

## Our Theme for November 2021

### *Loss*

“It's only after we've lost everything that we're free to do anything.”

Chuck Palahniuk, *Fight Club*

What's the first thing you think of when you see the word *loss*? Most likely, it's the loss of someone's life, perhaps a loved one. Yet from the very beginning of life we experience loss. Yes, right from the moment of birth each of us loses the comfort, warmth, security of the womb. And then life happens with all sorts of losses along the way: we lose a toy, we lose a tooth, we lose a home, we lose a friend, we lose the feeling of innocence, we lose loved ones, we lose money, we lose a job, we lose a marriage, we lose our hair (well, at least some of us), we lose our minds, our dignity, our self-respect, our way, our balance, and, alas, we lose our lives.

The truth as some Eastern religions and philosophies will note, is that we lose each moment, each breath. There are many of these moments we are grateful to see pass by; others we would like to cling to forever. This, Buddha would remind us, is the cause of suffering in life. In the Five Remembrances given by Shakyamuni Buddha and noted in full below, we are reminded that “All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature of change; There is no way to escape being separated from them.” In other words, each of us will experience the loss of everything and everyone that we cherish. There is no avoidance of this.

Our 4th Unitarian Universalist Principle, “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning” relates to this theme. Isn't it just that that we are left with following each loss we experience? We seek a way to find truth and meaning. The Reverend Paige Getty states, “As responsible religious seekers, we recognize that we are privileged to be free, to have resources to pursue life beyond mere survival, to continually search for truth and meaning, to exist beyond bonds of dogma and oppression, and to wrestle freely with truth and meaning as they evolve.” Gratefully we have others in our faith, in our congregation, in our lives to call upon and support us through and beyond loss.

Must we always think of loss as being bad? It seems as if the word just calls for us to be down and gloomy. However, there are losses which we may react to positively such as losing weight, virginity, addictions, compulsions, illusions, ignorance, and burdens. Then, there are some of the tougher losses that frequently lead to what many would call better outcomes...divorce, job loss, etc. (See the reflection below for an example.)

Yes, loss may create a feeling of hurt or pain within us. It may be best to not push that away so quickly. Perhaps it's the lesson life requires of us in that moment. Robert Frost, in his poem, “Servant of Servants,” wrote, “...the best way out is always through.” Let's not be so quick to put the loss away, to justify it, to make it OK, to rush to a remedy, a cure, a fix. What if we took the time to just let it be, let the loss be the loss, let the feelings resulting from the loss just be? Up to now, we have all gotten through the worst day of our lives. We have, from birth, built resilience

in facing loss by getting through it. Patience, understanding, listening, exploring, and sharing loss may guide us forward in our lives and, someday, we will get through it, as we always have.

### **Questions to contemplate:**

1. What is the earliest loss you recall in life? How did you respond to it?
2. What loss are you being with at this time? What loss is visiting you in this moment? What is your response?
3. What losses that, while seeming 'bad' in the moment, turned out to be blessings in disguise?
4. How do you practice, as Frost says, "the best way out is always through?"
5. What are you clinging to so closely now that you are actually losing the full value of? In other words, if you were to let go, even just a bit, would you have more or less of it?

### **Personal Reflection:**

This from Alan Cantor: Many years ago, I was in the midst of experiencing the two greatest and worst losses of my life. Better said, in the moment, they were the greatest losses. Not only was the marriage I was in coming to an end, but I was losing my job. The combination of these two losses led me to a significant life change. As a result of this change, of getting the help that I needed, I lost not only the job and marriage but lots of other thoughts about how my life should be lived. Perhaps the greatest loss I experienced was the 70 pounds that dropped off my body.

The two worst losses turned out to be the best things that happened in my life. Combined, at the age of 36, gave me the greatest gift—the opportunity to live a productive, useful, purposeful, and healthy life. Without those losses, I may very well not be here today. I am grateful for these and other losses in life as, while they seem terrible in the moment, may lead to a fantastic next chapter.

### **Quotations to consider:**

Facing our wounds, our brokenness, and our hurt is not easy, but walking through that pain, a pain which may feel like dying, a pain which may signal the death of something in us, may be the only path to new life. ~ Jason B. Hobbs

Loss of control is always the source of fear. It is also, however, always the source of change. ~ James Ray

"You cannot think or talk yourself into a state of inner security.

Self-convincing never convinces. Recall how often you have tried and failed to do this. Maybe you were worried over losing someone or something important to you. You nervously tried to think of all the good reasons why you would not suffer the loss, but fear persisted. There is a higher way that works every time. It is to be, instead of to do." ~ Vernon Howard

The Five Remembrances (Shakyamuni Buddha, from the Upajjhatthana Sutta) {I am of the nature to grow old;} " There is no way to escape growing old. I am of the nature to have ill

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health; There is no way to escape having ill health. I am of the nature to die; There is no way to escape death. All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature of change; There is no way to escape being separated from them. My deeds are my closest companions. I am born of my deeds; and I am their heir. My deeds are the ground on which I stand.

