



Washing Dishes Is Not a Spiritual Practice

BY SHARON WYLIE, MINISTER AT CHALICE UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION, ESCONDIDO, CALIFORNIA

In college, I majored in Women’s Studies. My sense that I lived in a world that objectified and devalued women was strong. And, like many college students, I was passionate about social justice issues. On Saturday mornings I stood outside an abortion clinic to counter-protest the anti-choice group that met there. I went to campaign rallies and protest marches. I went to hear justice speakers and panels on campus. I was *involved*.

In the spring of my last year in college there was a scandal that high-school-age boys at a California school were using a point system to keep track of and compare their sexual attacks, including attacks on very young girls. This group made national news, and the boys were treated like celebrities. They were arrested at one point, but were not ultimately prosecuted.

I was deeply affected by this news. After four years of college and activism, this felt like the proverbial straw on the camel’s back. The world seemed overwhelmingly terrible to me. These high school boys treated girls like they were nothing, and nobody seemed to really care. I cried and cried.

So when I graduated college, which is already a stressful time, I welcomed the chance to unplug from social activism. I was busy looking for a job and figuring out big questions like *what do I want to do with my life*, and *with whom*, and *where should we live*? I did look into meeting with the League of Women Voters, but their meetings were at a time I couldn’t attend, so...that was that.

To be honest, justice work had exhausted me, and I was glad to retreat from it. I remained a responsible voter, but when it came to other kinds of involvement and activism, I wasn’t involved. There are names for this withdrawal. Activism fatigue. Activist burnout. Compassion fatigue. I certainly reached a point where I felt recovered from the exhaustion and hopelessness I had felt, but the memory of it stayed with me. I didn’t want to go through all that again. I felt like I had learned that I shouldn’t do justice work.

It was just over ten years later that I joined a UU church and began once again to be involved with something bigger than just my own life and concerns. It was a big deal for me to join in protest again, but this time was different. In religious community, our gathering began with an interfaith prayer service. And then we marched in silence through Balboa Park, carrying signs to convey our commitment to peace and our opposition to war. It didn’t just feel good to take action, it felt nourishing. I didn’t feel depleted by our protest, I felt restored.

I continued to get involved, joining a group at the church called Allies for Racial Equity, committed to doing anti-racism work together. I wasn’t a justice *leader* as a congregant, but I was involved when I felt called to be involved.

So what was the difference? At the time I would have said that it felt different to do justice work in community, but then, I was in community in college. I was surrounded by people I knew, doing justice work with friends. Or I might have said that I was simply more emotionally mature, that there’s some wisdom and balance that comes with age. There might be some truth to that.

But as I look back, I see more clearly now that what made the difference for me in

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The important point of spiritual practice is not to try to escape your life, but to face it—exactly and completely.

• Dainin Katagiri •

A monthly for religious liberals

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making justice work and activism more sustainable—and making me more resilient—is that I had a regular spiritual practice. I attended church every Sunday.

Regular spiritual practice has been shown, again and again, to have many benefits. These include increased clarity, focus and equanimity; improved mood; and stronger self-awareness.

Okay, but what is spiritual practice? The idea of spiritual practice gets thrown around a lot these days, and there's a tendency to describe almost anything as spiritual practice. I've heard that washing dishes can be a spiritual practice.

There are many different criteria used to define spiritual practice, but here's mine: an activity whose primary purpose is to quiet the mind and bring us into deeper connection with the interdependent web of all existence. Spiritual practice is intentional, can be performed daily, and—this might be the most controversial part—is nonproductive.

Let me say those again: The primary purpose is to quiet the mind and bring us into deeper connection with the interdependent web of all existence. Spiritual practice is intentional, can be performed daily, and is nonproductive.

By nonproductive, I mean there's no reason to do it except that it's a spiritual practice. Your practice may produce something—a piece of art, for example—but you create the art because doing so quiets the mind and brings you into deeper connection with the interdependent web of all existence.

