

“SHAMEFUL, ISN’T IT”
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ABOUT TWELVE YEARS AGO, I DID A SERMON ENTITLED “THE DEATH OF SHAME” – IT WAS AROUND THE TIME OF THE BILL CLINTON/MONICA LEWINSKY DEBACLE. BY THE BY – WHAT EVER HAPPENED TO MONICA LEWINSKY? I HAVEN’T HEARD A WORD ABOUT HER IN YEARS. PROVING, I GUESS, THAT THE NOTORIETY OF BEING INVOLVED IN A VERY PUBLIC SHAMEFUL EVENT, EVENTUALLY FADES AWAY – EVEN WITH A PUBLIC THAT SEEMS TO THRIVE ON OTHER PEOPLE’S SHAMEFUL BEHAVIOR. BUT SHAMEFUL BEHAVIOR IS CERTAINLY NOT IN SHORT SUPPLY. QUITE THE OPPOSITE, AS A MATTER OF FACT, THERE IS ABSOLUTELY NO SHORTAGE OF SHAMEFUL, DESPICABLE BEHAVIOR. SHAME HAS BECOME SOMETHING OF AN OLD FASHION CONCEPT. BUT IT’S ONE OF THOSE FEELINGS THAT YOU KNOW IMMEDIATELY WHEN IT HAPPENS. IT’S THE PAINFUL FEELING THAT ARISES FROM WITHIN US WHEN WE HAVE DONE SOMETHING DISHONORABLE, IMPROPER, OR CRUEL TO OURSELVES OR SOMEONE ELSE. IN SPITE OF THE FACT THAT NO ONE APPEARS RESPONSIBLE FOR THEIR BAD BEHAVIOR ANY MORE – I HAVE TO BELIEVE THAT AT SOME LEVEL – UNLESS THEY ARE TRUE SOCIOPATHS – THEY KNOW THAT THEIR BEHAVIOR WAS WRONG. I REMEMBER AS A CHILD, THAT IF I HAD DELIBERATELY BROKEN A RULE, MY MOTHER WOULD SAY “SHAME ON YOU.” THOSE THREE LITTLE WORDS REALLY HURT ME – ENOUGH TO RECOGNIZE MY OFFENSE AND FEEL TRUE REMORSE FOR MY MISDEED. SHAME WAS NOT SOMETHING TO IGNORE OR TO BE TAKEN LIGHTLY. AND IF BRINGING SHAME ON TO ONESELF WAS NOT BAD ENOUGH – BRINGING SHAME DOWN ON ONE’S FAMILY WAS THE WORST. SO THIS MORNING, I WANT TO ASK THE QUESTION – WHATEVER HAPPENED TO SHAME? IN AN ARTICLE BY CAL THOMAS IN THE WASHINGTON TIMES DATED DECEMBER 15, 2009 HE WRITES: “EARLY IN MY COLUMN-WRITING CAREER I TOOK NOTE OF COMMENTS BY THE SINGER MADONNA. A SKIN MAGAZINE HAD PUBLISHED NUDE PHOTOS OF HER, TAKEN WHEN SHE WAS A TEENAGER. AN INTERVIEWER ASKED IF SHE WAS ASHAMED ABOUT HAVING POSED FOR THEM. SHE THREW THE QUESTION BACK, SAYING SOMETHING LIKE, “WHAT HAVE I GOT TO BE ASHAMED OF?” TODAY, SHAME SEEMS TO BE SOMETHING EXPERIENCED AFTER AN ACTION, IF IT IS FELT AT ALL. SHAME NOW

