

Life and Love After Insurrection (1300 words)

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I've recently taken up knitting again. It's very simple knitting, just straight scarves of one skein of yarn. I'm not a skilled knitter, so when I find a mistake, it usually means I have to unravel the whole thing and start again. I'm not looking for perfect, but when I see a mistake, I have to deal with it.

We are witnessing in our country this week an unraveling—an unraveling of norms and assumptions and behavior, an unraveling of laws and precedents, of what constitutes truth within a framework of our human limitations, an unraveling of the “more perfect union” Abraham Lincoln aspired to, imperfect, but in ways always moving toward the greater good for all. We ask, in anguish and fear—where is that union now?

In too many ways, it has been a gut-wrenching and soul-sickening week, though the unraveling did not begin this week, nor this year, nor this presidential cycle. Whichever frame of reference, whichever sources of insight and wisdom you use to make sense of the world, that frame will give you some answer to when the unraveling began. I tend to begin in the 1980s, with the erosion of support for public education after a brief 25 years of fuller access for people of color and the poor, but that's just me. You have your starting points and frameworks and news sources, your own experience and history. Each of these offers answers explaining what you witnessed this week, this year, this electoral cycle, this decade, this century and the last.

We each have our perspective on when the unraveling began, when the social fabric began to fray and tatter. We each rely on sources of authority to frame and inevitably to constrain our thinking and hence our behavior. Maybe the unraveling began as the nuclear family seemed to become less common. Maybe when children didn't play outside until the streetlights came on or their mothers called them for supper. Maybe when the dominating expression of Christianity became more about abortion and less about the social gospel of Jesus. Maybe when hand-held computers and social media became so ubiquitous. Maybe when Europeans began sailing the seas and claiming entire continents for monarchs. Maybe when we stood up and walked on two legs out of the Rift Valley or out of Eden. Maybe when the space aliens arrived and enslaved humans to build pyramids and to take up farming. There are facts and evidence to support any of these notions and more.

And if we are fair, if we are honest, we will admit that facts and evidence only go so far, especially about the space aliens but not only about them. The answers—the reasons we claim something happened—they only go so far. It's the authority that we invest in the processes that produce the answers that we really rely upon. And what particular authority we each invest in, as the source for our answers, that is what we need to question in times such as these. Sources and their authority offer answers, and all of those answers are partial and slanted in one way or another.

Nothing we human beings do is without error, without limitation, without the need to occasionally unravel, if the knitting is to be “more perfect.” But many of us will not question the authority we invest in, and that leads to bigotry, to hardening of positions. An unwillingness to question the authority we

each invest in leads away from the free and responsible search of truth and meaning, our fourth Unitarian Universalist principle.

A large portion of our American population and leadership work from the perspective that America has to be made great again, that America was great at one time and to be great now means to go back to another time. And we know what that time is—not the time children played until the streetlights came on or before social media and held-held computers. The time is before voting rights and efforts toward institutionalized equal social access for people of color, for LGBTQ people, for refugees and migrants. The time is before the acknowledgement of religious expression beyond Christianity. The time is before, when fear of difference and a melting pot mentality discouraged our human and cultural diversity and insisted that one was inherently better than all the others. The time when suppression and oppression was the law of the land. That time is before and that time is also now. America was never America for all, and some in this country, and with great power supporting them, would have it that way forever. They are willing to overturn an election and storm the Capitol to maintain that social reality.

I trust the authority of the rule of law, even though the law is imperfect. I trust the authority of election officials *in toto*, who follow established procedures even though they are only human. I trust the authority of historians and investigative reporters and social critics who look for patterns and evidence both reinforcing and contrary, even though the stories are always subject to change. I trust the authority of the voices of those who are marginalized and oppressed to tell what it is like to be powerless in this country, even though the news can make me uncomfortable and the stories are complex and changeable.

I trust this authority, but I do not rely *only* on this authority. I rely also on principles. I rely on the values of Unitarian Universalism. I affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person. And so, I seek to view with compassion those who are wrong about our democracy, those who are misguided about the election, and who have dangerously placed their faith in grifters and power-mongers. I seek to view such people with compassion—even while I am pulled toward anger and contempt—so that I do not become what I behold. So that I do not fill my heart with the hatred that I witnessed all week long. And I also affirm and promote the independent web of all existence, of which we humans are a part and never apart from.

The first Principle cannot be fulfilled without the seventh. Thus, I am called to hold those who would destroy the promise of our fifth Principle, our democracy, imperfect as it is but worth saving and worth manifesting to wholeness. I am called to hold them accountable for the actions that threaten, in the words of our UUA, the “pursuit of a more just, equitable, multiracial and pluralistic democracy.” And accountability includes not just those who broke windows and took selfies and souvenirs but also all the political leaders who foment lies that usurp the will of the American people.

Our democracy has been unraveling, in part because it never was holding all of the American people in its care. And now it is unraveling because too many seek unthinking, uncritical, racist authoritarian safety and security. Yet, may we unravel so we might repair. In *Healing the Heart of Democracy*, Parker

Palmer defines for us the source of our trouble, and I quote, "It is well known and widely bemoaned that we have neglected our physical infrastructure—the roads, water supplies, and power grids on which our daily lives depend. Even more dangerous is our neglect of democracy's infrastructure, and yet it is barely noticed and rarely discussed." But we have begun discussing it, and the evidence is the election in Georgia, overshadowed this week by insurrection but real and important and impactful.

There's no hole in my head. There are feet going the way I mean to go. Four years ago, when Trump was elected there were those of us who were dismayed. You know what we did? You know what we did. We organized and trained. We networked and phone banked and texted. We canvassed and registered new voters. We educated others and donated. We sign waved and volunteered. We marched and protested. We spoke truth to power. And you know what we didn't do? You know. We didn't stage a violent coup.

May the unraveling be to repair a mistake and not to perpetuate one. May the spirit of life abundant and love unceasing help us choose justice, help us lift up the good and strike down the evil, hold us in our devastation and our fear. As we sing, as we sing for our lives, may our singing move our feet into a dance, a dance that creates justice in a world crying out for more goodness, for holiness and wholeness, not holes in the ground of democracy through which we all might fall. May we find our center, the deepest part of us that remains unmoved by the commotion of the world, that core of being around which we live through faith within the ever-changing nature of the human experience. And in all this tumult, may you remember, today and everyday, that you are loved, you are worthy, you are welcome, and you are needed. May you feel it so. May it be so. And may the people say "Amen."