



## Grateful

BY ABBEY TENNIS, MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN CHURCH OF PHILADELPHIA, PENNSYLVANIA

There is a large duckling-yellow hardcover book in my mother’s house called a “baby book.” It is my baby book, in fact. The book where my parents recorded the details of my birth and development—I was 10 ½ pounds when I was born, my grandmother gave me my first bath. There are pictures from the first day of school every fall. A tiny ink footprint from my first days on earth.

When I was a kid, this book was a treasure trove of information about the “me” that I didn’t remember anymore. Over time, there were fewer and fewer entries until they almost petered out. Then, in the height of my cantankerous teens, I got into a huge fight with my mother. I no longer remember why we fought, but I do remember that I screamed “[BLEEP] you, mom!”

Except I didn’t say “[BLEEP].” I said something much worse.

My mother calmly walked into the dining room, pulled down the big yellow book from the bookshelf, opened to a new page, and wrote:

“1997. Abbey screams “[BLEEP] you, mom!” at the top of her lungs for the very ... first ... time.”

My family members have good senses of humor. There are times when we can laugh at our fights, then use our indoor voices to say why we’re really upset. We can get back into right relationship with one another. I’d like to say that 1997 was the last time I screamed “[BLEEP] you” at anyone, but I’m not that good a liar. I’d like to say that I’ve been able to laugh it off every time, but I’m not that good a person.

So, those of us in the US are about to have Thanksgiving, and I’m guessing many of you will be spending the holiday with family, so you know what I’m talking about, right? The laughter and the dreaded fighting? Anxiety as well as comfort? Gladness and sadness?

Being with family over the holidays can be wonderful—you get to eat second helpings of your aunt’s famous greens, watch your hometown’s football game, and pass around the newest family baby. In my family, we usually have more types of pie at Thanksgiving than we have guests. There are wonderful things about family.

But family can also push your buttons. Dad’s knee is acting up again, but he is too proud to ask for help with the yard work, and you’re worried sick. It’s 2pm, your son-in-law is sitting next to his three-year-old niece, drinking his fourth beer and yelling obscenities at the TV. Cousin Sarah refuses to acknowledge your partnership of ten years and keeps calling your wife your “friend.” We show up, exhausted after a long drive with a screaming two-year-old, only for our mother to criticize our parenting style. Our son returns home from his first psychology class in college and blames us for all of his maladjustment in life.

No matter how patient we are, we know we will erupt into a fight with someone who voted differently than us. No matter how we yearn for love and affirmation from our parents, they will never be able to express their feelings in ways that feel good to us.

It makes sense that our families push our buttons. After all, they are the ones who installed the buttons in the first place. But getting into the same fight, year after year, with the same family member can get wearing. Sometimes it gets bad enough that we avoid the family just to avoid the fight. Or maybe our anger is deeper than irritation. Maybe there is a history of abuse in our family that no one talks about. Maybe our wounds come from years of being put down, neglected, overlooked.

Being away from family over the holidays, having no family, or just being alone,

# Quest

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Praise, my dear one.  
Let us disappear  
into praising.  
Nothing belongs  
to us.  
—Rainer Maria  
Rilke

A monthly for religious liberals

THINKING ABOUT  
THANKS AND PRAISE

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can feel awful even when it is sometimes what we have chosen. Even when it's the right choice.

No matter what, some of us find the holiday season rivals only the election season as the most stressful and anger-provoking time of year.

And yet, sitting next to the person who pushes our buttons more than any other person in the world, we are told that this is a time for gratitude.

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### *Grateful in gladness, grateful in sadness.*

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There is a line in the Gospel song by Brian Tate called "Overflowing" where the choir sings "*Grateful in gladness, grateful in sadness.*"

This line has always struck me, because I have always associated gratitude with the times when we are happy. It is easy to be grateful in gladness. But if gratitude is not simply some nuance of gladness, if gratitude is perhaps not even an emotion at all, then what is it?

*Grateful in gladness, grateful in sadness.*

Like many of you, I have been looking for gratitude in the midst of a steady stream of horror.

I have been looking for gratitude after reading that we have only 12 years to turn around climate change if we hope to avert utter catastrophe, and that we are on our way to pushing a million different species to extinction.

