

“Wake Now My Soul”
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Today I want to begin with a metaphor. It comes from Ramakrishna’s story of a passenger in a horse-drawn carriage, as told by Meck Groot, congregational consultant in The New England Region of the UUA. It’s the kind of carriage with a driver on top, reins in hand. The driver has been guiding the carriage on a long trip. The driver has come to think that the carriage is theirs and mostly doesn’t even think about their passenger. But suddenly the passenger, having dozed off, wakes up and looks around. The passenger knocks on the carriage roof and says, “Stop here.” The driver says, “Who do you think you are?” The passenger answers, “I am the owner of the carriage.” But the driver says, “Don’t be silly – this is my carriage.”

The driver wants to be in charge. In our parable the driver is the ego. The one who has been having fun guiding the carriage – too much fun to surrender control to the real owner, what Meck Groot calls, “the soul.” The carriage belongs to the soul. And once the soul has awakened and re-established control, ego can begin to play their role as a wonderful servant.

The title of my sermon today, “Wake Now My Soul.”

In the Old Testament, the Hebrew word for “Soul” is nepes [[v,p,n](#)]. It appears 755 times in the Old Testament. There are 42 different English terms to translate it. The two most common renderings are “soul” (428 times) and “life” (117 times). Nepes [[v,p,n](#)] in the Old Testament is never the “immortal soul” but simply the life principle or living being. It is the breath of God that makes the lifeless dust a “living being” — person.

Clearly, then, in the Old Testament a mortal is a living soul rather than *having, possessing* a soul. Instead of splitting a person into two or three parts, Hebrew thought sees a unified being, but one that is profoundly complex, a psychophysical being, so says Baker’s Theological Dictionary.

Ralph Waldo Emerson, Scotty McLennan reminds us in his book, Christ for Unitarian Universalists, A New Dialogue with Traditional Christianity, that “the Highest dwells within us. There is a deep power in which we exist and whose beatitude is accessible to us...It comes to the lowly and simple; it comes to whosoever will put off what is...proud; it comes, as insight, it comes as security

and grandeur.” It basically reminds us, the driver, our ego, of who truly owns the carriage. “Emerson affirms poetically: ‘Within us is the soul of the whole; the wise silence, the universal beauty to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal one.’”

Why am I talking about this today? The soul. My interest for us is not to engage in theological debate here but to, as McLennan would propose, to invite us to consider who we are aside from our identities, inside the carriage, as complex as they may be, our experiences, our history, our emotional and psychological make up is not finally all that we are. It’s when we awake our passenger in that carriage we own, that the decisions we make, how we treat one another, respect each other directs how we then go about doing all of that. Sometimes when the passenger knocks on the carriage roof, it surprises us. Reminds us that we are the servant of that passenger.

He, the owner of that carriage I was driving with reins in hand, surprised me one day last week. I was at my mother’s Assisted Living Facility to receive my second Covid19 vaccination as my mother’s essential care giver. The appointment was scheduled for 3:00 p.m. and when I arrived those giving the vaccine were still immunizing the residents of the facility and were behind in administering the vaccine to the caregivers. As I waited, more caregivers were arriving and, like me, were just told to wait outside. It seemed there to be no organization happening. I was feeling a bit frustrated and could see others were starting to voice their displeasure at having arrived when they had been told to but given no indication as to how long we would have to wait. It was then that I heard the tap from within upon the carriage roof.

It was then that the owner of my carriage made his way to the staff person holding a clipboard. I went up to her and asked, “Would you like some help?” She was astonished and replied, “Oh, yes! Would you?” I said, “How about if you give me that clipboard and I’ll go outside and take people’s names and the time they arrived to the facility. I’ll let them know what’s happening and that as soon as the residents have been taken care of you’ll then come out to call people by their names, according to the time they actually arrive for their appointment.” Without hesitation, she handed me the clipboard and I got to meet a lot of people I had not met before, all of whom, like me, had parents in that facility.

I share that story with you simply to illustrate that there is something inherent in each of us that is at work, that reminds us from time to time, even at times in

spite of ourselves, that driver who holds the reins atop our carriage, isn't the one finally in control. There is in each of us, as McLennan would say, that is a spacious, radiant mystery and wonder. It is that that I want to call the soul. It is what Dr. Martin Luther King Jr labeled as life's blueprint.

He says, "...Number one in your life's blueprint should be a deep belief in your own dignity, your worth and your own somebodiness." He goes on to say that nobody confers somebodiness on you or anyone else. Your somebodiness is inherent. To me, and I would hope for you to claim for yourself again that you are the owner of the carriage: in Old Testament terms a living being, a soul. It's what makes you a person, a sacred somebody, instead of lifeless dust.

Now there are some ramifications of such a claim, of having that deep belief in your own dignity, your worth and your own somebodiness. It asks of us, no, it beseeches us, as I beseech you this morning, to be about those matters for which the driver in us is the servant of the owner of our carriage. For example, the business you have already begun with Rev. Roberta and one another, awaking in one another the deepest of values you hold by the words we use with one another, the time we give to deep listening, and the touch we reach out with to hold another's pain when they can't bear it alone. Our efforts in bringing about justice in affordable housing, health care for those who go without in order to have food on the table, or helping folks to release the weapons they hold in their hands, are for naught if in our efforts they can't claim for themselves their somebodiness, awakened to their soul, their inherent worth as a living being.

This kind of living into our worth, our somebodies, so that other's see their soul through our eyes, doesn't always mean we will be tireless in our efforts. We have to listen to what our bodies tell us. In Hebraic terms, body and soul are not separate elements of the whole. They together make up the whole of a living being.

And so, I leave you with one more metaphor today. The other night I attended a webinar on Suicide: The Second Epidemic. Near the end of that webinar the survivors of those who committed suicide became the focus of discussion. The speaker put up a slide of a large community of penguins huddled together in the Antarctic. She spoke how the penguins on the outer edge of the huddled gathering take the brunt of the cold winds that sweep across the ice. Over time they begin to inch toward the center of the gathering where it is the warmest.

And after a while those penguins that had been at the center eventually make their way to the outer edges of the group. This is how the whole community of penguins stay alive in the deepest of freezes.

Spiritual communities are like penguins staying warm, surviving in the deepest of freezes. We have certainly been such a community in this time of Covid19. Folks amongst us, like Margie Mannie and Sue Boone, and the other worship associates have huddled on the outer edges these past months of planning and navigating our way so that we could inch to the center together to worship. Folks like your pastoral associates have huddled on the edges, providing the kind of listening and caring that inches a fellow member to that awakened living being in those they serve. Seeing the world not just within this community but reaching out to all those other souls through our Social Justice members who have been tracking our state legislators through the UU Justice Florida network. Your board of trustees, penguins, weathering the elements of finances, policies, procedures, by-laws, technology challenges, and yes, clergy leadership so that we all can inch toward being a Beloved Community, penguins all.

Here is what I ask of you now. For those of you who joined us via your telephone I would like for you to do what I'm about to ask in your own minds eye. For the rest of us I would like for you to all remain in your mute mode and in the upper right-hand corner of your screen, go to gallery view so you see on your computer screen a good number of your sibling congregants.

Now take your hands like this (in a prayer position) and stretch them out to edges of your zoom frame window like this.

Just as we, each of us, is a living being, so too are we as a Beloved Community, with it's own soul, it's somebodiness, inherent in its worth...sheltering in ways that keep us as community but warming us, loving us, so that we may go to the outer edges where we are called, to this world is in need of warmth, of justice, of love, of soul.