

Fully Alive: A Retreat

Soul Draining Habits and Soul Survival Options



Acknowledgments

Kay Haugaard, Martin Luther king, Jr., Plutarch with kind permission personally from Os Guinness and The Trinity Forum Steering Through Chaos, 1994, 2004.

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KAY HAUGAARD

Kay Haugaard is a teacher of creative writing in southern California whose essay "The Lottery' Revisited" was first published in the Chronicle of Higher Education in June 1997 under the title "Suspending Moral Judgment." This fascinating account of her years of teaching creative writing using such examples as Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery," struck a chord in many readers and sparked widespread discussion.

"The Lottery" first appeared in the New Yorker in 1948. Since then it has been read and discussed in countless high school and college classes. Fifty years ago the stunning climax of the story raised a storm of shocked outrage and the New Yorker was deluged with sackfuls of mail in response. In the 1990s, by contrast, the rise of relativism, tolerance, cynicism, radical multiculturalism, and morally ungrounded morality poses the question, how is anyone to judge anything, let alone condemn?

It is a telling exercise to read Kay Haugaard's essay as a yardstick to measure where we stand today on several things earlier generations thought vital to a free society, including faith, character, truth, and right and wrong. The shifting responses of different generations of Haugaard's students to "The Lottery" tell us more about our moral condition than endless public opinion surveys and presidential speeches. We're left with haunting questions: has it truly become "forbidden to forbid"? Is our eleventh commandment, "Thou shalt not judge"?

'The Lottery' (excerpts)

"All right fellows." For a minute, no one moved, and then all the slips of paper were opened. Suddenly, all the women began to speak at once, saying, "Who is it?" "Who's got it?" "Is it the Dunbars?" "Bill Hutchinson's got it."

People began to look around to see the Hutchinsons. Bill Hutchinson was standing quiet, staring down at the paper in his hand. Suddenly, Tessie Hutchinson shouted to Mr. Summers, "You didn't give him enough time to take any paper he wanted. I saw you. It wasn't fair."

"Be a good sport, Tessie," Mrs. Delacroix called, and Mrs. Graves added, "All of us took the same chance." . . .

"How many kids, Bill? Mr. Summers asked formally.

"Three," Bill Hutchinson said. "There's Bill, Jr., and Nancy, and little Dave. And Tessie and me."

"All right, then," Mr. Summers said. "Harry, you got their tickets back?"

"I think we ought to start over," Mrs. Hutchinson said, as quietly as she could. I tell you it wasn't *fair*. You didn't give him time enough to choose. Everybody saw that." . . .

"Remember," Mr. Summers said, "take the slips and keep them folded until each person has taken one. . . .

"All right," Mr. Summers said. "Open the papers. Harry, you open little Dave's."

Mr. Graves opened the slip of paper and there was a general sigh through the crowd as he held it up and everyone could see that it was blank. Nancy and Bill, Jr., opened theirs at the same time, and both beamed and laughed, turning around to the crowd and holding their slips of paper above their heads. . . .

"Tessie," Mr. Summers said. There was a pause, and then Mr. Summers looked at Bill Hutchinson, and Bill unfolded his paper and showed it. It was blank.

"It's Tessie," Mr. Summers said, and his voice was hushed. "Show us her paper, Bill."

Bill Hutchinson went over to his wife and forced the slip of paper out of her hand. It had a black spot on it, the black spot Mr. Summers had made the night before with the heavy pencil in the coal-company office. Bill Hutchinson held it up, and there was a stir in the crowd.

"All right, folks," Mr. Summers said. "Let's finish quickly."

The pile of stones the boys had made earlier was ready. Mrs. Delacroix selected a stone so large she had to pick it up with both hands. The children had stones already, and someone gave little Davy Hutchinson a few pebbles.

Tessie Hutchinson was in the center of a cleared space by now, and she held her hands out desperately as the villagers moved in on her. "It isn't fair," she said. A stone hit her on the side of the head.

Old Man Warner was saying, "Come on, come on, everyone." Steve Adams was in the front of the crowd of villagers, with Mrs. Graves beside him.

"It isn't fair, it isn't right," Mrs. Hutchinson screamed, and then they were upon her.

"The Lottery" from *The Lottery* by Shirley Jackson. Copyright © 1948, 1949 by Shirley Jackson, renewed © by Laurence Hyman, Barry Hyman, Mrs. Sarah Webster, and Mrs. Joanne Schnurer. Used by permission of Farrar, Straus & Giroux Inc.

