**AND YE SHALL INHERIT THE WHIRLWIND**

***Or Learn to Live in Gratitude and Grace***

It is the best of times. It is the worst of times. Never before has humanity been endowed with such fantastic opportunities. Never before has humanity’s survival been so precarious, the threat of self-extinction looming on the near horizon.

The first step in solving a problem is recognizing that there is one; and though prophets and sages, assassinated statesmen and pacifist activists have long issued warnings about the urgent need for sane and pragmatic reform, their voices have been muted by a perpetual blizzard of epistemological confetti and jingoistic sloganeering aimed at the citizen populace by sophistic politicians and mainstream media technocrats serving the imperial needs of the richest of the rich.

Evoking Plato’s allegory of the cave, Howard Zinn observed: “The truth is so often the opposite of what we are told that we can no longer turn our heads around far enough to see it.” Noam Chomsky adds the necessary twist: “The problem is not that people don’t know; it’s that they *don’t know* they don’t know.”

Hence the enduring potency of Marx’s maxim: “The demand to abandon illusions about our condition is a demand to abandon the conditions which require illusion.”

America repeats the unlearned lessons of history.  Founded on noble ideals undermined by genocide and slavery, America wraps itself in a cloak of virtue, and forgetting the cautionary wisdom of John Quincy Adams, goes abroad in search of monsters to destroy, not knowing she is destroying herself.

Men at the helm of the ship of state, swollen with greed and skilled at sophistry, steer civilization toward the abyss.

Only the blind can fail to see The Statue of Liberty weeping for another lost chance for human history to be something other than ignorance, violence, and ignoble self-betrayal.

With all too few individual exceptions, the difference between the Democratic Party and the Republican Party is the difference between neurotic and psychotic. For example, Democrats at least occasionally raise the issue of self-inflicted ecological doom, while Republicans continue to label this prophetic warning “a liberal hoax.”

Howard Zinn, noting that the problem is not civil disobedience, but, rather, all too pervasive obedience, declared: “Our problem is that people are obedient all over the world, in the face of poverty, starvation, stupidity, war and cruelty.  Our problem is that people are obedient while the jails are full of petty thieves, and all the while the grand thieves are running the country.”

Albert Einstein said: “We cannot solve our problems with the same thinking we used when we created them.”  He said further: “Money only appeals to selfishness and always irresistibly tempts its owner to abuse it.  Can anyone imagine Moses, Jesus, or Gandhi with the moneybags of Carnegie?”

James Thurber once offered the parable of a man standing on his cabin porch watching a forest being cut down to provide timber for the building of an asylum in which to house people driven insane by the cutting down of forests.

The vast majority of American citizens have been conditioned to think that democracy and capitalism are synonymous, and that socialism equals fascism.  To which we can apply Mark Twain’s observation: “Loyalty to petrified opinion never yet broke a chain or freed a human soul.”

John Lennon said: “I think our society is run by insane people for insane objectives.  I think we’re being run by maniacs for maniacal ends.  I think they’re all insane.  But I am liable to be put away as insane for expressing that.  That’s what is insane about it.”

Noam Chomsky notes: “I don’t know what word in the English language – I can’t find one – applies to people who are willing to sacrifice the literal existence of organized human life so they can put a few more dollars into highly stuffed pockets.  The word ‘evil’ doesn’t even begin to approach it.”

Perhaps, with a bow to Norman Mailer and C. G. Jung, two words are needed: *elephantiastical psychopathology*.

Plato says in *The Phaedo* that “all wars are fought for the acquisition of wealth.”

Today, the American landscape is littered with statues of generals on stallions, while memorials to prophetic peacemakers are barely to be found.

War memorials abound, but where are the institutes for the study and practice of peace that could hold the promise of a better future?

Imperialism is the most potent and nefarious force in human history, and it haunts us today.  America has nearly a thousand military bases scattered across the globe, mostly in countries that don’t want them there.

New York calls itself “The Empire State;” and the Empire State Building on Fifth Avenue in New York City remains a popular tourist attraction, its very name unrecognized as a paean to the unrelenting violence, death and destruction of mega-wealth’s imperial ambitions.

Decade after decade, American students say history is the most boring subject in school.  Perhaps this would change if every history textbook began with Mark Twain’s observation that “America’s flag should be a skull-and-crossbones,” and if parents and students demanded to know why he said that, and teachers were sufficiently well-informed to provide an honest answer.

The only sane and civil alternative to global capitalism gone amok is democratic ecosocialism, wherein citizens are keenly attuned to the lessons of history, respect and revere the biosphere, have ample time to continue their self-education, and are well-schooled in the critical thinking skills necessary to detect and refute sophistic speechifying.

A just society is committed to the well-being of all, and is therefore committed to egalitarian economics, universal healthcare, voluntary simplicity, free lifelong educational opportunity, preservation of natural resources, and a modest and well-tamed military overseen by “guardians” committed to peace.

We are free to become free.  This is the lesson taught by Socrates.  It is also the essence of Buddhism.  The word “Buddha” means “awake.”  Awakening, as Plato would say, is recollecting the sanity we were born with.  Nietzsche quotes Pindar: “Become who you are.”

We are inextricable strands in the holistic web of being and becoming.  Said the poet Byron: “Are not the mountains, waves, and skies, a part of me and of my soul, as I of them?”  John Lennon said: “I am the walrus.”

Whitehead said: “In order to acquire learning, we must first shake ourselves free of it.”  To shake ourselves free from chains of illusion, William Blake urges a cleansing of “the doors of perception.”  This has long been the virtue of Zen; and it is a sign of hope for human survival that the “Mindfulness” movement is today finding widespread resonance in what Marshall McLuhan called “the global village.”

To give birth to a government by and for the people, we need a concerted effort, both individual and collective, to shatter the illusion that democracy and capitalism are synonymous.  The two terms desperately need to be separated: analyzed and evaluated on their own merits, and put together again only in a modest, enlightened, socially pragmatic fashion, in conjunction with – and this too is a crucial point – a radical dismemberment of the specious and misleading caricature of Marxist politics that has so long reigned supreme in the American psyche, placed there in service to the captains of capital.

Greta Thunberg is a Swedish teenager.  Imbued with ecological despair and courage of conscience, she is leading a global youth revolt against the status quo.  As the climate crisis intensifies, the glaciers melt, polar bears die, and the earth burns, she calls on politicians “to act as if your house is on fire.”  She was recently honored by Tenzin Gyatso, the fourteenth Dalai Lama, as a major world peacemaker and a voice for sanity and virtue.

John F. Kennedy, Martin Luther King, Robert F. Kennedy, John Lennon – the brightest lights of a generation shot out to assure the triumph of the corporate counter-revolution against The Spirit of The Sixties.  Giving peace a chance would not be an option.

Yet, despite the victory of the mega-wealthy and the war-machines during the tragic course of the last half-century, there is a global undercurrent of awakening that daily increases in momentum.

More and more people are realizing that it is better to swim against the current than to be swept over the cliff.

If philosophy is the journey from the love of wisdom to the wisdom of love, so too is our collective journey to peace, justice, and survival.

***Stefan Schindler***