This is why something you enjoy doing—like creating art—so often stops being fun when you decide to do it for money. Once it becomes a productive task, it loses some of the benefits that spiritual practices bring. Spiritual practices are things like prayer, meditation, worship, journaling, chanting or singing, playing music, sitting in silence, dancing, walking a labyrinth.

For me, things like washing dishes are not spiritual practices, because their primary purpose is not to quiet the mind and bring us into deeper connection with the interdependent web of all existence. Their primary purpose is practical matters like clean dishes.

I think we tell ourselves that washing dishes is a spiritual practice because we want to check off the box that we have a spiritual practice, but we don't have much time, and we have to get

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the dishes washed, and if we could just make that one thing, wouldn't that be convenient?

But spiritual practice isn't really meant to be convenient. It's not even necessarily meant to feel good. Sometimes it does, but ask anyone who meditates regularly. They'll tell you: a lot of meditation is sitting, convinced that you're doing it wrong, or not good enough, and how much longer do I have to sit here?

It is the daily aspect of spiritual practice that is ultimately so powerful and transformative. Now, you'll recall that I said attending worship every Sunday was my spiritual practice, and I *do* count worship as a spiritual practice. I don't attend worship every day because that's not an option, but the hourly gathering, attended weekly, can also have a transformative impact on people's lives. I know that from my own experience, and I know that because other people have told me it's their experience.

My spiritual practice was to attend church every Sunday. Not many Sundays. Not almost every Sunday. *Every* Sunday. We did not wake up on Sun-

day to see how we felt and then decide whether or not to go. We just went. It was a discipline. That's what made it a spiritual practice.

Church attendance is still my spiritual practice, but I'm also working on a daily prayer practice. And I want to encourage you to consider developing a regular spiritual practice if you don't have one already.

Here's why—because the news is terrible. Every day that you open the newspaper or turn on the news or look at your phone or computer is a struggle to stay hopeful. Because we're so tired and busy and everything is different and it's a challenge to go to the grocery store and it's easy to feel completely knocked over by small things.

It's called "spiritual practice" because what we're doing is practicing. We're practicing what it is to try and be calm and quiet and centered because so much of the time, we *aren't* calm and quiet and centered. We practice and we feel awkward and like we're not doing it right, but if you keep at it, like building a muscle, you'll find that you do not feel so knocked down by what life throws at you.

Your practice doesn't have to be long, just a few minutes a day. Whatever practice you might like to develop, start small and build up. The discipline of daily practice is more important than the length of what you're doing. Five minutes of meditation each day is better than an hour of meditation once in a while.

We're carrying a lot these days. Which is why spiritual practice is so important. Please don't wait until the day you feel you cannot get out of bed. Find a daily practice to work on. Do what you can to take good care of yourself. Do the dishes, but also take care to refresh your heart and soul so that you have the strength to move forward in this difficult world. ■

Spiritual Practice



BY DARCEY
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I grew up in a music school—that is to say, our home was filled most afternoons and evenings with music teachers and students playing scales and études. A couple of times a year our living room was transformed into a recital hall for those students to show off what they had learned, and to practice performing.

Over those 16 years I studied music at the Hegvik School of Music, I would occasionally ask my mom if I could quit. We argued the various merits of learning to play an instrument, but ultimately she believed there were benefits to studying music beyond the music itself. One of those was being able to stand up in front of people confidently, and the other was learning how to practice.

As a child growing up in a house full of music students, I heard examples every day of the most common misunderstandings beginners have about practicing (one I often made myself). Folks think “If I want to learn to play this piece fast, I should practice it fast.” What we don’t realize at first is that what we are actually doing by practicing this way is training our fingers to stumble and trip. However, if you slow it down until every note is just the way you want it, your body and mind are creating neural pathways to play it just the way you want it. Another mistake beginners make is that they want to play the piece the whole way through over and over, mistakes and all. Again, by doing that we are training those mistakes into the brain and the muscles. At some point you just have to stop and do the thing in little bits and pieces until body and mind really understand. Then, and

only then, do you put it back together in bigger and bigger pieces until is second nature.

