



# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

July 2020

## Harmony

## Wisdom Story



“Islam is ...a practice, a way of life, a pattern for establishing harmony with God and his creation.” Harmony with the divine is also a foundation of mysticism.

Within our own tradition, our commitment to social harmony is affirmed in a number of our principles, including “justice, equity, and compassion in human relations” and “the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all.”

Harmony with nature figured prominently among the Transcendentalists, especially Thoreau. This emphasis on harmony is expressed in both our seventh principle, “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part,” and our sixth source, adopted in 1995, which asks that we be mindful of “spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of

*(Continued on page 6)*

### Making Beautiful Justice

*Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland*

His father was a Harvard-trained professor of musicology and his mother, who trained at the Paris Conservatory of Music, was a classical violinist. But he never cared for classical music, which may explain why he began to play the ukulele at the age of 13. He also learned to play the guitar. In 1936, when he was seventeen, he fell in love with a five-string banjo. He heard it at the *Mountain Dance and Folk Festival* in western North Carolina near Asheville. Perhaps the banjo chose him, since a person once said that he actually looked like a banjo. He would later say, “I lost my heart to the old-fashioned five-string banjo played mountain style.”

At the time, the banjo was thought of as a “white” instrument, the province of poor Appalachian farmers, but the truth was that the banjo went back to the early days of slavery in America. The African-influenced banjo had a body made out of

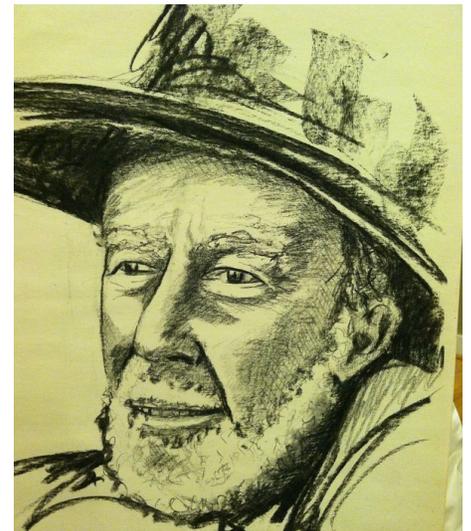
### Introduction to the Theme

While there are efforts at harmony among world religions, the emphasis on harmony varies within the different world religions. Social harmony figures prominently in Asian Religions like Taoism, Confucianism, Buddhism, Hinduism, and Sikhism, while harmony with nature is emphasized in Taoism, Neopagan, and Native American traditions. As the Buddha said, “Many do not know that we are here in this world to live in harmony.” The focus on harmony within Judaism, Christianity, and Islam is best understood as harmony with the divine. Sachiko Mirata observes that,

### Harmony & Building Beloved Community

The Beloved Community is not an idyllic utopia, rather it is clear-eyed vision about what is possible in terms of human community as well as living “in harmony with the rhythms of nature,” as our sixth source counsels. The degree of harmony that exists is a basis for assessing the overall health of the Beloved Community. This does not mean that Beloved Community is conflict free. Rather, the Beloved Community is a place where we see each other, as M. Scott Peck wrote, with the soft eyes of respect instead of the hard eyes of judgement. Rev. Tom Owen-Towle writes that respect means, “to look at something or someone again and again.” He adds, “mature, hardy communities tangle for impact or resultant change rather than injury or retaliatory damage. They struggle openly in order to minimize the lying and cruelty that often contaminate our communal life.”

*Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>*



*(Continued on page 2)*

# Building Beloved Community

## Surrounding Hate

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**  
a gourd and a wooden stick for the neck.

In the fall, this novice banjo player began attending Harvard, his father's alma mater, but dropped out two years later when he failed an exam. He decided to explore America with his banjo in hand. He began learning folk songs as he traveled across the country hitchhiking and hopping freight trains. By 1940, he had traveled with his five-string banjo through forty-eight states. That year in New York City he met Woody Guthrie at a concert hosted by the John Steinbeck Committee to benefit farm workers. Guthrie became the young man's most important teacher. The lessons were not just about music, they were also about social justice.