I have been looking for gratitude for my fellow Americans, who voted for a leadership team that will do nothing to halt the violence against trans people, who will do nothing to halt the increase of greenhouse gases in the atmosphere, who have separated thousands of immigrant children from their parents.

I have been looking for gratitude when beloved congregants, friends, and

loved ones are in the hospital, or facing frightening diagnoses, or assaults, or uncertainty about whether they will recover—whether they will survive.

If I don't feel gladness, where can I find gratitude?

Too often recently, the place I have been able to look for gratitude is in the sadness.

Because gratitude lives there too.

*Grateful in gladness, grateful in sadness.*

I'm talking about the gratitude that makes my body weak and pours as tears from my eyes as I leave the hospital room of someone who might have died, but didn't.

I'm talking about the kind of gratitude that comes when entering an African Methodist Episcopal church for a prayer vigil the night after a white supremacist radical Christian terrorist massacred nine black people of faith at another African Methodist Episcopal church in Charleston, and hearing the choir begin to sing:

*How great is our god? Sing with me  
How great is our god? All will see  
How great, how great is our god?*

The kind of gratitude I feel when I'm with people who choose faith in the face of devastation. Gratitude for those who choose resilience in the face of fear. Gratitude for those who show up, week after week, to do the work of greeting strangers, or lifting their voices in song, or passing the baskets of nourishment along the rows, all while they feel that the world is unraveling at the seams.

*Grateful in sadness*

I served as a hospital chaplain in Baltimore several years ago. If you ever want an education in gratitude, go spend some time at a hospital. When one lives in such close proximity to sickness and death, I think most people

find practices of gratitude essential for coping.

Though working on the psychiatric unit was my most intense duty, I learned the most about gratitude from my stint with the folks in the elder care program. This was a day program where elders living in their own homes would be picked up in vans and brought to the hospital for group programs, breakfast and lunch, and wrap-around medical care. It basically provided the community, fun, and medical support of a good nursing home, while allowing its members to stay in their own homes.

When I began, they told me I would be responsible for leading a short worship service every morning I was with them.

"Excuse me?" I asked.

I was a soft-spoken second year seminarian at the time, and had only preached a handful of times. Ever. The idea of leading worship multiple times a week for a multi-faith group of elders, most of whom struggled to even hear my voice, terrified me.

I wracked my brain for worship topics that would resonate with evangelical Christians, members of the Nation of Islam, cultural Jews, and Atheists. And what came to me, over and over, was the theme of gratitude.

So each morning, I would arrive, sweaty palmed and heart beating fast, and pick up the beat-up old microphone at the front of the room. After pressing the on button and making sure I was holding the bottom properly so that the batteries wouldn't fall out—this wasn't a well-funded program—I would ask the program participants what they were thankful for.

As they raised their hands, I would walk around the room and hold the microphone out for each of them in turn.

All kinds of gratitude were lifted up. "I'm grateful for God," one would



begin.

“I’m grateful for my family,” the next one would say.

“I’m grateful for the bus driver who got me here this morning.”

“I’m grateful for this program.”

But the most common thing they said was “I’m grateful that I woke up this morning.”

Each time I invited them to share their gratitude, one after another of them would give thanks for simply waking up that day. Others around them would say “Amen” and then would ask for the microphone and say that THEY were grateful for waking up that morning.

Every day, so many of them said “I’m grateful for waking up this morning.”

They knew that one day, all too soon, they would not wake up again. And that made each waking so much more precious.

*Grateful in gladness, grateful in sadness.*

As you prepare for whatever Thanksgiving meal you may go to—whatever shared meal you may go to—remember that breaking bread with others is a revolutionary act. Especially if it’s with those who may not be like you, whether that is an Uncle who is a die-hard Trump supporter when you were a Bernie fan, a person who asks for some help getting something to eat on the street, a person who offers that help or even just someone you don’t yet know. Breaking bread together turns “them” into “us.” Breaking bread together turns a stranger into a companion. Breaking bread together joins us in a revolution of loving across difference.

