

No God Worthy to Preside Over This Art

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Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley
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All children are artists.

The problem is how to remain an artist once one grows up.

— Pablo Picasso

*The intuitive mind is a sacred gift and the rational mind
is a faithful servant. We have created a society that honors the servant
and has forgotten the gift.*

— Albert Einstein

La Loba¹

In variations of the story, a wolf woman, La Loba, lives in broken granite of Tarahumara Indian territory; she's buried in a well outside Phoenix; been seen in a car with the back window shot out, traveling toward Monte Alban; standing by the highway near El Paso; riding shotgun with truckers in Mexico; or walking to the market in Oaxaca carrying firewood on her back.

La Loba's only task is to collect the bones of animals that are in danger of being lost from our world. Her cave is filled with bones of many animals, but true to her name, she specializes in the bones of wolves, wandering the desert from mountaintop to dry riverbed in search of wolf bones that she brings back to her cave.

When she has assembled an entire wolf skeleton, she puts the bones in proper relationship to each other forming a beautiful white sculpture, then sits near the fire and contemplates which song to sing to the bones.

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When La Loba is certain of the correct song, she stands over the bones, lifts her arms high, and sings out. The rib bones and the leg bones start to get flesh on them and the creature becomes furry. She sings more: the tail curls upward, shaggy and strong. La Loba sings more and the creature starts to breathe. She sings even more, strongly enough that the desert shakes. The wolf opens its eyes, leaps to its feet, and runs out of La Loba's cave and down the canyon.

Suddenly, perhaps just from the speed of running and the wind rushing by, or splashing through river water, or when struck by a moon-beam or ray of sunlight, the wolf is transformed into a laughing woman.

Ezekiel 37: 1-14 (NRSV)

The hand of the Lord came upon me, and he brought me out by the spirit of the Lord and set me down in the middle of a valley; it was full of bones. He led me all around them; there were very many lying in the valley, and they were very dry.

He said to me, "Mortal, can these bones live?"

I answered, "O Lord God, you know."

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to these bones, and say to them: O dry bones, hear the word of the Lord. Thus says the Lord God to these bones: I will cause breath to enter you, and you shall live. I will lay sinews on you, and will cause flesh to come upon you, and cover you with skin, and put breath in you, and you shall live; and you shall know that I am the Lord."

So I prophesied as I had been commanded; and as I prophesied, suddenly there was a noise, a rattling, and the bones came together, bone to its bone. I looked, and there were sinews on them, and flesh had come upon them, and skin had covered them; but there was no breath in them.

Then he said to me, "Prophecy to the breath, prophesy, mortal, and say to the breath: Thus says the Lord God: Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe upon these slain, that they may live."

I prophesied as he commanded me, and the breath came into them, and they lived, and stood on their feet, a vast multitude.

Then he said to me, "Mortal, these bones are the whole house of Israel. They say, 'Our bones are dried up, and our hope is lost; we are cut off completely.' Therefore prophesy, and say to them, Thus says the Lord God: I am going to open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people; and I will bring you back to the land of Israel. And you shall know that I am the Lord, when I open your graves, and bring you up from your graves, O my people. I will put my spirit within you, and you shall live, and I will place you on your own soil; then you shall know that I, the Lord, have spoken and will act," says the Lord.

Sermon Duane Fickeisen

Like much of the oral tradition of myth and story, the tales of dry bones coming to life are archetypal. In the story of the wolf woman, La Loba, magic is at work as she sings life into the wolf bones and when the wolves are transformed into women.

In the Hebrew Scriptures the dry bones Ezekiel comes upon in the desert return to life as he casts a prophetic vision over them.

Both stories recognize that transformation is not a casual act, but requires faith and persistence. La Loba works hard to find, collect, sort, and assemble wolf bones, and she doesn't start singing until she is certain that she has the right song for the work. Ezekiel's prophesying requires the encouragement and coaching of God. Both Ezekiel and La Loba call upon sources outside themselves or from a place deep within the subconscious that most of us aren't used to touching.

In both stories the protagonist responds to early signs of awakening and transformation by raising the effort. La Loba's song becomes so strong that the very desert shakes.

There is a critical point in each of the stories when breath comes into the emerging being. The Hebrew word that is translated as breath is *ruach*, which also means spirit or wind, and it is related to words for thunder and voice.

There is power in this spirit. Power to effect transformation, to bring new life, to re-animate even dry bones. It is an awesome power.

Hear the Ezekiel story as the prophet's metaphoric language. The dry bones represent people in exile, and the story is about the

power of leadership through vision to resurrect hope. Having given up hope and without vision, the people had as good as perished. They would be lifted from their moribund, depressed state if they chose to act on the vision Ezekiel cast.

