

**CLAIMING WHOLENESS**  
THE UNITARIAN FELLOWSHIP OF PETERBOROUGH  
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**RESPONSIVE OPENING WORDS**    *From the Fragmented World*    #440

From the fragmented world of our everyday lives we gather together in search of wholeness.

By many cares and preoccupations, by diverse and selfish aims are we separated from one another and divided within ourselves.

Yet we know that no branch is utterly severed from the Tree of Life that sustains us all.

We cherish our oneness with those around us and the countless generations that have gone before us.

We would hold fast to all of good we inherit even as we would leave behind us the outworn and the false.

We would escape from bondage to the ideas of our own day and from the delusions of our own fancy.

Let us labor in hope for the dawning of a new day without hatred, violence, and injustice.

Let us nurture the growth in our own lives of the Love that has shone in the lives of the greatest of our human kin, the rays of whose lamps still illumine our way.

**All:** In this spirit we gather. In this spirit we pray.

**STORY FOR ALL**    *The Missing Piece*    ~ Shel Silverstein

*("It" is a circle which appears to missing a piece, and it rolls along looking for that missing piece. Along the way, it tries a lot of possibilities, and stops to enjoy the butterflies.)*

**MEDITATION**    *Meditation on Broken Hearts*<sup>1</sup>    ~ Thomas Rhodes

Feel the earth beneath your feet as it supports you.

Feel the love of this community as it surrounds and enfolds you.

Feel your breath as it flows in and out of your body.

Listen to your heartbeat.

Listen to your heart . . .

And how is it with your heart?

Does your heart feel whole, shielded by intellect, cocooned by reason, closed to feeling?

Or is it broken, fragile to the touch, brimming with the pain of loss? Or has your heart

been broken and healed so many times

that it now lies open to the world,

knowing that true growth comes not without pain,

that tears may wear down barriers,

that we may carry the hearts of others

even when our own is too heavy for us to bear.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/meditation-broken-hearts>

None of us has an unblemished heart, not one.  
For such perfection can be found only in death,  
and we who are alive still have much to heal.  
So let us give thanks for the broken places in our hearts,  
and in our lives.  
For it is only through such brokenness that we may truly touch one another  
and only through touching one another that the world may be healed.  
Let us give then thanks for the brokenness (and the wholeness) that we share.

**READING**    *We Are Whole [even when...]<sup>2</sup>*        ~ Beth Lefever

We are whole, even in the broken places, even where it hurts.  
We are whole, even in the broken places, the places where fear impedes our full  
engagement with life; where self-doubt corrupts our self-love; where shame makes our  
faces hot and our souls cold.  
We are whole, even in those places where perfectionism blunts the joy of full immersion  
into person, place, activity; where "good enough" does not reside except in our silent  
longings; where our gaps must be fast-filled with substance, accomplishment, or  
frenzied activity lest they gape open and disgust.  
We are whole where we would doubt our own goodness, richness, fullness and depth,  
where we would doubt our own significance, our own profoundness.  
We are whole, even in our fragility; even where we feel fragmented, alone,  
insubstantial, insufficient.  
We are whole, even as we are in process, even as we stumble, even as we pick ourselves  
up again, for we are whole. We are whole.

**MESSAGE**        *Claiming Wholeness*        ~ Rev. Julie

Every time I speak, I am simply sharing wisdom gathered from a variety of sources. Today, I  
humbly acknowledge that my message was inspired, pretty directly, by conversations about  
wholeness in our Journeys groups which met during this past week. As Journeys is a collective  
experience, I'm not going to name names, but I offer much gratitude to each one who came  
and shared their wisdom so openly and personally.

Wholeness. What exactly is it? We speak easily of the whole of something... (and I can't say  
this without my Minnesotan coming out.) We speak of a whole dollar, a whole day, a whole  
pie, the whole wide world. At the most basic, the whole is equivalent to the all. The whole  
includes everything. Seems pretty simple.

Until we begin to speak of wholeness... and then comes that qualitative edge, and the  
judgement door swings wide open. Wholeness as a person is something to be desired. Wholeness  
means to be beautifully wise and complete. So, the opposite of wholeness is, what...? To be  
partial? Inferior? Broken? Unhealthy? Unworthy?

Naturally, we resist being seen as not-whole, and resent being made to feel not-whole. While  
Eleanor Roosevelt suggested that no one can make us feel inferior without our consent, let's  
not overlook the power of messaging and imprinting. The messages that a child receives

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/175456.shtml>

contribute greatly to their lifelong sense of wholeness. The endless barrage of marketing to which we are subjected tells us that we not okay as we are, and that there is something else out there that will make us whole and happy. The hate-crimes and bullying that way-too-many experience, could never make a person feel whole or complete or included.

