



Con*Spiracies*

BREATHING TOGETHER THE BREATH OF LIFE

SPRING 2013 VOL. 1. NO. 1

AN OCCASIONAL PUBLICATION OF
THE OFFICE OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE
HARVARD DIVINITY SCHOOL

Conspiracies

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CONSPIRACY THEORY

KERRY A. MALONEY

DIRECTOR OF RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL LIFE

Harvard Divinity School is renowned for rigorous intellectual inquiry in the many fields of religious and ministerial studies. In our classrooms, theory and practice are interrogated vigorously. Beyond the classroom, our faculty members publish some of the leading books and articles in their respective disciplines, and many of our students have already distinguished themselves as rising scholars through their own publications and public presentations. Whether one is a first-year graduate student or a tenured professor here, all of us are expected to contribute to the creation of knowledge as much as to its transmission.

Of course, the pursuit of knowledge without the love of wisdom can be a futile,

and frequently vain, endeavor as all the world's great spiritual traditions attest and as we all can surely report from our own experiences. Especially in the face of the incalculable suffering on and of our planet, we may well wonder if all our teaching and learning advance healing, justice and peace or merely comment on them. While we may fail at least as often as we succeed in demonstrating that the love of wisdom undergirds our study and practice of the world's religions at HDS, we continue to strive to get it right. In this publication, you will find evidence of some of our attempts to articulate that mystery through a few of the many sacred wisdom traditions represented at our School. Contributors to this volume include faculty, students, staff and alumni/ae.

For all our magnificent, irreducible differences across religious, ethnic, philosophical, class and gendered boundaries, we draw the same breath. And it is a common and ancient air we breathe, full, literally, of the same atomic particles that inspired those we study, and those we study beside. A holy wind blows through us with every breath. In the end, it may be that the simple act of breathing together, conspiring, reveals the wisdom beneath our knowledge as profoundly as all our theories and theses, projects and programs. As you read the meditations, prayers, poems and sermons in these pages, we hope you will draw a breath with us and find yourself inspired by the Breath of Life.

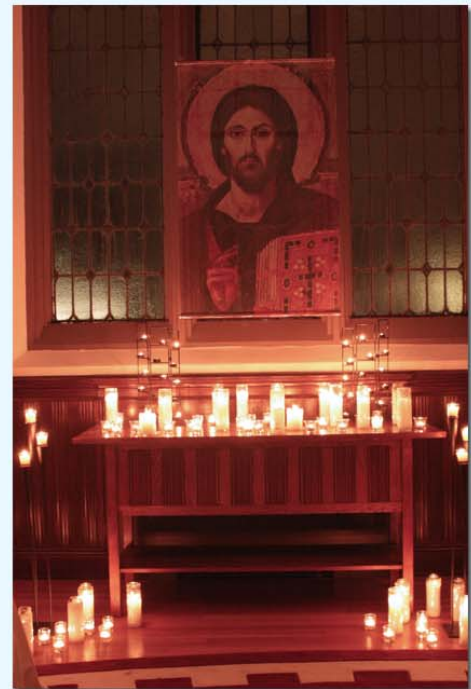
*"The winds of grace are blowing,
but it is you who must raise your sails."
~Rabindranath Tagore*



Credit: Tony Rinaldi



Credit: Steve Gilbert



Credit: Kristie Welsh

FORGIVENESS

DAVID N. HEMPTON

DEAN OF THE FACULTY OF DIVINITY

ALONZO L. McDONALD FAMILY PROFESSOR OF EVANGELICAL THEOLOGICAL STUDIES

JOHN LORD O'BRIAN PROFESSOR OF DIVINITY



It is no accident, I think, that many of the people we most admire in recent history had something memorable to say

about forgiveness.

Go Google forgiveness and read the 500+ most famous short statements. You will find there some striking comments by Gandhi, Mother Theresa, and Martin Luther King who famously stated that "forgiveness is not an occasional act, it is a constant attitude." Nelson Mandela reflecting on his release from Robben Island stated, "As I walked out the door toward the gate that would lead to my freedom, I knew if I didn't leave my bitterness and hatred behind, I'd still be in prison."

When I think of forgiveness my mind goes back 25 years to an incident in Northern Ireland's interminable 30 years of troubles. On Remembrance Day 1987, in an event that was shocking even by Northern Ireland's standards, a bomb went off during a Sunday Remembrance Day parade in the small border town of Enniskillen. Eleven people were killed and over 60 injured. One of the dead was a young nurse, Marie Wilson, who died poignantly holding her father's hand beneath the rubble. In an interview with the BBC soon afterwards, her father, Gordon Wilson said this: "She held my hand tightly, and gripped me as hard as she could. She said, "Daddy, I love you very much." Those were her exact words to me, and those were the last words I ever heard her say." To the astonishment of listeners, Wilson went on to add, "But I bear no ill will. I bear no grudge. Dirty sort

of talk is not going to bring her back to life. She was a great wee lassie. She loved her profession. She was a pet. She's dead. She's in heaven and we shall meet again. I will pray for these men [her killers] tonight and every night." His words are widely regarded as the most powerful single statement in the history of the Irish troubles. No-one who heard them could ever quite forget them. I haven't.

Before the Remembrance Day bombing, Gordon Wilson was an insignificant country draper. After it, he became an emblem of the peace process and was invited by the Irish Prime Minister to sit in the Irish Senate. Perhaps more importantly, Wilson's remarks, though not single-handedly ending the Northern Irish troubles, powerfully demonstrated that revenge and tit-for-tat killings, which so much stoke the emotional hatred of conflict zones, are not the only way of responding to violence.

Forgiveness is not only advocated in the teachings of many of the world's great religious traditions, but is actively commended in classical literature and also by psychologists and public health professionals. The website of the Mayo Clinic, for example, states that forgiveness leads to healthier relationships, greater sense of well-being, and lower levels of stress, anxiety and blood pressure. In a much quoted Gallup poll 94% of those polled thought forgiveness was essential to our lives, but 85% thought they needed outside help to do it. So why is forgiveness so difficult? Moral philosophers have used gallons of ink to parse out the human quandaries involved in forgiving (when is it appropriate, when not, do you forgive the unrepentant, and so on).