'The Lottery' Revisited

Once again I was going to teach Shirley Jackson's short story "The Lottery." I sighed as I gathered my books to leave for my evening class in creative writing; I had taught this story so many times over the past two decades.

Throughout the twenty-four years that I had been teaching creative writing, I had found that the various anthologies that I had used, as well as the stories written by the students themselves during the semester, had reflected national changes in social mores and attitudes.

When I started teaching, in 1970, my students—ranging from an occasional 18-year old to an occasional 80-year old—were still shocked into giggles and frowns at the sound of naughty words, whether they appeared in the published stories we read or in students' work. The youngest students (mostly the males) wrote pieces calculated to shock and reveled in an abundant use of vulgar slang and details of drug parties and sexual encounters. Remembering my commitment to freedom of speech, I steeled myself and read all of the students' stories out loud to the class, even when I could feel my cheeks flaming.

A few years later, I started getting floods of powerful stories written by Vietnam veterans, who described killing, maiming, being wounded and crippled, having friends die in their laps, and sexual encounters with Vietnamese prostitutes.

As the years went by, the students seemed to become jaded by the obscenities. If a story contained a great deal of lewdness, they sighed and pointed out that it was boringly excessive. The Vietnam War began to fade and, for the first time, we began reading students' narratives of homosexual inclinations and encounters. At first these, too, startled the class. The students did not condemn the stories, but their eyes flew open in visible shock. A student would say, "Did I understand it right? The characters were two men, not a man and a woman?" Assured that that interpretation was correct, the student usually did not respond, but sat back with a serious, reflective expression. . . .

Along with the students' stories, anthology after anthology mirrored the social concerns of the particular period in which it was published: free-speech issues, civil rights, sexual liberation, feminism, and, most recently, multiculturalism. But every

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anthology, without fail, included “The Lottery,” and students often chose the story for discussion.

Students who had never read this story were always absolutely stunned by it—as though they personally had been struck with the first ritual stone. I had vivid mental pictures of their faces as we discussed the story: wide-eyed, unsmiling, disturbed. They made comments such as, “I thought this was kind of an ordinary little story, and then wham! I never thought. . . .”

Students who had read the story before were calmer but admitted that it had shocked them the first time. Everyone thought it was scary because, as someone inevitably said, “The characters seem just like regular people—you know, like us!”

In spite of the changes that I had witnessed over the years in anthologies and in students’ writing, Jackson’s message about blind conformity always spoke to my students’ sense of right and wrong. Jackson had made an important and powerful point. . . .

That evening, I thought to myself, it would be more fun if we had a story to discuss that I had not read before.

“So, what did you think of ‘The Lottery?’” I asked as soon as I sat down in front of the class.

Beth, a slender, stylish woman in her mid-40s, pushed up the sleeves of her enormously baggy sweater as she spoke: “I was rather surprised that this seemed to be taking place in the United States and like it was right now.”

“Yes, it does make it more shocking when the characters seem like people we might know, or even be, doesn’t it?” I said. “How about you, Jeanette?” I asked the plump 19-year-old, whose dyed black ringlets framed an ivory, kewpie-doll face.

She replied: “It was pretty boring until the end. The end was neat!”

“Neat?” I asked. “How do you mean, neat?”

“Just neat! I liked it.”

“I see. Kind of Stephen King ‘neat,’ I suppose.” I turned to Edward, well dressed in the suit he had worn to his job as a high-school teacher that day. “What was your response to the story, Edward?”

He bounced the foot of his crossed leg and looked up with a kind of bored expression. “It was all right. It wasn’t that great.”

But, I pressed, “how about that ending, where the whole village turns on one of their neighbors and kills her with stones? Had you read it before?”

Edward furrowed his brow but refused to be impressed. “No, I hadn’t read it before. It was all right.”

I could not believe these responses. Everyone seemed so blasé. Giving up on Edward, who was never very vocal in discussions, I turned to Richard, a slightly graying elementary-school teacher. “Why do these people perform this ritual, Richard, this human sacrifice?”

He took a deep breath. “Well, I agree with Beth that it was pretty surprising to have it take place right today, as it were.”

“But why do they do it?” I persisted.

“Uh, well, it isn’t too clear.”

Someone else spoke up. “For the crops. They do it so the crops will grow well.”

“That’s one of the reasons they give,” I responded, pleased that someone had found a clue in the text. “Is that a sufficient justification? Any other reason?”

