

New Years with Yin and Yang

By Bill Kilpatrick

THIS IS THE first end-of-year editorial that I've written and many topics have swirled around in my head. Do I write a summary of the big events of the year such as the conflicts with Palestine/Hamas/Israel or Russia/Ukraine, or do I focus on wildfires and climate change, or homelessness, or inflation, or political corruption, or the woes of Donald Trump, etc? But we have all heard this and I feel like I have nothing profound to add regarding these issues, in fact, I'm not sure I have anything profound to say at all as 2023 comes to an end, but I'll give it a go anyway. There was a quote I read this year and it has been bothering me ever since I read it and it involves Adolf Hitler and his relationship with Eva Braun and the power of love to change the world for good. Love is not a word that is ever associated with Adolf Hitler, the brutal dictator of Germany who oversaw the torture and mass murder of millions of innocent people and tens-of-millions more during the Second World War, yet in Richard J. Evans' book *The Third Reich in History and Memory*, Evans analyzed the work of another author that explored the relationship between Hitler and Braun and drew some unsettling conclusions about Hitler and his often overlooked human side. The work in question is Heike B. Görtemaker's *Eva Braun: Life with Hitler* and it is, according to Evans, the first major work on Braun and her relationship with Hitler. The book is groundbreaking as it does away with many of the rumors, lies, assumptions, and conjecture surrounding Hitler, his sex life, his love life, and his ability to form, somewhat normal, human relationships with others. For example, there has been much speculation that Hitler was a sexual sadist and pervert, which is a perfectly natural conclusion based on his brutal personality and is a conclusion which causes the least cognitive dissonance because it fits our preconceived notions of someone who is a brutal, heartless, evil dictator. Not so, concluded Görtemaker, the sensational stories that were made up appear to have no evidential basis in reality, as Evans added, "Difficult though it may be to accept, it seems overwhelmingly probable that Hitler had a sex life that was conventional in every respect, except that he kept it secret. Not everything about this most evil of men was necessarily twisted or perverted." Evans further pointed out that, "If Hitler emerges from this story as a man with normal human desires for domestic bliss and sexual fulfillment does this make him seem less evil? Do we somehow need to believe that people who commit evil deeds are evil in every respect of their lives? Is it somehow more comforting for us to think that a man who deliberately causes millions of innocent people to die often in the most horrible of circumstances is in some way not really human?" Most biographers have written Hitler off as a man without a real human character, a kind of black hole at the centre of Nazism cut off from normal human emotion by his violent and alienating upbringing, incapable in adulthood of any true feelings except hatred and ambition. *Eva Braun: Life With Hitler* shows that this is too simple a view to take and for that reason it is deeply troubling to read, for if a man like Hitler was capable of ordinary human love for another person then what power does love possess? This truly is a troubling question to consider because love has been held up as the one force that can conquer evil, that can overcome hatred, and is the one force that has the power to change the world for the better, and if this is not true then what truth is worth holding onto? The Bible puts love at the forefront of change, claiming that the love of Jesus will transform the world for the better, yet the same book that claims that "Love is patient and kind; love does not envy or boast; it is not arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way; it is not irritable or resentful; it does not rejoice at wrongdoing, but rejoices with the truth," is the same book that was used to justify the Spanish Inquisition, the Crusades, slavery, residential schools, colonialism and imperialism, the genocide of Indigenous peoples, and multiple other atrocities. Donald Trump is the very antithesis of love according to the Biblical definition above, yet some people consider him a good, wholesome, and honest Christian and many people claim to love him. Despite all the songs, poems, and stories that exult love, perhaps it's not all it's cracked up to be, or could it be because we forget that love and hate are two sides of the same coin? It may make us feel better to believe that Hitler was evil and cruel in all aspects of his life and that he made the choices he did because he was purely evil, but sadly the dichotomous nature of a Hitler who could simultaneously love and hate, be kind and cruel, is an all too human condition. A recent "also me" meme that illustrates this well, describes a person who says that they love everyone and everything, but "also me" is a person who screams, curses, and attacks other people who do not drive correctly. The Story of Two Wolves further illustrates the point that we have a choice when it comes to our behaviour: "An older Cherokee man is teaching his grandson about life. 'A fight is going on inside me,' he says to the boy. 'It is a terrible fight between two wolves. One is evil. He is anger, envy, sorrow, regret, greed, selfishness, arrogance, self pity, guilt, resentment, inferiority, lies, false pride, superiority and ego. The other is good. He is love, joy, peace, hope, serenity, humility, kindness, benevolence, empathy, generosity, truth, compassion and faith. The same fight is going on inside you and every other person.' The grandson thinks about it for a minute and then asks his grandfather, 'Which wolf will win?' The old Cherokee replies, 'The one you feed.'" The Chinese symbol of the yin

and yang represents this struggle well as it states that many things that we consider opposites are also complementary, the masculine and the feminine for example, and it claims that it is important to keep them in balance for things to remain harmonious. The dark and the light exists within all of us, but it is up to us to decide which one will govern our behaviours. The comforting part is that it is a choice and it's up to us, but, in true yin and yang fashion, this is also the unsettling part, to know that good and evil is a choice. Aldous Huxley, who dedicated his life to understanding human behaviour offered this profound advice to humanity, "After 45 years of research and study, the best advice I can give people is to be a little kinder to each other." Here's to a kinder 2024.