

Letting the Light Shine Through

Kate Isaacs: Welcome everybody, and welcome to all the mothers who are nurturing and tending and stewarding our children and our planet and the next generation of all things. And welcome to the fathers, the brothers, the uncles, the sons who are looking after all of us women and protecting us as we go about doing what we women do.

There is an inspiring line in a recent TV show called *Friday Night Lights*, which is about a high school football team. The team's motto was "Clear eyes. Full hearts. Can't lose." I want to riff on that a bit and say "Clear minds. *Open* hearts, Can't lose." It might at times look like you are losing, but you aren't, in fact, if you're proceeding with an open heart.

There is an old Chinese story, which has many variations, that speaks to this. There was a farmer who had an old horse that he used to plow his fields. One day the horse escaped into the hills and disappeared. The farmer's neighbor said, "Oh, what bad luck you have." But the farmer was wise, with a long view on life. He said, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"

The horse returned one day, leading a whole herd of wild horses from the hills. The neighbors congratulated him this time. "Look, you have a whole new herd of horses, what good luck you have!" But the farmer replied, "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"

Then the farmer's son broke his leg trying to tame one of those wild horses to put it to work on the farm. The neighbors commented, "Oh, awful. What terrible luck that your son broke his leg." The farmer's reply? "Good luck, bad luck, who knows?"

Then an army marched into the village to draft all the young men into war. But because the farmer's son had a broken leg, they left him alone. So he escaped the war. Good luck, bad luck...who knows?

I want to relate a good luck, bad luck story of my own. Our family had a ski trip planned this past February. We cancelled the trip because the temperature was predicted to be 15 degrees Fahrenheit (-9 °C)—too cold to take young kids skiing, not to mention us! As the week wore on, the forecast changed to relatively balmy temperatures of just above freezing—perfect skiing conditions. I tried to rebook the trip, but all the hotels were full. Good call, bad call, who knows?

A few months later we took a trip out of state to see family. The kids' schools required them to get Covid tests before they could return to school. Because we had cancelled the ski trip, I happened to have one last household-pooled test sitting at home. It is the kind where everyone in the house does a swab and they test all the swabs together in one "pool." The

adults didn't have to do the test, but since it didn't cost anything extra, Bill and I did the swab too. At the last minute, I asked our au pair to contribute a swab. She hadn't traveled with us, but why not? Off the pool went for overnight testing. The next morning I opened my email and was shocked to see that our pool test came back positive. Further tests revealed that our au pair had Covid. She isolated right away in her room, where she remained for the next ten days. None of the rest of us got Covid.

Because of the canceled vacation, we had the unused pooled test kit; because of the unused test kit we'd found out her Covid status in time for her to isolate immediately. Was this good luck, bad luck? Who knows?

Sadly, because of all of this, my dad had to cancel his first trip to see us in nearly two years. Last week he finally came out. But now his visit coincided with a two-week window when the lilacs in this part of the country were in full bloom. We visited a wonderful 150-year-old arboretum where we had a divine time seeing and smelling the many varieties of lilacs for which the place is famous. I did lose my sunglasses on that walk, but...good, bad, who knows?

So what's the point of these stories? The point is: who are we *being* in the midst of the flow, when there are periods of pressure and intensity and things don't go as planned? When we wonder why things are happening as they are, and if we're really making the right decisions? Can we stay open-hearted? Can we allow and trust that things are unfolding just as they should? What might seem like failures aren't actually failures, as long as we are able to stay in an open-hearted space and welcome the flow of life to forge our greater character. Things often turn out far better than we might have thought or could have planned.

I recently came across a quote from JK Rowling, the author of the *Harry Potter* books. She sent the draft of her first book to twelve publishers. It was rejected eleven times before a publisher at the twelfth place, Bloomsbury, brought it home and gave it to his 8-year-old daughter, who loved it. We know the rest of the story. Rowling says, "It's impossible to live without failing at something unless you live so cautiously that you might as well not have lived at all. In which case you fail by default."

In her wonderful poem, *The Summer Day*, Mary Oliver asks, "Tell me, what is it you plan to do with your one wild and precious life?" I'd suggest that it's our hearts that know, and it's in our hearts that the process of life gets integrated, and we find our way, step by step.

I'll tell you another story. This is a very personal story about grappling with issues of oppression and systemic racism that have been raised more to our collective consciousness since the murder of George Floyd, and by a year of Covid's impacts on minority and historically disadvantaged communities.

I'm participating in a culturally and racially diverse group that meets to explore how to create a space in which people can feel that they truly belong and are also free to express their unique gifts as human beings. How do we come together beyond our differences, and yet not ignore the differences, and even truly celebrate them?

