

Helping Hands

A service by Laurie Stuart

Upper Delaware Unitarian Universalist Fellowship

April 3, 2011

Welcome to the Upper Delaware Unitarian Universalist Fellowship. Today, I am finishing a trilogy of services, Loving heart (All you need is love, February 2011), Open Mind (Open Mind is like a riddle, March 2011) and today's Helping Hands. With this service, I will be presenting the big idea that we need to be helping hands in the world. From there, I will connect how helping hands are connected to how we treat each other, specifically how we communicate. (For the adults, this is the work of Marshall Rosenberg and non-violent communication.) Finally, I want to link it back to the "unrecognized global movement" and the huge number of people and organizations effecting positive change in their communities (from the work of Paul Hawken and his book, Blessed Unrest.)

I like that the tenets of Unitarian Universalist are Loving Heart, Open Mind and Helping Hands. It seems simple to me and also rather profound. By profound, I mean amazing. It's amazing to me that being actualized as a person, being my best self in the world, means that I am loving heart, open mind, and helping hands.

And I admit that it is hard to remember, especially when people around us are not doing what we want them to do.

Here is the song that I made up to help remind myself.

I am loving heart, I am loving heart, I am loving heart, I am.

I am open mind, I am open mind, I am open mind, I am.

I am helping hands, I am helping hands, I am helping hands, I am.

Chalice Lighting

We light this chalice *[make motion of striking match]*

to celebrate Unitarian Universalism *[cup hands in shape of two Us]*

This is the church of the open mind *[place hands over eyes and open like a door]*

the loving hearts, *[cross arms over chest]*

and the helping hands *[hold hands out, palms up]*

We take care of the earth *[make circle with hands]*

and each other. *[Spread out hands in inclusive gesture]*

Candles of Joy and Concern

Offering: I am loving heart, I am open mind, I am helping hands, I am.

Helping Hands/Social Justice: an introduction

To be a helping hand in our world is to make our faith live. To me, helping hands and by provide outward ways for us to bring Unitarian Universalist principles into the world. Consider how helping hands work to respect all people and to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations, consider how helping hands helps us grow and encourages spiritual growth in our congregation. Consider how helping hands helps promote fairness for all. Consider how helping hands promotes the interdependent web of life. Consider this story.

Story: The Clearwater

By Janeen K. Grohsmeyer

In the month of July in 1969, a gigantic rocket was launched into space. It sailed through the darkness away from the Earth, and carried three people to the moon, a quarter of a million miles away. Two people got out of the spaceship and walked on the moon.

It was amazing. Through the ages, people have looked up at the moon and wondered what it would be like to go there. And finally, we had. People had walked on the moon. It wasn't easy. We had to come up with new ideas, figure out new ways of doing, invent new techniques and build new machines. Thousands of people had to work together to make the trip to the moon happen. And we did. We made it happen.

There was another group of people working together to build a ship, and that was another amazing thing that happened in the month of July in 1969. It wasn't as famous, so perhaps you haven't heard of it.

After all, this ship wasn't a space ship, full of new inventions. It was a sailing ship, built like the sailing ships of old, the kind called a sloop. It had wooden beams, strong ropes, and a towering mast more than 100 feet high.

It didn't go to the moon, a quarter of a million miles away. It sailed the Hudson River, 142 miles from the state capital at Albany down to the great port of New York City, and then back again.

It didn't have thundering rockets or powerful thrusters; it had great white sails—like the wings of gull—that caught the breeze and carried it forward on a whisper of the wind.

The name of this ship was the Clearwater, and she still sails the Hudson River today.

Thousands of people worked together to help build the Clearwater , but she started from the idea of just one man. His name was Pete, and he and his family had lived next to the Hudson River for years and years. When they first moved there, after World War II, trees grew all along the banks. Otters slid down the muddy slopes into the water. Fish swam in the river. Birds nested in those trees. The Hudson was a living river.

But as the years went by, people cut down some of the trees and put up oil tanks. They dumped old cars and made a junk heap right across the river from Pete's house. People built factories up and down the river and dumped chemicals into it. People built homes near the river and dumped their dirty water and their garbage in it. Every year, people kept cutting down more trees and dumping in more filth.

After a while, the water got so dirty that the fish couldn't live there anymore. With the fish gone, the otters didn't have anything to eat. With the trees gone, the birds didn't have anyplace to nest. The Hudson River wasn't a living place anymore. It was barely even alive.

Pete knew this was wrong. He knew the fish and the otters and the birds needed a place to live. He knew the trees shouldn't all be cut down. He knew the river should live. He knew the water should run clear again.

So, he decided to make that happen. He decided to build a ship, like the great sailing ships that had traveled the river 100 years ago, back when it was clean and clear. The ship would show people what had been, and what could be again.

