

# Hope in These Times

By David Spangler

I went out for a walk around my neighborhood Wednesday morning. The sun was still shining brightly above me, and the sky was as blue as ever, dotted with familiar white clouds. The evergreen trees lining the streets were as green as they were yesterday while on their deciduous companions, the leaves were turning bright colors or had already fallen onto the ground. In short, everything looked normal for a November morning.

This was reassuring, as a revolution had occurred the previous night. Against all expectations except his and his staff's, Donald Trump was elected the 45th President of the United States. This was the 57th Presidential election since the founding of the American Republic (the numbers don't match since Presidents have been re-elected, and one, Gerald Ford, was never elected at all). For fifty-seven times, the winners have felt like a new world was beginning and the losers have felt like a world was ending. This was probably never more true than last night, given that all the polls said unequivocally that Hillary Clinton would win and be the first woman President in American history.

But as my walk showed me, the world hadn't ended when Wisconsin was declared for Trump, giving him the necessary 270 Electoral votes and a bit more. Indeed, while half the American population, terrified of a Trump Presidency, fell into depression and disbelief, the other half, equally if not more terrified of another Clinton in the White House, rejoiced and were relieved. Whichever half you fell into, the world itself continued as before.

Not that things haven't changed. The Supreme Court may become more conservative. The rights of women and the LGBT community may be curtailed under a Republican controlled government. Immigrants and minorities may have reasons to be worried. The divisiveness in the country may become worse. All politicians lie to some extent; it's built into the job description. But Trump raised lying to levels unseen in recent elections; the fact that he won now validates this behavior for future politicians and their campaigns. Why bother with facts when the reality we make up out of whole cloth will get us elected? Already our country, influenced by the Internet where anything can be said and veracity is irrelevant, is drifting away from a regard for the truth. Trump's campaign, fueled by hyperpartisan websites, may accelerate this, to the detriment of trust and unity in our society.

Or none of these things may happen. Trump may turn out to be a terrific President, contrary to expectations. He may be just what the country needs. After all, Nixon, the arch-anticommunist, was the one to open the door to relationships with communist China, something no liberal President could have done. Maybe Trump will be the one to convince his followers that climate change is a real threat and mobilize government resources to deal with it.

Trump is a volatile personality, as much at odds with the Republican establishment he now heads up as he is with the Democratic establishment. There is no law that says he cannot rise to the occasion, if given a chance, and honor the office to which he has been elected in ways that truly benefit the country and break up the partisan gridlock and elitism of Washington D. C. in so doing.

No, the world did not end last night, but we are in new and unknown territory, for who knows what Trump will do as President. He may not know himself. It's a scary place to be, I admit. But...

In Lorian and in the teachings of Incarnational Spirituality, there is a concept called "Fiery Hope." "This is not a wishy-washy, "Gee, I wish that such and such would happen," kind of hope. Rather, it's the hope that keeps the door firmly open to new possibilities. It's fiery because it's passionate and strong, giving a light that shows

the way to those possibilities. Where depression and despair constrict our thinking and close down possibilities, hope expands our awareness so that we can see new opportunities. It's a hope that acknowledges that the world is constantly renewing itself, and we can renew ourselves right along with it. In other words, it's a hope that doesn't see the world as ending but rather sees it as being newly born each day, unfolding opportunities that were not apparent before.

Thinking of a new Trump Presidency, I don't "hope" that he will be a good Chief Executive for the country (while also holding the expectation that he won't). I want to keep open the possibility that he will grow into the job and be better than anyone expects. I want to offer him that possibility in my thinking and not burden him with projections of any negative emotions I may feel.

But-and this is the source of Fiery Hope-I realize that in my own life, his election has not closed the doors of my own growth. My life has not become lessened overnight. Rather it is as open to new potentials and possibilities of creativity and service as it has ever been. And I'm sure this is true for you, too.

What do we do now?

I believe the Soul of America is struggling right now to rise to its full spiritual potential to be a source of benefit and blessing to a world that is rapidly changing and in some ways becoming more challenging. It can't do so when it is riven with division in its own house, when it is in fact at least two countries, if not more, within its borders, countries that at the moment don't trust or appreciate each other. However we name those "countries"-urban/rural, men/women, educated/less educated, religious/secular, coastal/heartland, rich/poor, white/people of color-we cannot be one nation forging unity from creative diversity if these divisions continue to widen and deepen. In some ways the recent election has contributed to these splits, but in a more important way, it has brought them forcefully to our national attention so that we can take action to heal them.

There is nothing new about this. It's been the challenge of the United States ever since its founding, brought into stark relief during the Civil War, but continuing ever since. So what we do now is what we have always done: draw on our courage, our hope, our creative intelligence, our wisdom, and our love to build the unity that has always been the dream and the promise of this nation.

We are the servants of our country's soul-a soul embracing all who come to its Light-and as such, we stand for justice and liberty for all. We oppose darkness, oppression, and anything that diminishes the promise of each individual, no matter where that danger comes from. We rise above preconceptions, stereotypes, and lies to see each other as clearly, as accurately, as we can and to proclaim truth as firmly as we can wherever and whenever it is in jeopardy. We honor and appreciate our differences and draw on them for new insights and deeper understanding.

And we never, never doubt our ability-and that of our countrymen and indeed of all humans-to rise to the noblest levels of our nature and act from our loving power to create wholeness if given a chance and the encouragement to do so. And when people don't do this and act from hurtful motives, we stand ready to protect those who may otherwise be harmed.

The election was a shock, I admit. Like millions of others, I fully expected Hillary Clinton to be taking the oath of office next January. But that it will be Donald Trump doing so instead has not brought the world to an end. It has not diminished the spirit within each of us. It has not destroyed the promise of the United States. Life is as vital and wondrous as ever, and no matter who is President, we can still choose to participate in its vitality

and its wonder in all the days ahead, celebrating the country and the Earth that we love and doing our best as always to ensure that hope, wholeness and blessing manifest in our world.