In one of the sessions we were broken out into smaller, same-race groups. I was in a group with other white women for about twenty minutes. When we came back to the full group, we were invited to speak about our breakout group conversations. I talked about what our white women's group had discussed. The first few sentences were ok. But then I flipped into a part of me that still carries some racist programming from my family of origin and my formative experiences growing up outside of Detroit, where there are many racial inequities and tensions. I made a comment from a part of me that still carries racist thoughts. I was shocked to see this part come out. I hadn't planned on giving voice to it at all. But there it was. I had said this thing in a very public way.

We spent the next hour talking about what my comment stirred up for people. I just listened, and it was hard to hear what people said. But it was also a gift. The Black men and women in the group spoke so powerfully and vulnerably and truthfully about the pain and the history that my comment had stirred up. One said, "It's a very short path from a comment like that to dehumanizing another person." How right he is.

While this conversation was happening, a few of the Black women in the group were sending me side chats on Zoom saying: "Thank you so much for your courage, and for speaking authentically. It opened up the group into a deeper level of conversation." I didn't understand that at the time. But I have more perspective on it now.

After a while, one of the group facilitators asked me how I was feeling about the conversation. I said, "I can see that I spoke from a racist part of me, and I can see how much pain that it stirred up." And then I somehow connected on the Zoom screen to a Black man in the group whom I had felt drawn to from the very beginning. He and I had had some side chats in the group along the way. I looked into his eyes on Zoom, and I said, "I'm just so sorry. I hear what you said about how my comment landed with you. And I'm just so sorry. I would never want to create that kind of pain in your heart."

I spent the next few weeks having some very deep conversations with several of the Black men and women in the group. One woman and I spoke very directly about the Black pain and the white pain of this historical oppression that we have been living with for so long. We also spoke about how the whole conversation in the group seemed to be carried by a deep, powerful love that was holding us all, and how mysterious and filled with grace it was.

My new friend said three things that I want to repeat here. She said, “You really stepped in it that day. But I just cannot see that as a stumble. Something was being born and is being born. Why focus on the crack in the egg? Let's focus on what's being born!”

How beautiful is that? We fumble around and we do things we don't intend to do sometimes. We hurt others. It's not easy, and it's messy. Yes, we should take complete responsibility for our words and actions, and their impact. And, as we keep saying *yes* to life, we can focus on what is being born.

The second thing that we talked about was that we can't grow except in relationship. I was feeling a little ashamed of myself for a while after this group experience because I felt I should have known better. I have done all this work and tried to understand race and racism. I've read lots of books. I have taken anti-racism classes. I have organized groups; I've participated in groups. I try to be an ally. And yet there is this racist part of me that came out that day. It is not who I am. But it can cause real harm. Now that I see it there, I can take responsibility for it.

We spoke about how it is impossible for us to grow except in relationship. We can do our own work to release various knots and contractions in our consciousness, and still there is something alchemically magical when we relate to each other from an open-hearted place. We push and poke and prod each other, sometimes in uncomfortable ways. There are bumps along the way, but they are just that—bumps. There is something bigger that can be born through relationship.

The third thing we talked about was something we do in the group called “R.O.A.R.” If you mess up and say something unconscious in the group, you are expected to try to Recognize, Own, Acknowledge, and Repair with others. I asked my friend, “Is there anything that I need to do to repair whatever hurt my comment might have stirred up in your heart? And she said, “No, you did it in the group, in the moment. There's no residual left.”

The root of the word courage is “cor,” which means “heart.” There was a heart connection among all of us in the group and a deep desire to go somewhere new together, beyond the racism and pain of centuries. That current of love came through our hearts.

So when we commit what seem like mistakes and failures, can we stay true to our hearts, stay present with Life, and connect from our hearts to the hearts of others? Our hearts are such trustworthy, reliable mediators of life and truth, through which we can dissolve the rigidities and beliefs about things we have absorbed that are not really the truth of who we are. In that space, unnatural things can be resolved. What come through the other side are the

luminous qualities of our larger Selves: curiosity, clarity, wisdom, humor, and love. Open hearts make for clear minds; then we can't lose.

Joyce Krantz: I appreciate Kate's expression and her ability to flow with life. And I love her example of not focusing on the crack but what is coming *through* the crack that is the expression of who we truly are. I have another story relative to vision and what we see.

There is a tree in front of our home in the desert that has the dubious distinction of being labeled a "dirty tree." This is a species of tree that the original developers of the community planted some thirty years ago in various front yards. When we took possession of our house a couple years ago, the neighbors were quick to point out, in a somewhat derogatory tone, that we had one of those "dirty trees." I remember how I felt when I first heard this term—like a mother whose child didn't measure up to the other kids on the block. How could this innocent tree be seen in such a negative light? I love trees! I have over my lifetime planted many and supported organizations that do so too. What drew such dislike? Well, I was told, they make a mess of the yard. Their small leaves are dropping all the time and the acorns they produce attract the javelinas, which are just a nuisance. Well, when I heard this, my love for this tree grew even greater in stature. I love javelinas too! They are one of the most interesting, unique animals of the desert. To have them visit my yard was a bonus. The tree may be seen as a nuisance to others but it was a special provider to me.

