

“We Would Be One”  
Rev. Pamela Wat  
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**Meditation Story:** When I was in my 20’s, I found myself in a time of transition. I just finished my Master’s degree in Interdisciplinary Art and I was wondering what the next chapter of my life would bring. I did not feel excited about it. I felt unsettled. Restless. And I certainly didn’t feel whole.

I decided to spend two weeks in Arizona. I flew to Phoenix, rented a car and followed where my heart led me. My heart did not let me down. There was something holy in the Native American ruins and in the bright blue skies and the expanse of dusty, dry land. I swear I felt a pulsing in the earth and heard reassuring voices whispering in the wind.

In the last days of my trip I was just outside of Sedona, hiking up Wilson Mountain. The trail started from a running creek and then moved its way up through dry desert. As the trail began to wind to the left, I heard a rattlesnake. The sound was very clear, very distinct, and very nearby. I screamed and jumped onto a rock that was about a foot high. After a long time of quiet, I quickly scurried off along my path. I came into a lush forest of green trees, with significant signs of burning on one side of the mountain which made the trail hard to follow. At some point I realized I couldn’t find the trail behind me or in front of me. I was pushing my way through dense bushes, scraping up my legs. I was disoriented. I couldn’t even decide which direction to head toward.

It was at that point on my journey that I realized that no one knew where I was. This was before cell phones. I hadn’t seen a single person since that running creek bed. Unable to find the trail, I began to question the wisdom of the hike altogether and my fear got bigger and bigger. I wondered how much time I had until sunset. I considered how much water I had brought.

And then I stopped walking. Stopped pushing through bushes. After a time, something of that pulsing earth and whispering wind brought me back to my peace. I continued on and found my trail. When I got to the top of the mountain, I sat on a top of a boulder and took in the panoramic view of the red rocks and the bright blue sky.

Along the way up this mountain I found a little blue feather. I carried it with me to the top and held it as I sat there. I felt like something sacred had delivered me there to that boulder. I stopped worrying about where my life was going. And in the absence of worry, I felt a calm wash over and through me. I felt a kind of calling. A call to do something like teaching. Or something like healing. And something with writing or arts, I didn’t know. I wasn’t a church goer then. I couldn’t have imagined it was all pointing me toward ministry. But in that moment, I didn’t need to know. In the quiet of that moment, in the stillness of that place, I found my wholeness.

And that little blue feather that I carried up the whole way, came to symbolize that wholeness. A wholeness my own self. A wholeness in my relationships and in my work. A wholeness with all of life.

I blew that feather into the wind in a prayer that I would always return to that place—not necessarily the literal place, but that feeling, that truth, that vision. In theist language it's about finding one's way back to God. Or spirit. Or Love.

So when I returned home from that Arizona trip, I had a blue feather tattooed on my hand. My left hand which is my writing hand, a place where I see it often and my hope is that all that I do and say comes from that place of wholeness and holiness.

What makes you feel whole?

Where have you experienced a sense of your own strength, calm, clarity?

What brings you back to your best self?

**Reading: “You Are Not Enough” by Alexis Engelbrecht, Soul Matters Family Ministry Coordinator**

The phrase is everywhere. Though the words may vary, the essence remains: You are enough.

You have what it takes. If you just believe, anything is possible. You can do it.

May I suggest that you are not enough?

I am not enough. Each of us, as individuals, is not enough.

Alone, one can feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Alone, one must fend for oneself.

Alone, one is left to only one's personal experiences and knowledge.

No – I am not enough... but... when I am with another, my tears can be accompanied by the comfort of companionship. When I am with another, one seemingly impossible challenge is divided by half.

When I am with many, the work is shared.

Our insights and wisdom multiply with the presence of others at the table.

We cannot be everything at once. Instead, when you are with me, and I am with you – when we are part of this community grounded in Love – we are enough...we are whole.

**Sermon: “We Would Be One” by Rev. Pamela Wat**

A couple of weeks ago, while we were beginning to plan today's service, I sent to Ed Scott (our Worship Associate for today), the hymns and the title for the reading. Ed wrote back and sweetly suggested that I might have made a mistake in typing the title for the reading. He asked, “I have to ask is the title really ‘You Are *Not* Enough’?”

It's a good question, because what candidate for minister, who is trying to make a good impression, would lead by suggesting that you are not “enough”?

So let me be clear, this reading is not really to say that individually we are not enough, but that there is a wholeness found when people come together in love. It is a Humanist response this month's theme of Wholeness. It's a lifting up of our shared human

capacity for restoration and healing.

In some Christian circles, wholeness is better understood as more of a cosmic restoration. It is rooted in a belief that humans come into the world broken and what many Christians believe is that in baptism, one is restored to “wholeness” (or restored to perfection, or reunited with God). No matter one’s beliefs, to talk about wholeness then is to also consider one’s brokenness.