While he loved to sing, his vocal range was limited. C minor was too high for him. His solution was to have a longer neck installed on his banjo. The first one added two frets, later his custom banjos would have three additional frets. This made the songs he wrote fit his voice, and they in turn, made it easy for people to sing along. You have probably sung some of his songs. One came from lines in a famous Soviet novel written by Mikhail Sholokhov and published in the 1930s. The lines in English were "Where are the flowers? The girls have plucked them./ Where are the girls? They're all married./ Where are the men? They're all in the army." Pete Seeger rephrased the lines and added two more: "Long time passing" and "When will we ever learn?" You know the song as *Where Have All the Flowers Gone?* It is a wonderful example of the ways in which Pete Seeger made both beautiful music and beautiful justice for more than 50 years.

Its why in the 1960s he hand-lettered the following words on the head of his banjo, "This Machine Surrounds Hate and Forces It to Surrender."



Source: Touchstones

## Kosmos

### A New Harmony

Philip J. Newell

The word *kosmos* in ancient Greek means "a harmony of parts." In the classical world, everything in the universe was viewed as moving in relation to everything else. This ancient understanding of the cosmos is being born afresh today in radically new ways. We are realizing that the whole of reality is one. In nearly every dimension of life—whether economic or religious, scientific or political—there is a growing awareness of earth's essential interrelatedness. This new-ancient way of seeing is radically challenging us to see ourselves as connected with everything else that exists. And it means that any true vision of reality must also be a cosmology, a way of relating the parts to the whole, of seeing our distinct journeys in relation to the one journey of the universe.

...[A]ncient harmony ...is deep in the matter of the universe, the essential



interwovenness of all things. Everything, whether the expanding light of distant galaxies or

humanity's inner light of mind and consciousness, carries within itself the life of the universe's shared beginning. [Recognizing] the brokenness of our harmony, whether as individuals and families or as nations and species, ... our disharmony, is essential to finding the way forward. Confronting our brokenness, individually and together, is integral to the hope for healing. ...[H]ow ...can [we] be part of a new harmony? What is the cost, both personal and collective, of releasing life's essential oneness in radically new and transformative ways?

Source: *A New Harmony: The Spirit, the Earth, and the Human Soul*, Philip J. Newell, Jossey-Bass, 2011

## Awake to Harmony

### The Great Song

Jack Kornfield

Here around us always is the mystery. This great song has joy and sorrow as its warp and woof. Between the mountains and valleys of birth and death, we find every voice and every possibility. Spiritual practice ...asks us to wake up, to face life directly. ...Zen master Seung Sahn, on visiting the site of the Buddha's enlightenment in India, wrote:

*Once a great man sat beneath the Bodhi tree.  
He saw the Eastern star, became enlightened.  
He absolutely believed his eyes, and he believed his ears, his nose, his tongue, body, and mind. The sky is blue, the earth is brown, and so he was awakened to the truth and attained freedom beyond birth and death.*



Buddhist practice offers us ...the possibility of awakening. In this we must listen to the whole song, as Siddhartha did. We will see how difficult this can be. ...We will sense emptiness and loss in the lack of permanence of ourselves and all things. For a time in practice, all creation may appear to be a limited and painful story.... But these perspectives are only the first part of our awakening.

The second part of the great story of awakening is not about loss or pain but about finding the harmony of our own song within the great song. ...In awakening to this harmony, we discover a treasure hidden in each difficulty. ...In the process of change, there arises an abundance of ... new possibilities, new expressions....

Source: *A Path with Heart*, Jack Kornfield, Bantam Books, 1993

# Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "You are only afraid if you are not in harmony with yourself. People are afraid because they have never owned up to themselves. A whole society composed of men afraid of the unknown within them!" Hermann Hesse



**Day 2:** "Because we all share this planet earth, we have to learn to live in harmony and peace with each other and with nature. This is not just a dream, but a necessity." Dalai Lama XIV

**Day 3:** "There is a balance, a harmony to be nurtured, between the head and the heart. When the intuition rings clear and true, loving impulses are favored." Brian L. Weiss

**Day 4:** "With an eye made quiet by the power of harmony, and the deep power of joy, we see into the life of things." William Wordsworth

