

## ***Weep Loudly***

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*Therefore thus says the Lord, the God of hosts, the Lord:  
In all the squares there shall be wailing;  
and in all the streets they shall say, "Alas! alas!"  
They shall call the farmers to mourning,  
and those skilled in lamentation, to wailing;  
in all the vineyards there shall be wailing,  
for I will pass through the midst of you,  
says the Lord. (Amos 5:16-17)*

### **Invitation to Worship:** (Ecclesiastes 3:1,4)

For everything there is a season,  
**And a time for every matter under heaven.**  
A time to weep, and a time to laugh;  
**A time to mourn, and a time to dance.**

### **Ancient Witness:** Esther 4:1-3

One of the first books that had a profound effect on me was a novel by Chaim Potok called, *The Chosen* (1967). It was a story about Rabbi Saunders who was the spiritual leader or *tzaddik* of an Hasidic community. The word, *tzaddik*, literally means "righteous one" and derives from the Hebrew word for "justice." A *tzaddik* was a holy person who was devoted to the study of the Torah, called to lead, teach and guide people.

Rebbe Saunders had a son, Danny, who was expected to follow in his father's footsteps by going to rabbinical school and becoming a *tzaddik*. Danny was brilliant, but his father noticed at a young age that he did not show empathy for others.

*I went away and cried to the Master of the Universe, "What has you done to me? A mind like this I need for a son? A **heart** I need for a son, a **soul** I need for a son, **compassion** I want from my son, righteousness, mercy, strength to suffer and carry pain, **that** I want from my son, not a mind without a soul!" (p. 264)*

And so Danny's father engaged in this practice of never talking to his son directly for almost all of Danny's young life. This practice seemed cruel to some and was a source of deep pain. This silence toward his son was something that the Rabbi's father also did to him. And the Rabbi recalled his father saying,

*One learns of the pain of others by suffering one's own pain, by turning inside oneself, by finding one's own soul... of all people, a *tzaddik* must know pain. A *tzaddik* must know how to suffer for his people, he said... He must grow old before his years. He must cry, in his heart he must always cry. Even when he dances and sings, he must cry for the sufferings of his people. (p. 265)*

And so weeping for the suffering of the world was part of the job description.

Today, I'd like for us to reflect on this, that any authentic spirituality includes mourning and lament. Not just occasionally, but woven into the fabric of our inner life. It's important and instructive that the word, "compassion," a word so often held up as the way of the spiritual life, literally means in the Greek, "to suffer with."

And so, first and foremost, as we seek to heal and transform the world, we must have the *capacity to feel*, to mourn, to grieve and to suffer with our sisters and brothers. *We cannot skip over this step.*

Are there other things needed to be done? Of course. However, a failure to mourn is a denial of our humanity and our divine image that we share. A failure to cry out separates us from the Source of Life, the Ground of All Being, and the foundation that is solid and eternal.

Rabbi Harold Kushner talked about when he officiated at funerals, often bereaved relatives in the front row were uncomfortable, knowing that they ought to feel something—grief, pain—but they didn't feel anything because they had never learned to let themselves feel. They never learned the language of emotions. And he said that so often there would be an old woman crying at the top of her voice, "Why? Why did this have to happen?" And there would be a forty-year-old man in a three-piece suit who would become very uncomfortable and say, "Can't somebody make her shut up?" The fact is, said Kushner, the old woman is the only one in the room who is in her right mind. She knows that something painful has happened to her, and she is responding to it. The rest of us are too numb, too inarticulate in language of grief, to know what is happening to us.

I don't know how—when we consider our situation—how we don't weep more than we do.

Instead of offering a pathway to citizenship, thousands of immigrant families who work in our fields and factories, who clean and serve food, who go to school and pay taxes, who seek a better life—they live in fear of being rounded up and deported. I don't know how this doesn't bring us to tears! I don't know how what we've become as a nation doesn't break our hearts.

We are descending into a Dickensian world of extreme wealth and extreme destitution, and our ever-increasing gap between the haves and the have-nots is growing. As in the *Tale of Two Cities* begins, "It was the best of times and the worst of times." In this nation we have over 800 billionaires and 45 million people living in poverty with 18% of all children living in poverty. Many more families are struggling month to month to make ends meet.

Joseph Stiglitz, a Nobel winning economist, says,

*Can you believe a country where the life expectancy is already in decline, particularly among those whose income is limited, giving tax breaks to billionaires and corporations while leaving millions without health insurance?*

We see aggressively regressive policies leading us toward greater inequality cuts in food stamps, subsidized housing, medicare, medicaid and social security. There is a hostility toward the poor, assuming they are lazy or trying to defraud the system. And so there is a punishing of low income people that will result in suffering and death of many, many people. And I don't know how this doesn't bring us to tears.

