

## “Divine Dawali”

OCTOBER 30, 2016

I want to preach this morning on the upcoming election. The New England divines who more or less founded our faith all preached regularly on the state of national and global politics; it's a well-established tradition. Don't worry, I won't endorse any candidates and threaten our 501 (c) 3 status. Moreover, I'm going to preach on the election twice, but intend to approach the subject differently each time. This morning's approach is the roundabout way: via Hindu mythology. My intention is to use one popular Hindu myth as a *lens* through which to get a better handle on our political situation. In other words, I want to offer this morning a *mythic analysis* of our current national and global political situation and to do so in metaphorical language and imagery found in the Dawali myth.

Dawali is an annual Hindu festival that, this year, is celebrated on October 30<sup>th</sup>—*today*. On Diwali Indians across the subcontinent make and light beautifully colored lanterns, put them all around their yards and houses, and also set them afloat down the Ganges River as part of their celebration.

The idea behind Dawali is to reenact and commemorate the mythic triumph of Prince *Rama*, the Indian Lord of Light, over *Ravana*, the god of Illusion. That is, the triumph of Light over Darkness and of Order over Disorder. The age-old legend being reenacted goes like this: Rama's father, the King, gets drunk one night and in a rage banishes Rama and his lovely wife, *Sita*, from the capital. For the next fourteen years they wander through the forests of the south, the Land of Illusion. Throughout this time Rama goes hunting daily with his bow and arrows while Sita keeps their camp. Whenever the prince left to go hunting he'd draw a wide circle around the camp and warn his bride not to venture beyond it. This was the circle of concentration or place of yoga: the *mandala*.

But one day a visitor came in a wonderful flying machine: Ravana, the Lord of Darkness or Illusion. Quickly he takes the form of a deer and leads Rama off in pursuit. After leading Rama far away from the mandala circle, Ravana again changes his form, becoming a poor mendicant begging for alms. Approaching the camp, he cleverly shames Sita into venturing outside the circle. (It happens to be very bad form in India to ignore a beggar, so Sita was easily tricked into disobeying Rama's order and leaving the mandala.)

Once Sita leaves, of course (*i.e.*, once she loses her concentration), the Illusion God kidnaps her and runs off to his stronghold on the island of Ceylon. Immediately Rama senses that something is wrong. He runs back to their campsite, but it's already too late. The whole area is empty and still. He cries. But before long he regains his composure and sets off on a long quest to find his partner and bring her home.

In his epic search Rama meets many allies and many distractions, but eventually he connects with *Hanuman*, the leader of the Monkey Kingdom (and symbol of our primal, animal nature—if, like our hero, you want to break through illusion and back into the

circle of awareness, *start* by trusting your instincts, your intuitive animal nature, not your disembodied head, to lead the way...). Quickly Hanuman and Rama become allies. The Monkey King sends off thousands of his little primate subjects in every direction to search for Princess Sita. Before long all the monkeys return—except for those who’d been sent toward Ceylon. So it was that Rama, Hanuman and the remaining monkey army, figuring that that meant Sita was on Ceylon, set off to find her.

The ensuing battle was horrific; pure carnage. Ravana, you see, this Prince of Illusion, is one of those strange mythological beasts like the *Hydra* of the Greeks. He has ten heads and many arms. And also like the Hydra, every time one of his heads or limbs gets cut off, two grow in its place. *For this is the main quality of illusion: the more caught up in it one gets, the more consumptive and self-destroying it becomes....* Well, against such overwhelming odds, Rama and Hanuman were losing and losing badly, until fortunately (and in the nick of time) the other gods intervened. Ravana and his allies were defeated and put to death.

The holiday of Dawali, then, celebrates this cosmic victory of Rama over Ravana and his and Sita’s return to the capital in central India: it’s about *the re-enthronement of Light*—the god of Light—and the defeat of Illusion.

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Now to truly understand this story one has to realize that, as in all myth, *all the different parts of the story are all happening all at once, all the time.*

- The King is drunk.
- Illusion is calling us outside the circle of concentration.
- Our animal nature is trying to connect with our higher Self in the service of truth.
- Light is battling Darkness.
- And truth—Light—is being re-enthroned.

All this is happening all at once all the time. Or, as the late Joseph Campbell put it, “The latest incarnation of Oedipus, the continued romance of Beauty and the Beast, stands this afternoon on the corner of 42<sup>nd</sup> Street and 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue, waiting for the traffic light to change.”