**Day 5:** "I want ...to live 'in grace' as much of the time as possible. ...By grace I mean an inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony. ...I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to...." Anne Morrow Lindbergh

**Day 6:** "Give up being right. Instead radiate peace, harmony, love, and laughter from your heart." Deepak Chopra

**Day 7:** "If humans can live in harmony with other forms of life, the world rejoices. If not, the world suffers—and may not survive." T.A. Barron

**Day 8:** "There are two aspects of individual harmony: the harmony between body and soul, and the harmony between individuals. All the tragedy in the world, in the individual and in the multitude, comes from lack of harmony. And harmony is ...given by producing harmony in one's own life." Hazrat Inayat Khan

**Day 9:** "Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance, order, rhythm, and harmony." Orison Swett Marden

**Day 10:** "When we feel, a kind of lyric is sung in our heart. When we think, a kind

of music is played in our mind. In harmony, both create a beautiful symphony of life." Toba Beta

**Day 11:** "How is it they live in such harmony, the billions of stars, when most men can barely go a minute without declaring war in their minds?" Thomas Aquinas

**Day 12:** "Three Rules of Work: Out of clutter find simplicity. From discord find harmony. In the middle of difficulty lies opportunity." Albert Einstein

**Day 13:** "The physical powers of the body cannot be separated from the rationale of the mind and the emotions of the heart. They are one and the same, a compilation of a singular being. It is in the harmony of these three—body, mind, and heart—that we find spirit." R.A. Salvatore

**Day 14:** "We don't get harmony when everybody sings the same note. Only notes that are different can harmonize. The same is true with people." Steve Goodier

**Day 15:** "But life at its best is a creative synthesis of opposites in fruitful harmony." Martin Luther King Jr.

**Day 16:** "Wandering re-establishes the original harmony which once existed between man and the universe." Anatole France

**Day 17:** "The highest education is that which does not merely give us information but makes our life in harmony with all existence." Rabindranath Tagore

**Day 18:** "The search for meaning is really the search for the lost chord. When the lost chord is discovered by humankind, the discord in the world will be healed and the symphony of the universe will come into complete harmony with itself." John O'Donohue

**Day 19:** "Is it always to be a winners-losers world, or can we keep everyone in the game? Do we still have what it takes to find a better way?" Robert Fulghum

**Day 20:** "The harmony that holds the stars on their courses and the flesh on our bones resonates through all creation." Morgan Llywelyn

**Day 21:** "Music, to create harmony, must investigate discord." Plutarch

**Day 22:** "We planned for betrayal. They planned for deceit. No one ever thought to plan for harmony." Jonathan Hickman

**Day 23:** "God against man. Man against God. Man against nature. Nature against man. Nature against God. God against nature. Very funny religion!" D.T. Suzuki

**Day 24:** "The mathematician's patterns, like the painter's or the poet's must be beautiful; the ideas like the colors or the words, must fit together in a harmonious way. Beauty is the first test...." G.H. Hardy

**Day 25:** "The ultimate aim is reverence for the universe. The ultimate aim is love for life. The ultimate aim is harmony within oneself." Helene Cardona

**Day 26:** "Though it might be nice to imagine there once was a time when man lived in harmony with nature, it's not clear that he ever really did." Elizabeth Kolbert

**Day 27:** "Peace is more than the absence of war. Peace is accord. Harmony." Laini Taylor

**Day 28:** "In 1921, a New York rabbi asked Einstein if he believed in God. 'I believe in Spinoza's God,' he answered, 'who reveals himself in the orderly harmony of what exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fates and actions of human beings.'" Jim Holt

**Day 29:** "Peace and harmony do not require perfection. Thank goodness for that—because life so often seems to be an itch here, a glitch there, a mess waiting to happen. Harmony is flexible. It bends with imperfection. So should you." Jerry Spinelli

**Day 30:** "You can not hope to arrive at harmony in your life while stirring up disturbances in another's...." Rasheed Ogunlaru

**Day 31:** "The universe is not required to be in perfect harmony with human ambition." Carl Sagan





## Faith and Theology

### Music and Mediation

Rev. Bret Lortie

...Many have noticed the powerful effects of jazz. Sharon Welch, a professor of religion..., says that she has learned from jazz how to work with limits and opportunities, possibilities and ambiguity, obstacles and challenges. She says it reveals a new model for resolving conflict, even globally. "In jazz," she says, there is a model of "responsiveness without progress or repetition, without self-abnegation or self-righteousness. As part of the cultural resources of Americans, it can lead us into a new way of resolving conflict."

