

At the Water's Edge



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Down the cliffs to the black sand of the Pa'iloa beach, and right on the shore, was an opening. Not a comfortable one for me. It was just big enough to fit my body, but I had to bend down and contort myself a bit to make my way through it. Once inside and able to stand, I realized I was in a small lava tube that sat right at the shoreline of the beach. It was absolutely stunning. Black rocks wide enough to sit on and black sand everywhere, all as a result of lava flows hundreds of years before. An opening to the ocean let the Pacific in, waves crashing and settling right at my feet.

I won't lie. It was scary. I'm not a swimmer. Those classes I took 30 years ago, without a lot of access to pools and large bodies of water in my everyday life, mean very little to me now. And so the idea that I was even in this tiny space with water coming in and out made me question myself. It was pretty and everything, but it seemed dangerous. A large swell could fill this little cave with water at

any moment, and I'd be left with very few options to protect myself beyond trusting my body or mind to do what they need to do to get me out. Before I knew it, I was already in a space of worry and regret that I'd even bothered to go in.

But the word 'trust' stirred me in ways I wasn't expecting. I was reminded of a book I'd been reading off and on over the last year called *Undrowned: Black Feminist Lessons from Marine Mammals* by Alexis Pauline Gumbs. In it, she offers these words about surrender:

And what happens if we just let go? Like dolphins who beach themselves on shore to eat, and trust the tide to bring them back into the water... What would it take to tune in with our environment enough to be in flow with the Earth, instead of in struggle against it.

As I began to reflect on the immediacy of my worry and lack of trust, and Alexis' hopes for our surrender in her incredible book, I noticed my body

At the Water's Edge, continued on page 5

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*"When you
go in search
of honey, you
must expect
to be stung by
bees."*

JOSEPH JOUBERT

in this issue

AT THE WATER'S EDGE

Rev. Mykal Slack

SACRIFICE

Multiple authors

TIKKUN OLAM / CLF WORSHIP

*Rev. Michael Tino
& JeKaren Olaoya*



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SACRIFICE

What is the value of sacrifice? What are its downsides?

JASON

CLF Member, incarcerated in IL

Being in an institution, sacrifice takes on different meanings. Are you sacrificing time to help someone? Are you sacrificing your favorite food to save your money so that you can contribute to your religious service meal? Are you sacrificing your spot so someone else can experience something they haven't, that you have?

Sacrifice becomes more personalized when you don't have that much to begin with. So the value of sacrifice changes as well.

As an elder in the Wiccan service here, there have been times that guys from the service have called me out to the yard or out to a group room to have me help them. Knowing this is a possibility, I am happy to help, though not always right when I'm being asked. The sacrifice for me is knowing that there may be times I'll be asked for help and even though I'm doing something else at the time, unless it's something like legal work or something else equally serious, I will sacrifice what I'm doing to help my brethren.

Of course, the downside as shown above is the interruption of whatever



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er I was doing. It can also mean loss of personal time that I might need to unwind from the stresses and pressures of being in an institution.

I used sacrificing a favorite food to save money to contribute to a service meal as an example. Some guys walk a delicate balance of what they

buy off commissary and the very few things they eat from the dietary. So to have to sacrifice their commissary to contribute to a religious meal becomes a big deal. It then becomes a question of whether they are putting their health at risk just to contribute to a meal—and for some that sacrifice is still worth it. ■



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JOSEPH

CLF Member, incarcerated in NC

The value of sacrifice is relative. Without sacrifice, I would not be living life as I know it. If my mother hadn't sacrificed her time and put her dreams on hold, then she wouldn't have been able to raise me so lovingly. She was 20 years old when I was born, barely an adult, and I feel certain that I wasn't planned. She probably held many other plans, like traveling and concentrating on

school, before I came along. I thank my mother for her sacrifice — it was very valuable to me.

