



Conspiracies

BREATHING TOGETHER THE BREATH OF LIFE

Conspiracies

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The New Human

By Gianluca Avanzato, MDiv '24

This poem was written, "with gratitude," in December 2022 and was read by Gianluca at the Catholic Renewal Noon Service on April 3, 2024.

The New Human

for Karen L. King

Pray to lichen prey to
light celestial delightful body

holy meek almighty
secret revelation dual commandment

speak when spoken through
and seek what's seeking you yes do what humans

do we bend we break
we mend we wake from sleep and celebrate

the thunder and the rain
the pleasure pain the recognition eye to

eye to soul surrender
synthesis of two to three and every

thing is beautiful
and everything is clean that is to say

there is no law that can be
broken down as caterpillar flesh

in chrysalis transforms as
embryos erupt from eggshells now

alive and living witness
prey to lost omission pray to life

relived again the antlers
rise to roots whose lips regenerate

the perfect mind resplendent.



All Waters are Traversed by God's Grace

By Rajeev Persaud, MTS '24

Rajeev delivered these remarks at the HDS Ganga (Students of Hindu Descent) Noon Service on March 20, 2024.

Nearly 200 years ago, following the abolition of slavery in British Caribbean colonies, the British Empire, to replace that labor, began the displacement of over a million coolies—Indian indentured laborers—transplanting them from the land of the Ganga to the shores of Guyana, from the home of Krishna, to the plantations of the Caribbean. Having crossed vast oceans and having reached the distant Caribbean—their names butchered, their language stripped, their dignity robbed by the bitter work in the sugar cane plantations—these coolies, my ancestors, found strength in their *bhakti*.

Hidden among the seeds of *haldi*, *channa*, and *daal* that they brought to cultivate in the fields were the seeds of *śraddhā* and *viśwās*, faith and trust in God for the cultivation of their spirit. Their Hindu faith not only tied them to their past in India but assured them of a better future ahead in the Caribbean, one that God himself had ferried them across those waters to. All waters are traversed by God's grace. My ancestors were reminded. Was it not God who assumed the form of the divine fish to steer the righteous king through the great flood? Was it not Lord Shiva with his matted locks who rescued the world from the relentless flow of the river Ganga? Was it not Hanuman who leaped across the sea to rescue Ma Sita? Was it not Lord Vishnu who delivered from the crocodile's jaws the elephant trapped in the lake? Was it not the baby Krishna, at the mere touch of whose feet, the river was parted? And was it not the magic name of Shri Ram that caused rocks to float so a bridge could be built across the ocean?

All waters are traversed by God's grace. In Hinduism, after all, God is called *Karunā Sāgar*; the great ocean of mercy Himself. In front of Him, our oceans become streams. And my ancestors brought with them across those oceans a prayer that I'd like to share with you. I invite you to think about the oceans ahead of you. It says:

*Ab Shiva Pār Karo More Naiyā
Avaghaṭ Ghāṭ Agādh Mahājal Bhale Lage Nāhi Khevaiyā
Ab Shiva Pār Karo More Naiyā*

Now, only Lord Shiva can take my boat across this ocean.
The shore is far, the great waters are treacherous, and the boatman is no good, either.
Now, only Lord Shiva can take my boat across this ocean.

As a Hindu from the Caribbean, I am reminded of this by my ancestry: God has ferried my ancestors and so many before them across their oceans, why wouldn't he ferry me across mine?



New Tables, New Banquets

By Judy Beals, MDiv '23

Judy is the former Program Director for Religion and Public Life at HDS. She preached this homily at the HDS Tuesday Morning Ecumenical Eucharist on November 7, 2023.

This is a time of deep generational trauma and fear that are being re-enacted, relived in real time for many, for Jews and for Palestinians especially. My heart is broken, shredded. I cannot turn away from the news. I am horrified, angry, so sad. It did not have to be this way. I cannot stop grieving.

A colleague shared an Arabic word with me: *qaher*: “It is when you take indignity, place it on a low fire, add injustice, oppression, racism, dehumanization, and leave it to cook slowly for a century. And then you try to say it but no one hears you. So it sits in your heart and settles in your cells. And it becomes your genetic imprint. And then it moves through generations. And one day, you find yourself unable to breathe. It washes over you and demands to break out of you. You weep. And the cycle continues.”