Avant guard composer Jonathan Harvey says that "music is both emotionally intense and possessed of a deep sense of harmony." He points to how music disproves Aristotle's *Law of the Excluded Middle*, which says that a thing cannot be two things at once.... Think of how many times this dualistic notion has gotten our world into trouble. Right versus wrong. Us versus them. Evil doers versus, well, who? But music offers us an alternative, for as Harvey says, if music is to be meaningful, it must be more than one thing at a time. Beautiful and abrasive. Harmonious and dissonant. It must exist in ambiguity....

...When they play, musicians risk their individuality, their sense of autonomy, even their egos. Conflict is inherent in the fabric of what they are doing. In fact, the greater the risk, one might argue, the more powerful the outcome. Think of the John Coltrane piece..., *A Love Supreme*. When that recording was released it blew people's minds. They just hadn't heard anything like it—a fusion of bebop intellectualism, Coltrane's own drive toward unity and healing, and love. ...

What if we could approach all conflict with this in mind? What if we could approach all conflict with the same drive toward healing and unity and love?

Creating music takes commitment. It is more than thinking things through—it's delving into the midst of a complex tradition and feeling your way

through a lifetime of accumulated stories and feelings. I attended a conference ...led by Sharon Welch, titled *Being*

*Good Neighbors in a Brave New World: Truth, Justice, and Jazz*. ...At one point in the weekend we were treated to a demonstration by jazz pianist James Williams, one of Art Blakey's former *Jazz Messengers*.

The concert was an optional evening session.... The concert was a place of risk: what kind of jazz would be played? aren't I too hungry and tired to go? do I even like jazz?

Actually the jazz I listened to that night wasn't easy for me to get into at first. I'm a fan of bebop and free jazz forms where combinations of instruments throw ideas back and forth, build on each other's ideas and references, engage in an intricate challenge and response that ultimately resolves into the great "AH!"—the awesome, "OH YEAH." Here was a single guy sitting at a piano playing from the American songbook. (He later told me he was playing what he thought Unitarians would like.) As the evening progressed, however, I watched this lone piano man start to shift things up a little, respond to us. It all came unglued for me when he played *Old Man River*, with a syncopated on-the-edge-of-the-piano conclusion that pushed right into our zones of risk and said "listen to my history, where I'm coming from."

...What does it take to improvise? First, a respect for the tradition, one we can learn and practice without falling into repetition. Next, a respect for other players. ...Finally, an openness to learning, working with difference and novelty, and practice—lots of practice.

...Jazz teaches us ...transformation: that the social fabric is not held together by our intellectual ideals, but through the reality, and proximity, of people interacting with each other. That is, the ground of social transformation is not the ideal versus the real...—but the real versus the real.

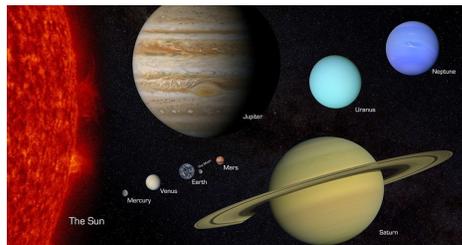
Source: from *Music and Mediation: Resolving Conflict in a Warring World*, <http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/8786.shtml>

## Celestial Harmony

### A Clockwork Universe

Maria Popova

Three centuries before Kepler, Dante had marveled in his *Divine Comedy* at the new clocks ticking in England and Italy: "One wheel moves and drives the other." This marriage of technology and poetry eventually gave rise to the metaphor of the clockwork universe. Before Newton's physics placed this metaphor at the ideological epicenter of the Enlightenment, Kepler bridged the poetic and the scientific. In his first book, *The Cosmographic Mystery*, Kepler picked up the metaphor and stripped it of its divine dimensions, removing God as the clockmaster and instead pointing to a single force operating the heavens.... Kepler ...formulated for the first time the very notion of a force—something that didn't exist for Copernicus.... For him, the planets were horses, whose reins the sun held; for Kepler, they were gears, the sun wound by a physical force.



