

“Coming of Age Homilies”

by the 2019 Coming of Age class:

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The Good, The Evil, and The True Neutral

by Joey Gilson

“There is no typical human,” the 5th Dungeons & Dragons module wasn’t kidding about that subject. Humans tend to do whatever falls in line with social and moral codes and everyone of them is unique. However, another important part of human nature is under the alignment category: “Humans tend toward no particular alignment. The best and the worst are found among them.” and that would be my homily basis.

So for all the all non D&D fans out there, here is the basics of alignments. Alignment is basically the description of whether you follow the laws or ignore them. Do you do this for good or for your own advantage? It is really one of the most challenging and unique parts of the character and gameplay experience. Every alignment has its benefits.

I get that this is very confusing so... I decided to show you this via star wars. Lawful good: Obi-wan Kenobi. Neutral good: Luke Skywalker. Chaotic good: R2-D2. Lawful Neutral: C-3PO. True neutral: Boba Fett. Chaotic Neutral: Han Solo. Lawful evil: Darth Vader. Neutral evil: Jabba the Hutt. Chaotic Evil: Jar Jar Binks... not really. It is Emperor Palpatine. However, apply those character traits to the real world and you see something different.

People tend to be all over that scale of alignment. “You can find the best and the worst amongst them,” according to the D&D player’s handbook. A large amount of people tend to go about their daily lives not caring in the greater battle of good and evil. Yet they tend to follow the rules of the law and morals. Furthermore, I will ignore the warnings of D&D and I will generalize humans. Humans are lawful neutral; Following the rules, yet not always caring about good and evil.

But what does that mean for me, or any other person. Well, what does that mean you or me. It means that no matter how many people will make unwise decisions, the general body of people will follow the law, and most people won’t be all too much caring about the greater good and worse evil. Being lawful good myself, this basically means that most people will independently be trustable and respectful. But then there are people who do bad things, and there are people who are just cruel, so where do they fall? There are eight other alignments, people can be found on every single one of them.

People are very interesting creatures. We really do each have a original experience per person. Meaning there are about 7 billion people all seeing the world through different eyes. We all see the world differently, and in all honesty, that is what makes human experience so great. No two people are exactly alike. So no matter how many people are irritating, remember a few simple things. Everyone is trying to be as respectful as possible, so please show them dignity like the principles suggest. We're all human after all, we should help each other perfect our world. Love and care for each other too. What you take from this homily, I hope, is that people are made to be good, so be nice, spread some love, and encourage all people to Live long and prosper. Thank You.

Defining Choices

by Emma Jiron

Good morning everyone and thank you for coming to the Coming of Age ceremony. My name is Emma Jiron, and today I will be talking about how I define decisions and how they make me who I am as a person.

Have you ever wondered if you are making the right choice? Have you ever really known you were doing the right thing? Throughout my life, I have asked myself many times if I was making the right decision. But whenever I asked myself these questions, I never found the answer that I was looking for. For example, when I make a decision I consider right for me and what I want, I find in the end, my decisions have been based on someone else's rules, societal norms and other people's expectations. Today I would to share with you all how these my choices have influenced me.

Since I was a child I have made daily decision after decision, like choosing what I want to eat or wear or wanted to do. But these decisions didn't greatly influence or impact my life in any particular way, or so I thought. I was content to go along with everyone else and whatever their choice or opinion was. But I have come to realize I haven't been thinking for myself. I was allowing others to do my thinking and decision making for me. As I have Come of Age, I have found my pathway to making my own decisions. Instead of focusing on other people's perspectives, I know to make my decision on what I feel is right. I know inside myself that I am doing the right thing because I can feel it inside my heart. I bet all of you have had these same struggles, but ultimately have learned to trust and listen to your own inner voice.