She speaks as a Palestinian. Her words rip me. Listening, I don't know but expect there is a parallel in Hebrew. I know that deep generational trauma is experienced by Jews as

well. I know too that there is no simple binary of Jews and Palestinians and that, in fact, none of the usual binaries hold. That many Jews hold Arabic identities. That many Palestinians are Christian, not Muslim. That being Jewish does not equate with support for unjust policies of the state of Israel. That being Palestinian does not equate with support for the terrorist tactics of Hamas. That support for Palestinian liberation does not equate with anti-Semitism. And so on. The “Narratives of Displacement and Belonging” course taught here at HDS brings students into the heart of these complex lived stories, on the ground, in Israel and Palestine, into both the anguish and the remarkable resilience of those who navigate these complex identities and realities in real time, yearning for peace and justice.

Holding this and reflecting on today's readings, it is the image of the banquet table that I am drawn to. In the parable, a table is set. At first, it is the elite that are invited. One by one they decline with their polite excuses. The “B list” is then called in – the poor, the crippled, the blind, the lame. One senses they don't really have power to say no. Neither do they have access to the same alternatives – a new field, a new yoke of oxen, a new spouse. They are acquiescent, but they are not joyful, and they don't fill the table. Finally, the host literally forces the rest. “Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full,” he says.

To my mind, this is a story about a host, full of pride and hurt, full of ego. This is a story about guests who know they weren't the first or even second choice, who know they are there simply to fill the host's table. In this story, the table is not a table of love or justice. It is not a table of “home” but rather a command performance of participation for the benefit of the host.

I am left wanting. Is this the kingdom of heaven? And if so, what does it mean that only some are initially invited? That others are literally forced? That the host ends up so angry? What is Jesus – who is both Palestinian and Jewish – trying to say here?



New Tables, New Banquets Continued

By Judy Beals, MDiv '23

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Honestly, I'm not sure. And yet, accepting Stephanie's invitation to imagination last week, it is the image of the table that ignites my interest. The table is a symbol of belonging – of the deep desire to be seen, known, loved, and listened to. The table as "home". As security. Home and security – the very things so longed for both by the people of Israel and by the people of Palestine.

I come to see the problem. It's the problem of setting the table only for one's own. Of failing to see others in their full humanity. We need a different kind of table – a table that welcomes all – the "A" list, the "B list" and all the rest. A table of warm invitation and ready acceptance – where hosts and guests arrive in good will and in thanksgiving. A table where everyone feels at home.

I desperately need an image right now that moves beyond the binaries of good and evil, of the invited and the compelled, of "us and them."

Looking again at today's readings, I know that the only way to get there is through the beautiful passage from Romans – "though many, we form one body, and each member belongs to all the other," writes Paul. "Honor one another above yourselves" "Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. Live in harmony with one another"

Such beautiful words, so hard in practice, especially now. And why? Because this kind of love is not just a "feel good" love. It is love of the hardest sort because it is a love that requires seeing those we most fear and even despise as full human beings, of valuing all lives equally. It means honoring the deep generational trauma held in that powerful word *qaher*.

We, sitting here, grieve but it is not enough to grieve. We are called to sit at the foot of this terrible cross of suffering recognizing our own complicity – as Americans, as Christians, and as the people too busy with our new fields and oxen and spouses to pay attention. We are called to do the work of justice, which begins with a critical understanding of history and a willingness to examine the deep structural causes of this conflict. It brings us into the need, now, for action. To release hostages held in Gaza, many of whom are peacemakers. To secure a ceasefire to end the horrific brutality against the stateless Palestinians who've suffered decades of siege and occupation. To end illegal settlements and settler violence in the West Bank. To insist on political and diplomatic action to finally create the conditions for secure, rights, for abiding, and diverse Palestinian and Israeli states, side-by-side.

What this requires is a different kind of table than we hear about in Luke's gospel. I look for other images. Another that comes to mind is that of Psalm 23. "You prepare a table for me in the presence of my enemies," writes the psalmist. Here, at least all are gathered in one place. But in my imagination, this cannot be a table of victors in which the vanquished look on, injured, starving, and, no doubt, seething in anger.