FOLLOWS WHAT USED TO BE CONSIDERED SHAMEFUL BEHAVIOR BEFORE EVERYTHING BECAME RELATIVE AND TOLERABLE IN A SOCIETY THAT JUDGES NOTHING, EXCEPT THOSE WHO JUDGE CERTAIN BEHAVIOR TO BE WRONG.” KUDOS TO MR. THOMAS – MAY I SAY TO ALL THE REPUBLICAN SENATORS WHO DICTATED TO THE PRESIDENT OF THE UNITED STATES HOW THE SEATING ARRANGEMENT NEEDED TO BE BEFORE THEY WOULD EVEN SHOW UP AT THE WHITE HOUSE THIS PAST WEEK TO DISCUSS THE PROPOSED HEALTH CARE BILL - AND THEN DID ABSOLUTELY NOTHING BUT OBSTRUCT THE PROCESS OF COMING TO AN AGREEMENT – SHAME ON YOU ALL. SHAME ON YOU FOR HOLDING THE WELFARE OF THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HOSTAGE. SHAME ON YOU FOR YOUR PETTY GRANDSTANDING AND OVERALL INTOLERABLY BAD BEHAVIOR. SHAME. I REALIZE THAT YOU COULD CARE LESS – BUT THE EYES OF THE WORLD ARE ON US – AND YOU BRING SHAME TO MY COUNTRY – AND I’M REALLY SICK OF IT. MR. THOMAS GOES ON TO SAY “SOME COMMENTATORS CLAIM THAT TIGER WOODS’ MULTIPLE EXTRAMARITAL AFFAIRS MIGHT BE A “TEACHABLE MOMENT.” IF MR. WOODS ALONG WITH SOME CELEBRITIES AND PHILANDERING POLITICIANS IGNORE THE ANCIENT PROPHETS AND PROVERBS THAT WARN OF THE CONSEQUENCES OF INFIDELITY, WHO AMONG US MODERNS HAS THE MORAL STANDING TO TEACH THEM, AND AVERAGE MEN, HOW NOT TO CAUSE SERIOUS HARM TO THEMSELVES AND THEIR FAMILIES? THERE ARE STANDARDS FOR SWINGING A GOLF CLUB. VIOLATE THEM AND THE BALL GOES AWRY. THERE ARE STANDARDS FOR LIVING AN ORDERED LIFE – VIOLATE THEM AND YOUR LIFE CAN LAND IN A BUNKER. WELL, I WOULD SUGGEST THAT I HAVE SOME DIFFICULTY WITH THE IDEA OF TIGER WOOD’S MORE THAN BAD BEHAVIOR WILL BE MUCH OF A TEACHABLE MOMENT. OUR NEW HOPE CHILDREN HAVE A FINER GRASP OF RIGHT AND WRONG THAN TIGER WOODS – AND HE IS A PRESUMABLY A BRIGHT AND WELL INFORMED ADULT. I WOULD FEEL CONFIDENT LEAVING THIS TEACHABLE MOMENT TO THEM – I BELIEVE THEY COULD GIVE MR. WOODS SOME COGENT ADVICE ON MORALITY AND RIGHTEOUS LIVING. EVEN THE MOST GIFTED AMONG US UNDERSTAND THE BASIC CONCEPTS OF WHAT IS GOOD AND BAD – RIGHT AND WRONG. TIGER’S COMING FORTH AFTER THREE MONTHS IN HIDING WITH HIS MEA CULPAS DIDN’T IMPRESS ME. AND, I MIGHT ADD, IT WAS REFRESHING THAT HIS WIFE ELIN, DIDN’T FEEL THE NEED TO SHOW UP FOR HIS PUBLIC APOLOGIZE.