In the anxious winter of 1617, ... Kepler ...hastens to his mother's witchcraft trial. For this long journey..., Kepler has packed a battered copy of *Dialogue on Ancient and Modern Music* by Vincenzo Galilei, his sometime friend Galileo's father.... Three years later, he would draw on it in composing his own groundbreaking book *The Harmony of the World*, in which he would formulate his third and final law of planetary motion, known as the harmonic law—his exquisite discovery, twenty-two years in the making, of the proportional link between a planet's orbital period and the length of the axis of its orbit. It would help compute, for the first time, the distance of the planets from the sun—he measure of the heavens in an era when the Solar System was thought to be all there was.

Source: *Figuring* by Maria Popova, Pantheon, 2019

# Family Matters

## Harmony in Flowers

Judith Babb

The basic principles of flower arranging have to do with ...form, line, shape, balance, texture, color, unity, proportion, harmony, etc. By following the basics, your flower arrangement will be aesthetically pleasing and visually appealing.

One of the more important principles, one which ties together all the other basics ... is harmony.

...[H]armony in floral arranging is when all the elements used in the arrangement are in complete sync with each other and seem to belong together. When

discussing harmony, you are not only talking about the flowers matching or belonging together, but also the flowers and foliage, the flowers and foliage with the container, the container with the space it has to share, the texture, shape, size, color, etc. ...[A] harmonious floral arrangement is striking to the eye without being over the top and without seeming ... contrived. It should look effortless to the viewer.

...[H]armony in a flower arrangement can easily and best be achieved through color. Color is very often the single most important element contributing to the harmony of your arrangement. By using monochromatic or analogous color combinations, a flower arrangement can look harmonious and visually striking. The simplest way of being sure that your color combinations are going to work is to check their positions on a color wheel. Adjacent colors generally belong together. For a contrast, opposite colors on a color wheel can be used.

Finally, harmony in a floral arrangement is achieved by choosing the right elements and experimenting with different materials, colors, textures, shapes, and styles.



Source: <http://www.artisticflowerarrangements.com/principles-of-flower-arrangement-harmony/>

## Family Activity: Flower Arranging

Two books worth considering on the subject of flower arranging for children are *DIY Flower Arranging for Kids: Book 1* by Mercedes Sarmini, Create Space Independent Publishing Platform, April 4, 2013 and *Ikebana: Create beautiful flower arrangements with this traditional Japanese*

*art* by Shozo Sato (Asian Arts and Crafts for Creative Kids), Tuttle Publishing, July 15, 2004.

The possible family activities within flower arranging are broad. It can be as simple as

looking at pictures together of flower arrangements and sharing which arrangements you especially like and why to watching videos on the internet on flower arranging and *ikebana*, and beginning to create flower arrangements together.

## It's Our Nature

Children's author Rebeca Orozco writes, "In the grasslands, the forests, the deserts, and the seas, animals learn to get along. They tolerate each other's differences and embrace diversity. We are part of the same animal kingdom. We, too, can learn to live in harmony with the world around us!" Her book, *It's Our Nature*, illustrated by Menena Cottin, is for children ages 5 to 8. Appreciating that indigenous people regard animals as spiritual teachers, she explores the social behavior of ten different animals through short, but poetic descriptions of biologically innate animal behaviors. Orozco explains that, "We have a lot in common with animals. We experience love, pain, happiness, and sorrow. Animals do too. We share these feelings and others as well. But animals could show us a thing or two about responsibility,



community, generosity, and tolerance." The animals featured include a howler monkey (altruism), a flamingo (community), a dolphin (communication), an elephant (generosity), an armadillo (responsibility), a crocodile (trust), an octopus (commitment), a penguin (solidarity), a wolf (brotherhood), and a wildebeest (tolerance).

