

Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society
Online Worship Service
August 30, 2020

Liminal Zones
Rev. Jeanne Lloyd

Long ago, and far away, I was saved by Unitarian Universalism.

Such a small word, “saved”, with so many meanings. Such large words, “Unitarian” and “Universalism,” let alone Unitarian-hyphen-Universalism, also with so many known and unknown meanings at so many levels. But, what do you call it, when something you haven’t experienced before, bids you welcome, bids you to be yourself, bids you to discover yourself, bids you to rise with clear voice and say and do that which expresses most truly who you are? And, what can this process be, but the act of being saved from a dis-possessed life, where one was asleep to life’s possibilities, where one didn’t know oneself and therefore couldn’t form the boundaries so necessary for others to know you?

For, you see, if you don’t know, deep down, who you are, when stripped of the artificial identities others give us . . . if you can’t draw on the known depths of your being, to face the joys and sorrows of life, then how can others know you?

And, if lost in an oblivion of where you do not truly know yourself, your values, your inspiration, and where others are also lost in similar oblivions, how can we fully live our precious lives in ways that transform this world? How can we live a life worth living? How can we help others do the same?

Seeking the answers to those questions, is how Unitarian Universalism saved me. And, that is how I came to be in seminary. Unlike many other faiths grounded in inflexible dogmas, Unitarian Universalism gave me permission to explore, to seek out my spirit, to find out what it was that uniquely nourished my spirit, and it called me to declare that those soul nourishing findings were good in their own right.

It called me to give no credence to those who dismissed my discoveries as wrong or unsuitable to them. Unitarian Universalism declared that it had a faith in me, that I had the capability to know myself, to speak for myself, and to determine for myself my life’s calling.

And, so, it does for you, too; for all of us . . . if we listen and do the work. But, you can’t just wave a wand and make all this seeking and discernment come true over night!

This kind of soul work doesn’t happen by just opening the door, and boldly crossing the threshold, as though you’d just won the lottery! No one else can open that door. No one else can cross the spirit’s thresholds.

Finding the path that leads to the spirit’s door that you seek (*but can’t quite name*), is a long journey that eludes many.

This process of becoming is a process you move through from where you were to where you will be. It is the process of spiritual growth and transformation. It is in the space between the past and the future, where that movement . . . that transformation occurs.

In that space, pregnant with possibilities, neither here nor there, you/we exist in a liminal zone.

PAUSE

I first heard this phrase “liminal zone” from my Hebrew Bible teacher in my first Hebrew Bible class. The professor sized us up, and then became our prophet. She told us that we, as seminarians, were entering into a liminal zone. A place of in-betweenness, between who we were, and who we would become.

She used Moses as her example, leading the Hebrews across the desert, explaining that like us, that time between, when the Hebrew slaves left Egypt and when they arrived in the promised land, was a liminal zone, a place of in-betweenness, a necessary place and period of time for journey seeking and growth.

She reminded us that physically, it doesn't take 40 years for a people to travel from Egypt to Canaan. Why then, did God¹ lead them on such a circuitous route, lasting 40 years, during which time they complained bitterly, and, lost all confidence in Moses and his leadership? Why indeed?

Because, eventually, with time, and by their shared adversity, they would, (however much they resisted), grow into the self-governing, covenantally grounded people they were meant to be. They needed a chaotic, creative time and space of in-betweenness so that they could, finally, leave behind their identities as slaves, and grow into a self-discerning, self-governing, spiritually grounded people.

PAUSE

Most of us think about a goal as a place to reach, a threshold to cross. It may seem that the goal is to cross a threshold, such as those that so eluded Moses, and later, the Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. who said to his people, “I may not get there with you.” They knew that creativity and growth resides in the liminal zone *in between* the old ways of doing things and new ways we can't quite imagine. It is only in this in-between space where new information is *allowed* to break through, where it can incubate, and where, subconsciously and through discernment, we can *re-align* our understanding of the world and way of being with others.

Only in this place of creativity can a people become . . . what they cannot yet name. Those who ultimately make it across the next threshold “get comfortable with the discomfort of ‘not

¹ When speaking for herself, Rev. Lloyd does not spell out the word, “G*d,” because the term is loaded with many misconceptions and preconceptions. That which is the spirit of life and community, the spirit of love and death, the spirit of humanity, cannot be relegated to one three letter word. Rev. Lloyd invites others to reconsider the meanings of this word, and, to contemplate whether it is a noun or verb. Is G*d Love? The reader is invited to expand their vision and understanding .

knowing”² in the meantime. Those who grow the most, make the most of this time of unknowingness giving *the spirit* the time and space to expand past the known and into the future.

For many of us, this time of pandemic has been the uncomfortable liminal zone within which we’ve been struggling. Elizabeth Watt says, “Creativity is about getting beyond what we take for granted, [and] pushing through to new levels of awareness. It’s not easy, but [when we do so] we [become] infinitely richer for it. The good news is that it is only by slowing down, paying attention and engaging with . . . chaos and confusion [(rather than resisting it)] that we can truly perceive how to] move forward.”³

The threshold you seek appears when you have done the deep reflection required to cross a threshold you cannot *yet* even name.

PAUSE

And, so, beloved, we have reached a threshold. Together, you and I. All the members of this congregation received letters from me and our President, Mary Strieff, this past week, explaining that I will be retiring from my role as your called minister, this fall.

Leaving you and SUUS is not my first choice. In fact, it is my last choice and only choice at this point in my life. New health conditions and family needs require that I step back from ministry. I do so, even though I love you and I am excited about where you are headed. I can easily envision SUUS moving through this liminal zone and toward a new kind of ministry that reaches out to the world in both traditional and virtual ways. All that will unfold during this time of transition as you reimagine what SUUS will become, in a virtual world with fewer walls. If this sounds scary – then I encourage you to reflect in gratitude for this opportunity to think outside the box and support each other in reimagining the congregation’s future and your place in it. SUUS is *so lucky* to have such superb lay leadership, good staff, and wonderful members. Our courageous leadership is ready to guide you, through this important and creative liminal zone toward your next threshold.

Though I am leaving with regrets, I am proud of all you have become and are becoming. In fundamental ways this congregation has grown so much, moving toward the next threshold of spiritual wholeness. Though you may not know them now, you *will* discover new ways to offer the sanctuary necessary for others to also save their own lives. A sanctuary where, thanks to you, others will find their own voices, and stand with you, ready to face this world’s challenges and promise, together.

² <http://create-shift.com/blog/tag/happiness-2/> April 13, 2016

³ <http://create-shift.com/blog/tag/happiness-2/> April 13, 2016

I know you, and I know you can do this. You are ready. You are resilient. And, as you continue to move forward toward the next threshold, know that Bob and I will be cheering you on, with love, from the sidelines.

PAUSE

To close this reflection, I offer you these words from Rumi:

The Guest House⁴

This being human is a guest house.

Every morning a new arrival.

A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
as an unexpected visitor.

Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who . . .
sweep your house empty of its furniture.

Still, treat each guest honorably.
[They] may be clearing you out for some new delight . . .

. . . Meet [those guests] at the door laughing,
. . . invite them in.

Be grateful for whoever comes,
because *each* has been sent as a guide from beyond.

May it be so.

⁴ <http://allpoetry.com/poem/8534703-The-Guest-House-by-Mewlana-Jalaluddin-Rumi> April 13, 2016