“They just always do it. It’s a ritual,” said Maria.

“That’s right. They do it because they’ve always done it,” I said.

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"I was wondering if there was anything religious about it," said Beth. "If this were part of something of long standing. It doesn't seem to be religious."

"Would that make a difference, if it were part of a religious ritual?"

Beth furrowed her brows and gazed toward the ceiling.

"There isn't anything mentioned in the story about religion, but it does seem related to religious traditions of human sacrifice intended to make the crops grow better," I said. I took a few moments to talk about Sir James Frazer's *The Golden Bough*, which describes many cultures with such traditions.

"Oh, well, if it was something like that . . .," Beth responded.

"How do you mean? That would make it all right?"

"Are you asking me if I believe in human sacrifice?" Beth responded thoughtfully, as though seriously considering all aspects of the question.

"Well, yes," I managed to say. "Do you think that the author approved or disapproved of this ritual?" I was stunned: This was the woman who wrote so passionately of saving the whales, of concern for the rain forests, of her rescue and tender care of a stray dog.

"I really don't know. If it was a religion of long standing. . . ."

For a moment I couldn't even respond. This woman actually couldn't seem to bring herself to say plainly that she was against human sacrifice. My classes of a few years before would have burst into nervous giggles at the suggestion. This class was calmly considering it.

"There have been studies," said Richard, "about certain cultures, and they show that, when there aren't any killings for a long time, the people seem to . . . require it. . . ."

I listened in a state of shock as Richard went on to describe a psychological theory he had read that seemed to espouse the social function of a certain amount of bloodshed. "It almost seems a need," he concluded in cool, reasonable tones.

It was too much. I had always tried to keep my personal feelings out of class discussion and allow the students to discover a story's theme and significance as much as possible. But I had reached my limit.

"There certainly are precedents for it," I said, "but does a precedent necessarily make something right? I think the author strongly disapproves of this ritual and is attempting to shock us into re-examining our activities every now and then to see if they still seem justified and functional."

I went on, probably longer than I should have. "The Aztecs believed that the sun would not rise if they did not feed the hummingbird god Huichtlipochtli with human blood. This was their rationale for human sacrifice. But we know that the sun will rise on its own. Are these things justified on the basis of precedent?"

I turned to Patricia, a 50-something, redheaded nurse. She had always seemed an intelligent person of moderate views.

"Well, I teach a course for our hospital personnel in multicultural understanding, and if it is part of a person's culture, we are taught not to judge, and if it has worked for them. . . ."

At this point I gave up. No one in the whole class of more than twenty ostensibly intelligent individuals would go out on a limb and take a stand against human sacrifice.

I wound up the discussion. "Frankly, I feel it's clear that the author was pointing out the dangers of being totally accepting followers, too cowardly to rebel against

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obvious cruelties and injustices.” I was shaken, and I thought that the author, whose story had shocked so many, would have been shaken as well.

The class finally ended. It was a warm night when I walked out to my car after class that evening, but I felt shivery, chilled to the bone.

From Kay Haugaard, “Suspending Moral Judgment: Students Who Refuse to Condemn the Unthinkable—A Result of Too Much Tolerance?” *The Chronicle of Higher Education*, June 27, 1997. Reprinted by permission of the author.

Not My Problem!

“I’m not going to get upset over somebody else’s life. I just worry about myself first. I’m not going to lose sleep over somebody else’s problems.”

—David Cash, 18, when asked if he was appalled by his friend’s murder of a seven-year-old girl in a casino restroom while he waited outside.

When asked whether he felt worse for the dead girl or her murderer (his buddy), Cash replied, “Because I know Jeremy, I feel worse for him. I know he had a lot going for him.”

—*Washington Post*, September 1998

“Dear Mom,

“Gosh, can you believe it’s 2023 already? I’m still writing ‘22’ on nearly everything. Seems like just yesterday I was sitting in first grade celebrating the century change. I know we haven’t really chatted since Christmas. Sorry. Anyway, I have some difficult news and I really didn’t want to call and talk face-to-face. Ted’s had a promotion and I should be up for a hefty raise this year if I keep putting in those crazy hours. You know how I work at it. Yes, we’re still struggling with the bills. Timmy’s been ‘okay’ at kindergarten although he complains about going. But then, he wasn’t happy about day care either, so what can I do?

