

Reflections on Hate in the Recent Election and in the  
American Psyche:  
How Do We Become Emotionally Literate

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....The best lack all conviction,  
And the worst are full of passionate intensity.

W.B. Yeats; *The Second Coming*

Introduction

Many commentators on our current political scene have noted how much anger and hate there is in the country right now and how our President-elect Donald Trump has been a lightning rod for this anger, exploiting it to his own political advantage, all the while fanning the flames of hatred with his

inflammatory rhetoric, his outright lies, and his denigrating Twitter-messages. Now, after the election, the country is still saturated with intense, polarized and polarizing emotion that seems increasingly to have taken over the national dialogue and pushed it toward extremism.

Last summer, I found myself pulled into this maelstrom, and spent much of my vacation time in Canada reading the New York Times and trying not to hate Donald Trump. My own hatred became a problem for me, and this is one of the reasons I decided to explore the issue of hatred in the American election and in the American psyche. Here are a few of the questions I want to touch on from a psychological perspective. What constellates hate in an individual personality and in a nation? How can hate be contained and transformed into usable anger in the service of the good? How, in other words do we promote “emotional literacy” in ourselves and in our community as a nation? And how do we do so when so many spokespersons in the nation are exploiting us emotionally—goadng us towards outrage and hatred in order to distract us from the “inconvenient truths” and painful realities of what it means to live with an informed heart in the complicated, inter-dependent world of the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Healthy vs. Unhealthy Hate

As a psychoanalyst, I know that there is such a thing as healthy aggression and healthy hate in the psyche. We know that it takes aggression to have a self, for example. Having a self means having a core of identity and a sense of value and self-esteem that exists within a boundary that is not to be violated. That’s

called “integrity”—being a cohesive unified whole—like an integer, “One.” When that integrity is threatened by other people or by oppressive institutions or by unjust treatment or threats of injustice, aggression is necessary and if the danger is life-threatening then aggression mounts to rage, fury and even hatred. So even these extremely negative feelings can serve the integrity of the self and are not necessarily destructive...unless the violence that hate sponsors gets out of control, creating fear in the other, counter-hate and counter violence leading to a chain reaction that leads only to war and destruction. Healthy hate is a feeling that can be channeled, neutralized and constrained. Unhealthy hate is raw, unconscious emotion that pours through us like molten lava and is often a defense against underlying grief. It cannot be held and usually sweeps us away towards destruction. Both originate in a fundamental threat to our identity or integrity.

I felt this sense of threat to the integrity of American democracy all summer—mostly from the outrageous incivility, outright lies, demagoguery and contempt expressed by Donald Trump. On the other hand, there was something about his unapologetic negativity that I couldn’t help watching, and some of it I actually liked. I was astounded by the seeming ease with which the Republican nominee directed his hatred everywhere—at companies that shipped manufacturing jobs overseas and left skilled workers in the Midwest without jobs; at ISIS, at Obamacare, at Hillary Clinton and the Clinton Foundation’s enrichment of itself during her tenure as Secretary of State, at bloated big governmental bureaucracy and at some of the excesses of political correctness itself. There was a clarity in this and an un-apologetic hatred of the “wrongs” he saw that made me wish for a similar passion on the Democratic side. But I

couldn't find it. I wanted to be released from my outrage by some good clean hating on the other side, but very little was expressed.

All summer long I watched news reports, films, and documentaries that rubbed my nose in things like the following: Thousands of home-owners bankrupt after having been sold faulty mortgage loans by greedy, unscrupulous Wall Street bankers, and tens of thousands more under water from the collapse of the housing bubble and the loss of trillions of dollars to American families, without one banker paying a penalty or going to jail; Children in Aleppo Syria, their eyes glazed over from trauma as thousands of people were slaughtered with cluster bombs in genocidal slaughter by the Assad regime in league with Vladimir Putin of Russia, while our Secretary of State engaged in feckless, futile negotiations and our President refused to get involved; ISIS fighters dressed in black, cutting the throats of Western journalists on u-tube videos without any explicit aggressive response of outrage from Western governments including the US; A small minority of Tea-Party Republicans threatening to shut down the government unless they could extort certain budgetary concessions from the administration; 97 percent of climate scientists warning us that unless we radically reduce the burning of fossil fuels immediately, ocean flooding will destroy most of our coastal cities by the end of the century, most animal and bird species will die in a massive extinction, and we will leave a poisoned and toxic world to our children, while our President Elect pronounced climate change a Chinese hoax! Worse yet, none of the specially chosen media moguls who conducted the Presidential debates even brought up the issue!

