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Psychospiritual Reflections on the 2016 US Elections

By Eric Leskowitz. MD, Alfred Heath. MA, Debra Greene. PhD, Larry Burk. MD, Judy Tsafir. MD, and Kimberly Flemke, PhD

Apart from war itself (and competitive sports), there may be no collective activity that elicits such deeply felt emotions from a nation's populace as politics in general and elections in particular. Who rises to the surface as a candidate, what demographics they appeal to, how they generate waves of enthusiasm – these are all topics that have been addressed by American political scientists and campaign strategists for decades. And America has certainly had its share of politicians who have captivated different factions of our society, whether it be the racially divisive message of George Wallace in the '60s, the antiwar movement's McCarthy and McGovern and RFK, or the inclusiveness of Obama's 2008 campaign. This year's prolonged presidential primary season has seen some particularly strong emotions being evoked, and no shortage of attempts to psychologize and analyze the various candidates.

For example, the neuroscience perspective views the campaign as a struggle between the limbic system and the frontal lobes – will America's media-provoked reactions of fear and anger color how we make our decisions, or will people be able to process their emotions and think from their cortex before acting? The psychodynamically inclined ask what impact the childhood experiences of Donald Trump (the son of a millionaire) or Ted Cruz (the son of a minister) had on their political styles. Along these lines, a group of holistically-oriented psychotherapist colleagues has recently been discussing politics, but from a perspective not usually seen in mainstream discourse. The following brief commentaries are offered to illustrate several approaches to a holistic political psychology.

The most important common denominator among these views is the idea that even "external" events like political careers and election campaigns may reflect deeper internal processes that are going on in the individual citizens who comprise the country as a whole. We share a collective consciousness at some level, whether it's the manufactured consensus of advertising and the mass media, or the archetypal Collective Unconscious of Carl Jung, or the energetic resonance explored by the Global Coherence Initiative. Individual candidates and issues emerge from, and are manifestations of, this collective matrix. It's worth mentioning that the unexpected popularity of Donald Trump was the initial trigger to these conversations, so these comments (written in early April, 2016) tend to focus on his story. But they also touch on the metaphysical aspects of Bernie Sanders, Ronald Reagan and Hillary Clinton. Here, then, are some alternative perspectives on Campaign 2016.

Owning our Collective Shadow, by Alfred Heath, MA

The laws of metaphysics are universal and unbiased. We tend to forget that when we are faced with challenges in our personal lives, including the challenge of understanding *all* of the collective dynamics behind Donald Trump's ascent in the 2016 US elections. Reactions to him seem polarized: appealing to the white working class men and traditionalist women in America who feel threatened and unheard by both parties; an anathema to the progressive-minded world citizen.

Mr. Trump is the only one speaking *directly* to those Americans who feel as though minorities and women are "taking over"; to those who have lost their jobs to outsourcing overseas and see undocumented illegal aliens working for less while their working class towns slowly die; and to those who feel under attack by social change and terrorist threats from "outsiders".

To other groups, Trump's position represents a direct threat to all that the socially progressive-minded who embrace social changes have been fighting for: equality for women and minority groups who've historically occupied a second-class status or were even ostracized from society. These include African Americans, Asians, Native Americans, Muslim Americans; illegally residing immigrants; and lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender Americans.

Much of what we see in the reactions to Trump's candidacy appears to derive from a part, deep-down in each of us, that is longing for the security of familiarity and the relative simplicity of what used to be. It is natural to reminisce about an idealized past and fear the unknowns of further change.

One could look at these polarized positions psychologically as expressions of America's collective ego and shadow. In Jungian psychology, the shadow represents those aspects of personality that are repressed in order to form an acceptable persona (the politically correct, progressive, multicultural modern American). The influence of progressive views and political correctness has become our contemporary "righteousness," leaving behind the worldview of a "middle America" working class that is threatened by loss of economic opportunity; by technology; by departures from its traditional social and religious mores; and by hostile foreign influences.

If this is indeed what is happening in America, then we need to look inward for an understanding of the Trump phenomenon, because this external political phenomenon is a reflection of our own collective polarized internal shadow, one which we must find a way to accept, understand, forgive within ourselves, and integrate to become truly whole. Wholeness will never be found in *either* polarity.

