**How Do You Mend a Broken Heart?**

**Eleuthera Diconca-Lippert and Rev. Diane Rollert**

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***From Eleuthera Diconcoa-Lippert:***

We are living mirrors for those we love.

When I've spent long bouts of time in the woods with few reflective surfaces, I have seen myself mirrored back in the eyes of those I am sharing that sacred silence, uplifting birdsong and verdant canopy with. Their experience of who I am and reflection back to me during our interactions, nourishes my sense of self, and grounds me in the absence of the looking glass.

This lesson once came to me in the form of a dream during a bout of heartbreak. In this vivid vision, I could see my pained heart, clearly in my mind's eye, beating sluggish in my chest, sending lifeblood, begrudging, through the veins of my sleeping body in the dark of night. Gradually the image changed. A light grew in the distance. It revealed my heart transforming, filling with bright colours, sounds, and faces, a mosaic of memories taking shape, made up of the people I love. In the warmth of that slumbering moment I realized that they were within me everywhere I went, that they made me up.

In romantic love it can be easy to fall into a sense of merging, forgetting about the other sources of love in our lives. In so doing we deny ourselves a richness, a resourcefulness, a deep down sense of self that is uniquely our own and intricately related to a vaster network of caring that can support us through thick and thin. Countless times it has been my community that has helped me persevere.

When I parted ways with the former love of my life ten years ago it was the creative process that played that role. I sang, danced, acted and wrote, released that grief in every way I knew how. In that case it was the unfettered channelling that kept me going, through a death of sorts and paved the way for my rebirth.

Jamie Anderson said it beautifully, “Grief, I've learned, is really just love. It's all the love you want to give, but cannot. All that unspent love gathers up in the corners of your eyes, the lump in your throat, and in that hollow part of your chest. Grief is just love with no place to go.”

Often we process the grief, of our love with no place to go, alone. Sometimes we are fortunate enough to have the opportunity to process with our romantic partners. Recently I reached out to the former love of my life to see if he would like to have a healing ritual to speak all the unspoken and close our chapter together once and for all.

It was powerful to see each other. When you've loved someone deeply you can be apart for years and there is almost always still a remnant of that love lingering on. The way they hold their fork, the way they separate all the food on their plate into little piles, the way they stick their tongue out when they're concentrating. These tiny gestures can make countless memories and emotions come flooding back.

We spoke at length of everything we remembered from our time together. We brought all that was hidden away in the recesses of our minds to light, apologized for what we needed to, and acknowledged all the love that had been between us, all the trying. Tears streaming, with our hands on each other's hearts we felt things shift and heal in the way they needed to. When that moment came, we took our hands off each other's hearts and a flock of black and white birds that had been in the honey locust tree next to my balcony, took flight into the sunset, in song.

How do you mend a broken heart? The answers to this question will be different for each of us. What has helped me persevere is community, creativity and ritual.

***From Rev. Diane Rollert:***

The old one says to the young one: You may face disappointment and rejection. Your heart may be broken many times. You may be overwhelmed by the cruelty of humanity and the indifference of lovers. But you have strength and persistence; and what you need is to simply love yourself. It’s that love, more than anything anyone else can give you, that will enable you to survive your most painful days. My dearest, take the pain and the love and make all the beautiful music you can. That is your gift to this world, and we are listening.

*I believe in the sun, even when it’s not shining.*

*I believe in love, even when I don’t feel it.*

*I believe in God, even when God is silent.*

— from the choral piece *“I Believe”* by Mark Miller, based on an anonymous Jewish poem

Maybe that’s the hardest thing for us, the silence and the rejection of belief that don’t always unite us. This is the great challenge in our evolving faith. What some of us believe with overwhelming confidence, others of us reject vehemently. Yet we find this meeting point, this place of desire to find something, to create something, to accomplish something. Together. Against all odds.

For the past two weeks, I’ve been travelling in Europe, visiting UU fellowships in Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris in my role as UUA ambassador to the Unitarian Universalists in Europe. There are several hundred UUs scattered across the European continent, many of whom are ex-patriots from the US.

This does not include the the thousands in Romania and Hungary who belong to the Hungarian Unitarian Church that began in Transylvania in the 1500s, or the British Unitarians that have gathered since the mid-1800s, or the hundreds of German-speaking Unitarians and free religionists who have gathered since the late-1800s, or the Unitarians in the Czech Republic who were first gathered in the 1920s by Rev. Norbert Câpek, creator of the flower communion we celebrate here each June.

The group of fellowships and individuals that I serve call themselves the EUU. They have been growing organically since at least the 1980s, if not earlier, as faithful UUs who have emigrated mostly from the US to settle temporarily or permanently in Europe. Today there are fellowships in Germany, Switzerland, Belgium, France and the Netherlands that meet on a monthly basis to worship. In addition, there are members-at-large in Spain, Denmark, Finland and elsewhere who stay in touch online. Twice a year, these groups and individuals gather as one large community for weekend retreats that include worship, workshops and small group ministry. For many, those biannual retreats have themselves become a spiritual home.

As I met with the fellowships in Amsterdam, Brussels and Paris, the same concerns arose. How do you stay alive? How do you encourage new blood to volunteer? How do you share this amazing UU message to the wider world? How do you balance a desire for the warmth and intimacy that comes from being a small group that loves and knows each other well with the ambition to grow? How do you make room for the stranger, for the native speaker as well as the English speaker? How do you welcome the differences that may change the comfortable way things have always been done?

Underneath those questions I heard a longing for connection, a longing for a place to call home in lands that may not be home forever. A place to raise children. A place to heal old wounds. A place to find the divine in the most human of failures.

An ocean may divide us from these groups, but there is so much we have in common.

As I travelled, I thought of this Sunday, of the words I would want to share. I thought of our fears around love, of the fear of abandonment, that most elemental fear that can overwhelm us in childhood and then become a silent, stealth response later in life. These are the reflexes that keep us from trusting each other, that can make us fear our own vulnerability, that can make us reject love and community. We get angry when the ones we love seem to have their own lives or others to take care of. We worry that we have been forgotten.

I think of being pregnant with my daughter, my second child, and wondering if I would have enough love for her when I already loved my son with more love than I had ever thought possible. Then my daughter was born and my capacity for love expanded exponentially. Yet I know there were days as my children grew older when they were frustrated and sad because too many things divided my attention. I gave as much as I could to them, to my work and to my community, and I had my own growing to do.

Sometimes we can feel broken-hearted because we feel we aren’t able to *give* enough or because we don’t feel we have been *given* enough. That’s when we have to find our own way in this world. We have to search deep inside ourselves for the love that is alway ours for the giving and for the taking.

*“I believe in love, even when I don’t feel it.”*

This is the gift of perseverance, of continuing to build religious community even when love seems to abandon us. Even when our hearts are broken. Even when the silence of God is deafening. We come here to be mended and we learn how to mend ourselves.

With each song we sing, with each candle we light, with each moment of silence we share, we find our way home.

It’s so good to be home with you again.

Amen. Blessed Be. Namaste.