

## Abundance, Scarcity, and Pebbles

For most of my life I have viewed situations and people with a lens of abundance and scarcity. I have observed that when people operate out of a sense of abundance, the understanding is that there is plenty or enough that can be shared without a diminishment of quality; when people operate out of a sense of scarcity, the understanding is that there is not enough or things are limited to self and/or select others.

Maybe you have heard the story of two children who saw a huge pile of hay under the tree on Xmas morning. The first child says, "All this hay and no pony. Why is Santa being so mean to me?" The second child says, "Give me a shovel, please. I'm sure that my pony is under the hay somewhere." Same situation, different responses: the first child approaches the hay with a sense of scarcity, without seeing the pony, the child assumes there is only hay and anticipates that Santa is being mean: Scarcity. The second child sees the hay with a sense of joy and confidence, all this hay must indicate the presence of a pony, and only needs a little extra effort to achieve it: Abundance.

One of the reasons I include Universalism in my Unitarian identity is because Universalist theology is grounded in abundance. It starts from the premise that God is love and then has universal salvation at its core. Back in a time when the threat of hellfire and damnation was used to enforce obedience to the orthodox Christian life, the Universalists believed that God loved everyone and therefore everyone went to heaven. In other words, God saves everyone or universal salvation. According to early Christian history, Origen wrote about this in the year 225; one hundred years later, in 325, the Nicene Creed established the dogma of the Trinity; and then 219 years later belief in universal salvation was declared heretical. Over one thousand years followed of persecution, by religious and political powers, of individuals and groups who believed in the abundant power of divine love. This is a gross simplification of history, and I choose to manipulate the historical evidence to make my point for emphasizing Universalism as an abundant part of UU identity. Please forgive me.

Stone Soup is a story that reminds us of the magic of stones to create

delicious lavish soup: the stranger arrives in a village where scarcity rules, each family has less than enough for themselves, and they hide it to keep it safe. By invoking the enchantment of the stone, the stranger entices the villagers to share a variety of tasty ingredients that when cooked together provide a bountiful feast for everyone. Of course, the magic is the movement from fear to acceptance, from scarcity to abundance.

Abundance doesn't always appear beneficial, especially in light of the recent tornado in the Ottawa/Gatineau area: all that heavily devastating rain and the mega-powerful winds created devastation in its wake. For those of us affected by the abundance of extreme weather, it was hard to see the advantage of plenty. And yet, it turned into an opportunity for abundance: the profusion of connection in that people reached out to each other to show concern, consideration, and generosity. There are big and little stories from the tornado. For example, in my building beside Tunny's Pasture we lost power from Friday to Sunday evening, yet there were two outlets in the lobby, powered by a generator where people could charge their phones and boil kettles. It also became a place where we gathered for company instead of rushing through on our various weekend errands and outings. People made a point of knocking on doors to make sure everyone was doing OK. So we had an abundance of human contact, which was very unlike our regular state of affairs. People in Dunrobin commented on this recently when they were interviewed by CBC newscaster, Adrian Harewood. 'We have a stronger sense of community than before.'

The recent legalization of marijuana can also be seen through the lens of abundance and scarcity. Within my ministry of addiction treatment and recovery, I believe that the criminalization of a public health issue is unethical. It is like arresting people for high blood pressure or diabetes; these are also chronic illnesses which need to be treated by making significant life changes. Ending the prohibition of marijuana use in Canada has revealed how many people are smoking or ingesting this drug and no longer in secret. Yes there are problems associated with heavy marijuana use, and there are addiction struggles with legal drugs like alcohol and nicotine. Research shows that 80 to 85 % of people can engage with these substances without developing problems. Ironically,

addiction is a place of scarcity for people who are struggling because there is never enough of the substance to feed the problematic bio-psycho-social cycle in which they are trapped.

Johann Hari has a TED Talk called, "Everything You Think You Know About Addiction is Wrong". He spent three years researching addiction, for his book, "Chasing the Scream" and sums it up in 14 minutes. One of the many insights he shares is that human beings are hard-wired for bonding with each other and with a positive, productive, and valuable sense of ourselves. Addiction happens, in part, because one or both of those needs are lacking; we experience a sense of scarcity. For Mr. Hari the opposite of addiction is connection, or an abundance of bonding with self and others.