That ship would be the Clearwater.

Pete knew he couldn't build a ship all by himself. It takes a lot of work to build a ship, and it takes more than a dozen people just to sail it. He would need help.

He knew he couldn't clean up the river all by himself, either. The Hudson is a long river; a lot of people live near it. All of them would have to help.

So, Pete went to get help. He asked people. He wrote letters to people. He talked to people. But mostly what Pete did was sing to people.

You see, his full name was Pete Seeger, and he'd been a singer and a songwriter all his life. He sang at concerts, at campouts, at meetings, and at temples and chapels and churches—including at least one Unitarian Universalist one. His mother had been a Unitarian, and Pete joined a Unitarian Universalist congregation in New York City and sang there.

He sang in many places, and his songs were for everyone. Maybe you know some of them?

He wrote: If I had a hammer, I'd hammer in the morning...

And he wrote: Where have all the flowers gone, long time passing...

And a lot more. Maybe you've even sung a few of his songs.

Pete knew that music could bring people together. He knew that the words in the songs could help people see a better world. So Pete wrote songs about the river, about the water and the trees, and about what we would have to do to make the water clear again. He traveled all over, singing these songs.

People came from all over to hear him sing, and in his music, they saw a better world. So they gave money to help build the ship Clearwater ; \$60,000 was collected from those concerts. Plus, thousands of people sent in membership money for the Hudson River Sloop Restoration group. In July of 1969 (four years after Pete got the idea, and the same month that people walked on the moon), the ship Clearwater was launched into the Hudson River. She slipped into the water, and her sails caught the breeze, flying like a gull on a whisper of wind.

Less than a year later, in April of 1970, the Clearwater sailed down the Hudson River and out into the Atlantic Ocean, down past New Jersey and Delaware and Virginia, and into the Chesapeake Bay and up the Potomac River, right to the capital of the United States: Washington, DC . Clearwater went to Washington for the very first Earth Day, 40 years ago, to help teach people about how to help keep our land clean and our water clear.

Because Clearwater is more than a special ship. She's a special school. More than 10,000 people go on board every year—all kinds of people—old people, young people, big kids, little kids—and they learn about fish and crabs and water and bubbles and grass and all the things a living river needs. Some of the teenagers get to help sail the Clearwater to different places. They hoist the sails and tie the ropes and scrub the decks, just like real sailors do. They even spend the night on the ship.

And they often sing songs, just like sailors do, just like Pete Seeger. People are still singing his songs, and the Clearwater is still sailing, up and down the Hudson River, 142 miles from the state capital at Albany down to the great port of New York City , and then back again.

She's done a good job. People have done a good job. The Hudson River's cleaner now than it was, all those years ago when Pete first got the idea to build Clearwater . The sky is cleaner, and

the land is cleaner, too. Other rivers are cleaner too. But they're not as clean as they used to be, hundreds of years ago. They're not as clean as they could be. They're not as clean as they ought to be.

That's our job—to make that happen—to make the land clean and the air fresh and the water clear. It may not be easy. We'll have to come up with new ideas, figure out new ways of doing things, invent new techniques, and build new machines. And we'll probably write some new songs. Millions of people will have to work together to make it happen.

And we can do it. After all, we've worked together before to make things happen. We went to the moon! And that was an amazing thing, no doubt about it.

But you know... no one stayed on the moon. They all came home. No one lives on the moon. It has only dry dust and dead rocks. The moon has no air. The moon has no water. The moon has no earth.

We need Earth.

We need Earth to be a living place—our living place—with clean land and fresh air and clear water. Because fish and otters and birds aren't the only ones who live here. We do, too.

Song: If I had a Hammer (Key of C)

Beautiful Hands

She was bewildered. Bewildered and ashamed. The other hands in the classroom were smooth with nails cleanly cut. Hands raised to answer the teacher's question. Hands engaged in the age-old art of spit-ball forming. Hands writing on the blackboard. They all seemed so new, so unused, so beautiful.

May hid her hands. In kindergarten she hid them under the table. In first grade she hid them under the table. In second grade, third grade, and even fourth grade, she hid her hands in this way. Winters were always easier, thanks to Grandma's handmade mittens. Colorful and bold, decorated with baby ducks and later, with purple and blue stripes, the mittens meant May felt no shame walking to school carrying books and lunch for herself and her sister.

Exclamations like, "Oh, how beautiful," and "I wish my grandma would make some mittens with stripes," stirred up hope inside May and for a brief moment she would tell herself she was one of them, for they would forget her hands and remember instead her beautiful mittens.

Back in the classroom, May would catch someone looking in her direction and shove her hands back under the desk. She never raised her hand, never applauded with excitement. She wrote in hurried strokes of the pencil so as not to have her hands in full view for very long.