Because we are nurtured by the world around us, our first duty is to be grateful for the world around us. Grateful for the sun, rain, the bus driver—grateful for each day. ■

## Giving Thanks



BY JAMES ISHMAEL FORD,  
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SANGHA & THE UNITARIAN  
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ANAHEIM, CALIFORNIA

There’s an old joke—perhaps you’ve heard it. A man and his granddaughter are walking along a beach. It’s a wonderful day, although it seems there’s a squall just over the horizon, and it looks like it’s coming toward them. Even as the man thinks perhaps it is time to call it a day, a giant wave crashes into them and before he can do a thing the child is carried away. Filled with horror he looks up to the heavens and shouts, “God, how can you do something so terrible?” And even before the words slip from his lips another wave comes washing over him and as it recedes deposits the child in the man’s arms. He looks at the little girl to make sure she is okay. She smiles at him and locks her arms around his neck. The man then looks back up at the heavens and shouts, “Hey! She had a hat.”

We laugh. Okay, I laugh. There’s something so human in this. A slice of homemade apple pie is great. But, hey, where’s the scoop of French vanilla ice cream? We can be grasping creatures, missing the apple pie, missing the saved child. We can be resentful and angry about, well... there’s just a ton to be resentful and angry about. But lost in the waves of those feelings something slips away from us, something lovely and beautiful. Gratitude gets washed away in the waves, along with the hat.

It seems our English word *gratitude* comes to us through the French and back to the Latin *gratus*, meaning thankful or pleasing. It turns out gratitude is closely related to the word grace, with its various meanings of showing favor, pardon, mercy, elegance, songs, praises, announcements. I really like that—*announcements*.

But first, a pretty good way to understand something really important is to notice what surrounds it, what can turn our hearts from some deeper matter, what some of my friends call the near enemy of that which is important. And so, what is the near enemy of gratitude? I know how I’ve experienced people who seem to be expressing gratitude for something I’d had a part in, but afterwards I’m left with an uncomfortable feeling. It comes across as flattery, with a sense of manipulation hanging in the air after the conversation.

Here, to really get to the heart of the matter, we need to open our hearts, and perhaps even confess. And, so, yes, I’ve even been that person who expresses gratitude to flatter, to manipulate, often barely conscious of what I’m doing. Maybe some others among us here have also been that person, have embraced some facsimile of gratitude for any number of reasons, maybe even sometimes for good reasons. The world isn’t a very safe place, and a little flattery addressed to the powerful can be a smart thing.

But we need to be careful. There is something astonishingly important, I feel, in the act and the experience of genuine gratitude—the spontaneous arising of those feelings of thankfulness, of pleasure, of being present to the announcement of things. Cicero claimed “gratitude is not only the greatest of the virtues but the parent of all others.” I think this is so. And if it’s true, we need to attend.

But then, is this gratitude a noun, a state of being, something we achieve? Or, perhaps, does it come mostly as a verb, something we do?

Galen Guengerich, senior minister at All Soul’s Unitarian in Manhattan, delivered a sermon at his home church in 2006. In the following year it was adapted as an article in the *UU World*, our denominational magazine. Galen asked a very interesting question.

“What should be our defining religious discipline?” He goes on:

*While obedience, love, and even submission each play a vital role in the life of faith, my current conviction is that our defining discipline should be gratitude.... In the same way that Judaism is defined by obedience, Christianity by love, and Islam by submission, I believe that Unitarian Universalism should be defined by gratitude.*

Now, I actually think gratitude lies near the heart of all three of the great Near Eastern faiths—Judaism, Christianity and Islam—not to mention perhaps all the great religions of our world. Still, as a discipline, as something we consciously do, I think he’s calling us in an important direction.

Wandering around the web I’ve found all sorts of advice as to how to cultivate gratitude. There are four-step plans, five-step plans, ten-step plans. For the most part they seem to center on stopping and noticing. With a dash of *fake it ‘til you make it*. As I consider that stopping and noticing with a dash of *fake it ‘til you make it* to be the heart of spiritual disciplines, I think most all of them are probably useful.

But reading the lists I found myself thinking of a one-step program. Many, many years ago I came across a small book called *Wisdom of the Desert*, which is a selection of sayings from the fourth and fifth century Christian monastics and sages called the Desert Fathers, and for those who pay attention, Mothers. This particular volume was collected and translated by Thomas Merton, who brings not only a great eye for matters of depth, but also a style sympathetic to a world religious perspective. I consider it one of the central books in my spiritual life.

