

“Here comes the sun!”

A Reflection by
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Here comes the sun! It’s a new year. Dawn comes earlier, twilight later. “Happy New Year!” we proclaim, not knowing what will be, how we’ll be, not knowing who will enter our life, not knowing who will leave life, who will leave us. What can we count on? Sunny days? Cloudy days? Rainy days? Snow and sleet? Yes, yes, yes, and yes.

“Another year has gone,” writes Mary Oliver, “leaving everywhere its rich spiced residues: vines, leaves, the uneaten fruits crumbling damply in the shadows...”

“I try to remember,” she continues, “when time’s measure painfully chafes, for instance when autumn flares out at the last, boisterous and like us longing to stay.” Such was this autumn, for many of us painfully chafed even as it burst into the richest magnificence of colors. How we basked in its beauty. How we embraced the warmth with its trace of crisp. How we marveled at the beauty that could, should somehow, go on and on. How we want whatever is beautiful in our lives to stay. The bittersweet of the season that is autumn is in that blend of radiance and shadow, those rays of sunshine dancing off leaves that become most glorious as only the most focused observer notices how they’re curling at the edges, signaling certain departure.

For a family in our midst and for this church family, such was the seasonal shift of this autumn. It’s time to talk about it. It’s time, especially as we begin a new year; for just because autumn is no longer with us in its glory, I believe it remains with us in the sense of loss that this past autumn holds—specifically, early October.

“We laugh, we cry, we live, we die;
we dance, we sing our song.”

We do and she did. She laughed with us; she cried with us. She lived and danced and sang with us. You, all who knew her, hold her in your heart. You, our children, know perhaps more than any of us how present she was—cheering you up when you were down; cheering you on, when you doubted whether you could do whatever; speaking softly when soft was just what you needed; and breaking forth with a smile that lit up your classroom, this sanctuary, our lives. We miss her. We love her. For those of you who are new this morning, I speak of Megumi Yamamoto, a much-loved member, teacher, mother, mentor, and friend, who died suddenly this past October.

Here comes the sun! Are you sure? It didn't and sometimes still doesn't feel like it; for Megumi all but held hands with the sun. We could count on both. And then, the sun rose one morning without her. How did it happen? All that we know is that it was an accident. She was missing; she was found. She is now missed, sorely missed. She is found in our hearts that open again and again, in our tears that unexpectedly stream down our cheeks, in the questioning of why; the response seems only to be another why.

We sang on: "Our lives are full of wonder and our time is very brief. The death of one among us fills us all with pain and grief."

Before we get to any "yeah buts" in the mood of this song, stay as long as you need to with the pain and grief. There is no timeline for either.

It's a new year, and the sun did rise this morning; but for some of us, the sun rises with clouds and the clouds produce rain and the rain is what runs down our cheeks in our times of greatest longing.

Might we all be who we are, where we are, wondering that we are and that she is not as we would wish she were—here, right here in our midst. Yes, she is in our hearts. It's just that sometimes that doesn't feel like enough. So might we feel what we feel as we feel it and know that it comes from the deep rivers of our love; and love always carries the seedlings of hope—hope for comfort, hope for serenity, and trust that the legacy of one we love lives on.

I don't know for sure what Megumi's favorite bird was, but I'm guessing, just guessing that it might be a crane. Do you remember the origami cranes that she made with her mother? In Japan, where she was born, the crane is a symbol of peace.

Writer Margaret Renkl recalls a New Year's tradition among bird-watchers.

"The first bird you see on New Year's Day is your theme bird for the Year: Your spirit bird, the bird that sets the tone for your encounters with the world and with others, the bird that guides your heart and your imagination in the coming year."

We don't have to be bird-watchers to notice, to notice and remember that the crane as a symbol of peace soared through Megumi's life. I wonder when she felt down, like the sun hadn't come up at all, if a tiny crane ever so gently coaxed her into trust that peace was possible. The chill and stubborn darkness of these early January days can haunt like an icicle refusing to melt. "Winter," remarks Renkl, "is not generally a season that inspires a sense of hope," and hope we need in our darkest chilliest days. "In winter," she continues, "the world is fast asleep. Except it's not." Renkl's ritual for the new year is to walk around her neighborhood, searching for signs of spring. "They're always there," she notes, clearly from experience. "They're always there, perfectly clear to anyone who's looking."

I wonder if Megumi's theme-bird was a crane. And I wonder if when she least expected it, it soared through the great mystery in new form—not as a sign of peace, but as the presence of peace. And I wonder if we might find some precious moments of peace, in the midst of our lingering grief, if we went for a walk—yes, in these early days of January—looking for signs of

spring. If you can't find any right away, just imagine. Imagine a tiny bud astride a branch otherwise glazed with ice. Imagine a robin perched on a nearby roof—that early bird looking for a worm. Imagine a ray of sun wrapping you in warmth like a cloak of spun gold.

And imagine the love you have known and still hold from all you have loved and lost and from each and every person who loves you so very much. Now feel it, because that love is real.

As Kasey Jalbert read earlier, “we stand at a threshold, the new year something truly new, unformed, leaving a stunning power in our hands: What shall we do with this great gift of Time, this year?”

May we reflect with grace on the time that is past and stretch into the light of hope that is dawn.

So may it be and Amen.

Sources:

Mary Oliver, “Fall Song” in *American Primitive*, Little, Brown & Company, 1983.

Margaret Renkl, “Spring Is Coming”, *The New York Times* Op-Ed, Saturday, January 5, 2019.

“We Laugh, We Cry”, Words and music by Shelley Jackson Dunham, in *Singing the Living Tradition*, Beacon Press, Boston, The Unitarian Universalist Association, 1993, 354.