

Composed and Presented by Rev. Priscilla Geisterfer for the Unitarian Fellowship of
Fredericton on September 23, 2012

Living Love in a World of Fear

Almost 25 years ago now, I lived in England in a community for spiritual growth and healing now called The Abbey. The Abbey is located in a small village in Oxfordshire, called Sutton Courtenay. It is approximately 800 years old and is surrounded by several acres of lush gardens. Sounds wonderful doesn't it? Indeed, it was and is the perfect place to be on a healing journey.

The nature of healing journeys, however, is actually less peaceful than the surroundings they are often lived in. I was there along with five other retreatants and I stayed for a full year. While I was there, I often arrived late for morning prayer, kicked my shoes into the corner where everyone else had mindfully placed their shoes in rows and pairs, laid down during meditation, learned to juggle in the sanctity of the Great Hall, worked a half acre garden by hand in which I grew sunflowers instead of vegetables simply because I could, and I used the library to sew a rag doll. Some might say that I was in a rebellious phase, but the truth is that I did all of these things mindfully allowing myself to be imperfect in ways that were measurable and yet still be accepted.

It was during this year of learning to step across the conventional lines of acceptance that I encountered the question that today's talk raises. "How am I loving?" This was not my question. I mean, it did not come to me. As you can see by what I have shared, I was more concerned with how others were loving me than about how I was loving.

Every Thursday morning at the Abbey, we would gather for the community meeting and begin by sharing where we were in our lives, on our journeys. One day as the sharing unfolded, a fellow journeyer indicated his desire to take his turn. We all stopped with him in silence as he carefully constructed the phrase he was about to say. Then he began to speak saying, "This morning as I was waking the question came to me, 'How am I loving?'" And then he went silent. Not a word was said for quite some time. I don't remember exactly how long we remained in silence nor if any one responded to him or even how the meeting ended. I was struck by the question and even more than the question I was awed by my own inability to respond to it for myself. I have never forgotten the question. It has come back to me time and time again and as I prepared this talk for you, it came back loud and poignant. Have you ever asked yourself that question?

What are your questions? What are the first things you think about as you wake into each and every day? Is your first thought about the wonders that will greet you this day? Do you wake with anticipation for your next breath knowing that without it you cannot be here? Do you wake to the sound of the morning breaking, as if it were the first morning? Do you hear the birds singing as if they are the first birds ever to sing? If it is raining, do you hear this rain or see it as fresh and new, sunlit from heaven, like the first dewfall, on the first grass? Do you sing praises for the sweetness of the wet garden as they spring into completeness where your feet pass? Do you praise with elation, praise every morning as a recreation of each new day?

Truly Cat Stevens captured it well in his song "Morning has Broken". I listened to this song as little girl and I danced to it in my living room growing up.

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Often today when I am lucky enough to be awake to catch the first glimpse of the sun coming over the horizon, the words to this song with the piano in the background coming rushing to memory. This recreation at the birth of each new day is repeated every 24 hours. It is offered to us without restraint. In every season, the splendor of creation spreads itself forth freely.

So now I ask you again, what is your first thought as you wake into each new day? Is your first awareness even your own thought? Do you wake to an alarm, a radio? Do you wake up just before your alarm in anticipation for it to ring? Do you wake up in the middle of the night with so many thoughts of yesterday and tomorrow that you cannot discern one from another? If our first thought of the day is not rooted in love and compassion then we cannot participate in the recreation of a new day. In fact, if our first thought is not of love and compassion we deny as our first thought our deepest truth, the love that we are. As a result, we invest in the fear that is currently running our world.

Let me describe to you the face of fear in our world today. Indeed, and most obvious are the fears of terrorism, earthquakes, tsunamis, hurricanes, mudslides, poverty, social division, war, and political conflict. These fears creep right into our front door, and inhabit our living rooms and bedrooms through the media. These are so big that they consume most of our energy and distract us from the from the day to day fears that confront us. In a way, these global crises desensitize us and make the daily fears almost acceptable.

Each and every day, we leave our houses to greet a world threatened by traffic delays, timelines we are working toward, the damaging effects of the sun, germs and infection, too much media exposure or not enough, food that carries disease, food that is not clean enough, food that is not pure enough, food that is not healthy enough, or food that is simply not enough. We are afraid of the air we breathe, of being in close physical proximity to too many people, of living in isolation. We fear rejection, expression and even acceptance. The fears that inhabit our world and are nurtured by our society and fed by we ourselves tug at us everyday.

This world that so threatens us, we call it freedom. For, in it, we have freedom of choice, freedom of speech, freedom of expression and action. Yet because of all of this we have so much choice that we are now afraid of making the wrong choice. We have so much speech that we can no longer hear each other. There is so much expression and action that we have lost the value of stillness.

