

Column

SOLITARY SPIRITUALITY: One Little Girl's Visions

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Theme: Solitary Spirituality

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Sometime in 1949. I am six years old. It is 8:00 PM Bedtime. I crawl into my top bunk. Two double bunks in a tiny bedroom, not much space for the four of us; yet between me and my little sisters yawns an enormous chasm.

In minutes the room is silent. In a few more minutes, I hear their soft snuffling snores. I close my eyes, dreading the visions of nuclear fire, of hellfire, which flash in automatically.

As I keep busy during the day to obliterate the visions, I keep busy at night, too, seeking to pacify them, with secret ceremony. This nightly ritual, I hope and pray, will guarantee me a long life, or at least allow me to wake up in the morning. But I cannot know. I am Chicken Little, and, as much as I expect the sun to rise again each morning, so too, do I *know* the world is just about to blink out. My fervent hope is to stave off the conflagration for a little while longer. I, a little girl, must control the whole world in order to survive.

To begin the ritual, I lie on my back. Mumbling silently, I say the first words: *Dear Baby Jesus, please help me be a good girl. Oh dear Baby Jesus, please help me to obey my parents. Oh please help me not to fight with my sisters . . .* On and on, I beg baby Jesus to help me bottle up my instincts so that I won't go to hell. So that the Bomb won't blow up the world.

The first few supplications are followed by five Hail Marys, mumbled fast, with the ease of long practice. I finger my rosary, keeping track.

Next I turn on my right side, to begin a new series. *Dear Baby Jesus, please help me not to be jealous. Dear Baby Jesus, please please help me not to lose my temper* — I drone on and on, my fevered whispers mingling with my sisters' dreamless sleep. Five Hail Marys.

Another quarter turn, onto my stomach. *Oh please dear Baby Jesus., help me to not be so selfish . . .* More prayers. Whatever I did that was "bad" that day must be atoned for and forgiven, even before I go to confession on Saturday. (Otherwise, if the world blows up before then, I will go to hell!) Five Hail Marys.

And now the final quarter turn, onto my left side, preparation for the most important prayer, the one all the others have been leading up to, the one that really matters, the one that will save us all. *OH PLEASE , BABY JESUS, HELP EVERYBODY TO LOVE EACH OTHER. OH PLEASE PLEASE , BABY JESUS, HELP THE WORLD BE AT PEACE.* Five Hail Marys.

Sometimes the ritual lulls me to sleep. More often, the flames dance in again, mocking . . .

I finally told my mother about my secret ceremony, and she asked me to write it down. I wonder what went through her mind. Did she think I was crazy? Obsessed? Sainly? Whatever the case, she saved it for me. I still have that painstakingly penciled print gored into yellowed lined tablet paper. As I read it my heart fills with compassion for that infant born during World War II within weeks of the first atomic fission experiment under the grandstand in Chicago. For that little girl whose muffled need to express her fiery nature was so intense and so repressed that her terror knew no bounds; she saw the whole world in flames.

Fifty years later, nothing much has changed. We are still full of fear, still repressing the life within us, still projecting what is inside onto the outside, needing to control the whole world — and still puzzled by the violence.

The birthright of each living thing is a miraculous fountain of energy. Like water flowing downhill, when energy is damned, it will eventually break the dam and flood. The creative force, when denied, turns destructive. At every level, whenever energy is repressed, violence is done when that energy explodes.

The spectre of nuclear destruction is the twisted, macabre pathological externalization of humanity's buried creativity.

At this point in history, we must remember how connected we are. How our personal choices have collective consequences. When we muzzle our unique inner natures, all of Nature suffers. For each of us, there is a hole in the universe that we were meant to fill.

The world is to go up in flames. Whether this is to be the flame of enlightenment or of nuclear explosion is not yet known. All we can do is wake up, wake up to our own inner natures, to who we really are. One by one, individuals thinking and acting according to our own inner lights will ignite a collective creative process such as we have never known. The end of this millennium is the end of history.

When we follow our natures, Nature takes care of us. Far from being "selfish," we are then centered, moving from the inside out, no longer subject to the vicissitudes of others' approval and disapproval.

The complete acceptance and expression of the Self removes the projections from — the judgments upon — others. To be centered within the self is to allow others space to be, to grow, to accept and express themselves.

Love of Self opens space, fills the void where fear resides. Love of Self quickens hearts, transforms conflict into cooperation, greed into gratitude, war into peace. For each of us, Love of Self is the seed from which will flower our common security.

Update 2010: "The end of this millennium is the end of history." A bit dramatic; what was I expecting? And yet I recognize the feeling that impelled me to say it, for the apocalyptic flame still burns in me. Though I no longer project my own inner turmoil out into the world, I also realize that I was largely right, as a child, about what we had loosed into the world with atomic power.

Actually, one might say that the 9/11 event, during the first year of the second millennium, C.E. *was* the end of history, the grand destructive finale of *his story* — how the masculine, unchecked and unbalanced by the feminine, turns destructive. Ten years later, we old ones are

witnessing the corporatist American empire descend, shock by stunning shock, into slow-motion collapse.