Gradually it dawned on me that if you practice a piece without beauty, without tone, without feeling, that is how you perform it. If we practice joylessly, the music we make will be joyless. If you hate practicing, it’s time to make a change. It’s so much easier to sit down and practice a piece you love than one that doesn’t speak to you. Sometimes it’s more fun to collaborate with friends when our solo practice has lost its vitality. Sometimes you just have to practice goofing around, improvising spontaneously, making silly sounds. If we want joy and creativity in our music, we must practice bringing joy and creativity into our music. This is the opposite of what so many young musicians learn—they



somehow learn that playing music should be difficult, joyless work, and it’s no wonder they quit.

Perhaps the most important lesson is not to get attached to your mistakes. I would so often hear moans and groans from the lesson rooms, and have myself many times slammed my fingers down on the keys of the piano in frustration. Practice is specifically *time* to make mistakes. We must learn compassion for ourselves, and patience while we practice; we need a safe space to make ugly sounds, to play things imperfectly as we begin to smooth and polish and shape.

Knowing how to practice is useful in unexpected parts of our lives. I remember when we got a brand new video game called “Spyro,” and all my friends took a turn playing it. Most of my friends, when it was their turn at

the controller, raced forward toward their goal until they plunged accidentally off a cliff and had to start over with a new life. When my friend Akire, who had studied classical cello for many years, took the controller, she pulled over to a meaningless clearing and started running in circles and making little jumps into the air. “What are you doing!” we all cried impatiently “there’s nothing over there!” “I’m practicing” she replied. Her strategy was to learn to jump and glide in a safe area where death would not be the consequence of messing up.

In fact, the skills you learn practicing apply to just about every part of your life. This is never clearer than watching a toddler practice walking, or obsessively opening and closing doors, or putting things into a box and then dumping them out and starting it over. It takes hours of repetition to develop skills that now seem second nature to us—walking, talking, closing and opening doors, putting keys in your pocket and taking them out again later when you need them. This is why we do fire drills—so that in the moment of an actual emergency the procedure is second nature. I went to a master class many years ago with the great singer Leontine Price. When a student asked if she thought about technique while she performed, she told the packed house that the time for thinking about technique is in the practice room. When you perform you just think about the music you are making and the character you’re playing.

Spiritual practice is no different in this respect than any other kind of practice. Some days it will not seem like much is happening, but things we repeat day after day have a way of sinking down deep into our muscles and spirits. There are many stories among healers and ministers of visiting an elder who has lost much or all of her memory. She doesn’t recognize family or friends, but when the old hymns of her childhood are sung, or the rosary

beads placed in her hands, something old and deep wakes up. Her fingers start to move on the rosary, she nods or even sings along with the hymns. What we practice most we know in a deep way; our bodies remember even when our minds are distracted or diminished.

There was a funny headline in the satirical paper *The Onion* the other day: “Man Who Downloaded \$2.99 Meditation App Prepares to Enter Lotus Plane of Eternal Serenity.” This could have described me at my first meditation class. I, like many other new meditators, was constantly frustrated by my early attempts. I wanted to power through to enlightenment the same way I had, as a beginning flute student, wanted to power through to the end of the piece, without taking time in the difficult spots so they could become smooth and clear. I chose forms of meditation that were very challenging for me right off, rather than choosing forms that were enjoyable, so I dreaded my spiritual practice rather than looking forward to it. I was so miserable in my meditation practice at one point that I took a class called “Removing Obstacles to Meditation,” which was full of other people who were also having trouble meditating. The best advice the teacher gave in that class was “encourage yourself” — it turns out beating yourself up for your perceived failings in your spiritual practice is not actually helpful. It’s important to be compassionate with yourself as you practice.

Then I discovered yoga, which I looked forward to and dreamed about. No matter how much I practiced I wanted more. I took a break from meditation that lasted almost a decade. I realized that meditation was just one of many spiritual practices. Sure, the Buddha realized enlightenment sitting under the Bodhi Tree, but meditation is not temperamentally or developmentally appropriate for everyone.

