

Water Communion: Ingathering, Mingling, Merging By Darrah Dunn

I like to think that Unitarian Universalists are an intelligent people. Or at least a thinking people, always expecting explanations, and prone to demanding those explanations should they be curiously absent. Unlike many religious congregations gathered around the world this morning, we can't exactly be compared to a flock, and rarely are we at all prone to following the same shepherd. In fact, we are happiest when we have the viewpoints of eighteen different shepherds presented simultaneously, so that we all find some tidbit of the same idea to grasp and assimilate into our own personal mythologies. In any case, we aren't a people who believe something--- embrace it, espouse it, share it, wear it, or even bear it--- simply because it has been presented to us as the truth. For this reason, we try to avoid thoughtless repetition in our gatherings. We generally shun formalized rituals and liturgical trappings, and when we are confronted with them, we feel compelled to do a public analysis of the goings-on, over-articulating the hows and whys of what we're doing and collectively re-affirming the inclusion of said ritual into our shared experience. In short, we want to know why we're doing what we're doing----- and more importantly why----- week-in-week-out, year-in-year-out-----we should continue doing it.

And there you have my carefully worded----beautifully punctuated (if you could see my copy)--- somewhat academic--- erudite--- pedantic even----lead-up to what may well be our most beautifully transparent ritual: the annual water communion. Its significance should be obvious; its allusions to diversity, gathering together, merging our ideas----celebrating our differences and yet cherishing what we share----we know this. We get it. Okay. Let's do it. And we could just do it. Parade past the bowl, re-converging, dumping their water in and saying where it came from-----acknowledge our common bond and our communal identity, and call it done. And we will do those things. We will all have our chance to merge and mingle and blend and be as diverse as we know better than anybody else how to be. But let us not pass like ignorant sheep through the meadow of this lovely moment. Some of us in this room have never passed this way before. Let alone led the way. So let us pause. Let us think. Let us define the elements. Let us refine the symbols. Let us articulate the metaphors. Let us float around in our collective intelligence. Let us discover, as if for the first time, it not for the first time, why we are a people in need of such TOGETHERNESS.

Let's begin by defining the elements:

WATER--- a ubiquitous chemical substance that is composed of hydrogen and oxygen and is essential to all forms of life.

UBIQUITOUS-----existing or being everywhere at the same time; constantly encountered; widespread.

CHEMICAL----of, relating to, used in, or produced by chemistry.

CHEMISTRY---a science that deals with the composition, structure, and properties of substances and with the transformations that they undergo.

COMMUNION---mutual participation; an act or instance of sharing; intimate fellowship or rapport

SHARING---partaking of, using, experiencing, occupying, or enjoying with others.

OTHERS----those not the same

INTIMATE---marked by a close association, contact, or familiarity

CONTACT---union or junction

UNION---something that is made one; the growing together of severed parts.

Now we will refine the symbols and articulate the metaphors:

Hopefully, each person here today, or each family, remembered to bring a sample of water which in some way represents them and their experiences as an entity separate from this collective body. In this way, the water represents us as individuals. Individual people, individual families, couples, clics, or clans. And we are each like little drops of water. Little molecules which exist apart from our collective role as RRUU. Like gas. Or steam. Moving quickly and independently through the community, each bouncing off different parts of the same larger world, encountering our own unique places and situations. In this way we disperse ourselves over a large area, effecting everything we encounter with our understanding that all life is sacred,. that everyone is essential, and that being one of the “others” is a shared experience. And yet, when we come together in solemn celebration, we, like molecules of H₂O, slow down, coalesce, and merge into a large body of clear, shining, peaceful, justice-loving liquid.

When we add our own sample of water to the bowl, we are acknowledging that we are a part of the larger body. We are expressing our desire to be included and our willingness to engage in familiarity and shared experiences. We are also committing ourselves to being a part of the whole. And we are expressing our sincere belief that our unique and individual offerings to this community not only enlarges it, but also enriches it for all the others.

Our own diversity, our Uniqueness, is beautifully demonstrated every year by the amazing array of water sources represented. This year we will be exploring some of these sources and finding new ways to think about our own personal inspirations and experiences. We will think separately about oceans, lakes, rivers, and tap water and you will be asked to come forward with your contribution accordingly. We will also be adding a sample of water from last year’s water communion, to represent those who come before us and the vast wisdom and history upon which we build our ongoing community. This year we will also make available some water from this building’s kitchen sink, to be used by those who may have forgotten to bring a water sample. We want everyone here today to be represented in the communion we now undertake.

OCEANS

This planet on which we live may not be unique in the vast universe, with its life sustaining waters, but we don’t know of anyone quite like us just yet. 71% of our planet is covered in water. Only .001% of this is in the air, as vapor and clouds. A mere .6% of the earth’s water is contained in lakes and rivers. Underground aquifers hold 1.6%. 2.4% is held in ice caps and glaciers. Amazingly, the remaining 97% is found in the oceans. These vast bodies of water cover 139 million square miles, and can be as deep as 6.787 miles. The four major oceans are actually one continuous body of water with relatively free interchange among its parts. The ocean has a significant effect on the biosphere of the entire planet. Oceanic Evaporation, as a phase of the water cycle, is the source of most rainfall, and ocean temperatures determine climate and wind patters that affect life on land. They also provide humans with a means of travel between distant places. They are sources of great beauty. They are home to some of the largest

and most amazing animals on the planet. And they are so deep that most of the area they cover remains unexplored.