I happen to like the distinction made by C. S. Lewis between forgiving and excusing. Forgiveness accepts the reality that a bad thing has been done and the tough thing is to forgive it, while excusing implies that although a bad thing might have happened, it was really no-one's fault. Lewis states that for our own actions "we accept excuses too easily; while in other people's we do not accept them easily enough." What the Lord's Prayer and the Parable of the Unforgiving Servant tells us is that God's forgiveness of us is linked to our willingness to forgive others. Make no mistake, this is a high bar: "Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us."

Forgiveness, as Reinhold Niebuhr pointed out, is really the final and ultimate form of love, because it is not based on any perceived reciprocity. It may be the most beautiful and meaningful thing we can aspire to as humans. So try it. If we don't buy the spiritual dimension, at least think of the Mayo Clinic's pay offs. We will become less angry, less stressed, less prickly, and better able to forge more successful relationships. No long-term relationship can survive without the repeated exercise of forgiveness. Besides, if all else fails, you can always resort to Oscar Wilde's dictum: "Always forgive your enemies; nothing annoys them so much." I hope you find a better reason.

Morning Prayers
Appleton Chapel, The Memorial Church
January 29, 2013

FROM THE SKY: ON DRONES, DREAD AND DUTY

ROB MCCALL
BD '70



"Mine heritage is unto me as a speckled bird, the birds round about are against her. Come ye, assemble all the beasts of the field, come to devour... They have made it desolate, and being desolate it mourneth unto me; the whole land is made desolate, because no man layeth it to heart."

—From the prophet Jeremiah

Natural events: Many times I have paddled too near an osprey's nest and heard their shrieks and screams as they circle threateningly over my head and I can almost feel their talons piercing my shoulders and their sharp beaks tearing at my scalp. Many times I have walked down toward the lonely gravel shore on Cobscook Bay, and seen a bald eagle drop out of the highest branches of the biggest black spruce, like a plains Eagle Dancer in full regalia, and plunge toward the water with spread wings bigger than a man. Primal fear, awe and wonder together would pierce my chest as the winged shadow sailed above me, to beat its enormous wings over the water, then to rise and disappear into a tiny speck in the sky. I had witnessed the angel of life and death.

Once endangered, Ospreys and Bald Eagles now flourish on the Maine coast. Eagles may have a wingspread of eight feet. Their nests – usually built in the broken top of a tall pine or spruce near the water – may be eight feet wide, twelve feet high and weigh more than a ton. Their prey include fish, duck, young deer or other mammals, and carrion. The adult is brown with white head and tail. The adolescent may be as large as the adult but is speckled. Both are majestic and horrible.

The Osprey, the Bald Eagle, the Great Speckled Bird of the Bible, the Roc of the Arabian Nights, the Griffin, the Thunderbird, the B-movie pterodactyl; all call up the same heart-piercing shock and awe at the great cloud-borne creature who could shelter us under soft pinions, or seize us in cruel talons, rise on mighty wings, and drop us to be dashed on the rocks so our bones could be picked clean. It is the flying shadow of bombers over Dresden and Hiroshima and Baghdad, or airliners over the World Trade Center, or Predator drones over the Afghan desert or a Pakistani village. And it is the soft, silent wings of grievous angels come to carry us away to paradise.

Rank opinion: Having heard the shrieking call as the osprey's shadow circles menacingly around, having seen an eider or a herring gull suddenly torn apart by an eagle's cruel beak and talons, one is able to imagine the terror of a helpless boy seeing a mindless and soulless drone circling his home village seeking its human target, his father, his brother, his uncle, and too often his family and friends. It is not hard to imagine the rage against us abiding in the heart of that child when he becomes a man forever seared by that memory of terror. That our government

should tell us that it is legal for our military to secretly send such murderous destruction into the lives of others, without warning, without trial, without any semblance or hope of judicial process, this should pierce the hearts of us all with the talons of shame. They call it 'legal' and perhaps it is legal by the false laws of some men somewhere, but it is not legal by the ancient laws of justice, it is not legal by the modern laws of morality, it is not legal by the eternal laws of God. The fundamental law of every faith is to do to others as we want done to ourselves. Is this what we want done to us? Stop the drone strikes.

Seedpods to carry around with you: From Eleanor Roosevelt: *Justice cannot be for one side alone, but must be for both.*

And from the Sermon on the Mount: *Whatsoever ye would that men do to you, do so to them.*

That's the Almanack for this quarter moon, but don't take it from me; go out and see for yourself

Rob McCall is the pastor of the Blue Hill Congregational Church in Blue Hill, Maine. Every Friday, WERU (89.9 FM), Blue Hill Community Radio, airs his weekly report, the Awanandjo Almanack. This is his broadcast from February 8, 2013.

Rob can be reached at awanandjoalmanack@gmail.com or at PO Box 911, Blue Hill, Maine 04614.



Credit: Rob McCall

IS OUR FATHER STILL ALIVE? A MEDITATION ON NEWTOWN

RABBI JORDIE GERSON
MTS '04



This week's Torah portion, Vayigash, contains one of the most fraught and painful encounters in Genesis. In

Vayigash, Joseph, who years before was thrown into a pit and left for dead by his jealous brothers, has risen to a position of great prominence in Egypt, and been so transformed by his experience of powerlessness in jail, and power in the government in Egypt that he is literally unrecognizable to his brothers. In fact, when they arrive from Canaan to plead with the Egyptian government officials for food to save their family from famine, they have no idea that they're speaking to Joseph.

But Joseph recognizes them, and suffers silently, in their presence, until finally, unable to l'hitapek – control himself, he bursts into tears and confesses his identity.

"I am your brother, Joseph." He announces, and then asks: "Is my father still alive?"

In rereading the parsha this week, it was impossible to not pause at this sentence: Is my father still alive? and not think of Newtown, and the terrible anguish of parents forced to ask the unthinkable: "Is my child still alive?", impossible not to weep at the horror of these words.

In the case of Vayigash, the question, "Is my father still alive?" has been interpreted in hundreds of ways over thousands of years. It's been understood to indicate Joseph's newfound maturity and humility – his ability to think of another before himself. It's also been read as words of reconciliation, an attempt to find common ground with his estranged brothers.

But it has also been read by post-Holocaust theologians as a theological question: "Is our father still alive?" has been read as: does God still live – can God still exist after such incredible evil? Is there room for a God in a world where brothers leave each other for dead, sell each other into slavery, and humanity perpetrates horrific crimes upon others? Can God exist in a world capable of such unthinkable evil, in a world where school shootings occur? For years, the Catholic archbishop of Poland, who wrestled with the role of the Catholic church in the Holocaust, signed his letters to Rabbi Michael Signer z"l, with this question: "Is our father still alive?"

