

“ELEGANT CHOICES”

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Today's loss of Justice Ginsburg makes it hard to talk about anything else. Hard to think about anything else. Hard to move past the fear that is undoubtedly setting in.

I'm still going to share some of my drash tonight. It's one about enriching our spiritual lives, about shoring up our ability to feel whole so that we can be doing this work of this world fiercely, compassionately, and not in a constant panic. –Rebbe Irwin Keller

We've got Stephen Sondheim theme going here today. Thank you Linda for the wonderful piece, you played, "Being Alive." The other piece we saw Dame Judi Dench sing, "Send in the Clowns," is from Stephen Sondheim's "A Little Night of Music." It's the story of a woman who works hard at succeeding in her career. She is a woman driven towards having it all. She is nobody's person but her own. Known to her is a young man who adores her. He loves her. He wishes only to be possessed by her. But she, driven as she is towards her image of the successful life, makes no room for him. Finally, a day comes when the young man gives up on ever having her and she realizes the loss his departure makes in her life.

If only the timing had been different. If only she had stopped long enough to really see him as he saw her. So busy was she at opening doors that she failed to see that finally the door she really wanted was the one behind which he stood. And now she must live with whatever consolation that life has in store for her Send in the clowns. Send in the thing that might make for laughter and hope, even if it isn't lasting. Send in the clowns with their exaggerated painted faces.

Has there even been a time for you in which you were so busy trying to open doors, to get at the things that would make life feel like it was altogether, pushing for it, that in that effort, you lost it? You come to the place where you

say to yourself that now you're just going to have to live with whatever consultation life has in store for you.

It's not unlike landing a good-sized fish. We become so intent on holding onto the thing that we grasp at it ever so tightly that it slips right out of your hands, over the side of the boat, and back into the water it goes. And so, we console ourselves with the story of the one that got away. Send in the clowns.

What incredible burden we place upon our lives when we do that. We in a sense do ourselves in. We begin to settle for the clown paint we see on our face when looking in the mirror. We may not be unhappy, but neither are we joyful. We may not be enraged, but neither are we at peace. We may not be depressed, but neither are we impassioned. The clowns have us singing, "Maybe next year."

What I understand about us, about what it is to be truly your human self; is that we are not ultimately, if not daily, satisfied with settling for anything less than the real self, the self that Thomas Merton, Trappist Monk, called the True Self. The real self in us that doesn't call in the clowns. It is on some level what has each of us here today, in this virtual space. It is what makes this sacred space.

Walt Whitman wrote:

"What we commonly call man – the eating , drinking, planting, counting man does not, as we know him, represent himself, but misrepresents himself. Him we do not respect. But the soul, whose organ he is, would he let it appear through his action, would make our knees bend. When it breathes through his intellect it is genius. When it breathes through his will it is virtue. When it flows through his affection, it is love.

How hard, at times, we find ourselves working to get it right as persons, of fulfilling the successful images we envision for ourselves that at some point, usually unannounced, we don't recognize who we are. We find ourselves on

the side of the door that doesn't recognize the true self, what Walt Whitman called the soul, wanting, yearning, yielding to be at work in us, in our intellect, in our will, in our affection.

When we discover we are on the side of the door that doesn't recognize who we truly are, that true, soulful, self? That's when we discover that we've actually been working against ourselves. We make ourselves sick for being ill when we're ill. We beat ourselves up if we make mistakes when we would never think of saying an unkind, corrective word to someone whom we see making that very same mistake.

I spoke with a woman once who had just attended her first Alcoholic Anonymous meeting. She told me that she was finding it difficult to begin the process of making amends with the people she had hurt in her life. I asked her if that step in the Twelve Step program didn't come further down the list, like fifth or sixth, not the very first step in the twelve. "oh!" she exclaimed with relief, "I guess you're right." She had become so intent at getting sober and spiritually healthy that she had skipped the first steps in the program that centers on self-worth and acceptance.

It is in our wanting of worth and acceptance, either by others, or ourselves, that push us towards doors we think are labeled with the word "flawless" or "faultless." When we work at being humanly flawless in our decisions, in our choices, that's when we get in our way of becoming fully human.

One of the great mysteries of life to me, that holds my attention, within myself, in others, in governments, political parties, and even in churches and congregations, is the amount of energy we will put into maintaining, justifying, where we are, or to recapture where we've been on the side of the door we are behind. All the while we tell ourselves we have no other choice. And so, call in the clowns.

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What I'm here to tell you today is that there is another way to live that makes us not flawless human beings but beings fully human. Not staying behind our doors but opening them to our true selves and in so doing, allowing not only others in but freeing us to go out. It has to do with making choices that free our souls, in Whitman's words, to bring the different parts of our lives into wholeness, into a rhythm if you will, from which the Good can flow.