My response to all of this was outrage of an especially helpless sort. Where was I to take my passionate negative responses to these and many other issues? Why weren't my elected representatives doing something about these things? The cumulative impact of these issues was overwhelming and overwhelmingly depressing. If this was emblematic of the kind of outrage and impotent rage experienced by Midwestern white males who lost their jobs and way of life, then I was feeling it too, albeit for different reasons.

So, I began to wonder....could it be that there hasn't been enough healthy hate in our country?—especially by Democrats? That President Obama has been so measured and careful and cautious and nuanced about all the admittedly complicated issues that confront the nation, that all the fire in our belly has gone out and that we have forgotten how to hate in a constructive way? How to hate the gross economic inequalities in the country like Bernie Sanders did? How to hate the fact that the entire Republican party has decided to shirk their constitutional duty and block any Supreme Court nominee by the Obama administration? How to hate the repeated refusal of the National Rifle Association to even consider the registration of guns, leading to slaughter after slaughter of innocent children in our schools like the massacre in Newtown Connecticut. Have we become so sophisticated, so educated, so passive and politically correct and maybe so frightened of our negative feelings, of what it would really mean to put ourselves on the line, that we've ceded all our hate to Donald Trump?

And where was the clarity and outrage about some of these issues in Hillary Clinton's campaign? While Hillary Clinton clearly had passionate

patriotic convictions in her younger years, evidenced by the valedictory speech she gave at her college graduation, in this campaign it was hard to find any real fire in her convictions, any passion in her commitments. To me she seemed timid, perhaps afraid of being humiliated by her bullying opponent, on the defensive throughout. It was almost impossible for me to watch the second debate, where she was vilified so unfairly, falsely accused, and menaced, by Donald Trump. To me it felt like she was mesmerized by a snake, stalked by a predator, blamed for everything wrong with America and even accused of having “tremendous hate in her heart”—a gross projection if there ever was one. For me on this occasion, she didn’t have enough healthy hate in her heart to respond and to respond aggressively.

### A Mid-Summer Night’s Fantasy

In the middle of the summer, while wrestling with these questions of healthy vs. unhealthy hate, I had a fantasy that I think was an unconscious effort to release myself from the impacted aggression I was feeling. It went like this: I imagined President Obama coming out into the Rose Garden to talk with reporters. Here’s what he said:

*“Ladies and gentlemen, as you know ISIS just released another video-tape of their henchmen beheading three Western journalists—two were Americans. I watched it last night as I must watch all these horrific propaganda videos and I have to tell you that I did not sleep afterwards. I didn’t sleep because I was seething with outrage and hatred. I lay in bed all night imagining*

*some way to get even—some way to attack this evil in the name of everything we stand for. I imagined a SWAT team of our best Army and Navy Seals—dressed in white--who would parachute into ISIS strongholds like Raqqa and kill the killers. I imagined an army of the best armed warriors who would target these bastards and go after them in their own dens of iniquity. I even thought for a moment that maybe we should hang these monsters in the public square and let them rot so that ISIS would get the message. I lay in bed the whole night seething and writhing with outrage and fury and bad dreams. And then I woke up. And I realized that I had become an extremist myself! And I realized that my outrage, however understandable, is not a proper basis for the foreign policy of a great nation. I realized that as the greatest power in the world and a democratic example to many all over the world, we can't simply unleash our fury, murder and kill because we are angry and have the power to do so. And so I ordered a meeting of the Cabinet this morning and we will be working together to fashion an aggressive response to the murderers of ISIS while at the same time respecting our values of inclusiveness and diversity for all the people of the middle east. As for the killers of our journalists, they should know that we will pursue them to the ends of the earth until they get the justice they deserve and until the world is liberated from the sick scourge of hatred and death that they represent on the face of the earth.*

That was the fantasy of what I needed from my President. I needed a lesson in emotional literacy that I could not get from the hatred of someone like Donald Trump. I needed him to be articulate about his hatred. I needed to know that it was possible to hate with a vengeance and not act on it. I needed to know that the President was willing to take an aggressive stand on principle but was

also conscious enough to acknowledge the conflict within himself, to recognize when he had gone “over the top” with his own hatred, and to reign himself in. I needed a lesson in how to keep my own hatred healthy.

I suppose it’s too much to ask for lessons in emotional literacy from the President. But I think my fantasy filled a vacuum in our body-politic—a vacuum of intelligent discussion about how frustrated many of us are in the face of violent acts (suicide bombers!) that originate in hatred, the terrifying fear they cause us, and how easy it is to respond with pathological hatred that only encourages more hatred, more fear, more violence, and ultimately a crippled democracy.