Perhaps it was because of all those

years practicing music that I took so readily to practicing yoga. I was reminded of the power of repetition. As I entered Down Dog pose the other day, I considered that if I have been practicing yoga for about 12 years, at least three times a week, and took Down Dog about ten times each class, I had been in the pose about 20,000 times. When you do something 20,000 times, not only do you learn it more deeply, it changes you. Not everyone is going to be able to twist themselves into all of those yoga pretzels you see in photos, but everyone will change and grow with practice.

One yoga teacher called this “slow surgery,” because the capacity it has to change muscles and joints and connective tissue is so powerful. This is why form and alignment are so important in yoga. Yes, if you practice carefully you can become more flexible and strong. But if you don’t practice mindfully you can easily blow out a shoulder or acquire an array of injuries.

Think of all the things you have done 20,000 times so far in this life. That probably includes brushing your teeth, which is why the humans alive today have better teeth than any humans who have ever lived before. It also probably includes sitting at a computer, which is why we have problems like carpal tunnel syndrome that millennia of humans have never had in this magnitude before.

Even if you don’t practice ukulele, or meditation, or yoga, you are practicing something. You already have a spiritual practice right now, whether you think of it that way or not. The question is—what are you practicing? Some people might not realize they have a spiritual practice, that they have shown kindness, or shared a warm smile 20,000 times. It now comes so easily to them they don’t even have to consciously choose to be kind; it arises naturally out of habit. Some folks notice the natural world around them on their daily run or their walk to work, or

watch the slow growth of a tree through the kitchen window while they sip their coffee. They know just by looking at the fresh, green shoots whether spring is early, or what tree is fighting off parasites. One spring when birds and butterflies come back in reduced numbers, they notice the change and wonder what is wrong—they have become that in tune with their ecosystem through years of practice.

Practice is the patient expression of our intentions. In the same way that devout practitioners in Hinduism, Buddhism or Catholicism use a rosary to help them stay connected as they repeat prayers to the divine, so can our repetitions of scales, Downward Dogs or compassionate acts help us stay connected to ourselves and to our intentions to grow and bloom. Depending on our intention, the action itself becomes a prayer. In fact, many UUs understand their work helping others, or working for social justice, as their spiritual practice, as their prayer.

Every life is filled with repetition. All those thousands of repetitions of simple things when taken all together have power. Like drops of water that wear away a stone, we are shaping ourselves every moment with the simple repetition of our daily lives, whether we are conscious of it or not. Let us choose carefully what we practice, because that is what we are becoming. ■

A spiritual practice is something which you repeat regularly that grounds you in depth and connection. For the CLF, supporting us by making a regularly scheduled donation not only builds the depth of our connection, it gives us a vital stability and capacity to plan for the future. You can sustain the CLF by scheduling a monthly or quarterly donation online at clfu.org/give, or you can call the CLF office at 617-948-6150.

Thank You, Meg Riley!

BY REV. GINGER LUKE, CHAIR OF THE BOARD, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

It was sometime in the 1980s. We were at a UU Religious Educators retreat north-east of Minneapolis and I remember my roommate saying from the other twin bed in our room, “Ginger, I think I should let you know I am a lesbian.” My response was, “Oh, I just thought you were a graduate student.”

Well, that graduate student, the Meg Riley we all know today, has become a student of American 20th & 21st century culture beyond all expectations, and a religious educator extraordinaire.

At that early RE retreat Meg Riley was creating programs to help young people feel like they belonged and that they had worth. Her entire ministry has focused on that—helping people of all ages and from all circumstances of life feel like they belong and have worth.

I remember when she invited me to lead a workshop at GA on supporting youth advisors. It was my first GA and she thought I had something to offer. Today she doesn’t so much create programs as she embodies them, as she nurtures others in their innovative creativity. She pulls people into the midst of the fray and holds them up and has their back. The song “Lean on Me” comes to mind.