One day she was walking through the school hallway, with her hands shoved into her pants pockets. In the hallway that day, she saw a poster for an art class. It was a special art class, it was going to be taught by her favorite teacher, and each student was going to be able to learn to draw and paint. She signed her name on the poster and all the way home, she thought about the kind of art project she might make. Her mom worked all night long while she watched her younger sister, and she thought maybe Mom would like a pretty picture to look at when she got home from work. She also thought about how tired Mom was during the day, trying to sleep while the rest of the world was awake, and May thought she might make a "Do-not-disturb!" sign for the front door. And then she remembered her beautiful mittens, and thought she might draw a pattern to send to Grandma so Grandma could make new mittens, even some for her sister.

As soon as May got home, she sat her sister, Kate, at the kitchen table for a snack. As she did the breakfast dishes and tried to keep Kate quiet so they would not wake up Mom, May thought of all the wonderful art projects she could try. May was so busy planning her project, she forgot about her hands. She finished the dishes, got out the mop to clean up the milk that didn't quite make it to Kate's mouth, and chopped potatoes for dinner. Mom was up by now, and was rushing out the door to get to work. Mom kissed May on the head, told the girls she loved them so-o-o-o much, and went off to work.

May helped Kate with her bath, tucked her into bed, made up Mom's bed, and vacuumed the front room. After doing her homework, May went to bed and dreamt of being a famous artist. Everyone in town marveled at her beautiful paintings, she won awards from her school, and even got to give a speech in front of the governor.

When May woke up, she jumped out of bed, excited about the art class. As she braided Kate's hair, she saw her hands and suddenly realized she could not paint or draw without the other children seeing her hands.

She could not get Kate ready fast enough, and practically pulled her all the way to school. May ran to the hallway to cross her name off the poster. It was not there. The poster and sign-up sheet were gone. She went to class and told her teacher she needed to drop out of the art class. The teacher said she would have to go to the art class and tell the art teacher that she was no longer interested in the class.

When May went to the art class that day, she tried to get the teacher's attention, but there were so many other children in the class and such a lot of noise that May decided she would wait until after the class to talk to the art teacher.

After the teacher got the class to quiet down, she talked a little bit about drawing things, how important it was to draw what you saw, even if no one else saw the same thing. She said they would eventually draw their pets and maybe even a family member, but that their first lesson was to draw their own hand. May was stunned, and tried her very best not to cry in front of the other children. Though there were many things she wanted to draw, her hand was certainly not one of them. Still, she did her best though she was ashamed to even look at the rough redness around her nails. She had little bumps on her palms, and the lines in her hands reminded her of Grandma's hands. May finished her drawing and left as quickly as possible, even before the teacher had collected the hand pictures and told them what they would be doing the next day.

The following morning, May was determined to tell the art teacher she could not take the class anymore. When she got to art class, the teacher talked about all the wonderful hand drawings she had gathered from their desks the day before. The art teacher laughed about the hand drawing that showed pink-and purple-dotted fingernails. She laughed about the hand that had diamond rings on every finger, and four diamond rings on the thumb. Then she held up a hand drawing that was familiar to May. It showed a small hand, with fingers curled toward the palm as if holding a precious stone or delicate butterfly. May shoved her hands under the desk, and wanted to crawl under there to hide along with her hands.

The teacher said, "Of all the hand drawings I saw yesterday, this is the one I could not stop looking at. This is an interesting drawing, a beautiful drawing, for it shows a hand that is not idle. It shows a hand that has worked hard. The fingers are curved, as if to protect something fragile." She walked to May's desk, and asked May, "Could I please see your hand?" May did not want to show her hand, but being accustomed to obeying teachers, she pulled her hand out from under the desk. The teacher took May's hand into her own.

"Now," said the teacher, "as I hold in my own hand the hand from this drawing, I can see that I was not wrong. It is a hand that has caressed little kittens and held small daisies. It is a hand that has washed many dishes, folded laundry, given baths, and combed hair. Yes, this is a very interesting hand. It is a beautiful hand."

With that, the teacher went back and started talking about that afternoon's drawing assignment.

After class, May ran all the way home, dragging Kate part of the way, and carrying her the rest of the way. She put the drawing on Mom's bed, and with her rough, red hands, she washed the

dishes, fixed dinner, bathed Kate, and finished her homework. As she lay down in bed, she noticed that the glow from the moon was shining on her hands. They look different tonight.

May thought of the many dishes and counters she washed when Mom was sleeping. She thought of the times she had bathed her sister and cleaned up the house when Mom was at work. She thought about the way her palm fit over Kate's cheek, and how wonderful her sister's skin felt to her hand. She remembered the tender kisses Mommy gave her hands when she came home from work in the dark hours of the early morning. She would hear her mommy say, "Thank you, May, for all your help. I could not do this without you."