And hear it in the context of today's world. Don't we long for a fresh vision, a new approach, leadership that promises a renewal of spirit and the return of the breath of life? For the fresh gust of honesty, accountability, and responsibility in leadership — in governmental, corporate, religious, and philanthropic realms?

Each of us is a creative being. We've had the potential to be creative since childhood. That creative potential represents an opportunity for transformation. Unitarian Universalist author Richard Kimball asserts "You are, can be, and should be one of the creative forces in the world — for its sake, and for yours."

In his book, *The Winds of Creativity*, Kimball writes, "We have all felt the winds of creativity and the spirit they bring." They represent "the place where we and the gods are one."

Rollo May found that problematic: "Creativity invokes the jealousy of the gods. That is why authentic creativity takes so much courage: an active battle with the gods is occurring," he wrote.

Or maybe not. Richard Kimball says on the contrary, the creative forces within us don't ask us to fight. These gods and goddesses ask us to dance with them — to collaborate, not to battle. He says we flee from their embrace because we fear the power of creativity. The active battle isn't their making, but ours.

Eliza Farnham, a 19th century feminist and reformer, had a different vision. She wrote, "Each of the arts whose office is to refine, purify, adorn, embellish and grace life is under the patronage of a muse, no god being found worthy to preside over them."

Is it the muse of song or a goddess that La Loba invokes as she sits by her fire discerning the correct song to sing over the gathered bones? Maybe we can't know and must simply enter the realm of mystery that is the home for creativity with a radical faith, open and receptive to whatever happens. We are trained well in the Western paradigm to assign cause and effect, to ask 'why' and 'how' questions and to demand rational explanation. But too often we miss major learning that could be ours if we

would embrace mystery and ambiguity and ask “What does this mean?”

We do know how to enter that realm. We’ve been there before. It takes some patience and persistence, some gathering and arranging of dry bones perhaps, and maybe a spell of sitting in the cave or by the fire, but you each have an awesome innate capacity for creativity.

We — your own self, this beloved community, the world — need your creativity now. There’s plenty of trouble in our world, places where we’re stuck and have lost hope. We need a fresh vision and a prophetic voice to lead us back from this exile. To breathe new life into our dry bones, to put new flesh on them, to make our tails curl up strong and furry, to cause us to rise up from our graves and reclaim our homeland. We need to wake up, to find novel solutions, to embrace life with courage, compassion, and commitment.

When we use our creativity, when we let it loose, whether to sing over a collection of wolf bones or give voice to our wild vision for the future in prophecy, we are touching the high-tension line of the power of ruach, tapping into something that has the potential to jolt us into new awareness. To breath new life into us.

This power is so awesome that we are also cautioned by the tale of La Loba to pause for guidance — to wait until we are certain — before we start singing.

One path of spiritual practice that nourishes creativity is that of collage making. SoulCollage™ was introduced to UUCV several months ago by our then student minister, Kathy Ellis. Dot’s going to give you an introduction to the process in a few minutes and some of us will describe our work. The process involves gathering and collecting images (our wolf bones) cut from magazines or other sources, then combining them to make cards that represent archetypes, companions on the journey, spirit guides, helpers, and challengers and giving them meaning through our own reflection on them.

You’ll also have an opportunity to experience your own creativity in a guided meditation.

Barry Lopez writes in his short story, “The Orrery,” about a place in the desert north of Tucson, called The Fields.² A strange and wondrous wind blows there. There is a mysterious quality to

the wind. It is intoxicating, with a quality of wild refinement, "like horses turning around suddenly in the air by your ear." But if you turn to face it, it diminishes as if "someone had exhaled through silk."

On a visit to the area, Lopez saw a man who lives nearby sweeping a large area of the desert with a broom. There was no vegetation in the swept area, only bits of rock and loose soil. He danced with the broom as if to some wondrous music.

Lopez returned and spent an afternoon with the man. After supper and conversation, Lopez asked him if the winds seemed strange to him there, and he answered "Yes" as they stepped out into the garden, bright with moonlight, indicating that Lopez should follow.

The man led him through the garden and out to the swept area. Motioning Lopez to halt, the man stepped from the night's calm into hurricane force winds and bent down to arrange several stones. The stones lifted off the desert into the night air, riding on the wind to form an arc in the sky, a giant pinwheel five hundred yards across. The stones began to glow as they formed a model of the universe and solar system.

"This is beyond — I can't believe this," Lopez said.

"Yes. Yes, I know. If one is patient — if you are careful — I think there is probably nothing that cannot be retrieved."

Anything is possible. Set your creativity loose — you deserve it's benefits and the world needs them. Amen.

SoulCollage by Dot Everhart

SoulCollage is a creative process developed by Seena B. Frost of California, who describes it as an imaginative and intuitive process where we make something unique, something that never existed before. It is a process that takes us to those "inner worlds" we seldom take the time to explore. And it is an intuitive process that encourages us to activate our innate intuition as we spend time listening to our deepest self.

