

The Lost and Found of Love

Alison Wohler, February 15, 2009
Unitarian Universalist Society of Amherst

Reading: by Mary Oliver

The Place I Want to Get Back To

*is where
in the pinewoods
in the moments between
the darkness*

*and first light
two deer
came walking down the hill
and when they saw me*

*they said to each other, okay,
this one is okay,
let's see who she is
and why she is sitting*

*on the ground, like that,
so quiet, as if
asleep, or in a dream,
but, anyway, harmless;*

*and so they come
on their slender legs
and gazed upon me
not unlike the way*

*I go out to the dunes and look
and look and look
into the faces of the flowers;
and then one of them leaned forward*

*and nuzzled my hand, and what can my life
bring me that could exceed
that brief moment?
For twenty years*

*I have gone every day to the same woods,
not waiting, exactly, just lingering.
Such gifts, bestowed,
can't be repeated.*

*If you want to talk about this
come to visit. I live in the house
near the corner, which I have named
Gratitude.*

Zelda Fitzgerald said “Nobody has ever measured, not even poets, how much a heart can hold.”

How much longing, how much sorrow, how much joy, how much beauty, how much love? It’s a number even my beloved scientific method will not be able to measure, because it’s a number without limit. Love has no inward or outward bounds. How much can we hold? How much can we give? Sometimes we are convinced that a love “like that” could never happen again. Sometimes we refuse to entertain the thought of ever loving again – what betrayal to the past it would be! Yet often, love comes again.

Hafiz wrote “Admit something: Everyone you see, you say to them, ‘Love me.’” We each need to feel loved.

Mary Oliver wrote “What can my life bring to me that could exceed that brief moment? For twenty years I have gone every day to the same woods, not waiting, exactly, just lingering. Such gifts, bestowed, can’t be repeated.” But we will forever be waiting, just in case.

We spend our lives in The Lost and Found of Love. Lingerin.....

Have you ever lost a glove? Or an earring? These things sometimes show up, due to the sympathetic kindness of a person who finds them, in a box called The Lost and Found. We have one in our meetinghouse office, just in case you didn’t know that little fact.

But there does not seem to be any container in our office, or even one solitary room anywhere, speaking as one who has experience in such things, that could be called The Lost and Found of Love. We are on our own when it comes to love – there is no house keeper of love running around picking up after us, like Mom who always seems to know where we left our shoes the last time we took them off. How is it we manage, with our huge, expansive, loving, breaking hearts, to survive all the love we have lost in our lives – and still have room, and hope, for more? We may not be able to find it, but the Lost and Found of Love must be a big place.

I have lost friends – mostly because they, or I, moved away. Sometimes we have grown apart. They seem lost. But the memories remain. For each and every one of my relationships, even the brief and casual ones, there remains both a joy and a sorrow. Mostly a joy, because that’s the kind of person I am. Forgetting does not seem to be an option. These are the ways we grow our lives.

I have lost pets, and neighbors, professors and colleagues whom I dearly loved. They are nowhere I can find them. But their love has left its mark on me.

I believe that any kind of relationship is a kind of love, because being in relationship is an acknowledgement of our need for each other. Even our dislike for someone is an expression of love for something that person is not, a love of a potential that is not being realized. It would be worse not to care at all. If it didn’t matter to us, we would never dislike anyone.

I, like some of you, have lost a spouse to death. This man, the father of my children, will always be part of my life. We move on, but as people we weren't, before.

We spend our lives in the lost and found of love – and we are changed.

The Mary Oliver book I'm reading from today is called Thirst. It was written at a sad time of loss in the author's life. The poems in this book are about sorrow, and about renewal. I had heard about this book of poetry, put it on a mental list, and apparently, at different times, bought two copies of it in my determination to have it in my library. I've put my second copy of Thirst in our office library here in the meetinghouse. It is a testament to the power of our grief and our will to go on living. Here is another of Mary Oliver's poems, called "A Pretty Song."

*From the complications of loving you
I think there is no end or return.
No answer, no coming out of it.*

*Which is the only way to love, isn't it?
This isn't a playground, this is
earth, our heaven, for a while.*

*Therefore I have given precedence
to all my sudden, sullen, dark moods
that hold you in the center of my world.*

*And I say to my body: grow thinner still.
And I say to my fingers, type me a pretty song.
And I say to my heart: rave on.*

We spend our lives in the lost and found of love – we learn to give ourselves permission to grieve, and then we find that love still exists.