Just as the little girl with the red, rough hands was starting to nod off, she looked one more time at her hands. And she smiled, for they really were most interesting hands.

By Barb Pitman, in *uu&me!*
Collected Stories, edited by Betsy Hill Williams
(Boston : Skinner House, 2003).

Homily: The Clearwater and beautiful hands

I like these two stories because it tells us that sometimes we can have an idea and we can get a lot of people to help us. It also tells us that we can just be in our own homes and do what we can to be helping hands to the people who are around us. So helping hands can be both big and small. It can involve a lot of people and it can involve only us. The common thing in both these stories is that at the central place is one person who is helping hands. Think of yourself as that one person.

Now bring into your thinking the idea that our helping hands are made more powerful when we combine it with loving heart, open mind and helping hands.

Musical interlude: I am loving heart; I am open mind, I am helping hands, I am.

Fist ritual: Close your fist. Clench it. Feel your body.

Consider this poem by Mary Oliver

The Fist
There are days
when the sun goes down
like a fist,
though of course

if you see anything
in the heavens
in this way
you had better get

*your eyes checked
or, better still,
your diminished spirit.
The heavens*

*have no fist,
or wouldn't they have been
shaking it
for a thousand years now,*

*and even
longer than that,
at the dull, brutish
ways of mankind –*

*heaven's own
creation?
Instead: such patience!
Such willingness*

*to let us continue!
To hear,
little by little,
the voices –*

*only, so far, in
pockets of the world –
suggesting
the possibilities*

*of peace?
Keep looking.
Behold, how the fist opens
with invitation.*

Non-Violent Communication

For me, when I clench my fist my whole body tenses up. My mind becomes kind of blank and I forget about my loving heart, my open mind. I have angry hands.

This can happen a lot with all of the things going on in our world. And we can easily make a fist and shake it. But shaking our fists is not what the world needs, and I would venture to guess that you would agree with me that it is not helping hands.

Thinking about this puzzle—of combining helping hands with loving heart and open mind—makes me think about the work of Marshall Rosenberg and what he calls non-violent communication. Basically, non-violent communication encourages compassionate understanding. It is a way of relating to ourselves and others by honestly expressing our personal needs and empathizing with the needs of others. People who practice this way of talking to each other (and it does take practice) avoid making judgments or offering criticisms, which often lead to defensive and hostile responses. They learn to identify their needs, express them clearly, and listen actively to the needs of others.

So with that in mind, that it's important how we say things, I am asking you to think about is how you say things and whether you are speaking through your fist or your open hand.

Intro to the prayer for water

I was forwarded an email this week that asked that I take part in a global prayer for the water around the nuclear power plant. Masaru Emoto (Messages from Water) issued a [request for prayers](#) for the waters around the nuclear power plant of Fukushima. He said there was no answer to the unfolding crisis in conventional action and that human energy could affect water even as far away as Japan. He asked that people pray the following message:

“The water of Fukushima Nuclear Plant,
we are sorry to make you suffer.

Please forgive us. We thank you, and we love you.”

So at 12 noon on March 31, 2011, I prayed the words of Masaru Emoto, and in the next moment I prayed this.

Prayer to the water

To the waters of the world, we thank you.

To the waters of the world we bow.

To the waters of the world we pledge our protection,

To the waters of the world we send our love.

And to show you how important it is to pay attention to how we say something, let's sing the prayer again using a different tuning. It sounds different; it evokes different things in us. And it shows us that the way that we say something really makes a difference.

And this brings me to my last point. I wanted to tell you how many other people and organizations are thinking and acting on this very thing. How they can be their best selves in the world, taking care of the earth and each other.

Paul Hawken is an environmentalist, entrepreneur, journalist, and author. He spent over a decade researching organizations dedicated to restoring the environment and fostering social justice. And he found more groups that he could have possibly imagined. These groups collectively comprise the largest movement on earth, a movement that has no name, leader, or location, and that has gone largely ignored by politicians and the media. Like nature itself, it is organizing from the bottom up, in every city, town, and culture and is emerging to be an extraordinary and creative expression of people's needs worldwide.

Wrap up

We have done it. In this time we have talked about the big idea that we need to be helping hands in the world. We connected it to how helping hands have to be linked with loving heart and open mind. We have explored that it is how we treat each other, specifically how we communicate, that makes a real difference and we now understand that we are part of a “unrecognized global movement.”

It is my hope that together with them, we will hug and hold the world in an embrace of love, curiosity and capable and helping hands.

May it be so.

Closing Song: We've got the whole world in our hands.

Benediction:

May we use our loving heart, open minds and helping hands to bless the world with all that we are.