

Watering the Path

*A Message by the Rev. Molly Housh Gordon
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In my last semester of Divinity School, I took a class called Buddhist Meditation and Social Action. Sounds good, right?

It was good -- a semester long course in a particular form of meditation from the Tibetan school called the Dzogchen tradition. Our homework was to meditate and to reflect on our meditation. Our exams consisted simply of writing about how the meditation practice had transformed our understanding of social action. Not too shabby!

The meditation method itself was broken down into parts. Every meditation started with emptying ourselves, readying ourselves to receive.

Then we spent the first three weeks simply visualizing the face of someone who loves us and practicing receiving love. We were to imagine waves of love, torrents and streams of love, filling us up. Three weeks of receiving love. It's a heady thing, and not as easy as you might imagine.

The next three weeks we spent imagining the face of someone we loved right in front of us and the original person in back of us. We continued to imagine receiving love, and then envisioned channeling that love out at the person we imagined in front. We were to be the conduit, the empty vessel receiving love to the brim, and then pouring it out upon another.

Only after those six weeks could we even begin to imagine receiving love from the universe and channeling it out to all beings. And only after that did we set the lifelong goal for ourselves to be constantly aware of receiving love and living out love in every moment.

We had to be empty first, and then filled, only then was our compassion able to truly spill forth. It takes practice to be really loving some of the time, much less all of it.

The lesson for me had something to do with slaking my own thirst in order to reach out beyond myself, with letting myself receive blessing. When we recognize all the ways in which our own vessels are filled, we are better able to water the path.

And here's another thing I realized. Too often when it comes to serving others and working for justice, we mistake ourselves for the water, and forget that we are only the vessels.

We want to feel important and needed to the work at hand. We want to be known as a force for justice. But we are only needed in the way that each and every person is needed

– as a channel through which streams of love may flow into the world. And we are not here to be known, but to serve. We may work for justice or do justice in a given setting, but no matter how politically correct, or passionate, or informed we might be, we are not, ourselves, justice.

We are the vessel, not the water. The love and compassion within us are not ours to give or withhold. We did not make them. They are a great gift, an unearned blessing of such volume that they simply must spill forth.

Therefore, we do not water the path for our own pleasure, to admire the flowers along the way. We water the path because we are both full and cracked – gifted and flawed - and the water simply must spill out.

Tell me, what is in you that must spill out? What is in this room that must spill out?

Think of all the ways you are nourished, here and throughout your life. Think of all that you receive, and let it fill you up. This community has abundant blessings to share. Blessings of love and renewal. Of passion for justice. Blessings of spirit and song and companionship.

This is our good news. Life abundant. Love, powerful, and living through us. We will share our good news, not to gain recognition or snag new members, but because it is bursting forth from us. Because we are full to the brim with blessing, and what can we do but spill out in great streams of love?

God knows the ground is parched and dry. People thirst in body and in spirit. Yet here there is water abundant, in metaphor and in truth. Here none must thirst.

So let us share.

Let every path we walk be watered with love, that all people might grow and flourish.

Let us know ourselves to be blessed. And then let us be a blessing.