

Unitarian Universalist Congregation of South County
Sermon, April 27, 2008

Lay Down Your Burden by Tracy Rae Hart

I joined UUCSC because you are a loving, caring community. I feel a kinship with people who sign petitions once a month for Amnesty International, who have a system for buying fair trade coffee, who provide a meal once a week at the Welcome House, who want to have green coffee hours, and so many other loving, caring activities.

People who are passionate about caring for our planet and all of its inhabitants.

People who discern inequities and seek to rectify them, who fight for social justice in our town, country and planet; who probably feel like myself that we need to make our media accountable and truthful, who want to protect our privacy and civil rights.

Who don't want childcare or poverty assistance programs cut.

Fellow souls who know the value of clean water and air, who understand the need to protect the states of Idaho, Alaska, Montana.

People who work to protect the wolf, the bison, the buffalo, the polar bear, seals, antelope – and all of their habitat.

People who want the whales and dolphins to keep their hearing.

People like you. And me.

It's exhausting! The planet is huge and due to the wonders of technology – we now know of almost every instance of greed, cruelty and destruction happening everywhere at all times!

In preparation for this sermon I counted my emails just for the month of March. Emails alerting me to greed, cruelty and destruction of people, places, and rights and there were 138! That's about 1600 messages a year asking me to help! I would call that a macro burden!

I willingly signed up for a covenant which declares service is our prayer, and helping one another is a priority. My ideals totally mesh with those of the Unitarian Universalists – and of course people of every religious and spiritual tradition share these high, noble ideals.

We feel the needs and pain of others.
We're smart – we know what actions would remedy the problems.
And sometimes I feel overwhelmed because I want the pain to stop NOW.

And I don't understand why stopping cruelty or poverty or hunger or lack of safety is not every human being's priority – is not everyone's government's responsibility.

If we can see what needs to be done, how can we let one more child in Africa die of aids, one more family in Providence go hungry, and on and on.

I wrote a poem a couple years ago, that I couldn't put my hands on, but basically, it was about being under the covers. Literally.

I was under my covers and I wanted all the cries for help to stop. I didn't even have a migraine. I just wanted the neediness and cruelty and stupidity to STOP!

And then I had a realization that was very comforting.

I bet I'm not the only one in my bed under the covers. There are probably people all over the world under their covers.

Because I'm just like everyone else – one more flawed homo sapien, doing the best I can. And sometimes the needs of the world feel heavier than I can bear.

And they feel like that because my heart wishes,
my heart and soul longs
for things and people to be different.

Lao Tsu, in 6th century China, wrote down his philosophy of Taoism. He believed that one has to accept the world as it is. And in relation to that foundation, one finds peace.

He writes in the Tao Te Ching, passage 29:

Do you think you can take over the universe and improve it?
I do not believe it can be done.

The universe is sacred.
You cannot improve it.
If you try to change it, you will ruin it.
If you try to hold it, you will lose it.
So sometimes things are ahead and sometimes they are behind;
Sometimes breathing is hard, sometimes it comes easily;

Sometimes there is strength and sometimes weakness;
Sometimes one is up and sometimes down.

Therefore the sage avoids extremes, excesses, and complacency.

The next passage of his that I'd like to share made me laugh at myself. I had thought these were my ideas, but 30 years ago a friend gave me a copy of the Tao Te Ching and this is where I probably first came in contact with this perspective.

Passage 2:

Under heaven all can see beauty as beauty
Only because there is ugliness
All can know good as good only because there is evil.

Therefore having and not having arise together.
Difficult and easy complement each other.
Long and short contrast each other;
High and low rest upon each other;
Voice and sound harmonize each other;
Front and back follow one another.

There is a passage in the New Testament that also supports the idea that suffering is part of the world.

Matthew, ch 26:

While Jesus was in Bethany in the home of a man known as Simon the Leper, a woman came to him with an alabaster jar of very expensive perfume, which she poured on his head as he was reclining at the table.

When the disciples saw this, they were indignant. "Why this waste?" they asked. "This perfume could have been sold at a high price and the money given to the poor."

Aware of this, Jesus said to them, "Why are you bothering this woman? She has done a beautiful thing to me. The poor you will always have with you, but you will not always have me."

One of the most supreme healers taking time for replenishment.

There is a Chinese Proverb: You cannot prevent the birds of sorrow from flying over your head, but you can prevent them from building nests in your hair.

It is the nature of religious and spiritual traditions to advise us not to carry the weight alone.

Judaism and Islam have powerful protective God figures. Christianity has many Divine entities that comfort, Jesus, Mary, the Saints, Angels.

Buddhism says that I don't have to carry it at all. Life is suffering – a given.

And I can end my suffering by following the Noble Eightfold Path – and awaken to Nirvana.