And one of the characters who shines out from that collection, and whom I’ve encountered again in other translations of the actions and sayings of the Desert Fathers and Mothers, is some-

one called Abba John the Dwarf. Abba or Abbot John was born around 339, studied under the direction of another of the great Desert mystics, Abba Ammoe, for a dozen years before wandering further into the desert, where, despite his best efforts, people came to listen to and follow his guidance. There are lots of stories about him.

Abbot John would recount the story of a pagan philosopher who told his student that for three years he should give money to anyone who insulted him. When the three years passed the philosopher told the young man to go to Athens, as he was now ready to really learn. At the gate to the city he encountered an old woman who insulted everyone as they passed. When it was his turn and he was insulted, the young man just laughed. The old sage looked closely at him and asked why the laughter. The young man replied how for three years he’d paid for this sort of abuse, and now at the gate to the city of wisdom he was getting insulted for free. The old woman smiled and replied “Enter the city of wisdom, young man. It is yours.”

Okay, maybe that might prove a harder discipline than the three or five steps you can get online. But here’s an easier discipline, this time from that late thirteenth/early fourteenth century German Dominican friar Meister Eckhart. The master once said, “If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.”

Want to be grateful? Then just say thank you.

Now, I think there’s another mystery hidden within why *just say thank you* is enough. It has something to do with that noun and verb thing.



Leonard Cohen

was once asked about his song “Hallelujah,” which is one of those divine thank yous that have caught my heart. He was asked what the song re-

ally meant. Cohen replied, “It explains that many kinds of hallelujahs do exist, and all the perfect and broken hallelujahs have equal value.” Gratitude takes many shapes. There are many kinds of thank yous. Some are perfect. Many, even most, are broken. I think of those near enemy thank yous that are so broken. But, here’s a secret. In fact, at bottom, at the end of the day, even those almost fake thank yous have value. All in some deep and true sense arise with equal value.

The reality is that within the web of relationships, within the world that we live in with all its horrors and all its joys, the moment we stop and notice, we discover we are bound up within a great mystery of intimacy. As natural as our breath, gratitude arises. And in my own experience, I find gratitude, kindness, and generosity all arise together. The mother virtue may be gratitude, but her sisters kindness and generosity walk with her.

I find motivation and sustenance through acting in the world out of this practice. I see the connections. I am horrified and I am grateful beyond any words. And I want to do something. Here, I suggest, is why our own tradition is so caught up with the work of justice in this world. The intuition of connection, of gratitude, calls us to service, to care, to love and action.

So we are caught by noun and verb, our actions and our being. When we attend to gratitude, we find something fundamental, something deeper than the hurts and longing.

We open our hearts to what is; we don’t turn away. And we discover a strange and mysterious and wild beyond imagination universe. And, we find the secret: we’re totally and inseparably a part of it. Noun and verb. One thing.

And as we notice, how can we not open our hearts, and open our mouths, and from that place, say thank you? ■



## In Praise of Weeds

BY PETER A. FRIEDRICH, LEAD



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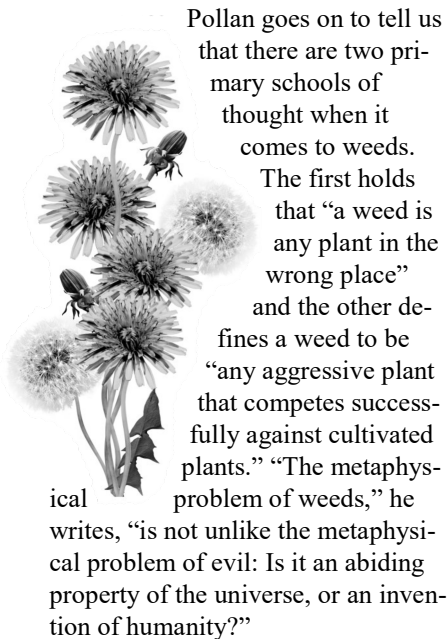
Pity the poor dandelion. It is, in many ways, nature's perfect

plant. Its tender, young greens make a tasty addition to any salad. The dandelion's leaves contain more beta-carotene than carrots and more iron than spinach. Its blossoms, when properly fermented, perhaps with a bit of orange or lemon, make a sweet white wine. That tap root contains medicinal properties, and can be beneficial to both the liver and the kidneys as both a diuretic and blood cleanser. It can also be dried, roasted and ground as a coffee substitute. The flower's white, milky sap can be used to alleviate bee stings and to remove calluses and moles. Nature's perfect plant.