“He’s been a real problem, Mom. He’s a good kid, but quite honestly, he’s an unfair burden at this time in our lives. Ted and I have talked this through and through and finally made a choice. Plenty of other families have made it and are much better off. Our pastor is supportive and says hard decisions are necessary. The family is a ‘system’ and the demands of one member shouldn’t be allowed to ruin the whole. He told us to be prayerful, consider all the factors, and do what is right to make the family work. He says that even though he probably wouldn’t do it himself, the decision is really ours. He was kind enough to refer us to a children’s clinic near here, so at least that part’s easy. I’m not an uncaring mother. I do feel sorry for the little guy. I think he overheard Ted and me talking about ‘it’ the other night. I turned around and saw him standing at the bottom step in his PJ’s with the little bear you gave him under his arm and his eyes sort of welling up. Mom, the way he looked at me just about broke my heart. But I honestly believe this is better for Timmy, too. It’s not fair to force him to live in a family that can’t give him the time and attention he deserves. And please don’t give me the kind of grief Grandma gave you over your abortions. It is the same thing, you know. We’ve told him he’d just going in for a vaccination. Anyway, they say it is painless. I guess it’s just as well you haven’t seen that much of him.

“Love to Dad,
“Jane.”

—from a parish newsletter, quoted in *First Things*, January 1999

Questions

1. What response does Kay Haugaard expect from students who had never read “The Lottery” before? What had struck nearly all of Haugaard’s students about the people in the story? What message about conformity had students gleaned from the story?
2. How did big public events, such as the Vietnam War and the rise of the gay movement, affect the way her students responded to the story?

3. This time, what are the first three student responses to the story? What shocks Haugaard about these opening reactions?
 4. How does Beth react to the idea of human sacrifice in the story? What is particularly ironic about her response? What does Richard, the elementary school teacher, suggest about the ritual killing? What is Haugaard's response? How would you have responded to the class had you been the teacher?
 5. What is the final response of Patricia, the 50-something nurse? On what idea does she base her answer? Why do you agree or disagree with her underlying assumption?
 6. As you see it, what factors have caused this massive change? What are the obvious dangers of being unwilling to judge or condemn? How can you tell when tolerance is taken too far?
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PLUTARCH

Plutarch was introduced earlier in the discussion on Envy. The compelling passage below is also from his classic Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans. It describes a fateful incident that was a key turning point in the degeneration of Alexander the Great.

It is the spring of 328 B.C., exactly half way into Alexander's Persian campaign—five years after its start and five years before Alexander's death in 323 B.C. The easy, glory days of the campaign are over. Opposition is stiffening as they go further east, and Alexander is growing more arrogant as the days pass. He has begun to introduce Persian practices into his ranks, such as prostration (subjects falling face-down in homage to their leader). Such a practice would have been unthinkable to Greeks, who bowed to the gods but to no human being.

Some of the veteran Greek officers, such as Clitus, are disgruntled and uneasy. Clitus, nicknamed Clitus the Black, was called the "Alexander Savior"—the hero who rescued Alexander from death in an earlier battle. Yet he has recently been demoted. Now Clitus is seeking to work his way back into Alexander's good graces.

The ensuing event, whatever the motives, is a vivid indication that Alexander's explosive anger is a fatal flaw which, left unchecked, will deepen his path to tyranny and prove to have dire consequences for the future of his empire.

Double-crossed

"Indeed, anger is in its own right—quite apart from 'acting it out' and further consequences—an injury to others. When I discover your anger at me, I am *already* wounded. Your anger alone will very likely be enough to stop me or make me change my course, and it will also raise the stress level of everyone around us. It may also evoke my anger in return. Usually it does, precisely because your anger places a restraint on me. It crosses my will. Thus anger feeds on anger. The primary function of anger in life is to alert me to an obstruction to my will, and immediately raise alarm and resistance, before I even have time to think about it." —Dallas Willard, *The Divine Conspiracy*

Alexander

It being my purpose to write the lives of Alexander the king, and of Caesar, by whom Pompey was destroyed, the multitude of their great actions affords so large a field that I were to blame if I should not by way of apology forewarn my reader that I have chosen rather to epitomise the most celebrated parts of their story, than to insist at large on every particular circumstance of it. It must be borne in mind that my design is not to write histories, but lives. And the most glorious exploits do not always furnish us with the clearest discoveries of virtue or vice in men; sometimes a matter of less moment, an expression or a jest, informs us better of their characters and inclinations, than the most famous sieges, the greatest armaments, or the bloodiest battles whatsoever. Therefore as portrait-painters are more exact in the lines and features of the face, in which the character is seen, than in the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to the marks and indications of the souls of men, and while I endeavour by these to portray their lives, may be free to leave more weighty matters and great battles to be treated of by others.

