

Unitarian Society of Hartford
And Then We Are Home
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And Then We Are Home

Reading:

What if death is not the ultimate solo but our initiation
into the greatest communal adventure of all?
What if, in that transitory moment, when our orphan self falls away,
all the barriers of separation--of time and space, of flesh and spirit--
are dissolved,
and we are present to all the living and the dead at once
in an epiphany of mutuality?
Then we are home.

--Lost in the Land of Oz, by Madonna Kolbenschlag

Rev. BJ

Living. Dying. Perhaps our most vital spiritual practices,
certainly our most profound religious questions—
What would it look like to live well, to die well?
How to honor loss and grief as part of life?
It's no wonder that religion asks what happens when we die,
though for some of us the deeper question is how ought the awareness THAT we
die impact our living.

Today death sits square in the middle of our space—
With children and new members and musicians dancing life
round death's table. As it should be.

“What if death is not the ultimate solo but our initiation
into the greatest **communal** adventure of all?
What if in that transitory moment,
when our orphan self falls away,
all the barriers of separation—time, space, flesh, spirit—
are dissolved,
and we are present to all the living and the dead at once
in an epiphany of mutuality? Then we are home.”

What in the world could those words mean?
to know all barriers of separation dissolved?
to be present to the living and the dead at once in
an epiphany of mutuality?

I, and many UUs, do not believe in Heaven as a place for the continuation of this unique constellation of being,
these skandas, the Buddhists call a person.
I've worked hard to become a skeptic about life after death.

--jumped through the hoops to claim my Unitarian objectivity,
that high calling of incredulity and Enlightenment coolness
regarding earlier religious beliefs.

I **think** today that things we experience in our dying can all be accounted for, by
some brain activity, electrical pulses which, science
can measure and map.

But, and, I feel these lovely words:
to know all barriers of separation dissolved. To be, not solo,
but communally present to all the living and the dead at once
in an epiphany of mutuality, to be in some field of home,
as a great **WE**.

Today I want to tell you about 2 moments in my life,
which have informed my understanding of this epiphany of mutuality,
of being home.

I was blessed to companion my father in his dying months,
in his own home of more than 40 years,
a home he had built with his own hands.

In his last few days he often wanted to sit on the side of his bed. I'd listen
for his efforts to sit up, from my own childhood bed just across the hall,
and go help him.

We spent long night filled hours just sitting on the side
of the bed, his hands folded in his lap like this, with me playing
with his thumbs as I had done sitting in his lap
during church when I was a child.

Sometimes he would pat his bare feet on the floor to
an ancient rhythm I could not hear.
His pain was his own and as it became his world, we went to morphine
and the veil between the worlds grew thin.

One night, as we sat side by side on the bed, he said,
"Sugar, when are we going home?"
I said, "Daddy we are at home."
He looked around the room where he had slept well over
half of his long life, then glanced over at my mother who was
sound asleep on her side of the bed,
as she had been for all those years....
then he tilted his head in that gently skeptical way he had
when he thought somebody was pulling his leg, and he said,

“Now baby you know we are not at home.
When are we going home?”

Having not yet figured out that the dying are never wrong,
I said, “Daddy if we are not at home, where are we?”
His eyes swept across the room again, And he replied,
“We could be at your uncle Pete’s. We’re somewhere,
but we’ve got to get up and go home.”

I said, “Well, it’s not daylight yet.
Let’s rest a few more minutes and then we’ll go.”
Lying back, he said, “OK, just don’t forget.”

A few years later, I had the same conversation with my mother.
Dying brought her little pain and very little medication,
so she was mostly alert. She did not speak however for many days
before she died, and she lay quite still,
listening to taped church music.

I was sitting by her bed reading when she **called** me,
much as she’d called me to do my homework or to sweep the carport.
“Barbara Jean!” I leapt up, astounded that she could talk, and said,
“Here I am mother.” “Where is your sister,” she asked—
as if we’d been caught in the act of something.

“Edna!” I yelled, and my sister came bounding in from the kitchen.
“Here I am mother,” she said.

“Well, here I am,” mother said. Then after a long pause she said,
“and we’ve got to get out of here girls!”
I started to laugh and said “Oh mother you are absolutely right.
We have got to get out of here.”
Those were my mother’s last words.
“We’ve got to get out of here, girls.” We-- Going home.

I don’t have a clue where my parents are.
Dead and gone is my best guess.
But the love of my father and of my mother moves sometimes
Through me and creates for me an epiphany of mutuality—

a deep knowing that I am engaged in an interdependent
reciprocal relationship
with all things I have loved or ever will love,
and that death does not alter that relationship.
nor does death alter the reciprocity that love demands.
We are bound by our love for them,
obligated to continue what they began.

You and I are bound to those whose ashes are scattered in the memorial garden,
bound by our shared love for this place.

I invite you to go sit with them sometimes, in that freshly weeded garden just through those doors, sit with those dead, and remember, that you and I drink from wells we did not dig and are warmed by fires we did not build.

And one way we can express our mutuality with those who built and dug, on whose shoulders we stand, is to ourselves be strong shoulders for those who come after us to stand on.

We can have this epiphany of mutuality with the **living** as well as the dead, as we recall and keep promises made to the living. As we create and keep covenants, we are passing forward the love that will not let us go.

Until we join this innumerable caravan of all souls, it is our role to stand in witness to this unspeakable truth: that love does go on, when in whatever way we can, we take the hand of the living and say "Don't go alone. I'll go too." Today even into your grief, I'll go too.

There is a reservoir of tears given to us when we lose someone we love, a heavy reservoir. And as we allow ourselves to cry, day after week, after year, that reservoir grows lighter. So days like today cry with me. Lighten the reservoir...so that you can rejoice with me that love does not die, and help me pass that love along here.