

## ***A People of Abundance***

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Today, there are many things I'm not talking about.

Not talking about sexual harassment and sexual violence. Not talking about *#metoo*.

Not talking about elections, about investigations.

Not talking about the destruction of our planet and of our democracy.

Not talking about white supremacy. Or mass shootings.

I will talk about all those things at some point, in worship and elsewhere.

But not talking about these things today doesn't mean I'm this.

Because what I AM talking about today does have to do with all the things I just listed and more besides. I'm talking about how we get through these times in all their challenges.

We live in a world that exhausts us and is *intended* to exhaust us.

What will get us through?

Something critical - our ability to see the presence and the possibility of ABUNDANCE.

This is NOT ABOUT making lemonade out of our lemons!

That is trivial in comparison.

Staying in the place where we IMAGINE and we LIVE in a world of ABUNDANCE is *deep*.

It is PROFOUND SPIRITUAL WORK! It is hard.

First we must know that we have the abundance. We must remind ourselves. What am I talking about?

Paradise. The Garden of Eden. It's here in our lives. Right next to and right along with all the terrible stuff.

It's remembering every moment what Peter Mayer sang about. That EVERYTHING is holy. All of the small and large acts and beings and doings of beauty and abundance. They are present and they are holy. They are a miracle.

This world is not some second-rate, low-rent version of Heaven. It is Heaven. Right now. Right next to the Hell that is here, too.

And there is even more to abundance than what is around us right now.

Last week, as we remembered and honored Our Beloved Dead, we remembered their many legacies to us – the ABUNDANCE of wisdom they have left to us.

We heard a reading from Leslie Takahashi where she said:

*They are more than remembered, they are memory itself.*

*For what we love lives on in the way our beloved dead accompany us through our life  
—their words and wisdom our guide,  
their humor our relief, their restless concern for the world **our** charge.  
Through this, we know immortality.*

Our ancestors' concern for the world has been given to us as a charge. The **abundance** of their words and wisdom and humor are there to help us as we continue to live out their concern for the world in our own lives. As **our** concern for the world.

So first, we look around us and see the paradise and the abundance that is here right now. Right next to what is challenging and frightening and horrible. We must **see** the abundance.

Then, second, we can remember what our beloved ancestors have charged us to do. That is – to take care of the world as they did.

What else? How else does seeing and remembering abundance help us to survive and to thrive right now?

We have a third and very critical source of abundance. Perhaps the most powerful. The abundance and the power of our **imaginations**.

If we cannot imagine the nature of positive change. If we cannot picture the world we want to live in, the world we dream of. There is no way we can bring it to pass.

In an essay on the saving power of the imagination, author Susan Griffith shares a story told by her friend Odette, a survivor of the Holocaust. The story is about a friend of Odette's, Robert Denos. Susan writes:

*Along with many others who crowd the bed of a large truck, Odette tells me, the poet Robert Desnos is being taken away from the barracks of the concentration camp where he has been held prisoner. Leaving the barracks, the mood is somber; everyone knows the truck is headed for the gas chambers. And when the truck arrives no one can speak at all; even the guards fall silent. But this silence is soon interrupted by an energetic man, Robert, who jumps into the line and grabs one of the other condemned. Improbable as it is, Odette told me, Desnos reads the man's palm out loud.*

*Oh, he says, I see you have a very long lifeline. And you are going to have three children. He is exuberant. And his excitement is contagious. First one man, then another, offers up his hand, and the predictions are for longevity, more children, abundant joy.*

*As Desnos reads more palms, not only does the mood of the prisoners change but that of the guards too. How can one explain it? Perhaps the element of surprise has planted a shadow of doubt in their minds. If they told themselves these deaths were inevitable, this no longer seems inarguable.*

*They are in any case so disoriented by this sudden change of mood among those they are about to kill that they are unable to go through with the executions. So all the men, along with Desnos, are packed back onto the truck and returned to the barracks. Desnos saved his own life and the lives of others by using his imagination.*

Susan continues:

*Robert Desnos was famous for his belief in the imagination. He believed it could transform society. And what a wild leap this was, at the mouth of the gas chambers, to imagine a long life! In his mind he simply stepped outside the world as it was created by the Nazis.*

Again – we first must see the abundance that truly exists all around us.

Then, we can look to the abundance given us by our ancestors. We remember that they have CHARGED us with their concern for the world, which must become our concern.

Then, we use the power of our imaginations to create the world we wish to see. If we can't imagine it, we cannot bring it into being. Why would we let anyone else define for us how the world should be?

We affirm our ABUNDANCE, we celebrate it and above all, we let it work in our lives.

If we cannot live in this place of abundance, not only as the imagined future, but the very real present, we cannot create it. And we cannot expand it.

And there is one more practice that is essential in all of this. The practice of Sabbath.

Sabbath is not just a day of rest, as observed by Christians and Jews. It is much bigger than that. This week I asked my Facebook friends to tell me what they mean by *Sabbath*.

My friend Bruce said the Sabbath is:

*a different rhythm of life than our busyness - it can be an afternoon, a few minutes, a day...but it is an intentional remembering of god's grace in our lives. It is a pause that enables creativity to emerge.*

My friend Luke said:

*Sabbath is a reminder that we are human BEINGS, not human doings.*

My friend John said:

*It is a spiritual, physical, and emotional rest from life's edginess.*

My friend Chris said the Sabbath is:

*Whatever serves to rejuvenate and reconnect.*

My friend Genevieve reminded me that the Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said:

*Everything we do with the other six days is to serve the seventh, the Sabbath. Not the other way around.*

Nebraska native and renowned Old Testament scholar Walter Brueggemann describes the Sabbath this way:

*The market ideology wants us exhausted. Because exhausted people do not make for transformers in the community. Rested people are dangerous. Sabbath is a profoundly subversive practice. Sabbath days are not just rest. They are acts of resistance. **They are acts of resistance!***

Your Sabbath time can include the contemplation of the abundance around you and the abundance you have received from your Beloved Dead.

Your Sabbath can include imagining the abundance of the world we dream of.

And your practice of Sabbath is what makes it possible for you to go forth and engage in **creating** that world. It is both rest and the **source**, the **wellspring**, of abundance.

I invite you in the coming weeks to develop a spiritual practice of Sabbath if you do not have one. It is an act of resistance. **BE** a rested and dangerous person!

The contemplation and the practice of abundance through our imagination and Sabbath reminds us that we **have** enough. That we ARE enough, right here and right now in this community. Together, we are enough.

Roberta Finkelstein's story reminded us that as Unitarian Universalists, we are a life-saving community. And by saving our own lives and the lives of others, out of the abundance that we share and that we imagine, we can save the world. Right from this Beloved Community.

No one can stop us from imagining another kind of future, one which departs from the terrible storm of violent conflict, of hateful divisions, poverty and suffering. Let us begin to imagine the worlds we would like to inhabit, the long lives we will share, and the many futures in our hands.

So may it be. Blessed be.