

***“...a thousand gifts will flood the void...”***

Bellingham Unitarian Fellowship ~ [www.buf.org](http://www.buf.org)

April 15, 2018

Rev Paul Beckel

## **WELCOME**

Come, let us make room here for one another  
Let us make room in our hearts both for joy and for sorrow.  
Let's open our minds to the challenge of reason,  
    The disturbance of art  
    The soothing rhythms of nature  
And open our lives to the callings of conscience.

In the presence of risk and beauty and companionship...  
Let's make room for wonder and gratitude.

Open this space  
Release the grip of possession  
A thousand gifts will fill the void.

## **LIGHTING THE CHALICE / COVENANT**

**GATHERING SONG**                      *#347 Gather the Spirit*

**CHILDREN'S FOCUS**                      *Grumpy Pants, by Claire Messer*

**CHILDREN'S BLESSING**                      *From you I receive, to you I give  
Together we share, and from this we live*

## **ANNOUNCEMENTS & GREETINGS**

**ERACISM MINUTE**                      Linda Fels

## **NEW MEMBER CEREMONY**

**READING**                                      *Making Room for the Muse, by Carolyn Koehline*

We need not be afraid.

A thousand gifts will flood the void when we  
Loosen up our grip  
Let our hands fall open.

Too easily we fill our minds our hearts our homes  
With frantic changing on TV crowding jumbo cans from Costco  
Onto shelves squeezed tight and flustered.

If we open up these rooms  
Inside,

Out,  
Make some space between  
The nagging items on our lists

There she will be –  
Our essential, though elaborate friend reminding us  
That if we look beneath the ugly road a true tangled meadow  
Will reveal itself  
Stem by stem, bloom by bloom

Then will come the goddesses who whisper music dream  
Honey, play a delicate shadow symphony leaving us  
Moon drunk to fiddle in our sleep dancers leaping  
Round and round.

The tasks are important.  
Our chores, responsibilities, keep our world in place.

Still  
If we open up some space  
To walk into our lives buck naked,  
Love immensely  
What will leave us,

A thousand gifts will flood the void.  
A thousand gifts will flood the void.

## **WOMEN'S ENSEMBLE**

*Hands Fall Open*, by Carolyn Koehline

## **REFLECTIONS**

When you hear the word “emptiness” do you think of longing, despair, and unfulfilled need? Or do you think of spaciousness, breathing room, open-endedness?

Emptiness is an important concept in Buddhism, and thus, over the millennia, has been interpreted and translated in many different ways. Even the concept of emptiness has been emptied, re-filled, and emptied again one thousand times over. And still there is room in its unboundedness, there is time in its perpetuity.

The concept of emptiness is used, for example, in reference to a state of mind which one might achieve in meditation — not just to achieve some momentary relief from the firestorms of thinking and knowing and thinking that we're knowing, but in order to glimpse the very nature of things: their emptiness.

This is not to say that nothing exists and life is just a dream.

This is not to say that human existence is empty of meaning, but rather that neither substance nor concept can exist as its own independent self. Nothing can exist, nothing does exist without the context that surrounds and shapes it and enables it to be what it is. Enables it to exist within its time and space. In the same way, of course, we do not exist. There is no you, no me, no time, nor even love that can exist on its own. All comes into being as inter-being, in relationship.

Suffering, then, comes from our grasping after things as if they are fixed — such that they might be held, owned, known, possessed by the ego. The breakthrough, the joy, the joke, perhaps, is that when we understand that all is fluid, ungraspable, even inconceivable, this enables us to relax into clarity, compassion and courage.

We cannot begin to imagine the complexity of things and ideas, phenomena in all of their necessary tangled relationships. We cannot begin to imagine the complexities that enable us to exist in this space for this moment. The earth, air, fire, and water, the consciousness, memory, hopes, mistakes accidents, kindnesses, and corruptions that now swirl into being in a perfectly unique moment, now gone.

Nothing *here* exists: the sounds, the light, the hardness of the pews, the distractions of unopened emails, none of these exist in themselves but only in relationship... by themselves only in our imagination, our sense experience, our mental constructs, which themselves do not exist except within the All.