So I’d like to talk about this subject of healthy vs. pathological hatred. In order to do so, I want to step back a bit, put my Psychologist hat on, and talk about emotion in general and about the negative emotions in particular, to try to promote our emotional literacy. The first thing we need to understand is the difference between *emotions* and *feelings*.

### The Spectrum of Affect and Where Hate Fits In It

First a word about what we might call the “spectrum of affect” that is part of normal emotional life in all of us. This spectrum is like the range of visible light going from red, orange, yellow, green, blue, indigo, to violet. On either end of this spectrum are frequencies of radiation that exist, but we can’t see them and therefore we remain unconscious of them. We describe them as infra red and the ultra-violet frequencies. They are “off the chart” so to speak, i.e., off the spectrum of visible light.



We can imagine that such a spectrum—together with the infra-red and ultra-violet frequencies--contains all the powerful emotions that we become conscious of over our lifetimes—love and hate, joy and sorrow, grief and delight. The “visible” or conscious portion of this spectrum represents those emotions that we have tamed and learned how to recognize. They are the ones we can witness and hold in awareness while we have them, and communicate in language in our important relationships. This conscious spectrum is what we know as our “feelings.”

Some of our emotions are so powerful however, that they cannot be entertained in consciousness and they fall off the visible spectrum into the ultra-violet or infra-red-like areas where they become “unconscious.” Unconscious negative emotions (like rage and hatred) are especially dangerous because they threaten to erupt in violent actions, the purpose of which is to discharge affect and defend against some real or perceived threat posed by the “other.” They try to destroy a perceived danger to the self.

An important feature of hate is that it’s very hard to keep it on the spectrum of conscious affect. It’s always threatening to overwhelm us and jump off into the “ultra-human” or what we in Jungian psychology call the “daimonic” or “archetypal” or “collective” dimension of affect where it can utterly possess us and drive us into destructive, violent actions. Hate, like all powerful emotion, has its roots in the primitive instinctive centers of the brain stem that lie “underneath” the higher cortical layers that have a constraining and inhibiting effect. What I have called the “visible” spectrum of conscious affect depends on links and connections being forged between the primitive neurological centers in

the brain stem and higher cortical layers (neo-cortex) of the brain where rational powers and language prevail. When these connections develop, the child learns how to restrain the flood of emotion and acquires some language with which to label and describe it. This is what makes for our emotional literacy—our ability to reflect on our feelings, delay their impulsive gratification and communicate them in words instead of just discharging them in action. However there is always the danger of regression to the primitive emotional states that preceded the transformation. Then we fall off the spectrum again.



*The Churning of the Sea of Milk*

*In this image from Hindu mythology, the gods and demons cooperate in churning the cosmic ocean to recover the elixir of immortality—each pulling on opposite ends of the naga, a huge snake wrapped around the world axis as a churning stick. In addition to the elixir, many wonderful treasures are brought up from the depths. The image supports the idea that both the dark and light energies of the psyche (like the white and black wolves) are necessary for a creative solution to the conflicts that beset mankind.*

### The Humanization of Archetypal Affect

To become conscious of our feelings like this is a major part of the work of child development in general and it is going on all the time in psychotherapy. Jungians sometimes refer to this process as the “humanization of archetypal affect.” It is important to understand this. As Jungians we have a model of the psyche in which the ego is originally identified with the powers of the transpersonal psyche. We talk about ego/Self identification as the “normal inflation” of early childhood. The rest of the psychoanalytic world has different names for this state, i.e., infantile omnipotence, primitive wish-fulfillment, narcissistic grandiosity. But in the Jungian world, we have an understanding that the earliest ego-states are mythic identifications with powers that present themselves as “spiritual” “divine” “god-like” “transpersonal.” To humanize these archetypal forces that possess us is therefore experienced as a sacrifice of our divine entitlement—a giving up of our inflated, omnipotent expectations. Infants don’t want to do this and the limitations of reality are a difficult stormy negotiation for all of us when we are little. To come through this process however means the development of a secure sense of self and ego-agency in the world with a large spectrum of conscious feelings at our disposal.

Psychology teaches us that love and hate are THE most powerful emotions in the human infant. In early life, our emotions don’t start out as a conscious spectrum of feelings. They start out as volcanic eruptions—off the chart—the equivalent of 880 volts of electricity direct from the power company. In the human nervous system, the “power company” is called the primitive neurological

system or the brain stem or the reptilian brain. Psychologically, we describe emotions that originate in this instinctive layer as volcanic, titanic, protean, or primitive.