Negative messaging seems to find receptor cells deep in our psyches. And cruelly, the more negative messages we hear, the more receptor cells we seem to generate. They call out for additional and similar input...please, won't you tell me again about how I don't measure up? It's like we have to make sure we got the message right, that indeed we are inadequate and broken. What has been told to us, we tell to ourselves.

I was reminded in this week's conversations of the stark differences apparent between those who were unconditionally loved as children and those whose childhood experience was lacking such acceptance. A parallel comparison could be made between those who are given certain privileges in our society and those...by dint of gender, age, race, ability...who are not. Some are repeatedly assured of their worthiness, and others don't get that assurance. So, I get it if today's message doesn't make sense to you. Perhaps that means you are so fortunate as to have had those privileges...experiences that all deserve.

All this to say, our experience within our relationships, and the messages we hear, play a huge role in determining whether or not we might feel whole.

You may have noticed that I've been talking about an experience of wholeness or a feeling of being whole rather than about the reality of wholeness. Indeed "not being whole" is not reality, but rather a lie we are told. It is impossible not to be whole. You are whole, and wholly yourself. I am whole, and wholly myself. We are whole and wholly ourselves. There is NO WAY that you are not whole. It's impossible.

But it is possible not to experience wholeness. The problem seems to lie in how we judge ourselves. We see certain parts of ourselves as unacceptable. We see parts that others have, and that we don't. We imagine ourselves deficient and that there is a preferable way to be. We note any imperfections as signs of unworthiness.

As I worked through what I would say today, I wanted to feel what it is to be whole, so I kept trying to draw a circle around myself, to claim myself as whole. You know those little negative-message receptors? They kept popping up, like whack-a-moles, and saying stuff like 'who are you to claim wholeness?' and 'maybe you could be whole if you could get rid of your inarticulateness, or your forgetfulness, or your lack of will'. And I could feel my circle beginning to shrink like a balloon with a hole in it, crumpling in on itself, and becoming misshapen and sad.

But I tried it again, and again. Draw the circle. I am whole. Claim it. All of who I am is the whole that is me.

Here's another gift from the Journeys group...a reminder of Ram Dass' take on self-judgement. He writes:<sup>3</sup>

...when you go out into the woods and you look at trees, you see all these different

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<sup>3</sup> <https://www.ramdass.org/ram-dass-on-self-judgement/>

trees. And some of them are bent, and some of them are straight, and some of them are evergreens, and some of them are whatever. And you look at the tree and you allow it. You appreciate it. You see why it is the way it is. You sort of understand that it didn't get enough light, and so it turned that way. And you don't get all emotional about it. You just allow it. You appreciate the tree.

The minute you get near humans, you lose all that. And you are constantly saying "You're too this, or I'm too this." That judging mind comes in. And so I practice turning people into trees. Which means appreciating them just the way they are. (*unquote*)

So, turn yourself into a tree. You are a tree just trying to grow toward the light. Be as gentle with yourself as you would be with a tree. Just allow for the whole reality of who you are. Maybe you didn't have enough room to grow symmetrically. Maybe you were damaged by an ice storm. Maybe some bugs ate off some of your bark. Your story is just as simple as that of a tree. How you have developed is the result of a set of phenomena that cannot be judged as good or bad. It just is. You are simply the whole person that you are.

One of the workshops I attended at the Parliament of the World's Religions last fall was offered by practitioners of "Enough", a kind of spiritual practice. The "Enough" message is that of Laurie McCammon,<sup>4</sup> who wrote a book of the same name. Her message, in a nutshell, is: "I am enough. I have enough. We are enough. We have enough. Enough!" Its purpose is to claim liberation from a 'never enough' paradigm.

I was fascinated by the responses I witnessed to this message. Looking at McCammon's website (and those gathered at that workshop in Toronto) it seems to appeal to my own demographic...women of a certain age who lifelong have been subjected to messaging about not being enough, and therefore being somehow substandard. And so, to say 'I am enough' is a way of claiming wholeness...claiming one's rightness with the universe.

This message doesn't resonate very deeply for me, but that's precisely the point. Many, many of us are going through life looking for our missing piece, or pieces.<sup>5</sup> We try on a lot of different things; some are satisfying, and others are not. And ultimately, it's not about finding something that makes us whole, but rather about realizing that we are whole, just as we are, even with missing pieces...about learning that we roll better with our imperfections, even as we keep working to be the people our dogs think we are.

