

Balancing
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Years ago, when I lived in Boston, I was in a folk dance performing group, called Mandala. We performed suites of dances from all around the world, including a number from different regions in Mexico. There were a couple of times that I was in our Veracruz suite. The costumes for women included high heeled tap shoes that were made from driving very short nails into the bottom of the soles, so it wasn't a smooth tap, and big huge beautiful white skirts that made half circles of fluffy ruffles when we raised our arms. The best part was that for one dance in the suite, we balanced glasses of water on our heads for the whole dance. When my husband Tadd and I were first dating, almost 20 years ago, I was still dancing with Mandala and he came to see a show. And the water glass dance is the one that has stuck with him. It has become part of our family mythology, and when I am facing something hard, he will say, you danced with a glass of water on your head, you can do this.

It may be important to note that there was no trick, we really were balancing glasses of water on our heads while we danced and tapped around the floor, but there were some things that we did to set ourselves up for success. The first was the most obvious, that we practiced a lot, the second was that the glasses were pretty heavy. They were large glass tumblers, probably intended for something on the rocks. And then there was a very small circle, maybe a half-inch in diameter of sandpaper, glued to the bottom of the water glass, to give a little bit of friction in our hair, which was pulled back. That said, it was really all about the knees. We kept our knees bent, so that our heads could glide through the space with no sudden movements. We never lost a glass in more than 40 years of dancing, or at least, that was what they told me when I started to learn, which was incredibly comforting and confidence building.

Our experience and attention to balance in big and small ways informs all levels of understanding. Attention to balance is vital to our ability to move through the world, literally and metaphorically. In Taoist thought, meaning and harmony is found in the balancing of opposing forces, yin and yang, working together and connecting everything in the universe. As we look to find our way through challenging times, and to find balance, some of what we need are the tools that were part of my water glass story - beginning with hope and the belief that we can do it. Some of what we need is to set ourselves up for success by practicing, adapting our tools to the situation at hand, and learning from people who have done it before. As we are finding our way through whatever we are dealing with, big or little stuff, we can't simply will things to be more simple or different, but our practices can help us move through.

In the last couple of weeks, I have struggled with how to pick what to tackle and how to move through the aggregate of all of the things I need to do or figure out. So I have been using a tool in my box, a practice, which is paying attention to my breath. As I feel the weight of choices and tasks pressing on me, I stop and take some deep breaths. It is some sandpaper and glue on the bottom of my glass. I still have to get through all of the things, they still are there, but this one small practice can make a huge difference. What are those tools for you?

Earlier in worship we wrote down something that we are struggling with and something we hope for. That kind of practice can be helpful in processing challenges. In the exercise that I borrowed from Rev. Erika Hewitt, she quotes Paul Wadell, "Hope has to be seen to be believed. It has to be made visible. It has to be something we can feel and touch. We are called to be

persons who embody hope for one another. We have to be each other's partners in hope."¹ And so we will close that practice that she offered with another tool, one of seeing and being seen. I am going to read through *hopes* on these slips of paper, and after each we can respond, "We hold the hope for you."

[READ]

Let's take a deep breath together.

We hold the hope for you.

I have something to ask of you. If you are here in the room, as you are able, when you leave today, please take a piece of paper with you with another person's struggle and hope, and put it somewhere so you'll encounter it again a few times this week. If you are on Zoom, think back to one of the hopes shared. When you do, imagine that unknown person and their struggle, and send them your loving kindness. Keep holding the hope for them, all week long, and know that your struggle and hope are also being held.

Your love and compassion are gifts to the world toward balancing indifference and hurt. When things feel overwhelming it can be hard to connect with and believe that, and so in those moments, it is time to pull out a tool from your toolbox. It may be something you do by yourself, maybe in community, whatever it is, we all need tools to connect with love, compassion, with what grounds us and gives us hope, with the ultimate, because that comes from inside of each of us. Other people and experiences can remind us, or reflect it back, or make it harder to find, but, it is in *you*. Consider again Chapter 2 of the Tao te Ching:

For being and nonbeing
arise together;
hard and easy
complete each other;
long and short
shape each other;
high and low
depend on each other;
note and voice
make the music together;
before and after
follow each other.

That's why the wise soul
does without doing,
teaches without talking.

The things of this world
exist, they are;
you can't refuse them.

To bear and not to own;
to act and not lay claim;
to do the work and let it go:

¹ <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/ritual/holding-hope-one-another>

for just letting it go
is what makes it stay.²

This is my prayer for us today: May we be attentive to practices that grow our compassion rather than perfection. In releasing our love and compassion, may we be filled. In naming our struggles may we find peace. In listening to others, may we be heard. In seeking our way, may we find our path.

So may it be.
Amen.

² Ursula K. Le Guin translation