To continue the analogy, 880 volts cannot be used by the ego unless it's transformed, i.e., reduced from 880 to 440, to 220 to 110 where it becomes useable electricity. In the human realm, the transformer is usually the child's first attachment relationships with the parents who must both survive the destruction of volcanic negative emotions and, at the same time, provide reality-limits and boundaries to the wish-full fantasies of the child's volcanic "love" and idealizing expectations of total unity and grandiosity. This process slowly transforms archetypal affects into human feelings which can be used to communicate what is going on inside us. It is the process through which we become emotionally literate.

Those of you who are parents know all about transforming high voltage emotions like hate. Any infant or two year old having a temper tantrum is temporarily out of his mind--possessed by volcanic archetypal emotion. He rages and kicks and screams and literally tries to destroy whatever or whoever stands in his way. Eventually, if the parents hold him and do not retaliate with their own rage, the destruction slowly ends; 880 volts is transformed into 110. The love between child and parent helps this transformation of destructive hate by providing the unifying and integrative "glue" that holds child and parent together even in the most destructive moments of disintegration that rage and hatred produce. Loving relationships, in other words, contain and transform the high voltage of primitive rage and hate, and render them into more differentiated,

usable feelings of anger, irritation, resentment, etc. The presence of the opposing emotions love and hate on the spectrum keeps hate from falling off. It increases our affect-tolerance.

### Binary Thinking and Extremism

Un-transformed hate is a powerful polarizing force in the psyche, because it comes to us in binary categories, straight out of the early evolutionary centers of the brain—that part of our central nervous system that was the first to develop and is known as the reptilian brain or the repto-mammalian brain. The reptilian brain is the instinctive brain that lies just above the spinal column in the area known as the brain stem. It is organized to protect us by picking up threats from the environment, reacting pre-consciously, instantaneously and organizing the flight or fight response. It is less sophisticated than the higher cortical layers that distinguish the brains of higher primates, and it operates on an all-or-none, us-vs-them basis. So hate originates in a threat to the self and tries to deal with that threat by destroying it.

From an evolutionary perspective this is essential. In the face of a dire threat to one of our hominid ancestors on the African Plains it was often a “kill or be killed” situation...charge forward to destroy the threat or run away to avoid it. Those are the binary categories and either/or logic sponsored by the primitive instinctive brain that’s alive in all of us. If there’s a snake in the path we are afraid. We don’t stop to reflect and discern whether it’s a garter snake or a rattler. We react on the basis of instinctive generalizations and stereotypes because they

are a lot faster...instantaneous. Someone is either one of us or one of them, a friend or an enemy, good or bad. You don't get to be both, or have a little bit of good in you, according to the primitive brain.

We see this stereotypical binary thinking operating in our current national situation in the language and attitude of Donald Trump. To his apparently insecure and fear-ridden psyche, if you're a Mexican you're likely to be a rapist, so we'll build a wall to keep you out. If you're a Muslim, you're likely to be a terrorist so you must be "vetted" with extreme methods. If you're someone advocating the registering of guns, you're "anti-gun" and a threat to freedom and you're playing into the hands of those who will "take our guns away" and leave us defenseless. According to this mindset, demonstrators at rallies are "scum" who should be smashed in the face; abortion doctors are butchers, "ripping the child out of the mother and destroying innocent life." In this way, complicated human and inter-human realities are reduced to totalistic categories and stereotypes. *The difficult emotional fact that we are all both good and bad and in a constant internal conflict with ourselves is eliminated.* The nuances, difficulties, and complications of human life, human tragedy, human choice, and human freedom are denied. Once the object is stereotyped and painted "bad" (as in "all Muslims are dangerous"), hateful action feels justified. When the object gets angry and attacks back, or aggressively defends herself this proves her "badness" and justifies more hate. "What a nasty woman!" said Trump to Hillary as she defended herself against his contemptuous accusations. Hate escalated and pretty soon he was making threats—"you're a criminal and should be locked up."

There is nothing rational about this process. It is driven by off-the-chart emotion that cannot be held in consciousness. You cannot argue a different point of view with people who are both afraid and defended by their hatred. They are rendered insecure by some primitive threat to their identity and their hateful emotions are necessary to consolidate that identity with infusions of high-voltage affect. Discharging these archetypal emotions, because they're so "big" makes us feel "big" too. To be possessed by hatred is to be carried away by rage which can make us feel inflated and "big"-- powerful and righteous beyond human measure—as if possessed by a God. If our human identity is insecure—if our self-esteem is shaky and we have a history of humiliations at the hands of others, we will get an ego-boost from hating.