Soren Kierkegaard said that when we put our attention on those choices that express the Good we are not diminished or repleted by the energy we put into those choices. He wrote:

"Only the Good is one thing in its essence and the same thing in each of its expressions. Take love as an illustration....the one who truly loves....loves with all of their love. It is wholly present in each of their expressions. They continue to give it away as a whole, yet they keep it intact as a whole, in their heart. Wonderful riches! When the miser has gathered all the world's gold in his sordidness....then he has become poor. When the lover gives away their whole love, they keep it entire...in the purity of their heart."

When we come to those times in life in which we find ourselves stuck, can't get out of the mud for all the energy we consume in justifying our being where we are or trying to do the next thing just right, just so, that's when we are called to make a choice. But it can't be any choice. It must be what Marsha Sinetar calls, an Elegant Choice.

Marsha Sinetar began her professional life as a primary teacher, moved through the ranks of public education as an English teacher, then a K-5 Principal, soon a consultant for both local and State projects, designing curriculum for individualized instruction and Mentally Gifted Minors.

In 1980 she left the public sector to start Sinetar & Associates, Inc., customizing leadership programs for senior management of multinational, Fortune 500 corporations. Concurrently she wrote over 20 books (including

children's books), and a growing number of professional Monographs and recordings.

In 2000 Sinetar redesigned her life again toward a simpler, more contemplative schedule and began a small R & D arm and Archive related to her lifelong love with what she calls "the true learning"~ actualizing the spiritual wholeness we are created to be.

She says, "For good or bad, we are defined and molded by our choices. Since only the Good is whole enough to be one thing in all its expression, by choosing elegantly (i.e. the Good) we become like that thing. The Good, through our choice, touches, enters, develops, and transforms us."

Just the other day I heard one of our members say, "From here on out I'm going to work at, take into my life, expansive compassion." I've seen them beginning to take that on, entering into them, and transforming. Becoming the expression of that choice.

How do I go about making the elegant choices? If I'm sick what elegant choice is there for me to make in that. If I'm frustrated by the relationship I am in, what is the elegant choice I am to make so that neither that person, or myself is diminished in value? If I am seeking a new direction what elegant choice must I make so that the doors I walk through will open to me what is authentic about me and not what I think others may expect from me?

To really be about those questions, we must confess that to make the elegant choices in life doesn't mean they will always be the easiest choices. They're intentional choices. Some days I believe that are usually the hardest choices. That's okay! "The elegant choice," writes Sinetar, "is always going to tend toward truth, beauty, honor, courage...in other words, choice that are life-supporting both in motive and in quality, by the same token, our avoidance of elegant choices will be life- defeating or self-defeating."

When faced with making an elegant choice I must ask myself two things. First, am I looking for guarantees or do I want, believe, that the choice I'm about to make holds the promise of working? If it's the prior I am going to be disappointed because my guarantees most often seek safety, usually born out of fear that seeks things of the status quo, even if it means settling for the clowns. Elegant choices are about the Good which is in process, evolutionary in expression, that does not support what is static. Sacred writings, the Old and New Testaments, the Upanishads of Buddhist teaching in which the self, the atman, is identified with the indwelling power, the brahman, or in Taosist texts our nature, like in all things are a product of yang and yin, operational processes of Tao, The Good. Or whether it be in pantheism, or panentheism, Everything is in motion.

To step out into that motion is the elegant choice. So to me, and to you I believe, in whatever expression you give to it, it is a matter of faith, of a promise that the expression of the Good, love, awaits on the other side of the door or in my favorite song, "beyond the sea". It is risky to pull up the anchor and sail into waters where storms can arise, but that's what ships are meant for. Elegant choices take risks and pays attention to what is truthful, beautiful, honorable, courageous.

Yesterday, and last night **(post vigil pic)** in St. Petersburg, we paid homage, held our lighted candles, dedicating ourselves again to the vision of an Elegant Lady **(post RBG pic)**. Her legacy is one that was formed out of those elegant choices that led to decisions, some of them in the majority and some in the minority, that have and still hold the promise of not only equality but of equity. Those choices have made all the difference in how, going forward, we behave as a country, how we think of ourselves, as a people.

When I make an elegant choice, I may very well be asking of myself to change a pattern of behavior or a way of thinking, believing that does not work in my best interest, for my well-being. I do that, not so that I may be a perfect

person, but that which is perfect in me, the Good, can bring me to wholeness, to joy, to experience the expression of my true self.

If I'm sick, my elegant choice may ask of me to bring meaning to my suffering so that my suffering is not a way for me to punish myself, but provide a possibility to share in another's suffering in a way that I would not have understood how to have shared before. And if I'm looking for a new direction in my life the elegant choice may ask of me to look deeply, truthfully at all that I bring to that choice so that when I do step out through the door I'm not running in circles.

One of the guides, and I'll close my time with you today with this, is that I look to understand in the choices we are making as to whether they bring others in, not the clowns, but those for whom our expressions of the Good, revealed in us, are of life, are of truth, are of love, so that others are welcomed into our lives in a way that they may know themselves to be as whole and as valued as we trust ourselves to be.