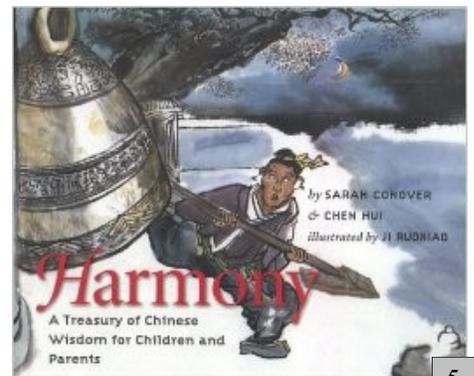
Source: Touchstones

## Family Activity: It's Our Nature

Read the book, *It's Our Nature*. As you focus on each animal, discuss how this trait helps animals get along with each other, which is a basic goal of social harmony among people.

## Family Activity: Harmony

Consider purchasing and reading with your children the book *Harmony: A Treasury of Chinese Wisdom for Children and Parents* by Sarah Conover, Chen Hui, and Ji Ruoxiao, paperback, Skinner House Books, May 1, 2010. It contains 24 popular *chengyu* (i.e., brief sayings about wisdom) from China and the stories based on them.



(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**  
nature.”

Harmony was also important in ancient Greek philosophy. While primarily associated with Pythagoras, it figured in the thought of other philosophers, including Heraclites, who believed that harmony was part of the structure of the cosmos through which opposites were connected: light—dark, good—evil, etc.

East Asian cultures emphasize harmony and responsibility to groups, but Western cultures, especially American culture, are structured around competition and responsibility to self. Harmony for Unitarian Universalists is counter-cultural.

Musically, harmony is defined as the “concord of sounds,” which more broadly relates to a “concord of feeling.” This is instructive since the literal meaning of concord is “hearts together,” as well as “of the same mind.” We can experience harmony both intellectually and affectively. A synonym, balance, is often applied to opposites, but it also can mean “general harmony between parts.”

To fully appreciate the importance of harmony, we would do well to focus on disharmony. It is the difference between ease and dis-ease. In his journal (1845 entry), Thoreau recalls the fable in which Jupiter sent a plague to the island of Aegina that killed all of the inhabitants except Aeacus, who, in turn, prayed to Jupiter to repopulate the island. Jupiter responded to the prayer by turning ants into people. Thoreau wrote, “Still we live meanly, like ants; though the fable tells us that we were long ago changed into men.”

This “ant-like” reality is captured in a cascade of visual images in the 1982 film *Koyaanisqatsi* produced and directed by Godfrey Reggio, which took almost six years to make. The first image in the film is an ancient pictogram by the Fremont



Indians located in the Great Gallery at Horseshoe Canyon in the Canyonlands National Park in Utah. The

film starts slowly, and has a calming effect until a close-up of the Saturn V

rocket during the lift-off of the Apollo 12 mission. This fades into a scene of a desert landscape followed by footage of changing ocean waves and cloud formations. And so it goes. There is no dialogue in this 87 minute film. The soundtrack is a score by Phillip Glass. It accompanies the succession of moving images, many in either slow-motion or time-lapse cinematography. Some of the sequences are of the natural environment, always offering a brief respite, but most focus on human society, and they are jarring. The longest segment of the film at 22 minutes is called The Grid. Its theme is the speed of modern life and the people in this sequence seem little more than ants. (All of these segments are available on YouTube.)

The film asked, “Since this is how we live, we must ask ourselves why?”

*Koyaanisqatsi* is a word from the Hopi language that means “life out of balance” or “life of moral corruption and turmoil.” Thoreau asked, “Why should we be in such desperate haste to succeed, and in such desperate enterprises?” Why, indeed? Another meaning of the Hopi word, which Thoreau would have understood, is “a state of life that calls for another way of living,” one characterized by harmony.

Native American author Tony Hillerman writes, “The Navajo word *hozro* ... means a sort of blend of being in harmony with one’s environment, at peace with one’s circumstances, content with the day, devoid of anger, and free from anxieties.” Our task is to find our *hozro*, our way of living in harmony and in beauty.