Yet, plunk a dandelion down in the middle of a manicured suburban lawn and it is treated like a terrorist. Armies of lawn care professionals are dispatched with chemical and biological weapons of mass destruction to eradicate this menace. It is, after all, a *weed*. Americans spend more than a billion dollars a year on more than 100 million pounds of herbicides, pesticides and other lawn-care chemicals in their attempts to rid their yards of these and other pesky plants.

What, then, makes a weed? Is a weed a weed just because we call it that? Ralph Waldo Emerson once said that a weed is simply a plant whose virtues we haven't yet discovered. But I don't think that's quite right. Long ago we discovered the virtues of the dandelion, yet they are a public menace. In his book *Second Nature*, author and gardener Michael Pollan describes the strict hierarchy of plants, where the top spaces

are occupied by what he calls the "hypercivilized hybrids" like roses, and the bottom tier is infested with the weeds, which he calls "the plant world's proletariat, furiously reproducing and threatening to usurp the position of their more refined horticultural betters." Weediness, he tells us, is determined by several factors, including how highly hybridized a plant is (the more refined and cultured, the better), the ease or difficulty of growing it (the hearty and easily adaptable larkspur is more "weedy" than, say, a fragile, delicate orchid), and, finally, its color. (White, of course, is at the top.)



As I've considered and encountered weeds, I have become increasingly troubled and uneasy. For as the crops of our country's farmlands have ripened and, in some cases, shriveled on the vine, I hear the language of weeds being used in our nation's debate about the "problem" of illegal immigration. We, the precious flowers of our highly hybridized civilization, are under siege from these uncultured invaders. "Aliens" we call them, "Illegals." Labels that, like the term "weed" imply that they are a scourge, a menace, to be eradicated.

When we label these people—these mothers and fathers and grandparents and children—as "illegal aliens" we dehumanize them. And once they are dehumanized it is easy to talk about them as things, as problems, as so much kudzu to be beaten back at the border, lest our garden be overtaken and all that we have cultivated destroyed. What has been lost in the debate over our immigration situation is the fact that each of the individuals who live in our country without documentation is a human being, a person with a family and a story just like us. They may not be highly hybridized flowers in the top tiers of the garden's hierarchy (though some of them could be, I'm sure, given the chance). But nor are they weeds to be uprooted and eradicated from the rich soil of this nation.

In describing the process by which we cultivate our gardens, Michael Pollan tells us that "weeding is the process by which we make informed choices in nature, discriminate between the good and bad, apply our intelligence and sweat to the earth." We owe at least this same level of care, discrimination and intelligence to the human beings who sit at the heart of the immigration debate. ■

Thanks and Praise is exactly what we have for all of our wonderful CLF members and supporters who contribute so that CLF can be there for religious liberals around the world. I hope you hear a chorus of thanks coming up from prisons and jails, from dorm rooms and rest homes, from houses and apartments and libraries or wherever people find us in print and/or online. Thank you! You're the best! If you'd like to join in making all we do possible, we'd be ever so thankful for your contribution, either in the form of a check mailed in the enclosed envelope or a gift online at [clfuu.org/give](http://clfuu.org/give).



## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Alice Walker has been in the media in some pretty awful ways, but I still think her book, *The Color Purple*, is one of the most extraordinary theological texts I've ever read. Her description of God wanting praise the same way people do has echoed in me ever since I read it more than 30 years ago:

[Shug says] *"Listen, God love everything you love, and a mess of stuff you don't. But more than anything else, God love admiration."*

*"You saying God vain?" I [Celie] ast.*

*"Naw," she say. "Not vain, just wanting to share a good thing. I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it."*

*"What it do when it pissed off?" I ast.*

*"Oh, it make something else. People think pleasing God is all God care about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back."*

I love that. And the reciprocity described is what I feel when I am gardening, that the earth is offering to me as I offer to the earth, and together we co-create beauty and nourishment. Praise be!

For me, gratitude and praise go hand in hand.

When I am grateful for something, I praise it. When

I praise something, I am grateful for it. And when I am grateful and praising, my generosity follows naturally.

