



How It Might Have Gone

BY **GRETCHEN HALEY**, SENIOR MINISTER,
FOOTHILLS UNITARIAN CHURCH , FORT COLLINS, COLORADO

I kept imagining how it might have gone.

I keep thinking of it like my Universalist Dream Ballet version of the horrifying/captivating Senate hearings on Brett Kavanaugh’s appointment to the Supreme Court. That is, a version of events fueled by my most idealistic notions of redemption and reconciliation. A version that would obviously include spectacle, ornate costumes and over-the-top musical flourishes, and/or non-linear plot devices—because it’s that disconnected from reality.

Which did not stop me from thinking about it.

Like most everyone I know, I listened to almost all of Dr. Christine Blasey-Ford’s testimony. I listened reflexively, out of loyalty more than curiosity. After all, I’ve been off-book on this script for most of my life. All the words, the players, how it turns out. I’ve had it all down at least as far back as that same life stage they were working so hard to recall in the course of the hearings.

There are plenty of things I don’t remember about being a teenager. Still, there will always be those things I will never forget, even if I try.... My first long, slow, increasingly desperate survey of the school cafeteria wondering who to sit with. Staring down the swimming lane at state finals. Beating all the boys at the math competition. Getting the love note from the boy everyone said liked me. Saying goodbye to my sisters and my parents once they dropped me and all my stuff at the dorms. And a month or so later, that night in the frat house.

The therapist who greeted me the day I realized the memory was not going away agreed with me, it wasn’t rape. But it was *questionable*— in the consent arena. Fuzzy lines made fuzzier by alcohol and the dark rooms of Greek row. I was 17 when I went to college, still very much a teenager. A couple years older than Dr. Blasey-Ford, the same age as Judge Kavanaugh when he held her down, and covered her mouth, and she wondered if she would survive.

I don’t remember everything about it. Definitely not enough to withstand Lindsey Graham and his temper tantrums. But enough to still know his name. His face. His smell.

In my Dream Ballet version of the hearing Brett Kavanaugh still doesn’t remember doing it, still isn’t sure. It isn’t required for reconciliation to begin, I’ve realized. Because I’ve seen it enough now, the power of denial. The stories we tell about ourselves, stories that if you topple them, would mean toppling over entirely. Facts are no match for these stories. And at 53, he’s been telling himself these stories for decades. *“I went to an all-boys Catholic high school where I was focused on academics and athletics and going to church every Sunday and working on my service projects and friendships.”*

These sorts of moments challenge Universalists (and others oriented towards a commitment to compassion and our common humanity). Because we don’t believe in writing anyone off. Because we often don’t have a fully formed theology of evil. Because we do have an over-functioning theology of human goodness. Not to mention a totally unscientific faith in human reasoning. Because we too often confuse today’s US court system with anything resembling real restoration.

So, in a different world, in the world of my Dream Ballet, how does restoration happen?

Quest

Vol. LXXIV, No 4

April 2019

All the beauty that’s
been
lost before
wants to
find us again.

—U2

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT RESTORATION

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It is a process that requires multiple steps, what I call the Five Rs:

1. **Recognize** yourself in ways you have not been willing to know yourself before. Recognize the injury. Study it. Not just from your own life perspective, but also from an empathetic view that imagines how someone else might have seen it. Recognize your role, without excuses or explanations. Accept responsibility.
2. **Remorse** comes naturally after a full recognition. Remorse is more than regret. Remorse means we know ourselves as the one who has caused another pain.
3. It's this real remorse that inspires our **Refusal** to ever repeat the same mistake again. Without this commitment, all the other steps are meaningless.
4. It's not always possible to **Repair** the damage that was done, but trying matters too. Do whatever you can to put the pieces back together. Repay the money. Restore the reputation.
5. And finally, it requires **Revelation**. As in, your own out-loud utterance of every other R—out loud to the person you injured, out loud to the surrounding community. Out loud to God, the universe. Bring what has been previously hidden and secret into the open so that it can be accountable.