After we have made the cards, we can use them individually as a single card to meditate on the images there or in a layout, similar to the Runes or Tarot card layouts to go more deeply into

our own inner life story, where we gain insights into our spiritual, emotional, cognitive and physical selves. We can also use them with other trusted people in small groups, where we share how the card was created and what the images mean to us—or offer others insights about what we see their creations and what we hear in their meditations and interpretations.

Last fall, Kathy Ellis invited us to explore SoulCollage as a spiritual practice and lead us in an introductory workshop. We came to UUCV on a Saturday morning to learn about the process as part of a one-day, adult religious education program. While Kathy did not start the program with a warning that Soul Collage can be habit-forming or even addictive, most of us left the experience “hooked” and excited about finding a new (to us, at least, process by which we could grow spiritually as individuals and relationally as a small group. Since then, we have met about once a month and many of us connect with one another through emails and phone calls to share news about found images and new cards and techniques and strategies that seem to work and those that seem to be less than helpful.

With each card, there is an “I am One who...” statement that explains the meaning of the card. These are often collected in a journal or notebook. Some write their statements on file cards and keep them close to their deck for reference. Some restate their “I am One who” each time they use the card in a reading—allowing the images to speak to them anew.

We’ve wanted to share this dynamic spiritual practice with you. As you have already learned this morning, there are four suits in a SoulCollage deck and a Source card—or two or three. You see, that’s one of the refreshing things about SoulCollage—while there are suggested “rules” or structure that can guide or facilitate the process, there is also freedom and encouragement to follow your own art, if you will. The rule says, all card should be the same size and shape, without images extending beyond the edges, so that when turned face down, they can be identified by their suit, but not as the specific card—yet, some have found it worked best on a card to have an image extend out beyond the edge of the card, and Duane even was so bold and creative as to shape his first Source Card as a circle!

Let’s start with the Source card, which Seena suggests might be the first card each practitioner endeavors to make—and also

warns that we might find ourselves creating more than one Source card to represent different images of the Source—for as she says, “The Source Card in represents “the oneness beyond dimension.” There really is no image that goes with Source because it is without form, and not accessed with our five senses.

If you think of Source as “God,” try not to limit your definition of that God. Source is not like a God who exists separate from us as a supreme being, loves us, and judges us. Instead, Source is One. It is the Source of all life. It is that which every living thing comes from, and to which every living being returns when life is over.

The Source Card, when created, is placed in the center of a SoulCollage reading to symbolize the oneness of all the guides and challengers represented on the other cards in a deck. The Source Card does not have a voice itself, so it isn’t questioned or consulted. Its reality is known through the voices of all the other guides and allies represented in a person’s SoulCollage deck.

The first suit is called the Committee Suit and represents the different parts of our selves that seem to form an inner committee—which might at times organize our energies into a productive force and at other times seem to fragment or split our whole Self into so many different aspects or parts. I expect to have a Committee card for my Cook, and one for my Reader, and one for my Teacher, and one for my Preacher, and one for my musician. There will likely NOT be a card in my deck called “The Runner” or “The Stair-stepper.” Get the picture?

The second suit is called the Community Suit and represents the actual physical communities or virtual communities in which we participate, or which have helped to shape us. So, I will have a card for the community of my birth family, and one for Wellsboro, where I lived and worked for 24 years of my life. I’ll also seek to create one for this beloved community of UUCV.

The Community card I brought to share with you today is one I created about our SoulCollage group to send to Seena Frost on her 75th birthday in April. It has a celebratory feel and uses the fireworks suggested by Anne Gero and the animal images each of the other members chose to represent themselves—or should I more correctly say, the animal energies that chose us in one way or another. This card was created in PowerPoint on my computer, so that it could easily be sent to the folks who were honor-

ing Seena with a birthday party. Many practitioners think the computer is too mechanical for this type of artistic and intuitive endeavor, but I found the same centering energy coming into me as I worked to create in this media. The key here is to have enough facility with the technology that you can manipulate and move images on the screen with as much adroitness as you can on the table.

The “I am One who” statement reads like this:

“We are ones from the Unitarian Universalists of the Cumberland Valley (in Boiling Springs, PA) who join to celebrate your 75th birthday, Seena, with gratitude for your gift of Soul Collage Cards! We are ones who gather on the first Saturday morning of each month to create Soul Collage Cards. We are leopard, elephant, mountain lion, frog, crow, raven and firework energy.”

