

# The Companion



## Letter from Executive Director, Janet Seckel-Cerrotti

The mission of FriendshipWorks has remained unchanged during the enormous hardships experienced by older adults as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Our country's response, sometimes lacking, other times inspiring and humbling, has made me reflect on something Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel once said:

"A test of a people is how it behaves toward the old...the true gold mines of a culture."

The virus' disproportionate toll on our elders has made our mission to reduce social isolation, enhance the quality of life, and preserve the dignity of older adults throughout Greater Boston ever more urgent and necessary. Since our inception in 1984, when we were known as MATCH-UP Interfaith Volunteers, a key partner in this work has been our local religious communities and congregations. Each religious tradition, each congregation, has brought enormously valuable and unique perspectives to the task of

creating meaningful intergenerational friendships. In a time so full of challenge, the richness of our spiritual traditions and communities still provides us with hope and optimism for a future where older adults are treated with the dignity and respect they deserve.

In this way, The Companion provides a venue for intergenerational, interreligious reflections on faith and aging. It is our hope that the contents of this newsletter will bring you a sense of spiritual companionship while we all continue to adapt to physical distancing measures that may keep us from our churches, mosques, temples, meditation groups and prayer meetings.

We at FriendshipWorks have been heartened by the incredible ongoing work of our volunteers, the resiliency of our elders, and the contributions of our religious partners. We are overjoyed to share with you these reflections; as always, we welcome your feedback and support.

**Few situations can be bettered by going berserk.**

Melody Beattie



## **Breathing Humanity**

**Dr. Carol Marie Webster, PhD**

In these uncharted times many of us are breathing fresher air than on New Year's Day of 2020. Over the past several weeks of Coronavirus (COVID 19) quarantine, air quality around the world has improved dramatically. Travel restrictions (domestic, commercial and international) impacting more the ninety-percent of the world's population, have given the planet much needed respite from the day-to-day onslaught of pollution that had become a common byproduct of twenty-first century life. The planet has had time to catch its breath, to breathe.

### **Ruach Elohim - (Breath of life)**

Breathing is a radical exercise. It harkens the human back to that primal breath that brought life to the world and to quest for humanity. Breathing is a practice of radical hope deeply woven into the human DNA. Every cell in the body celebrates each breath, affirms "I'm alive!" We breathe to become humanity with and for each other. A baby's first breath:

the unfamiliar wind (the spirit of life) courses and ripples through its body: lungs and muscles contract and pulsate. The baby screams: delight and distress simultaneously wash over its fragile frame. Its voice added to the human chorus.

### **Hesed - (Loving kindness)**

Loving is not incidental; it is intentional. Loving is the journey and character of the human quest, the route to and for the beloved neighbor - the stranger (the foreigner, the differently-abled, the differently-understood, the differently-oriented, the different). Breathing engages loving kindness in the practice of radical hope.

### **Charis - (Grace)**

Allied comrades, neighbor-strangers and planet, weave loving kindness between the wounds and the pollution, between the not yet and almost now, between yesterdays and tomorrows. Breathe.

## **Thou Art With Me**

**Rabbi Andy Vogel**  
**Temple Sinai, Brookline**

When I ask members of my community this simple question, I keep hearing one response, repeated over and over, as their consistent answer: In the months since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, which forced so many of us to stay inside, withdraw from public spaces, limit our contact in grocery stores, restaurants, the buildings of our churches and synagogues and more, what has kept you going, what has kept you strong?

The answer has its echo in the best known of all the Psalms of the Hebrew Bible, Psalm 23. The heart of that prayer-poem, which is so beloved, is this: “I shall not fear, for Thou art with me.” Knowing that we are not alone, that we are kept in the hearts of family members who love us, watched over by friends who care for us, accompanied by our neighbors and caretakers, lifts us up and builds our strength and resilience.

Sometimes, we do feel alone. The phone doesn’t ring, and there is no knocking on our door. But my tradition, Judaism, teaches that, even in those moments, we aren’t truly alone. We have a community that loves us and cares for us. We have ancestors who stay with us in our hearts, and sometimes we may even hear them speak to us, in the voice of memory. The mysterious Source of Life is by our side. God’s presence can be felt, through prayer, rejoicing, weeping, silence. Even in dark moments, in times of deep despair, God hears our innermost prayers. Psalm 23 reminds us: “Thou art with me.” Always.

