

## How Shall We Have No More Putins?

Is it possible to have no more Putins? It's necessary, isn't it? We don't know yet whether we will get through this crisis without the nuclear button being pushed in one way or another. And, even if we do make it through this time, what will happen when there is another demagogue just a little more unhinged than Putin in Russia or another country that has nuclear weapons?

Are there people crazy enough to self-destruct? Unfortunately, we see them all the time, in school massacres in the US, in the terrorists who use themselves as bomb vehicles. When will one of these obtain access to nuclear weapons?

It is possible to understand the circumstances that produced Putin, Trump, Hitler, Stalin, and so many other demagogues throughout history, and also the pedagogical beliefs that create a population that allows them to come to power.

In 1987, through deep listening practices, modeled by Joanna Macy, I began to become aware of the broader extent of childhood inner wounds from physical, emotional, and sexual abuse, non-abuse related childhood wounds, and the consequent impact of the resultant imbedded stories of these inner wounds on people's lives. This led to my understanding where such expressions as, "I don't deserve, I'm not (good) enough, I'm bad, I'm not safe, nothing will ever work out, etc." come from, and I resolved to find a way to address these wound stories. My search did not lead me to anything existent at the time that seemed adequate to address the depth of these wounds. This was before trauma work was much known.

A kind of revelation manifested after some years of reflection, and I began to lead what I called Self Worth workshops. I heard people's wound stories, their locked away shameful secrets and deepest fears. I fully opened myself each time and shared their pain from a place of deep empathy. The workshops clearly helped people heal themselves, and I began to train others to lead them.

I had no idea that in finding a way to help heal inner wounds, I would find what I have come to believe is the key to answering my own life-long core questions: What fills so many of us with fear, lack of self-esteem, self-loathing and mistrust? What produces the anger and hatred that leads us to hurt others, ourselves, and just about everything around us? What creates the impulse in so many men to be violent? Why do so many of us manage to go through life without feeling love and concern for the well-being of others? What happens to us that allows us to run businesses and governments without caring about the harm we do to others and to our planet?

An important answer I have learned from listening to people's stories is that we almost all come into the world innocent, without sin or guilt, regardless of place, race, culture, religion, or class. We come into the world ready to trust and ready to love and be loved. It is being deeply-wounded in childhood, generally by severe physical and emotional abuse, and, sometimes, by external circumstances, that people lose their capacity to love and to trust, and, all too frequently, wind up being moved by fear, hate, anger and rage, that can so often lead to misogyny, racism, xenophobia, war, and extreme violence.

I came to understand the compelling relationship between physical and emotional punishment of children and hateful anger, greed, xenophobia, violence, and war. What a revelation it was after so many years to discover the key I had been looking for in a place where I did not expect to find it! This recognition changed the focus of my life. I came to know at a core and gut level that if we are ever to have a peaceful world, it will be through ending child abuse and recognizing the integrity and personhood of children.

Will it be challenging to bring an end to child abuse? Of course, but once we come to understand that if we do not do so, we will sooner or later, wipe ourselves off the planet, we will be able to see that egregious corporal punishment of children is a planetary scourge that must be eliminated. A form of cancer on the human condition, that requires as much focus and attention as we have recently brought to dealing with Covid, to addressing this issue in every way possible.

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