If we think of the ocean as the vast expanse that connect us to the far corners of the earth, then they can also represent the most fundamental aspects of the human condition. The needs and desires that make us uniquely human. The common threads to tie all living things together. At some point, all water has been a part of an ocean. And will be again.

If the water you brought with you this morning comes from an ocean, please come forward now and add it to the common bowl. Please feel free to tell us where your special contribution comes from, if you wish, why that is significant.

LAKES

A lake is a body of liquid on the surface of a world that is localized to the bottom of a basin. It is not global, and it moves slowly, if at all. On Earth, a body of water is considered a lake when it is inland, not part of the ocean, is larger and deeper than a pond, and is fed by a river or other water source, such as glacial melting.

Some lakes are natural. They may have been created by rifts in the Earth's surface, or they could have been carved by the slow and powerful movement of glaciers. Other lakes are filled up basins, such as craters and calderas. Sometimes lakes form along the courses of mature rivers, especially where the rivers bend and constrict. Most lakes, though, are artificial, created as reservoirs or as sources of hydroelectric power. All lakes, in any case, are temporary. Eventually, all lakes will fill up with sediments, and spill over their banks into the larger world, the water held therein being again redistributed.

There are so many different kinds of lakes, ponds, lochs, burns, inland seas, fjords, springs, meres, and waters. They all have their own regional associations, uses, and significances. Most lakes have a natural inflow and outflow, and generally maintain a consistent level. They may be used locally for recreation, industry, agricultural, or as sources for domestic water.

If your water sample is from a lake, please come forward and tell us about it now.

RIVERS

A river is a natural watercourse that flows toward an ocean, a lake, a sea, or another river. The water moving along this waterway is generally collected from precipitation through surface runoff, groundwater recharge, springs, or glacial melting. They usually ebb and flow with time, many having a floodplain into which they can occasionally spill if necessary.

A river is a source of energy which can be channeled and used for many different purposes. They are important sources of food, transport, hydropower, and recreation. The presence of a healthy river within a region or community helps to determine the shape and presence of the area and contributes enormously to its potential opportunities.

The beauty of rivers and their surroundings have historically been inspirations to the greatest artists and writers in the world, and have been the source of culture-shaping works of art and literature.

Let us not forget, too, that rivers often represent the boundaries that separate one country from another. As much as rivers can provide connections, they can also be used to contrive divisions. Sometimes, ferries are used to facilitate the necessary connections. Smart people have learned to build bridges.

If your water this morning is from a river, please come forward now.

TAP WATER

No doubt, many of us this morning bring tap water as our contribution. This is not shameful, nor is it lazy. As a matter of fact, the water from our own kitchen sink, hydrant, or swimming pool is the most honest representation of who we are in our everyday lives. This is the water which actually quenches our thirst, bathes our babies, cools our bodies after a long workday, and warms us during a cold winter night's soak. It is the most common of waters. At least in this country.

Potable water requires a massive infrastructure of piping, pumps, and purification works. It is vastly expensive. And yet, we really do take it for granted. Unless we have not paid our bill, we have water to use as we see fit. Hopefully, all of us here are educated in knowing how to appreciate and use our water with frugality and care. But in any case, it is there. Just turn the spigot. Good, clean water.

It is like the grace of a mighty deity. Or the promise of spring returning. Or the unconditional love of a child for its mother. It is there for us. May we always be grateful for this amazing resource. May we always remember to express our gratitude for being so richly blessed. And may we always remember to guard this precious commodity, just as we remember to guard the precious community.

If you chose to bring water from your own plumbing line, please share it with us at this time.

COMMUNITY WATER

Now is the time for those of you who did not bring a water sample to come forward and pour from the community vessel. It is here for you to share so that you may be represented here today. At some point we have all been unprepared, overbooked, out of pocket, out of the loop, out of our minds, or not in the right frame of mind, to fully invest ourselves in the very things we know are critical to our well-being. Never the less, we choose to participate. To be included. To be recharged and replenished by those who love and know us the best.

It is your presence here this morning that is perhaps most critical of all. You who arrive out of your singular room and wish to be included in this loving community of thinkers. Thank you for sharing our water and making your presence known. Please come forward now.

WATER FROM LAST YEAR

And now I will add some water from last years collection. I do so with humility and some sorrow, for there are people represented herein who do not return this year. Some have moved away. Some have parted ways. Some have died. But through this final addition, they are still a part of us. The best parts of those people are still with us and will continue to richen our community with the history of their presence here. They are a part of who we have been. And a part, therefore, of who we have yet to become. May it be so.