

# Ground Control

By [Erika A. Hewitt](#)

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“We are all falling. This hand’s falling too—  
all have this falling-sickness none withstands.

And yet there’s One whose gently-holding hands  
this universal falling can’t fall through.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, “Autumn” (trans. J.B. Leishman)

I hate flying. I get scared by turbulence; understanding the physics doesn’t help my head communicate with my fear centers. I realized long ago that it wasn’t sustainable to blitz the fear away with pharmaceuticals, which means I’ve spent my adult life developing strategies for staying... calm? No, let’s call it *less anxious*... in the air.

A few years ago, a pilot friend threw me a lifeline by introducing me to live air traffic: the staccato transmission of static-popping chatter between pilots and air traffic control professionals. If you’re in the air, you can listen to your own pilot exchanging information with air traffic control: an audible reminder, or even a revelation, that a host of trained human beings watches over every move, making sure pilots know what they need to know in any given moment.

It doesn’t matter that I can barely decipher the rush of code and engineering that comprise this language of the sky. I’m soothed by the occasional bursts of human kindness (“Roger that, delta-two-niner. Thank you very much for your patience and have a great day”), and I now know that as planes travel through a patchwork of designated zones, air traffic control professionals hand off the plane at the border of one zone to those in the next. We, the passengers, are a baton being passed, hand over invisible hand, zone by zone, to safety.

During these confusing, turbulent pandemic times, I sometimes feel my stomach lurching from uncertainty and loss. On any given day, I feel as out of control as I do at thirty-four thousand

feet. (I am, however, just as determined not to rely on chemical substances as a coping mechanism.)

This great and fearful loneliness is made lonelier by the muddling of my connection to Spirit, to Mystery. I find myself trying to make decisions, asking for help, and straining to find it. It used to be that if I held still long enough, I'd feel gentle guidance bloom inside of that silence. Today, there's so much noise—anxiety, brittleness, disappointment in my fellow human beings—that it's harder to discern wise, steady instructions amid the static.

I did not ask for, or want, a months-long lesson that I am not in control. What I do know is that the most faithful, life-giving coping strategy—for me—is to attune to a voice calmer and wiser than mine, and to allow that seeking to be its own expression of faith.

## Prayer

You are there, One Who Holds Us All, whether we're clinging on for dear life or oblivious to the bumps. Help me attune to your voice, and remind me that more instructions will arrive.

## About the Author



### [Erika A. Hewitt](#)

Erika Hewitt is the UUA's Minister of Worship Arts and Editor of Braver/Wiser, a weekly spirituality series.