

Reuniting the Light

By Rev. Jane Smith, Channing Memorial Church, UU, Ellicott City, MD November 10, 2024

A Jewish wisdom tale recounts the origin of the world, with, of course, many variations. As one narrative offers, God worked to create the world by filling a vessel with divine light. As this sacred light filled the vessel, the container was unable to hold the divinity and shattered. The scattered shards contained that holy light as they dissipated throughout the cosmos ultimately forming this sacred earth we call home. Our task as people of this blessed planet is to reunite those scattered sparks of divine light, repairing this broken world, and, in doing so, finish the work that God began. This dictates the Jewish practice of Tikkun Olam, translated as fixing or repairing this world we call home.¹

Today, we talk about repair. We talk about finding these scattered shards, to make complete once again that vessel of divine light that restores “the innate wholeness of the world”² – the world God envisioned. As it is our world is broken so we search for those fragments. Shards are buried deep in this earth, a small piece of everything in this blessed realm, fragments of hope and strength and perseverance and love. As our Story for All Ages tells us, there is kindness.³ While there are shards in the apparent beauty of the world, there are also fragments concealed by hate or bigotry or violence awaiting a blessed being to unearth them and help make the world whole once again.

Today it feels like bigotry and hatred have won, but bigotry and hatred will never win. Love. I truly believe in the power of love. The power of hope. I do not want to be flippant with these sentiments. We are held in a state of anger and fear and disbelief, and rightly so. In this pivotal moment, I acknowledge how distant and even impossible or unwarranted and how profoundly challenging that love or hope may feel. I think of our trans beloveds, our undocumented

¹ “Broken Shards of Light” by Myke Johnson

² “On Being with Krista Tippett” with Lawrence Kushner

³ *Be Kind* by Pat Zietlow Miller, illustrated by Jen Hill

beloveds, our immigrant beloveds, those who fear for their safety. I see you and I love you. And yet, in order to repair this world, some form of love and hope are needed. These will help us survive in a world grounded in peace and faith; a world – however idealistic yet necessary – that is deprived of that which serves to our detriment. And when I speak of fear in this sense, I mean the fear stoked by our leaders to foster hate and oppression. Compassion and hope and love are needed because our only other alternatives are resentment and hostility and violence, and this will only serve to foster more detrimental division. Ultimately these shards of divine light are hidden and buried deep below the shadows and veils that cloak much of the world as we know it. But, as the story tells us, they can be found, and we can be made whole. I think of the underlying values of our faith that guide us to find those shards and to heal the world, those values of love and equity and worthiness and democracy – those values that serve as sparks of justice and healing - Tikkun Olam. Those values guide us as we work to repair our world. Repair – what can that mean? Often, we think of repair as having made amends for wrongdoing or transgression. And yet I wonder of reframing this and highlighting the idea of, instead, repairing one another. Of loving the wounded. Of protecting those who are targeted. I wonder of repair as an act of healing that which is broken. This is a collective task – we are all healers⁴ – all who were, all who are, all who ever will be. We are healers of the world. We are possibility. We are potential. We are hope.

Peace, hope, love, compassion – these are the antidotes to the fear and anger that breeds hatred. And we see the repercussions of this fear and this anger all around us. Of hate, of violence, of bigotry, of racism, of misogyny – intentionally cultivated fear sparking unwarranted anger that serves to break this world and lead to its detriment. It is so very apparent – the power of fear. And responding to this fear – cultivating repair – this is intentional. It is how and who we want to be in this world. Of how we want to serve as bearers of the values of our faith and protectors of our values that are under attack. Reproductive rights, immigrants' rights, trans rights, the environment – our values are at risk. The story tells us we are here because we are tasked with finding those shards of light and recreating the world of all that is sacred and

⁴ “On Being with Krista Tippett” with Lawrence Kushner

holy – of mending that which is broken to create a vessel of divine light – of uncovering peace and hope and love. And maybe, just maybe, we, ourselves, all of humanity, we are those scattered pieces. Maybe we create a blessed, whole world when we unite as one – of one heart, of one soul. This is a substantial goal. This is a seemingly impossible goal. This is a goal that will take time and intention and patience and perseverance and hope. It is seeing inherent goodness in one another, as our faith offers. Each of us, on either end of the political divide, seeing that innate goodness and worthiness and dignity held within all.

