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Yoga Talk #33
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The Chosen Tribe

Darren's theme this week is "The Chosen Tribe." I don't think that he means to say that one particular group of people is more righteous or valuable or has greater responsibility than any other. This is not about a "Chosen People." Instead I believe that he wants us to think more about how we ourselves choose the groups that then give us our identity.

Most of us start out in a functioning dysfunctional family. But then we go out into the world. We in effect choose a different family of friends. We choose our tribe. I'm so grateful to be part of our Grace Yoga tribe on Tuesday nights.

Trevor Noah's book of autobiographical essays about growing up in Apartheid-era South Africa is called *Born a Crime*. Noah's father was a white European Swiss citizen and his mom is black and Xhosa. His parents relationship was illegal ("Most children are proof of their parent's love. I was proof of their criminality").¹ As a child it was dangerous to be seen in public with them.

Noah writes about the moment when he most explicitly became aware of race. After being in a Catholic school he moved to a large public school. A placement test put him with one other person of color in an otherwise all white class. Then came lunch and as hundreds of children streamed onto the playground he had to decide where he would go.

He could go with the white children he had spent the morning with in class. He could go with the children who most looked like him that South African called "Colored People." These were not people of mixed race but children of two other colored people who had married. Or he could go with the black children. "I saw myself as the people who were around me, and those people were black."²

Trevor Noah had the hardest time with the group of people who looked most like him. He said that if you are a white person immersing yourself in the culture and practices of the black world, they would more or less accept you. If you were a black person wearing ties and honing your golf game in the white world people would accept you too.

He said the problem was when you adopted the culture of another group but remained in the group you came from. He writes that, "people are willing to accept you if they see you as an outsider trying to assimilate into their world. But when they see a fellow tribe member disavowing the tribe, that is something they will never forgive."³

This dynamic of human community makes it hard to choose your tribe. That is one of the reasons why our yoga practice is particularly important. We are trying to teach our bodies to be flexible, our breath to be even. We are training our balance so that when we meet obstacles they become part of the story of how we became stronger.

Alonzo King of LINES Ballet is our Artist in Residence this year. On Sunday he talked about how often people tell him dancing horror stories. They say, "I quit because the teacher said I was too short or my bottom was too big or my feet stuck out in the wrong way." His response was, "if dancing is so meaningful why would you ever let these criticisms derail you?" Part of life is meeting opposition and using that force to make us better.

My prayer for you is that in all the ways you are blocked, you might find the inspiration of Grace, that you might find a way to use that experience of rejection to better care for others.

Theme: The Chosen Tribe

We are called to be strong companions and clear mirrors to one another, to seek those who reflect with compassion and a keen eye how we are doing, whether we seem centered or off course ... we need the nourishing company of others to create the circle needed for growth, freedom and healing.

—Wayne Muller

<https://amzn.to/2PCwLCR>

Some people think they are in community, but they are only in proximity. True community requires commitment and openness. It is a willingness to extend yourself to encounter and know the other.

—David Spangler

<https://amzn.to/2ZV9bpM>

¹ Trevor Noah, *Born a Crime: Stories from a South African Childhood* (NY: Random House, 2016) 27.

² *Ibid.*, 59.

³ *Ibid.*, 118.