Despite what any of us might wish, time does not automatically do the work of the Five Rs. Even the time that passes from age 17 to 53. A law degree does not do it either. Nor does a successful career as a judge, or a nice house with a beautiful family. The work requires actual effort. Intention. Starting with that first move towards recognition.

In my fantasy version of the hearing, Brett Kavanaugh does not have to top-ple over. (Even in a Dream Ballet, we can't imagine that denial can be un-

done in one moment.) But even an opening towards the pain Dr. Blasey-Ford was expressing would be a start, a move towards restoration. Rather than amplifying his own sense of pain and entitlement, channeling anger for what was being done to *him*, in my Dream Ballet Kavanaugh would look toward repairing what was broken.

He would show a willingness to acknowledge that it is possible that he did not have all the information. It is possible that his memory is imperfect. (Dr. Blasey-Ford could teach him a little about the scientific reasons why memory can be deceptive and self-protective.) Any move towards wholeness would have to begin here. With an acknowledgment that there are always things out of our view, a humility, and a willingness to see anew.

Imagine how differently things might have gone if he'd made even the slightest move towards this recognition. In the courtroom or, even better, in the first hour he learned of her coming forward. Or even more incredibly, in any of the days between that night at the party and the day his name was put forward for a lifetime appointment to the highest court in the US (so-called) justice system.

Imagine. Instead of trying to accept that we are appointing a self-righteous sexual predator to the Supreme Court, we could even be giving thanks that we'd be appointing someone who knows what real justice looks like. This is the power of this path of real turning, real redemption and restoration.

I know. It's a wild fantasy, but it's a fantasy we need not abandon. We can hold this fantasy at the forefront when we are talking to our kids about the lessons of this hearing. About the lessons of the #MeToo movement. About the sorts of humans that we can and must be for each other. About consent. And respect. And love.

We can and must also speak about failure, and regret, and repair. Because we are not perfect creatures. None of us.

Science actually shows that we are mostly profoundly irrational, illogical, inconsistent. But I want my kids to know not only that if they have something terrible happen to them, they can and should expect this degree of accountability, and repair—but also that if they do something terrible, there is a path to restoration. Because it remains true that no one is ever outside the possibility of redemption. And because even when all seems lost, truth continues to be revealed. Even for Judge Kavanaugh. ■

Notice of Annual Meeting To all members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist

Per Article VII, Sections 1 and 2 of the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) Bylaws, the 46th Annual Meeting will be held via video/telephone conference call and screen sharing on Tuesday, June 11, 2019 at 8:00PM EDT. The video call link is <https://zoom.us/j/559129880>

We will post all the necessary documents and contact information to the CLF website (www.clfuu.org/annualmeeting) by June 4, 2019. You can download materials and print them. Or call the CLF office at 617-948-6150 and request a paper copy.

The purpose of the meeting is to, from the slate of candidates recommended by the nominating committee,

- Elect two members to 3-year terms on the board of directors,
- Elect one member to a 3-year term on the nominating committee,
- Elect a clerk and treasurer

We will elect a moderator from among members present to preside at the meeting.

Danielle Di Bona, Clerk ■

Finding Restoration Through Stories



BY **MYKE JOHNSON**,
MINISTER EMERITA, ALLEN
AVENUE UU CHURCH,
PORTLAND, ME

If European Americans begin to learn the real stories, and become aware of the level of devastation and grief suffered by Indigenous peoples, our first reaction can sometimes be defensiveness. After all, we think, it wasn't me, personally, who stole Indian land, or caused disease among the people, or killed anyone. Perhaps our second reaction is a feeling of guilt, because of what our ancestors may have done. But I have learned that neither defensiveness nor guilt is really very helpful. In a way, they keep the overwhelming losses at arm's length. We must go deeper than that. Is there a way we can acknowledge the terrible brokenness? How can we begin to find healing, or a way to restore wholeness?

