The secret of the power of attention

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Dearest Friends, Laurence Freeman, Meditatio Newsletter December 2015

There is no violence in God. Justice and mercy, which seem incompatible when we are in conflict with others, embrace in God as love. Love not violence is the motive power of our progress and evolution. So, when human beings descend into violence it is because we easily forget, deny or distrust who we truly are and in what our common humanity consists. Animals are not violent even when they eat each other and compete for power. They are being themselves. Violence is a human rejection of our true nature, a choice to regress.

We cannot completely negate the inborn intelligence, the self-awareness and the spiritual sense that is born from the human experience of transcendence. It is a uniquely human capacity, however, to try to deny who we are. To add insult to self-injury we bring our higher gifts of creativity to develop what is most inhuman, in ever more extreme forms of self-destruction. Driving in reverse gear we make monstrously absurd, life-denying things like nuclear arsenals and the armaments industry. We make arguments for the philosophies of genocide, homophobia, religious persecution and economic exploitation. War and its modern hybrid, global terrorism, are the illogical consequences of such absurdities, such negations of the truly human. To justify these atrocities we create a monstrous god. This is the god of the Islamicists but also of fundamentalists in all creeds, even the atheistic gods of religion-hating ideologies. It is a human creation, a figment of an inflamed imagination. The essential absurdity of violence is exposed when we worship a god that we have imagined instead of the unimaginable one who calls us into being.

(…) Contemplatives hold a secret with immense hope for our violent, anxious and unsettled age of transition. It is the secret of the power of attention. In times of turbulence when dark forces reign and infiltrate even our best hope of defeating them – when violence appears the only feasible response to violence – all we can do is keep paying attention to what is good. The good in ourselves, in the laws of nature and in our enemies. This kind of love becomes almost a divine influence – not ‘almost’ but ‘actually’ – when the human rises above itself and becomes fully human. Everything human starts in childhood. Including the art of attention which we should be teaching children – the real Christmas gift that lasts.

A Poison Tree — William Blake (1757–1827)

I was angry with my friend:I told my wrath, my wrath did end.I was angry with my foe:I told it not, my wrath did grow.

And I watered it in fearsNight and morning with my tears,And I sunned it with smilesAnd with soft deceitful wiles.

And it grew both day and night,Till it bore an apple bright,And my foe beheld it shine,And he knew that it was mine,—

And into my garden stoleWhen the night had veiled the pole;In the morning, glad, I seeMy foe outstretched beneath the tree.