

Fat Liberation as Good News

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When I ruminate on good news, I am drawn to moments that are simultaneously an exclamation point and an exhale. For me, good news has looked like: a job acceptance after searching for the right fit, finding out I would be taking my then, two-month-old dog, Tank, home; or a mentor surprising me during a difficult time with her presence. While each memory of good news has its own individual flavor, these moments are fastened together by their similarities: they are moments in time worthy of equal parts celebration and relief.

I invite you to think of a time when you received good news. I wonder if you, too, can feel the exclamation point and the exhale in your own bodies, as you imagine the good news that has found you. For some, good news may look – another birthday celebrated or getting a job that will offer you the means to move your family from a period of survival, to a period of abundance. For others, good news may be a doctor sharing word of remission, or the awareness of a pattern that is no longer serving you. The beauty of good news is that, just like the tides, the ebb and flow of celebration and relief, comes in waves, offering us a gift of liberation.

The dual feeling of celebration and relief when we receive good news – can open our hearts and minds to see the world in a different way. The liberation we receive from good news is a gift of hospitality, ushering us from one space to another. When I am facing a time of trial or difficulty, I seek to manifest the liberative energy of good news, in the form of a meditation. I visualize my closet beloveds gathered at a lake in North Carolina, swimming and splashing, joyfully basking in communal celebration – there is cheap wine, store-bought cake, and balloons

– laughter is abundant and the sun gently kisses our skin. We show up as ourselves – fully, abundantly, and we are not scared of being seen – we feel the shared spirit of connection – and we welcome others who seek to join in on our celebration – all are welcome here.

The meditation I imagine, is not so different from our reading for today. Anastasia E. B. Kidd’s poem speaks to the very spirit of liberative good news – one where a woman exists freely in her own body—intimately knowing every piece of her being. The way she acknowledges her fat – her ripples and worth, honoring every curve, dimple, and roll, is a beautiful depiction of celebration. I can see this woman, as if the words are coming off the page, and bringing her to life – a fat woman dancing fluidly, open to the rhythm around her, for all she hears is the music, and all she feels is the divinity within her. This type of freedom is an act of resistance in a world where white supremacy and capitalism run rampant, snuffing out difference. However, however, it is the woman’s lack of repentance and posture towards her understanding of self, that is the very liberation of good news.

The poem, “The Unrepentant Fat Woman,” creates a vision of another world: a world where fatness is honored and whole heartedly welcomed. A world where fat existence is not questioned, and the “inherent worth and dignity of ALL people” is a universal human principal. Friends, the good news I offer today, is that the “unrepentant fat woman” does not have to be either imagined or envisioned, instead the “unrepentant fat woman” can be the standard for our individual and collection liberation. Today, I come offering with celebration and joy: fat liberation as good news – an exclamation point and an exhale.

Fat liberation as good news, is a party like no other – one where all are welcome – and I mean all – and everyone is greeted with care and dignity. Contrary to what society has taught us, the word fat and therefore, the concept of fatness, is a neutral word to describe a body.

Historically, the descriptor fat, has been associated with concepts such as laziness, unworthiness, and most readily, choice. It isn't necessarily fatness that people are avoiding, it's the unfair stereotypes and treatment around fatness, that create a fissure between fear and liberation.

I wonder how hearing the word fat feels? If the word fat is hard to say or if the concept of fat liberation is hard to conceptualize, you are not alone, I struggled with this as well. The word fat and thus fatness, is something that we as a society like to avoid — we have been taught to disregard fatness due to the invisible hand of systemic oppression — the belief that fatness and therefore, fat is wrong. The good news about the feeling of discomfort, is that we can learn to shift our gaze and challenge our way of thinking. This act liberates our view of self and our worldview. The beauty of fatness is too abundant to let systems of oppression define what fatness is — a diverse assortment of goodness and true freedom from systemic standards of what an “acceptable body looks like.”

The hope that oppressing fat people so that the Eurocentric western dream is kept alive, is at the root of fat oppression and maintains an anti-fat worldview, much like “The Unrepentant Fat Woman” names “A world that was never meant to hold her.” Fatphobia, anti-fat bias, and healthism pepper our world in an attempt to marginalize and other fat people — three major barriers to fat liberation.

We see fatphobia and anti-fat bias play out on mainstream tv through shows like The Biggest Loser and I Used to Be Fat — reiterating the same sentiment: fat people are meant to change and straight sized folx should avoid the state of fat existence at all costs. The BMI or Body Mass Index, is a problematic measurement that too this day, measures “the health” of people, women, and men. Although never intended to be used as a medical measurement, and based off of white European cis-men, the BMI continues to be a standard for health. This

standard is not only a barrier to fat people, but also is a current barrier for our trans siblings, who seek gender confirming surgeries, and a major tool of racism.