One first step for me has been to listen to Indigenous people tell their own stories. I needed to learn how to listen to stories of loss and pain. Listening is not about fixing something, or feeling guilty, or giving advice. Listening is about being present and opening our hearts to the experience of someone who has a story to tell. We need to seek out those stories of brokenness, to listen and let our hearts be broken by them. There have been moments when the pain of such listening has felt almost too much to bear, but I reminded myself how much more painful it must be for the one telling the story. Then I felt such gratitude that someone was willing to share these stories.

Let me tell you about one opportunity that used listening to create a path to healing. In the fall of 2012, I attended a presentation about the Maine Wabanaki Child Welfare Truth and Reconciliation Commission. The goals of the commission were three: to find out

and write down what happened to Wabanaki people involved with the Maine child welfare system; to give Wabanaki people a place to share their stories, to have a voice and to heal; and to give the Maine child welfare system guidance on how it can work better with Wabanaki people.

The history underlying this effort is soul-shattering. One of the ways the U.S. and Canadian governments tried to solve their so-called "Indian problem" was to take Indian children away from their families and communities. Beginning in the 1800s, children were taken from their homes and sent to boarding schools run by different churches. The purpose was to destroy their Indian identity, and assimilate them into a white way of being. Their hair was cut and their own clothing was taken away. They were forbidden to speak their languages, or practice their religions, and often did not see their parents again for years. This original horror was amplified by emotional, physical, and sexual abuse. Many children died. Those who made it home were not the same as when they left.

How can we begin to find healing, or a way to restore wholeness?

In the 1950s and 60s, the Bureau of Indian Affairs and the Child Welfare League of America tried another experiment: they took hundreds of Native children from their families and tribes to give to white families to adopt and raise. Hundreds of others were taken from their homes and placed in white foster care. In Maine, Native children were taken from their families and placed in white foster homes at a higher rate than most other states. The stealing of children has been one of the worst forms of genocidal oppression Indigenous peoples have suffered.

In 1978, after heroic efforts by Native

activists, Congress passed the Indian Child Welfare Act. It recognized that children's tribal citizenship is as important as their family relationships. It stipulated that child welfare agencies should work with tribal agencies to keep children within the community, and prioritized placing children with relatives rather than taking them to strangers outside of the community. They also recognized that there is "no resource that is more vital to the continued existence and integrity of Indian tribes than their children."

The effects of stealing the children persist through generations of Native families and communities. Co-founder of the Truth and Reconciliation Commission, Passamaquoddy Denise Altvater, spoke of how she had been taken to foster care as a seven-year-old child:

State workers came onto the reservation. My five sisters and I were home. My mother was not home. They took all of our belongings and they put them in garbage bags. They herded us into station wagons and drove us away for a long, long time....

They took us to a state foster home in the Old Town area and left us there for four years. During those four years, our foster parents sexually assaulted us. They starved us. They did some horrific things to us.

No one believed them when they tried to get help. During another three years they were placed in kinder situations, but the dislocation and sense of not belonging anywhere caused lasting psychic trauma into adulthood. Even though Denise eventually became successful in a career and was admired by many, this trauma left her feeling a profound sense of disconnection. She did not know how to be a real parent to her children, and she saw its effects in the struggles of her children and granddaughter.

Telling these stories is incredibly painful. Denise Altvater revealed that she

had a breakdown after she first shared her story. But she persevered because being able to speak the truth is central to the path toward healing. Without her willingness to tell her story, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission might never have come to be. Listening to her story, I felt my heart break open, too, for the hurt caused to those young ones who were so vulnerable, for the pain that repeated itself through generations.

Healing becomes possible through telling the stories and through listening to the stories.

Denise and others who were working to implement the Indian Child Welfare Act in Maine, educating state workers about its meaning and implications, realized they needed a process to deal with the deep levels of hurt and trauma Native people and communities were carrying. The Truth and Reconciliation Commission hoped to be a tool for that healing, and for making changes so children do not suffer in the future what Denise and so many others suffered in the past.