The third suit is the Companion Suit, sometimes referred to as the “Chakra Allies.” This suit contains cards for those animal guides and energies which seem to speak to us as in metaphorical ways and link us to the universal images and energies of each of the seven chakras. These energy centers were identified in the body by the Eastern mystics and yoga practitioners. The specific animal image that is linked to each chakra is discovered in guided imaging or meditation. Seena provides a script for this guided visualization and many members of our group have found it helpful and at the same time a curious process of discovering which animal comes to visit us at each energy center, what gift the animal guide presents and what he animal guide might want from us and how we might remember each visitation. May sound too New Age for some of us, but for many, it links us to the ancient yogic practices and sensitivities. For some, it is a rediscovering or Native American totem animals that speak to us with powerful, transformative messages.

The fourth suit is the Council Suit. This suit helps us represent those archetypal images—which Carl Jung described as universally recognized metaphors for many of the significant human experiences and awarenesses. Some make a card to signify Death, others have cards for the Great Mother, the Eternal Father, Goddesses and God-images from various cultures, The Child, The Maiden, The Warrior, the Crone, the Shaman, the Hero, the Fool, The Witch, The Healer, The Teacher. I’m working on a four-card series for each of the Solstices and Equinoxes. Perhaps later, I’ll

add cards for each of the mid-point festivals of the nature-based calendar.

This is structure suggested by Seena Frost, the originator of SoulCollage--- but Seena is also quick to encourage SoulCollagers to consider other suits that might be significant an meaningful for their own practice. Some create specific cards to capture images and meaning of dreams or nightmares, and have a Dream Suit. Some choose to commemorate specific important life events with a card, and call these their Life Cards. Some have a suit of Special Places cards.

We wanted to offer you a chance to experience a creative process this morning, so we've provided a blank piece of paper and while Carole is playing some meditative music, I will lead you in a guided imagery or visualization. After the guided meditation, you may want to quickly capture what you experienced by drawing some images on the paper. Perhaps later, you will find yourself looking for these images as you page through magazines or sort through the junk mail on the way to the recycling bin. It's amazing where we find images and simply astounding to me, how the process of clipping and sorting images can be as centering and energizing as the actual card creation process.

Guided Meditation by Dot Everhart

So, let's begin by getting as comfortable as we can where we are sitting right now. Feel free to shake out any tension you feel or to move around in your seat until you are comfortable and when you find that place, you might want to gently close your eyes and begin to focus on your breathing. Notice whether you are breathing slowly or with pressure; whether your breaths are deep and slow or quick and shallow. Don't try to control your breathing, just let it happen and notice the rhythm of the in and out movement and feel yourself beginning to center and to relax into this mindfulness.

We're going to briefly visit each of the suits so you can discover what images might be located in each of these divisions and might capture meaningful images that your might want to pursue later on. If you feel compelled by a powerful image, you may certainly leave the meditation by opening your eyes and focusing

your attention on your blank piece of paper and use the time to record what you saw.

Think now about what comes to your mind when you hear the word "Source." What images do you see? Or is it a color or a shape? Is there only one image or are there several or does your mind fill with a kaleidoscope of images? Sit for a minute with this question: "What is the Source in my mind's eye?" "What does it look like?" "How does it feel?"

Now think about your inner Self and all of the parts you know that make up the whole of who you are. Who are some of the members of your Committee? By what names do you know them? What images represent who they are...who you are? What colors go with each image that suggests itself to you as an important member of your interior committee? Who are the members others recognize? Are there some that only you know are part of you?

Now watch and see who comes to mind as we shift our focus from the Committee Suit to discover our communities. Is there only one? Are there several? Are we struck by many images of groups that have created us and even now helping us to be/become who we are? How do we see these various communities? What are the images that represent them?

Now as you straighten your spine, get in touch with the cord of energy that flows up from your seat where your first chakra vibrates with its red color through each of the colors of the rainbow and each of the seven energy centers. As you get in touch with this pathway of energy, what animal guides come to sit with you and share this space? Wait for them to show themselves—don't force them to appear or be disappointed if they do not come to visit today. They might be waiting for another time when you are less distracted and less rushed and can visit with them for a while, discovering gifts they bring and questions they ask or answers they reveal. For this moment, know this energy cord vibrates with powerful images and meaning and welcomes your return.

And now, as we move to the fourth suit, what archetypes appear as members of your Council Suit? Who comes to share with you an image that connects your individual life to the universal human metaphors that share deep meaning? By what names do

you call these archetypes? What feelings come with them? What colors or objects do they have to offer you?

And as we bring our guided meditation time to its close, I invite you to sit a moment longer with your thoughts and feelings and to use the paper here to capture and record whatever you want to remember from this time. Your Source? Your Committee? Your Community? Your Companions? Your Council? Perhaps there are many images you want to record—or only one or two. Perhaps none came to your mind's eye today, but you have felt the inner peace that comes with mindful meditation—if only for a few minutes.

¹ Adapted from *Women Who Run With The Wolves* by Clarissa Pinkola Estés (New York: Ballantine Books, 1992) pp. 27-28.

² Adapted from "The Orrery" by Barry Lopez pp. 37ff in *Winter Count* (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1981).