

## The Hidden Will of Us All

by Donne Hayden

A couple of days ago, I was greeted by the following email from MoveOn.org:

*By Tuesday, the oil spill in the Gulf will have been gushing out for 50 days straight. It might already be five times larger than the Exxon Valdez, and now BP says that the spill probably won't be stopped until August.<sup>1</sup>*

*. . . On Tuesday, across the country, Oil Spill Vigils will be held around the country to “demand an end to our dependence on oil, call for stepped-up efforts to end the spill, and stand in solidarity with all those affected in the Gulf.*

I respond to the urgency in this message, and I agree that we should “demand an end to our dependence on oil,” and I have no trouble “standing in solidarity with all those affected in the Gulf,” i.e., acknowledging that though they suffer under the first wave of this tragedy, it ultimately affects us all. But I am troubled by the middle part of this message which continues what seems to me a distraction from the real issue, and that is “calling for stepped-up efforts to end the spill,” implying that somehow, someone is not trying hard enough. If they were, the problem would be fixed by now. We are 21<sup>st</sup> century humans, after all—we have solutions to everything. Or do we? Perhaps this oil spill is a sign that we don't.

A couple of weeks ago I read this poem in meeting for worship—I was talking about children in a different context, but the poem came back to me as I considered the American response to the oil spill in the Gulf. It's called "God Signs to Us."

God signs to us  
     we cannot read  
 She shouts  
     we take cover  
 She shrugs  
     and trains leave  
         the tracks

Our schedules! we moan  
 Our loved ones

God is fed up  
 All the oceans she gave us  
 All the fields  
 All the acres of steep seedful forests  
 And we did what  
     Invented the Great Chain  
         of Being and  
 the chain saw  
 Invented sin

God sees us now  
     gorging ourselves &  
     starving our neighbors  
     starving ourselves &  
     storing our grain

& She says  
 I've had it  
     you cast your trash  
     upon the waters—  
     it's rolling in

You stuck your fine fine finger  
 into the mystery of life  
     to find death

& you did  
 you learned how to end

the world  
in nothing flat

Now you come crying  
to your mommy  
Send us a miracle  
Prove that you exist

Look at your hand, I say  
Listen to your sacred heart  
Do *you* have to haul the tide in  
sweeten the berries on the vine

I set you down  
a miracle among miracles  
You want more  
It's your turn  
You show me.

—George Ella Lyon

We cast our oil upon the waters—it's rolling in.

This oil spill in the Gulf is big. We can avoid thinking about it, but the ramifications will go on in spite of our wish that it would just go away. I find myself frustrated, however, not by BP's efforts that haven't yet worked, not by the government which somehow did not manage to foresee such a devastating spill and regulate to prevent it, but by the voices blaming the oil companies and the government for something we ALL are responsible for. We demand that *someone* be to blame for the oil spill—someone *else*, not us; BP and/or the government must bear the burden of guilt which we will not accept. But we are not blameless, you and I. Perhaps I should speak for myself. I don't live in Louisiana, or drive a Hummer, or work for an oil company or the government, yet how can I, as one who lives and consumes in the U.S., separate myself from this tragedy? I participate in the demand for oil that led to off-shore drilling. Even in my little high-mileage car—my life is built on oil. I am *part* of what caused BP

to drill for oil off the Louisiana coast. For me to expect the government or the oil company to fix something *in nature* that has been broken to meet my own demand for a certain lifestyle is the ultimate lunacy, not to mention hypocrisy. This is the kind of hypocrisy Jesus warns against when he says, *“Why do you see the speck in your neighbor’s eye, but do not notice the log in your own eye? ... You hypocrite, first take the log out of your own eye, and then you will see clearly to take the speck out of your neighbor’s eye.”* (Mt. 7:3 & 5)

Or, as Texas blues songwriter Delbert McClinton put it, “Before you accuse me, take a look at yourself.”