The mandate for the Commission was signed by Tribal leaders from the five Wabanaki communities in Maine and by the governor of Maine. Five commissioners were selected and community support was set up for those who told their stories. This was the first Truth and Reconciliation of its kind in the United States. Organizers also established a network of non-Native allies to lend support to the Commission's process.

Healing becomes possible through telling stories and through listening to the stories. Healing becomes possible through re-building trust and connection between Native and non-Native peoples. When we listen together, there is hope. Native people want us to move

beyond myths and stereotypes and learn more deeply and accurately about the issues they face today. Those of us living in the mainstream society can use our advantage and position to be allies and resources for Native peoples' concerns, and join together in our common concerns for the earth.

In her novel *Solar Storms*, Chickasaw writer Linda Hogan begins with a story of an unusual feast given by a woman named Bush. Bush was grieving the loss of a small child, Angel, after she was taken away from their tiny Native community by the white county authorities. Though not related by blood, Bush had cared for Angel after Angel's mother could not. In order to reckon with her grief, Bush prepared food for the whole community, and then she gave away all of her possessions to them. Hogan writes, in the voice of one who had been to the feast:

Going back that morning, in the blue northern light, their stomachs were filled, their arms laden with blankets, food.... But the most important thing they carried was Bush's sorrow. It was small now, and child-sized, and it slid its hand inside theirs and walked away with them. We all had it, after that. It became our own. Some of us have since wanted to give it back to her, but once we felt it we knew it was too large for a single person. After that your absence sat at every table, occupied every room, walked through the doors of every house.

Through this sharing of sorrow, the sorrow became bearable. Indigenous people too often bear the sorrows of our history alone. Once we let ourselves feel this grief, we realize it is much too large for one people to carry alone. But the more of us who are willing to carry this sorrow, the more of us who are willing to join in the struggle, the more bearable it will be. ■

Restoring Hearts

BY MICHAEL, CLF MEMBER
INCARCERATED IN KENTUCKY

I watched a man die today. Infirm with age, he was hobbling along with his cane as he went to the commissary window to buy a few snacks when, stepping backward, he bumped directly into Death.

Then men who care nothing for any of us were inconveniently compelled to try to restart the worn-out engine of life, now suddenly silent in his chest. They failed.

It occurs to me that restoration of a heartbeat shouldn't be more difficult than the restoration of a human heart. People will work tirelessly to restore a heartbeat for a stranger, but shouldn't we all work just as diligently to restore a "heart" for others? Perhaps even our own heart. Should we not work for restoration of hearts that are broken? Restoration for the lost and lonely and misguided in our world?

If the hearts of all people were restored to a state of kindness, what would our world look like? Almost everyone feels compassion for a sick child or an injured animal. So why don't we feel the same way for others who are broken, lost and lonely? Why not for the prisoners, the addicts, the confused teenagers or the other down-trodden people all around us?

I believe that in every human heart, from the bitterest to the softest, there is a capacity for genuine kindness and compassion. Somehow, somewhere, something has buried that innate ability in too many people.

Whether we realize it or not, we all need restoration. Restoration of our heart's deep compassion. Restoration of our faith in basic human goodness. Restoration of our sense of connection with one another and with all people. We need restoration of our genuine "heart" in order to continue, or even to begin, living our lives with real depth and fulfillment. ■

Restorative Justice

BY JACK, CLF MEMBER
INCARCERATED IN TEXAS

Restorative justice is an act of giving back, not going back, for nothing will ever be the same as before the damage was done. Most justice is seen as retribution, or revenge. The victim is to be made whole again by the act of removing the perpetrator from society, punishing them in the hopes that by this act the victim will gain some kind of restoration, while the perpetrator's years of incarceration may deter them from future misdeeds.

However, this system does nothing to truly restore the victim's sense of loss and harm, and it produces even more victims. For every incarcerated person there is likely to be a spouse and children who are made destitute by the imprisonment. There are children who grow up without one of their parents in the home. And the larger system is

victimized by what is so often the family's need to rely on services such as food stamps and public health services.