Whether it's the generosity of admiration or the generosity of attention or the generosity of support, I cannot be stingy when I am genuinely praising something or someone.

I think about when I am in a restaurant

with someone and order something delicious. "Oh my! You have to try this!" is the first thing out of my mouth. If the deliciousness caused me to say *Mine, all mine*, it would mean I was not in gratitude or praise, but rather clinging to ideas of scarcity. Generosity comes from a place of abundance. Sharing creates more joy! Praise generates gratitude, gratitude generates abundance.

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### Praise generates gratitude, gratitude generates abundance.

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Ideally. But those threads can break when the currency of generosity is taken instead of reciprocated. Increasingly, with pesticides and genetic tinkering and huge equipment, agribusiness does not praise the gifts of the earth, but seeks domination, a whole different form of currency.

I see it in a smaller scale when I offer a gift to someone—say, hospitality in my home—and rather than receiving thanks or generosity back, I experience the guest taking from me without appreciation, ignoring my requests or needs, concerned only with their own. My generosity, gratitude and praise can fizzle into resentment over time.

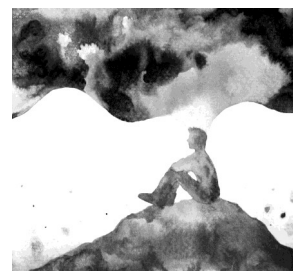
Which makes me think about Job. The guy who was living a good, faithful life, praising God and being ethical and kind, until Satan dared God to curse Job and see if Job remained faithful. So God killed Job's family, destroyed his livelihood, and otherwise "tested" his faith. When Job finally cries out in anguish God says, basically, *What do you know? I created the whole world and can do anything and you can't do much at all can you?* And we're told Job then praises God.

When you look online for interpretations of this text you find all kinds of folks telling you what a great story it is, and how it shows that we need to praise God no matter what if we are

faithful. I hate the story, myself. I loathe it. Years ago, in a religious education class, the curriculum was to share that story with fifth graders and then give them shaving cream on tables with which to finger paint what they thought about God. I needed to step out for a minute during the finger painting, and when I came back into the room they had thrown it everywhere in a giant finger paint fight.

They told me the story made them mad, and that was part of what started the foam-throwing. We talked as we cleaned the room and they were indignant that God would make a bet with Satan and be so mean to Job because of it. And I had to agree with them. The story does nothing whatsoever to strengthen my faith in God!

But maybe there's another path besides faith in an omnipotent God to find a way to praise and gratitude when suffering profoundly. I note the people who have much, much less material comfort and wealth, societal privilege, and freedom to move about seem to manage better than I do to stay in a place of generosity and gratitude. I also realize that my own ability to remain in the currency of generosity and praise is in part the result of too much privilege. I have been awed, in my life, by the kindness and generosity of people who have reason to be much more resentful about their lives than I do. Praise and gratitude can become a spiritual path, a way out of no way, the only means towards affirmation of what is praiseworthy when none-other is evident. Spiritual practice can be born of suffering like Job's, which is ultimately not about how great some omnipotent God is, but rather about how the holy can be



discovered through blessing what is still possible. ■



## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR,  
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THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

At the beginning of his book of poetry, *Praise*, Robert Hass writes:

*We asked the captain what course of action he proposed to take toward a beast so large, terrifying, and unpredictable. He hesitated to answer, and then said judiciously: "I think I shall praise it."*

I love this quote more than I can tell you. I love that the captain knows that he is responsible for the choice that will produce the best possible odds for his crew, and so, "judiciously," he decides that the best approach to the terrifying beast is to praise it.

Mostly we assume that safety demands we defend ourselves, that we attack before we can be harmed. And I expect that there are situations where that is the best response—perhaps when you encounter a mountain lion while you're out hiking.

But I wonder if there might not be situations—perhaps even more situations than we had ever imagined—in which praise might turn out to be the judicious option. When my daughter was young (OK, who are we kidding, this is still true now that she's 20), her response to being justifiably chastised for doing something wrong was to become angry and defiant. Which, I am not proud to say, tended to send me right over the edge of my patience. *You've screwed up*, and now you're coming at *me* as if it is somehow my fault that you were bad? I might have been just a little mad before, but now I am furious, and I have every right to be!

