



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“Flowing with the River”

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At the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

Centering Thoughts:

*Life is a series of natural and spontaneous changes. Don't resist them; that only creates sorrow.
Let reality be reality. Let things flow naturally forward in whatever way they like.* Lao Tzu

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving through you, a joy. Rumi

It's like swimming against a current. It exhausts you. So after a while, whoever you are you just have to let go, and the river brings you home. Joanne Harris

I would love to live like a river flows, carried by the surprise of its own unfolding. John O'Donohue

Reflection:

Have any of you had the privilege of kayaking on a river or other body of water?

I've borrowed and rented kayaks to paddle the Middle Oconee River and Lake Chapman here in Athens. I love that we don't need to leave town to enjoy a body of water.

I like kayaking because it's more stable than an inner tube, and I can reach out to touch the water anytime I wish. Kayaking allows me to feel almost at one with the water. I like that I can choose to paddle or simply float along with the current. As long as others on the river aren't blasting music or talking noisily, I find it very peaceful and restorative.

On the Oconee, if the water level is low, my kayak occasionally gets stuck on the rocks and that breaks my reverie. And, occasionally I have to navigate around big boulders that seek to impede my journey. The boulders are huge and firmly stuck in the riverbed, so it's not like I can move them out of my way. Instead, I have to maneuver my kayak around them. And, wanting to maintain my state of calm, it doesn't do me any good to get mad at the boulder for being there. Nor does it help me to get stressed by trying to convince it to move itself out of my way, though I suppose miracles can happen.

Even though the shallows and boulders slow me down and prevent me from taking a totally tranquil journey, I actually like the challenge these obstacles provide. I like trying to read the riffles

and patterns of the river. I like guesstimating the depth of the water and choosing which pathway will provide the least resistance. I like deciding whether to risk floating over the rocks lying just below the surface, or take a surer route around them.

Sometimes I get stuck because I read the riffles wrong. So I throw a leg out on each side of the kayak, place my feet in the river, and lift my bottom up to enable the kayak to float a little higher. And with some wiggling and pushing with the paddles, I free myself. Other times I get lodged behind a boulder because the current's too swift and my skills aren't good enough to avoid it. When pushing and wiggling prove fruitless, I sometimes just get out of the kayak and carry it a short way around the obstacle.

Far from being annoying, these challenges make the river journey interesting. They test my skill, my resolve, even my creativity. And because the river is never the same due to different weather conditions from day to day, season to season, the adventure is always new, never boring. And after navigating these always new challenges, the accomplishment and self-confidence I gain is also new.

In the oriental philosophy of Taoism there is an oft-repeated expression for us to 'go with the flow.' To treat obstacles in our way like a kayaker. Don't let them stop us. Don't try to push right through. Don't get angry.

This does not mean we ignore what challenges us. Instead, see the obstacles. Recognize them for what they are, then go around them. Confronting them head on only damages our kayaks and our spirits. We can't wish problems away, either. Not getting caught up in them, learning to float past them, is often our best path forward.

Clearly, some obstacles in our life can't be easily floated around. Sometimes that pushing, pulling, and even wiggling is what's necessary to move forward. And, like the waters in the current, sometimes we can slowly wear down an obstacle so that it no longer gets in our way. As the chant we sang earlier advised, we can trust the current's movement toward that far-off shore we desire.

Here, at this UU Fellowship, we journey life's rivers together. Whatever our challenges, our changes, our joys or sorrows, together we support and celebrate life. Together, this community makes the river manageable and enjoyable. It is good to be together on this river we call life.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. Do you find it rejuvenating to rest beside a particular source of water, and what makes it so?
2. Some of us dip our toes into new rivers, others enter full body. What particular life rivers have you entered, and did that significantly change you? Share.
3. What obstacle/s might you feel prevent you from reaching a goal? Are you forcefully resisting them, or do you seek a less confrontational path around them? How is that going for you?