

Inauguration II, What Was That?
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Good evening, everyone.

Last week we were here to celebrate the inauguration. It seems there might be a few more things to say about this threshold moment. There are a lot of people who know a lot more about things like economics, international relations, military strategies, and politics that have a lot to say about it; I would like to look at it from our own particular small window that has to do with consciousness — our field of expertise — the shared territory of the human heart-mind.

A few things that have caught my attention that seem important in our practice lives together, in our community lives and in our individual lives. And I'd love to hear from you about the things that have caught your attention or that you're wondering about.

First is this juxtaposition of simultaneous euphoria and sobriety that I've never before seen in my lifetime. Many people are feeling a huge sense of joy and happiness and possibility about what has happened and at the same time, people feel that there are big things that we still have to tackle. These two things seem to coexist comfortably.

That says something about the way we're growing as a culture. It's possible for us to hold as big a fundamental paradox as that, two seemingly contradictory things at the same time. The euphoria isn't covering over the sobriety. It isn't making us feel that it's all fine now, everything's good, and the sobriety isn't making us hedge out bets on euphoria; we're still feeling that quite fully. Somehow the day of the inauguration when so many people came out to stand in the freezing cold of the public space of the mall in Washington and in Times Square and all over the country — when people came out to public spaces and stood together, that seemed significant to me. It's as though we were saying *We're coming back; we're coming out of our private lives into the shared communal space of the town square.*

The fact that many of us had withdrawn also was made vivid in that moment. I've been thinking about that. Where did we go? Where have we been? What happened in the last eight years? (I want to make it clear that I'm using the last eight years as an easy time to talk about, but you can go back as far as you want. You can include Clinton's rah-rah 90's, you can go back to the founding of America, or to the invention of agriculture nine thousand years ago, it doesn't matter.)

With the exception of the time right before the Gulf War when there were huge protests around the country, we didn't come to the public square. It seems as though many of us made a decision to step back, withdraw into our private lives, and put our attention and love there.

That's the kind of question I'd like to see if we could investigate without immediately jumping into a story about it. I'd like to pose some other questions that are similar. Can we look at them and wonder about them but not jump immediately into some kind of conclusion or story about what happened?

There are the people who believed in what they thought the last eight years was going to represent. What is it like for them? I think about people like the Tillmans, Scots-Irish families in Appalachia, who for generations had been sending their sons, and more recently their daughters, too, into the military because they believed in defending this country. Some part of that was driven by a sense of duty and patriotism. They came to find that they had been badly used and badly lied to by the government. What must that be like for them?

What must it be like for a genuinely devout Evangelical Christian in Louisiana or along the Mississippi Gulf Coast who saw the hurricane and years later sees that the neighborhoods were left the same as in the days when the waters receded, still hundreds of people unaccounted for, families split apart and neighbors dispersed and towns gone?

What about those people who voted for George Bush because they genuinely thought that he was like them, that he held the same values, that he represented a view of the world that was deeply important to them? They have come to feel that the values that they hold dear, like taking care of you neighbor, and loving each other, weren't

upheld. In some way they too were badly used. What must it be like for them? I want to include all places in the mandala to look at this.

We talked last week about how quickly things seem to have changed — that there seemed to have been a quantum shift from one state to another. There was November 3rd and then there was November 4th, and those were two completely different things. If you know something about quantum theory there's the sense that a system will adapt and adapt and adapt to keep itself going for a long time until it gets completely distorted and bent out of shape — until it's held together by a band-aid and chewing gum. It will do that for as long as it can and then there will be a sudden collapse.

There's something that feels resonant about that but at the same time (and I reach again for my Celtic roots) I have the sense of there having been a glamour in effect. The origin of the word glamour is to put a spell on someone so that they see you as you wish them to see you, and that they do your will, your bidding, without complaint. There is some quality of glamour about these last eight years. It's a way I'm playing with trying to understand what happened at the level of consciousness.

How was it that people could be so badly fooled? I'm not making a political statement about that. I'm really trying to stay with the results — what we can see that happened as a result of this time. We don't know the end of the story. This could be the wake up call we needed. I acknowledge all of that and I keep thinking these days of something Daniel Patrick Moynihan once said : "People are absolutely entitled to their own opinions, but they're not entitled to their own facts." That seems relevant to this moment. The facts are that we're really in trouble. The facts are that a lot of people have been hurt and killed.