Like Beauty and the Beast, like Oedipus, and like much of the Bible, Dawali is a *myth*; an imagery with which we make sense of the world; an elaborate, lyrical series of metaphors. A sort of collective, cultural *dream* offering insight into what our life here on earth is all about. I realize well enough that there are people who dismiss our dreams as well as most of our myths as nonsense or airy nothing, and would also dismiss most dreamers as fools.

And yet... we all have our dreams, no matter who we are.... We all envision a future by dreaming about it; and it is my contention that often it’s the anti-dream, anti-myth, so-called “realists” whose own dreams about our future—though unrecognized as such—are truly the most dangerous. I refer to the dreams of *neocons* and their allies in the defense

and intelligence community: *the dreams of the NATIONAL SECURITY STATE and the WAR ON TERROR*. Keep in mind the Dawali myth, because the illusory dreams of the National Security State and the War on Terror are precisely what Diwali is all about.

Now it happens that, cosmologically, the Hindus believe that the universe goes in 8,640,000,000-year cycles: 4,320,000,000 years of day followed by 4,320,000,000 years of night. And that as we near the end of each cycle, or *Day of Brahma*, things begin to degenerate badly. They further believe that we are very near the end of a cycle right now. In fact, in our present day and age, things have degenerated so badly that Ravana, this god of Illusion, wears the mantle of great authority and all the trappings of respectability. So that in our day and age we have people seeking high office who (with careful scrutiny) can be recognized as crooks, illusionists, and con men.

I have been involved in theater most of my life, both as an actor and as an audience member. Meanwhile I'm professionally involved in designing and creating ritual worship services every Sunday morning—it's a big part of my job. So I'm a serious student of both forms: myth & ritual *and* theater. It is my observation that, essentially, the function of myth and ritual is to *strip away illusion* and to reveal, through the use of metaphor, imagery, and narrative, the Really Real. Theater, on the other hand, *creates illusion*. That's its purpose and design, its passion for smoke and mirrors. *Myth and Ritual strip away illusion. Drama creates it.*

Nowadays, much of the news coming out of Washington is more theater than fact. The GOP candidate for President already has a star on the Hollywood Walk of Fame. Another star belongs to former President Reagan; trained as an actor, Reagan gets a lot of credit for turning illusion-creation into a Washington D.C. way of life. But neither he nor the Republicans were the first to try this kind of thing. Basically they're just good at pulling it off. Oliver Stone's recent movie "Snowden" and Laura Poiras's documentary "CitizenFour" both declare that governments are lying to citizens everywhere—and do their best to document it. Claims I first recall hearing in another documentary film from the 1970s, "I.F. Stone's Journal," about the dogged efforts of the late Pulitzer Prize-winning journalist Isidor Stone to reveal and document Johnson Administration malfeasance during the Viet Nam War. The opening words of that documentary are chilling: "All governments lie to their people." All governments, whether ancient or modern, democratic or totalitarian. Stone's journalistic efforts went on to substantiate his charge with half a dozen movie clips showing cabinet secretaries Rusk and McNamara engaged in deliberate, documented lying to the American people. Lies that were uncovered only through painstaking journalistic research and later confirmed in *The Pentagon Papers*.

It was I.F. Stone's point that *all governments lie*, not only Lyndon Johnson's...or George W. Bush's. In his final report on the Iran-Contra Affair Special Prosecutor Lawrence Walsh named both Presidents Reagan *and* George H. W. Bush as having been fully aware of the whole operation *and the cover-up!* Millions of American dollars, unaccounted for and beyond public review, scrutiny, or control, diverted to fund an illegal war—international terrorism of our own—against the peasants of Central America. In El

Salvador military units trained by military and National Security personnel at Ft. Benning, GA are implicated in the assassination of Archbishop Oscar Romero, the El Mozote massacre of 900 civilians, and the abduction, rape, and murder of four American churchwomen.

I wonder how many people know that many of the villains involved in the Iran-Contra scandal (people like Elliot Abrams and John Negroponte) and their neocon compatriots working in the George W. Bush administration, pretty much launched the War on Terror.

