

**“Be Like Water”**, by Rev. M. Lara Hoke

*a brief homily at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Andover*      September 13, 2009

It’s always comforting to know what you’re getting into, isn’t it? Here we are for our first official Sunday together, with each other... Our first Sunday together as congregation, lay leaders, new comers, visitors, and new minister. What have you newcomers gotten yourselves into today? What have you members and long-time attenders gotten into with me as your minister? More importantly, what have *I* gotten myself into with you? I don’t think we can answer that definitively this morning. All I know is, like the song says, “Something tells me I’m into something good”<sup>1</sup>.

Today is our Water Communion, and so I have been thinking a lot about water. And speaking of water, and speaking of not knowing what you’re getting into.... One of my earliest memories of water was when I was quite young, a toddler. We were visiting family, aunts and uncles and cousins. Now, this was back when it was very common to have small children bathe together. I don’t think this happens as often in this day and age, but it used to be a very common practice. And so, at the end of the day visiting with my cousins and relatives, it was time for a bath. Very naturally, my mother and one of my aunts thought it made sense for the two toddlers present – my cousin and I – to bathe together. So they drew us a bath and put us in. Now, we were dirty – I think we’d been playing outside in a sandbox – and after a few moments in the tub, there was a visible ring of dirt forming. Even as a toddler, this concerned me a little. I didn’t mind being in a tub with my own ring of dirt, but I wasn’t too sure about being in the tub with a *shared* ring of dirt. But after a minute or so, something more concerning happened... My young cousin giggled, and she said to me, “Do you ever pee in the bathtub?” And I said, in surprise, “No!” And then, after a moment, something clicked in my toddler brain and I added, “Please don’t pee.” (And, I’m happy to tell you, she heeded my request. Thank you, dear cousin!)

And so, here we are together, you and I, and all of us. What’s the moral of the story? No, the moral is not, “Don’t pee in the bathtub” – though I do think that’s sound advice. I think the moral of the story is this: we’re in this tub together, wading in the waters together. I know I will leave my own special ring of dirt in the tub. I’m sure we will each contribute some dirt to the ring in the tub. And together, we will create our own unique ring of dirt in the tub. But don’t be overly concerned. It’s all part of the nature of being in this together. I have faith that we will come out of this better off than we went into it. Not necessarily cleaner than we went into it, mind you, but closer. And together in our hopes. And with memories that we’ll share for the rest of our lives. Thank you for letting me wade in the water with you, for letting me share your ministry with you.

In a short time, we will begin our Water Communion ceremony. This is a very special ritual in the Unitarian Universalist tradition. I want to describe it briefly for those of you who are new here today, or who are new to Unitarian Universalism.

A Water Communion is a gathering ceremony traditionally done in this congregation on the first Sunday after Labor Day (a similar ceremony is often used in Unitarian Universalist congregations across the country on “homecoming” Sundays like today). All are invited to bring

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<sup>1</sup> A hit in the 1960s for Herman’s Hermits.

water to the service, sharing why the water is special or representative of the summer. (If you haven't brought water today, you are welcome to use a cup of water from the table.) One by one, you will come forward and pour your water into this lovely bowl. By the end, the bowl should have plenty of water in it – and we will have heard each other's words.

I know some folks prefer to call this a “Water Ceremony”, as opposed to a “Water Communion”, because of the connotations that the word communion has for some as a Christian ritual, and sometimes a very exclusive ritual at that. But Unitarian Universalists today do not exclude any from our worship, and our own versions of rituals. Communion, as a most basic definition, is about “union with” – specifically, union with the Divine, or with whatever is holy to you. In that sense, it is very similar to a word I think many here today are more comfortable with, and that is the word “yoga”. Yoga, some of you might know, means “union” in Sanskrit – yoga being an Eastern way of communion with the Divine, the Ultimate, the holy. Call it what you will – Water Ceremony, Water Communion, or even Water Yoga, if you prefer. The important thing about this ceremony is, as the Unitarian Universalist Association website puts it, “The combined water is symbolic of our shared faith coming from many different sources.”

Water is in many ways the *ultimate* source for us. Many present-day scientists speculate that water is necessary for any life to exist, anywhere. Ancient people understood the importance of water too, not just for their daily existence, but even in a philosophical sense. Earlier, you heard words from the ancient Chinese scripture, the *Tao Te Ching*, as our Opening Words. To refresh your memory, the words he spoke were: “The greatest good is like water. It flows even to the lowliest places where no one chooses to be and so it is very close to the Tao”<sup>2</sup>, or the Way, the All in All. Ancient people understood that water is both mysterious, and mysteriously central to our existence.

I heard a similar concept put into words of the 20<sup>th</sup> century that are perhaps easier to grasp. The words of which I speak come from Bruce Lee, best known as a martial artist – but Bruce Lee was also a well-read philosopher in his own right. Bruce Lee once said, “... be like water. Empty your mind, be formless, shapeless — like water... you put water in a cup, it becomes the cup; You put water into a bottle it becomes the bottle; You put [water] in a teapot and it becomes the teapot... Be water, my friend.”<sup>3</sup> So says Bruce Lee.

Actually, like it or not, *we are* water. Indeed, as you heard in this morning's reading by Masaru Emoto, 70% of our body is made up of water. Emoto says, “throughout our lives *we exist mostly as water*”<sup>4</sup>. Interestingly, about 70% of the earth's surface is covered by water too. I suppose we could say that our planet exists mostly as water.

Emoto's book is fascinating, and a quick read, and I welcome you to borrow my copy.<sup>5</sup> Emoto has taken pictures of water molecules to see what happens when the water is exposed to various words, written and spoken, and when water is exposed to various emotions. In Emoto's

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<sup>2</sup> This translation is by Chao-Hsiu Chen, found at [http://www.earlywomenmasters.net/tao/ch\\_08.html](http://www.earlywomenmasters.net/tao/ch_08.html).

<sup>3</sup> Bruce Lee, *A Warrior's Journey*, documentary film that was included as a bonus feature for the feature film *Enter the Dragon* (DVD, 2004).

<sup>4</sup> Masaru Emoto, *The Hidden Messages in Water* (New York: Atria Books, 2005) p. xv.

<sup>5</sup> I first became aware of *The Hidden Messages in Water* after listening to a talk by poet/activist Sonia Sanchez at the UUMA's Ministry Days in Salt Lake City, Utah, in June 2009.

experiments, positive statements were spoken to water, or written on paper that surrounded the water vessel, and then Emoto took photographs of the water molecules. He also photographed water molecules that were exposed to negative words and emotions. It's all spelled out in this book, of course, but the bottom line is, the photographs of water molecules exposed to positive words and emotions formed beautiful crystals. The photographs of water molecules exposed to negative words and emotions? Less perfectly symmetrical... in some cases, almost disturbingly off-kilter. Whether or not you buy into this experiment completely – I'm sure many of you have doubts, having heard just this brief explanation – it does give one pause.

I will conclude my reflection today with this thought: If our planet is largely water, and if “we exist mostly as water”, and if water literally soaks up the emotions, words, thoughts around it... We had better mind ourselves around water – which is to say, everywhere we are, since we exist mainly as water. It's important what we do; what we say; what we write; what we think. We can make holy water with our intentions, with our loving-kindness. But more than that; we can actually *be* holy water. Today, with our Water Communion, our “Water Yoga”, if you will, may we create our own holy water with our shared words and sacred stories. In this year together, may we ourselves *become* holy water with our words, thoughts and deeds of loving-kindness. Amen, and blessed be.