"Therefore as portrait-painters are more exact in the lines and features of the face, in which the character is seen, than in the other parts of the body, so I must be allowed to give my more particular attention to the marks and indications of the souls of men, and while I endeavour by these to portray their lives, may be free to leave more weighty matters and great battles to be treated of by others."

. . . Not long after this happened, the deplorable end of Clitus, which, to those who barely hear the matter, may seem more inhuman than that of Philotas; but if we consider the story with its circumstance of time, and weigh the cause, we shall find it to have occurred rather through a sort of mischance of the king's, whose anger and over-drinking offered an occasion to the evil genius of Clitus. The king had a present of Grecian fruit brought him from the sea-coast, which was so fresh and beautiful that he was surprised at it, and called Clitus to him to see it, and to give him a share of it. Clitus was then sacrificing, but he immediately left off and came, followed by three sheep, on whom the drink-offering had been already poured preparatory to sacrificing them. Alexander, being informed of this, told his diviners, Aristander and Cleomantis the Lacedæmonian, and asked them what it meant; on whose assuring him it was an ill omen, he commanded them in all haste to offer sacrifices for Clitus's safety, for as much as three days before he himself had seen a strange vision in his sleep, of Clitus all in mourning, sitting by Parmenio's sons who were dead.

Clitus, however, stayed not to finish his devotions, but came straight to supper with the king, who had sacrificed to Castor and Pollux. And when they had drunk pretty hard, some of the company fell a-singing the verses of one Pranichus, or as others say of Pierion, which were made upon those captains who had been lately worsted by the barbarians, on purpose to disgrace and turn them to ridicule. This gave offense to the older men who were there, and they upbraided both the author and the singer of the verses, though Alexander and the younger men about him were much amused to hear them, and encouraged them to go on, till at last Clitus, who had drunk too much, and was besides of a forward and willful temper, was so nettled that he could hold no longer, saying it was not well done to expose the Macedonians before the barbarians and their enemies, since though it was their unhappiness to be overcome, yet they were much better men than those who laughed at them.

And when Alexander remarked, that Clitus was pleading his own cause, giving cowardice the name of misfortune, Clitus started up:

"This cowardice, as you are pleased to term it," said he to him, "saved the life of a son of the gods, when in flight from Spithridates's sword; it is by the expense of Macedonian blood, and by these wounds, that you are now raised to such a height as to be able to disown your father Philip, and call yourself the son of Ammon."

"Thou base fellow," said Alexander, who was now thoroughly exasperated, "dost thou think to utter these things everywhere of me, and stir up the Macedonians to sedition, and not be punished for it?"

"We are sufficiently punished already," answered Clitus, "if this be the recompense of our toils, and we must esteem theirs a happy lot who have not lived to see their countrymen scourged with Median rods and forced to sue to the Persians to have access to their king."

While he talked thus at random, and those near Alexander got up from their seats and began to revile him in turn, the elder men did what they could to compose the disorder. Alexander, in the meantime turning about to Xenodochus, the Pardian, and Artemius, the Colophonian, asked him if they were not of opinion that the Greeks, in comparison with the Macedonians, behaved themselves like so many demigods among wild beasts.

But Clitus for all this would not give over, desiring Alexander to speak out if he had anything more to say, or else why did he invite men who were freeborn and accustomed to speak their minds openly without restraint to sup with him. He had better

live and converse with barbarians and slaves who would not scruple to bow the knee to his Persian girdle and his white tunic. Which words so provoked Alexander that, not able to suppress his anger any longer, he threw one of the apples that lay upon the table at him, and hit him, and then looked about for his sword.

But Aristophanes, one of his life-guards, had hid that out of the way, and others came about him and besought him, but in vain; for, breaking from them, he called out aloud to his guards in the Macedonian language, which was a certain sign of some great disturbance in him, and commanded a trumpeter to sound, giving him a blow with his clenched fist for not instantly obeying him; though afterwards the same man was commended for disobeying an order which would have put the whole army into tumult and confusion. Clitus still refusing to yield, was with much trouble forced by his friends out of the room. But he came in again immediately at another door, very irreverently and confidently singing the verses out of Euripides's *Andromache*,—

“In Greece, alas! how ill things ordered are!”

