

“According to the Teachers, there is only one thing that all people possess equally. This is their loneliness. No two people on the face of this earth are alike in any one thing except for their loneliness....within [their] desire to be needed and loved.(Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows*, p7).”

These are the words of Native American writer Hyemeyohsts Storm taken from his book *Seven Arrows*.

We all wish to be seen, understood...needed and loved...to break out of our isolation of loneliness. Whether introvert or extrovert, artist or accountant, scientist or singer...none of us want to lead a life under the heavy burden of loneliness.

Although simply a line in a movie, Greta Garbo is famous for saying that line that many thought represented her deepest wishes in real life. She said, “I want to be alone. I just want to be alone (from *Grand Hotel*, 1932).”

Yet wanting to be alone and loneliness are two different things. Many people are quite happy being alone, being with themselves. They may be quite content in their own skin and satisfied with what they make of life as a solitary being.

Loneliness is different. One need not be alone to suffer from loneliness. One need not be an introvert to suffer from loneliness. One may surround oneself with friends, one may be in a committed relationship with a partner, one may be the life of the party yet despite all this, deep inside, they feel empty, isolated, unseen, invisible, unknown. Deep loneliness.

This is sad enough yet it is almost tragic if one doesn't see this for oneself, or if one doesn't know why one feels so lonely. Of course, there could be many reasons, yet perhaps the biggest is that the friendships and relationships one does have simply have no depth to them. No depth, no authenticity, no truth, no meaning. We Unitarian Universalists tend to think about "truth and meaning" as intellectual concepts. Do we feel comfortable thinking about truth and meaning in a relational context?

Maybe we've all experienced this type of deep loneliness. Maybe you're experiencing this right now. I know I've experienced this in my life. Looking back on my loneliness, it could have been of the tragic sort as I didn't see it for myself. I had no idea what to do about it because I was ignorant of it.

Hyemeyohsts Storm goes on to say that "the only way that we can overcome our loneliness is through Touching.(Hyemeyohsts Storm, *Seven Arrows*, p7)."

Touching at times is beyond words...the touch of the hand, a caress, an embrace.

Sometimes our day-to-day words are insufficient. We can't find the words. Feelings are sometimes too complex, too hard to express with mere words.

Yes, touching could say it all; yet, it could also be said that words can name things in ways that no other way can. Don't we all long to hear the words, "I love you"? ...Don't we long to hear it actually said, actually verbalized? Can I truly say, "You are the love of my life" with a hug? Might only words best say, "I'm hurting," "that hurt me deeply," "help"?

"I am worn, I am tired, in my quiet sorrow. Hopelessness will not let me be, help me (Jeannie Gagne.)"

To say such things requires courage - courage to cross the chasm of one's quiet sorrow toward healing.

"If only..." are amongst the saddest, most tragic, words in our language. "If only." And who here hasn't uttered those words at one time or another. There could be a variety of contexts in which this could be expressed, yet in the context of one's relationship with another, in the context of bridging the gap of loneliness with another person, "if only" is a final realization of that tragic ignorance...a realization that the relationship lacks depth, authenticity, truth and meaning.

How can we garner such courage to cross this chasm of one's quiet sorrow? How can we be helped to utter words that heal - words that can dispel ignorance and bring depth, authenticity, truth and meaning?

Words that heal.

- I'm sorry that I was not there for you.
- Knowing what I know now, I wish that I had done better.
- Can you find it in your heart to forgive me?
- Here is how you have helped me.
- What you did meant a lot to me.
- This is what I need from you now.
- Is there anything you want to ask me?
- I won't forget that you were there for me.

Words that heal.

Sharing by Lawton and Linda Etheridge

Litany – “A Place to Forgive and to be Forgiven” by Cathy Cartwright-Chow

Words of the heart were spoken yesterday at Jim and Tanya’s wedding. Here are examples of words that heal taken from their Exchanging of Vows:

- The love and patience you provided to me while I was broken showed me the extraordinary person you are and I want to spend my life with you.
- Your love gives me the tranquility and sense of wholeness I’ve never had before.
- You are a constant source of support, encouragement and good advice
- Your devotion to me (and the puppies) has provided such a warm home for us.

Greta Garbo did say, “There are many things in your heart you can never tell to another person. They are you, your private joys and sorrows, and you can never tell them. You cheapen yourself, the inside of yourself, when you tell them.”

There’s nothing necessarily wrong with keeping your private joys and sorrows to yourself – unless this privacy gnaws at your sense of well-being or prevents the needed healing of another.

I was lucky to survive my loneliness. Somehow, I began to trust myself, love myself, love my life. Maybe without knowing, as a young adult, I began to touch. Maybe without knowing I began to give and expect words that heal in my relationships.

May you have the courage to touch, may you have the courage to surrender to words that heal.