We are never alone. That is the powerful message from the heart of the Jewish religion. And it is borne out in the answers that I’ve heard in the past few months from so many people. Connecting on the phone, by Zoom, with a smile from strangers we may pass safely on the sidewalk – all these connections with others lift us up. In each person is the face of God seen, the voice of the Divine heard. And for each one, we may give thanks.



**For you created my  
inmost being; you knit me  
together in my  
mother’s womb.**

Psalm 139: 13



**Family photo  
I put my arm around  
my philodendron**

Jeannie Martin



**Shaped by the sunlight  
old houseplant  
on the windowsill**

Jeannie Martin

## **Gratitude Breath: Houseplants**

**Jeannie Martin, FriendshipWorks  
Nursing Home Outreach Coordinator**

You may have a plant that grows in a pot on your windowsill. This may be a new plant, or one that you have had for a long time. Either way, you water your houseplant, tend to it, and watch it grow. Maybe your plant produces flowers from time to time, and most certainly, green leaves.

Houseplants are our calm, quiet companions. No matter what goes on during the day, they are there on your table, shelf, or windowsill. In their own way, as they grow, they keep us company. They share our living space. We even share the same air. Plants take in carbon dioxide and release oxygen, while we breathe in oxygen and exhale carbon dioxide. So we help each other.

It is impossible to imagine a world without plants. Look carefully at your houseplant. Notice its leaves, its stalks, and maybe its roots that appear from the soil. In some ways, sitting there in the sunlight, houseplants bring the outside world of growing things inside, to be with us.

## **Don't Forget to Look for God**

Rev. Jordan Harris, Connexion -

A Reimagined Methodist Community

In these days when we can't always make it out of the house. In these days where the news seems more and more bizarre. In these days that we see so much worry, fear, and uncertainty. Don't forget to look for God. Look out the window or down the hall or in the mirror to see God is all around you. Notice the divinity and love of the flowers growing in the garden, the children growing in the neighborhood. See God in the people whom God has given you to take care of – and you to be taken care of by.

God is in the thousands of grace-filled moments embedded in this day. Grace-filled moments waiting to be discovered like tiny shards of gold. Tiny moments of courage and love, forgiveness and hope. God is in the rain. God is in the warm sunshine, beautiful sunsets, and starry night sky.

God is in this life in all its messy glory, swirling and unfolding all around us. God is in the stories you have, which are worth telling, memories worth remembering, dreams worth working toward, a body worth feeding, a soul worth tending, and beyond that, the God of the universe dwells within you, God's love and grace fills every part of who you are. In these days when we don't know what's going to happen one moment to the next, don't forget to look and see God is all around you.

**There are a thousand  
ways to kneel and kiss the  
ground.**

Rumi



**All great artists draw from the same resource: the human heart, which  
tells us that we are all more alike than we are unlike.**

Maya Angelou



## A Quaker Hymn

Kristina Keefe-Perry, Coordinator  
Quaker Voluntary Service

My daughter is singing. I hear  
her voice drifting into the  
kitchen where I am chopping  
onions -- and I join in:

**Tis a gift to be simple  
Tis a gift to be free.  
Tis a gift to come down where  
we ought to be.  
And when we find ourselves  
in the place just right - it will  
be in the valley of love and  
delight. When true simplicity  
is gained: to bow and bend we  
shall not be ashamed. To turn  
& turn will be our delight til  
by turning, turning we come  
round right.**

It's an old Quaker Hymn whose  
meaning blossoms like my  
unfolding onion. These are  
hard, hard times. Like me, you  
might feel uncertain, wonder-  
ing what the future holds. Yet,  
I take great comfort in knowing  
that the more loosely I hold to  
what I think I know, the more  
easily I can bend and turn with  
the winds of the Holy Spirit. It's  
likely we won't go back to the  
"way things were," and I can  
both mourn that fact and  
accept it.

I call upstairs to my ten-year-  
old that dinner is ready,  
grateful for the reminder from  
her youthful song that even I  
can be ready to welcome the  
Beloved Community into  
being!

