



RESURRECTION OF RELATIONSHIPS

I love what I've come to call over the years, "the dead fish call story." The storyline of Jesus' death that precedes his resurrection three days later may not have much meaning for us religious liberals, but it's the motif of death preceding life in our own relationships that can have far more meaning for us. It's definitely the motif for this beautiful Easter morning. How do the deaths in our lives, figurative and real, affect the rebirth and resurrection that follow? How do we bring such a holy transition in the timeless cycle of life-death-life-death-life-death into our consciousness, and empower it with our own intentions? How do we infuse it with our own passion and good will? We do so with great love and great faith, just as Rabbi Jesus taught his followers so long ago.

When my fish died all those years ago when I was 17, I was so sad, and I still so badly missed Erin being a part of my life, that I didn't question my reflex to call her for an instant. This is back when teenagers still talked on the phone. Something is meant to come of this death, I felt, something good, and it did.

Though it's not written explicitly in our Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism, one belief I've learned as a lifelong UU is that our relationships are always renegotiable. Meaning, when there is a rupture of some kind, no matter how bad and destructive, there is an openness to life and a faith in the power of transformation that allows us the chance to repair what is broken. It allows for forgiveness, for new growth to resurrect out of the old shell, the old husk of whatever went wrong or wasn't working. We believe in the innate goodness in people, and while it may not always occur, we allow for this possibility, that amends can be made, that right relationship can be restored, again and again.

Think of how much this opens up for us, how much good news we can bring into our lives, of our own power. UUs believe that relationships are always renegotiable – our relationships with ourselves, with our family and friends, with the earth – in this way, it's our relationships that save us, that allow us to live our lives with integrity and wholeness, and peace of mind. I can testify for myself that it's had a significant impact on my life – my restored friendship with Erin being just one example.

And here's another. Today is so rife with eggs - ah the egg, that stalwart Pagan symbol of fertility and rebirth. I can't resist the temptation to tell a story that involves my brother and eggs, in the most ridiculous of ways. You see, today, my brother Bruce's family, who live in the Chicago area, is joining my family for Easter. This is something of a first, and our mother could not be more thrilled – I learned yesterday that she had a giant chocolate egg delivered to us via our grandmother, so the eight of us could share it today. Our mother doesn't think my brother and I have a good relationship - oh, she intimates, I just worry you and Bruce don't communicate enough, you don't spend enough quality time together, yadda yadda. No, mom, we tell her, we're fine, we're just busy living our lives and raising our families.

Well, Mom's concerns are partly valid - Bruce and I have had our less than stellar moments. He and I know what those moments entailed, the last memorable one involving airborne beer. It's true my brother and I aren't super connected and our parents think we're quite different, but the funny thing is, Bruce and I know we are alike and we respect and see in one another our similarities. Especially our sense of humor, which is classic Midwestern sarcastic, and when we were kids, could only be classified as zany silliness.

As kids we both went to Camp Echo in Michigan, hands down the best YMCA overnight camp ever. Each two week session held an extravagant 2-day Olympics program, and siblings were always placed on the same Olympic team for some reason. There was a really weird event that Bruce and I were entered in every single year for five summers. It was called, *The Egg and Banana Game*. This involved the 2 – 3 foot high section of the swimming area in the lake. Each two-person team had to wade in the water and conduct battle: the smaller person, me, would have two fresh eggs tied to my head, with the help of pantyhose, and then I would go piggy-back on the bigger person, my brother. I then got to wield a weapon in one of my hands, a banana, with which I was to smash the other team's eggs tied to their heads with pantyhose. I told you this was ridiculous.

The object of the game, of course, was to be the last team standing with intact eggs. So you see, the reason I will feel bonded to my brother throughout our lives, no matter how much beer he provokes me to chuck in his direction, is that, for five years straight, between 1981 and 85, we were the Camp Echo Egg and Banana Game CHAMPIONS. The key, of course, was to cheat a little bit – you smashed the other team's eggs with your fist, not with the banana.

I bet many of you didn't know until now how resourceful I could be under pressure. Thank you, Young Men's Christian Association. A few weeks ago, Bruce called me – he called me just to talk, which is something we rarely do. He was in northern California, probably feeling a little lonely, on business. We talked like real friends do, and at the end of the call, I went for it, to seal the renegotiation. "I love you, Bruce," I said. And he told me back, he loved me, too. So let's celebrate all the resurrected relationships in our lives, by rising in body or in spirit for hymn #354, *We Laugh, We Cry*.

RESURRECTION OF THE EARTH

Part of the Easter story of Jesus that is most compelling begins when Jesus arrives in Jerusalem, five days before his execution, riding a donkey – this is the famous scene that came to be known as Palm Sunday. It's a great metaphor about how, in life, we often don't recognize gifts for what they are, because they come in packaging we're not expecting. In this case, the Jews were looking for a militaristic savior, to save them from the oppression of Roman rule. But Jesus showed up not on a warhorse, but on a donkey, with no weapons, and presented himself just as he was, the Prince of Peace.

Let's try to apply this metaphor to the current state of our relationship to the earth. It's a broken relationship; especially since the western industrial revolution, we have oppressed all nations with our own short-sightedness. Feeling desperate, we have high hopes that technology might save us, might come charging in on a white horse so we don't have to heal this relationship ourselves. Please, we say, somebody or something else fix this problem – not me, not me!