The table of my imagination is set for all – a table where, as Paul puts it, "love must be sincere", where all who come "hate what is evil and cling to what is good." And here's the trick. It is not – it cannot be – a table of "us and them" – the "good guys and the bad guys" or as President Biden puts it "our team and their team." It is a table that recognizes the enemy as something that sits in our own hearts – the place of fear and certainty that so easily pits us against each other, especially in times of difficulty – here at Harvard and HDS, as well as in the world. It is a table at which all of us work together to stop anti-Semitism, Islamophobia, and doxxing. It is a table at which even I – who is not Jewish, Arab or Palestinian – am able to leave behind the bunker mentality I have experienced these past weeks on campus,

New Tables, New Banquets Continued

By Judy Beals, MDiv '23

watching groups and individuals “position” themselves and combine in shifting or hardening camps on all sides. It is a table at which different voices are welcome and difficult conversations are possible because while we as people are all invited – staff, students, faculty of all perspectives—the hardened parts of our hearts are not. It is a place where we can grieve, *qa'her*, within the hearts of all those affected, and where we can come together in recognition that Jewish and Palestinian liberation are deeply entangled and caught up with one another, that one cannot exist without the other.

This is the banquet table I long for. Blessed are those who eat at this feast in the Kingdom of God.

I leave you with a poem by Israeli poet Yehuda Amichai

The Place Where We Are Right

From the place where we are right
Flowers will never grow
In the spring.

The place where we are right
Is hard and trampled
Like a yard.

But doubts and loves
Dig up the world
Like a mole, a plow.

And a whisper will be heard in the place
Where the ruined
House once stood.

In our anguish, may we come to the table of humility, knowing that what is most dangerous sits in our own hearts, in our own certainties and pain. May we commit to the hard work of setting new kinds of tables, of hosting different kinds of banquets, here at Harvard and in the wider world, especially now.



Photo credit Micah Rensunberg

Maybe at Heaven's Gate*

By Jude Ayua (MTS '24)

Read by Jude at the Harambee (HDS Students of African Descent) Noon Service, January 24, 2024

*From personal reflections and wide wonderings; these are not statements of opinion.



Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know what the original color of human beings was;
Whether brown, or black,
Or red, or white, or light, or dark.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know who was dumb and who was bright;
Whether brown, or black, or red, or white.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know which religion was true;
And who would go into heaven first;
Whether the Jew, or Christian, or Muslim, or Hindu.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know who was right or wrong;
About gender, and sexuality, and marriage, or abortion;
Whether the liberalist or the conservative;
Whether he/she/they were created "male" or "female."
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know the true name of the Supreme Being;
Whether it is Allah, or Yah, or Great One, or Deus
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know if there is only one name by which all should be saved.

Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know who would go into heaven or sent to hell;
Whether the religious person or atheist, or the believer or agnostic.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know if human beings were made from clay,
Or if they are descendants of apes,
And if "all people are equal, but some are more equal than others,"
Or, as Fela Anikulapo Kuti sang, all are "animals in human skin."
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know who should have saved us from hated and racism but failed to;
Whether the One who created us,
Or we who created the races, or we who accepted be called thus.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know who we should have voted;
Whether a Trump or a Biden; an Obi or a Tinubu; a Netanyahu or a Lapid; a Putin or a Grudinin.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know if any war was ever "just" or "holy;"
Whether the one in Ukraine or the one in Gaza, or the Congo.

Maybe at Heaven's Gate Continued

By Jude Ayua (MTS '24)

We shall know who should have saved us from hatred and racism but failed to;
Whether the One who created us,
Or we who created the races, or we who accepted be called thus.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know who we should have voted;
Whether a Trump or a Biden; an Obi or a Tinubu; a Netanyahu or a Lapid; a Putin or a Grudinin.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know if any war was ever "just" or "holy;"
Whether the one in Ukraine or the one in Gaza, or the Congo.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know if there was truly a "United Nations" or a "United Plunderers;"
And why countries with the richest natural resources are also the poorest economies;
Whether they are greedy or servants of the greedy.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know why Claudine Gay resigned;
Whether by will or by force.
Maybe at heaven's gate,
We shall know what was true and what was false.
But now we are in Mother Earth's womb
Not everyone believes;
Not everyone knows;
But one thing is certain: death!
And shall we wait till we gate to heaven's gate,
To know what is or what is not?
What if not everyone will make it to heaven's gate,
Or if there is no heaven?
But here we are at *VERITAS!*
Maybe we all know the truth, maybe we do not.
Maybe we are seeking;
Maybe.