I have always wanted to know the exact answer to everything, but simply can't be done. Just like my choices, they are not exact. My gut pushes me to make the decision that is right. This inner urge pushes all of us to the choices we want to make and helps us discard the decisions that we feel are wrong for us. I am excited about my future, to achieve my goals, and to find the answers I have been looking for. I'm not sure, at this point, what my spiritual belief system will ultimately look like. But what I do know is I want it to be my decision and my choice. I

don't want to just go along with everyone else. I want to think for myself and feel it in my gut. Hopefully, like me, you have found this urge as well and it helps you to make your decisions.

My choices in life thus far have not been what I have wanted them to be exactly, because they were decisions influenced by my family, my teachers and my friends. But somehow those decisions have helped me become the person I am today. They have helped shape my perspective of what I see as wrong and right and have help me make good choices. It is still extremely complicated to define my choices because we all define them in different ways. Yet my decisions have paved a pathway to my future. My decisions may not be perfect and they might not be perfectly defined, but they have taught me lessons and are helping develop my mindset, a mindset I hope will create good change in our world. There is a quote by Robert Kiyosaki that says, "You and only you are responsible for your life choices and decisions."

Thank you.

Panthers: A History

by Delino Kapelianis-Donado

[WARNING: THE FOLLOWING TOPIC IS EXTREMELY CONTROVERSIAL. THOSE WHO ARE SENSITIVE TO SUCH TOPICS ARE ADVISED TO LEAVE THE SANCTUARY AS TO NOT SPOIL ANY NOTIONS THAT THEY MIGHT HAVE HAD. LISTENER DISCRETION IS ADVISED.]

Is everyone out who wanted to get out?

Good, let's begin.

Let's start by proposing a simple question: What is a panther?

Well, easy enough, some of you might say "A panther is a big cat that can be typically found in the jungle." Others might say "A mysterious and dangerous predator found in the wild." Some of you people who think you're funny (But you're really not) might say "An animal in the zoo" or "The pink panther."

Well, I'm sorry, but you're all wrong. There is only one correct answer. One which probably nobody in this room would have ever guessed. But that answer is: there is no such thing as a panther. (Audience gasps in amazement).

So now you might be asking "Well, then what is that big black cat?"

Today, I'm going to explain to you where people get the preconceived notion about the black jungle cat called the panther and what this cat actually is.

First of all, I'd like to get this out of the way. I'm not saying that panther isn't a word or that it doesn't mean anything, it just doesn't mean quite what you think.

It's likely that the word started as the Sanskrit "pandarah", meaning whitish-yellow which was used to describe the tiger. Later, the word was adapted into Greek as panthera, meaning all beasts. In medieval times panther was used to describe a calm, colorful, mythological animal with a pleasant smell.

Now today, the word panther is used as the genus for the five biggest big cats. It is used for: Panthera Leo, Panthera Tigris, Panthera Onca, Panthera Pardus, and Panthera Uncia. The lion, tiger, jaguar, leopard, and snow leopard, respectively.

The confusion is that panthers are their own unique and distinct species, which is entirely untrue. What people think are black panthers are actually either leopards or jaguars that happen to be melanistic, making them darker.

In fact, most "panthers" are not even solidly black, as you can see here they do have spots, demonstrating that they are in fact leopards or jaguars.

I'm not entirely sure when and why humans started calling melanistic leopards and jaguars "panthers", but all I can say is I hope they knew how much confusion they caused in the future.

I know it sounds hard to believe, but it's true. There is no such thing as a panther.

Or maybe, maybe it's not even just about the panther. Maybe the panther is a metaphor, a symbol. A symbol for humanity. Because what I think, is that humans tend to take things at face value. Humans are ignorant and incompetent. Humans know so little, how can they make an educated decision about anything? And to quote Stephen Fry, "People sometimes accuse me of knowing a lot. 'Stephen,' they say accusingly, 'you know a lot.' This is a bit like telling a person who has a few grains of sand clinging to him that he owns much sand. When you consider the vast amount of sand there is in the world such a person is, to all intents and purposes, sandless. We are all sandless. We are all ignorant. There are beaches and deserts and dunes of knowledge whose existence we have never even guessed at, let alone visited." Humans are ignorant. And the worst part is, we don't even know it.