Thomas Merton began his poem, Hagia Sophia, with these words:

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity, a dimmed light, a meek namelessness, a hidden wholeness. ... There is in all things an inexhaustible sweetness and purity, a silence that is a fount of action and joy. It rises up in wordless gentleness and flows out to me from the unseen roots of all created being, welcoming me tenderly, saluting me with indescribable humility.<sup>6</sup>

There is in all visible things an invisible fecundity...a hidden wholeness. And Parker Palmer

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<sup>4</sup> <https://www.lauriemccammon.com/>

<sup>5</sup> Reference to the Story for All Age...The Missing Piece by Shel Silverstein

<sup>6</sup> <https://thevalueofsparrows.com/2013/08/16/poetry-hagia-sophia-by-thomas-merton/>

picked up on Merton's line, and went on to explore how it is that we hide parts of ourselves, dividing ourselves between an inner life made up of what we don't want others to see, and an outer life made up of what we're willing to expose, ultimately removing ourselves from our own integrity.<sup>7</sup> We do this...create this divided life... Palmer says, when we feel unsafe, and then we hunker down into foxholes where we withhold our energy and our commitment and our gifts.<sup>8</sup> We shrivel up and get small.

And he argues that we can only solve this dilemma, this division, this experience of brokenness, with an embodied empathy for the whole of human experience...ours, and that of others. He makes the point that our humanity is something of a two-edged sword. We have the gift of consciousness...which can lead us to hide parts of ourselves... and the gift of free choice...by which we can claim our wholeness.

It feels antithetical, but it would seem that claiming our wholeness is the key to being able to accept and allow the parts that we have hidden from view. Claiming wholeness helps us to shed the walls and protections that have shut us off from ourselves...a path that leads us back to ourselves and to our integrity as whole beings.

I draw a circle around me. This is my wholeness. I am all of this. I am slow to anger, but too easily hurt. I am thoroughly resilient and self-sufficient to a fault. I am permanently overweight and occasionally feel beautiful. I have had cancer and I am healthy. I am wearing a beautiful stole, and I have a hole in my tights. I am creative and not the artist I wish I was. I am your minister and I sometimes fail in ministering to you. I am all of this. The whole enchilada that is me. I will keep looking for missing pieces and trying to shed unwanted bits, but the absence or presence of particular bits and pieces has no effect on the reality of my wholeness.

How can I...you, we...more consistently know ourselves as whole? Palmer speaks of creating spaces in which the soul can show up...a place that has no agenda other than to help people listen to themselves and to discern their own truth.<sup>9</sup> And isn't this exactly what this community, this faith, aspires to be? A place where you are encouraged to listen to your own wisdom and to discern your own truth. A place where you are reminded that you are worthy and whole just as you are. A place that allows you to be fully, wholly, you.

I say aspire, because of course we don't embody such a place perfectly. We are, after all, a whole and beautiful community complete with failures. Again, I turn to a conversation from the Journeys group.

It began with a question posed about where you feel most whole, and it was noted, by several, that being in nature is that place. Walking into a forest, we put aside all of our need to make something perfect or to have it a certain way. In that space, among the trees, we stop judging, and just see it for what it is. And we appreciate it for what it is. One tree has fallen down, maybe even blocked a path or damaged a neighbor tree, but it just is. One tree has lost its needles, and we wonder at the stark beauty of the bare branches, seeing colours in its bark that were invisible when fully needled. Two trees are leaning on one another, and we don't name

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<sup>7</sup> Palmer, Parker, *A Hidden Wholeness: The Journey Toward An Undivided Life* (Jossey-Bass, San Francisco: 2004) p. 4

<sup>8</sup> <https://www.brainpickings.org/2014/11/03/parker-palmer-hidden-wholeness/>

<sup>9</sup> Palmer, p. 53.

them as strong or weak. No matter the condition of the forest floor, it is completely natural, and wants not for a vacuum.

In the absence of judgement, we, like the trees, are whole.

As Palmer says, we co-create the reality in which we live.<sup>10</sup> Think of yourself as a tree in the forest of community, a forest that we co-create with the reality of all that we are. We share a whole communal system no matter our condition, our age, our ability, our colour. We affirm one another's inherent worth. We accept and allow each other to simply be...accepted and appreciated for the whole that being embodies. And with our individual wholeness, each contributes to the wholeness of the whole community.

My favourite question in this month's theme packet is this one, and I leave it with you: "What if wholeness is simply a matter of accepting you already are?" Claim it.

May it be so.

**READING**      *You Are Not Enough*<sup>11</sup>      ~ Alexis Engelbrecht

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 that 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.

\* **CLOSING WORDS**      *There Are Miles Behind You*<sup>12</sup>      ~ Andrew Pakula

There are miles behind you

And many more ahead.

As you journey on toward wholeness

May all that is good and true guide your way

May the joy of love lighten every step

And the miracle that is life be ever in your sight.

## EXTINGUISHING THE FLAME

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<sup>10</sup> Palmer, p. 48

<sup>11</sup> Alexis Engelbrecht is the Soul Matters Family Ministry Coordinator

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/closing/125415.shtml>