Distrust and resentment of Secretary Clinton's leadership at the Department of State has been picked up on by Mr. Trump—to powerful effect. But it's not only Hillary; our government has been lying about its foreign policy for years, misleading the people with appeals to patriotism and the spreading of democracy, while theatrically distracting them from what they're really doing: enforcing global corporate dominion. The trade deals—NAFTA and the rest—help enforce that power. In his book *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* John Perkins, a former respected member of the international banking community, describes how as a highly paid professional he helped the U.S. cheat poor countries around the globe out of trillions of dollars by lending them more money than they could possibly repay and then taking over their economies by privatizing public assets that had been used as collateral. Perkins writes,

The book was [to be] dedicated to the presidents of two countries, men who had been my clients whom I respected and thought of as kindred spirits - Jaime Roldós, president of Ecuador, and Omar Torrijos, president of Panama. Both had just died in fiery crashes. Their deaths were not accidental. They were assassinated because they opposed that fraternity of corporate, government, and banking heads whose goal is global empire. We Economic Hit Men failed to bring Roldós and Torrijos around, and the other type of hit men, the CIA-sanctioned jackals who were always right behind us, stepped in.<sup>1</sup>

Critics of the intelligence community have long contended that the institutional secrecy these agencies operate under allows them too much latitude, and too little oversight. Indeed, the Pike and Church Committee hearings of the 1970s revealed broad-based abuses of the intelligence community, including CIA surveillance of legal American political groups, and CIA sponsored mind-control experiments performed on unwilling subjects. Congressional oversight of the intelligence community was increased and under President Carter the CIA was forced to institute modest reforms.

The old hands of the Agency, who formerly had at their disposal almost unlimited "Black Budget" funds for covert operations, were suddenly forced into retirement, or forced into

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<sup>1</sup> Perkins, John. *Confessions of an Economic Hit Man* (Berrett-Koehler Publishers, Inc., San Francisco, 2004) p. *ix*.

compliance with the new guidelines, causing the secret cells of the good-old-boy networks to bury themselves—and their illegal activities—even deeper.

It is this element, birthed in the hysteria of the Cold War, legitimized by the paranoia of the National Security state and more recently by the War on Terror, and *nurtured by the politics of greed*, which has buried itself in the core of American politics.

As long-time Army Criminal Investigator Gene Wheaton defines it, these people are "an elite, very clandestine, very covert group within the intelligence community.... The CIA...is just the lightning rod for the people who really control things...—the little conspiratorial cliques within the government."

These “little conspiratorial cliques”—with the same players going back to the Bay of Pigs, Laos, Nicaragua, the Soviet war in Afghanistan, the Iraq fiasco and now the interminable American war in Afghanistan—have been involved for decades in everything from drug and gun-running, to assassinations, covert warfare, and outright terrorism. Following the GOP victory in 2000 they were openly in charge; men like Elliot Abrams and John Negroponte, ring leaders of Iran-Contra, suddenly establishing and directing policies that established America’s so-called War on Terror: rendition, torture, the smearing of anyone who dares question such policies, and most of all: ***war without end***. *Unending imperial war*: foisted on the American public by “fixed” intelligence and waged by men who’ve spent their whole lives as “black ops” and dirty tricks apparatchiks of the National Security state. We’re *told* that this is a war to spread democracy, but such declarations are, indeed, nothing more than Ravana at work, from the Bay of Pigs to Iran-Contra to Baghdad, Libya, Mosul, and—forever it now seems—Kabul. President Obama has reduced America’s overt war making, but his broadly expanded use of armed drones continue brutally enforcing our imperial power.

Indeed, the whole War on Terror, as I see it, is essentially distraction—a cleverly designed illusion to lead Rama after a false target and out of the mandala, the sacred place of concentration, so that Sita and all the rest of us can be kidnapped.

- Kidnapped to an island: an island of celebrity-addled, addictive *and heartless* consumerism—and
- Cut off from the real world of nature, life, and human interrelationship.

The real issue, what’s *really* going on in the world is growing global *corporate dominion*—essentially a return to *feudalism* with corporations replacing the feudal lords and working people the world over cast in the role of vassals. A New World Order supported by *our* CIA and enforced by people who believe dirty tricks and “black ops” are perfectly okay so long as it increases corporate hegemony and pays good dividends.

