

The Only Dance There Is

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January 22, 2017

We really have no choice you know. Despite despair, despite whatever sense of failure or of fear makes us want to run away and hide, the sun comes up each morning insisting we get up as well to greet the day. Since the election, like many, if not all of you, I've been working my way through the tangled thicket of my emotional terrain. At first I was surprised. I felt sheepish and embarrassed. How could I, how could we, how could the polls have been so wrong? I tried to comfort those around me recalling the opening lines of Kipling's "If"

*If you can keep your head when all about you
Are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you,
But make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting,
Or being lied about, don't deal in lies,
Or being hated, don't give way to hating...you'll be a Man, my son.*

I'm drawn to that old image of emotional restraint and stoic strength that marks the essence of manhood as it is supposed to be. It infuriates my wife. In the days immediately following the election as I suppressed and compartmentalized my disappointment. Janne and virtually every other woman I know refused to relinquish the legitimate rage they felt as they came to grips with the fact that an unashamed sexual predator had been elected president of the United States.

I heard my long-departed father whispering in one ear "Don't worry," he would reassure me, "history shows the office shapes the one who holds it." While in the other ear I hear my sisters singing "Bread and Roses." *No more the drudge and idler, ten that toil while one reposes, but a sharing of life's glories—bread and roses, bread and roses.* And so I stopped listening to the news and walked away from all of the impassioned speculation as to the whys and wherefores of what

for me was a stunning defeat. I didn't want to hear it. I hungered for a deeper wisdom.

I felt trapped between two worlds. I didn't want to "keep my head" if it cost me my heart. I wanted desperately to move on, to put the election behind us and start working on winning the next one. But this election triggered something deep inside so many people that I love, so many people who let me know that they experienced my desire to move on as a betrayal of their inconsolable rage. I needed to pause and think deeply about how the election of Mr. Trump triggered memories of abuse and disregard among millions of people who gathered yesterday across the Nation and around the world to share their rage and grief and solidarity. The election was a liminal moment, a threshold moment that invited me and all of us into new ways of being we have only just begun to comprehend.

I, for one, refuse to choose between heart and mind. I want to live in the tension, release and resolution of unconditional love. I have to believe that love has everything to do with the challenge that confronts us now. It's not about winning and losing anymore (if it ever really was). What we need now goes far beyond politics, far beyond the old dualistic game. I want to believe that my tribe knows better. I want to believe that my tribe is the right tribe and that if we were in charge liberation would surely be the order of the day. But you know as well as I that any way of being in community that lacks a deep commitment not only to protect but to listen respectfully, with open hearts and curious minds to those with whom we disagree, will surely descend in the end into tyranny.

W.J.T Mitchell writes *"Hoping to challenge empty formalism, didacticism and elitism, many of us teachers believe that the shocks of awareness to which the arts give rise leave us less immersed in the everyday and more impelled to wonder and to question."* That is exactly what we need now. We need to be impelled to wonder, a gesture of the heart, and to question, a discipline of the mind. I doubt you came to church today expecting to see dancers embody the gifts and challenges of the interpersonal tensions that may well "leave us ill at ease or prod us beyond acquiescence...but also may "move us into spaces where we can envision other ways of being."

Much as we may treasure them our old assumptions no longer will suffice. We need new ways of being, together and apart, ways that help us practice what Unitarian Universalist theologian, Thandeka has named "love beyond belief." I want to challenge our assumptions for a moment. Personal agency, freedom of

expression and the rights of the individual for self-fulfillment are bedrock values for religious liberals. But could it be that our fierce commitment to these values gravitates toward social atomization and a steady breakdown of the mutuality and sturdy interdependence of communal life?

In Zia Haider Rahman's brilliant first novel In the Light of What We Know Zafar, a Bangladeshi mathematician and philosopher expresses his doubts about the well-meaning American aid workers in Kabul who are taking over from the defeated Russians:

They are the offspring of civilizations that have promoted individual rights, the rights of the self, yet establishing the limits of the private sphere not at the line where skin meets air but outside the body...into the private sphere in situations in which the private sphere is a person's tribe, which unlike his European liberal counterpart is more than himself. That's what my liberal friends have done. And I see them sitting there now. Their repugnance at the unequal treatment of women, their repugnance at the treatment of homosexuals, these could not be accepted as just that: repugnance. They cannot abide Let them be but fight their wars of reconstruction to the banner of Let him be or Let her be. They have built this monument to the West's enlightenment, and they call it human rights, and on that rock they have founded their new humanity, and in its name they act with clear conscience. Bush and the neo-cons—God bless them—might have wanted their natural resources and strategic positioning, but the liberals were always after their souls.

Admit it. We've always been after their souls. In our discomfort with all things evangelical we've displaced our fervor for personal freedom making it the National agenda only to find that many million for whom faith and family are more central than freedom have beaten back what you and I have always thought was destiny. How can we witness, how can we feel the isolation and loneliness radical individualism has produced and still imagine their tribe is entirely wrong and ours is entirely right? It is deeply troubling to have our core values called into question. The great civil rights activist and song leader Hollis Watkins, a man William Barber would call a "theo-musicologist," begins his presentations with a deceptively simple question. What is the first rule of effective community organizing? His answer? No assumptions.

Here is what I know: Win and lose will not suffice. We need to learn the alchemical art of transforming the lead of conflict into the gold of creativity. *It is*

the way you lean to me and the way I lean to you, as if we are each other's prevailing. I wish I could offer you a map. I wish I could offer you a surefire solution to the disdain and even hatred that divides us. I know that love begins with listening. I know that the edgy inspiration of the arts, those disciplines that open into freedom, are key to who it is we long to be. *This is where I want to live, writes Scottish poet Andrew Grieg, close to where the heart gives out, ruined, perfected, an empty arch against the sky where birds fly through instead of prayers while in Hoy Sound the ferry's engines thrum this life, this life, this life.*

This is where I want to live, *close to where the heart gives out, ruined, perfected,* with you and all the neighbors we have yet to know.

May it be so and Amen.