

Lighting the Fire

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As a new entrant to the UU tradition, my experience isn't bound to church tradition; childhood memories of Sunday gatherings don't bubble up in me when lighting the chalice. Still, as the candle is lit, and the inevitable giggling about the faulty matchbook subsides, I take shelter in the embrace of the group harboring the flame.

I grew up with the act of lighting a flame as something mysterious, perhaps occult. The most common occasion for sparking a fire, apart from cooking, was to commune with the deceased. In my family's traditions imported from southern China, the whole Young tribe would gather at Mount Hope cemetery to greet and propitiate passed relatives. An enthusiastic aunt or uncle offered incense, tips glowing like amber coals on a cool fall day. Holding the three joss sticks in my hand and bowing three times before the gravestone was a means to invoke the presence of loved ones and speak in silence. Similarly, in the Jewish tradition we lit a candle for seven nights (roughly) after my uncle passed, and my dad instructed me to stare into the flame to divine its mysterious flickering movements.

At Young Adult Group we convene to light the chalice, not to worship in silence, but to light the way for the mysteries of self and soul to be revealed. This period of young adulthood is a time of reconciling colliding, often overwhelming emotions. Our aim on Sundays is to sit down, and, with a posture of sincerity, risk knowing one another. Rather than put on more layers to posture, protect, or feign a false confidence about direction and goals, we allow ourselves to be exposed to the elements, entrusting our most whole, unabridged selves into the hands of community.

We began this past session by bringing to life the story of dancing rabbis offered during the Sunday sermon. Though these rabbis were headed to a Nazi crematorium, facing an imminent end, they found the fortitude and wisdom to dance, holding all of the grieving, terror, and will to live in each other's hands. This lament and celebration juxtaposed—a concentration of time and raw experience without qualifiers, offered a guidepost to orient our reflection on holiness in our own lives.

To light the flame is not an act limited to bringing together the elements of kindling, sulfur, and oxygen through the stroke of a match; it is commitment to embrace the holy. In our gathering, we deduced that sacred experiences take many forms and are about

by different acts: it's found in the delightfully jarring absurdity of human experience and released in laughter, in anger that brings about transformation, and in questioning when there is dissonance between what's said and felt. In our striving to sit in that sacred place, we practice owning the messy, latent truths that are found in the windows of our most candid relationships.

In our time we shared examples of how the holy is creating a space for a child to say, "I feel left out;" it is confessing the wounds of unspoken hurt we harbor; it is listening to your heart beat wildly when you know there is more to ask or challenge. As a young adult community, we ask one another what allows us to turn up the heat in our relationships, eschewing what is convenient or polite for a more radical encounter with what is alive and true within and among us.

Looking back at the occasion of visiting relatives who've become spirits, I am grateful for a ritual which brought family into relationship, though I am left thinking about what responsibility I have not to merely replicate what is passed but deepen into new rituals of establishing trust and intimacy. This dear gathering of young adults is here to offer the gift of showing up for one another to establish an enduring reunion. We are striving to translate our experiences and yearnings into a flame that guides our collective longing for community and grounds us in the making of a holy place.