I HAVE FELT SUCH PITY FOR THE WIVES OF PEOPLE LIKE ELIOT SPITZER, JAMES MCGREEVEY AND MOST RECENTLY, JOHN EDWARDS – AS THEY STAND NEXT THEIR HUSBANDS AND ARE SHAMED BY THEIR SPOUSES’ LYING AND CHEATING WAYS. THEY DESERVE TO AT LEAST KEEP THEIR DIGNITY IN TACT – AND NOT STAND THERE FOR ALL THE WORLD TO SEE THEIR PAIN AND SUFFERING. KUDOS TO ELIN FOR NOT SHOWING UP. ALTHOUGH, TIME WILL TELL HOW LONG SHE REMAINS SILENT – DO I SENSE A BOOK DEAL IN THE NEAR FUTURE? IT APPEARS THAT THE WAY THESE WOMEN TAKE THEIR REVENGE IS TO THEN WRITE A TELL-ALL BOOK EXPOSING THEIR LIVES AND THEIR HUSBAND’S CHEATING WAYS FOR ALL THE WORLD TO READ. AND THEN MAKING THE ROUNDS ON LARRY KING AND OPRAH TO HYPE BOOK SALES. THUS LOSING, IN MY MIND ANYWAY, WHATEVER SHRED OF DIGNITY THEY MAY HAVE HAD LEFT. GETTING RICH AS A RESULT OF DESPICABLE BEHAVIOR HAS BECOME QUITE FASHIONABLE – JUST ASK BRITNEY, PARIS, LINDSAY AND THE KARDASIANS. THE GLORIFICATION OF THESE PEOPLE HAS BECOME AN ABOMINATION IN OUR MODERN SOCIETY. EVERYTHING IN MODERN CULTURE SEEMS TO DEPLORE THE STRAIGHT AND PROMOTE THE CROOKED. PEOPLE WHO WISH TO PROMOTE THE TAWDRY, AND THE COMMERCE THAT MAKES MANY OF THEM A FINE LIVING, BRAND THOSE WHO SEEK TO REMIND OTHERS OF ETERNAL TRUTHS AS “FANATICS” AND “FUNDAMENTALISTS.” BUT THERE ARE CASUALTIES TO SUCH BEHAVIOR, MUCH AS THERE IS COLLATERAL DAMAGE TO AN OUT OF CONTROL CONGRESS THAT SPENDS MONEY AS IF WE HAD IT IN THE BANK WHILE MORTGAGING OUR COUNTRY TO FOREIGNERS, MANY OF WHOM WISH OUR DESTRUCTION. WHAT IS WRONG? WHY DO THESE PEOPLE NOT SEE THE CONSEQUENCES OF THEIR ERRANT BEHAVIOR? IT ISN’T THAT THEY CAN’T. THEY CAN. WE DO. WE ARE EXPECTED TO RESPECT THE LAWS THAT GOVERN OUR DAILY LIVES. WE ARE EXPECTED TO PAY OUR TAXES AND MOW OUR LAWNS. WE ARE EXPECTED TO TAKE OUR VOWS OF FIDELITY SERIOUSNESS WHEN WE MARRY. SO ARE THEY – SO IS EVERYONE. BUT THESE SO-CALL CELEBRITY PEOPLE HAVE CHOSEN NOT TO, WHICH IS MUCH WORSE ACTUALLY THAN WHEN ANY OF US UNKNOWN COMMITS AN INFRACTION OF THE RULES. IT’S WORSE BECAUSE MANY OF THEM HAVE BEEN SET UP AS ROLE MODELS FOR OUR CHILDREN – PEOPLE THEY LOOK UP TO AND WHAT TO EMULATE. FOR INSTANCE, HAVING AN AVOIDABLE ACCIDENT IS DIFFERENT FROM DRIVING DRUNK AND