So, if we look at the facts, how is it that we voted for it once and we voted for it twice? (Whether we voted in the majority is another question). There was a kind of glamour; there was a being fooled, and then there wasn't. It lifted, it was gone. It's so gone that Republicans fighting what's happening in Washington are talking about tax cuts and people just laugh. There's no residue of any kind of power. How does that happen so instantly?

I think the glamour wasn't just on the people who bought into the last eight years; I think it was on those who didn't buy into it as well. Why did we turn so quickly? Was

that maybe not another face of the glamour? I don't know, but I wonder about it. Why is it that instantly millions of people stepped out into the public square with this opportunity? How did it change so quickly?

That's a constellation of questions I'm wondering about.

There's a kind of beautiful starkness to what's happened. If the World Dharma Corporation had called you and said, "We want you to make a comic book that explains greed, hatred and ignorance," you couldn't have done much better than \$1,400 trash cans and \$50 million jet planes paid for by the bailout, and *Bring it on!* and Shock and Awe! Or people for whom 'reality-based' became an insult to hurl at other people. Do you remember all of that? The people at the Bush White House used to speak of people like us contemptuously as being part of the reality-based community.

How is it that we've come to this place that is so stark, and so bald and so inescapable? What's that about? Is there something happening here, something shifting or becoming apparent in a way that will be inescapable from now on?

I spoke last week about Dr. King's beautiful statement, "The arc of history is long but it bends toward justice." One of the things that is the most interesting and hopeful about President Obama is how comfortable he is with the idea that we are *becoming*. It's okay with him that we're not there yet. It's ok with him that we're a work in progress. It's ok with him that we make mistakes and get it wrong and do some things better than others, etc. If we step out of the time of certainty in the face of the evidence, the black and white view of the world, and step more into Dr. King's understanding of the long arc, can we be comfortable with the imperfection? Can we be comfortable with this process of becoming? Can we invest our hearts again in the communal effort, the effort in the town square, to go on becoming?

There was that moment in the inaugural speech when President Obama said, "We have to pick ourselves up, dust ourselves off and get going." That seems true. Do we take that invitation?

I noticed how after September 11th, over time, not being asked to do anything was one of the most soul-corrosive things I can remember having seen happen in a community. There was such a willingness to step forward and do something. If someone had just said, "Here's what we're going to do..." People were so willing to do

something, and that we weren't asked was really corrosive. People seem to be responding to this new call, saying, "Times are tough, things are hard, we're going to need to do this together." This seems hopeful to me.

I would ask, when we weren't asked to do something by our politicians, why didn't we do it ourselves? Why didn't we just figure it out ourselves? That's curious and interesting.

I'm interested in these questions at the level of the heart-mind—the individual heart-mind and the collective heart-mind. Let's look at what happened. When I was thinking about this talk I called it to myself, *What Was That?* There are so many questions that are before us and so many things to consider. Is there a way to look at them through our window of consciousness on the heart-mind?

Take a question like, What do we do about things that happened during the last eight years? There's a whole camp of people who say *Let's just forget it, let's move on. We've got too much to worry about in the future.* And there's a whole camp of people saying, *We have to hold people accountable if we don't want it to happen again.* There's a tension right now about where it could go. So let's ask another question : Is there a sideways move here? Is there a third thing? Is there something beyond that duality? There might be a creative and healing and justice-full response to what's going on. I would like to make those kinds of explorations part of what we do so that we're not just hermetically sealed inside the meditation hall but that we are continuous with this great move of consciousness happening in the country.

I'd be interested in hearing what you've noticed and what you're thinking about in these times.

Q1 : I think that part of the passivity of the last eight years and lack of energy and passion about what was happening in this country and around the planet, was that our opinions and reactions didn't matter much. Things were going terribly wrong anyway. The information was out there. Journalists were reporting about the crimes all the time. All of a sudden people were writing, and it didn't make any difference.

I think that makes people even more passive. If you are an activist and you read and you have information and you talk to people and the world persists in supposedly re-electing this person ...

So now I think it's important that there is a reckoning. I don't want to be vengeful, but I do want it to be pointed out, it's immoral. It's been wrong for a long time. Maybe then people will speak up and be active if they see that there is an effect.

Q2 : I keep thinking about that notion that we're getting what we deserved. So why were we deserving of the last eight years? And why are we deserving of something so radically different now? I was thinking about the Jungian notion of the shadow — about how Bush and his colleagues are expressive of the shadow aspect that needed to come forth. Now it feels like some cycle has been completed. Now something else has to manifest and be represented — something more true and courageous and idealistic and wise. Is this just because the other cycle exhausted itself, or ...?