And denigration of the object to sub-human status is necessary to keep pathological hatred flowing. Some of the outrageous stories that were perpetrated by Trump during the campaign—like the one that Hillary was perpetrating a child-pedophile ring, was fake news designed to promote and justify more hate. Hating coheres an unstable ego in an instant.

To summarize what I call the pernicious hate cycle: *Hate originates in some sort of threat to the self. It leads to a polarization of the world into negative stereotypical categories, which justifies more hate, consolidating the self, while at the same time, leading to more fear which leads to more hate, etc., just like a nuclear chain reaction.* This chain reaction threatens a meltdown of our containing institutions, and our democratic processes every bit as devastating as Chernoble or Fukishima.

## Transformation of Hate into Inner Conflict and Usable Anger

Now let's look at two examples from our national life of men who were flooded by hate and how this hate was transformed—or not. The first one is a story about Dwight Eisenhower as reported by David Brooks in his excellent recent book *The Road to Character*, and the second is a story about Donald Trump.

Dwight Eisenhower was one of five boys raised by Ida and David Eisenhower in relative poverty in Abilene, Texas. David was a rigid man and strict disciplinarian while Ida had a warm, vibrant personality. Dwight would later call her “the finest person I’ve ever known” (Brooks, p. 50). One of the things Ida did for Dwight was to help him with his hate. Like Donald Trump, he had an innate aggressive and rebellious disposition that he would have to temper and discipline all his life to become the great General and later President that he was. Here is the story.

*“One Halloween evening, when he was about ten, Eisenhower’s older brothers received permission to go out trick-or-treating, a more adventurous activity in those days than it is now. Ike wanted to go with them, but his parents told him he was too young. He pleaded with them, watched his brothers go, and then became engulfed by uncontrolled rage. He turned red. His hair bristled. Weeping and screaming, he rushed out into the front yard and began pounding his fists against the trunk of an apple tree, scraping the skin off and leaving his hands bloody and torn.*

*“His father shook him, lashed him with a hickory switch, and sent him up to bed. About an hour later, with Ike sobbing into his*



*pillow, his mother came up and sat silently rocking in the chair next to his bed. Eventually she quoted a verse from the Bible: “He that conquereth his own soul is greater than he who taketh a city.”*

As she began to salve and bandage his wounds, she told her son to beware the anger and hatred that burned inside. Hatred is a futile thing, she told him which only injures the person who harbors it. Of all her boys, she told him, he had the most to learn about controlling his passions.

Much later, when he was seventy-six, Eisenhower wrote, “I have always looked back on that conversation as one of the most valuable moments of my life...” (Brooks, p. 52 from Eisenhower’s Memoir At Ease). At the end of the conversation, Eisenhower admitted to his mother that he was wrong and felt sufficiently reconciled in his mind to fall off to sleep.

In this case hate was mediated by a loving relationship and transformed into both inner conflict (“I was wrong”) and usable anger. Eisenhower was lucky to have this kind of compassionate containment and transformation of his 880 volts of hate. It gave him choices about how much of his rage and anger to unleash on the world later. He became one of the most effective generals in all of history, directing massive amounts of aggression against the Nazi enemy in the European theater. But his aggressive use of this power was no longer motivated by primitive hatred. He had mastered and neutralized his high-voltage hatred into anger he could talk about and use. He had become emotionally literate—a man who was aware of his inner conflict and a man with choices about how to use his aggression. It was he who warned us of the dangers of the “military-industrial complex.”

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## Donald Trump and the Unleashing of Hatred

It was different with Donald Trump. One of Trump's moments of hate was captured by a PBS Front Line documentary called *The Choice* about Donald Trump's life [PBS.org Frontline, full episodes on YouTube minutes 57:28–60:15.] A partial transcript follows:

The documentary describes how Trump...

*..... "had hit it big with Trump tower. At 40 he claimed he was a billionaire. He was determined to make Trump a household name. ... By the late 1980's Donald Trump's ambition pushed him into uncharted territory, Presidential Politics. He liked the publicity. He liked the notoriety....and even began to insert himself into controversial issues in New York City, for example the Central Park Jogger case..."It was the ages of the accused-- 14 to 17 years-- and the horror of their alleged crime that caused a furor. A woman jogging in New York Central Park last Wednesday night raped and nearly beaten to death." What happened in Central Park was a violation to him. He felt it keenly and had a deep emotional reaction to it and so he lashed out....He took out a full page add that read: "Bring Back the Death Penalty, Bring Back Our Police." He said the kids who did this should be executed.... "they're beasts... they're animals..."*

“You better believe that I HATE the people that took this girl and raped her brutally. You better believe it! And it’s more than anger. It’s HATRED! And I want society to hate ‘em.”