I was reminded of the concept of the collective shadow as I wrote this just after Easter Week, the archetypal celebration of the integration and transcendence of ego and shadow. In this paradigm, forgiving our inner shadow is the essential alchemical process for realizing wholeness.

So what might progressives do regarding "The Donald"? Apart from not voting for him, they might address their inner fear of and anger at his supporters, seeking to appreciate, if not to agree with, the Trump perspective. And on the other side, in order to access the gold in the shadow, Trump's supporters could instead emphasize the logic behind their legitimate traditionalist and blue collar issues of political abandonment and threats to livelihood, security, and social mores.

Trying to shout down the shadow only makes it stronger. When we own our shadow, we grow in spiritual power and a deeper understanding of those we designate as our "enemies" and of ourselves.

Ronald Reagan's Symbolic Symptoms, by Larry Burk, MD

I always think we get exactly the president we deserve/attract, someone who represents the current cultural zeitgeist, often an accurate depiction of our societal shadow.

Here are some thoughts on Ronald Reagan, from my 1996 letter to the editor of the Duke University Chronicle, that illustrate how the medical symptoms of a nation's leader can reflect deep and unacknowledged issues running through the society as a whole.

Ronald Reagan's illnesses can be seen as metaphors for our society's ills, and listing them in chronological order adds additional symbolic meanings. The assassination attempt on Reagan at the beginning of the '80s was an early manifestation of the country's struggle with escalating violence. Skin cancer in the well-tanned actor was diagnosed at a time of increasing concern over the environmental and health effects of ozone depletion. His colon cancer was a metaphor for the retentive greed promoted by the Republican administration in the '80s. The head injury resulting from the fall of the cowboy president from a horse foreshadowed the crash of the Wild West economy at the end of the decade. His memory of the events of the '80s then began to fail due to Alzheimer's disease at the time of the 1994 election, when we as a nation also forgot the lessons of the previous decade. Let us hope that the 1996 election results do not make "the sunset of his life" an ironic prophecy of the sunset of our country.

Twenty years later, I can't help observing that Nancy Reagan's recent passing, from congestive heart failure, occurs at a time when voters in the primaries are expressing unprecedented hostility, a known risk factor for heart disease, toward the establishment candidates through their support of Trump and Sanders.

A Metaphysicist's Guide to Donald Trump, by Debra Greene, PhD

I have a hard time accepting Donald Trump as a presidential candidate. In fact, I have witnessed his rise in popularity with a variety of reactions ranging from denial and rationalization to outrage and despair. The only thing that has brought me some semblance of acceptance is a metaphysical understanding that I'd like to share with you.

First let's identify some metaphysical principles from the perspective of energy medicine, in which subtle energies such as thoughts, emotions and consciousness are used for therapeutic purposes. Then we'll apply those principles to Trump's candidacy. At the end I'll offer a solution. In the interest of time, I don't go into detail on the principles. For more information I invite you to research online or check out my book *Endless Energy: The Essential Guide to Energy Health*.

Ten Pertinent Principles:

1. Everything in existence is energy vibrating at different frequencies.
2. When the energy vibration slows down enough, things show up on the physical plane.
3. There are other planes of existence in addition to the physical plane (e.g. etheric, emotional/astral, mental and spiritual).
4. These other planes (in #3 above) are non-physical yet they greatly impact the physical.
5. The spectrum of planes of existence (in #2 and #3 above) represent a frequency continuum ranging from lower/slower to higher/faster frequencies.
6. We humans occupy these multiple planes of existence simultaneously.
7. These various planes are mediated, traversed and "held together" by a high frequency energy called consciousness.

8. Although at the physical level we appear separate and distinct, on the nonphysical planes we are all connected: we are all one.

9. The physical level is a manifestation of what's happening on the nonphysical levels. This means that the physical level, from the perspective of humans, is like the display monitor or stage where these other energies play out.

10. If anything shows up "out there" in the physical world, it already exists in here, inside each of us as well, because we are all individuated units of essential oneness.

What does all this mean with regard to Donald Trump? The bottom line is: the current manifestation of Mr. Trump is reflection of what is going on inside every one of us, whether we want to admit it or not.

Donald Trump is a reflection of the collective consciousness of which we are all part and to which we actively contribute. If he suddenly disappeared tomorrow, there would be another similar person to replace him because the "problem" of Donald Trump is a problem of consciousness.