God in the Edgelands

By Stephanie Paulsell, Susan Shallcross Swartz Professor of the Practice of Christian Studies

Stephanie Paulsell preached this homily at HDS's Tuesday Morning Ecumenical Eucharist on October 3, 2023.

Our readings this morning are all about Jerusalem and its irresistible pull. God is in the midst of the city, a magnetic force that draws people and nations to it. Zechariah says that people will hold onto the garments of the pilgrims on the road if they have to, to make sure they get to that holy place. Even our gospel story is about Jerusalem's irresistible attraction—Jesus turns his face toward Jerusalem and never looks back. The road to Jerusalem is worn smooth by the feet of pilgrims of many religions. The city is shaped by their rituals and reverberates with their prayers.

Psalms 87 is a hymn to Jerusalem, and I want to focus on the last verse: "Singers and dancers alike say, 'All my springs are in you.'" I looked around in the commentaries and found that this verse is notoriously hard to translate and so all translations of it are more or less guesswork. It probably means that singers and dancers express in their rituals the people's conviction that life itself pours out of Jerusalem, making a home that everyone wants to inhabit. Before I read the commentaries, though, I thought the verse meant that Jerusalem is the source of creativity for

the artists of the city. "All our springs are in you," the singers and dancers say. And it made me wonder where my springs are.

I grew up on what was then the edge of my hometown, in a subdivision that had been built on formerly agricultural land. My street dead-ended at the woods and they stretched all the way to the new shopping center, ending at the spot where a pile of red dirt had been bulldozed out of the way of the construction and left there to harden into a mountain that we kids scaled over and over on our bikes.

Our parents mostly told us to stay out of the woods, but none of us did. Because for us the woods were alive and full of distinctive landscapes—the sandy track that could yank your bicycle out from under you, the crater that looked like an asteroid had once landed there, the circle of trees where the caterpillars strung dense webs filled with their eggs, the sunny path and the darker, more mysterious path, and the path where we'd seen a cottonmouth hanging from the branch of a tree, which we called the snaky path. The woods were full of the sound of living things rustling just out of sight.

I think we kids knew there was a sacred aspect to the woods. Some boys nailed the head of a fish on a tree where the woods began, and walking past it was as unsettling as passing under a gargoyle at the entrance of a cathedral. The pine trees towered above us like gods, and there were small groves and mossy places where you could sit alone and be quiet for a bit. I remember setting a tiny green New Testament and Psalms—the kind the Gideons used to give us in school back in the 1970s—beneath a tree in a small clearing off one of the trails. I don't remember ever doing anything with that Bible—I think maybe the woods just seemed like a natural place for a sacred object and that having a holy book tucked away out there would make my little grove even more of a chapel than it already seemed to be.

Of course, those woods are long gone now, the mysterious universe between my old neighborhood and the shopping center filled in with more streets, more houses, more yards. The woods had ever only been temporary, a brief assertion of the natural world during a pause in capitalism's forward motion. It was not an eternal city; it was an edgeland, which is a word for the unregulated, unmanaged stretches of land at the edges of human dwelling—the "inglorious fallow patches," one writer has put it, "that you find at the fringes of the everyday." Trash blows into edgelands that no one ever picks up; they are untidy, ragged, coarse, and weedy. But because edgelands are largely ignored by humans until they decide it's time to start building on them, they teem with biodiversity and host ecosystems that sustain the life of amoebas and crane flies and caterpillars and frogs, birds and snakes and many other creatures. As children know, even if adults seem not to, life pours out of the edgelands of the world.