Harmony operates on multiple levels: inner harmony (which can also include harmony with the divine), social harmony, and harmony with nature. Ideally, these levels are mutually instructive and reinforcing, yet each is challenging to cultivate. Inner harmony is cultivated through spiritual practice. William James wrote, “Spirituality is the attempt to be in harmony with the unseen order of things.” Social harmony is often achieved through work involving social justice. Harmony with nature, given ecological challenges, is facilitated by a combination of spiritual practice that deepens reverence for life and environmental justice.

### Balance

Rev. Susan Manker-Seale

...My daily spiritual practice is to balance. A major part of that practice involves balancing the busy, taking-for-granted moments of the day with moments to pause and appreciate what is before me in my life.



...Spiritual practices are aimed at helping us understand connectedness, to sense our oneness, to the end that our yearning is appeased in actuality. For whether you call it God/dess, Nature, Spirit, or Oneness (or some other word), the feeling of presence is very real for many of us.

...Out of our busy-ness, we are called back into balance, back into ourselves, and the silence of present being.

... We live our lives too much in a shell built of inattention and distraction.

...The world is full of wonder, if we but stop and pay attention. It is there, waiting to feed us, even in very difficult situations. The day is made up of moments, and each moment can be an eternity of peace to those experiencing pain or grief. They are like blessings, and we count them, one by one throughout the day. They help us keep our balance.

Pause for those moments every so often to listen and to look, to feel and to smell, to taste and to appreciate, to feel thankful for the beauty which is around us even in the smallest grains of red dirt and in the grandest blue of sky. The mundane world is a source of deep spirituality. Notice it, appreciate it, for you are it and it is you.

Source: *Balance* by Susan Manker-Seale in *Everyday Spirituality*, edited by Scott Alexander, 1999

## Spirit of Harmony

### The Woodcarver

Chuang Tzu,  
Taoist philosopher

Khing, the master carver, made a bell stand of precious wood. When it was finished, all who saw it were astounded. They said it must be the work of spirits. The Prince of Lu said to the master carver: "What is your secret?"

Khing replied: "I am only a workman: I have no secret. There is only this: when I began to think about the work you commanded, I guarded my spirit, did not expend it on trifles, that were not to the point. I fasted in order to set my heart at rest. After three days fasting, I had forgotten gain and success. After five days I had forgotten criticism. After seven days I had forgotten my body with all its limbs.

By this time, all thought of your Highness and of the court had faded away. All that might distract me from the work had vanished. I was collected in the single thought of the bell stand.

Then, I went to the forest to see the trees in their own natural state. When the right tree appeared before my eyes, the bell stand also appeared in it, clearly, beyond doubt. All I had to do was to put forth my hand and begin.

If I had not met this particular tree there would have been no bell stand at all. What happened? My own collected thought encountered the hidden potential in the wood; from this live encounter came the harmonious work that you ascribe to the spirits.

Source: *The Active Life*, Parker Palmer, 1990.



## Finding Our Song

### Original Harmony

Rev. David S. Blanchard



On sabbatical in East Africa, I heard a story of a people who believe that we are each created with our own song. Their tradition as a community is to honor that song by singing it as a welcome when a child is born, as a comfort when the child is ill, in celebration when the child marries, and in affirmation and love when death comes.

Most of us were not welcomed ...that way. Few of us ...know our song.

It takes a while for many of us to figure out which is our song, and which is the song that others would like us to sing. Some of us are slow learners. I heard my song not necessarily from doing extraordinary things in exotic places, but also from doing some pretty ordinary things in some routine places. ...What came to astound me was not that the song appeared, but that it was always there.

I figure that the only way I could have known it for my own was if I had heard it before, before memory went to work making sense and order of the mystery of our beginning. Our songs sing back to us something of our essence, something of our truth, something of our uniqueness. When our songs are sung back to us, it is not about approval, but ...recognizing our being and our belonging in the human family.

Source: *A Temporary State of Grace*, Skinner House Books, 1997.

## Why so Beautiful?

### Harmony in Knowing

Robin Wall Kimmerer

...When I ...entered ...forestry school, ...I wanted to study botany ...because I wanted to know why asters and golden-rod looked so beautiful together. These are these amazing displays of this bright, chrome yellow and deep purple of New England aster [growing together] ... I thought that surely in the order and the harmony of the universe, there would be an explanation for why they looked so beautiful together. ...I was told that that was not science, that if I was interested in beauty, I should go to art school.



