

Lama Choyang (Allison Rader) at The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship,
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Good morning, I believe that we're in a time of collective heartbreak now (reference earlier reading, "Heartbreak," by David Whyte — see end of file) – for what is going on in our country, what is happening in our world, the suffering and loss and pain of that, beyond what I could say. I'd like to share these words from Joanna Macy,

...the most pivotal point is this dance with despair, to see how we are called to not run from the discomfort and not run from the grief or feelings of outrage or even fear. If we can be fearless, and be with our pain, it turns. It doesn't stay static. It only doesn't change if we refuse to look at it. When we look at it, when we take it in our hands, when we can just be with it and keep breathing, then it turns. It turns to reveal it's other face. And the other face of our pain for the world is our love for the world, our absolutely inseparable connectedness with all life.

And so I would like to begin this morning, by inviting us to notice that we are *here* together. Perhaps we can pause for a moment and feel ourselves in community. Notice how this shows up in your body – in your chest or your belly or your shoulders. Feel free to look around. My sense is that this impulse to come together- to gather to comfort and to create - to honor and to remember, is an impulse that goes back through time to the beginnings of human culture – and even before. We join together to share, to feel strength, solidarity and connection. The simple act of gathering is profound, and revolutionary.

These themes of sustenance, connection and responsiveness to world are present in community, and are also alive within each of us. I would like to tell a story. It is a tribal tale shared by Michael Meade. He mentions that it appears in different Native traditions.

It is a story about an old woman weaving in a cave. It's always said that the cave is nearby. The old woman is weaving a magnificent garment, the most beautiful garment in the world, and she has been weaving for a long time.

The garment is made of brilliant colors, and she has woven in carved pieces of antler and bone, feathers and shells. She has reached the fringe of her cloak, and decided that she would like it to be very special, so she is weaving it with porcupine quills. She needs to flatten each quill by biting on it, and her teeth have

become worn down from biting the porcupine quills, but the fringe is exquisite.

The old woman rises slowly and walks across the cave to a cauldron that is suspended over a fire. There is a soup simmering in the cauldron, and she has come to stir the soup. As she is stirring the soup, the small black dog that was curled up at her feet while she was weaving, begins to rouse and stretch. He stands and notices a loose thread on the edge of the garment and begins to tug and pull on that thread. He pulls and pulls on this thread, and because this thread is attached to all the other threads, the garment comes undone. There is just a chaotic tangle of threads on the floor. The elegant cloak is completely unraveled in a mess of destruction.

The old woman walks slowly back across the cave and sees the remains of her once beautiful garment. She stands looking quietly. She just stands there. And then slowly, she reaches down and pulls at one thread and begins to weave the whole thing again. As she pulls threads from the tangled pile on the floor, she begins to vision again the most beautiful garment...

Michael Meade shares how many people hear this story and feel upset about that black dog. Why didn't she tie him up? How could he have destroyed the weaving? And yet the black dog belongs to the old woman in the same way the magnificent weaving belongs to her. There are "black dog times," when the weaving of our world is threatened with destruction and darkness. She lives in the dark cave of knowing in ways that are not ordinary, and she continues to weave.

How do we bend down in our unraveling world, under threat and siege - in so many ways, to pick up glinting threads at our feet, and continue to weave our world?

First, we need to pause and be still, to breathe and to feel. We need to land in our bodies, against this Earth, in this given moment. Joanna Macy says that, "the most radical thing we can do is to be fully present to what is happening in the world." It is our willingness to open, to feel our discomfort and pain, that reflects the depth of our caring and commitment to life. Bessel Van Der Kolk, a physician who works with trauma and recovery, says that what makes us resilient to trauma is to be in relationship with our organism, to feel our sensations and to own ourselves fully.

Joanna Macy reflects on the etymology of the word "apathy." It is a - "without," pathos - "suffering." It does not suggest indifference, as we commonly understand

that word, describing someone as “apathetic,” if they seem indifferent or uncaring; but it rather points to a fear or resistance or incapacity to suffer with our world. It is a response to caring so much, and feeling unable to work with what that means. We care so much about our world we cannot bear her suffering, and so we distance ourselves. We shut down.