We have been driven to ask ourselves this question this week, and I hope we find an answer that we can believe and find comfort in: an answer that tells us yes, our father (or mother, as it may be) lives in the heroism of teachers who gave their lives for their students, the bravery and selflessness of those who tried to wrestle a

killer to the ground and a community and country that has come together to repudiate senseless acts of violence and comfort the families of the victims. It is compassion and love that maintains our humanity – and divinity – in the face of unspeakable horror, and acts of incredible bravery that allow us to maintain our faith in the world, and people. As the kabbalists knew, there are sparks of the divine waiting to be uncovered in everything that exists, but especially, and most importantly, in all of us, and in our goodness.

May God be with the brokenhearted.

Jordie Gerson is a Hillel rabbi at the University of Vermont in Burlington. This is her sermon from Shabbat Services on Friday December 14, 2012.



Credit: Steve Gilbert

A HEAD AND HEART PLACE

RUSSELL POLLARD

COLLECTIONS MANAGEMENT LIBRARIAN, ANDOVER HARVARD THEOLOGICAL LIBRARY

When I came for my interview 34 years ago, Dr. Maria Grossmann, the librarian, marched me over to Dean Krister Stendahl's office for part of the interview. If you knew Maria, always a commanding presence, you would know that march is an apt word. As my interview was closing, Dean Stendahl asked what my title would be. I said, "Head of Technical Services." "Vell," he said with his Swedish accent, "I hope you will also be a heart in technical services."

As I have reflected on Dean Stendahl's words, I think they sum up why I have found this to be a great place to work: this is a head and heart place. A head place because together we study and learn. We seek truth, wisdom, and understanding. A heart place because in my experience, HDS people care deeply about one another and about our world.

A head place is perfect for a librarian!
Folks who delight in the pursuit of historical

and critical truth need a great deal of information and providing information is essentially what librarians do.

This is a heart place for me in so many ways. When I go to the HDS local graduation ceremony and hear what our students are going to do next: all kinds of ministries, social service agencies, teaching, more education, social justice causes of all kinds, I think to myself: this is why I do what I do. When I read our faculty's books, or hear them speak about the causes they support. For example, when Prof. Madigan shares his motivation for studying and teaching about the Holocaust: in brief, so that Nazis who boasted they would erase the memory of a people from history would never be right. I was moved to tears and felt privileged to be serving such a faculty. My colleagues in the library supported me through two stints as interim librarian. Like colleagues throughout the school they are generous with their time and dedicated to

the success of one another and HDS. People care about and celebrate people here. When people are sad or sick or down, there is a community of care here. And the staff too have so many worthy causes: greening the school and the earth, conquering diseases, sheltering the homeless, and on and on.

My faith in people has grown here because this is a place where difference is not merely accepted or tolerated, but celebrated, and there is a genuine interest in learning from one another. My Lutheran Christian faith has grown here too through the books, the lectures, the conversations with others from other religious traditions, as well as with humanists, agnostics and atheists.

So for me HDS is a head and heart place where faith grows.

Russell Pollard offered this reflection at the HDS Noon Service on February 6, 2013, a service hosted by the HDS Staff.

AT THE SITE OF THOREAU'S CABIN, CONCORD, MASS

JONATHAN BETTS FIELDS

MDiv '15

Writing restacks brick on mortar:
ensure the chimney
can burn new wood,
pay homage to the gravesites of
great works,
stack stones intentionally on
slightly overgrown slopes above the cove.

Written on an HDS retreat to Walden Pond
October 2012



Credit: L. MacPherson

PRAYING BEYOND DUALITIES

KALPESH BHATT
MTS '13



I try to pray without choices. For whom do I pray? For what do I pray? How do I pray? Choice entails confusion, which, in turn, diminishes the intensity of prayer. I simply pray. I try not to choose because what is, is and what will be, will be. Choice also presupposes a subtle ego: "I"-ness and "My"-ness. "I" choose to pray for this or that because in "my" opinion this or that should happen. No. No expectation, no accusation, no differentiation, and hence, no frustration. Only prayer, for the sake of prayer. Krishna says in the *Bhagavad Gita*:

One who is thus spiritually situated in the Supreme Brahman does not desire to have anything nor grieves for anything. S/He is equally disposed toward everyone and everything. Living in such a state, s/he at once becomes fully blissful and attains pure love and devotion unto Me. (18:54)

However, even if one chooses to pray with sagacious choices, a sincere selfless prayer in our multifaith educational environment provides a plethora of possibilities to understand and appreciate each other. Such equanimous prayer eventually clarifies and strengthens one's own place in our richly diverse world and

affirms how to contribute meaningfully towards its betterment and harmony. Both teachers and students will have their role to play in this collective project. I paraphrase a prayer from the Upanishads that reflects teachers' and students' sentiments as they embark upon their academic pursuits:

*May we be protected together.
May we be nourished together.
May we excel together.
May we grow in knowledge together.
May we never bear enmity for one another.
May there be Peace, Peace and Peace.*

PRAYER TO BE MORE LIKE AN ANIMAL

HILLARY COLLINS-GILPATRICK
MDIV '13

Oh God,

I'll trust the trees to cradle me,
And the space to hold me still.
I'll do my best to keep open my heart,
And love my body like an animal.

So let my softness furl around,
Let my purrs thrum on.
Help me bare my teeth sometimes,
May my naps be long.

Break all the chains from round my neck,
Grant courage to guard my den.
Bless my thighs so I run wild,
Give milk to nurse my children.

I'll love the world, the light, the dark,
I can see now in it all,
And to you I'll howl, and caw, and bleat,
Each day for the aliveness of it all.

Amen



Credit: Kristie Welsh

PRAYERS FROM THE ABBEY OF REGINA LAUDIS, OUR QUEEN OF PRAISE

LILY OSTER
MDiv '13

Blacksmithing Prayer

Our mother of magic, our ladysmith
We offer you our rust and roughness

Soften us with your warmth
Stretch us to your goodness
Transfix us with your bright flame
Transform us, make us mighty.

Milking Prayer

Our lady of grace, our dairy queen

Help me match the calm
of this great body
Help me receive her
perfect stream in peace
Only my cleanness
welcoming her cleanness
Without red mud of anger
Without sour stripe of indifference

Like a calf I cling to her
May she teach me to nourish, and to wait.
May she remind me that I am full of riches,
And to give them all away.

