

On Life and Meaning

MARK PERES

Episode 40 – Patrice Funderburg – Self-Care and Liberation

Existential Choice and Formation

And now a personal word,

I am so moved by Patrice Funderburg. I am moved by the honesty of her feelings, by her strength and vulnerability, by her call to higher ground.

Patrice could have continued to live a life of upper-middle class security. She could have gotten the next corporate job. She could have represented her company at community meetings, but she chose the harder work of social activism, the harder work of being more than position and wealth, because other things now matter more.

When she told her story of going on a run with news weighing on her of yet another black body dying at the hands of law enforcement, and how it led her in that moment to confront who she wanted to be and what life she wanted to live, I could see the memory of it come over her. A spirit had moved through her. It became vital within her.

I thought of her story as her own conversion on the road to Damascus. I thought also of the words of Victor Frankl, author of *Man's Search for Meaning*, a defining book of the moral philosophy I hold true, that we determine ourselves whether we give in to conditions or stand up to them. That we always decide what our existence will be, that the next moment is ours to make, and that every person has the freedom to change at any instant.

Every situation we encounter is ripe with meaning. Existence confronts us with choice. The decisions we make determine who we are.

In 1948, Jean-Paul Sartre, in his lecture *Existentialism Is a Humanism*, made this case: We live in anguish because there is no way we have to be. We choose who we are. Even deciding not to decide is a choice. We create ourselves every moment in what we do and do not do. In saying this, Sartre said we are condemned to be free. Condemned because every choice has a price. Even the best, most desirable choice provokes some degree of regret since every choice confronts us with what has been lost as a result of having made the choice. Choice is not always a pleasant experience. It can be quite overwhelming creating who we are, but we cannot escape it. There is no exit from creating ourselves. In our freedom and responsibility is the anguish of the human condition and its wonder.

I sense these feelings in Patrice: Grief. Hope. Freedom. Uncertainty. Conviction. Pride. An identity being created. A new person in formation.

Patrice talks about self-care and liberation. She is talking about herself as one person, but not only herself. Self-care and liberation is social equity and justice. It is the same work. Self-care and liberation is being kind to yourself. Forgiving yourself. Believing in yourself. So social equity and justice is being kind to others. Forgiving others. Believing in others. As we create ourselves, so we create community. This is what Patrice is doing.

All of us have this choice. We can listen for the call. We can stand up and decide.

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