

Enjoying Humble Pie

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By Emily DeTar

My mom gave me many things to be grateful about, but one of the things I will always be thankful for is the gift of this pie recipe. I remember my mom teaching me how to make an apple pie from scratch. She had her few tricks and techniques for how to transfer the dough, ways to make the dough just wet enough to make it stretch over the pan, but so dry that it would come such. Crumbly delicious notes to the apples. It has been the pie of Thanksgivings, the pie of friend's gatherings, the pie of late night college hang outs. And I have certainly enjoyed it. I have certainly enjoyed this humble pie.

But that's not usually how people interpret the phrase, humble pie. In fact, I believe people give humility a bad rap. People talk about handing out humility like some sort of judgement call and convicted punishment. In fact, usually the phrase evokes the opposite of humility, with a sense of self-righteous declaration that someone else needs to be humble. However, humility, and even atonement, accountability, and asking for forgiveness, doesn't have to be some big bad monster. Humility isn't only filled with judgement, shame, or blame. Instead, often humility is filled with reverence, serenity, acceptance, and most simply - awe.

This evening begins the celebration of Rosh Hashanah, which marks the Jewish New Year and starts the celebration of the Days of Awe. During these high holy days, Jewish people around the world reflect on the deeds of the past year, atone and review their lives, preparing for a new beginning to the new year, and a for a good year ahead. "In the Jewish tradition, we are asked during these ten days, between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur, to live and plan our lives a little more deliberately and seriously than usual. "

Days of Awe, what a beautiful way to describe entering into a state of humility. I ask us to consider this process of reviewing our lives, of taking inventory, and imagining how to prepare for the coming year. You might look back and find all the regrets and mistakes you've made, maybe you'll look back and be disappointed. But what I hope you might find, is awe. Awe for the gifts you have been given, awe for how your life has unfolded, or

where you are and how far you've come, or that you are still here despite all the things in life you are facing. When looking at the larger picture, I hope you find how amazing it is that you are here where you are now.

Humility and being in awe are two sides of the same coin. One cannot experience moments of realization, without recognizing something greater than oneself. To find those awe-some moments of life and to catch your breath is to be made humble. In essence, it is to step away from self-possession, a claim of self-reliance, and a recognition of all those things we could never deserve.

The words of Robert Walsh speak to this dual reality of awe and humility. While being awestruck listening to the Bach Concerto, he automatically humbled himself in his larger perspective of life. Which bring him to a clear statement about human nature. An essential reality of being human is that our lives are gifts, and that we are made to be humble. As he says, Life is a gift that we have not earned and for which we cannot pay.

Yet, when we look at those who gain the most spotlight in our everyday culture, they are people who believe not only have they earned their lives but that they can buy it. In our current political climate, humility is not something that is prized. In fact, when political leaders or pop culture's stars show humility, or when they admit and own their mistakes, our culture writes them off as weak, overloads them with comments of shame and judgement. Our society is more concerned with who deserves humble pie, then valuing real humility. I do not need to reach far in the events of this past week to highlight some examples of how unimportant it seems our media and political arena makes humility. In fact, when I look at the current nature of our political rhetoric, what is being broadcasted by news stories across the country aren't about issues of immigration, climate change, or even the American economy. It's conversations containing body-shaming, who looks like a leader, and even blatant accusations against American citizens and political figures about their sexual relationships and activities. And these blatant accusations are being given limelight, they are our headlines. When our nation consistently reports bombastic statements and accusations, how does that reflect on what our nation and society values in leadership? What does citizenship mean, and where is our purpose in the awe invoking

responsibility of leadership, if instead it's an ego game? For our national conversation about politics, where is our humility?

I feel like the nationwide conversations about politics should be an alarm bell. We need now more than ever these Days of Awe. We need as a nation a time to take stock, to reflect of where we have been and who we want to become. We need humility.

We also need a national sense that's it okay to admit we were wrong. Atonement in real life isn't some dogmatic judgement cast down to mired in shame and blame. Atonement, asking for forgiveness, is vulnerable act of love and even resistance. Making amends admits that we are human, not gods. It needs our empathy, our sense of relationship, and forces us to put aside our egos. Making mistakes is not shameful, it's human. And making amends is not painless, but it can be poignant. Sometimes atonement is the hand on a lover's hand on our shoulders while we are in a fight. Sometimes atonement is your mother's is the sting of expressed disappointment, while she kisses your forehead. There is this undeniable sweetness that happens you make right something that you held once wrong. There is such grace and love abounding among us, if we are humble enough and vulnerable enough to claim it.

And in my experience, the only ways I am ever humble enough, is because of a community and faith like ours that grounds me in our values and reminds me of humility. I cannot do this alone, no one can. I need you. I need you to catch me when I fall, to remind ourselves in our covenant together, or our mission and shared values. You will let me know when I make mistakes. Here we value the vulnerability and love needed to make amends, because we join for something we admit is larger than just ourselves. We come to shape the world in our image of love. And that love is what makes our relationships and commitment to our shared missions and covenants we make so sweet.

And this community, our faith has shaped my life forever. Our UU faith, this community and its mission. It is a gift. It is a gift - that I cannot earn and I cannot pay for. In the face of such a gift I am humbled. All I can do is express my gratitude, and to take up our share of the work of creation, to shape our world in our image of love.

So I invite us all to look back on the last year. What are your gifts? What things have shaped your life forever, or just enough to make you gasp in awe? For Robert, it's Bach's concerto. For me, it's my mom teaching me how to bake an apple pie. For us, it might simply be each other. But it is serious work to practice remembrance, even for our mistakes, because they are gifts to. Gifts this world right now in its age of arrogance so sorely needs. Savor the lessons life gives you. Life went through all the trouble of making a pie. Won't you humbly thank it and enjoy every bite.