Weeding Prayer

Our mother of mystery,
our gardener queen,

Never let me forget that all life is yours,
Every inconvenient growth,
High and wide in its enthusiasm,
Wild rose most beautiful,
Olive most favorite.

May this uprooting be
the only violence in me.
Fill my fingers with your life's
strength and grace.

As I dig and untangle,
let me in turn be made spacious.
May I pull up all that keeps me from you,
May you wander in my clearings
and take seed.

Spinning prayer

Our lady of patience, our shepherd queen

May this be the work of my life
To guide gently and surely
Rough ends toward union.

Prayer Before Slaughter

Our lady of love, our mother of
compassion

Be with this dear body
These eyes filled with questions.
Clutch him to you, end his fear.
Fill him with remembrance of you.

Fly him forward, and pull us along,
Let us approach in reverence
the border of your country.
We offer ourselves to you
in the halo of his passage.
May we be touched with your quiet.

Dear warm one, we will remember
your name, your colors.
Now sunlight dances over you,
your friend is at your neck,
The whole world kisses you
and wishes you a good journey.

We drink in your courage.
May we be worthy
of having shared your last days.



Credit: L. MacPherson

Lily wrote these prayers during a 2011 summer residency at the Abbey of Regina Laudis in Bethlehem, Connecticut. Lily has also served as the intern in the HDS Garden. To learn more about that growing project, visit <http://www.facebook.com/HDSgarden>.

SLINGS, ARROWS, AND DOCTORS' VISITS: A BUDDHIST MEDITATION ON MINDFULNESS

JOHN WINTER
MDiv '14



I still remember that conversation with my father. We were sitting across from each other in a restaurant, exhausted after a full day of driving.

My father and I had rented a U-haul trailer, which was now carrying my possessions from California to Boulder, Colorado. I would be starting a new life at a new school, Naropa University. As we sat, I felt pangs of anxiety over my unknown future. My feelings must have registered on my face, because my father asked, "What's wrong?" I paused. My father and I are close, but he has a sarcastic streak that kept me slightly guarded. In this instance, however, I took a deep breath and spoke honestly, "I'm worried." He, too, paused, and took on a more serious demeanor. "About what?" he asked. I contemplated his question. The answer was not obvious to me. It wasn't just starting school, or moving to a new town. No, it was much deeper than that. I drew a circle around the rim of my water glass and looked back up at my father. "Life," I answered, somewhat surprised with my response. "Well," my father grinned with measured amusement, "Life's going to happen. There's nothing you can do about that."

My father's glib yet deceptively wise response has stayed with me these past ten years. Life does happen no matter what, and let's be honest—it comes with substantial pain and suffering. This is unavoidable. We experience loss, failures, pains, setbacks, disappointments, broken hearts, and so on. But, according to the Buddha, while some pain is inevitable, a substantial portion of our suffering is unnecessary, and it is important to differentiate between the two kinds. As an example, the Buddha speaks of a person who is shot with an arrow and who then laments, wails, beats his chest and becomes distraught. This mental anguish is likened to a second arrow with which the victim shoots

himself. He couldn't avoid the pain of the first arrow, but the second was his own doing. And when we look carefully into our own lives, we see that much of our suffering is akin to this second arrow, which can take the form of worrying about the first arrow before it strikes, or lamenting over it afterwards. But if we simply surrender to life as it is, we can save ourselves a lot of trouble.

Usually we aren't content to simply accept life as it comes. Instead, we crave this, and we're averse to that. We want this, but can't stand that. As a result, we constantly try to manipulate reality to meet our expectations. We're filled with ideas about how things should be and we think if we just try harder, work more, say the right things, and figure out how to live life better, things will go "our" way. But life takes its own course, and almost never meets our expectations, so we are inevitably stricken with disappointment, frustration, and anger. We lament, and then vow to do "better"—to avoid the arrow next time. So we push forward, but we proceed from a place of hope and fear. We hope circumstances will satisfy our expectations, and we constantly fear they won't.

This constant hope and fear is also known as stress. Stress is arguably the most lethal "second arrow" in our lives, and as we all know, unmanaged stress doesn't only cause mental suffering; it can breed an onslaught of additional "first arrows" such as headaches, fatigue, chronic pain, digestive disorders, sickness, and worse. Additionally, our stress-induced symptoms can themselves serve as new causes for worry, exacerbating our problems further. At age 19, I began experiencing strange symptoms such as those listed above, and each new symptom caused increased anxiety. I spent two years in-and-out of doctors' offices trying to locate the root of my compounding ailments before I realized they were stress-induced.

Apparently, I wasn't alone. According to Ronald Siegel, PsyD, stress accounts for 60–90% of all visits to physicians.

But there is an alternative to the cycle. In my own life, things began to shift as I took up the practice of mindfulness meditation. Through this practice, we train ourselves to relate directly to each moment of our lives. Instead of letting ourselves get carried away in hope and fear, we simply relate to what is, here and now. Our mind wants to wander in anxious surveillance, but mindfulness practice short-circuits this habit. In this simple yet profound practice, we relate directly with the present, and when we do this, there is no room to add excessive worry or evaluation. Even if we are experiencing pain, we can just simply be with it, feeling it fully and directly. In other words, mindfulness trains us to experience our life without adding the "second arrows." Within a few short weeks of regular practice, I began to feel less anxious about my symptoms, and they, in turn, began to decrease in intensity. After a year, the symptoms were almost completely gone. While mindfulness proved a beneficial means to balance my stress and thereby bolster my health, this experience was a gateway toward the realization that mindfulness is an end in itself. Mindfulness isn't another strategy we use to get what we want. It doesn't mean avoiding anything; it means being here, directly, with what's going on, whether this moment brings joy or sorrow. Relating directly in this way is ultimate wellbeing. Wellbeing is relating openly and directly to what is. Incidentally, this promotes true peace and harmony because we are no longer relating from our thoughts or ideas, which only generate further anxiety in ourselves and others. So in the end, as my father pointed out, life happens. There's no getting around it. We can't protect ourselves from the "slings and arrows of outrageous fortune." We can, however, give up our ideas about what should be and relate to what is, thereby relinquishing the second arrow with which we so commonly beat ourselves into dis-ease.

