

A THIN LINE

J.B. Drori

A thin line separates evil from good.
It extends from a bottomless canyon
To the roof of the world,
Past Orion and the Butterfly supernova,
To where time and space are one,
Where tomorrow is yesterday.

Some claim that the line is hard as flint.
Others vow it is soft as a morning mist.
Many swear it is smooth as glass,
Revealing nothing,
While more teach it is an ancient parchment,
Thick with wisdom, the source of right and wrong.

They argue that man, like Janus,
Is the double faced progenitor of malice and compassion.
He destroys the cities he builds,
Decimates the edifices he erects,
And strangles the creatures he conceives.
He loves and hates at the same instant.

Driven by subliminal fear of his powers,
He unleashes fury at his own image – his kin,
Leaving death and havoc in his wake.
Yet, like a ray of light in the night,
Sacrifices of self and deeds of loving-kindness
Permeate the fabric of human interactions.

The Talmud asserts - wondrous is the ecstasy
Of saving a life, like saving a whole world,
Sanctifying humans' right to life.

Life's blessings are serene,
Unfolding endlessly over eons,
Replicating generations of sentient marvels.

Let then the word go forth to all.
“Banish fear from your hearts and learn to love yourselves
As you would your brothers and sisters. Selah.”

The idea for this poem occurred to me on a morning walk while musing about a news headline of another suicide attack in a Baghdad market in which three score individuals were killed. Humans have engaged in incessant mutual killings from time immemorial. Although man has come a long way since the Stone Age, this aspect of settling differences between us without recourse to violence eludes us.

The first stanza depicts the images of the separation between good and evil.

Continuing, my ponderings focused on what must be obvious to all, i.e., fear and distrust between humans. What prevents us from trusting one another since we are all kin, after all? Is it the fear of what we ourselves are capable of – and thus the other fellow looms as a threat? Is pre-empting and killing first the only course of action?

That's what gave rise to the next three stanzas.

Stanzas five, six and seven were the immediate counterpoint that emerged as I continued to cogitate.

I thought of the adage of “Love your neighbor as yourself.” Known for approximately four millennia, why has it failed? Is there another way?

Stanza eight is the poet's query of what might result if this concept were turned on its head.

Perhaps we have to learn to love ourselves – not for ourselves - but in order to learn to love others.

We must first learn to banish the fear in our hearts, grow to love ourselves, and thereby learn to love our brothers and sisters.

Selah, from Psalms, means - may it be so for evermore.

That was how I constructed my poem.

Thank you,

J.B. Drori