Upon this, at last, Alexander, snatching a spear from one of the soldiers, met Clitus as he was coming forward and was putting by the curtain that hung before the door, and ran him through the body. He fell at once with a cry and a groan. Upon which the king's anger immediately vanishing, he came perfectly to himself, and when he saw his friends about him all in a profound silence, he pulled the spear out of the dead body, and would have thrust it into his own throat, if the guards had not held his hands, and by main force carried him away into his chamber, where all that night and the next day he wept bitterly, till being quite spent with lamenting and exclaiming, he lay as it were speechless, only fetching deep sighs.

His friends apprehending some harm from his silence, broke into the room, but he took no notice of what any of them said, till Aristander putting him in mind of the vision he had seen concerning Clitus, and the prodigy that followed, as if all had come to pass by an unavoidable fatality, he then seemed to moderate his grief. They now brought Callisthenes, the philosopher, who was the near friend of Aristotle, and Anaxarchus of Abdera, to him. Callisthenes used moral language, and gentle and soothing means, hoping to find access for words of reason, and get a hold upon the passion.

But Anaxarchus, who had always taken a course of his own in philosophy, and had a name for despising and slighting his contemporaries, as soon as he came in, cried aloud, “Is this the Alexander whom the whole world looks to, lying here weeping like a slave, for fear of the censure and reproach of men, to whom he himself ought to be a law and measure of equity, if he would use the right his conquests have given him as supreme lord and governor of all, and not be the victim of a vain and idle opinion? Do not you know,” said he, “that Jupiter is represented to have Justice and Law on each hand of him, to signify that all the actions of a conqueror are lawful and just?”

With these and the like speeches, Anaxarchus indeed allayed the king's grief, but withal corrupted his character, rendering him more audacious and lawless than he had been. Nor did he fail these means to insinuate himself into his favour, and to make Callisthenes's company, which at all times, because of his austerity, was not very acceptable; more uneasy and disagreeable to him.

Excerpt from Plutarch, *The Lives of the Noble Grecians and Romans*, trans. John Dryden, rev. Arthur Hugh Clough (New York: Modern Library, 1864).

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“With these and the like speeches, Anaxarchus indeed allayed the king's grief, but withal corrupted his character, rendering him more audacious and lawless than he had been.”

Questions

1. In the opening paragraphs, what rationale does Plutarch give for writing “lives” rather than “histories”? What is he aiming to expose or record for future generations? How does his approach differ from typical methods of recording history?
 2. In the following paragraphs, consider some of the factors that built up to the murder. What is the significance of the Grecian fruit incident for both Alexander and Clitus? What is the role of superstition? Of the hard drinking following the evil omens? Of the ridicule between the “young Turks” and the “old guard?” What part does anger play in this build-up?
 3. To what is Clitus referring when he speaks of those who “would not scruple to bow the knee” to Alexander? Why does this comment incite Alexander to anger? In his anger, what does he do? How often is your anger tied to feelings of guilt or the need to defend yourself?
 4. Aristophanes, one of Alexander’s guards, had already hidden his sword out of the way. What does this gesture imply about Alexander’s past handling of anger? What does Aristophanes’ treatment of his trumpeter indicate about his own anger? In general, how did anger contribute to the chaos of the situation?
 5. Left without his sword, how does Alexander finally kill Clitus? Why didn’t the guard’s hiding of Alexander’s sword prevent the murder? When have you seen anger’s “inventiveness” displayed in your own life or in your circle?
 6. What happens to the king’s anger once he has killed Clitus? For how long does he experience the satisfaction of having “avenged” himself? What do you think lay behind the king’s subsequent desire to kill himself? his weeping through the night?
 7. How do Aristander, Callisthenes, and Anaxarchus each try to rationalize Alexander’s explosive anger? Why is Anarchus the most successful? What factors make acts of anger particularly easy to justify?
 8. Why might such rage as Alexander’s be called “blind”? What consequences of his behavior did he not foresee?
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MARTIN LUTHER KING, JR.

Martin Luther King, Jr. (1925–1968) was a civil rights leader, pastor, writer, and Nobel Laureate. The son and grandson of Baptist ministers, King was born in Atlanta and later graduated from Morehouse College in 1951. He earned a Ph.D. from Boston University in 1955. King was fundamentally shaped by his faith in Jesus Christ and his church background, but was also helped by the life and teaching of Mahatma Gandhi.