Everyone must leave something behind when he dies, my grandfather said. A child or a book or a painting or a house or a wall built or a pair of shoes made. Or a garden planted. Something your hand touched some way so your soul has somewhere to go when you die, and when people look at that tree or that flower you planted, you're there. It doesn't matter what you do, he said, so as long as you change something from the way it was before you touched it into something that's like you after you take your hands away. ~ Ray Bradbury, From Fahrenheit 451

### Nothing Gold Can Stay

By Robert Frost

Nature's first green is gold,  
Her hardest hue to hold.  
Her early leaf's a flower;  
But only so an hour.  
Then leaf subsides to leaf,  
So Eden sank to grief,  
So dawn goes down to day  
Nothing gold can stay.

Bad things do happen; how I respond to them defines my character and the quality of my life. I can choose to sit in perpetual sadness, immobilized by the gravity of my loss, or I can choose to rise from the pain and treasure the most precious gift I have—life itself. ~ Walter Anderson

The most beautiful people we have known are those who have known defeat, known suffering, known struggle, known loss and have found their way out of those depths. ~ Elizabeth Kubler-Ross

“You will lose someone you can't live without, and your heart will be badly broken, and the bad news is that you never completely get over the loss of your beloved. But this is also the good news. They live forever in your broken heart that doesn't seal back up. And you come through. It's like having a broken leg that never heals perfectly—that still hurts when the weather gets cold, but you learn to dance with the limp.” ~ Anne Lamott

“Where you used to be, there is a hole in the world, which I find myself constantly walking around in the daytime, and falling in at night. I miss you like hell.” ~ Edna St. Vincent Millay

“Grief does not change you, Hazel. It reveals you.” ~ John Green, *The Fault in Our Stars*

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## PRAYER FOR MEMORIAL SERVICE

Laura Horton-Ludwig

Spirit of Life, Spirit of Love,  
we come today carrying our grief, our memories, and our love.  
We gather around screens and devices,  
reaching out with our minds and hearts  
to join in this most ancient of human customs:  
honoring one whom we loved who has died.  
In this moment, let us know that we are connected  
to all who have ever loved and mourned,  
going back through countless generations,  
reaching back into deep time  
as time stops  
for a moment  
and we are one with the eternal mystery  
of life  
and death.

Breathing in the stillness,  
let us ground down and feel the deep earth supporting us,  
the trees overhead sheltering us,  
the sky above us all connecting us to the universe itself.  
We know so little of where we come from,  
or where we will go when this life is done.

But breathing in the stillness,  
may we know that we are one,  
that we are held,  
that love abides.  
Let us be in silence together,  
each adding our own silent prayers and meditations  
as our hearts lead us.

May it be so. Amen.

“Don’t grieve. Anything you lose comes round in another form.” ~ Rumi  
“Life seems sometimes like nothing more than a series of losses, from beginning to end. That's the given. How you respond to those losses, what you make of what's left, that's the part you have to make up as you go.” ~ Katharine Weber, The Music Lesson

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Forgetfulness: Billy Collins. 1941

The name of the author is the first to go  
followed obediently by the title, the plot,  
the heartbreaking conclusion, the entire novel  
which suddenly becomes one you have never read,  
never even heard of,

as if, one by one, the memories you used to harbor

decided to retire to the southern hemisphere of the brain,  
to a little fishing village where there are no phones.

Long ago you kissed the names of the nine Muses goodbye  
and watched the quadratic equation pack its bag,  
and even now as you memorize the order of the planets,  
something else is slipping away, a state flower perhaps,  
the address of an uncle, the capital of Paraguay.

Whatever it is you are struggling to remember  
it is not poised on the tip of your tongue,  
not even lurking in some obscure corner of your spleen.

It has floated away down a dark mythological river  
whose name begins with an L as far as you can recall,  
well on your own way to oblivion where you will join those  
who have even forgotten how to swim and how to ride a bicycle.

No wonder you rise in the middle of the night  
to look up the date of a famous battle in a book on war.

No wonder the moon in the window seems to have drifted  
out of a love poem that you used to know by heart.

“Despite your best efforts, people are going to be hurt when it's time for them to be hurt.” ~  
Haruki Murakami, Norwegian Wood

“We are all the pieces of what we remember. We hold in ourselves the hopes and fears of those  
who love us. As long as there is love and memory, there is no true loss.” ~ Cassandra Clare, City  
of Heavenly Fire

“Every one of us is losing something precious to us. Lost opportunities, lost possibilities,  
feelings we can never get back again. That's part of what it means to be alive.” ~ Haruki  
Murakami, Kafka on the Shore

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Dalrymple, Jess Jonas, Nora Kempner, and Katherine McHugh (chair).

“At the temple there is a poem called "Loss" carved into the stone. It has three words, but the poet has scratched them out. You cannot read loss, only feel it.” ~ Arthur Golden, *Memoirs of a Geisha*

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