But I'm not a Buddhist scholar and I won't go in to that but what I have found in my research, was that Buddha took care of himself!

In order to sustain his ability to preach and teach – until he was 80, he maintained a pattern of withdrawal and return.

Every year was divided into 9 months of teaching and 3 months of retreat.

And his daily routine was to withdraw from his duties to meditate three times per day.

I've just been speaking about that macro burden, not the micro burden (which sounds too small to be an appropriate word).

The tending to and managing and fixing the needs of family and friends some who may be ill or addicted, struggling, or just growing and learning.

The burden of wanting to be the best spouse, partner, parent, sibling, child, or friend.

And there's the weight of fulfilling our individual lives – squeezing every morsel of knowledge, joy, connection and purpose that life has to offer.

If I didn't think we'd scare the children downstairs, we could have a group scream.

But instead, I hope we'll have a group laugh. I'd like to play you a song by Cheryl Wheeler that fits this topic.

(Musical Interlude: "Unworthy", Cheryl Wheeler)

I don't believe we are unworthy because of what we don't get done. But when I heard Cheryl Wheeler perform that song I had an awakening.

OF COURSE I CAN'T DO ALL THOSE THINGS!

Why did I think I should or could. And it's spooky because a lot of the things she wants to do are exactly what I'd like to be able to do or learn.

But it brought me back to the inner knowing that there is only so much time and I am only one person. I Cannot Do it All.

What can I do?

Accept my limitations. Time is one of the most basic.

There is a finite amount of time per day, and I wake up with a finite amount of energy – which can change – sometimes I have more, sometimes less.

If I discharge my energy early, if I allow myself to become empty, and then continue to schedule activities, I'm emotionally and spiritually in trouble. I cannot help the world from under the blanket.

If I do not stop and pay attention to how wound up inside I feel, how frustrated with the world or myself,

I will feel like that cranky rabbit.

And then I don't act like sweet, wise, loving Tracy. Just ask my daughter or husband.

I can soothe my soul. I **MUST** soothe my soul.

It makes spiritual sense that with the beauty of creation all around us and our being endowed with senses to experience them, it's here for us to enjoy.

Here is a translated Scots Gaelic prayer for healing from the Celtic Druid spiritual tradition:

Your pain and sickness
Be in the earth's depths
Be upon the grey stones,
For they are enduring...
Be upon the clouds of the sky,
For they are the rainiest,
Be upon the river's current
Cascading to the sea

The forest, the ocean, Gardens, ...places to refresh ourselves. Music, art – all here for us to enjoy.

It makes spiritual sense that I since I am a social being and wired to connect with others – I can commune, laugh and cry with you – comfort and be comforted by you.

I feel less burdened, less guilty for what I am NOT doing, when I act in integrity with myself in quiet, daily ways.

When I use my "Green" knowledge and reuse my envelopes and plastic bags, write notes to school on the back of papers I don't need, (not worrying that it's not pretty stationary), hang my laundry, compost, sign petitions for the environment, pick up litter.

When I sign my letters for Amnesty International.

When I take 1 minute! To go to the Breast Cancer Site which also has the Hunger Site, the Child Health Site, The Literacy Site, the Rainforest Site and the Animal Rescue Site. And with 6 clicks – I help the world – for free – using only my heart's love for this world and all beings – and a daily email reminder that they send me.

What else can we do to lay down our burdens?

Meditate. Exercise. Pray. Be mindful. Present.

Ask the universe for positive people and experiences to come into our lives.

Read the "Good News" – paper or web site – info. from around the world of good things happening.

This can balance the way we view the state of the world.

Be in gratitude. For all the blessings and opportunities for growth that life offers us,
for the loving people in our lives,

And thank you to my husband who has been so supportive as I've let the house fall
apart, with most of my time given to creating this service.

So, in these last few moments, I invite you to close your eyes.

Take a slow, deep breath in; a slow deep breath out.

Imagine a sparkling ball of purple light hovering in front of your face; imagine that
it represents the energy, the force that binds us all
and silently speak your burdens to it

Imagine that as you do so, it absorbs them
and when it is full

imagine that it radiates love to you,
strength for you to utilize.

Now see it lift off and fly up and away,
taking those life trials and burdens into the universe for resolution.

Open your eyes and be in peace.

Blessed be and Amen

The Peace of Wild Things
(closing words by Wendell Berry)

When despair for the world grows in me
And I wake in the night at the least sound
In fear of what my life and my children's lives may be,
I go and lie down where the wood drake
rests in his beauty on the water, and the great heron feeds.
I come into the peace of wild things
who do not tax their lives with forethought
of grief. I come into the presence of still water.
And I feel above me the day-blind stars
waiting with their light. For a time
I rest in the grace of the world and I am free.