We all have an inner Donald Trump inside of us and this is our opportunity to become aware of that, to deal with those shadow aspects that we project onto him (e.g. bully, braggart, bigot, and other uncomfortable aspects), bring them into the light of consciousness and stop projecting them outward. When these aspects are truly healed and when that healing on an individual level is reflected in the collective - when we have reached critical mass - then Mr. Trump no longer has to play the role he's been playing.

In other words, it's a mirror trick.

Here's an example: Mr. Trump wants to build a wall to keep out those he believes are harmful. Who has never done this? I don't mean who has not built a physical wall, but rather, who has not had the experience of wanting to wall-out someone we believe to be harmful? Whether it's our ex, a neighborhood thief or a global terrorist doesn't matter. In this instance we may even be wanting to wall out Mr. Trump. Maybe we refuse to watch his presentations or maybe we put up psychological barriers to accepting what he is proposing. The energy is the same.

In another example, Mr. Trump appears to be very angry and often anger masks underlying fear. He is frequently focused on external threats such as terrorists and immigrants. Certainly there are aspects of most people's lives where we are driven by fear. We may not share the exact same objects of our fears but, again, these represent a common fear-frequency. Maybe you are not afraid of Muslims, Blacks and Mexicans, but who or what are you afraid of?

The extreme popularity of Donald Trump on the political scene is an invitation to each of us who is uncomfortable with Mr. Trump to do the deep inner work of clarifying and cleaning up our own consciousness structures. Only in that way will future Donald Trumps be able to show up differently or, perhaps, not show up at all.

An Astrological View of Bernie Sanders, by Judy Tsafir, MD

Early in the morning on April 7, 2016, at 4:24 AM Eastern Standard time there was a new moon in the sign of Aries, the first sign of the zodiac. A new moon occurs when the Sun and the Moon join together at the same point in the sky. The Sun is associated with the Masculine, and the Moon with the Feminine. When they couple once a month at the time of the new moon, their union plants the seed which begins the new cycle which comes to fruition at the time of the full moon.

When the new moon is in Aries, it is especially symbolic of new beginnings. Aries is the most passionate of the fire signs, associated with the archetypes of the leader and pioneer, and the qualities of courage, independence, and authenticity.

Bernie Sanders has the Moon in Aries in his natal chart, in exactly the same point in the sky as the current new Moon. Never has there been a politician in my lifetime who so embodies the admirable qualities of Aries: courage, independence, authenticity and willingness to fight for his convictions on behalf of the collective well being. Sanders has the unequivocal support of those who care about leaving a habitable world for future generations and who recognize the urgency of the moment in this regard.

This particular new moon features the planet Uranus in very close proximity to the Sun and the Moon. The presence of Uranus lends the flavors of revolution and the unexpected to this fiery moon. The planet Pluto in the sign of Capricorn is also strongly expressed, suggesting a transformation of structures such as governments and institutions, and the crumbling of those which have outlived their usefulness and no longer serve.

The tension between the Uranian and Plutonian archetypes being felt now was also expressed during the '60s. Both were eras of intense cultural, political and social transformation. Then there was a focus on gender equality in the Women's Movement, and now we focus on the rights of women, and homosexual and transgender individuals, (with a major party poised to nominate its first woman for president). Then we saw the Civil Rights Movement and now we have Black Lives Matter. Then we had the first celebration of Earth Day and now there is an increased recognition of an impending ecologic catastrophe.

In this presidential election, the conflict between these astrological archetypes is represented by the heated battle which is being waged between the old and the new, between the established powers and a new paradigm of governance. The old is characterized by Donald Trump's championing of American protectionism and exceptionalism, and the new by a global consciousness reflected in Bernie Sanders' policies to foster the highest good of not only the USA, but of the planet as a whole. An astrological perspective can offer guidance and a cosmic perspective in this era of overwhelming, enormous, and rapid change.