SEPTEMBER 11, 11 YEARS ON

MIKE BALL
MDiv '13



Our reading this morning comes from the 7th verse of the 32nd chapter of the Book of Deuteronomy: "Remember the days of old, consider the

years long past; ask your father, and he will inform you; your elders, and they will tell you."

Every year, Beloit College in Wisconsin releases what it terms a "Mindset List:" a list of the various cultural touchstones and events that have shaped the minds of any given year's incoming college freshman. Originally meant to help faculty confront the confounding fact that, as every year passed, the fresh-faced eighteen-year-olds before them would look at them with confusion whenever they mentioned things like Watergate, the mindset list has become something of its own cultural touchstone, marking a ceremonial "passing of the torch" to each year of incoming students. The list itself seems to move from undeniably frivolous material, like the fact that for the class of 2016, "there have always been blue M&Ms, but no tan ones," to items that are more consequential, like the realization that in the lifetime of freshmen, "White House security has never felt it necessary to wear rubber gloves when gay organizations have visited." What seemed so important not really so long ago appears ridiculous now, and vice versa.

The driving force behind the Mindset List, and the reason that it usually makes a splash in the media when it is released every year, is that the kinds of shifts that inform and define entire generations so often take the form of quick, largely inconsequential changes. Fashions and tastes change so rapidly that we don't usually have the time or the inclination to reflect on them. With its eighteen-year delay, what the Mindset List really provides, then, is the shock of recognition—time really has marched on.

What once was valued and significant no longer carries purchase in the same way with the people in ensuing generations. The list invites us to remember, if only for a moment, how transient and temporary our own hold on the times that shape us can be.

Of course, today is a date that shaped most Americans in a way that feels anything but temporary. All around us, we hear people remembering where they were, what exactly they were doing, when the horrifying events of eleven years ago were unfolding. September 11 is a touchstone that we feel will never wear away, a memory that, while it might lose some of its immediacy, remains etched in our consciousness. We are reminded, again and again, to never forget those who lost their lives, to never let the courage and heroism we witnessed that day fade away. The very notion that we could do so seems alien—the experience of watching, of knowing, of bearing witness to the immense tragedy of eleven years ago makes it indelible. For the thousands of people who were more directly affected, the memory burns even brighter.

It is striking to me, though, that soon, the Mindset List will be able to mark the day when the incoming freshman college class will not have borne witness to what we remember today. Soon, in only the next few years, the women and men entering adulthood will be too young to reflect on how they felt as the events of that morning unfolded. That this fact is inevitable does not make it any less remarkable. What does it mean to never forget what you never knew? How can related accounts, however poignant or insightful they might be, overcome the feeling that they are only relating history? What happens to our common memory when it ceases to be common?

I ask these questions not for rhetorical effect, but because I don't know the answers. In my relatively short life span, nothing looms larger

than the events of September 11th. I have never seen an event as wrenching and as earth shaking as what happened eleven years ago recede into memory. It is, in many ways, the central part of my mindset, and the notion that it doesn't have the exact same significance for other people is difficult to wrap my head around.

Yet that is not to say that we are destined to forget, or that we are condemned to speak at cross purposes until all memory and memorial is lost in the fog of time. In our passage this morning, Moses, at the end of his life, surveys all of the Israelites and exhorts them to recall the forty years in the wilderness, and before that, God's delivery of the people from captivity. The years have passed, and time has dulled what once was fresh, but Moses pointedly calls the people to remember, to ask the elder and the parent so that memory cannot fade. I, like the younger Israelites in the wilderness, have not had long on this earth to cultivate memory. And so I am compelled to ask. I ask how we can honor lives, and how we can love in the time allotted to us. I ask how time can heal, and how we can keep memories fresh. I ask to be taught to remember, and to learn to teach memory to others.

Yes, our mindsets mark us. They situate us in a certain time and place, with certain concerns and presuppositions. But we are not alone. The voices of those that came before us, and those that will come after us, depend on our willingness to ask and to speak. This is our task, this is what never forgetting looks like. May we remember it always. Amen.

Morning Prayers
Appleton Chapel, The Memorial Church
September 11, 2012

DAVARH TORAH TO OCCUPY BOSTON ON KOL NIDRE

RYAN ADAMS
MTS '13



I want to talk you about Enoch. Who has heard of Enoch from the Bible? [Only about five or six hands went up at the Kol Nidre service.] It's okay if you haven't: he is

another person with a media blackout on him. Enoch is the great grandfather of Noah. He is only mentioned once in the Bible, and it is barely a paragraph. Adam has long since died and Abraham is far, far ahead. Enoch is but a footnote in the long list of names between important figures, leading up to Noah. I'll give you Genesis 5:18-27 to put it in context:

"When Jared had lived one hundred sixty-two years he became the father of Enoch. Jared lived after the birth of Enoch eight hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Jared were nine hundred sixty-two years; and he died.

When Enoch had lived sixty-five years, he became the father of Methuselah. Enoch walked with God after the birth of Methuselah three hundred years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Enoch were three hundred sixty-five years. Enoch walked with God; then he was no more, because God took him.

When Methuselah had lived one hundred eighty-seven years, he became the father of Lamech. Methuselah lived after the birth of Lamech seven hundred eighty-two years, and had other sons and daughters. Thus all the days of Methuselah were nine hundred sixty- nine years; and he died."

No big deal, it seems. He is just another name. But there is actually an incredibly rich tradition behind the story of Enoch and what it means to "walk with God."

As it says with Noah, Enoch is born to a wicked generation. Everywhere around him there is sin and theft. No one respects his or her fellow person, and no one has any inkling about the Divine. Enoch, though, is righteous

amidst all this. What is a righteous person to do when faced with a wicked generation?

His response is interesting. He reflects and realizes he should undo the sins of the past. Where Adam corrupted a garden, Enoch will build and purify one. And so it goes that Enoch built a garden and meditated there for forty years. He meditates on his relationship with God, with his fellow man, with his place in the world. He occupies a garden, one could say, while people come and mock him. Unbeknownst to them, though, he is nourished by angels. Finally, he is so pure that God takes him up into the heavens. And then he was no more. But what does that mean?

The answer is even more interesting. Enoch is taken up to heaven and burned alive. Cleansed by fire is a more accurate description, but the image is the same: his eyes become stars, and his eyes become lightning, and his sinews become fire; but he is alive and can feel it. When the purification ends, he has donned the garments of light, worn by Adam before their expulsion. He is magnified hundreds of times over. The angels even stand in awe of him. He has become Metatron, one of God's greatest and most important angels.

