

There Is a Crack in Everything (Tina Rose)

Arlington Street Church—August 11, 2019

Ring the bells that still can ring

Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything

That's how the light gets in.

Leonard Cohen, the legendary Canadian troubadour and poet, wrote these powerful lyrics. Published in 1992, "Anthem" took him 10 years to write. Cohen, who didn't like explaining his music, reportedly made a rare statement about his now-famous ballad.

"The future is no excuse for an abdication of your own personal responsibilities towards yourself and your job and your love. "Ring the bells that still can ring": they're few and far between but you can find them. This is not the place where you make things perfect, neither in your marriage, nor in your work, nor anything, nor your love of God, nor your love of family or country. The thing is imperfect.

And worse, there is a crack in everything that you can put together: physical objects, mental objects, constructions of any kind. But that's where the light gets in, and that's where the resurrection is and that's where the return, that's where the repentance is. It is with the confrontation, with the brokenness of things."

Though I'd listened to Leonard Cohen's music for years, I'd never heard the chorus from "Anthem" until I read it in Brené Brown's book *The Gifts of Imperfection*. She takes up and extends Cohen's worldview:

"Owning our own story can be hard but not nearly as difficult as spending our lives running from it. Embracing our vulnerabilities is risky but not nearly as dangerous as giving up on love and belonging and joy—the experiences that make us most vulnerable. Only when we are brave enough to explore the darkness will we discover the infinite power of our light."

According to Brown, the quest for betterment and self-reflection often comes at a breaking point or 'unraveling' when you are seeking out opportunities to live the life you want not the one you are 'supposed' to live. This is one of my unravelings.

I first experienced Morocco through its art and food as a shy 16-year-old in Paris. Since that initial encounter, I'd had an ongoing 40-year love affair with its amazing history and fascinating storytelling.

In January 2017 I traveled to meet my love for the first time. I wandered on my own in Morocco for the first two weeks, exploring ancient imperial cities and smaller rural villages by train, bus, bike, and foot. Traveling to Africa for the first time to a country where I couldn't speak the two dominant languages afforded a never-ending panoply of sensual delights—colors, textures, sights, sounds, and smells.

For my third week I hired a guide to take me to southern Morocco, the land of the Berbers and the Sahara. Along the way, I learned so much from Boujema my guide. He was a kind, intelligent, soft-spoken, and fun-loving spirit.

We made our way toward the Sahara over serpentine mountain passes and barren highways. Boujema told me that the desert measures 5,000 x 2,000 square kilometers. "How big is that?" I asked naïvely. "You can put the United States inside the Sahara and still see sand around the outside," he replied calmly.

Later that afternoon after spinning for hours through sand halfway up the tires in our 4-wheel drive vehicle, we arrived at a desert camp. Given that it was January, we were the only guests. I was shown to my tent—more like an elaborate harem with a huge bed, more pillows than I'd ever seen at one time, layers of woolen blankets in a panorama of colors and geometric designs, with a small pail and water jug in the corner.

When I emerged from my tent, I was told my camel was waiting. I didn't remember requesting a Lyft. My guide was dressed from head to toe in white with a colorful headband. He helped me up into the saddle. Boujema took some photos and told me that when I walked away from the camel that my guide should always be visible. With my horrible sense of direction, I accepted his advice without question.

After strolling in the desert with sand as far as the horizon in all directions, the guide stopped, and instructed the camel to sit so I could dismount. I started to walk toward a large dune. Every footfall made an imprint, sending rivulets of sand in opposite directions. Before I realized, my pace was slowing, and I started to cry. Very soon after, I fell to my knees, sobbing. I picked up a handful of sand and let it run through my fingers. In that moment, I felt like a single particle, and tried to imagine how many gazillions of sand particles there were in the desert.

I looked up into the darkest sky I'd ever seen and saw the first star. I felt overwhelmed and continued sobbing uncontrollably. I heard a divine voice and knew immediately what I had to do.

When I got home, I started to live full-time as Tina Rose, downsized my business, and became a committed activist for transgender people and the rights of all. I would live the life I'd wanted since my divorce but felt too much fear and shame. My new life began in February. A childhood friend told me, "The genie's out of the bottle and she's not going back in!"

In *The Gifts of Imperfection*, Brené Brown writes: "The wholehearted journey is not the path of least resistance. It's a path of consciousness and choice. It is about embarking on a journey that doesn't have room for quick fixes or how-to's, but rather a deep and meaningful commitment to vulnerability, self-love, and ingenuity."

Simply put, Brown shares that living wholeheartedly means letting go of who you think you're supposed to be and embracing who you are. She explains that accepting your imperfections and working towards a wholehearted life is founded on courage, fueled by compassion, and supported by connection.

Brown defines courage as "to speak one's mind by telling all one's heart." She encourages us to put our vulnerability on the line. To be vulnerable is to be open, honest, and authentic with ourselves and our community. "Every time we choose courage," Brown says, "we make everyone around us a little better and the world a little braver. And the world today can definitely use more of both."

Brown continues: "The heart of compassion is really acceptance. The better we are at accepting ourselves and others, the more compassionate we become." She shares that to be compassionate, we have to be in tune with ourselves and available to those around us, while imposing real and honorable boundaries. Brown demonstrates the importance of holding people accountable for their actions, while

also being compassionate to their shortcomings. Kinder and firmer. Less blame and more accountability. Fewer blurry lines and more clarity.

Finally, Brown defines connection as "the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from relationship."

As humans, we are hardwired for connection and we often take it for granted. Our dependency on others has become a sign of weakness or an obstacle to success, with a heightened importance placed on people who offer help versus those who seek it. Brown provides a beautiful and empowering final credo: "until we receive with an open heart, we are never really giving with an open heart."

Leonard Cohen came from a devoted Jewish family and lived as a consummate spiritual seeker. He was an ardent student of the *Talmud* (the source for the code of Jewish law) and *Kabbalah* (mystical Jewish texts), lived for many years in a Zen Buddhist monastery, and studied briefly with the Hari Krishna and at a Scientology center in Greenwich Village.

Near the end of his life Cohen conducted a series of interviews with David Remnick of *The New Yorker*. At one point he told Remnick: "I know there's a spiritual aspect to everybody's life, whether they want to cop to it or not. It's there, you can feel it in people—there's some recognition that there is a reality that they cannot penetrate but which influences their mood and activity. So that's operating. That activity at certain points of your day or night insists on a certain kind of response."

"What I mean to say is that you hear the *Bat Kol*—the divine voice. You hear this other deep reality singing to you all the time, and much of the time you can't decipher it."

My dear spiritual friends, I'd like to close with Leonard Cohen's *Bat Kol*—the impassioned words in full of "Anthem". I'll save you from my singing voice and recite this as a poem.

The birds they sang
 At the break of day
 Start again
 I heard them say
 Don't dwell on what
 Has passed away
 Or what is yet to be.
 Yeah, the wars they will
 Be fought again
 The holy dove
 She will be caught again
 Bought and sold
 And bought again
 The dove is never free.
 Ring the bells that still can ring
 Forget your perfect offering

There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.
We asked for signs
The signs were sent
The birth betrayed
The marriage spent
Yeah, the widowhood
Of every government
Signs for all to see.
I can't run no more
With that lawless crowd
While the killers in high places
Say their prayers out loud
But they've summoned, they've summoned up
A thundercloud
And they're going to hear from me.
Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in.
You can add up the parts
You won't have the sum
You can strike up the march
There is no drum
Every heart, every heart to love will come
But like a refugee.
Ring the bells that still can ring
Forget your perfect offering
There is a crack, a crack in everything
That's how the light gets in. <Amen.>