Columns
Ministry



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An arctic blast froze the landscape in a good part of the United States this mid-January.

Coupled with the darkness of the morning here in the Midwest, it invited hibernation. Stay asleep and wake up when spring thaws the frozen ground.

In the flurry of all the executive orders and the constant refrain of the MAGA doctrine in the media, there is an attraction to hibernate. President Donald Trump promised "shock and awe" and it is succeeding. It is succeeding to distract us from other significant and underlying issues facing us as a nation.

We need to ponder, what are our rights and responsibilities as citizens in a democracy? What responsibilities are ours as the wealthiest country in a world where 8.5% of our global community live on less than $2.15 a day? What are the values and virtues we hold that shape the character of who we are as a nation and are worthy of our aspirations? How do we want to move forward in ways that generate unity rather than division?

We can't focus on those and other critical questions if we are reacting to *everything, everywhere, all at once*. Perhaps we do need a time of hibernation. Not the falling asleep hibernation but rather the withdrawing from the "noise" all around us to enter the cave of silence and contemplation so as to listen to the stirrings of our heart preparing us to come back out and respond in new ways to each other and the issues that divide us.



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In preparation, there are a couple of things that might be helpful.

First, to remember that regardless of how one voted, each of us is part of less than 50% of the population. We are either in the 49.9% of the voting population or in the 48.4%. The margin of victory was only 1.5%. It is important to remember this is not a landslide election. This is not a mandate. Among those of us who voted and those of us who did not vote, there is a broad political spectrum with many of us crossing over party lines on specific issues. The us vs. them is not quite so stark as some would want us to believe.

Second, to face into, so as to let go of, the feeling that we are going backward. The memorial of former President Jimmy Carter might provide some perspective. He was not a Washington insider. He was a very Southern gentleman, and during his presidency in 1977-1981, he addressed and worked for civil rights, women's rights, human rights, peace, energy efficiency and renewable energy.

Many laws were enacted during Carter's term even as he was ridiculed and dismissed within the political establishment. Much of what he believed and stood for was overturned by his successor, former President Ronald Reagan. Yet those persons with the consciousness that understood these issues as key to who we are as a nation did not stop believing that and the commitment to these issues has continued to develop in many more people throughout the years.

At Carter's memorial, the entourage of current and former presidents and vice presidents, representing close to 40 years, embodied the realization that critical shifts take time. The trajectory of evolution is never in a straight line nor is it a pendulum swing. There are mutations, extinctions and emergence in a constant flow of change.

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However, evolution always seeks further interiority/self-manifestation, differentiation/diversity, and communion/mutuality. These are considered to be evolution's essential characteristics or values. Our human actions — personal and political — throughout time can be evaluated in relation to how harmonious they are with the evolutionary direction and activity of the universe. The energy of the universe continues to flow in this direction and will not be stopped. [*Editor's note: This and the following paragraphs reflect insights found in* The Universe Story*, by Brian Swimme and Thomas Berry, and in* Journey-Faith in an Entangled World *by Nancy Sylvester.*]

Freed of thinking that this election was a mandate and that we are going backward, the contemplative time in the "cave" can deepen and strengthen our capacity to respond out of love to what is going on in the world.

Fr. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, a Jesuit paleontologist and mystic, understood there was a directionality in evolution toward oneness. He believed that love was the most transformative force on Earth and wrote about harnessing for God the energies of love and in so doing transforming the entire human community. He believed that a greater, stronger, more inclusive love for all people and all of life must be an integral part of the further evolution of the human species. This is a deepening of what Jesus taught: to love one's neighbor as oneself regardless of faith, gender, economic class or cultural bias.

This kind of hibernation is not falling asleep. It is taking time to deepen one's contemplative practice to awaken and "take a long loving look at the real" so that we can emerge to join with others to address our political reality. We will move from reacting to responding with "skillful means" out of our magnetic center of divine love, imagining new responses to this time we are in. New responses to our questions, especially in how we want to move forward together in ways that are in harmony with evolution's values of diversity, interiority and especially communion.

This is a time to hibernate to awaken and act!