So as you begin this Yom Kippur fast, you may ask yourselves: Why am I the one fasting? What do I have to atone for? Why do I have to suffer when I am not of this wicked generation? The story of Enoch seems to tell us that even the righteous must suffer, but for the purpose of ascending to an even higher realm of power and knowledge.

So when people mock you for occupying this garden, when they say nothing will come of you just sitting here and thinking, when they say to you that the greatest generation has passed and that you are but a footnote towards something greater far, far ahead, tell them that you are Enoch.

Isaiah 58:5-7

"Will you call this a fast, a day acceptable to the LORD? Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of injustice, to undo the thongs of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry, and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover them, and not to hide yourself from your own kin?"

I want to start with that quote, tell you two stories about the Shofar, and then bring it all together. Sound good?

The first story is about what the Shofar is said to do. They say that during the Days of Awe, the 10 days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, the barrier between this mundane physical world and the divine reality that we can't see but is all around us thins. It becomes diaphanous, as the shofar blows on Rosh Hashanah, both piercing that barrier and signaling the opening of the gates of repentance. And then, with every mitzvah we perform during the Days of Awe, we chip away at that barrier more and more. By Yom Kippur, we, having become aware of that divine reality around us, are meant to be like angels: we, as they, do not eat or drink, we are neither vain nor lustful, and we do not work. We only praise God and ask for forgiveness for the person we left behind. Then, at the end of this day, we hear the shofar blown. This is taken as a signal that the gates of repentance have closed, and then it is over.

Or is it? Does the barrier really return to its normal rigidity with the blowing of the shofar at the end of Yom Kippur, or could it be the opposite? That last blast could serve as the final piercing of that barrier; it would be the final force needed, if we chipped away at it with mitzvot, to tear it down completely and live this next year aware of the divine spiritual world around us. Aware of what is really important. Aware of what sustains us physically and spiritually. After hearing that final shofar blast, we should live this next year

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RYAN ADAMS
MTS '13

aware of the worth every soul, Jewish and Gentile, that we see and treat it with the respect it deserves.

So that was story one. Well, it was more of an explanation. Story two is an actual story. Like most Jewish stories, it is set in the old country. It stars the Baal Shem Tov, mystical founder of the Chasidic movement, and one of his best students. The Lord of Good Name (the literal translation of Baal Shem Tov) tells his best student that he will have the honor of blowing the Shofar during the High Holidays. The student is ecstatic. He prepares day and night. He formulates countless meditations and prayers to unlock the deepest chambers of the soul. He writes it all down, folds the paper, and stuffs it into his pocket. When he is finally called up to speak and blow the shofar though, the paper is gone. His pockets are empty and his heart is broken. He failed everyone, especially his master, who trusted him to do this incredibly important service. But since he is already there, he continues. He prays. He takes a deep breath and blows the shofar. He promptly blacks out at that moment.

When he comes to, he is standing there and

everyone is just staring at him, wide-eyed. He blew the shofar and said something. How and what he did not know. When the service ends, he quickly hides himself in shame and scuttles off. He sees the Baal Shem Tov approach and he apologizes. "I am so sorry Master. I let you and everyone down."

The Baal Shem Tov laughs. "That was the most beautiful and inspiring shofar blowing I have ever heard," he says. The student is confused. The student explains "But I had so much prepared! I was so ready to do so much good! I..." until the Baal Shem Tov cuts him off. He explains, "The Soul is like a mansion with many rooms. Different prayers unlock specific rooms, but there is a master key. Prayer with a broken heart unlocks it all, even the deepest depths of the soul." And with that, the master walked off with a smile, stroking his beard, as most Jewish stories end.

A broken heart is indeed a powerful thing, but this story leaves something out about prayer with a broken heart. A broken heart is also an open one, as it has been emptied of everything else. Once it is open, it can become a vessel for change.

So when you hear that shofar at the end of Yom Kippur services, I want your heart to break. I want your soul to be open this year. I want your eyes to be open this year. After that final blast of the shofar, I want you to be aware of the divine reality all around us, so you can be a vessel for change.

I want your heart to keep breaking even after this point. I want your heart to break for all the "oppressed [who don't] go free." I want your heart to break for "the hungry," "the homeless poor," and "the naked." I want you to perform mitzvahs and break down that barrier so that every person can see the worth of one another's soul.

"And then you shall take delight in the LORD, and I will make you ride upon the heights of the earth" (Isaiah 58:14).

HDS students led the efforts to establish Protest Chaplains throughout the country for the Occupy Movement in the autumn of 2011. Ryan Adams led High Holiday services at Occupy Boston. These are his meditations from Kol Nidre, Yom Kippur 5772.



Credit: Kristie Welsh

WHOLLY (AND HOLY) ORGANIC: A MEDITATION ON THE HDS COMMUNITY GARDEN

TIM SEVERYN
MTS '11

At Harvard Divinity School, we talk a lot about gardens—the biblical fruits of Eden, the blissful states of Sukhavati, the verdant blessings of Al-Janna — and now we too have a pluralist plot of paradise: the HDS Community Garden. This space was converted from lawn to lushness three years ago, through a combined effort of HDS staff (the HDS Green Team) and students (members of the student group EcoDiv). Thanks to them, we now have a holy, wholly organic garden, with garlic already on the rise.

It was here, halfway through the first season and my first semester, that I received my own baptism by soil, anointed by the dirt under my nails as I dug into the ground, pulling up pound after pound of the most beautiful golden potatoes I'd ever seen. It was love. Hours later, we roasted those potatoes for the community and I dug in once more: CHOMP! With that bite, the covenant was formed. The next season, spring to fall 2010, I took on some real responsibilities as one of two student garden managers. My green-thumbed partner was and is Grace Egbert (M.T.S. '12). Along with Leslie MacPherson Artinian in the Office of Ministry Studies, we expanded the project, helping the garden to grow to nearly 1,000 square feet of sacred space (though isn't all space such?). With a Student Sustainability Grant courtesy of the Office of Sustainability, we were able to add some serious infrastructure: tomato towers, cucumber trellises, raised beds, even a drip irrigation system to reduce water waste and create a sustainable, localized food system.

