

## Relearning to Wash Our Hands by Dori Midnight

We are humans relearning to wash our hands.

Washing our hands is an act of love.

Washing our hands is an act of care.

Washing our hands is an act that puts the hyper-vigilant body at ease. Washing our hands helps us return to ourselves by washing away what does not serve.

Wash your hands like you are washing the only teacup left that your great grandmother carried across the ocean,  
like you are washing the hair of a beloved who is dying, I  
like you are washing the feet of Grace Lee Boggs, your auntie, Audre Lorde, Mary Oliver...  
you get the picture.

Like this water is poured from a jug your best friend just carried for three miles from the spring they had to climb a mountain to reach  
like water is a precious resource made from time and miracle.

Wash your hands and cough into your elbow, they say.

Rest more, stay home, drink water, have some soup, they say.

To which I would add: Burn some plants your ancestors burned when there was fear in the air  
boil up some aromatic leaves in a pot on your stove until your windows steam up.

Open your windows.

Eat a piece of garlic every day. Tie a clove around your neck.

Breathe.

My friends, it is always true, these things.

It has already been time.

It is always true that we should move with care and intention, asking "Do you want to bump elbows instead?" with everyone we meet.

It is always true that people are living with one lung, with immune systems that don't work so well, or perhaps work too hard, fighting against themselves.

It is already true that people are hoarding the things that the most vulnerable need.

It is already time that we might want to fly on airplanes less and not go to work when we are sick.

It is already time that we might want to know who in our neighborhood has cancer, who has a new baby, who is old, with children in another state, who has extra water, who has a root cellar, who is a nurse, who has a garden full of elecampane and nettles.

It is already time that temporarily non-disabled people think about people living with chronic illness and disabled folks, that young people think about old people.

It is already time to stop using synthetic fragrances to not smell like bodies, to pretend like we're all not dying.

It is already time to not take it personally when someone doesn't want to hug you.

It is already time to slow down and feel how scared we are.

We are already afraid, we are already living in the time of fires.

When fear arises, and it will, let it wash over your whole body instead of staying curled up tight in your shoulders.

If your heart tightens, contract, and then expand.

Science says: Compassion strengthens the immune system.

We already know that, but capitalism gives us amnesia and tricks us into thinking it's the thing that protect us, but it's the way we hold the thing, the way we do the thing.

Those of us who have forgotten amuletic traditions, we turn to hoarding hand sanitizer and masks. We find someone to blame. We think that will help.

It is already time to remember to hang garlic on our door,  
to dip our handkerchiefs in thyme tea,  
to rub salt on our feet,  
to pray the rosary,  
kiss the mezuzah,  
cleansing with an egg in the middle of the night when you wake up with terror in your belly.

It is time to think about stardust and geological time,  
redwoods and dance parties  
and mushrooms remediating toxic soil.

It is time to care for one another,  
to pray over water,  
to wash fear away every time we wash our hands.

## Pandemic by Lynn Ungar

What if you thought of it  
as the Jews consider the Sabbath-  
the most sacred of times?  
Cease from travel.  
Cease from buying and selling.  
Give up, just for now,  
on trying to make the world  
different than it is.  
Sing. Pray. Touch only those  
to whom you commit your life.  
Center down.  
And when your body has become still,  
reach out with your heart.  
Know that we are connected  
in ways that are terrifying and beautiful.  
(You could hardly deny it now.)  
Know that our lives  
are in one another's hands.  
(Surely, that has come clear.)  
Do not reach out your hands.  
Reach out your heart.  
Reach out your words.  
Reach out all the tendrils  
of compassion that move, invisibly,  
where we cannot touch.  
Promise this world your love--  
for better or for worse,  
in sickness and in health,  
so long as we all shall live.

## Lockdown

Yes there is fear.  
Yes there is isolation.  
Yes there is panic buying.  
Yes there is sickness.  
Yes there is even death.

But,  
They say that in Wuhan after so many years of noise  
You can hear the birds again.  
They say that after just a few weeks of quiet  
The sky is no longer thick with fumes  
But blue and grey and clear.

They say that in the streets of Assisi  
People are singing to each other  
across the empty squares,  
keeping their windows open  
so that those who are alone  
may hear the sounds of family around them.

They say that a hotel in the West of Ireland  
Is offering free meals and delivery to the housebound.

Today a young woman I know  
is busy spreading fliers with her number  
through the neighbourhood  
So that the elders may have someone to call on.

Today Churches, Synagogues, Mosques and Temples  
are preparing to welcome  
and shelter the homeless, the sick, the weary.

All over the world people are slowing down and reflecting  
All over the world people are looking at their neighbours in a new way  
All over the world people are waking up to a new reality  
To how big we really are.  
To how little control we really have.  
To what really matters.  
To Love.

So we pray and we remember that  
Yes there is fear.  
But there does not have to be hate.

Yes there is isolation.  
But there does not have to be loneliness.

Yes there is panic buying.  
But there does not have to be meanness.

Yes there is sickness.  
But there does not have to be disease of the soul

Yes there is even death.  
But there can always be a rebirth of love.

Wake to the choices you make as to how to live now.  
Today, breathe.  
Listen, behind the factory noises of your panic  
The birds are singing again  
The sky is clearing,  
Spring is coming,  
And we are always encompassed by Love.

Open the windows of your soul  
And though you may not be able  
to touch across the empty square,  
Sing.