The commentator continues....

*“The unstated text of this was that because there were 5 minority kids who brutalized a white woman in Central Park and everybody’s outraged about it...and they’re different from us.... so we need to treat them with the severest methods possible. The 5 young men spent years in prison but were later exonerated when the actual rapist admitted his guilt. But Donald Trump never apologized. He didn’t want to admit he was wrong. And to this day he’s not apologized for the statement he made at the time.*

*But for Trump, his television rage had worked....his celebrity was bigger than ever. And the talk of President Trump had begun.”*

To me this video is a good illustration of the difference between healthy hate and unhealthy hate and how healthy hate can devolve very quickly into pathological hate—can fall off the spectrum of aggression, so to speak, and end up killing or destroying the very innocent life that it started out defending. Donald Trump was understandably offended by the gross injustice—the violence and violation of this innocent young girl’s body and psyche. I think we can all identify with his outrage. This is hate in the service of personal values and a desire—even a demand—for justice. So far so good. Up to this point, we can imagine a

constructive use of hate's powerful feeling-energy. But notice what happened next. Trump wasn't satisfied with expressing his feelings and leaving the rest to law enforcement. He was filled with ultra-human passion—inflated HATE—off the spectrum of potentially constructive aggression. He needed to ACT on these feelings in order to discharge them. To promote this discharge, he vilified the black youths that were suspects in the case and made them evil in his mind, justifying more hate, calling them beasts and animals, demanding action, demanding their deaths.

Let's imagine he had been in a position to execute these five men as he recommended--and that they were then exonerated later after their deaths. Can you imagine the outrage and hate in the black community?! The “justified” hatred? This is how the un-mediated binary structures and all-or-none stereotyping of the primitive neurological system promotes precipitous action and the destructive chain-reaction of fear/denigration/hate/destructive action (killing)/ and more hate, that we've seen so often in situations where power is abused in this country.

It is frightening to realize how much of US foreign policy is based on such binary thinking and the self-fulfilling prophecy of fear, hatred, destructive action and more fear. George W. Bush made Saddam Hussein into an evil man in his mind, claiming he was about to use weapons of mass destruction, and this justified a “shock and awe” bombing campaign in which tens of thousands of innocent people died. When it was discovered that there were no such weapons....well, Oops, sorry....but there was no apology, no genuine regret. And we wonder why the Muslim world hates us and blows up our buildings? Hateful

action breeds more hate and more fear. And the irony is—maybe you’ve noticed this—that the people like Donald Trump and George W. Bush, who hate the real or imagined bad guys and then seek their destruction—wreaking havoc with their hateful actions,—are seen as “strong” while more rational, deliberate men are seen as “weak”.

### Comparison of Eisenhower and Trump

A psychological comparison of the stories of Eisenhower and Trump might be useful. Eisenhower had his hatred painfully transformed in a loving, emotionally literate family—before he, as an angry, hateful, entitled young man was released upon the world.

In his conflicted moment with his mother he found himself loving and hating the same person at a moment of intense conflict. This was a huge advance in his emotional literacy. He was forging something Melanie Klein called the “depressive position” by which she meant the capacity to be depressed by our own destructiveness because we can see its effects on someone we love.

We have no indications (so far) that Donald Trump ever had such experiences in his original family. What we do know is that—just like Eisenhower-- he was an aggressive angry young man with trouble controlling his rage and hatred—so much so that his father sent him to military school where if he acted-out he was simply man-handled and beaten up....something he ended up respecting in his elders...something he respects in bullies like Vladimir Putin! It was as though he had the father’s whipping without the mother’s mediation. In

fact we know very little about Trump's mother or any role she might have played in the humanization of those archaic emotions that flowed through his young psyche.

From what we have seen so far, Donald Trump has great trouble seeing his adversaries as worthy and human. He tends to always make his object "bad"—less than human—criminals, animals, in order to energize his hatred, thereby securing his otherwise shaky identity. He is apparently not capable of holding the "good" in his antagonist together with the "bad". This accounts for his notorious thin skin and makes for extreme danger when negotiating with other human beings who, if they disagree with him, slip easily into his "enemy" category.