Bernie's momentum and global coherence, by Eric Leskowitz, MD

Recent research into the nature of consciousness shows that it is far more broadly interactive than is generally appreciated. Peoples' thoughts and emotions affect those who are near them, as well as, surprisingly, those who are separated by considerable distances. These resonant interactions have been used to explain such interactive phenomena from the world of competitive sports as team chemistry and fan energy, and they also apply to the similarly competitive group processes of politics. For example, positive chemistry arises naturally on sporting teams when all teammates are on the same supportive emotional wavelength. A stadium filled with enthusiastic fans generates a coherent energy field that entrains their beloved players' energies and enhances their home team's performance, leading to the so-called home field advantage. In the same way, recent massive and boisterous rallies for Bernie Sanders and Donald Trump magnify the fans' (ie, voters') enthusiasm level and add to their candidates' psychological momentum. Hillary Clinton has many supporters, of course, but they don't gravitate to such large venues to the same extent.

Research on heart rate variability at the Institute of HeartMath shows that the emotion which most powerfully facilitates this interconnection is appreciation, apparently by expanding the heart's electromagnetic field to encompass others in one larger group field. The emotion that breaks this

bond most quickly is fear, because it contracts and isolates us into our own individual shells. With this in mind, consider the psychological focus of our two main political parties. When Republicans emphasize threats to our security, both internal and external, and the need for greater military might to solve these problems, they are bonding together by uniting against common enemies. The Democrats, especially the Sanders wing, emphasize cooperation for the greater social good and use negotiation to find common ground with adversaries – these partisans bond over their commonalities rather than their differences from an enemy, an Other. In this way, the 2016 campaign becomes yet another replay of the eternal dance between fear and hope.

This Democratic/Republican split also mirrors the process of personal growth. Personal spiritual evolution requires the release of old reaction habits that originated to protect the ego from perceived threats. But as our sense of self matures, we are motivated less by fear and survival worries, and more by caring for, and appreciation of, the greater good. And just as individuals move along this spectrum in the course of their own personal development, so do nations. In that sense, the 2016 election finds America at a tipping point. Even though historically reliable political motivators (fear of Communists, of foreigners, of terrorists, etc.) are broadcast 24/7 by the mainstream corporate media, a new wave of hope and a sense of global community are being transmitted by social media and the Internet.

So what emotion, what candidate, does any individual voter resonate with? Trump's supporters are resonating with the fears triggered by an uncertain survival-of-the fittest economy and an atmosphere of cultural discord. They invoke the same aggressive words and physical responses that the American government often uses to resolve political conflicts around the world. But many Americans sense that a different way is possible. Younger voters are refusing to resonate with fear, and Bernie Sanders' national poll numbers continue to rise as he continues to draw large, stadium-filling crowds. These younger voters are not interested in a corporate-friendly, centrist Democrat (even a female one), and favor Bernie over Hillary or Trump by large margins. I believe that change in the national demographic is why Democrats are currently outpolling Republicans in head-to-head Presidential and state-wide matchups.

Similarly, across the pond, another rumped, white-haired, seventy-something politician (Jeremy Corbyn) is re-energizing Britain's Labour Party by reconnecting to its roots with the working class rather than with the corporate types of Tony Blair's New Labour. In other words, "Feeling the Bern" is just one facet of a global resonance pattern that is entraining millions of people around the world to choose hope over fear, cooperation over competition. If this momentum continues to grow, we might all wake up one morning to find that the dream of a peaceful world has become our new reality.

Politics and the Law of Attraction, by Kimberly Flemke, PhD

I recently was out canvassing for Bernie in Philadelphia and felt very encouraged, as signs for him were everywhere throughout the city. Yet, two days later I was devastated to see that Hillary beat Bernie in PA by quite a large margin. Even more disturbing was seeing Trump's landslide in the state, winning every single county!

As I sat with the disbelief and heartache over such outcomes, I had a moment of clarity. I thought of the metaphysical Law of Attraction, where, on an energetic level, "like attracts like", manifesting externally what is deeply held within a person's heart and mind. Then I thought about our current political scene. What seems clearly evident is that a growing number of Americans are fed up with the corruption of politics and want a new type of government that truly represents the interests of the people. Both Trump and Sanders appeal to those yearnings, but in different ways.

Each candidate holds their own unique energetic vibration or quality. So do voters, and they look for a candidate who matches them. Many people want to be free from political deception and oppression, and that fuels the momentum of Trump and Sanders. But perhaps a vibration full of integrity and a passion for social justice, as Bernie seems to hold, is not yet able to entrain full resonance with the masses, many of whom are focused on resentments and anger of the sort that Trump gives voice to.

