

FAITHFUL WORDS MEDITATION: ON LOVE

Love Is a Lamp

by Karen Hering

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A few years ago, on invitation from a friend, I attended a community *Iftar* in St. Paul that began at sunset. It was a gathering of Muslim families and friends celebrating the final day of Ramadan and the breaking of the month's daily fasts, and after we had eaten our fill from a generous buffet, an equally generous evening of stories began as guests from different countries took turns recalling their experiences of Ramadan – in Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Palestine and Somalia.

My friend's father, Adhil, spoke first, telling us it was the mornings of Ramadan that were so special in the small Turkish town of his childhood. Every morning before the fast began at dawn, his family rose to eat in the dark, and it was his job to light the household lamps, for the town had no electricity. Standing at the window as he lit the lamps, he would peer out into the darkness and watch intently as one by one other lanterns began to appear around them: each lamp a beacon of faithfulness and love shining in the night; each lamp casting a thread of light into the darkness, weaving together the town's Muslim families as they ate before daybreak; each lamp a promise of solidarity for the difficult practice of fasting in the day ahead.

As I recall Adhil's story and the deep connection of community that I heard in it, I find myself asking, *What lanterns do we Unitarian Universalists light against the darkness that sometimes cloaks our world, separating us one from another, and What beacons of faithfulness do we hold up for our children and one another as signs of our solidarity and love?*

As Unitarian Universalists, of course, we have no uniform practice such as fasting. But we do have, if we dare to call it that, a doctrine of love and a covenant of service; we have a shared call to work for justice and peace in this world, to rise before the new day of justice breaks and commit ourselves to this important work again and again.

The origins of our own flaming chalice remind us of this. A symbol designed for the Unitarian Service Committee in 1941, the flaming chalice was used by the Committee's European network then providing safe passage to those fleeing the Nazis. And as the

Service Committee used this new symbol, stamping it on replacement travel papers and sometimes scratching it in the dirt to guide people toward those who would help them flee, it came to represent trustworthiness, safe passage and the kind of love that reaches out and opens the door for those in need, even at great risk.

This is the light, I believe, that we Unitarian Universalists, still hold up for one another today, and we hold it up for the world at large as well – a promise of solidarity and a shared faith that none of us has to be alone if we will but learn and choose to stand together. It is the light we generate when we come together, as we do each Sunday, seeking loving support for our own personal challenges and for the difficult daily practice of working for justice and peace.

Love is a lamp that we first light for ourselves and then hold up for one another. Love is a bridge we build from self to other, so that we need not face life's troubles and the world's injustices alone. Love is a web of light that we spin together so that something will catch us when we fall.

This is our covenant. This is our call. When our children stand at the window in the darkness may they see lamps being lit all around them. And may our shared practice of working for justice and believing in peace, be the loving bond that supports us all in each new day ahead.

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