

A False Alarm in the Era of Fake News

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EMERGENCY ALERTS

Emergency Alert

BALLISTIC MISSILE THREAT INBOUND TO HAWAII. SEEK IMMEDIATE SHELTER. THIS IS NOT A DRILL.

It was a beautiful, sunny Saturday morning in the Hawaiian Islands (2018). The Waldorf Waves outrigger paddling team was on the beach preparing to launch their canoes in a regatta with other competing high school teams. At 8:07AM an *Emergency Alert* appeared on the smart phones of everyone in the state who had signed up for this early warning system (more than a half million people) that usually sends out flash flood, high surf, earthquake and tsunami warnings. However, this morning a very different alert was sent out.

Over the past few months, different sirens were twice tested, the first time since World War II, for possible missile attacks. But no sirens accompanied the phone alert this morning, which should have tipped-off people that something about the phoned Emergency Alert was not quite right. Nevertheless, panic struck: people phoned their loved ones to say goodbye, screamed or cried on the streets, sped through red traffic lights in their cars, and the Waldorf Waves at the direction of their coaches gathered together under cover of a nearby building.

Because the alert was mistakenly sent out during a test of the alert system it was known immediately by the Hawaii Emergency Management Agency (HEMA) that it was in error. However, because this was a new type of alert there was no text-page setup to recall such an alert, to announce a false alarm. Although different government officials were sending out text messages and HEMA posted on its Facebook and Twitter sites that it was a false alarm it took 38 minutes before the Emergency Alert was actually cancelled.

A quite different and unexpected fallout has followed this event. The HEMA employee who pressed the button has received death threats, increased sales of firearms has occurred, and the governor of Hawaii is not likely to be reelected. The anxiety and fear that has been stirred up by a lack of true world leadership and a distrust of one's fellow human beings has only been increased by yet another "Fake News" event.

This particular Emergency Alert might just as well be called a Threshold Alert; a warning that, yes, we have indeed crossed a threshold. Rudolf Steiner mentioned numerous times that the onset of World War I could not be explained away by conventional outer causes but only by understanding that a number of European leaders had their consciousness dimmed down, dulled to the point of not being able to think clearly and responsibly about what could be done in challenging political situations. We are confronted today with tremendous political, social, financial and environmental challenges (recently extreme flooding, earthquakes and volcanic eruptions have devastated parts of Hawaii) and we struggle at this threshold to find truly human solutions.

We can not necessarily prevent our national and international leaders from slipping into a dampened consciousness but we can strive through our own inner work and our outer deeds to be alert to the signs of our time. In this era of Fake News and false media alarms we have an opportunity to practice clear and disciplined thinking, control of our will impulses, equanimity, positivity and openness, equanimity and calm discernment, as well as forgiveness. These characteristic steps (the Six Basic Exercises) along the path of self-development are contemporary humanities true Emergency Alert.



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