Those who must manage the prisoners are also victimized by the rules and by being seen by their charges as captors. These guards then go home and may find it difficult to adopt the role of loving and listening parents and spouses. The rate of substance abuse and family dysfunction is high among prison guards, creating yet another generation of victims.

Most of all, the actual victim of the crime is not restored, for vengeance has no restorative qualities. They may well live in fear that they will once again become victims. Their lives are forever changed.

Restorative justice gives the victim the opportunity to take control, to give up that feeling of powerlessness. They may well be able to face their pepe-

trators and let them know just how their actions have caused damage—often permanent harm. It allows victims to be part of the legal process, not, as so often happens, becoming victimized once again by a process in which they have no say in the outcome. In many cases restorative justice gives the perpetrator the opportunity to perform acts of contrition to try to restore the lives they have harmed through their actions.

Restorative justice is often able to divert the perpetrators from long-term incarceration, and from the high social cost that goes along with it.

The goal of restorative justice is to make whole that which was torn, with each of the participants emerging stronger than before, able to enjoy a sense of peace, responsibility and unity. ■



Already Saved (Excerpt)

BY JAN CHRISTIAN,
CONGREGATIONAL LIFE STAFF,
PACIFIC WEST REGION, UUA

Years ago, I worked in Arizona's so-called justice system. A woman named Kathy McCormick, who worked at the Attorney General's Office doing victim-offender mediation, told me this story. A woman's house had been horribly vandalized, with damage in the thousands and thousands of dollars. She met with one of the young men who was responsible. She knew he could not undo the damage. He could not pay for it either. The books could not be balanced. She wanted something else. She wanted to be able to think of him as a good person. So she asked him to take pictures of himself being good. When he read to his little brother, when he helped a neighbor, he was to take a picture. Months later they got together again

and he shared his picture album with her. She had introduced him to a side of himself he didn't know existed and she was able to think of his goodness as well. Some time after that mediation, the boy's mother called to say he was headed for college. She believed that mediation was the turning point in his life.

When we live out of our best selves, our saved selves, our place of worthiness, we can say we are sorry. We can practice confession because we know that being wrong does not mean we are not worthy. It means we are human. We can apologize. We can work to make amends. We can take steps so it doesn't happen again. Being human means we will be wrong. It means we will be wrong in the way we are right. It means that we are complicit with structures of oppression and evil. It means our relationships will go kablooey. (That's a theological term.) Knowing our essential worth, we need only

to get back to that place when we lose our way.

And to practice confession, the first important step is to own our part. I used to think that confession or saying I was sorry was just for when I thought I was wrong. But it's not. Because I am often wrong in the way I am right. Do you know what I mean? And sometimes my relationships go kablooey and I have no idea why. But I can say that I'm sorry that things are the way they are, and that I want to do whatever it takes to have them be some other way. I have a long-time friendship that just seems to have hit the skids. I have been trying to figure out what it's about instead of simply going to her and saying, "I miss you and I'm wondering if I have done something that is keeping our friendship from flourishing right now. I am sorry about the way things are between us." In recognizing both the worth of what is there and confessing the brokenness, I can find my way toward restoration. ■

Arrows of Love

A SPECIAL GUEST
COLUMN BY **MANDY
GOHEEN**, DIRECTOR OF
PRISON MINISTRIES,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP



Do you remember a time when you attended a Unitarian Universalist congregation or gathering, and it felt like you were finally at home? I recall that feeling taking me by surprise—the minister was preaching about restorative justice and it felt like they were just talking to me. It was the day I became a UU, the day I learned that faith and justice were not mutually exclusive. For the first time I believed restoration was possible.

But no one told me about this faith I hold so dear—I had to find it on my own. Many of us are too uncomfortable to share our faith openly. However, there are exceptions. The most evangelical sharing of the good news I know of in Unitarian Universalism today is going unnoticed in US prisons. My own hope in restoration is strengthened by incarcerated people's sharing the message of love in such a devastatingly oppressive place.