And now even that is gone and reborn. So it will only hurt our brains, and crush our souls, if we imagine we can stop the breath of the universe.

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Perhaps it's for this reason that things become burdensome. Because even though we rely upon things, we rely upon concepts, we rely upon oxygen and nutrition and chocolate, at the same time, these things tie us down. The things we own, own us.

And if we ever become slaves to artificial intelligence it will only be a natural extension of our long having been slaves to plastic toys, credit cards, photographs and memories.

Can I live without stuff? No. Can I live in the void where there is no me?

This is the puzzle: the void is not a form of separation or disconnection. The void is the opposite: it's the possibility that opens to us when we catch a glimpse of understanding that nothing exists except as it is woven into the single garment of the All.

This is the wonder: when no thing gets in the way, no concepts obscure our vision, when the transparency appears, or rather, when the mirage disappears, and we see through to the oneness of everything.

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And so we have dropped bombs again upon our enemies, our neighbors, ourselves. We have

judged and responded in the best way we know how. And when I say “we” I mean Americans and Syrians, Russians and Brits. For none of us exist independent of one another.

To feel the sadness of this moment, its questions and complexities, to feel all of this is perhaps inevitable. But to imagine that it is our fault — or not our fault — is an illusion.

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The void itself does not exist. The void is a metaphor we might allow into the poetry of our lives... alongside that other inescapable metaphor of the world of things, opinions, needs, and desires.

So translating poetry to property and its poignancy, let’s take a moment to consider: is there one thing from which you would like to be released today? Some thing in your life that you’d like to do away with — perhaps as a symbolic gesture, or just to practice the art of letting go?

Is there one thing that you would ordinarily do, or buy or use, or think about *this week* that you could do without? ...Not to make yourself suffer, but for the sake of liberation?

If it’s too hard to commit to one thing, let’s make it easier. Make it one thousand things. No, that’s too hard too. How about a middle path. How about 25 things, and you don’t have to decide yet what they are. But go home pick up a bag, open it to create a void. Pick a number. Then walk around and place that many things into the bag to throw away, or bring to Goodwill. Remember this is just a metaphor. These things have no existence on their own. So you won’t miss them.

Or if they are not things, but fears, or bitternesses, or intangible goods you cling to in order to avoid the void of their absence... can you simply appreciate their passage through your life... somehow knowing that even that which you love will not endure — because it never did?

Your love, your joy, your nemesis, your illness, your generosity, none of these were yours anyway.

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Please read with me, responsively, the words on the cover of the order of service:

When we form a group for sharing silence,  
commitment is essential.

*Our promise to each other is that we will be present to ourselves ... and therefore  
to one another.*

Together we make a holding place,  
much like the stones in a well:

*side by side, they make a containment  
for the living water to rise through the ground*

*so that anyone can draw from it.*

There is no well if the stones are not steady.  
As in all deep things, constancy is necessary.

*Through it we become sturdy, reliable, and trustworthy; and so find our  
groundwater.*

— Gunilla Norris

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I imagine that those of you who just became members of BUF aren't expecting that signing a book and making an annual financial pledge will fulfill you. You have not come to be fulfilled.

Come then, make room. Stand with and for one another as stones in a well. Stand strong. Or, from time to time, if you forget, and imagine yourself tired and alone, envision this not as the burden of standing strong as a stone to hold everyone else up, but as the quietness of resting, secure as a stone held within a web of wellness.

Then let the inspiration — the gifts to flood the void — wash through you. In time, to change you, microscopically, moment by moment. Settle a little, shift, shrug, snuggle.

Listen as the spirit flows around and through you, pouring over our funny shapes and their infinite shapely juxtapositions... to gurgle and sing the song of the universe.

## **SOCIAL and ENVIRONMENTAL JUSTICE COLLECTION**

Eddy Ury – *RE-sources for Sustainable Communities*

### **BENEDICTION**

“The Real Work,” by Wendell Berry

It may be that when we no longer know what to do / we have come our real work,  
and that when we no longer know which way to go / we have come to our real journey.  
The mind that is not baffled is not employed. / The impeded stream is the one that sings.

### **CIRCLE 'ROUND**