

My father used to tell me that you cannot legislate morality. My dad was a softy political conservative, generally speaking and this is a slogan that sort of explained his brand of political conservatism. There's some truth to slogan, I suppose. As evidence, I'd have you consult your newsfeed. We spent the last half of the 20th century trying to legislate our way to a more moral world. It ain't working!

The problem with that slogan, however accurate it is, is that it's got the wrong end of the analysis. You see, legislation isn't good at making immoral people moral. Rather, legislation is good at making immoral behavior illegal. Legislation is not good at transforming people. What it is good at, when it's good at anything, is stopping people and systems from doing bad things.

Not good at changing. Good at stopping. So, yes, correct: you cannot legislate morality. But morality isn't the point of legislation... dad. You can still use it to stop bad ideas from thriving.

And yet, I do like that the slogan gives primacy to morality in the outcomes of the human and planetary drama. Laws have limits. Without moral transformation, laws are merely a container for an untamed beast. And at some point, as we have seen in the past and are seeing now, the beast can become stronger than the container. Immorality can swamp law. We're seeing that now.

Of course one person's morality is another's sanctimony. And we have certainly seen folks attacked out of a twisted set of moral beliefs. So this talk of morality can cut both ways and can be a slippery slope. But I don't think that it is contested should dissuade us from staking a claim.

Oh and by the way, your morality means little until it is tested by tribulation. And that is a lot like our principles and our covenant. Is it not? It's easy to say ALL people have inherent worth. It's easy to say you will stay in community while differences are resolved. It's easy to say that love is your guide, that you will ask questions with an open heart. But what about when some worthies are acting immorally? You sticking to your principles. What happens when someone here behaves rudely? You sticking to your principles?

What happens when it becomes dangerous to profess that all people have inherent worth? What will you do when that puts you or your family in jeopardy?

It's happened before. And there are those who are seeking to make it happen again. And they have great power, for they are riding a wave of immorality, manipulating the dark side of our culture's character and convincing them, you? Us? To sacrifice principle on the altar of power.

It is immoral to construe XXXX as enemy. It is immoral to take separate asylum seekers from their children. It is immoral to deploy a fighting force to confront a caravan of people seeking help and safety. It is immoral to do so as an actual strategy or as an act of political theater. It is immoral to encourage violence against people expressing opposing opinions or asking questions. It is immoral to erase the legal identities of people. It is immoral to line one's pockets with the profits of lies, distortions, extortions, evasions, pay offs, and fear. It is immoral to suggest it is okay to demean anyone for their physical ability, gender, heritage, or sex.

And it is obviously immoral to bring violence on those you perceive as other. And therein lies the

heart of the problem. Violence is not, in my estimation, in and of itself immoral. It is a means to an end. Sometimes it is necessary, but only in the rarest and most acute of situations. No, violence itself is not the heart of the matter. Otherness ideology is.

Otherness ideology seeks to dehumanize all who its apostles believe is different than them. Once the necromancy of dehumanization has begun, the practice of scapegoating is soon to follow. And now our problems can be off loaded onto the other and then persecuted.

Otherness ideology is a contagious strategy promulgated by the far right. Trump has gone further though. He has coupled otherness ideology with hateful and, yes, violent rhetoric, encouraging his froth-mouthed rally attendees to punch his opponents in the mouth, offering to pay their bail. In fact, just a week or so ago there was a rally where Trump endorsed a congressman who had attacked a reporter saying “Any guy who can do a body slam ... he’s my guy.”

Last week I attended a vigil for those who were murdered at the Tree of Life Synagogue. There, Tucson Mayor Rothschild reminded us that, “You cannot separate the ideology of hate from the violence it gives rise to.” Let me say that again. “You cannot separate the ideology of hate from the violence it gives rise to.”

The President of YOUR country has endorsed violence. And he has absolutely tapped into, exploited, and adopted an ideology of hate. You can not separate that from the violence that it inspired and abetted.

And so it is that I lay the slaughter of 11 Jewish elders in Philly at the President’s feet. I lay the murder of two black grandparents by a white nationalist at the President’s feet. I lay the narrow misses of mail bombs sent to his opposition at the President’s feet. I lay the so-called suicides of three Ferguson protestors at the president’s feet.

All over the country, people are being physically and verbally attacked as their attackers invoke the name of Trump. Does the president tell them to stop? Does he emphatically, unequivocally distance himself from the criminal bullies, murderers, and hate mongers? If at all, it is not enough. I haven’t heard him signal anyone to stop invoking him.

Tyranny rides the wave of immorality. Tyranny leverages people out of their principles by fear. Fear that you are not enough. If you join this movement, says the tyrant, you will be a strong jawed, virile, champion that deserves adoration rather than your pot bellied, mouth breathing, couch-potatoed self. But its a lie! Of course it’s a lie. Inspirational as it evidently is, its a lie.

And when you sell your soul to that... I guess it’s easier to abandon your principles, to let your morality die when you have no soul.

We say - we say - we love you. Your pot belly is great! Or not. We kind of don’t care. We believe your worth is not dependent on your belly being pot or pan, or your career, or your age, the angle of your jaw, or your employment status. We believe you are are a worthy person capable of dignity without relevance to accomplishment or mistakes or talent. We believe that when you accept that, it is all the more easier to behave in a dignified and compassionate way, a way that

can, when applied, reveal deep connection and meaning in your life.

And when connected to compassion and dignity through your inherent worth, we believe you will have the strength of your convictions, the power of principle, the wisdom to discern when and how to apply those principles contextually in a way that grounds you in a life giving morality that avoids sanctimony and steers us clear of narcissism.

But look, this is a dance, this country, this state, this congregation, this reality. We are all here sharing in it. And I can't help but wonder how I have contributed to the current state of affairs, how I *am* the current state of affairs.

If I am inextricably linked to and bound up with and interdependent with oppressors and the oppressed, what am I to do?

Let's get back to basics

Golden Rule - Do unto others....

But there's a new rule. New Rule - What you do to others, you do to yourself.

Interbeing

Buddhist mutual arising

Sort of in our 7th principle but it is beyond interdependence

Implications

Every encounter with a person or experience mirrors something in our self.

Beyond people though...

Take Soil. (by the way... next week)

We are obviously dependent, but interbeing... it is us.

We are the world... we feel the pain of it.

How would knowing that change how you live?

You already experience it.

So how would knowing it change how you experience it?

Now apply that to the person next to you. You partake in one another. You are mirrors of one another. You are, in many ways, one. You are both earth. You are both the cosmos. You feel the push and pull of all of that. You inter-exist, articulations of a unity.

Our purpose then, becomes one of gift giving. Service. Compassion. Even in our limited view of the whole, we will sense the ramifications. We are one. We inter-are. We are each other. We are the world. We are the soil.

Now apply that to someone you despise.