Thank you.

Why I Dance

by Victoria Scott

People ask me all the time why I dance. My friends tease me because I can never meet up with them. My mom checks periodically, to make sure that I am still doing what I love. And the

answer is always yes, because ballet is my passion. So for me, the question of why I dance is simple: I dance because it frees me. Whether I am at home or at school, I'm always rigid. I have to be, in order to get all of my schoolwork as well as homework done. I've always felt pressured to do well in everything, but at ballet, I have learned to let go. In some ways, it's the only thing that keeps me sane. It is the way that I express myself, just as an artist would use a paintbrush, or a musician would use their instrument. My body is my instrument to express the art of ballet. In the words of Martha Graham, "Dance is the hidden language of the soul of the body."

I've been a ballet dancer since I was five, and ever since I first saw a dancer on stage, I knew that I wanted to be that beautiful. But now, I know that beauty is not all of it. No one wants to see a dancer play it safe. To be beautiful, you must make an impact. And to do that, you must let go. My modern teacher, Ms. Cory, always says that if you don't push yourself, then you will never know your limits, and if you surpass that limit and fall, then the floor will catch you. In some ways, it's very freeing to think that you can leave your worries behind you, and learn to live in the present. Once you have learned to let go, it almost feels like you are flying. I experienced this not too long ago, while I was on stage performing as a Seraphim in the Nutcracker. For the first time, I felt like I was really dancing. Now, I try to apply this to my dancing in on stage as well as in class. I feel like this has improved my dancing, as well as my experience dancing.

I have always found it very important to find a time where I can express myself, and be free of any worries. Whenever I'm in an argument, I'll come back from ballet no longer upset or annoyed. Dance is one of the only places where I feel like I can truly be myself. Every dancer dances differently. I have now found that most people's dancing reflects their personality. However, even a quiet person dances big. Their voice can be heard through their dance. Ballet has given me a voice, for which I will be ever grateful.

I believe this can be applied to everything in life. If you are successful but always rigid and strict with yourself, then you may not be happy, as happiness is something money cannot buy. However, you also can't live someone else's life. They're already taken. So let go, and live life as it makes you happy.

My Coming of Age Story

by Ben Jiron

Hello and welcome to my Coming of Age Ceremony. My name is Benjamin Jiron. First off, I would like to thank everyone for coming today, not only to see me, but also my fellow classmates. Today I will talking about how I have changed throughout my pre-teen years. Then I will tell you about what I would like to accomplish when I grow up. Finally, I will explain

what I value most in life and how I have been exploring my spiritual beliefs. Ok let's get started!!

I was born in Albuquerque on August 10, 2005. Since the age of five, my interest in life has been golf. I love everything about golf and I love to play the game. I am determined to play golf for the rest of my life and to play it well. But it can't be my only focus. I need to graduate high school and college. The first school I attended was Comanche Elementary. There I met a lot of my good friends that I still hang out with today. I really enjoyed my time there and I am glad I attended that school.

After finishing 5th grade and just as I was to begin middle school, I encountered a traumatic change of events, and while at the Unitarian Universalist summer camp, no less! I snapped my femur bone clean in half while playing dodgeball. For those that don't know, the femur bone is your thigh bone. It is also the biggest bone in the human body. As a result of the break, I had a titanium rod put into my leg, as well as a few screws and had to start middle school in a wheelchair. This is the most serious injury I have ever faced this far in my life. But it was also a life experience that was great for me to endure because I learned empathy for those in wheelchairs and with other disabilities. The experience opened my mind to those who just need a little help.

The middle school I attended is Cleveland Middle School. I was selected to be in Honor Society, which means that I had to have a GPA of a 3.5 or higher. But Honor Society was not my only school activity. After school one day, my friend told me that there were tennis tryouts, so I tried out. It was my first time playing tennis and I made the Junior Varsity team. After a month of practicing, I was moved up by my coach to the Varsity team with all of the older and better skilled kids. At the end of the season, I was one of three allstars on the team. I did this while still keeping up with golf. This year at school, I tried out for the soccer team. I made the team and our school soccer team was undefeated this year. Throughout my middle school years I feel like I have become a more mature, well-rounded and athletic young adult.