In the book, "A Life of Being, Having, and Doing Enough," Wayne Muller suggests that the reason for this is that we have lived our lives for a very long time at the speed of our mind. Our minds are very quick. This is their beauty. They can generate ideas at lightening speed, and assimilate information likewise. Our technological advances are still not functioning at the speed of the mind. Amazing isn't it?

Yet this amazing capacity of the mind is out of sync with our hearts which function at a much slower rate. Wayne Muller explains that the heart is our emotional center and digests the emotions attached to the information the mind consumes in a second over long periods of real time. When we live at the speed of the mind and deny the heart we experience a sense of confusion and separation,

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even inadequacy. He says "in the midst of the frantic pace of a world hurtling by at light speed, the heart struggles to find some way to keep pace with what is." The heart struggles to simply be present to a single moment. This he says "causes violence to our most precious and valuable treasure: the necessary guidance of the human heart."(pg 85)

The pace of the heart is ancient and eternal. If we dare to be audacious enough to listen to the heart we will engage the ancient language of love. This is the language that all the mystics speak about. All the sacred literature speaks about this reality and they speak about it as creative energy.

In the Hindu tradition this source, this creative spirit is referred to as desire. As mystics within the tradition ponder the first things they come to reflect that in the beginning:

There was neither non-existence nor existence then.
There was neither the realm of space nor the sky which is beyond.
What stirred?
Where?
In whose protection?
Was there water, bottlemlessly deep?
There was neither death nor immortality then.
There was no distinguishing sign of night
nor of day.
That One breathed, windless, by its own impulse.
Other than that there was nothing beyond.
Darkness was hidden by darkness in the beginning,
with no distinguishing sign, all this was water.
The life force that was covered with emptiness,
that One arose through the power of heat.
Desire came upon that One in the beginning,
that was the first seed of mind.
Poets seeking in their heart with wisdom
found the bond of existence and non-existence.

Desire is the creative force and enlightens the mind. For us to find this desire that feeds our minds we must, like the poets listen to our hearts.

The Buddhist tradition which is also very much informed by One mind, as in the universal mind, suggests that first things began as One mind which they have called the great cosmic mirror. The cosmic mirror is that place wherein, if you look deeply, you will see the truth of yourself and that of everyone who is in existence in this moment with you. You will see the truth that you are. They call it peace.

Eckart Tolle calls it stillness. It is that moment that takes place between the notes in a birdsong. Have you heard it?

Judaism calls is light. It is that first light that emerged in darkness and is now shattered into sparks upon the earth. One spark in every human person, one spark in every human heart.

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And all the mystics call it LOVE! They say love is your deepest Truth. Live from your heart, for to live in love you dissolve the me and the you and you realize one heart, one incredible life. (Lyrics from Love is our Deepest Truth—Kathy Zavada)

So how do we access this love in the world in which we live today? Perhaps we need to learn to create as the Ancient Israelites did.

Our ancient Israelite ancestors who emerged as the people of the fringes of no distinct society in the Ancient Near East believed that with every breath you take you create along with the creator. Two possible creations could emerge. You could create life and you could create death. The choice was your very own. It was their belief that the creator walked alongside humanity creating reality in every moment. Humanity co-created this reality with their thoughts, words, and actions. Their lives were tenuous, so to survive even a day they would climb rocky slopes to find water. To survive a year, they would till and terrace the hill country building gardens for food. To survive a generation, they would gather remnants of families together creating new bonds of protection for each other, creating families out of compassion rather than bloodline. They knew that if they did not plant seeds, no food would be had. If they did not protect each other, they would not be protected. They referred to themselves as guests/travellers in the land of the Creator. As such they received those who travelled through their communities with protection, food and compassion. They gave praise each and every day to the creator for the gift of their very existence.

Indeed, this is not our direct reality today, or is it. What if our thoughts, words and deeds actually create our lived reality in each moment? When we enter the day with fear in our minds perhaps we create fear. Isn't it fear that encourages us to feel separate and distinct from one another? As if somehow we do not belong?

Do you think a tree ever questions whether it belongs or not? Does a squirrel, or a bird? Does a mountain or a grain of sand doubt the value of its presence? The creation stories of many of the world traditions recite the order of creation as, darkness, sound, light, water, earth, plants, animals and then humans. We are repeatedly the final act of creation created with intent and compassion. Had we been created first we would not survive. Created last we are sustained by the whole of the created order.