I did some research on this fine genus and discovered that it is a desert oak. In the Sonoran-desert region, unlike the oaks up north, these trees have to adapt to a very dry climate, so they have very small leaves to help them regulate an internal temperature of less than 115 degrees Fahrenheit (46.1 C) to survive the even hotter desert. Their leaves stay green in the winter and shed a little in the spring—unless they are stressed under drought conditions and then they shed a lot. Their acorns have been a food source for both animals and humans. In the past, Native Americans, ground the nuts into flour and used the bark as a medicinal tea. Besides all that, the tree provides invaluable shade from the intense desert sun, is home to hundreds of birds, is a carbon emissions storer, so valued in this time of climate warming, and an essential oxygenator for the planet, without which we could not survive.

How very little we see with understanding what is right before us. We could say *God is hiding in plain sight*. What we perceive as a tree, looking at its form with our limited understanding of its role in the larger ecosystem, is just one dimension. What about the animating life current that is giving form to the tree? Is there any perception of that and of our connection with Mother Nature? If so, we may not be so eager to cut her down because she is

“messy,” but rather, if our hearts were open to see, we would care for her and assume our responsibility as gardeners.

I'd like to offer another example of vision. Someone recently sent me a picture made with the latest imaging technology of her developing grandson at thirty weeks of age in utero. Some of you may have seen pictures of babies in utero using fetal ultrasound, which gives a combination of shadows and outlines that kind of resemble a person. It has been used as a helpful diagnostic tool for tracking the development and health of the baby. The new 3D fetal ultrasound technology captures in astonishing detail a three-dimensional definition of the baby in the womb. When I gazed upon this image of her grandson it took my breath away. Like a sculptor molding a clay image of a person's face into form but not fully complete yet. Such was the power and majesty of what I was witnessing—the human face of God emerging in exquisite detail. It will be a few more weeks before the head is fully developed and the body's systems, organs and lungs sufficiently mature to sustain life outside the womb. It is a wonder to behold. I challenge any human mind to render such a living work of art. Of course, it can't because it has lost awareness of the inherent design and purpose of invisible Spirit which is breathing life into that form.

In my preparation for this hour, an odd phrase kept coming to my mind: “Familiarity breeds contempt.” I consulted Google for a definition: “Extensive knowledge of or close association with someone or something, leads to a loss of respect for them or it.” Is this true? If we examine this more closely, we could say it depends on the viewer. In the case of our tree, the neighbor with the knowledge that this tree will drop its leaves and attract unwanted animals with its nuts, which the viewer doesn't like, has generated some contempt or, put more mildly, irritation or depreciation. The tree offers no perceived value to the viewer so he distances himself from it. In fact, he might even remove it from his yard. But from the viewer who sees the true value of the tree, there is delight, curiosity, wonder and a drawing closer—the law of attraction and ascension in perspective.

How do we see our fellow human beings? Do we judge them based on likes or dislikes of the outer appearances of things, which we know is only a surface view, or do we see beyond the form to the presence of the One who resides within; the light illuminating through the crack? If we stopped judging, who knows what aspects of our greater Self, our collective oneness, we would discover? As Kate beautifully illustrated in her stories, it takes a willing, open, clear heart and mind to truly see.

I read an article about the tragic conditions millions of people in India face now with the rise in Covid deaths. Oxygen shortages have been the greatest challenge to families seeking

to keep their loved ones alive. For some Indian-Americans living in the United States, desperate to help their relatives from afar, they went to social media for help. They knew that many Americans may not have personal connection to the situation up close in India, but hearing the plight from family members who do, might connect them to their call for help. In somewhat miraculous fashion donations poured in quickly to assist. Oxygen tanks were located through other online connections and delivered across the globe in days. Love can move form and oxygen tanks rather speedily. Never underestimate its power!

Our coming together in this configuration today, one which has been meeting, for many of us, for years, is wholly based in our love for the Master Sculptor and the Tone of Life, which is the character and expression of the Master Sculptor. Inherent in the Tone is this living force of connection, meaning, purpose, design, control and love for all living things. It is now and has always been present, but who sees and knows it? As we express this quality of character consistently, we find ourselves in position to see more clearly, and to assist others in seeing beyond the outer appearances of things.

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Pre-Service Music

Nocturnes, No. 2 in E flat Op. 9, No. 2

Composed by Frédéric Chopin and performed by YUNDI