JIS : I'm so interested in exactly that question. I've been thinking about completion and exhaustion. When we think something is complete we tend to think that that means it's whole. In Chinese the word that means *complete* also means *exhausted*. So there's a sense not only of what has been made whole, but what has completely run its course. I've been thinking of what needed to be exhausted. And then I think of the recovery. In substance abuse recovery the idea is that you have to hit bottom before you heal. That exhaustion really got my attention : what needed to be exhausted?

Q2 : We can see that now, but if we could go backwards in time four years and understand that that was a cycle that needed to be exhausted, would we vote for Bush? Did it need to run the full course? There's some kind of inherent wisdom in what happened. When you realize there are larger forces at work, like cycles that have to play out, would you choose to vote based on your normal, personal agenda? Or in relation to what's best for the country? I might vote differently if I could go back four years because I'm really glad that he was in for two terms in retrospect, as if it were necessary.

JIS : The glamour needed to be broken.

Q3 : The way that all of that manifested was nothing but sad. To find that we have a choice, to find that there's hope and other ways, that's the piece that fits with elation, and sobriety is that there is sadness and surrender to the darkness. It's something that hurts the heart. To be able to face that is joy, instead of denying it.

JIS : Yes, just so. Thank you.

Q4 : What frightens me is that the media and the great power of corporations, etc., can influence so much. But Obama has said that if one way doesn't work we're going to try something else. You have to do the conventional things it seems, and he's aware of that, but I get the feeling that that is part of the process. I've never trusted the process and yet now there's a feeling that it can get worse but the system can't get any worse. I think that's the great hope : what can come up? It feels so new. The old way doesn't work any more. That's the most exciting thing to me.

I think we're going to get called to do something. I don't know what that's going to look like. How on earth can we possibly know? There's something very special about it. I like the notion that we couldn't have gotten here without going there. Obama wouldn't be possible without Bush.

Q2 : On the way here I was listening to NPR. It was all about economics and how it's impossible to know what's going to happen because we could never create a controlled experiment. This situation is unprecedented. It's a big vast unknown that he and we are contending with now. I'm so grateful because grappling with the unknown is inherently spiritual. His approach seems to come from a very deep place in him. It may all be a huge mistake. We won't know until time unfolds. But I'm grateful for the quality of his leadership and the way in which he presses for something using his best guess. There's a kind of cleanness and clarity about it. It's very healing. Even if the economics are wrong, the hope, in the end, may be a very powerful force.

JIS : There's an ability to put faith in the process. Something I've not had in a long time.

Q1 : If we can figure out how we got him elected, because we didn't have a hand in the last elections, I feel confident that we can figure out how to actually talk to Obama. I see a new form of communication that can set up a new dynamic for involvement.

JIS : I love the fact that because we got him elected gives us hope that we might be able to get things done. Lyndon Johnson met with MLK in his office and said, "I need you to put incredible pressure on me so I can go out there and do the right thing. I need that because I'm not going to be able to do it if you don't."

Q5 : I've been thinking about one of the things that Bush pulled off either intentionally or unintentionally : to completely stop communication between the U.S. and the rest of the world. I've been thinking about that in terms of the Dalai Lama and his problem in Tibet. In some ways it's a similar problem. We've lost a country and now we've been given it back. The Dalai Lama's genius in this is two-fold : he has an incredible span of history – he's the 14th incarnation – so he has an incredible perspective on history. We have Tibetan exiles all over the world now. In a sense the Chinese completely blew this. They took a population and instead of annihilating it spread it around the world. So now in a sense the world is coming back to us and we're going to be going back out into the world. All of a sudden Americans are welcome back into the world. People are going to be coming to us for our ideas hopefully and hopefully we will be going to them.

JIS : Did you know that Obama had a kata blessed by the Dalai Lama in his pocket when he took the oath of office? Dianne Feinstein's husband Richard Blum is a big Tibetan exile supporter. On the platform he said to Obama, "I have a kata for you from the Dalai Lama. I can arrange to give it to you later." Obama said, "Give it to me now," and he put it in his pocket.

Q5 : I had a dream that instead of taking the oath on the Bible, that it was a stack of religious books: the Quran, etc. Maybe this is the next step.

JIS : And the Constitution!