Healthism, the concept that fatness is acceptable as long as someone is “healthy,” is a hurdle to fat liberation that feels the most urgent to correct. When we limit fat inclusion to only accepting healthy fat people, we leave out the most vulnerable and marginalized in the fat community, forgetting that fat liberation is for all — not just those who fit into the white supremacist box of “healthy.” Healthism must be understood as another limiting power dynamic to fat liberation, instead of another acceptable tool of oppression.

One of the most beautiful parts of the Unitarian Universalist Association are the principals that guide us. The values that the UUA stand on, such as justice, acceptance, peace, and respect – are the great connectors in a community with diverse experiences, thoughts, and theologies. The First Principal: “the inherent worth and dignity of every person” deeply speaks to fat liberation. When we begin to see the inherence of fat people, you are seeing fatness, and naming that fat people exist – creating visibility for other fat people to be seen. When we see the worthiness in fat people and our bodies, you are acknowledging that fatness is a form of abundance, not a hidden existence. When we see dignity – we are not only seeing dignity in fat people, and treating us with care, you are also seeing dignity in yourself. You are simultaneously offering the gift of liberation — from messages of self-loathing and internalized fatphobia — to yourself as much as you are to another.

This First Principal is a call to action not only in advocacy for others, but also for yourself. When the Principal names every person, the value is not everyone but you, instead the value is inclusive of you. Systemic oppression tells us a lie – that we are separate from the problem, that if we do not experience a certain type of oppression then liberation doesn’t apply to

us. In short, why does caring for fatness matter if it doesn't affect you? This is a trick question because the answer is simple: systemic oppression influences us all, even when you don't experience the overt effects of an anti-fat world. When we forgo caring for people whose experiences differ from us, when we forgo caring for fat people, we forgo empathy and compassion and choose sympathy from a place of power – othering fat people, and our existence.

“This is how she loves herself, how she honors the whole of her ...” “The Unrepentant Fat Woman” is all of us. We are she. The first principal calls us to invest in all people, to care for people whose experiences are different than ours, and to fight for justice — for we are people committed to “honoring the whole of her,” honoring the whole of us. Systems of oppression tell us that we are separate, and yet, liberation gathers us to tell us we are one. The first principal calls for fat liberation and liberation for us all.

“She is hazardous to any society that would have her shrink...”. The good news of fat liberation is too life changing to shrink – even when the system calls for it. As we begin to imagine how we can take fat liberation from this moment onward, may we be reminded of our First Principal that guides us. Fat liberation is a cause that is yearning to blossom in an act of resistance – just as the prophet Tupac says, “the rose in the concrete” or rather fat liberation is the rose in the concrete of the system – the true hazard to be feared – not fatness.

The good news of fat liberation is life changing, it is hospitality – all are welcome at the table. The good news of fat liberation is acceptance – that who we are is enough. The good news of fat liberation is “The Unrepentant Fat Woman”— who has space to be unrepentant. The good news of fat liberation is finding ourselves beneath systemic programming. The good news of fat liberation is the inherent worth and dignity of every person. I invite you to return to the moments of good news we imagined earlier. The moments that brought us to a place of both an

exclamation point and an exhale. I can't help but wonder now, can fat liberation to be a part of our collective good news?

I exist in a fat body. I could tell you about the ways fatphobia and an anti-fat system have deeply impacted me — however, it feels more meaningful to share with you how I experience the beauty of my own fatness, the good news of a fat body:

I spent some time imagining a metaphor for fatness. I thought about trees and how they beautifully and boldly grow wider, becoming fatter with time and stronger with age. I considered connecting my favorite element – water – to the softness and abundance of fatness, and yet my trusty water image did not fully capture exactly what I was trying to say.

It then came to my consciousness, that I wasn't thinking fat enough.

One element, one piece of creation, cannot possibly illustrate that breadth and depth of my fat experience. So, in the beauty and wholeness of fatness may I leave you with this: Fatness is an abundance of forgiveness, softly extending another chance. Fatness is the tenderness of ripples, full and sweet; and the ferocity of waves. Fatness is the earth and the sky, meeting together as one.

Fat Liberation is the exclamation point and exhale of good news, worthy of cheap wine, cake, and balloons, will you celebrate with me?