I had every right to be mad. But it didn't help. Eventually I realized that the only way my daughter knew how to deal with her feelings of guilt and anxiety was to turn them outward, to place the blame somewhere that felt safer

than sitting with her painful emotions. She was wrong, both in the initial misdeed and in the angry response. But it was what she knew how to do. And my going into punitive mode really, really didn't fix things.

What might have happened if I had the wherewithal to choose, instead of attacking back, to respond with praise to the beast that was my raging child?

What might have happened if I led with assurances that she was loved and cherished? What if I started with acknowl-

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*"I think I shall  
praise it."*

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edging some of the things that I was proud of her for, so that the thing I didn't like came as a contrast?

Honestly, I don't know. But I have learned to step away from blame and shame. Yes, if I have been telling you for months that it is crucial that you collect your W-2 forms from your various jobs over the past year so that you can file taxes for the first time, and then you tell me on April 10<sup>th</sup> that somehow you don't have two of the forms, I am going to be annoyed. But I can also decide, judiciously, that my annoyance is not really relevant to the situation. Expressing it is not going to help. Far more useful to acknowledge how hard the process is, and that you've taken some of the needed steps, and then try to help you figure out what the next steps need to be.

I am not ashamed to say that much of how I now look at human relationships is based in what I have learned from my avocation as a positive reinforcement dog trainer. Let me be clear. I am not saying that children are like dogs. I am saying that we are all animals, and that the laws of learning apply across the board. And one of the things I have learned is that it's really hard to teach a being *not* to do something. It's hard to teach a friendly dog not to jump on your guests and it's hard to teach yourself not to mindlessly graze on junk

food. It's way easier to teach someone to *do* something—to teach your dog to keep their paws on the floor if they want petting or to teach yourself to buy healthier snacks.

It is far more efficient to praise and support the behaviors we want than to punish and shame the behaviors we don't want. Which feels just about as sensible as praising the terrifying beast in our path. After all, when someone—our child, our partner, a stranger on Facebook—has done something wrong, it's only natural to hold them responsible by punishing their behavior, if only with sharp words. Choosing praise over blame feels ridiculous.

About as ridiculous as Jesus' admonition to "Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you." This is not the world's logic. Oddly, however, it might just be the logic that creates the change we long to see. ■

## Nominating Committee Seeks Leaders

FROM THE CLF NOMINATING COMMITTEE:  
CATHY CHANG, JORDINN NELSON LONG,  
DIANA SMITH, AISHA ANSANO

The CLF's Nominating Committee seeks members to run for positions beginning **June 2020**:

- Board of Directors—three for 3-year terms
- Nominating Committee—one for a 3-year term

Board members focus on mission, set policy and approve the budget. The Board meets in Boston or other US cities twice annually and periodically by video calls. Nominating Committee members put forth nominations for the Board.

For more information about the Board and Nominating Committee, visit [questformeaning.org/clfuu/about/](http://questformeaning.org/clfuu/about/). You may nominate yourself or another CLF member for any of these positions. Please contact the Nominating Committee at [nominating@clfuu.org](mailto:nominating@clfuu.org) or the CLF office at 617-948-6150 by **January 15, 2020**.





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## Praise the Sun, the Moon, the Stars

BY REV. KATHY HUFF, BERKELEY, CALIFORNIA

Praise the sun, the moon, the stars,  
Praise the ant, the tree, the shining leaf.  
Praise every child large and small,  
Praise the one within us all.  
Praise the swimmers, crawlers, and creepers.  
Praise the flower and the winding weed,  
Praise each blade of grass and every dewdrop.  
Praise dark moist earth.  
Praise rock, sand, and shoal.  
Praise wind—nature's breath.  
Praise those with fin, fur, and finger,  
Praise the winged ones, the tiny ones,  
and all the ones that live unseen.

Praise brightest morning and darkest night.  
Praise the prickly and the unpopular.  
Praise the crow's cry and the beggar's sigh.  
Praise the dancers, the doers and the dreamers.  
Praise those that give, those who love,  
and those who heal.  
Praise to wanderers, weavers and seekers.  
Praise sounds of thunder, crashing waves,  
and shouts for justice.  
Praise silence.  
Praise spirit.  
Praise all colors.  
Praise all acts of compassion.  
Praise all. Praise all. Praise all.