I think that's where my springs are. My Jerusalem. If I could sing or dance, those disappeared woods are what I would celebrate. Their landscape is still mapped perfectly in my mind, and I think I've been looking for its ephemeral beauty and its fertile contradictions ever



God in the Edgelands Continued

By Stephe Paulsell, Susan Shallcross Swartz Professor of the Practice of Christian Studies

since I first stepped past that fish head into the trees. I think it has affected how I read (and misread!), how I think, how I try to write. My springs are there, even though the woods are gone.

We're at a point in the semester when it's easy to forget where our springs are. Maybe they flow from a place, or a relationship, or a work of art, or a book, or a dream. When we're busy learning a new language, a new way of thinking, reading our way through a syllabus we don't quite understand, it can be easy to lose our bearings, our sense of our own creativity. Bring all of it into your place of springs and see what happens when your work here touches your life there. Because that intersection is where the water is flowing. Let down your nets and see what you bring up.



Photo credit Micah Rensunberg

The Hope Podcast

Hosed by Chaplain Intern Riley Brown, MDiv '25

RSL has launched a new podcast! The Hope Podcast features Chaplain Intern Riley Brown interviewing HDS students about their spiritual lives and practices and about what gives them hope at this point in history. Check out our first two episodes!

[Chaplain Interns Francesca Rubinson, MDiv '24 and Josh Kurtz, MDiv '25 speak with Riley Brown, MDiv '25](#)

[Ahmaad Edmund, MDiv '24 speaks with Riley Brown, MDiv '25](#)



What Does It Mean to Love?

Joe Archer, MDiv '24

Joe offered this reflection at the HDS Ganga (Hindu Students at HDS) Noon Service on March 20, 2024.

In a world where all things are impermanent, what does it mean to love? What does it mean to hold someone close, knowing that one day, soon, they'll be gone? What of our pursuits, our dreams, goals, visions? What does it mean to build a life assured that one day it will all be dust? Confronted by such an imposition, how can we possibly move forward, knowing that the only guarantee is that all things go? All things pass.

Faced with his own possible death and his clan's inevitable demise, Arjuna (the principal character of the *Bhagavad Gita*) found himself at the same crossroads. On the precipice of the great battle, how could he act, unsure of the fruit it would bear, and knowing that even the sweetest fruit would one day rot and melt away?

When called by Krishna to act, Arjuna, like many of us do, uses every rhetorical strategy he can to justify his hesitation and fear. When Krishna commands Arjuna to fight, to call *us* to live righteously and to love fully—to face the suffering and heartbreak of the battle of life courageously, unattached to the fruits of actions yet still deeply invested in a world that is transient.



At the climax of his teaching, Krishna reveals his expansive cosmic form of ten-thousand heads. He is Kala, Time itself, the expanse from which we all emerge and to which we will soon return. We look to Kali, the feminine embodiment of this principle of impermanence, change, and time. She holds the slain head of the egoic buffalo demon, a reminder that all forms will fade. Her terrifying appearance shakes us from our own buffalo-headed tendencies, reminding us of our impermanence and calling us to live and to love wholly and justly. When faced with Her vast scope, we find the true meaning of this life. The longer we stare at Her frightening form, the more we see Her beauty, deep and limitless.

We see that the significance of life and love is not in its permanence, but precisely in its impermanence. It all must pass. This incarnation will come but only once, a magnificent but finite moment, gone in a flash. Kali, like Krishna, teaches us that the highest courage is to face the bottomless expanse of Time with an open heart, loving with one's whole self a person that will one day be a mere name returned to its Master. She teaches us that this great world of suffering and loss is also a game of passing forms, dancing with themselves into eternity.

To love in an impermanent world is a radical act, not one that is superhuman, but one that is super-human. Faced with the agonizing knowledge of impermanence, we continue on, loving wholly into the infinite dance of Time.

field guide to unknown friends

By Nicole Newell, MDiv '24

look up—
outside the oaks and the elms whisper tales of years gone by
ground holds footsteps of a thousand thousand seekers
the cypress too attends morning prayers, weeping,
even when the sun has hidden behind her veil of tears

do the trees, then, ponder salvation as you do?
do the sweetgum leaves repent in their yearly falling
or is their shedding simply a gift to ground
to grow new grass shoots, hold new footsteps?

there are mornings when choral eyes hold only sun
not conductor

not marks of notes on paper
not the octogenarians sighting each other out
in their daily rite of
are you still alive?

are you still alive?

on the walk in winter find the witch hazel's bright
yellow flowers:



Chop Wood, Carry Water

By Kerry A. Maloney, HDS Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life

Kerry preached this homily at the HDS Tuesday Morning Ecumenical Eucharist on April 2, 2024.