Many millennials, not yet jaded and still hopeful for the future, resonate with the optimism of Bernie's message. It's as though each generation comes in at a higher vibration or clarity of consciousness than their predecessors: the WWII generation patriotically supported our military might while the boomers were anti-war protesters and the millennials are pro-peace activists – another example of the generational shift in focus. So Hillary Clinton's centrist approach sells best with older voters, while Bernie's hopefulness connects more fully with young idealists and Trump attracts the disaffected of all ages. I think it is safe to say that whomever we eventually wind up with as President will be a reflection of the country's overall level of consciousness.

Note: The IJHC is a 501c3 organization and hence prohibited from taking stands in support of or opposition to any candidate or political party. But we can and do present analyses of positions taken by political candidates and also allow our writers and readers to explain why they've decided to support candidate x or y and analyze the psychological issues for individuals and for groups of people that are reflected in and stimulated by the elections.

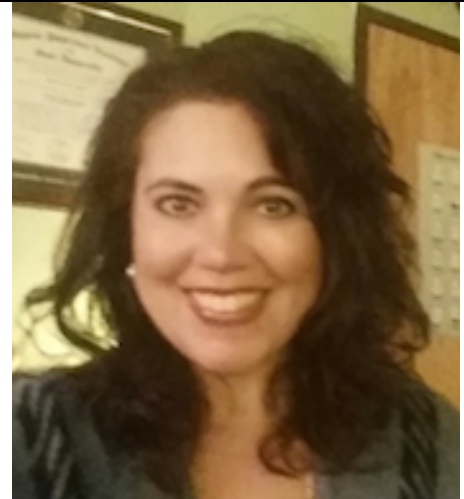
Larry Burk, MD is a holistic radiologist who researches the symbolism of medical symptoms. Dr. Burk is co-founder of Duke Integrative Medicine, and Consulting Associate Professor of Radiology at Duke University Medical Center. He specializes in MRI, EFT, hypnosis and dreamwork, and is the author of *Let Magic Happen: Adventures in Healing with a Holistic Radiologist*.

www.letmagichappen.com



Kimberly Flemke, PhD, LMFT, is a licensed marriage and family therapist, specializing in trauma, couple therapy and sex therapy. In addition, she is a Reiki master, working with the subtle energetic systems of individuals to help clear blockages of energy that may keep individuals stuck in their lives and in their relationships. She currently serves as adjunct faculty at Drexel University in the Complementary and Integrative Therapies program.

<http://www.drkimberlyflemke.com>



Debra Greene PhD is an author, practitioner and online educator who has lectured widely on energy medicine and the multidimensional nature of human beings. She is the founder of the online learning program *Energy Mastery: Self-Actualization through the Art and Science of Applied Energetics*, author of *Endless Energy: The Essential Guide to Energy Health*.

<http://www.DebraGreene.com>



Alfred Heath, MA is a Licensed Professional Counselor, Certified Hypnotherapist and NLP practitioner, Be Set Free Fast™ Master Trainer, certified Quantum Entrainment® Facilitator, and intention-focused energy healing innovator. He has been active in energy healing and counseling since 1992. Alfred maintains a phone and internet-based part-time private practice near Peterborough in the United Kingdom.

<http://www.alfredheath.com>



Eric Leskowitz, MD, ABHM is the Director of the Integrative Medicine Task Force at Spaulding Rehabilitation Hospital in Boston. He is on the faculty of the Department of Psychiatry at Harvard Medical School, and writes and lectures widely on energy medicine. He has edited three books, most recently *Sports, Energy and Consciousness: Awakening Human Potential through Sport*, and produced a PBS documentary on group energies.

<http://www.TheJoyOfSoxMovie.com>



Judy Tsafir, MD is a board certified adult and child psychiatrist and psychoanalyst with a private practice of Holistic Psychiatry in Newton, MA. She is trained in the GAPS Healing Protocol for treatment of the gut/brain axis, and is an Evolutionary Astrologer, Reiki Master and Shamanic practitioner. Her holistic approach often enables patients to wean from psychiatric medications or to reduce the dosages. She has a blog on her website where she writes about all of these matters.

<http://www.JudyTsafirMD.com>



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Phone (609) 714-1885 Fax (519) 265-0746
Email: center@ijhc.org Website: <http://www.ijhc.org>
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