Did you identify with some of the "I Love" activities Debbi and I read out loud for our Intergenerational Sharing? I think this one was my favorite: "After a terrible nightmare, I love when I go into Mama and Papa's room and say 'I want to sleep with you,' and they say, 'Well, what if we sleep with you instead?' And they both get in my bed, and then Papa falls out, and then Mama falls out, and we laugh so much because they want to get back in, but I don't need them anymore." (I Love, by Minne/Natali Fortier) Love is a healing force.

I was once given a book called "15,000 Things to be Happy About" or some such large but totally inadequate number. My friend and I immediately began writing in more things on the blank pages at the end of the list. Love is not just reserved for people, in my book. Just being happy is a form of love, too.

We spend our lives in the lost and found of love – and often are renewed, healed, by the small, or overlooked, opportunities for friendship and happiness that await us.

But at other times, love lost brings with it feelings of regret, remorse, guilt, too much determination, too soon.

“Letter to _____” by Mary Oliver:

*You have broken my heart.
Just as well. Now
I am learning to rise
above all that, learning*

*the thin life, waking up
simply to praise
everything in this world that is
strong and beautiful*

*always – the trees, the rocks,
the fields, the news
from heaven, the laughter
that comes back*

*all the same. Just as well. Time
to read books, rake the lawn
in peace, sweep the floor, scour
the faces of the pans,*

*anything. And I have been so
diligent it is almost
over, I am growing myself
as strong as rock, as a tree*

*which, if I put my arms around it, does not
lean away. It is a
wonderful life. Comfortable.
I read the papers. Maybe*

*I will go on a cruise, maybe I will
cross the entire ocean, more than once.
Whatever you think, I have scarcely
thought of you. Whatever you imagine,*

*it never really happened. Only a few
evenings of nonsense. Whatever you believe –
dear one, dear one –
do not believe this letter.*

We spend our days in The Lost and Found of Love, often not knowing what we should do next.

There have been, of course, many great thinkers on the subject of love.

Alfred Tennyson:

*I hold it true, whate'er befall;
I feel it, when I sorrow most;
'Tis better to have loved and lost
Than never to have loved at all.*

C. S. Lewis:

Why love if losing hurts so much? We love to know that we are not alone.

Elie Wiesel:

The opposite of love is not hate, it's indifference.

Albert Einstein:

Gravitation is not responsible for people falling in love.

Jimi Hendrix:

When the power of love overcomes the love of power the world will know peace.

Mark Twain (as Adam):

After all these years, I see that I was mistaken about Eve in the beginning; it is better to live outside the Garden with her than inside it without her.

Sometimes we spend our time in The Lost and Found of Love and emerge having found ourselves – maybe even our better selves.

And, speaking for the disillusioned in our world, Lily Tomlin said, “*If love is the answer, could you rephrase the question?*” Yes it’s a funny comment that we can all identify with now and then, yet I am sad that there are so many for whom admitting their love for anything or anyone is such a difficult task. Love is neither a disparaging nor a corny four-letter word.

We spend our lives in The Lost and Found of Love, and sometimes emerge with a simple “Yes,” for love itself.

Have you ever fallen out of love with yourself? I think this is an easy thing to do, and I understand how this kind of tragedy can happen. Lost love of self is a serious kind of loneliness. It’s the place we’ve all been and never want to visit again. One can wander the earth, surrounded by love in every form, and be blinded to its presence by depression and despair.

But, and I know this is true, there are guides, maybe angels, awaiting you with open arms and hands and hearts to show you the way back. The Lost and Found of Love can be a place where lives are not only made more whole, but saved as well. This is where a congregation comes in. Sometimes we are the wanderers, sometimes we are the angels. We are all wandering in this Lost and Found together.

If you should find yourself too much alone in the vastness of your solitude, your loss, your uncertainty, please reach out and find a companion with whom to keep going. No one should ever be too much alone. Love abounds, even as it appears to go missing.

With love, from me, on this Valentine's Day weekend.

Closing Words: by Mary Oliver

When the Roses Speak, I Pay Attention

*"As long as we are able to
be extravagant we will be
hugely and damply
extravagant. Then we will drop
foil by foil to the ground. This
is our unalterable task, and we do it
joyfully."*

*And they went on. "Listen,
the heart-shackles are not, as you think,
death, illness, pain,
unrequited hope, not loneliness, but
lassitude, rue, vainglory, fear, anxiety,
selfishness."*

*Their fragrance all the while rising
from their blind bodies, making me
spin with joy.*

References:

The Gift: Poems by Hafiz, the Great Sufi Master, Daniel Ladinsky, Translator, Penguin, 1999.

Thirst, Mary Oliver, Beacon Press, 2007

Love Quotes: www.wisdomquotes.com/cat_love.html