But what if we looked at this differently. What if our efforts to heal our relationship to the earth were life-giving – what if they got us in touch with a spirituality that once again makes sense; that applies our deepest values and knowledge to our everyday living; that aligns respect for the earth as integral to the respect and dignity of human beings? It's not a new worldview, it's a very, very old worldview. It's a worldview that values the interdependent web of life; that recalls the pre-Judeo-Christian Pagan traditions of earth-based religion. These traditions are found the world over, and they are not lost - they are in the process of being resurrected, and liberal religion has every intention of playing a leading role in that resurrection.

There is a lot of good news when it comes to resurrecting the earth. The Prince of Peace is popping up in places we don't expect him to – like in Pope Francis, for instance. “Safeguard creation!” he demands of world leaders, “because if we destroy creation, creation will destroy us!” he warns. The tipping point is upon us, and indeed it is our moral imperative to interpret nature's signposts of danger as invitations to transform ourselves and our world. At heart, I have heard that the prime message of the Easter story is the invitation to self-annihilate. To destroy the ego, to get out of our own way, so that a necessary transformation can take place.

All the signs of climate change, from the seriousness of the drought, to more extreme temperatures and storms, could be seen as our invitations to transform who we are, how we live, and the story we tell ourselves about our role on the planet. “Unless,” the Lorax tells us, “Unless” – Friends, the time of “unless” is now, and I challenge you all to consider that, while transformation can be scary, it's also exciting and hopeful and a period of rebirth.

Long ago, we knew how to live in harmony with the rhythms of the Earth – this is knowledge we had, that we lost, and thank Goddess, we are reclaiming. It is a homecoming for which we will sing and praise. Let's do it now, let us praise the Easter of our Earth - please rise in body or in spirit for hymn # 61, *Lo, the Earth Awakes Again*.

RESURRECTION OF SPIRITUALITY

I want to invite the adults in the room to consider signing up for the Deep Roots spiritual practices retreat that's coming up in a few weeks. It's in a lovely, natural setting, and it's a great way to sample a variety of spiritual practices, that engage our minds, bodies, and spirits. When it comes to spiritual practices for Unitarian Universalists, our message boils down to, yes, do some. Figure out what works for you, be it prayer and meditation, yoga, a creative

practice – whatever it is, make some commitment to it, have some discipline around it and see for yourself what the benefits are.

I think this is a fine message for the people for whom it works. I happen to not be one of those people myself – I don't really like sitting still and meditating. With my small children, I don't feel like I have time or space for that. I think my spiritual practices ought to be things I love to do, that I feel passionate about, that drive me. Whatever it is, it should say something about what I believe is true about myself and my world. For example, I believe my body is holy, and I honor it by dancing. My spirit is resurrected every time I get to dance, and I believe the world gladly receives this expression of freedom, and joy.

When the lay-leaders and I met a few weeks ago about the Deep Roots retreat, they asked me, so, Hannah, what do you do for your spiritual practices? My response was a cross between a dry laugh and probably a deer in the headlights. You see, there was a rupture recently, in my spiritual life, one that involves a death. For about three years, I've participated in rituals of the Temple of the Goddess, the local Pagan community, and it was really good for me to practice as a member of that community. And it still is, except that, in February, the head Priestess was diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer and was told she only had three weeks left to live. There was a living memorial for Kamala, which I couldn't go to because, I was writing a sermon that day. And then she was gone.

I didn't know her well, but she was a big gift to my life – she was a role model for what the feminine divine looked like long ago, and Praise the Great Mother, what she can look like in today's world. In my time of receiving her ministry, she told a story of fighting her body for so long, trying to lose weight, and then how, through dance and yoga, she learned to love her body, and you could tell that this was so. In other words, she had a story of how she healed herself.

So this sad rupture has caused my spiritual life to experience a period of dormancy, which is probably why asking me about my spiritual practices was a hard question for me. It's certainly causing the Temple of the Goddess community to go into a period of dormancy, as Kamala had been the director and creator of these elaborate and beautiful Pagan rituals, such as for the Spring Equinox, or the Summer Solstice.

I know it will be hard work for me and for everyone to resurrect these kinds of rituals again, when the time is right. My spiritual practice now is one of reflection. As I heal from losing Kamala, I think of the ways her death is an invitation to me to resurrect the power I saw in her in myself. Anyone's death can have this effect on us – it's the process that helps us heal. It gives us this question: How do you honor life by honoring what someone you loved taught you? The biggest thing Kamala taught me is to trust my instincts more, trust my intuition. I know every member of the Temple of the Goddess is reflecting in similar ways: how can we turn Kamala's premature death into something life-giving, and beautiful?

I don't think what I have come to identify as my spiritual practices are typically identified as such. Which things do you do because they bring you joy and honor your life? Maybe some of our hobbies are actually spiritual practices. Maybe some of our projects and the things we get really excited about are holy, because they bless our lives and the lives of others.

One thing's for sure. It often takes grit, it often takes hard work, to make spiritual gains, to resurrect the new life that draws us forward - it involves blood and tears. I love the image of Mary Magdalene and the other Mary, the women who believed the story wasn't over yet, and pushed and pushed at the stone covering Jesus' tomb. The power of their faith continued the story, and ushered in the good news, however we mortals could find a way to open our hearts, and receive it.

Happy Easter, and Happy Spring.