The 19<sup>th</sup> century Sufi poet, Kalil Gibran, wrote of this separation between the blamed and the blaming: “Oftentimes have I heard you speak of one who commits a wrong as though he were not one of you, but a stranger unto you and an intruder upon your world.” From what I hear on the news, the American public and media treat those we want to blame as though they are not human like ourselves, but “intruders” in our world. When the CEO of BP commented that no one wants this crisis over more than BP does, and he added, “I want my life back,” the media (speaking for us?) spouted outrage. What about all the little people on the coast who want *their* lives back! The BP CEO was showing his own humanity, which we will not stand for—if he is only human, like us, then *he and his company may not have the power to stop the gush of oil beneath the sea!* President Obama doesn’t show enough emotion, the media complains—where are his feelings! He can’t be human if he’s not weeping and gnashing his teeth. If he is slow in responding, measured in what he says and does at a time like this, he must not be human! If he is human, like us, and genuinely feels powerless to harness Mother Nature unleashed, then he may not be able to *fix* the leaking wound in Gulf of Mexico.

But my friends, the sun rises on the evil and on the good, the rain falls on the just and on the unjust, the oil washes up on the beaches of oil company executives and shrimp boat owners alike. This oil spill in the Gulf is *not* a political issue, but an issue of our stewardship of the earth. As Kahlil Gibran phrased it:

*But I say that even as the holy and the righteous cannot rise beyond the highest which is in each one of you,  
So the wicked and the weak cannot fall lower than the lowest which is in you also.  
And as a single leaf turns not yellow but with the silent knowledge of the whole tree,  
So the wrong-doer cannot do wrong without the hidden will of you all.*

The “hidden will of us all” to use oil and gas to power our cars and maintain our consumer lifestyle has led our country to this point of crisis in nature. Another way to relate this to ourselves is in these lines from George Fox’s *Journal*:

*I saw that it was fallen men and women  
who get up into Scriptures and find fault,  
who cry out against Cain, Esau, and Judas,  
and other wicked men of former times,  
but do not see the nature of Cain, of  
Esau, of Judas in themselves. These say  
it is they, they, they, that were bad people.  
But when we come, by the Light and Spirit  
of Truth, to see into ourselves, then we  
come to say, “I, I, I, I myself have  
been Ishmael, Esau! I have closed my eyes,  
stopped my ears, hardened my heart! I was  
dull of hearing, I hated the Light. I rebelled  
against it. I quenched the Spirit  
and vexed and grieved it. I walked spitefully  
against the grace of God, turned it  
into wantonness. I resisted the Holy Spirit.  
I got the form of Godliness, but turned  
against the power. I, the ravening wolf,  
the well without water, tree without fruit.  
It is I, Lord, who have done these things.”*

He is speaking about people who accuse others of the sins of murder and treason; people who don't get it and continue to point to others who have done bad or wrong things. When we "come, by the Light and Spirit of Truth, to see into ourselves," then we must admit that we have closed our eyes, we have stopped our ears, and we have hardened our hearts against the warnings we've heard and the changes required of us to fix the problems. We Americans are the "ravening wolf, the well without water," we have led the way to unbridled consumption of earth's resources.

It is natural, perhaps, for human beings to look for a cause of events; when that cause is human, then the person either gets the credit or the blame for what happens. But rarely do we consider our own role in what happens, especially if it is something big and bad like an oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico. Rarely do we perceive it is "I" and not "they" who have done these things. Oh, I didn't *cause* the oil spill, and you didn't. But as Americans, who have for decades paid less per gallon/liter of gas than the rest of the world, we benefited from cheap oil, didn't we?

It is not in human nature to change a comfortable situation to an uncomfortable situation unless we are forced to do so. We won't move so long as nothing pinches or hurts. Regarding oil, I think we should consider ourselves pinched.

If something is broken, it can only go on so long before it stops. The American lifestyle, which we have now exported to other parts of the world, such as China and India, is based on consumption of earth's natural resources, especially oil, as though they were infinite. The system undergirding that lifestyle is broken. I suspect that here is where it stops; that this oil spill is so big that we cannot forget it by spending countless hours on Facebook, that this oil spill

is so big that we cannot continue guzzling oil as though nothing has happened. This oil spill is so big that it won't matter whose fault it is—it is the fault of all who demanded more and bigger cars and other objects made from petroleum. But assigning blame does nothing to fix the problem. So let us please get past a need to blame someone; let us please re-consider our own lifestyles. If we cannot change so that we consume fewer products made from petroleum, let us at least acknowledge our own role in the dilemma.

Let us see that it is we who have done these things, and then either work to change the problem or stop complaining that someone else is not fixing it fast enough. Let us look at our hands; let us listen to our sacred hearts.