

*Living in Harmony*  
Unitarian Universalist Society of Schenectady  
Sunday, July 10, 2016  
Gary Feinland, Worship Associate

***Reading***

Coleman Barks in *The Essential Rumi* talks about Rumi's worldwide appeal. Representatives from many faiths came to Rumi's funeral in 1273 AD to honor him. He says that "Rumi's place among the world religions is as a dissolver of boundaries. He is the ocean that acknowledges oneness over the multiplicity of waves." He goes on to say that "mystical poetry is a way to open the heart". Let's open our hearts a little more with Rumi's *Come Close*.

Come close... closer... even closer!  
How long will this hindrance last?

If you are me and I am you,  
What is this separation between you and me?

We are the light of God, we are God's mirror.  
So why do we struggle with ourselves and with one another?

Why does one light escape from another?

Come, release yourself from this ego.  
Live in harmony with everyone;  
Be friendly with everyone.

If you are by yourself,  
You are only one drop, one speck;

Whereas when you bond and unite with everyone,  
You are an ocean, you are an ore.

There are many languages but all are the same meaning.  
Water in different cups becomes one when the cups are  
broken and they run as one.

***Reflection***

Wake now my senses. It seems hard these days not to be awake. We are being pulled out of the rhythm of our daily lives by one unsettling piece of news after another - Islamic terrorists carrying out violent attacks in Paris, Islamabad, Istanbul; Black lives being taken by police officers in many cities in our country; Police officers being targeted. So many lives lost out of fear, misunderstanding and anger.

Ashley Horan, Executive Director of the Minnesota Unitarian Universalist Social Justice Alliance recently posted her thoughts encouraging a discussion about UU values regarding the fallen police officers and the Black Lives Matter movement. She writes:

*I am wondering, did we send condolence cards and flowers and love notes yesterday to the Black activist collectives and organizations and churches that are in such deep pain and rage with the same alacrity as we sent them to police stations today? Are we in deep enough relationship with Black leaders and other frontline communities that we are asking whether it is actually useful for us to try to be "bridge builders" between police departments and activists in the Movement for Black lives? Are we willing to be perceived as "anti-police" if our Black congregants and partner organizations and organizers tell us that they would rather we focus our energy on doing the hard work of reminding the world that Black Lives Matter is not responsible for the shootings in Dallas, or raising money for Black-led organizing, or showing up for actions or vigils or protests led by Black folks?*

This is a lot to think about and discuss. The events of the last week have provoked conversation around my dinner table. We talked recently about Black Lives Matter versus All Lives Matter. My daughter Sara brought up an example she had seen on the internet explaining why it's a "Black Lives Matter" movement and not "All Lives Matter. It was posted last year on Reddit, an internet entertainment and news site where anyone can post their views. The author, known as GeekAesthete asks us to,

*Imagine that you're sitting down to dinner with your family, and while everyone else gets a serving of the meal, you don't get any. So you say "I should get my fair share." And as a direct response to this, your dad corrects you, saying, "everyone should get their fair share." Now, that's a wonderful sentiment — indeed, everyone should, and that was kinda your point in the first place: that you should be a part of everyone, and you should get your fair share also. However, dad's [explicative] comment just dismissed you and didn't solve the problem that you still haven't gotten any!*

*The problem is that the statement "I should get my fair share" had an implicit "too" at the end: "I should get my fair share, too, just like everyone else." But your dad's response treated your statement as though you meant "only I should get my fair share", which clearly was not your intention. As a result, his statement that "everyone should get their fair share," while true, only served to ignore the problem you were trying to point out.*

The author continues, "That's the situation of the "black lives matter" movement. Culture, laws, the arts, religion, and everyone else repeatedly suggest that all lives should matter. Clearly, that message already abounds in our society. But that's not how it actually works... we don't pay as much attention to certain people's deaths as we do to others. So, currently, we don't treat all lives as though they matter equally."

Another group of people being marginalized in this country and in the world is our Muslim brothers and sisters, mostly due to the actions of a tiny minority of terrorists carrying out attacks in the name of Islam. Muslim people living peacefully are increasingly the target of discrimination including attacks in their places of worship. As I stand here in this sacred and safe place, it seems unimaginable that someone could attack such a place.

There is so much pain, so much division... What can we do to move toward a path of justice and inclusivity?

Rumi offers a way. In the poem that I read earlier, *Come Closer*, he talks of our interconnection to each other. It harkens back to our Seventh Principle, the interconnected web of all existence

of which we are a part that Kim mentioned at the beginning of the service. Rumi asks, “If you are me and I am you, what is this separation between you and me?” He asks that we live in harmony with everyone.

The Black Lives Matters movement points out the challenge of living in harmony when black lives in American society are not treated as equal to white lives, when black lives are being lost and we are rarely aware of it happening. We can’t live up to Rumi’s ideal of living in harmony for we can’t seem to get to an understanding that “you are me and I am you.”

How can we get there? Rumi offers a way in the first line of his poem, “Come close... closer... even closer!”

We get closer to those who appear different from ourselves, are socioeconomically different, or have a different religion first by creating opportunities for interaction, inviting folks in, being friendly, creating community dinners, advertising that we want to have a more interactive role in the community. I’m not saying that building stronger relationships within our community will solve the inequities that are inherent in a system that favors white people, or the dominant religion, but going out of our way to treat all people with respect helps. We do great work in this church, but we often do it alone. As Rumi counsels, if you are by yourself, you are only one drop, one speck; whereas when you bond and unite with everyone, you are an ocean.

This Wednesday night we are fortunate to have an opportunity to bond with our greater Schenectady Community by participating in a Black Lives Matters community conversation one block from here at the Mt. Olivet Missionary Baptist Church. This is a chance to put our values into practice. For more details visit the back of the Great Hall after the service.

Another opportunity that has presented itself is through the Black Lives UU Organizing collective, which Dani Regan posted recently on the UUSS Beloved Community Facebook Group. This collective put out a call to action for UU churches to open up our doors to Black community organizers free of charge to offer an explicitly Black space. They suggest that if your heart is aching and you don’t know what to do, this is one meaningful way you can support Black organizers.

And we can, and need to, reach out to our Muslim brothers and sisters too. Our church has recently reached out to this community in one small way with the sign outside our front door supporting Muslims celebrating Ramadan. We have touched at least one person with this small gesture as Deb Best let us know recently on our Facebook Page. A recent post reads “Hello, I live in the neighborhood and saw the Happy Ramadan sign in the front of your building for the past month. During a time where the world is labeling us villains, it made me grateful for this ray of sunshine from you all. Thank you so much for your kind gesture, it did not go unnoticed. Wish you all the best. Love conquers all”.

When we reach out to those in our community with love, we can begin to understand each other and to see that “I am you and you are me.” Then we can work together toward justice.

#### Sources:

*Why is it so controversial when someone says "All Lives Matter" instead of "Black Lives Matter"?* Retrieved from

[https://www.reddit.com/r/explainlikeimfive/comments/3dulqm/eli5\\_why\\_is\\_it\\_so\\_controversial\\_when\\_someone\\_says/](https://www.reddit.com/r/explainlikeimfive/comments/3dulqm/eli5_why_is_it_so_controversial_when_someone_says/) posted by GeekAesthete

*The Essential Rumi*, translated by Coleman Barks, Reprint Edition, 2004

Ashley Horan, *An open letter to white Unitarian Universalists in the wake of the murders of Alton Sterling, Philando Castile, and the five police officers in Dallas*. Retrieved from <https://www.facebook.com/ashley.a.p.horan/posts/10102951965564141>