One of the most important things we witness in the above documentary is that Trump's hatred led to an impulsive and wrong conclusion about the "badness" in the world. His extreme un-tempered emotion--completely understandable as a first reaction to this crime--misinformed him about reality. He threatened action against the 5 black youths before he could think about it. He didn't want to think about it. He wanted to hate. Hating is powerful. It both inflates and coheres the self and resolves feelings of inner conflict. When the people he hated and threatened with death turned out to be the wrong suspects, he couldn't admit his own error—his own inner conflict. He could not contain a conflict. He could only expel the badness like Melanie Klein says every two year old must, to save its infantile sense of its own goodness.

By contrast, in his experience with his mother, Eisenhower became a problem to himself—someone with both good and bad inside—like all the rest of us. Eisenhower was able to feel his conflict, feel guilt about it, admit his wrong-

doing, and then feel gratitude to the person who had helped him through this. He did not have to project the badness outside himself in order to justify his own hating. We're not sure our President-elect can do that. Instead we see him tweeting his anger in the middle of the night and then withdrawing the tweets in the morning maybe with his family's help. It's as though he's relying on the country to help metabolize his hatred. Threats for him are everywhere....a demonstrator at a rally, someone who disagrees with him, a nasty comment in the papers. All are enough to get him tweeting anger again. Then someone takes his tweeter away in the morning to avoid embarrassment. He cannot see the consequences of discharging his anger. He cannot be "wrong." It is intolerable for him. All "badness" must be kept outside. He's not yet in conflict with himself.

### Cherokee Legend: The White and Black Wolf

There's an old Cherokee legend that speaks to the issue of being in conflict with oneself. According to the story a grandfather and chief of the tribe was talking to a group of adolescent children about a violent conflict that had broken out in the village and upset everyone. The Chief explained that everyone harbors in their hearts a white and a black wolf. The black wolf is anger, aggression, rage, and hatred. The white wolf is affection, attachment, and love. And they are always in conflict. One of the youths asked the old man "do you have a black and white wolf fighting in your heart?" Yes said the wise old man. We all do! The young people grew silent and fell into reflection. Then one of the young boys raised his

hand and asked. “But how do we know which one will win?” “It all depends on which one you feed,” said the Chief.



*Image source - <http://tredam.blogspot.com/>*

This story, which suggests that the way out of the paralysis of hatred that has infected our politics is to feed the white wolf, has immediate appeal. By emphasizing love for our fellow beings, we resist the tendency to diabolize and denigrate our antagonist in the other party or the other country and we have seen how this impulse to make the other “bad” generates pathological hatred and keeps anger flowing. By feeding the white wolf, we remind ourselves of the humanity of our adversary and this is a good thing. Feeding the white wolf is the very basis of the non-violent protest practiced by Mahatma Gandhi, Martin Luther King, and the Native people who recently stood their ground without retaliating at Standing Rock. In this tradition, we do not retaliate, no matter how badly we are treated. We never lose track of the essential goodness in our protagonist and this keeps the pernicious hate cycle from getting started.



But in my talk tonight I've been emphasizing the importance of healthy hate as well as the dangers of the pathological hate we see all around us. I've been talking about emotional literacy. This analysis suggests that we cannot just love our way out of our current dilemma. We can't just starve the black wolf and feed the white one. We will need some measure of moral outrage as well and this will require the services of the black wolf. The black wolf puts fire in our bellies and fury in our hearts when we see an obvious moral wrong and have the courage to address it. We can't let the fierce green light in the black wolf's eyes die out. By staying conscious of both wolves we retain our emotional literacy. By feeding them both and keeping them both healthy in the human heart, we promote a needed tension between the opposites that is absolutely essential to the health of the psyche and to the health of our democracy. In other words, we have to keep the two wolves—our good and our bad, our light and our darkness, our love and our hate—in conscious view both within ourselves and within the “other” who we are trying to defeat in a political contest.

Democracy, when it's really working, enshrines this contest between opposing sides in its very process. Democracy (when it's really working) gives a chance for love and hate to learn to co-exist inside us through our participation in communities and the rituals (debates, position papers, confrontations) of electoral politics. Containing institutions such as our political parties hold us together in contests with people who are just like us. They force us to see the good in them as well as the bad. They help us process our primitive hatred so that it can live inside us alongside love—as constructive, healthy hate. We've just been

through a presidential election cycle which, historically, has been our country's best hate container and transformer.

This election was compelling partly because the white and black wolves were fighting in all of us like never before. I don't know about you but I was riveted by this election! I couldn't stop reading about it and I couldn't stop feeling threatened and I couldn't stop hating. It is exhilarating to hate when the hate is contained in a civil and humane process where destruction is kept to a minimum and where there are checks and balances and rules of due process. These rules keep us in touch with the humanity in our antagonists, with the goodness in our enemies and in that way keep hate constructive. None of us ever expected that the rules would break down (at least I didn't).

