

Time of the Wolf

The home screen on my cellphone depicts a photograph of a Gray Timber Wolf staring into the camera. Its countenance has a focus, vigilance, and a penetration that is framed in both confident and poise. Each time I see it I am reminded of my own recessed, primal aggression, a “shadow side” written about by Sheldon Kopp long ago. We all have it, no matter how evolved we each may believe we are. We share this with the animal world. And, like the wolf, we counter our shadow sides with loyalty to the social boundaries we have agreed upon.

The wolf is similar. It is socially connected and dependent on the pack. It mates for life, co-parents its young, attacks only when it or the pack is threatened and does not kill out of hatred, malice or envy. Its highest priority is the preservation of the pack. In this sense it is a very moral animal.

Yet there are lone wolves as well. They are loners, move from pack to pack, use whatever resources are available and move on. They are not loyal to or protective of the pack. They care only for themselves. They are not moral animals.

We now have the representations of lone wolves among us. They have just been given passage to the highest political offices in our land. They feign social behavior but they say and do their own thing with no responsibility about who or how they affect others. They exploit, erode and degrade the decency of their office and the pack. They attack without provocation. They believe they are outside and above the pack. They are amoral animals.

As analysts and psychotherapists we are witnesses to the denuding effect of the lone wolves on the pack, most acutely our patients. In our consulting rooms we now see the hopelessness, hatred, anxiety and fear of the future that the lone wolves have proliferated. These increased level of tensions only distract and disintegrate our patients’ ability to focus on their inner world because the lone wolves have made the outer world so frightening. We ourselves may be sometimes overwhelmed with this new deluge of affect and become weary, hopeless and sleepy. We may lose our vigilance.

We must learn from both our moral wolf brothers and sisters and thoughtfully acknowledge our shadow side, our primitive aggressive energy. We need to tap this darker energy and use it for the greater good. We can do this within our work with patients by furiously upholding our analytic ideals, including truth, curiosity, mutuality and inclusion. We must aggressively renew our commitment to doing

impeccable analytic work and in this way counter the “moral laxity” of the lone wolves who aspire to power, divisiveness, elimination of difference and irresponsibility. We must protect the pack, our patients, our families, and our communities. Perhaps now, more than ever, it is the time of the wolf.