In preparing for this talk, I encountered beautiful voices speaking in different ways about the power of dark and challenging times to give rise to creativity and inspiration. We can retreat to our cave of hidden resource and deep knowing, finding ways to move forward.

Michael Mead describes three different dimensions of reality, the “microcosm” within ourselves, the macrocosm of the universe and the “mesocosm” of our shared social, cultural and political world on this planet Earth. It is this mesocosm that is profoundly out of balance, in chaos, upheaval and distress.

We can drop within ourselves to the depths of our soul/being. And we can also bring our attention to the larger order of our cosmos; the sun and the moon, the stars and planets in the sky, and feel held in larger field of wholeness, beauty and coherence. I think of two wonderful lines from David Whyte's poem, *Everything is Waiting For You*. He says, “Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into the conversation;” and also, “To feel abandoned is to deny the intimacy of your surroundings.” We are inseparably a part of our world. We suffer with her degradation, and we can also open ourselves to receive the energy blessing of wind and tree, bird, blossoming flower and wet Earth. We can see the sunset and the vastness of our night sky. It asks us to slow down, to notice and to receive this beauty, using our senses and being open to what we see and hear and smell and touch and taste as a source of nourishment.

And as we ground and settle, are aware in our world; we are also moved to engage and respond. Rebecca Solnit writes how there are consequences that we don't see, and can't anticipate, but they matter. She speaks of the “tyranny of the quantifiable,” that if an outcome is not “measurable,” it somehow does not exist or have meaning.

There are immeasurable outcomes to reaching across difference and encountering others with love and respect. Frances Kissler, a woman who started an organization called “Catholics for Choice,” speaks of, “approaching difference with an idea that there is good in the other.” She says, “I can disagree with your

opinion, but I can't disagree with your experience. And once I have a sense of your experience, you and I are in relationship, acknowledging the complexity in each others positions, listening less guardedly, *the difference in our opinions will probably remain intact, but it no longer defines what is possible between us.*" (I repeated the line in italics twice.) This is the whole thing, this is it.

The poet Elizabeth Alexander writes, "and are we not of interest to each other?" "Are we human beings who are in community, do we call to each other: Do we heed each other? Do we want to know each other?"

These queries are deep and rich and call us into the work of immeasurable outcomes. I was inspired to hear an interview with Van Jones, on NPR last month, on City Arts and Lectures. He was speaking about a foundation he helped to establish, called "The Dream Corps." They have a project where they are partnering with Republican legislators and law enforcement to reduce the prison population by half, and to cut high rates of recidivism. They send volunteers to do service projects in Red States, volunteer in opiate addiction recovery centers.

They have a program within their organization called #The Love Army, which has ten guiding principles including, "*Build Relationships*..Relationship and community are the foundation of change. Call each other up – not out...Take responsibility for your actions. Talk to each other, not about each other. Heal divides." Another principle is "*Amplify the Unheard*," "Hold up the voices of the marginalized and mistreated. Tell the stories that don't get told. Pay attention to who is heard and seen. Be generous with your power. Seek out and nurture potential." Another guiding principle is "*Protect Creation*," "Without a healthy planet there is no future. We are part of the Earth and her ecosystems, not separate from them. We support the conditions for life to flourish." And then "*Create Beauty*," "Beauty inspires and transforms. From the smallest conversation to the largest mobilization, make everything we do beautiful – inside and out." And finally, their tenth principle, "*Be Extraordinary*," "We are a leader-ful movement. Unleash your inner superhero. Don't play small and stay humble. Strive to be better. Trust yourself, We are the leaders we have been waiting for." These folks are weaving a beautiful tapestry, visioning a new world. Check them out, "Dream Corps.org."