So what I would like to accomplish in the future? My goal is to make the Sandia High School Varsity golf team. And I would love to try getting a golf scholarship for college. While at college, I would like to study Mechanical Engineering.

Lastly I would like to share with you what I value most in life and how I will continue to explore my spiritual beliefs. What I value most is my family, including my pets. I also value my friends, my teachers, my school, good food and especially golf. I have learned of a lot already about different spiritual beliefs and traditions, but there is still more that I am learning. I am still trying to figure out what I believe. One thing I know I believe is that there is more than one creator or explanations for creation. I believe that everyone can love anyone, and anyone can be whatever they want. I believe there is spirituality in the game of golf. I believe there are many life lessons that can be learned by playing golf. One thing golf has taught me is that every new hole is a new start, a fresh chance. And just like in life when we make mistakes, we can end up in the bushes or in a sand trap or even in a lake. Life has challenges that everyone

must face. But no matter what, if you mess up, there is still the next hole. Thank you everyone for listing and see you on the golf course!

It Just Goes On

by Katie Jones

Life doesn't pause for you to rest and have a break, it just keeps throwing problems and twists into the mix and that's just simply how it is. It's hard, and you want to give up a lot of the time. But you need to keep going, and keep lugging your burdens and hardships through life to get to the good parts, the happy parts, the laughs, and the friends.

I've felt like giving up a lot, and I feel like its so utterly difficult to get through life and keep going. Problems on top of problems happen... but I'm still here, and I've gotten through plenty of hard things and who says i can't get through more?

You have to decide the things you're going to try on. Everything doesn't come naturally, like writing this, it's really hard, but I care about it so I'm doing it . You need to stick to what you believe in and take the wins with the losses. But you have to know everything always works out in the end.

I've had a lot of losses, developing depression in about 6th grade was one of the biggest ones, making the whole middle school experience- lets just say... difficult. I've felt like a failure for my poor grades and for comparing myself to others but now I know, grades don't determine your knowledge, worth, or dignity, you do. Other people shouldn't determine what you think of yourself, or what you do either. Just be you and you will find your people.

Middle school and high school is a really hard and busy time and you can feel like everything is piling up and there is no way out. Going through puberty, on top of getting older and having more responsibility, it can feel like you're an ant trying to climb mount Everest.

I'm sure everyone has felt this way one time or another, and I think it's important to acknowledge the fact that getting older is scary.

There is always a silver lining in the darkness though. Like how storm clouds covering the sun always have glowing edges. A happy side to my depression is that I've learned a lot of things about myself. I've been faced with challenges I thought I could never get through, and I got through them, and I learned from them, and I'm trying to to embrace them. For crying out loud I'm on a stage in front of the whole congregation giving a speech, if I can do this I think I can do anything. And beliiiiieeeeeve me, I'm still struggling, every day. And EVERYONE struggles, everyday. But you have no choice, you just have to keep moving, and keep learning, and keep changing. Progress is sometimes slow.. But it's always worth it. There are

so many things you can overlook but its the little things that you have to appreciate; like walking in the bosque with your friends or family and throwing rocks into the river. Like telling inside jokes with your friends.

Look, My point is, that

it just goes on

Day by day

I think billy collins describes my fear exactly in “turning ten”

He says (quote)

‘The whole idea of it makes me feel

like I'm coming down with something,

something worse than any stomach ache

or the headaches I get from reading in bad light--

a kind of measles of the spirit,

a mumps of the psyche,

a disfiguring chicken pox of the soul.’

(End quote)

The fear.. Of growing up is there.. But growing up is okay, growing up is necessary. Growing up makes and made you the magnificent person you are today. So keep it up and everything, will surely be alright.