When I watched the news coverage of October 17th, I noticed the faces of the people who were protesting the legalization of marijuana use: they looked afraid, angry, and harsh. They were the faces and feelings of scarcity. I understand their perspectives: for some their religion prohibits putting impure substances into their bodies; for others the real effects of dysfunctional drug use have impacted their families in highly negative ways. This was contrasted for me with the joyful demeanor of those waiting in line to purchase their drugs openly, without legal punishment. As one young man said, "I want the money I spend on marijuana to go to the government instead of more nefarious groups." In other words, by paying taxes on his drugs he had a sense of participating in the abundance of contributing to the larger common good.

In the New Testament, there is a story called The Miracle of the Loaves and Fishes. Jesus has been healing many people, according to the bible, 5,000 to 12,000, and his disciples remind him it is time to eat and suggest he send the people away to find their meals. Instead, Jesus says that everyone can eat together, and he takes 2 fish and 5 loaves, gives thanks for them, looks up to heaven, and asks his disciples to distribute the food. The miracle is that everyone ate and there were 12 baskets of leftovers. In seminary, I learned that one way we can understand this story is as an illustration of the generosity of the people, like in Stone Soup, who were moved to contribute as they let go of their fear of not having enough. The miracle is not what Jesus does alone; the

miracle becomes what we can do together.

How do we integrate abundance into our lives. Here is a Hindu story about a child who wanted a drum, from Mark Nepo's book, "Finding Inner Courage": When he asked his mother, she couldn't afford a drum, so, sadly, she gives him a stick. Though he doesn't know what to do with it, he shuffles home and begins to play with the stick. Just then, he encounters an old woman trying to light her *chulha*, her wood stove. The boy freely gives her the stick. She lights her fire, makes some bread, and in return she gives him half a loaf.

Walking on, the boy comes upon a potter's wife, whose child is crying from hunger. The boy freely gives her the bread. In gratitude, she gives him a pot. Though he does not know what to do with it, he carries it along the river, where he sees a washerman and his wife quarreling because the wife broke their one pot. The boy gives them the pot. In return, they give him a coat. Since the boy isn't cold, he carries the coat until he comes to a bridge, where a man is shivering. Riding to town on a horse, the man was attacked and robbed of everything but his horse.

The boy freely gives him the coat. Humbled, the man gives him his horse. Not knowing how to ride, the boy walks the horse into town, where he meets a wedding party with musicians. The bridegroom and his family are all sitting under a tree with long faces. According to custom, the bridegroom is to enter the procession on a horse, which hasn't shown up. The boy freely gives him the horse. Relieved, the bridegroom asks what he can do for the boy. Seeing the drummer surrounded by all his drums, the boy asks for the smallest drum, which the musician gladly gives him.

Here we learn that the longer we let relationships unfold, the more we see the energy of abundance. We can trust that there is always enough, not just for us, for others as well. We have the freedom to let go of something and receive something else. In giving and receiving abundantly, the insecurity and hostility that can accompany scarcity is diminished. We come to see how we are all connected: with a stone soup, through a tornado and its devastation, and a child's longing for a drum.

Abundance, Scarcity, and Pebbles, by Rev. Linda Goonewardene

Meditation Stones: I want to close with a kind of stone communion. There was an invitation to bring a meditation stone for yourself and one to share. Operating on the principle of abundance, we will pass around one wooden bowl, place a stone in the bowl to share, and take a stone for this time of meditation.

**Pastoral Prayer** (Rev. Dr. M. Maureen Killoran - adapted)

Spirit of deep Mystery and Wonder,  
help me to recall that  
I do not need all the answers  
to the questions of the world.  
I cannot heal all the brokenness, this I know.  
That is not mine to try,  
And yet, it is mine to begin...  
Give me courage, Creator, to do my part  
even when the odds are on the other side.

God of Wholeness, give me patience,  
For the world is in transition and  
it is not easy to deal with unmanaged change.

And so I meditate:  
Where there is anger, may there be pardon.  
Where there is despair, may hope take root.  
Where there is loneliness, let love arise this day.  
And where there is scarcity, make room for abundance...

Bless those we love...and those from whom we are estranged...  
Bless all those remembered and those forgotten...  
Bless all the shapes of Life  
This day.  
Blessed Be.