Over years, I did retreat at the Ojai Foundation, a beautiful retreat center in Ojai, Ca. It just burned in the fires there this fall. They practiced something there they called "The Beauty Way." You could feel the tangible and intangible blessings of

this practice in their built spaces, on their land, and in their community. It is a practice I could feel in being on their land and in their community, and then I noticed a small piece of paper tacked up on a bulletin board in their kitchen. I copied it down years ago, and have it with me still. These are some of their principles:

The Beauty Way is a practice of mindfulness. It is an awareness of the affect I have on community space, people and land. The Beauty Way is present in actions, is the effect of space on people, is an awareness of cause and effect, is a holistic energetic view, bringing consciousness to details, beyond neat and meticulous placement of objects. The Beauty Way is awareness, is engaging, rather than traveling through space; is modeling, rather than teaching the Beauty Way. It is being energetically clean, and being relationally clean. The Beauty way is a path of engagement with the living world around us.

Put your hand on your heart. (*Really, right now, we'll share this practice together.*) Breathe, be still. Receive the support of the Earth, call in your benefactors – people in your life who have held/who hold you in unconditioned positive regard. Feel them all around you extending their love and support. Feel yourself, your gifts, your yearnings, your deep care. Stay aware of your breath.

Rebecca Solnit poses these worthy questions:

What is the most meaningful thing you can do with your life?
Do you live according to your principles?
What will your legacy be? What does your life mean?

And, my final question, (a question posed by social entrepreneur, Jacqueline Novogratz), what are you doing when you feel most beautiful? (*spend a moment there, reflecting on that...*) The more you notice what that is, the more you feel it. Nourish that feeling. Bring more intention to that experience in your life. It can be as simple as breathing and being aware.

Rachel Naomi Remen says, “It's not about healing the world by making a huge difference, It's about healing the world that touches you, that's around you.”

I would like to close with lines from a poem by William Stafford:

For My Young Friends Who Are Afraid

...And maybe for you, for me, a high passing voice that finds its way by being afraid. That country is there, for us, carried as it is crossed. What you fear will not go away: it will take you into yourself and bless you and keep you. That's the world, and we all live there.

Thank you.

(informal) References:

David Whyte, "Heartbreak," in *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*.

Joanna Macy in Krista Tippett, *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*.

And also, an interview with Dahr Jamail from *Truthout* magazine:
<http://www.truth-out.org/news/item/39448-learning-to-see-in-the-dark-amid-catastrophe-an-interview-with-deep-ecologist-joanna-macy>

Krista Tippett, On Being (Public Radio Podcast)
interview with Rebecca Solnit.

Krista Tippett, *Becoming Wise: An Inquiry into the Mystery and Art of Living*.

Michael Meade, *The World Behind The World: Living at the Ends of Time*.

And also his podcasts, "Living Myth," (weekly since January, 2017)

Rachel Naomi Remen, *My Grandfather's Blessings*.

Van Jones interview on City Arts and Lectures (not available), and the Dream Corps website, "www.thedreamcorps.org"

Heartbreak

David Whyte, from *Consolations: The Solace, Nourishment and Underlying Meaning of Everyday Words*.

“Heartbreak is how we mature; yet we use the word heartbreak as if it only occurs when things have gone wrong: an unrequited love, a shattered dream, a child lost before their time. Heartbreak, we hope, is something we hope we can avoid; something to guard against, a chasm to be carefully looked for and then walked around; the hope is to find a way to place our feet where the elemental forces of life will keep us in the manner to which we want to be accustomed and which will keep us from the losses that all other human beings have experienced without exception since the beginning of conscious time. But heartbreak may be the very essence of being human, of being on the journey from here to there, and of coming to care deeply for what we find along the way....If heartbreak is inevitable and inescapable, it might be asking us to look for it and make friends with it, to see it as our constant and instructive companion, and even perhaps, in the depth of its impact as well as in its hindsight, to see it as its own reward. Heartbreak asks us not to look for an alternative path, because there is no alternative path. It is a deeper introduction to what we love and have loved, an inescapable and often beautiful question, something or someone who has been with us all along, asking us to be ready for the last letting go.”