## Living Life to the Fullest

Posie Mansfield, Co-Warden  
Christ Episcopal Church  
Hamilton & Wenham

My name is Posie Mansfield, and  
I am 71-years-old. My husband  
of 41 years died suddenly in  
November of 2010. Just a month  
later I had a life- threatening in-  
fection in my left knee, and they  
amputated my leg above the  
knee on January 11, 2011. I had  
just turned 62.

Having suffered two huge losses all at once, I had a  
decision to make. I could resign myself to my fate and give  
up or I could get stronger and healthier and go on with my  
life. I had been very active before I got sick fifteen years  
before my amputation. I had suffered from many illnesses  
and my husband had been taking care of me. That all



ended after he  
died. I turned to  
my faith. I didn't  
know what God  
had planned for  
me going forward,  
but I put my trust  
in Him and got  
back to my active  
life. I came to  
realize that it had

been by the Grace of God that I had lost both my  
husband and my leg. I appreciated life so much more,  
didn't take anything for granted and was able to begin to  
enjoy my 4 children, 7 grandchildren and 2 great  
grandchildren like I had never been able to before. Instead  
of focusing on my losses, I thanked God for all my  
blessings.



**Nabil Ahmad Khan, MDiv.**

Dear Reader,

May the fall and the winter be kinder to us all than this spring and summer were. I know for many in my generation, the last couple years, and 2020 in particular, have been some of the hardest years of our lives. Some of this is an outcome of having grown up in the relative global stability of the Nineties, and seeing a progressive unveiling over time of various issues that stability hid from view. But I know the generations before us have survived and seen many terrible hardships - and that we have been raised by these resilient ancestors. You are among these ancestors who show us how to be strong and to keep pushing. Thank you for being models for us and for generations to come. Before 2020, I used to worry about being alone for too long - that if I was not seen by others, that my presence and my activities were not of value. In this year of varying levels of isolation, I have learned that this is not true, that it is never true. So much good stuff in this world happens quietly and unseen. May you be proud and strong despite any distances you may feel, and may we greet next spring as one full of the gifts of connection.

As a Muslim, I would like to share some verses from the Qur'an that keep my hope and faith alive. I offer these as prayers for us all.

"By the passage of time,  
Indeed, humankind is in loss,  
Except for those who have believed and done righteous deeds  
and advised each other to truth and advised each other to  
patience".

**Chapter 103, The Afternoon** *(translated by Sahih International from the Arabic, with my modifications)*

"And keep yourself patient [by being] with those who call upon their Lord in the morning and the evening, seeking His countenance. And let not your eyes pass beyond them, desiring adornments of the worldly life, and do not obey one whose heart We have made heedless of Our remembrance and who follows his desire and whose affair is ever [in] neglect."

**Chapter 18, Verse 28, The Cave** *(translated by Sahih International from the Arabic)*



May I be awake.

May I be receptive to creativity working in and through me but not grabby or precious with what comes.

May I understand the world around me and my place in it as a work of art.

May I cherish my sensitivity.

May I defend it against becoming dull.

May I honor movement in all things, music in all things.

May I come to love making a mess, and may I come to love cleaning it up.

May I, and you, be curious.

May I, and you, be playful.

May I, and you, be extravagant.

May I, and you, and all of us, be free.

**Ben Freeman, M.Div.**

## Take One Small Yoga Step Each Day

In these uncertain times you may find your mind racing with worry and negative thoughts. What can we do to counteract these feelings? The ancient Indian sage Patanjali advises when the mind is disturbed by negative thoughts, cultivate the opposite. When we are feeling low, hopeless, anxious or agitated, practicing yoga can help. Start small, one step at a time, by using your body and breath to cultivate a positive mindset. These simple chair yoga poses (asanas) will help get you started.



**Fig. 1: Tadasana (mountain pose)**

Sit in your chair, spine straight, and feet under knees. Hold the outside of the chair legs, roll your shoulders back and lift your chest. Take deep breaths, in and out through your nose. If you are feeling lethargic or your mood is sinking, focus on your inhalation allowing the breath to completely fill your chest. If you are feeling agitated, focus on your exhalation with slow, steady, calming breaths. Stay for five breaths.