When she became the Director of the UUA Youth Office she identified young leaders, took a chance on them and supported their development. Many of them shine today in our congregations and in our movement. And from her role at the Washington Office, look what “Standing on the Side of Love/Side with Love” did for the voice and identity of Unitarian Universalism—of understanding who we are and the impact we can create in the world.

As an outstanding student of our culture, Meg has challenged us and sounded the alarm again and again. She was an early prophet studying and warning about the dangers of the radical religious right and alerting us to the rise of white supremacy. She was early at calling out our role in the white supremacy culture. With love and compassion, she has consistently been willing to make us uncomfortable and to call us to task when we seemed oblivious or wanting to ignore hurt, pain, injustice and evil. Meg is present in the world as it is.

This enables her to listen, comfort and share the pain and longing with many of us when we lose heart. Many have called her a “ministers’ minister.” I think it is fair to say hundreds of disillusioned ministers, religious educators, administrators, youth and congregants have called and emailed Meg to be heard and to be understood. Another song, “You’ve Got a Friend,” comes to mind.

All of the above is why Meg has been such an outstanding leader of the Church of the Larger Fellowship. It is Meg’s being and wisdom that has enabled the growth of our prison ministry, of our support for our military chaplains, of creating a home for innovative learning fellows and a sanctuary for those longing for Unitarian Universalism but not yet able to find it in their immediate environment.

It has been a gift to have Meg Riley as the senior minister of the Church of the Larger Fellowship. We will do all in our power to continue the strength, purpose and heart that Meg has given us. She has been our prophet, our teacher, our minister, and yes, our friend. Thank you, Meg. And may the world continue to be blessed by your wisdom, your strength, your empathy and your love. ■

Meg’s Many Accomplishments

During the ten years of Meg Riley’s leadership as senior minister for the Church of the Larger Fellowship, we have changed and grown in a wide variety of ways. Embracing the motto “Always in Beta!,” Meg’s innovative leadership has taken us in many exciting directions to serve the needs of Unitarian Universalists around the globe:

- The Quest for Meaning website, with significant resources available online;
- Weekly online worship services;
- Live online vigils in response to national crises;
- The VUU, a weekly online justice-centered talk show;
- Development of the CLF Learning Fellows program, which helps seminarians and others prepare for innovative ministry;
- Covenant Groups that meet in real time through video conference technology;
- Faith Rocket—a program that shares CLF worship and religious education materials in a format designed to support small congregations
- Blogging
- CLF Facebook groups, including Coffee Hour
- Immediate pastoral care in response to world-wide crises
- Growth of the Prison Ministry program from 400 in 2010 to over 1,100 in 2020
- In-person contact with congregations throughout the US
- Growth of the CLF staff to include a director of technology and a communications coordinator ■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Letting go can be a spiritual practice. I should know, I've been doing it for a while as I prepare to leave CLF. "This is the last Christmas." "This is the last board meeting." "This is the last learning fellow I will choose." And now, "This is the last *Quest* column I will write."

It's odd, because of the schedule *Quest* keeps, that when I write this "last column" isn't when I'm about to walk out the door. I have many, many more endings between now and then. But this particular one—this last column—has been weighing on me, because so many of you talk to me about my columns, and they are the grounds for many of our relationships.

And this is the last one. Ten years writing a column "from your minister" each month, some better than others, some written with ease and some sweating bullets...that won't be happening anymore. That time is ending.

When I name an ending, I bless it. I have tried to bless all of my columns, but there is a poignancy in the knowledge that I am letting go with this one.

What shifts are involved so that letting go becomes a spiritual practice? Many endings come as surprises, so it is a gift to be purposeful and intentional in letting go. Letting go as a spiritual practice begins with deepened attention. Putting more time and focus on what I am doing. I am writing a column, as I have more than 100 times before. And yet, I am simultaneously doing something else. I am letting go of our relationship. I am saying goodbye.