In 1955 King led a historic black boycott of Montgomery's bus system. In 1957 he organized the Southern Christian Leadership Conference as the basis of a new civil rights movement based on nonviolence. Over the next eleven years, he led many protests throughout the South. He was arrested and jailed frequently, his house was burned three times, and he was stabbed once.

King's historic speech, "I have a dream," at the civil rights rally on August 28, 1963 in Washington, D.C., has come to epitomize the civil rights movement at its crescendo. He was given the Nobel Peace Prize the next year, at age thirty-five the youngest person to receive it. In 1968 he was murdered in Memphis, Tennessee, most likely by a white man.

King's message grows in large part from the substance and style of traditional black preaching. The following passage, from a different speech, is therefore not a rhetorical, religious flourish to grace an otherwise secular, political message. It is the very heart of his call to justice and reconciliation.

Loving Your Enemies

Probably no admonition of Jesus has been more difficult to follow than the command to "love your enemies." Some men have sincerely felt that its actual practice is not possible. It is easy, they say, to love those who love you, but how can one love those who openly and insidiously seek to defeat you? Others, like the philosopher Nietzsche, contend that Jesus' exhortation to love one's enemies is testimony to the fact that the Christian ethic is designed for the weak and cowardly, and not for the strong and courageous. Jesus, they say, was an impractical idealist.

In spite of these insistent questions and persistent objections, this command of Jesus challenges us with new urgency. Upheaval after upheaval has reminded us that modern man is traveling along a road called hate, in a journey that will bring us to destruction and damnation. Far from being the pious injunction of a Utopian dreamer, the command to love one's enemy is an absolute necessity for our survival. Love even for enemies is the key to the solution of the problems of our world. Jesus is not an impractical idealist: he is the practical realist.

I am certain that Jesus understood the difficulty inherent in the act of loving one's enemy. He never joined the ranks of those who talk glibly about the easiness of the moral life. He realized that every genuine expression of love grows out of a consistent and total surrender to God. So when Jesus said "Love your enemy," he was not unmindful of its stringent qualities. Yet he meant every word of it. Our responsibility as Christians is to discover the meaning of this command and seek passionately to live it out in our daily lives. . . .

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Let us move now from the practical *how* to the theoretical *why*: *Why should we love our enemies?* The first reason is fairly obvious. Returning hate for hate multiplies hate, adding deeper darkness to a night already devoid of stars. . . .

Another reason why we must love our enemies is that hate scars the soul and distorts the personality. . . .

“Love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity.”

A third reason why we should love our enemies is that love is the only force capable of transforming an enemy into a friend. We never get rid of an enemy by meeting hate with hate; we get rid of an enemy by getting rid of enmity. By its very nature, hate destroys and tears down; by its very nature, love creates and builds up. Love transforms with redemptive power.

Lincoln tried love and left for all history a magnificent drama of reconciliation. When he was campaigning for the presidency one of his arch-enemies was a man named Stanton. For some reason Stanton hated Lincoln. He used every ounce of his energy to degrade him in the eyes of the public. So deep rooted was Stanton’s hate for Lincoln that he uttered unkind words about his physical appearance, and sought to embarrass him at every point with the bitterest diatribes. But in spite of this Lincoln was elected President of the United States.

Then came the period when he had to select his cabinet which would consist of the persons who would be his most intimate associates in implementing his program. He started choosing men here and there for the various secretaryships. The day finally came for Lincoln to select a man to fill the all-important post of Secretary of War. Can you imagine whom Lincoln chose to fill this post? None other than the man named Stanton. There was an immediate uproar in the inner circle when the news began to spread. Adviser after adviser was heard saying, “Mr. President, you are making a mistake. Do you know this man Stanton? Are you familiar with all of the ugly things he said about you? He is your enemy. He will seek to sabotage your program. Have you thought this through, Mr. President?” Mr. Lincoln’s answer was terse and to the point: “Yes, I know Mr. Stanton. I am aware of all the terrible things he has said about me. But after looking over the nation, I find he is the best man for the job.”

So Stanton became Abraham Lincoln’s Secretary of War and rendered an invaluable service to his nation and his President. Not many years later Lincoln was assassinated. Many laudable things were said about him. Even today millions of people still adore him as the greatest of all Americans. H. G. Wells selected him as one of the six great men of history. But of all the great statements made about Abraham Lincoln, the words of Stanton remain among the greatest. Standing near the dead body of the man he once hated, Stanton referred to him as one of the greatest men that ever lived and said “he now belongs to the ages.”