I've learned a lot through my study of environmental ethics here at Harvard, but the garden has really been where the rubber meets the road, or more appropriately, the shovel meets the soil. Through a lived relationship with this community of plants, animals, and people, I've come to be me. I've learned to live in a world that is borderlands, transgressing the boundaries of human-nature dualism, dwelling in a community of life abundant. Is a comparison

to the concept of Pure Land really out of the question here?

My most important learning has been this: Nature is so much more than a pristine forest atop the mountain. In the garden that is the world, nature is something familiar — us yet not quite — something near enough to love yet other enough to welcome us back into a forgotten covenant. Try to rope it in, to pound it into rows, and the plants will remind you of what's what. A bean plant reaches out to the cucumbers, joining tendrils and becoming friends. A group of greens stubbornly reseed themselves throughout the garden. Even the squirrels can set us straight, raiding the trash to plant a kernel of corn, our single ear that year. Too many tomatoes? No problem. Squirrels like them too.

Like them, eating is our most basic connection to nature, wholly obfuscated by the modern industrialized food system. I believe growing gardens is one of the most radical acts in which we can engage. By re-entering a direct relationship with other forms of life, we can see rightly once more. We can say, with a single bite of a fresh tomato, still holding that earthy smell that comes after a summer's rain, that this relationship matters — that pesticides, chemical additives, and plastic packaging

can't take this away, that nothing can.

At HDS, we've been fortunate that the community has been open to building these relationships. Once people tasted the bounties of this space, the joy of communal work, the peace of respite, a rainbow of colors — heirloom tomatoes, eggplant, greens, carrots, squash blossoms — our garden has grown and grown. This bounty was shared at more than 20 School-wide events last year, including a harvest festival turned dance of gratitude around the garden.

In the garden, we co-create with the sun and the rain and the earth, participating in the divine. I urge everyone to have their own baptism by soil, to form a covenant with the land, the people, animals, and plants already around them, to dig in, and to relate. I'm a gardener for life now, and I have Harvard to thank for that. CHOMP!

Tim Severyn offered this meditation at the annual spring blessing of the HDS Community Garden. To learn more about the garden, visit <http://www.facebook.com/HDS-garden>.



Credit: L. MacPherson



OVER THE RAINBOW: A QUEER MEDITATION

JEREMY SHER
MDiv '15



*Somewhere, over the
rainbow, way up high
There's a place that I
heard of, once in a
lullaby.*

This familiar little song's simplicity and candor should not be mistaken for lack of spiritual heft. Having little to do with the plot of *The Wizard of Oz*, but much to do with the thoughts of a Jewish composer in 1939, the song expresses the undying hope of scorned and oppressed people everywhere who seek the simple joys of life, friendship, and love in a place free of societal oppression, where they are free to undertake their own path in life and face its dangers squarely.

*Somewhere, over the rainbow, skies are blue
And the dreams that you dare to dream
really do come true.*

The significance for early LGBT activists of the shift from the black-and-white world of oppressive laws to the full-color world of hope and possibility cannot be overstated. The black-and-white reality of LGBT experience in 1939 was cruel, oppressive

and often murderous. But that could not quench the full-color hope of a better world which respects the testimony of love and creation instead of the perjury of pretended piety. Because injustice is always perpetuated by a brokenness of hope, the first step to freedom is always imagining that it is possible.

*Someday I'll wish upon a star, and wind up
where the clouds are far behind me.
Where troubles melt like lemon drops,
away above the chimney tops is where
you'll find me.*

If all oppressed people could only live in such a place, where the light of all colors makes everything glow with its own intrinsic joy! Free of the oppressing blasphemy of black-and-white distinctions, each child of God is free to sing God's praise from the depth of her or his own heart.

*Somewhere over the rainbow, bluebirds fly,
Birds fly over the rainbow. Why, then, oh
why can't I?
If happy little bluebirds fly beyond the
rainbow, why, oh why, can't I?*

In the blameless bluebird we see God's intended joy in its created freedom. God didn't create us to be divided into rigid, narrow categories of imaginary Thou-Shalt-Nots. Reverence for God requires us to appreciate creation as it plainly is, not to enthrone our human narrowmindedness as the judge of whether God's work is or is not good. "For I am filled with joy, O God, by what you have done" (Psalm 92:4). If the first step to freedom is hope, we join the bluebird in hope -- in the hope that has made it possible to look out the windows of our classrooms and chapels and see the world changing, from black and white into full color before our eyes. If the second step is to fly, we join the bluebird in flight -- away from rigid assumptions and prejudiced lies, and into the bright rainbow reality of God's magnificent full-color handiwork.

In December of each year, HDS holds Seasons of Light, a multireligious ritual of song and readings that honor the sacred interplay of darkness and light as well as feasting and fasting in the world's religious traditions. Jeremy Sher, who is preparing to become a rabbi, offered this meditation at the December 2012 Seasons of Light service.

A BLESSING FOR A THANKSGIVING MEAL

LAURA FELL SCHOLTEN & JOHANNA MURPHY
MDiv '15

I feel blessings when I accidentally wake up to
a sunrise and take in the
freshest of sun beginnings.

In the words of Bill Withers, I feel grateful
when I wake up in the morning and feel life is
impossible and then I look at you, and know
it's going to be a lovely day.

I know blessings when my coffee is rushed
and my music blares before
I am ready to hear.

I taste gratefulness when
I eat dinner with friends.

I taste blessings when I know I am chewing
something that will be hard to swallow.

I know gratefulness when I see the animals in
the barn and know they are
happy and healthy.

I smell blessings when I know I am far from
home, but know it's there.

I touch gratefulness when I play
with my sister's children.

I invite gratefulness.

I invite blessings.

I invite gratefulness, I invite blessings when I
can feel, know, taste, smell, and touch it all.

*This blessing was offered by Laura and Jo, two Unitarian
Universalist students, as we sat down to share HDS's
annual Thanksgiving Dinner in November 2012.*

THE SPIRITUAL PRACTICE OF WRITING: A LIST

MAGGI VAN DORN
MDiv '13



I feel myself to be possessed. Possessed of the desire for words, expression, and to create something beautiful. Inspiration, for me, is not necessarily

having the greatest idea or storyline; it is the experience of being haunted by the desire to wrap words around my experiences. This is why I write. I've heard it is why a lot of people write. It does not necessarily mean that I am a particularly skilled writer, or that I have the dimmest hope of being published. It just means that I befriend the impulse that haunts me and that I make space to explore what it means.