So, I imagine sending this column off on its way into the world without me,

as I have seen lanterns released into the sky or on tiny floating boats into water at various Japanese and Chinese festivals I have attended. I imagine letting go of it as if I'm tossing a piece of wood into the river and watching it float away. I imagine the column as a train pulling out of the station, leaving me behind on the platform waving.

It's easier not to deepen into the letting go, to avoid the grief and pain, to pretend things go on as usual. I'm not good at saying goodbye. I tell myself, that within the tiny world of UUism, I'm not disappearing. You're not disappearing. But our special relationship—me as minister, you as my people—is shifting. It has been such an incredible privilege to be your minister. I will always cherish that, and in August I will leave. I will wonder about your further adventures without me. I will miss our contact—your notes and letters, our phone calls.

I'll be letting go of social media connections with you. That will be complicated, for sure. As a spiritual practice, this means breathing deeply into the acceptance that I won't know about your lives. I can't become your friend. I need to step back and give space to my successors to become your ministers, as Rev. Jane Rzepka stepped back to allow me to become your minister.

It's easy to get sidetracked from grief and separation into anger or bitterness or a sense of abandonment. I remember learning this starkly as a young adult, when I lived in a large cooperative house. We saw many people come and go. It was a rare person who didn't leave angry, or leave with us angry at them. Long-cherished friends would suddenly become either critical harpies or spaced-out fools who left the food on the counter to rot and didn't lock the front door.

Letting go as a spiritual practice means paying attention to my own emotions and those of others as part of the process, and not getting distracted from the need to grieve.

I may or may not have shared with you that I am a huge Dolly Parton fan.

(Huge!) Dolly's hit song, "I Will Always Love You," made epic by Whitney Houston, was written to Porter Wagoner, with whom she co-hosted a TV show when she was very young. She had known she had to leave for a while. They had fought about it. Finally, she wrote that song for him, sat him down and sang it. When he heard it, he knew she meant business. The purity of her need to go shines through the song.



Letting go as a spiritual practice means staying centered in the love, but still knowing that it is time to let it go, and to surrender to what is true: Every ministry has its time, and my time with CLF is through. I can't wait to see who comes next, and what they will do! By the time you read this, we hope to know who is arriving, but as I write it, I don't. That, too, is part of letting go.

Ultimately, we will all be letting go of all we know, on that edgeless edge, as we depart this earth for unknown parts. May each small opportunity to let go teach us a little bit better how to accomplish that big one! And in the meantime, do know that though we won't be in touch, I will always love you! ■

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REsources for Living

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

One of the important things that the CLF does is serve as a teaching congregation, providing an internship or other learning site for people in ministerial formation. Our learning fellows are a treasured and significant part of most of what we do at the CLF. And one treasured and important part of their learning process is a twice-monthly meeting we call Theological Reflection. It's a chance for the ministerial staff to dive deep into our understandings of a variety of topics related to ministry.

Not long ago, that topic was Beginnings and Endings. Knowing that Rev. Meg is heading toward retirement, knowing that our learning fellows are at various places in their seminary education and internships, knowing that not just ministry, but also life, is full of beginnings and middles and ends, where are we most comfortable? What point in any process makes us energized or anxious or fulfilled? We were all different.

Some of us love the excitement and inherent possibility of new beginnings. Some of us love the sense of accomplishment and fulfillment that come with endings. And, I realized, I am someone who likes middles. More specifically, I like a sense of progress, the feeling that I am moving toward a goal. For me, reaching the goal is not really as gratifying as feeling like I am headed in the right direction.

At the end of that meeting I shared one of my favorite poems, a section from W. H. Auden's "Christmas Oratorio." In it, he talks about the day after Christmas, the ordinary time that is neither the excitement of the new baby nor the devastation and resurrection to come. It is, perhaps, the most difficult

time when, as he puts it, "the Spirit must practice his scales of rejoicing."