They are sharing the good news that our faith is not here to focus on the terrible moments or situations or oppression that brought them to prison. Instead they find a home with a community concerned about their personal and faith development moving forward. A place with both unconditional love and boundaries. Long-time prison ministry member John writes: "When the Church of the Larger Fellowship came into my life and I started meeting UUs, I immediately felt that I had a home. And I love that feeling."

The Church of the Larger Fellowship's prison ministry team and volunteers are letter bombing our members in prison with love, never knowing what mail will make it through the system or

make it back to us. Over the past fifty years our prison ministry has grown to nearly 900 members. It is entirely the folks on the inside sharing Unitarian Universalism with cellmates and friends that has propelled our growth.

In doing the work of prison ministry, I am often reminded of one particular prayer practice of 15th century monks. Their belief was that a cloud of unknowing came between them and God. For those devoted to this practice, prayer was folded into the metaphor of the constant shooting arrows of love through that cloud. The prayer was kept simple, one word, like *love* or *god* or *grace* or *hope*. The only way to know God was to let go of all preconceived notions of the divine, including gender, appearance, and behavior. Only taking the risk of letting go would allow for glimpses of God.

My own hope in restoration is strengthened by incarcerated people's sharing the message of love in such a devastatingly oppressive place.

For Unitarian Universalists, letting go of our concepts of what restoration should be gives new opportunities to work toward a more welcoming faith. Restoration doesn't mean that when something bad happens we can fix it—it is not getting things back to an imagined perfection of how things used to be. It means doing the hard work of bringing all involved to the table to rebuild community in a new way.

Ted, a CLF member living in prison, writes:

The love of this community brought me back from despair. I've learned that not only do LGBTQs belong in church and worship but many have been called to lead. I get very emotional when I read beautiful essays and stories by "my people."

Of course now "my people" really includes all UUs, regardless of orientation. And to take that a step further, everyone on this planet, because we truly are a part of an interdependent web of life.

Regardless of how much his words strengthen my faith that Beloved Community is possible, and even though I get glimpses of it when the sky clears, I worry. I am worried about what happens when a previously imprisoned Unitarian Universalist shows up on the door of a brick-and-mortar church ready to be welcomed home by their UU family. What if the outside world of Unitarian Universalism is not the place of welcome I promised? I have consistently assured members of our prison ministry that we believe they are worthy of love and justice. So it pains me to pray they will not be turned away.

That's what systems of white supremacy like mass incarceration tell us to do—turn away from discomfort, not embrace a theology of risk-taking, not live a life that prays the word justice.

I hope I am not giving you the impression that doing prison ministry is easy. It's humbling at every turn. Every time I start thinking I understand how the prison system works, it reminds me that it is place of evil with the perfect playground for bullying and dehumanization.

When I lose focus or feel overwhelmed by the enormity of mass incarceration, my prayer into the Cloud of Unknowing is the words of Cornel West: "I may not be an optimist but I am a prisoner of hope." And there is hope for restoration, my friends. It is worth taking chances to push back on systems of white supremacy by shooting arrows of love over the walls of oppression in any way we know how, even if they only bounce off.

We can light a bright beacon of hope for all to see with simply the words: *You are worthy of love now. You are worthy justice now.* ■

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR
LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

You know the phrase *it seemed like a good idea at the time*? That's kind of how I feel about our choice of Restoration as our theme to explore during the month that contains both Easter and Passover. At the time, without giving it a great deal of thought, Restoration seemed like an interesting twist on themes that we've used in the past, like Resurrection and Transformation. But the more I think about it, the less Restoration seems to fit.

To restore something, after all, is to put it back the way it was before. You restore antique furniture by stripping and sanding it, or maybe replacing worn fabric. But the goal of all that effort is to have something that resembles as much as possible what it once was. When you restore an old house you try to bring it back to what it looked like before time took its toll, refinishing wood floors or stripping peeling paint or replacing rotted siding until the home is restored to its former glory.