If Lincoln had hated Stanton both men would have gone to their graves as bitter enemies. But through the power of love Lincoln transformed an enemy into a friend. It was this same attitude that made it possible for Lincoln to speak a kind word about the South during the Civil War, when feeling was most bitter. Asked by a shocked bystander how he, could do this, Lincoln said, “Madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?” This is the power of redemptive love.

“Madam, do I not destroy my enemies when I make them my friends?”

We must hasten to say that these are not the ultimate reasons why we should love our enemies. An even more basic reason why we are commanded to love is expressed explicitly in Jesus’ words, “Love your enemies . . . *that ye may be children of your Father*

which is in heaven.” We are called to this difficult task in order to realize a unique relationship with God. We are potential sons of God. Through love that potentiality becomes actuality. We must love our enemies, because only by loving them can we know God and experience the beauty of his holiness. . . .

Of course, this is not *practical*. Life is a matter of getting even, of hitting back, of dog eat dog. Am I saying that Jesus commands us to love those who hurt and oppress us? Do I sound like most preachers—idealistic and impractical? Maybe in some distant Utopia, you say, that idea will work, but not in the hard, cold world in which we live.

My friends, we have followed the so-called practical way for too long a time now, and it has led inexorably to deeper confusion and chaos. Time is cluttered with the wreckage of communities which surrendered to hatred and violence. For the salvation of our nation and the salvation of mankind, we must follow another way. This does not mean that we abandon our righteous efforts. With every ounce of our energy we must continue to rid this nation of the incubus of segregation. But we shall not in the process relinquish our privilege and our obligation to love. While abhorring segregation, we shall love the segregationist. This is the only way to create the beloved community.

To our most bitter opponents we say: “We shall match your capacity to inflict suffering by our capacity to endure suffering. We shall meet your physical force with soul force. Do to us what you will, and we shall continue to love you. We cannot in all good conscience obey your unjust laws, because non-co-operation with evil is as much a moral obligation as is co-operation with good. Throw us in jail, and we shall still love you. Send your hooded perpetrators of violence into our community at the midnight hour and beat us and leave us half dead, and we shall still love you. But be ye assured that we will wear you down by our capacity to suffer. One day we shall win freedom, but not only for ourselves. We shall so appeal to your heart and conscience that we shall win you in the process, and our victory will be a double victory.”

Love is the most durable power in the world. This creative force, so beautifully exemplified in the life of our Christ, is the most potent instrument available in mankind’s quest for peace and security. Napoleon Bonaparte, the great military genius, looking back over his years of conquest, is reported to have said: “Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and I have built great empires. But upon what did they depend? They depended on force. But centuries ago Jesus started an empire that was built on love, and even to this day millions will die for him.” Who can doubt the veracity of these words. The great military leaders of the past have gone, and their empires have crumbled and burned to ashes. But the empire of Jesus, built solidly and majestically on the foundation of love, is still growing. . . .

Jesus is eternally right. History is replete with the bleached bones of nations that refused to listen to him. May we in the twentieth century hear and follow his words—before it is too late. May we solemnly realize that we shall never be true sons of our heavenly Father until we love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us.

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Questions

1. In the opening paragraph, what two criticisms does King cite of Jesus' command to "love your enemies"? Which of the two is the strongest? Why? What is the most prevalent objection to "loving your enemies" in today's world?
 2. What three answers does King give to the question of why we should love our enemies? Which do you find the most persuasive? Why? Which of the three reasons have you seen "fleshed out"? Describe the situation.
 3. What is your reaction to the story of Lincoln and Stanton? What risk was Lincoln taking in choosing Stanton as his Secretary of War? Why do you think he took this risk anyway? What was the result? Do you know an example of "enemies transformed into friends" by love?
 4. What is the ultimate reason for loving our enemies, according to King? Is this reason strictly about private spirituality or does it have wider, societal implications? If so, what are they?
 5. King says that loving our enemies is both "our privilege and our obligation." How is it a privilege? Can you give examples? How is it an obligation? To whom is this obligation owed?
 6. Read the third to last paragraph. How do you feel when you read King's examples of violence and persecution being met with love? In the modern world, where is such love needed? What might be the result if such love were offered instead of hatred or anger?
 7. What did Napoleon say distinguished Jesus' empire from those of Alexander, Caesar, Charlemagne, and himself? Why do you think the power of love would endure beyond the power of force?
 8. How does Martin Luther King, Jr.'s position differ from most activists crusading for justice and reform?
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