The Spirit must practice the scales of rejoicing. I love that. Perhaps I love it so much because one of my central spiritual practices is music. A couple of years ago I decided that I wanted to learn to play the mandolin. I'd been playing the ukulele for a few years, and really loved it, but I wanted that feeling of progress, of accomplishment, and the uke is, well, not that hard, especially if you have no ambition to become the rare ukulele virtuoso. The mandolin seemed like a step up, a real instrument that real musicians played. Although it has eight strings, each pitch is doubled, so it only has four notes like a uke. How hard could it be?

**"The Spirit must practice
his scales of rejoicing."**

• W. H. Auden •

Well, pretty darn hard. Those eight steel strings are hard on the fingers, and picking is a whole different animal from strumming, and while almost any chord on the uke is simple to reach, on a mando it's a whole 'nother kettle of fish. And I love it. I love the sound, and the versatility of learning to play both tunes and chords, and I love how it feels in my lap. And I love slowly, slowly, making progress. Gradually learning to play a little faster, a little clearer, creating something that sounds a little bit more like music.

I love that every evening I sit down on my couch to practice my scales of rejoicing. I don't do it because I have to, or because someone pays me. I don't even do it with the goal that someday I will be really good, or that I will perform. Believe me, two years in, there is no indication that I am ever going to be very good! I do it because I rejoice in the practice itself, in that long stretch of middle in which I gradually become

more capable, more grounded in the music itself. I do it because it reminds me that with enough practice, enough repetition, my fingers start to just know where to go.

That's the thing about spiritual practice. It wears a kind of groove in your brain, a habit of body and mind. And the more we practice the scales of rejoicing, the day-to-day exercises of body and mind and spirit that place us in the path of joy, the more we are able to stay on that path.

For me, that sense of being on the journey, continuing on the path, getting stronger and more capable of finding my way, is where the joy resides. I feel that way about the mandolin, but I also feel that way about my work here at the CLF. I've been here for a long time. Beth Murray and I have a bit of an argument over which of us has been with the CLF longer, but in any case for both of us it has been more than 15 years. I've had the pleasure of working with both Jane Rzepka and Meg Riley as senior ministers, both Lorraine Dennis and Jody Malloy as executive directors. And I've loved it all. I expect when the new, as-yet-unknown senior minister or leadership team comes on I will love working with them too.

For that matter, every time one of our beloved learning fellows moves on I have a hard time imagining how CLF will go on without them. And every time a new learning fellow joins us I'm delighted by the new gifts that they bring. Sure, I have my anxiety about change. But I also know that change is always part of the path, part of what comes with the commitment to staying in that middle place. If what I enjoy is the sense of learning and growth, well, change is certainly an important part of that process.

I am so grateful for this long path that I continue to be privileged to move down with you, practicing together our scales of rejoicing. I always look forward to discovering what new music we will make. ■



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Chorus of Cells

BY PEGGY HOWE FREYDBERG

Every morning,
even being very old,
(or perhaps because of it),
I like to make my bed.
In fact, the starting of each day unhelplessly
is the biggest thing I ever do.
I smooth away the dreams disclosed by tangled sheets,
I smack the dented pillow's revelations to oblivion,
I finish with the pattern of the spread exactly centered.
The night is won.
And now the day can open.

All this I like to do,
mastering the making of my bed
with hands that trust beginnings.
All this I need to do,
directed by the silent message
of the luxury of my breathing.

And every night,
I like to fold the covers back,
and get in bed,

and live the dark, wise poetry of the night's dreaming,
dreading the extent of its improbabilities,
but surrendering to the truth it knows and I do not;
even though its technicolor cruelties,
or the music of its myths,
feels like someone else's experience,
not mine.
I know that I could no more cease
to want to make my bed each morning,
and fold the covers back at night,
than I could cease
to want to put one foot before the other.

Being very old and so because of it,
all this I am compelled to do,
day after day,
night after night,
directed by the silent message
of the constancy of my breathing,
that bears the news I am alive.

*From Poems from the Pond,
published by Hybrid Nation in 2015.*