I believe we each have encountered experiences of great difficulty. Of death or addiction or divorce or violence or loss or fear. We each know what it means to be devastated. I believe I know what it means to be devastated. To feel awful, helpless, angry, disappointed, rejected. We know this. And yet that is not where the story ends. This is not the conclusion; this is the climax. Ultimately, we get through and survive, that is how we can all be sitting here together in this sacred and holy space. This time of difficulty is when the imagination fails, when all we see is hardship, and we cannot imagine a better life. But we survive. And, often, we find some semblance of good or a hidden blessing in the process. Strength, compassion, perhaps hope. It was not solved overnight. It takes patience. It was not easy or quick. But it was possible. Healing and repair are possible.

How is this possible, we may ask, as we find ourselves buried in hate and fear and bigotry? How can we find good? We have unprecedented fears for our values, our future, our democracy, for our trans or immigrant beloveds, the looming threat of violence. But think of this. Think of the profound and life altering allyships that can form and grow and deepen as we see that profound need for solidarity and unity and partnership and love. Black, white, brown, gay, straight, trans united stronger than ever as a force against this violence and hatred and bigotry. We see the fight for justice amplified and strengthened, never to be stymied. We gather in the streets, and we unite against oppression, stronger and with more conviction than ever. Those are the shards of divine light. That is what makes our world whole and holy. We do not see things as better initially; we may not even be able to imagine it. Change takes time. But

hope tells us that it is possible. Experience tells us that we will survive and strengthen and grow.

I facilitated a small group discussion earlier this week and we talked about the difference between heaven and hell in this mortal realm. Heaven is when people care for one another, tend to one another, help one another. Hell is filled with self-centered egotism. With the election looming, we broached the topic, what would heaven look like today? How do we bring heaven to a country so laden with hate and division? We reflected, it is when we see one another as people, simply as people. Where values of love and acceptance are shared and amplified. When we get to know one another. When we realize we have more in common than we do different. When all of humanity – across the political spectrum – interacts with love. Ideal? Yes. Easy? No. Even seemingly impossible. But I offer that we can do this one small act at a time. One act of justice that creates and fosters equality and worthiness and healing and dignity and equity, creating a ripple effect that touches all humanity. This is the power of love. Love changes the lives it touches.

In reflecting on this idea of heaven I thought of a conversation I had with my dad earlier this week. His partner and he find great joy in square-dancing – they go out at least three times a week. He told me square-dancing is a beautiful experience in part because it is a diverse group of people coming together simply to dance – people from myriad backgrounds and life experiences. Not to engage with one another's politics or initiate arguments, simply to have fun and to enjoy one another – across differences, across fear, across the anger that is felt in the world at large. Beyond the walls of this dance hall, hate, bigotry, animosity, and violence persist. Within – joy, laughter, fun, and dancing persevere. These walls seem to serve as a barrier against the hate of the world. Is not that safety its own form of heaven? I task us with a question – how can we create such an oasis, such a pause, such a time for breathing and healing and peace? How can we do this? It starts small. With those we love, radiating out to our household, to our neighborhoods, our communities, our world. The barrier between hate and

love thins until it dissipates, as we dance, and find joy, and delight in one another irrespective of outward differences. May we find such an oasis.

Let us center in a place of hope; for hope can change the world. Hope, amidst hopelessness, shows us all that can be – it shows us the potential held within our aching world. Hope keeps us from sinking into despair for we can imagine what the future can hold. Hope keeps us from the harmful effects of inaction because we see it is action, and only action, that can heal. Hope provides us strength to persevere, and the creativity needed for radical change. Hope counters anger and fear because it reminds us that peace and love are possible. Hope is the spark of healing and the kindled flame of repair. And it is fostered by love. Deep, unconditional, transformative love.

As the tale tells us, we were created to piece together those scattered shards of divine light making the world whole once again just as God intended. May we engage in that Jewish practice of Tikkun Olam – healing the world. Hidden in the shadow of hate we find a spark of love, under the veil of fear we unearth the flame of acceptance, buried below the cloak of anger and violence, holy shards of hope and peace are apparent. Broken pieces of the earth waiting to be reunited as one blessed, holy, and complete world. This wholeness is what we seek to unearth and amplify as we meet the world with unconditional, holy, sacred love. Bigotry and hate will never win for love changes all it touches, and hope gives us the power to imagine and create that world of peace and compassion that can be. Together we repair this broken world and create heaven on earth. Heaven – where people are people, where we unite over similarities, where the dancehalls of our hearts invite joy and exclude fear. We collect that dispersed divine light, those scattered sacred flames, and create a blessed and holy world of divine love, peace, compassion, hope, and faith.

May it be so, and Amen.