The American military budget is now more than all the other military budgets in the world combined. For a brief period once the Cold War ended—and along with it any conceivable reason to maintain this trillion dollar idiocy—National Security mythologists didn’t know what to do. They resolved the quandary by scaring us that Third World hooligans like Saddam Hussein, North Korea’s Kim Jong II, and now (the current

nemesis) ISIS are so threatening to our vaulted National Security that we have to keep it all going, forever and ever, *ad nauseam*, and heaven help anyone who questions it. They used to call you a communist for even bringing this kind of issue up. Now they'll imply you're a dupe of jihadists.

God help us!

Which is what it'll take, by the way (according to the Dawali myth). But—also according to the myth—*that won't happen until we first help ourselves*. By recognizing the terrible danger in these nightmare dreams of “National Security” and the “War on Terror.” Dreams that have turned our “land of the free” into one in which an all-but-secret oligarchy determines policy serving multinational corporate interests, paid for by the dwindling middle class and the poor. Their dreams have turned the “home of the brave” into one of wholesale, indiscriminate, non-warranted surveillance of everyone. All to maintain a global empire that doesn't—and never will—serve human need, nor our true national interest.

Ultimately it all comes down to this: the National Security/War on Terror myth is founded on the illusion of *security through force*. Security through force is

- a lie;
- an illusion;
- one based on fear and shame.

A trick of Ravana's, perhaps the greatest of all his tricks. It is an illusion that led us into war with a hydra, so that for forty-five years every Soviet arms increase required further increases on our part to stay ahead. And now that Russia's in shambles, to stay ahead of Iranian ayatollahs, ISIS rebels in Syria, and the ever-intractable Taliban. (And people act dismayed when you say that myth is alive in the modern world. My God! If the War on Terror and the situation in Afghanistan aren't battles with a hydra, I don't know what is!)

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It is this security-through-force illusion that informs American adventurism across the globe. In the words of Daniel Ellsberg, himself a former CIA operative who leaked *The Pentagon Papers* to the press,

In Vietnam there was a war inside a country in which one side, not the other, was entirely paid, recruited, equipped, trained, and directed by foreigners. It was not a civil war. That was the real secret of *The Pentagon Papers*. We Americans were not on the wrong side in Vietnam; we *were* the wrong side.

And all too often, we're on the wrong side—*are* the wrong side—in all these imperial conflicts: El Salvador or Nicaragua, Columbia, Iraq, and now among the mountain tribes of central Asia. The saddest aspect of all this is that so little of it is really news. We all know it. David Gergen, advisor to four Presidents, even admitted as much in a *Sunday New York Times Magazine* article. Nine-tenths of what came out of his office while in the

White House, he admitted, “had nothing to do with anything that was real.” It was all packaging, advertising, and illusion-making. All the magic of Ravana. And none of it, I might add, more ungrounded in reality than the National Security State’s War on Terror.

The only real security is the *inner security* available through personal realization of one’s inner Self, and of one’s purposes and responsibilities to life, and the pursuit of brother/sisterhood. None of which can be found through bombing insurgents, or torturing captives, or smearing critics. But through yoga; i.e., through yoking or linking one’s inner Self and one’s concentration to the Really Real...

- To Light,
- To loving community,
- And to the dispelling of illusion.

For it is only when we get in touch with the true sources of power within us that we can begin to creatively go into the battle:

- By hooking up with our intuitive inner nature
- And setting out to recapture our lost wife (or nourishing, creative aspect) on the island of her captivity.

The battle ahead is bound to be horrific; indeed, it already *is* horrific all around us and within each one of us, every day. But as the recently sainted Mother Teresa, herself of India, often used to say, “God didn’t call us to be successful, but to be faithful.” In other words (and in more humanistic terms) if we want to turn this corporate feudalism/Iraq/CIA/War on Terror thing around we’ve got to be willing to go to the wall. To give it your all! *Because there’s always more to reality than meets the eye.* The gods *can* intervene. But they won’t—and never do—until we’ve given our utmost. As Rama and Hanuman were willing to do. As Jesus instructed the Rich Man to do. As our patriot forebears did—against great odds—to establish our free, open, democratic way of life *now so desperately imperiled.* As Abraham Lincoln was willing to do to preserve it. And as Daniel Ellsberg was willing to do, as well.

And as we, too, must be willing to do. To see through the monster illusion of National Security and the War on Terror that we may regain and reinvigorate our only real security—that found in our imperiled constitutional rights and gained through the thoughtful exercise of our freedom to be whole and ourselves, within the circle of open, concentrated fellowship...

so that Light and Truth

may once again return to the capital, and  
enthroned as Lord.

Amen.

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