HAVING A HEAD-ON COLLISION THAT LEADS TO THE DEATH OF THE OTHER DRIVER. IS THERE TOO LITTLE INFORMATION ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF DRUNK DRIVING? ASK THE HIGH SCHOOL STUDENTS IN ANY HIGH SCHOOL IN AMERICA ABOUT THE CONSEQUENCES OF DRIVING DRUNK. THERE IS NOT A TEENAGER TODAY THAT HASN'T KNOWN SOMEONE WHO HAS DIED IN A CAR ACCIDENT WHERE ALCOHOL WAS INVOLVED. EVERY YEAR HOWELL AND BRIGHTON HIGH SCHOOLS REPORT AT LEAST ONE OR MORE FATAL ACCIDENTS THAT WERE THE RESULT OF ALCOHOL. YET, WHEN MOVIE STARS AND TV CELEBRITIES GET PULLED OVER FOR DRUNK DRIVING – DO WE SEE REMORSE – NO WE SEE THEIR HIGH PRICED ATTORNEYS GETTING THEM PROBATION. TEACHABLE MOMENT FOR WHO? LIKE INMATES THAT THINK THEY CAN COMMIT THE PERFECT CRIME AND AVOID ARREST, THERE ARE THOSE WHO HAVE BECOME PRISONERS OF THEIR LOWER NATURE, BELIEVING THEY COULD GET AWAY WITH BAD BEHAVIOR. THEIR ENABLERS, FLUNKIES, POLITICAL ADVISERS AND INTEREST GROUPS, TELL THEM TO KEEP DOING WHAT THEY ARE DOING BECAUSE IT PROVIDES THEM WITH EMPLOYMENT OR POLITICAL POWER. AT THE HEART OF EVERY SIN (IF I MAY USE A WORD THAT HAS BEEN REPLACED BY THE LESS JUDGMENTAL WORD DYSFUNCTIONAL) IS PRIDE. AS A UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST I HAVE NO PROBLEM USING THE WORD THAT BEST DESCRIBES WHAT SOMETHING IS. WHEN WE HAVE COMMITTED AN OFFENSE AGAINST ANOTHER IT IS A SIN – PERHAPS NOT A SIN IN THE TRADITIONAL RELIGIOUS SENSE OF BEING AN OFFENSE AGAINST GOD – NO IT'S AN OFFENSE AGAINST A FELLOW HUMAN BEING AND WHEN IT'S TRULY EGREGIOUS – IT IS A SIN. AND AT THE HEART OF EVERY SIN IS PRIDE. THE STAN CHARACTER IN THE FILM “THE DEVIL’S ADVOCATE” SAYS “PRIDE IS MY FAVORITE SIN.” THAT’S BECAUSE IT LEADS TO ALL THE OTHERS, INCLUDING SEXUAL INFIDELITY AND THE INFIDELITY OF POLITICIANS WHO ABUSE THE POWER GIVEN TO THEM BY THE PEOPLE, BECOMING POOR STEWARDS OF OTHER PEOPLE’S MONEY. WHAT I TRULY RESENT IS THIS BUSINESS ABOUT SOMEONE BEING ABLE TO BE ONE PERSON IN PRIVATE AND ANOTHER IN PUBLIC. WHAT IF THIS WERE TRUE FOR JUST WE ORDINARY FOLKS. HOW COULD WE EVER KNOW WHO WAS BEING AUTHENTICALLY THEMSELVES. IT IS SO DISINGENUOUS TO THINK WE CAN BE A PERSON THAT IS DESERVING OF RESPECT AND TRUST IF WE ARE LEADING TWO SEPARATE LIVES. AT HOME WE ARE KICKING THE DOG AND YELLING CONSTANTLY AT

OUR SPOUSE AND CHILDREN AND THEN WE GO OUT IN PUBLIC AND WE'RE ALL NICEY-NICEY. HOW MANY TIMES HAVE WE HEARD COMMENTS MADE ABOUT SOMEONE AND THEY SAY "OH, HE'S SUCH A NICE GUY." AND YET WE KNOW THAT IN BUSINESS HE IS NOT AN HONORABLE PERSON. OR SHE IS SUCH A GREAT EMPLOYEE AND WE KNOW THAT SHE'S NEGLECTING HER CHILDREN. TO BECOME THE AUTHENTIC AND HONORABLE PERSON THAT WE NEED TO BE IS TO INTEGRATE OUR PERSONAL AND PUBLIC PERSONA INTO ONE WHOLE PERSON. TIGER WOODS' INFIDELITY