We see the carbon dioxide levels in the atmosphere grow higher and higher. Some say we are now past the point of no return, that with current levels of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, we are now in an ascending feedback loop. And our political system, in its corporate captivity, seems incapable of responding in any meaningful, substantial way. And I don't know how—this destruction of our planet and the suffering that will come to our children and their children—I don't know how this doesn't cause us to weep loudly.

From a spiritual perspective, this is our calling: *to have compassion, to suffer with, to carry the pain of others and to maintain the ability to weep.* It is up to us. In a society that is losing its empathy and soul, that is getting meaner and meaner, we need to nurture our own souls and not let our hearts become hard.

Prophets and mystics experience God's deep and expansive love for the world. And because of this, they also experience God's profound anguish over the brokenness in the world. Because the more we love, the more we will weep. Our grief for any loss is simply a measure of our love for who or what we have lost. *The more we love, the more we would weep.* And I'm telling you, being inconsolable is a perfectly appropriate thing to do in our nation at this time. Like the wailing woman at the funeral, you are the ones in your right mind.

Like Jeremiah, often called “the weeping prophet,” who warned the corrupt leaders of Judah, that the consequences of their unjust actions would lead to ruin! (Sound familiar?) But the people refused to change their hearts and minds, turning away from God's ways of justice, mercy and truth. So Jeremiah publicly *sheds tears* over the people. He saw the handwriting on the wall, the suffering that was to come. (Jeremiah 9:1, 13:17)

And like Jesus, who wept over Jerusalem on the Mt. of Olives, seeing the complicity of the temple and local government with the brutal ways of the Roman Empire and the armed rebellion that was to come. He sees the handwriting on the wall about the way of violence and the horrible pain it would inflict. (Luke 19:41-44)

You know, there's an age-old activist battle cry: “Don't mourn, organize!” I understand the sentiment, but we need to mourn, it seems to me. That doesn't mean wallowing. It means being honest, taking the time to honor our feelings of loss and sorrow and the power that they hold. Instead, I would say, “Mourn *and* Organize!” Spiritually and emotionally, it is healthy to mourn. And not just quietly to oneself, but loudly and publicly. When a nation is on the path to calamity, a prophet would put on sackcloth and ashes and weep. Before the prophet Joel would write about the coming of new dreams and visions, he publicly mourned his nation:

*Put on sackcloth and lament, O priests,  
Weep, O ministers of the altar...  
Gather the elders  
And all the inhabitants of this land...  
And cry to the Lord. (1:13-14)*

Your mourning expresses your deep values; it is your strength, not a weakness; it shows that you care; it is a positive statement, not a negative one. Over 20 years ago, activist Roni Krouzman said it well,

*As progressives, we tackle issues like war, environmental destruction, poverty, and repression—problems whose consequences are often horribly brutal, frightening and inhumane. And yet I believe most of us, myself included, rarely take much time to really feel much about these horrors, or our failure to stop them.*

Our mourning is the foundation, the reason we act in the first place. And so let us weep. It is healthy for you and the cause. Feel your feelings. They are what drive you. And so, we don't hide our tears. We are not ashamed of our distress. The righteous ones embrace it. We weep for our nation and our democracy only because it is precious to us and we love it.

In his new book, *The Tears of Things*, Richard Rohr says that the prophets saw a profound connection between sadness and anger—and that we need both. He writes, “Only tears can move us beyond our paralyzing anger at evil, death and injustice without losing the deep legitimacy of that anger.” How many of us are feeling this paralyzing anger right now? To move beyond cynicism and bitterness to healing ourselves and the world, we need the path of tears, he says. We need to grieve prophetically.

In our reading from the book of Esther today, it says that when Mordecai, a righteous man, learned of King Haman's evil policies and plans to systematically destroy the Jews, he “tore his clothes and put on sackcloth and ashes, and *went through the city, wailing with a loud and bitter cry*. And he went up to the *entrance of the king's gate*.”

And so may we, who would be righteous, open our hearts and mourn what has befallen our sisters and brothers. Go through the city, into the streets, up to the “king's gate,” the legislative halls and corridors of power, and *weep loudly*—not a weak crying, no. Let us put before ourselves the pain and the truth. Let us weep loudly! Let us lament!

Until the politicians cannot ignore our tears.

Until our neighbors cannot ignore our tears.

Until the nation cannot ignore our tears.

*(NOTE: The spoken sermon, available online, may differ slightly in phrasing and detail from this manuscript version.)*