There is an old Jewish myth that says that in the beginning of time, God said “Let there be light” and divine light came into being and was contained in ten holy vessels. God sent the light forth, but in a great accident, the vessels shattered into countless fragments of light. In that way, our cosmic wholeness here on earth was fractured and we (has humans) are meant to repair the world, which is described in Hebrew as “tikkun olam”. Repair of the world.

I confess that sometimes I can get very cynical about this responsibility to repair the world. Whether we are talking about warring nations, warring political parties, gun violence, poverty, racism, devastation to our natural resources...sometimes it all feels beyond repair.

But I also have moments when I genuinely believe that such work is possible. In fact, I entered into seminary with the idealistic, rose-colored belief that religious people could and would repair the world. And then, in my first year of seminary, we experienced the attacks of 9/11/2001 which deeply challenged my idealism.

Fast forward nine years later to September 2010. I was just stepping into my role as the minister of Denton Unitarian Universalist Fellowship in Denton, Texas. And in that first year I noticed that so-called “interfaith” gatherings like the National Day of Prayer event that is held each year on the Denton public square, is simply a mix of different Christian denominations. And Denton is religiously quite diverse. In fact, Denton is home to the first mosque in Texas with a thriving Muslim community.

I was also noticing that we were heading into the tenth anniversary of the attacks of 9/11/2001. I decided to call a meeting of my more progressive Christian colleagues and wondered aloud about the absence of truly interfaith gatherings in Denton and asked whether we might create a shared interfaith worship service on that 9/11 anniversary. As I spoke to them, I started to get more and more animated the possibilities—“you know, not just Christians, but Buddhists, Jews, Hindus, Pagans, Baha’i, and, of course, our Muslim neighbors.”

I watched these progressive Christian colleagues puzzle over all of this a bit. They shifted in their seats. One person finally spoke, “do we even have Buddhists in Denton?”

Someone else asked, “well if we all believe different things, how can we worship together?”

Another added to the concern, “we don’t all believe the same things about God. We

don't even all believe that there is one true God.”

And this was the moment when I realized that, as Unitarian Universalists, we have a special gift to bring to interfaith work. I talked about the shared values in which we all believe (peace, love, diversity, compassion). I talked about the power of a person sharing one's heart without the need to convert others to their beliefs. They were still hesitant, not in the idea, but in the ability to actually pull this off. And so I said, let me draft a worship service and then we can talk about it. No commitments at this point.

Some weeks later, we met again with the draft worship service in hand. It included singing songs, reading from sacred texts, and faith leaders sharing short statements about what they hope for. It was a worship service that, for me, was like any other worship service we might have in a Unitarian Universalist congregation, but for my interfaith colleagues, it was earth-shattering. They did not expect to come away from that meeting with a worship service that would include their beliefs and still be inclusive of others' beliefs.

We went ahead with planning. As a new minister, I hadn't yet learned the art of delegating and in addition to writing the service script, I was also the one in charge of calling various faith leaders inviting them to participate in our service in different ways. Every faith leader I called was so excited and on board...except the Imam.

Of all the faith leaders to express reluctance, the Imam was the one person we really needed to be present. He wasn't against the service. He understood that we wouldn't be replaying the events of 9/11, but instead that we were attempting to create a shared expression of interfaith solidarity and hope for the future. I expressed that we celebrated his Islamic faith, along with other traditions, and wanted to make that celebration public. He said he supported the idea, he even said that he planned to attend, but was not comfortable participating and nor was anyone else from the mosque.

Now remember that I was new to these kinds of politics, and because he was so friendly, but elusive, about the whole thing, my response was simply to keep calling him every few weeks to try to change his mind. Finally we were only weeks before the event when he finally named his reluctance—fear. Part of the history of Denton (that I only came to learn in the planning of that 9/11 service) is that in the days after September 11, 2001, when anti-Islamic hate was building throughout our country, their historic Denton mosque, their sacred religious home, was fire-bombed. Frankly, I don't believe that the larger community knew how to respond to that back in 2001. And there we were, ten years later, and of course this Islamic community and their Imam, were terrified (afraid for their physical safety) to stand in a church and affirm their faith in front of hundreds of strangers. Of course they were afraid.

Our reading today reminds us that, “Alone, one can feel overwhelmed and hopeless. Alone, one must fend for oneself. Alone, one is left to only one's personal experiences and knowledge.” (Alexis Engelbrecht) Alone, we are not enough. But together...