**Fig. 2: Urdhva Hastasana (upward hand pose)**

Being depressed makes you slouch, slouching makes you depressed. Cultivate the opposite by taking a deep inhalation and lifting your arms overhead. This simple movement immediately makes you feel more energetic and positive. Face palms forward, then turn palms to face each other, straighten elbows; lift hands up while keeping the shoulders down. Repeat several times. If your shoulders are stiff, take your hands further apart in a “V” shape.

**Susan Mulski** is a Certified Iyengar Yoga Teacher and has been practicing yoga for 18 years. She has volunteered for FriendshipWorks’ PetPals program since 2008.







**Fig. 4: Bharadvajasana  
(named for an ancient sage)**

This is a gentle twist for your spine. Sit on the side of chair with a back. Sit tall, feet hip width apart, knees over feet. Inhale, take arms overhead. Exhale, turn and hold the back sides of the chair. Keeping your feet on the floor, press down with both hands as you lengthen the sides of the waist and gently revolve your torso toward the back of the chair. Repeat both sides.

**Fig 3: Urdhva Baddhanguliyasana  
(upward bound fingers pose)**

Interlace the fingers and stretch the arms forward then extend them straight over your head, palms up. Press up through the thumb side and straighten your elbows while you keep the shoulders down. Take arms down, change the interlace, and repeat.



### **Wings Against My Window**

Wings against my window.  
Are they birds or are they angels?  
Waking me for worship at fajar before dawn.  
Wings against my window.  
Are they birds or are they angels?  
Singing me from slumber.  
Soon night will be gone.

Song by Dawud Wharnsby Ali

# The Long Lent

Nick Scrimenti

HDS M.Div. '22

FriendshipWorks Intern



For local Catholics, coronavirus lockdown began right in the heart of the Lenten liturgical season. Lent is traditionally a time of reflection, prayer, and penance in preparation for the celebration of the resurrection of Jesus on Easter Sunday, so the lockdown restrictions and social distancing guidelines were a weirdly appropriate observance for many Catholics. Lent can be hard, and it was made even harder when we learned that there would be no Easter celebrations and the Lenten sacrifices would have to continue for the safety and wellbeing of our community.

Nevertheless, Lent is ultimately a season of hope; of waiting for a time when we can celebrate together once again. There is hope for a day when we can gather together once again, hope for a vaccine, hope for a future where we treat each other with the respect we deserve. Our self-imposed, lent-like sacrifice has made us hungry for, in the recent words of the Canadian Bishops, “a world which is more human, loving, generous, forgiving, and radiant with God’s grace.” Many of you reading this have given us all reason to hope, because of your courage and perseverance through these difficult times.

The Lenten season ended during Holy Week, and we are now in the liturgical season called “ordinary time,” though things are anything but ordinary. We are still learning how to live in this world defined by isolation and illness. Yet, ordinary time can be an opportunity to focus precisely on “ordinary” things; the things in our lives that we take for granted.

During our extended Lenten sacrifice, it may be difficult not to feel some anxiety about the future, wondering how the extraordinary times we are living through are going to play out. While we await the coming of a new world with hope and expectation, let’s not forget to focus on caring for the world still in front of us and all the ordinary aspects of life.



**Reach out to the editor!** We would love to hear from you and include your questions, ideas and insights in future additions of The Companion. Please send your letters to: [cwaybright@fw4elders.org](mailto:cwaybright@fw4elders.org)

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## Gardening with FriendshipWorks

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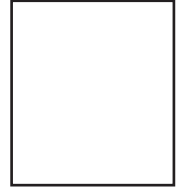
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BED	FLOWERS	ORGANIC	RAIN	VEGETABLE
BEEES	FRIENDSHIPWORKS	PATH	RIPE	WHEELBARROW
BIENNIAL	FROST	PERENNIAL	ROOTBOUND	
BLOOM	HEIRLOOM	PLANTS	SEED	





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**Praise and blame, gain and loss,  
pleasure and sorrow come and go like  
the wind. To be happy, rest like a great  
tree in the midst of them all.**

Jack Kornfield, Buddha's Little Instruction Book

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