IS NOT WHAT HAS UNDERMINED HIM AS A HUMAN BEING. IT IS THAT HIS PERSONAL AND PUBLIC LIFE ARE NOT REMOTELY ONE AND THE SAME. MANY YEARS AGO I WAS IN A HOTEL IN BUFFALO, NEW YORK FOR AN AMERICAN HUMANIST MEETING AND WHO SHOULD WALK INTO THE LOBBY BUT O.J. SIMPSON. WELL, NOT BEING A FOOTBALL PERSON I DIDN'T EVEN RECOGNIZE HIM BUT I KNEW HIS NAME. SEVERAL PEOPLE FROM OUR GROUP WENT OVER TO HIM TO SAY "HELLO" AND ASK FOR AN AUTOGRAPH. HE COULD NOT HAVE BEEN NICER OR MORE GRACIOUS. HE SPENT TIME TALKING WITH EVERYONE AND THEY ALL CAME BACK SAYING "WHAT A NICE GUY – WHAT A GREAT GUY." WELL, WE ALL KNOW WHAT HAPPENED TO O.J. SIMPSON. HE WAS NOT PRIVATELY WHAT HE PORTRAYED IN PUBLIC. AND I DON'T THINK WE CAN – OR FAMOUS PEOPLE CAN – LIVE LIVES LIKE THAT. DICTIONARY.COM DEFINES SHAME: "THE PAINFUL FEELING ARISING FROM THE CONSCIOUSNESS OF SOMETHING DISHONORABLE, IMPROPER. THE DEFINITION PRESUMES A STANDARD BY WHICH HONORABLE AND PROPER MIGHT BE MEASURED. HAVE WE ABANDONED THAT STANDARD? HAVE WE ABANDONED ALL STANDARDS IN FAVOR OF DOING WHATEVER MAKES US FEEL GOOD? PERHAPS IT LOOKS THAT WAY ON THE SURFACE. BUT THE REALITY IS THAT THE STANDARDS OF OLD – ARE STILL IN FASHION. IT IS WHY WE ATTEND NEW HOPE. NOT BECAUSE WE ARE PERFECT PEOPLE – BUT BECAUSE WE ARE ALL STRIVING TO BE A BIT BETTER. AND BECAUSE WE SHARE A SET OF PRINCIPLES THAT ENCOURAGE US TO RISE ABOVE THE INSANITY. MY GUESS IS THAT BAD BEHAVIOR WILL CONTINUE TO PLAY OUT IN THE MEDIA – BECAUSE IT SELLS. ONE ARTICLE THAT I READ RECENTLY SAID THAT MEDIA COVERAGE OF BAD BEHAVIOR AND OUR LUST FOR ALL THINGS CELEBRITY HAS BECOME OUR ONLY COMMON GROUND WITH PEOPLE. THAT THE AMERICAN PEOPLE HAVE BECOME SO POLARIZED IN THEIR RELIGIOUS BELIEFS, THEIR POLITICAL AFFILIATIONS AND THEIR

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS THAT THE LAST THING THAT BRINGS US ALL TOGETHER IS SHAMEFUL BEHAVIOR BY CELEBRITIES. WE CAN'T GO TO OUR BARBER AND DISCUSS HEALTH CARE, BUT WE SURE CAN TALK ABOUT TIGER WOODS. WE CAN'T SIT AROUND AT LUNCH IN THE WORKPLACE AND TALK ABOUT UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM, BUT WE CAN TALK ABOUT PARIS HILTON'S LATEST ESCAPE. IS THIS PATHETIC, OR WHAT? IT MAY BE, BUT THERE IS SOME TRUTH TO THIS AUTHOR'S ASSERTION THAT THE ONE THING UNITING AMERICANS IN 2010 IS OUR FASCINATION WITH CELEBRITIES BEHAVING BADLY. IF IT'S TRUE, EVEN A LITTLE, IT NEEDS TO STOP. AND STOP NOW. AND IF WE DON'T – SHAME ON US. SO BE IT.

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