But somehow this year, I think we all felt that our containers did not hold. Civilized discourse did not hold, mutual respect did not hold, truth-telling did not hold. Lies were told that inflamed hatred and this seemed to be their intention. This inflamed the fear/hate cycle and this was amplified as it had never been by twitter, facebook and other social media in which mis-information (fake news) and cynical denigration were heightened--all to justify hating and the simple answers that the country's frustrations and fears and impatience demanded. In the so-called debates—at least the first two—we saw the fear/hate cycle out of control with bullying, stalking, lying, and snarling.

When hate breaks the containers, love is the first to leave, and the result is despair. That's where I feel we are as a country. Pathological hate won. The white wolf left the sanctuary of the human heart and ran off. As Yeats says "Mere anarchy is unleashed upon the world....the best lack all conviction while the worst

are full of passionate intensity.” While there’s been some relief lately in the reconciling language used by Trump in his acceptance speech where he actually acknowledged the goodness in his antagonist, we remain suspicious.

The question now is how to restore love—how to re-awaken it in ourselves and in our democratic process. How to get the white wolf who has run off to come back into the human heart and lie down with his black brother. This is going to take hard work by all of us I think because we feel so betrayed and besides, hate is always an easy way to protect our innocence by projecting all the “bad” out there. We can huddle together with those of like mind and just not deal with our inner conflict....demonize the other with our contempt. Trump is such an easy target for this but in truth he’s only a lightning rod for a lot of pain, confusion, and hatred in the country.

I’d like to end with an example from my own life which illustrates the struggle that lies ahead. Robin and I were up in Newfoundland all summer and were receiving various social invitations from American and Southern Canadian couples who had summer homes in Newfoundland and who we’d come to know over our 15 years summering there. One of these was a couple from Connecticut who we heard via the grapevine were voting for Trump. These two individuals were friends for at least 10 years—not especially close, but we had shared with them a mutual enjoyment of the elemental beauties of Newfoundland and its people. I’ll call them Bob and Lucy. They had a boat like we did and I’d taught Lucy to fish cod and Bob liked to sing and we’d get together and sing Karaoke to American musicals and at the many kitchen parties in our out-port villages in Newfoundland. And now they were voting for Trump? I felt stricken! How could

this be!? How could any intelligent person vote for Trump? How would we survive a dinner with these two friends?

On my insistence, we avoided Bob's 80<sup>th</sup> birthday party and made excuses to avoid the two of them all summer long! I didn't trust myself to be able to control my feelings with this conservative business-man and his wife if the subject of "Trump" came up. Now I was also out of control, just like my hated political object! This is what I mean by emotional contagion. The hate had gotten into me and I was now vibrating with the same polarizing energy. And I was afraid of what might happen....that the civility between us might not hold....that I would say things I didn't mean....that it might end the relationship and alienate us forever. By painting him black and avoiding him out of fear of my own emotion, and the imagined discomfort of open conflict, I made sure that wouldn't happen. The important point is that I had lost sight of this man's goodness and our common humanity. I had painted him black. He was voting for Trump! This justified projecting the totalistic category of evil onto him and that justified the extreme emotion of hate and my bad behavior. I built a wall. Emotions are supposed to inform us about the world. In this case emotions were clouding my perceptions. Hatred was making me "emotionally illiterate" or "affectively incompetent." By giving in to my fears of conflict, my life became more constricted. I would huddle among my elite, literate friends who all agreed that a Trump supporter couldn't possibly be worth talking to, much less befriending.

And to be honest, in some perverse way I was enjoying my own hatred. It simplified everything. No more subtleties or shades of grey to wrestle with....no more soul-searching to find my own complicity with evil....maybe my own areas

of agreement with Trump! With Bob and Lucy I'd made sure we'd never have to process our differences either...we'd never test the resilience of our relational container. Things would stay superficial and I'd stay lonelier—perversely comforted by my own righteousness, my own haughty indignation, my own inflated innocence. What a shame! I am disappointed in myself. I am ashamed of myself. And I've made a vow that next summer we'll invite Bob and Lucy over for dinner and confess to our avoiding them all last summer, and then try to open up a discussion about why. It could be stormy. I'll need to stay emotionally literate. I'll need to keep both my white and black wolves in view the whole time. But if I can do this, the relationship will go deeper. Conflict, consciously held always takes us deeper. Ultimately that's what we all want. That's what the soul wants. And ultimately I think it's what our democracy wants too.

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