Which was really demoralizing as a freshman.... As it turns out, there's a very good biophysical explanation for why those plants grow together.... Those complimentary colors ...being opposites on the color wheel ...actually attract far more pollinators than if those two grew apart from one another.

...Science can address, ...as well as artists... [the question,] "Why is the world so beautiful?"

...The place that it became most important to me to start to bring ...ways of knowing back together again is when, as a young Ph.D. botanist, I was invited to a gathering of traditional plant knowledge holders, [i.e., indigenous people]. ...I was just there to listen, and it was such an amazing experience.

...Their education was on the land and with the plants and through the oral tradition. ...It was ...a watershed moment, because it made me remember those things that starting to walk the science path had made me forget.... ...I ...saw that their knowledge was ...whole and richer, and nurturing.... I wanted to do everything that I could to bring those ways of knowing back into harmony.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/programs/robin-wall-kimmerer-the-intelligence-in-all-kinds-of-life-jul2018/>

# Small Group Discussion Guide

## Theme for Discussion Harmony

**Preparation prior to Gathering:** (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

**Business:** Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

**Opening Words:** "One day, I heard a voice inside me sincerely concerned for the future of the earth and humanity. That voice asked, 'Would a world where all life forms on this earth live together in peace and harmony be impossible?' That voice answered, 'If all people really wanted that and chose that kind of world, why wouldn't it come true?'" *Ilchi Lee*

**Chalice Lighting** (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

**Check-In:** How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

**Claim Time for Deeper Listening:** This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

**Read the Wisdom Story:** Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

**Readings from the Common Bowl:** Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

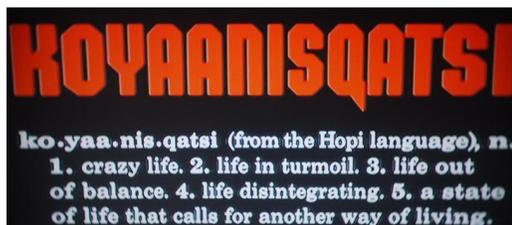
**Sitting In Silence:** Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

**Reading:** "They sang the words in unison, yet somehow created a web of sounds with their voices. It was like hearing a piece of fabric woven with all the colors of a rainbow. I did not know that such

beauty could be formed by the human mouth. I had never heard harmony before." *Anita Diamant*

**Living the Questions:** Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. Is harmony a state of being that you value? Why or why not?
2. When and where have you experienced harmony? Within yourself? With other people? With the natural world? What were these experiences like?
3. Have you experienced dis-harmony in your life? What impact did it have on you?
4. Is your life in or out of balance? What does that look like? Feel like? If your life is out of balance, what do you need to do to get your life in balance?



5. Does the film *Koyaanisqatsi* characterize American society? Why or why not? If it does, what can be done to restore balance?
6. What role can a congregation play in promoting social harmony? Harmony with nature? Inner harmony?
7. How can we teach children to value and cultivate harmony?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

**Deeper Listening:** If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

**Checking-Out:** One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

**Extinguishing Chalice** (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

*We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

**Closing Words** Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

# Lumpy Crossings

## Hill of Harmony

*Pádraig Ó Tuama*

When *Corrymeela*,

Ireland's oldest peace and reconciliation

organization, began in 1965, somebody who didn't have a great understanding of old Irish etymology had said, "Oh, 'Corrymeela' means 'hill of harmony.'" And people were like, "How lovely. Amazing. Hill of harmony. Isn't that delightful?" And about 10 years later, somebody who actually knew what they were talking about when it came to old Irish etymology said, "Well, it's kind of like 'place of lumpy crossings.'" ...And people were like, "Oh, thank God. The place can hold us still because we haven't been great at harmony apart from the occasional song." (Note: Corrymeela was begun by Ray Davey, a former chaplain in World War II, and a group of students from Queens University.)

Source: <https://onbeing.org/programs/padraig-otuumabelonging-creates-and-undoes-us/>



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