We ended up inviting a Muslim speaker from outside of Denton. Someone who didn't share that particular history. The Imam celebrated that choice and enthusiastically

supported the service, attending along with many other members of the Denton mosque. During that service, hundreds of people representing a diversity of religious traditions, gathered their voices to sing the song we sang today, "We Would Be One". The words are set to a tune called Finlandia and when I was planning that 9/11 service I noticed that many different hymnals return to the Finlandia tune to sing of unity, and hope, gratitude, and peace. Our own hymnal includes two hymns set to this tune (the other is "This is My Song").

Throughout that 9/11 worship service we returned to that tune again and again, singing a verse from the Lutheran hymnal, then later a verse from the Methodist hymnal, then a verse from the Reformed Church hymnal, our Unitarian Universalist hymnal. We went from "this is my Song, O God of all the nations" to "We would be one" and as those gathered sang this tune over and over again, anyone who didn't know the tune already began to get more and more confident in it.

And with rising confidence, all those hundreds of people just got louder and louder and louder. On September 11, 2011 in a large, packed-out sanctuary in Denton, Texas a whole lot of people very suddenly experienced a profound sense of wholeness that we didn't know was possible and that we didn't even know we needed. It built healing connections among religious groups and individuals that are still felt today.

When I want to believe in the possibility of repairing the world. I think about all those people joining together their voices to sing "We Would Be One."

When I want to return to my own personal wholeness, I recall my Arizona mountaintop experience. I might even close my eyes and imagine the land, and the air, and the getting lost, and finding my way...a time and place where the Earth herself saved me.

But wholeness doesn't have to be a grand worship service or a big mountaintop experience. Many of you know that I was born and raised here in Wilmington. What you probably do not know, is that my very first job (official paycheck kind of job) was the summer between my freshman and sophomore years of high school when I was a substitute daycare teacher right over there in the Educational Enrichment Center.

I was the "on call" backup when teachers couldn't work because they were on vacation or sick or whatever and so over the course of the summer I got to work in every age group, and my very favorite class was the infant room. It was in the infant room where I learned to rock a baby in each arm, while using my foot to rock a third baby in one of those plastic rockers.

And what I loved most about the infant room was the teachers. They were three women and they were, by far, the oldest of all the teachers. As far as I could tell, they were really, really old.

But these three women radiated a constant and glorious love for these babies that surprised me. In the infant room, every single morning we would have babies who would scream when their parents left. And every morning these women would hold these babies with complete empathy for the deep grief being suffered there. They held

these babies and assured them of their safety and well-being and they reflected back to these babies their worth and value until such time when these babies could assure themselves of these things. I began to think that these women had among the most important jobs in all the world.

“Alone we are not enough”... but... when...[we are] with another...[our] tears can be accompanied by the comfort of companionship. When...[we are] with another, one seemingly impossible challenge is divided by half.” (Alexis Engelbrecht)

Today’s reading places wholeness, not on any one person or group, but on the spaces between us. When I have worked with couples who are married or preparing to get married, I’ve seen so many instances where couples are doing a good job of tending to oneself and one’s partner, but failing to nurture the relationship itself (that space between them). They’d get so busy or so mired in their routines, that their conversations were always about worry for the past or the future and their time together was always fueled by productivity or need. What their relationship needed was for them to have time together where they could just breathe into the present time and place. Maybe name what they love about being in relationship together. Maybe tend to the changes that need to be made for the relationship to be stronger. Maybe laugh together. Maybe hold hands. And sure, maybe go to the grocery store and run errands, but with the express purpose of holding the relationship as more important than the to-do list.

And I imagine that is true for all our relationships. There is so much distraction that keeps us from tending to those spaces between us. In my experience, when those connections are not being tended to, the space between us can fill with a lot of anxiety and ill-feelings, apathy, even hate. Walls start going up. We start isolating by ourselves or in silos of “like minded” people.

Alone, we are not enough, but “when...[we are] with many, the work is shared. Our insights and wisdom multiply with the presence of others at the table.” (Alexis Engelbrecht)

In the beginning of time, God said “Let there be light” and divine light came into being and was contained in ten holy vessels. God sent the light forth, but in a great accident, the vessels shattered into countless fragments of light. And those fragments, those sparks, became deeply hidden in people, in plants, animals, in nature, in events. Rachel Naomi Remen says that “the whole human race is a response to this accident. We are here because we are born with the capacity to find the hidden light in all events and all people. To lift it up and make it visible once again and thereby to restore the innate wholeness of the world.” (quoted from an August, 11, 2005 interview of *On Being*)

And the great miracle is that by lifting up the light in someone else or something else, your own light is magnified and wholeness is restored. And opportunities to do this work are all around you, every day, all the time. When cynicism or apathy or hate or anger get the best of you, look for the light.

Rachel Naomi Remen says our work at this time and place is to “heal the world, one heart at a time.” (quoted from an August, 11, 2005 interview of *On Being*) And all we

have to do is draw out the light, the love, that we have in our hearts and reflect back another's light and love.