But both Easter and Passover are based in stories about change, about becoming radically new. In the Easter story, the resurrection of Jesus does not mean that he just goes back to roaming around and preaching and healing like he was doing before. The resurrected Jesus appears to his disciples, and then he hands the work of teaching on to them, while he ascends to heaven. Which I think we can agree is a pretty dramatic departure.

The Passover story begins with the Hebrews as slaves in Egypt, and Moses as a baby afloat on a raft in the river. It ends, after a burning bush and plagues and the parting of the Red Sea and the giving of the Commandments and forty years of wandering in the desert, with



the Jews as a covenant-
ed people living in the
Promised Land. And
Moses has died of old
age.

Neither of these are stories of restoration, of things being returned to their original state. Unless, of course, you think of their original state in a different way. Maybe from the beginning salvation and re-birth were inside not only Jesus, but also the disciples and the people that they taught. And also the thief who was on the cross next to Jesus. And also Pontius Pilate. And the crowd that called for Jesus' crucifixion. Maybe the story is a way to strip away all the old layers of "I'm not worthy" and "you are the enemy" to get down to the kernel that was already there—that each of us, beloved and foe alike, is a child of the Holy.

Restoration takes effort and patience and attention to detail and a certain amount of imagination.

Maybe Hebrew slaves in Egypt already held, somewhere inside themselves, the knowledge that people are meant to be both free and in covenant. That our natural human state is that of choosing for ourselves—in the context of relationships that set ethical limits on our freedoms. Perhaps they just needed the wading and the wandering and the waiting for Moses to come down from the mountain (during which time they messed up pretty royally) to strip away the layers of "there is no way out" and "what I feel like doing right now matters more than my commitments" in order to get down to the kernel they already had of being a free and responsible people.

As Unitarian Universalists we talk a lot about the "inherent worth and dignity of every person." *Inherent* means something that is already inside, some-

thing that comes with the package. Our worth and dignity is already there when we are born. But it gets covered over with so many sticky layers—oppression and entitlement, self-doubt and inflated ego, the need to please others and the need to triumph over them...the list could go on and on.

Perhaps our job as people of faith is something like taking a heat gun and a scraper to the many layers of paint covering a beautiful wood door frame. The rich grain of our worth and dignity is there for each and every one of us. But it gets covered up in all kinds of dubious colors that seemed like a good idea at the time, from the sickly green of greed and envy to the dull beige of trying to fit in. The dedicated application of compassion and truth-telling and questioning oppressive assumptions lifts away the layers one by one, bringing our worth and dignity more and more clearly into view.

Of course, it's not a one-way deal. Sometimes it feels like the layers are going on faster than they are coming off. Restoration, like so many things, is a process rather than a result. But it can help to think of the wholeness you are seeking as something that is already there, not something that needs to be built from scratch. Restoration takes effort and patience and attention to detail and a certain amount of imagination. But it begins from the presumption that what you seek is never impossible, because what you are looking for is already there, waiting for you to reveal it in all its glory. ■

Perhaps you find that *Quest* or other resources from the CLF help to restore your spirits in difficult times. Please help us continue to offer this soul-restoring work to people around the world by giving to support the CLF, either by sending in a check in the enclosed envelope, or online at clfuu.org/give. ■



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Unitarian Universalist

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Boston, Massachusetts 02210-1409 USA

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The Road to Restoration

BY TONY, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN CALIFORNIA

When I think of restoration, I cannot help but think of my time in prison so far. Before I was arrested I was a hopeless, miserable wreck that could not pull away from drug addiction. Being locked up gave me a chance to become sober and clear-minded. I wanted to use this time to become a better person. The self-help programs and vocational training available in the prison system enabled me to help myself on the path toward restoration.

My road to recovery has been a positive one, and I now have enough marketable skills to give myself a chance to succeed upon my release. I also understand the underlying issues that drove me to make the mistakes I made, and I can now spot the red flags in my nature before they become a problem.

People seek restoration for different reasons, and mine may be very different from yours. But my heart goes out to all people seeking restoration, as I know it can be a hard-fought battle. ■