Some sacrifices seem small to us but can be very valuable to the recipient. Perhaps you sacrifice some time once a week to go visit a nursing home. If you have spare time, time you would normally spend watching TV or on the internet, you could make a sacrifice that is of little value to you, but could be of enormous value to the nursing home resident who has no family.

Our sacrifices are offerings to the group soul of humanity. No matter how small or large, if it does good for one, it is good for all. Depending on my commitment and intention, my sacrifice doesn't have to be public. When things are done without my attachment to the result, they are more pure and powerful. Some sacrifice everything their whole lives so that others may live. Some make small sacrifices of their social awkwardness to share a kind word with a stranger. No matter how small a good thing is, it is still good. ■

LIAM

CLF Member, incarcerated in SC

For me, the act of sacrifice is allowing myself to feel the loss or absence of something that I took for granted. The immediate downside is that I no longer have the specific thing, but that feeling, like so many others, is temporary. The feeling that I get when I receive that missing thing is joy — pure, undiluted happiness. When I remember that cycle, I can learn to enjoy and cherish parts of my life more. ■



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tikkun olam

A CLF WORSHIP SERVICE

Most Sunday evenings, members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship with internet access gather for an online worship service. We are exploring ways to bring the spirit of those services to our many members who do not have regular internet access. The following is an abbreviated outline of a CLF worship service that can be read through or shared out loud in a gathering. Please feel free to make it your own, adding whatever music, ritual elements, and readings are most meaningful to you.

OPENING WORDS & CHALICE LIGHTING

We light our flaming chalice and enter into our worship service together with these words from CLF Learning Fellow, JeKaren Olaoya:

*We light this chalice
As we come together
To center love
To create community
To honor the world we live in*

SHARING OF JOYS & SORROWS

Every time we gather, we share what is most present in our lives. Whether you are arriving to this service full of excitement or with a heavy heart, take a moment to name that which you are carrying. You may write your joy or sorrow down, or share out loud with those in your gathering. We know that every joy shared is multiplied, and every sorrow shared is halved.

We hold these joys and sorrows with you, and say in response:

May we all be held in the heart of love

SERMON

REV. DR. MICHAEL TINO

Lead Ministry Team, Church of the Larger Fellowship

Sixteenth century Jewish mystic Isaac Luria told a story of creation in which God, in order to make room to create the world, stored divine light in earthen vessels. Some of these jars broke, and the light that they stored scattered with the broken pieces of clay.

In Luria's account of creation, the goal of humankind was to gather the divinity scattered with these shards, and to separate this sacred light from the sharp, jagged pieces of brokenness. Luria named this goal *tikkun olam*, the repair of the world.

Over the years, this calling has evolved into an understanding that the sacredness of our world is broken—torn apart by violence, oppression, injustice, and hatred—and that it is up to humanity to fix that brokenness in order to live up to our covenant with God.

Our Unitarian Universalist forebears saw this brokenness as well, and through the years handed down to us a religion that calls upon us to participate in the healing of creation.

Many of our Unitarian, Universalist, and UU ancestors have written about the calling of our faith to

participate in the healing of relationships, including our relationship with the ultimate, about our calling to participate in the creation of liberation and justice, about our calling to participate in dismantling systems of oppression that divide humanity in part by assigning power to identity.

I feel like that's something you hear a lot from us, from me. And while I could go on at length about it, today I want to go in a slightly different direction for this month in which we are focusing on healing: you are part of the world. We are each part of the world.

If we are to understand ourselves as part of the world and simultaneously commit ourselves to healing the world, we must see healing ourselves and others as part of that process.

Jewish feminist new-age storyteller and cancer survivor Deena Metzger writes about this connection. Metzger understands the healing of the self—be it from diseases of the body or wounds of the soul—as integrally connected to the healing of our society as a whole. While Metzger's writing is concerned primarily with the physical healing of the self, it also addresses wounds of the soul—wounds of the spirit. She writes:

"In my mind, there is a direct relationship between the healing of my body and the healing of the world. Where healing and peacemaking are one, they are the bridge between individual heal-

ing and the healing of the community. I do not ask for my healing without committing entirely to the healing of the other as the small possibilities of the healing of the world are sacred gifts extended to me as well. The world's body. My body. The same. This is the very nature of healing."