Judy Cannato, a spiritual writer who seeks to bring an awareness of the connectedness between the spiritual and the physical, encourages us to begin to become aware of the whole within which we exist. She reminds us that we are a whole within a whole within a whole. We are a creative component of creation. In a way, the created order in which we live holds for us the memory of creativity as a field within which we exist. Within this created order the memory of creativity is non-judgemental, it does not judge itself nor anything outside of itself. It sees itself as a vital part of the whole. It simply is. When we feel isolated, or separate and alone, we need simply to look around us and begin to remember. We need to remember that we are a whole within this whole. We are a vital part of this creative process.

If we maintain our belief that we are separate and alone, we resist the creative process and create death. If we engage the belief that we are a part of a much larger whole and that we ourselves are whole within it, we create life. Judy

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Cannato suggests that there is an interdependence in this relationship we have with creation. In other words, creation needs us as much as we need creation, for isn't it a whole within a whole within a whole?

Environmentalists like David Suzuki have suggested that the earth would thrive without us humans. We are the ones who are destroying the planet. But would it?

Let us come back to something that is immediate, yet ancient, our breath. We breathe the same air as our ancient fore sisters and brothers. We breathe the same air as the fish and land creatures. This air is also critical for the plants in our created order. We have a very interdependent relationship with trees for example. With every breath we take we make an exchange with the trees. We need the oxygen the trees exhale they need the CO₂ that we exhale. If we were not here, would they cease as well?

So we are critical to the continuing creation of creation. With every word we say, every action we take, and every thought we have, we create a reality. And just like the ancient Israelites we have a choice, we can create life or we can create death. By participating in fear, we create death.

So how do we make a new choice, you may be wondering? While the answer is simple the reality in some situations can be difficult. We need to surrender to the resistance. The answer for each of us is much closer than we can imagine. Let me give you a personal example.

I remember reading "Peace is Every Step" by Thich Nhat Hanh. One of my favorite stories was the one where he spoke about planting daisies with every step. Being a lover of daisies, I immediately connected. One day after reading this story, I was in a park with my son, then a toddler. It was fall and the air was crisp. The sand near the swings where he played was moist. I followed where my son went so that I could catch him if he lost his balance, he was just beginning to feel his feet upon the earth. After a few moments, I noticed that in the moist sand I could see the imprint of a daisy. Then I noticed another and another. I began to follow the daisies in the sand to see where they were coming from. At one point, as my son stood still and I followed the tracks with my eyes, I noticed that they led right to my own two feet. Indeed, the freshest print was right where I had last stepped. The excitement within me was building and I could hardly contain myself. I lifted up my foot to look at the bottom of my shoe and lo and behold there were daisies printed on my sole/soul. All of a sudden I realized that to plant daisies with every step, I simply need to place my soul, my heart, close to the earth and to become still enough to see.

My children are now both teenagers, their independence depends on me being able to drive them to their engagements. I struggle with this and have often felt like I was chasing time. I often leave the house at the last minute, so traffic is a real problem.

The other day, as I walked my dogs before getting into my car, I saw about thirty grackles, you know those black birds with turquoise necks that squeak to each other in the trees. These grackles flew across the road in front of me and my mind immediately imagined ribbons of compassion being woven across my path. Then there were four crows and two ravens, several jays and squirrels all weaving love. I had the most glorious walk ever. When I got home, I put the dogs to bed and hopped

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in my car. At the end of my compassion paved subdivision, I encountered the long flow of morning traffic. Bumper to bumper to bumper they lined the New Maryland highway. Then to my surprise and delight someone was letting me in. They smiled, I smiled. As I drove to work and watched the cars weaving in and out of each other my mind placed the ribbons of compassion I had seen earlier onto this experience also. I let go of my timeline and enjoyed the ride.

I did not expect this but it came and I opened my heart to this new possibility. Trust me if I can do so can you!

One of my favorite singers Dana Gillespie has a song called "Love is the Way"
The lyrics go like this:

There is only one language the language of the heart there is only
one religion the religion of love
Through the eyes of love all thoughts are beautiful
All thoughts are innocent in sweet harmony for love binds all hearts
together in a soft silken symphony
The heart without love is worthless
It becomes a heart of stone
But even a hard heart becomes soft as butter when love enters it
alone
For love is the way
start the day with love
Love is the way
spend the day with love
Love is the way
fill the day with love
Love is the only way
end the day with love

Today, I invite you to intentionally create your reality. Invite yourself to start the day with love, and in so doing create love in your day. Invite yourself to encounter love during the day and in so doing spend the day with love. Invite yourself to love those you meet in our day and in so doing fill the day with love. And in the quiet of your home as you begin to let go of the day before sleep, reflect on how you have loved today and in so doing you might end the day with love!