opportunity, within our own minds *and* within our political discourse.

We don't have to hate Donald Trump to stop his rise to power.

There is plenty of evidence in his behavior to suggest that he's hating himself enough already. For my part, when I find myself tempted to respond to anyone's self-hatred with more of my own, I try to return to my spiritual discipline. That means remembering that whatever inner madness I may entertain from time to time, it is also true that ***light and joy and peace abide in me.***

See also on this site:

[Donald Trump in the Really Big Bardo](#)



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