Our Unitarian Universalist faith asks us to heal the world. It asks us to attend to the brokenness in our systems and our society. And it asks us to attend to the brokenness in ourselves, and the brokenness in our midst.

We each, every one of us, know something of brokenness. We have experienced it ourselves, we have witnessed it in others. And every one of us, know something of healing, of wholeness, even if that knowledge is hidden deep within our hearts under layers of scar tissue. Each of us has received negative messages of some sort about ourselves. Messages that make us question our self-worth, our inherent dignity.

Some of these messages are in the form of abuse, and out of respect for the diverse trauma histories in our community I want to name that and create a space for you to do what you need to do in order to protect yourself from the re-emergence of your trauma.

It is a sad reality that too often our

Tikkun Olam, continued on page 5

Tikkun Olam, cont. from page 1

brokenness comes from people who were supposed to love us, who were supposed to care for us, who were supposed to protect us. Too often, our brokenness comes from institutions—especially religious institutions—that were supposed to heal us, and instead they hurt us deeply.

I received those messages as well—messages that I was not worthy of respect and love because of who I was. I am thankful that they didn't come from those closest to me, but they were present all around me. I internalized them. They broke me.

As a teenager, I didn't know how to deal with that brokenness. I tried pretending I was someone I was not—that didn't work. Ultimately, I rejected religion categorically because so many of the messages about my sexuality came from religious figures. I

convinced myself that I would never find wholeness in a religious community, that all religion had to be avoided.

That led to more brokenness—deep within, I had a yearning for spirituality. A yearning for connection to something greater than myself. I had a yearning for a communal expression of our call to love and liberation, for a theological grounding to my justice work.

It wasn't until I was a young adult that I learned that there was a religious tradition that preached love and acceptance, a tradition that insisted on the inherent worth and dignity of every person, a tradition that encouraged spiritual journeys and didn't insist on a narrow theology.

Unitarian Universalism helped me heal some of the broken places within me. It helped me overcome the negative messages I had received about myself by teaching me that I was beautiful, that I was loved, that I was a bearer of the divine within me just

as all people are. Slowly, the people I met who lived these values in the world again and again helped me put back together the pieces of me that had been broken off and hidden out of self-protection.

Our Unitarian Universalist religious community can be a place of healing for you as well.

In the context of religious community, we can come to recognize and name our brokenness. We can also come to recognize and name our inherent worth and dignity. We can create communities of love to work on our healing—together. We can begin the process of healing. We can put together our own pieces of the jar holding the divine light within us.

Here you are loved.
Here you are whole.
Here you are holy.
Here your worth is affirmed.

May the love you find in this community be a healing balm to your soul. ■

CLOSING WORDS & CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

We extinguish our flaming chalice and close our worship service with these words from CLF Learning Fellow, JeKaren Olaoya:

*We extinguish this chalice
As we depart this space
But never in our hearts
We carry the flame within*

At the Water's Edge, cont. from page 1

start to settle into the moment. My breathing slowed. I started listening to the water and the sounds the waves made at different points of contact with the rocks and the walls of the lava tube I was finally able to sit down and rest in. I sat on one of those rocks for a long time, watching the water and feeling the waves as they ebbed and flowed. Truthfully, it was a lot to take in all at once. And it was okay that it turned out to be simultaneously tranquil and still a bit terrifying in the place where the waves and the land met.

Isn't it not unlike the place where many of us find ourselves in our work of belonging and meaning-making?

Be well, dear ones. ■



PHOTO BY CHRIS CHAN ON UNSPLASH

FOR YOUR REFLECTION

In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.

Did you engage with our abbreviated “Tikkun Olam” worship service in some way? If so, what was your experience? What worship materials or themes would you like to see more of in the future?

If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include “You have permission to edit and publish my words” somewhere on your submission.



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