Fr. Richard Hendrick, OFM  
March 13, 2020

## **The Teacher Appears by Jamie K. Reaser**

I am afraid

Notice what you value enough to be fearful for.  
Put the same list under the word gratitude.

I feel vulnerable

If you lean into your vulnerability, you'll find empathy.

I am alone

Who or what are you not being attentive to?

I am lonely

There are so many ways to reach out, aren't there?

I have to take care of others

You don't have to do anything.  
Thank you for your tending spirit.

I want something

Consider how many people over how  
great a distance are needed for you to have that.

I don't have enough

You have something that someone else needs.

I don't want to stay home anymore

Haven't you spent your entire life trying  
to find your way home?

When the student is ready,

From "Truth and Beauty" (a collection in progress)  
Follow Talking Waters on FB

## Untitled from Pat Lambert

Maybe you saw that video  
2 middle-aged moms  
fighting over a sleeve of toilet paper  
in that store  
in that town  
somewhere in the US.  
It made you angry.  
It made me angry too but...

This is what I've seen.  
Silent exchanges  
between strangers  
walking down the aisles of my grocery store  
keeping room for each other to pass  
6 feet apart  
but in it together  
whispering "no, you go first"  
before making eye contact with the check-out attendant whispering a "thank you,"  
a practice that's new  
and that they recognize shouldn't be.

Maybe you saw that news clip  
with those Spring Break kids in Florida  
fighting for their right to party,  
flaunting their youth, vitality  
spilling vodka sodas  
while slurring these assertions  
to a local news reporter.  
It made you pissed.  
It made me pissed too but...

This is what I've seen.  
Teachers  
inviting their students into their homes  
via webcam  
holding toddlers on their hips  
while laying out their lesson plans.  
Becoming oddly human;  
strangely real to their students  
for the first time, maybe ever.

Food delivery workers  
wiping down the door knobs

of apartment building entranceways  
before leaving meals outside the front doors  
of strangers.

No longer nameless arms of an app  
but neighbors to us in a new way.

I also saw...

Dolphins doing back flips  
up the Venice canals.

Neighbors singing operettas  
on balconies  
in improvised elation.

CEOs cutting their salaries  
to keep their workers afloat.

The climate!  
Change!

as highways lay quiet  
and work-from-home policies  
shift the world's priorities  
and hopefully shift it's ecological course.

This is the chapter in history we will write.  
The humbling of humanity.  
These will be the loved ones  
we keep alive  
through the actions we take  
individually  
to save them.

Our small actions will be  
the crimes or the killings we commit casually  
or  
the "thank yous" we'll never hear  
for those who are spared.

This is our time to see straight.

To see light you must be light.

Be smart, be safe, be kind, and believe in what we can do together



## An Imagined Letter from Covid-19 to Humans

Stop. Just stop.

It is no longer a request. It is a mandate.

We will help you.

We will bring the supersonic, high speed merry-go-round to a halt

We will stop

the planes

the trains

the schools

the malls

the meetings

the frenetic, furied rush of illusions and “obligations” that keep you from hearing our single and shared beating heart,

the way we breathe together, in unison.

Our obligation is to each other,

As it has always been, even if, even though, you have forgotten.

We will interrupt this broadcast, the endless cacophonous broadcast of divisions and distractions, to bring you this long-breaking news:

We are not well.

None of us; all of us are suffering.

Last year, the firestorms that scorched the lungs of the earth did not give you pause.

Nor the typhoons in Africa, China, Japan.

Nor the fevered climates in Japan and India.

You have not been listening.

It is hard to listen when you are so busy all the time, hustling to uphold the comforts and conveniences that scaffold your lives.

But the foundation is giving way,

buckling under the weight of your needs and desires.

We will help you.

We will bring the firestorms to your body

We will bring the fever to your body

We will bring the burning, searing, and flooding to your lungs

that you might hear:

We are not well.

Despite what you might think or feel, we are not the enemy.

We are Messenger. We are Ally. We are a balancing force.

We are asking you:

To stop, to be still, to listen;

To move beyond your individual concerns and consider the concerns of all;

To be with your ignorance, to find your humility, to relinquish your thinking minds and travel deep into the mind of the heart;

To look up into the sky, streaked with fewer planes, and see it, to notice its condition: clear, smoky, smoggy, rainy? How much do you need it to be healthy so that you may also be healthy?

To look at a tree, and see it, to notice its condition: how does its health contribute to the health of

the sky, to the air you need to be healthy?

To visit a river, and see it, to notice its condition: clear, clean, murky, polluted? How much do you need it to be healthy so that you may also be healthy? How does its health contribute to the health of the tree, who contributes to the health of the sky, so that you may also be healthy?

Many are afraid now.

Do not demonize your fear, and also, do not let it rule you. Instead, let it speak to you—in your stillness,

listen for its wisdom.

What might it be telling you about what is at work, at issue, at risk, beyond the threats of personal inconvenience and illness?

As the health of a tree, a river, the sky tells you about quality of your own health, what might the quality of your health tell you about the health of the rivers, the trees, the sky, and all of us who share this planet with you?

Stop.

Notice if you are resisting.

Notice what you are resisting.

Ask why.

Stop. Just stop.

Be still.

Listen.

Ask us what we might teach you about illness and healing, about what might be required so that all may be well.

We will help you, if you listen.