In attempt to diagram the experience of being possessed and where it leads me, I've made a list called *Insights Gleaned From Writing*. It is also a way of answering the question: *How is writing a spiritual practice?*

1. Writing is a process of delayed gratification.

I never write without engaging in a considerable struggle—for words, for coherency, for details, for rhythm. It is usually only after I have put a lot of time on the page that little tributaries of thought and language come together into something that flows. And while I do think gratification is nice every now and then, it is in the askesis of writing that I develop patience. Patience with myself, patience for the process, patience before the complexity of an idea.

2. "I hate writing. I love having written." -Dorothy Parker

I think more clearly for hours, even days after writing. My college boyfriend would frequently stop me midsentence to say, "You've been writing haven't you? I can

always tell because your vocabulary changes when you do." It's as if the struggle has cleared the way for fresh insights to surface. So in a way, writing brings me Clarity. This is something toward which we aspire in academic writing, but I think it's basically true for creative work as well.

3. I write to take pleasure in the world.

The first task of any writer is to develop a way of seeing in the world. To attend. To cultivate attention and sensitivity for all that I encounter in a day. To be affected, to know tenderness, to savor the quality of an experience, to stimulate my own curiosity and ability to wonder. The result of this is always gratitude. But it is a gratitude that flows from the decision to take pleasure in grappling with the world around me.

4. Writing is an act of mining for medicine.

Perhaps this is another way of saying that when you name something, you loosen the power it has over you. It's no longer just an amorphous ache, but something you can identify, circumscribe with words, and know more precisely.

A friend wisely said to me: people think that pleasure or joy must involve the total absence of pain, but in fact, when you allow yourself to really know your pain instead of running from it, that pain is transformed.

In writing, I'm not simply naming pain, but I am restructuring the narrative itself. I decide where to place the emphasis. I decide the tone of this story. I find new meaning in my own experience. And in doing that, I discover a profound sense of inner freedom and empowerment.

5. "Perfect is the enemy of good." - Voltaire

We delay writing because we don't think we have enough to say, or because we're afraid it will be terrible, or because the mood just isn't right. Before I begin writing I am always faced with the imagined scene of artistic inspiration. The lakeside villa, with a cool breeze blowing, the sun setting over the placid water, and perfect tranquility of mind. I imagine that I cannot write until my mental state approximates the lakeside villa. But in reality, I am trying to rekindle the brief moments of timelessness and euphoria that come at the peak of inspiration. I mistake this as the starting point of good writing, when it is really only in the sheer discipline of writing that I have any chance of experiencing a creative catharsis.

In *The Artist's Way*, Julia Cameron lays out strategies for unleashing your creative potential as an artist, writer, actor, designer, whatever. And it was from this book that I found this prayer:

"Great Creator, I will take care of the quantity, if you take care of the quality."

And it is a prayer I utter every time I sit down to write. It has given me perhaps the greatest gift: self-acceptance.

So, as I review my short little list, I find that the fruits of my own writing have been: Patience, Clarity, Gratitude, Interior freedom, and Self-acceptance.

This essay is excerpted from a presentation in the Fall 2012 series "Practicing Divinity: HDS Students on Spiritual Practices," sponsored by the Office of Religious and Spiritual Life.

AR-RAHMAN: A LESSON ON GRATITUDE

MITUL DAIYAN
MTS '14



Growing up, I'd listen to the comforting sound of my mum reciting Surah Ar Rahman after maghrib (evening) prayer. As the day slowly dipped into

night, the soothing repetition of *Fabi ayyi ala irrabbikuma tukazziban* resonated with me as her voice rose, slowly extended, then spread each consonant, each vowel weaving together the same lines that I knew would surely, always come after every other *ayat*. I knew the meaning of this verse long before I became familiar with any of the other chapters of the Quran. As a child, I'd hear it so many times that it didn't occur to me to pause for a second, take a step back, and marvel at the weight of such powerful words that serve as gentle reminder.

These past few months have been extraordinarily trying. I moved away from home, leaving behind my little sisters. I settled into a new city just as my own city dealt with the onslaught of natural disaster. I plowed straight into graduate studies despite the feeling of insecurity that plagued me every day. And I'd finally fallen in love...so quietly that I didn't see it coming, so beautifully that it continues to amaze me; and just the same, I learned to face the idea that such a love, no matter how hard we believe in it, cannot always be returned, at least not the way we want it to. All these things combined together resulted in the deepest pit of depression that I couldn't bring myself out. Some days, I just couldn't get up from bed because the weight of it all lay on me like a pile of heavy bricks. I realized that I did not in fact have it all figured out and the ugly feeling of hopelessness and despair washed over me because suddenly it seemed like I stopped being the one in control.

I searched for ways to either forget or ways to bring back the past. I felt so stuck in the quicksand of sadness that I stopped caring about my present, the here and the now. I sought company with friends but all my efforts felt empty, coloured gray, without a pigment of meaning. I sought solace in prayer and occasionally the contemplative act soothed me but my heart was still uneasy. It wasn't until I decided to start reciting Qur'an again that I opened up my mother's Qur'an to the place where the spine of the book was bent from use. My eyes rested on the first verse of Surah Ar Rahman and I began to read as though I were embracing an old friend. The verses, *Fabi ayyi ala irrabbikuma tukazziban*, ebbed and flowed through the chapter and each time I uttered the verse, the words kept knocking on my heart asking, continuously asking, "And which of the blessings of your Lord do you deny?" I kept repeating this over and over and by the time I finished reciting this surah in its entirety, my heart suddenly felt light, surprisingly softened by perspective.

For so long, I was drowning in the "what used to be's" and the "what could have beens" that I'd blocked out all the *rahma*, the small mercies in my life. I'd forgotten to be grateful, not just for what I had in my life but also for all the things that had happened. Because when I look to what I do have instead of all that I do not, I find that there can be such joy in the small things. Whether it's watching Lilo & Stitch with the friends who are like my very own sisters now, appreciating that my heart could love so generously that it's soft enough to be vulnerable to pain, or thoroughly enjoying a text assigned for class, it's these moments that make this journey bearable. Allah promises in the Qur'an, "Verily with hardship comes ease" (94:5) and for me, this ease comes in the form of the little blessings I often take for granted. I thought myself to be broken and in some ways, I still am; but I'm healing. I am learning to look to what I have, appreciate all the love that surrounds me, and all I can say is *Alhamdulillah*, all praise and thanks be to Him. Really, *Alhamdulillah* for it all.



Credit: Kerry Maloney

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