

The Soul of Freedom

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So this is what the other side of Election Day looks like! Whether you are inclined to dance in the street or protest in the street, it is clear to see that this will go down in the history books as the Great Awakening of the 21st century.

It is an awakening to all the fears and concerns that we carry within our personal and collective hearts. It is an awakening to all that we hold dear and value most in this world. It is an awakening to the moral indignation of social injustice and the ethical response that is necessitated by those responsibilities that challenge our humanity.

Within this new eruption of awareness dwells an entire arc of beliefs, emotions, and personal truths. None of them are trivial, and all of them are creating deep wounds in our national consciousness, not to mention in our communities and even in our families. In many ways it feels as if the very foundation of our democracy is trembling beneath the weight of this new reality in which we now find ourselves.

With these recent revelations in mind, I now segue into my Veterans' Day message which has somehow taken on an even more poignant turn in the midst of this post-election mēlee. What is it that keeps us from harms way as we struggle to re-establish our national conscience and vision? What is the soul of freedom? Is it an amorphous, unattainable ideal? Is it merely the desire to exist without suppressive and oppressive governance? Is it an exclusive forcefield that is intended to preserve an equilibrium for only a select few, or is it meant to contain an inclusive space for all those who want to live within its embrace?

I believe that the soul of freedom is none of the above. I believe that the soul of freedom is much more organic, born out of the finite elements of the Universe and the infinite elements of the human spirit. You see, I believe that the soul of freedom has a face...in fact, it has many faces. It has bodies with hearts that beat, and arms that love, and a devotion to serve those higher truths that allow for freedom to prevail. The soul of freedom that I perceive creates a space that holds us all as we are, that does not question our race, gender, sexual orientation, or political

party. The soul of freedom protects our inalienable rights to life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness. The soul of freedom demands discipline, courage and personal sacrifice...and sometimes it even exacts the ultimate sacrifice, that others might ultimately live in peace, free to become all that they desire to be...or not.

Those men and women over the generations who have taken on the enormous mantle to protect and serve our right to exist, have been and continue to be the soul of freedom for those of us who are the embodied beneficiaries of it. As our veterans' can attest, whether on the battlefield or aiding in disaster relief or pushing paper somewhere, their job has never been to protect the rights of a select few, but rather to safeguard the rights of the many.

Unfortunately, it is a sad fact that we, as a nation, often take them for granted, and we certainly have not always been appreciative of their service, **often confusing the politics of war with the people who answer the call to serve**. It was General Douglas MacArthur who said, "The soldier above all others prays for peace, for it is the soldier who must suffer and bear the deepest wounds and scars of war."

As a child of the 60's, I remember watching peace protests on television where people often derided the returning vets from Vietnam, either shame blaming them for policies that were not of their own making, or ignoring the residual effects of their trauma, and failing to provide the necessary compassion and support for their re-entry into society.

Not all men and women who serve in the Armed Forces ever see the battlefield, but regardless of their assignment, they are always at the ready to defend freedom from tyranny and oppression, and there are emotional and sometimes physical consequences to that call of duty. These men and women are the oftentimes invisible shield that surrounds us while we go about living our lives, raising our children, dreaming our dreams, fighting our own personal battles, working toward peace and justice for all. Above all else, those who are the living **oversoul** of our freedom are also the living symbol of our courage...*courage that is not the absence of fear* (as defined by Nelson Mandela), *but the triumph over it*.

Indeed, we ask our military men and women to swallow their fear on behalf of our needs, but upon their re-entry into society, we all too often neglect to appreciate the amount of courage that is required to process all that they have suppressed and

experienced. The path toward transformation and possibility demands more than individual courage, however. Rather it necessitates a **collective** understanding and courageous response towards the soul's healing into wholeness.

As we contemplate our responsibility towards the health and well-being of those among us who have helped to protect and preserve the freedoms that we cherish today, I'm wondering on this Veterans' Day weekend, what can we learn from their bravery in the light of their struggles to regain their equilibrium at re-entering society? As we grapple with the fall-out from this most recent election and the subsequent traumatic recovery process that beseeches us all, what can our soul teach us about healing our broken hearts into wholeness?

Author Anais Nin says that *life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. The personal life deeply lived always expands into truths beyond itself. We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.* I think these thoughts are worth repeating. *Life shrinks or expands in proportion to one's courage. The personal life deeply lived always expands into truths beyond itself. We don't see things as they are, we see them as we are.* These are words certainly worthy of remembering as we begin the slow and difficult process of hearing each other into speech. Winston Churchill once said *courage is what it takes to stand up and speak; courage is also what it takes to sit down and listen.*

Perhaps the most profound lesson of this election is that on different levels we are all wounded warriors with the potential to be wounded healers. We each experience the world through our own lens, through our own life experiences, and then we bring that perspective to all of our relationships and then into the world at large. It is oftentimes hard to have our voices heard above the din of everyone else's, and that frustration can sometimes get mutated into hurtful and angry expressions that only cause to wound us more deeply.

Irish poet and author, John O'Donahue believes that we need to recognize the other side to this human dilemma. He says, *the world is not decided by action alone. It is decided more by consciousness and spirit; they are the secret sources of all action and behavior. The spirit of a time is an incredibly subtle, yet hugely powerful force. And it is comprised of the mentality and spirit of all individuals together. Therefore, the way you look at things is not simply a private matter. Your outlook actually and concretely affects what goes on. When you give in to helplessness, you collude with despair and add to it. When you take back your*

power and choose to see the possibilities for healing and transformation, your creativity awakens and flows to become an active force of renewal and encouragement in the world. In this way, even in your own hidden life, you can become a powerful agent of transformation. There is a huge force field that opens when intention focuses and directs itself toward transformation.

This Great Awakening of the 21st century has brought to the surface the fears and concerns that we carry within our personal and collective hearts. It has reminded us all of that which we hold dear and value most in this world. It has boldly aroused our sense of moral and ethical responsibility toward those issues that are challenging our humanity.

In a very real sense, this time of unprecedented pain and uncertainty is providing us with an opportunity to live up to our soul's example...to be courageous in our listening, to be fearless in our standing on the side of love, to intentionally seek out pathways that will lift-us-all-up as we devotedly and compassionately work together to create a peaceful society that lives up to the principles of justice upon which this great free nation was built upon.

Let us recognize that we have the potential to all be wounded healers, one nation, under the Creative Spirit, indivisible, working together toward peace and liberty for all.

Amen and Blessed Be