Readings: Isaiah 25: 6-9: Luke 24:1-12

Jesus said, “Split wood and I am there. Lift up the stone and you will find me there...Whoever has known the world has found the body...” (The Gospel of Thomas 77-80)



If you don't recognize that saying, it's because it comes from one of the many early gospels that didn't make it into the Bible as we know it, the Gospel of Thomas. But even if you don't recognize its source, you recognize its truth, right?

Why were all of us delirious with joy this past weekend when, despite the crush of thesis deadlines and other pressing end-of-semester work, we were basking in the weak sunlight after weeks and weeks of icy rain, almost every one of us spending the entire chilly weekend outdoors—going for long runs or walks, inventing errands that required us to be outside? Those of us with homes were bailing excess water off the gardens, hoping to plant something (anything!) before May. Why were we doing all this? Why, for that matter, did most of us choose to live in New England in the first place, even if only for a while? Because we love the world — the earth, the sky, the trees, the seas, the stones, all so readily within our grasp here. Split the wood, plant a garden, climb a mountain, lift a stone, paddle a river, fall in love with the earth ... and you will find the sacred. Or, as Jesus says, “Know the world and you will find the body.”

I think the prophet Isaiah could easily have been a New Englander. He loved the earth; he was an unabashed fan of mountains, as were most holy people then (as now). In this morning's passage from Isaiah's writings, he's delirious with joy, making wildly optimistic promises despite the facts on the ground. “On this holy mountain,” he says, “the shroud that is spread over all peoples will be destroyed. God will wipe the tears from all faces and the shame from all hearts. And death will be swallowed up forever.” That's big talk. Spring fever talk. But for all its exaggerated optimism, we know it's true because we've glimpsed it, even if only briefly, in our own lives and in the earth we love.

The big problem with Easter — in fact, the big problem with Christianity — is that it just seems so preposterous, so full of big talk and spring fever. Not to mention that in many of its popular interpretations — the ones that mount legislation to oppress queer folks and women and the poor and sell Bibles for \$59.99 — it doesn't seem like a religion anyone would want to join. In those versions, Christianity doesn't “get” this world — let alone *love* it ... or our bodies.

But it's a tradition preeminently about the world and bodies and their sacredness—and their hidden, secret triumph over so much that would destroy them. *That's* the story enshrined in Easter, where the central character, as Luke's gospel tells us, is a missing body. We've been searching for it ever since. I think that's one of the reasons folks

Chop Wood, Carry Water Continued

By Kerry A. Maloney, HDS Chaplain and Director of Religious and Spiritual Life

bother to show up in church on Easter morning. We're still looking. In a world full of places like Gaza, Ukraine, Haiti, the DRC, and Sudan, we're still looking. In a world where people get sick and die and nothing is ever the same again; where our hearts can be crushed so completely by a friend that we don't even recognize ourselves; where we can fail ourselves more thoroughly than we ever imagined, and fail one another; in a world like this, we're still looking.

So—where's the body? “Split wood and I am there. Lift the stone and you will find me there...Whoever has known the world has found the body....” Jesus, who loved bodies enough to become one himself, sounds here like the Buddha, who told his disciples that all they ever needed to know they could find by “chopping wood and carrying water” — by staying focused on the simple, bodily realities of this world, by seeking what they needed in ordinary places among ordinary people.

It might sound wildly optimistic, but it works, and we all know it because like Isaiah, we've loved the mountains — and the trees and the stars and the stones and the seas; we've loved them enough to endure long, rainy, freezing winters in New England. And we love what they teach us, which is almost everything we need to know about resurrection. Where's the evidence of that? Right there, in the core of the split wood, where new life is manufactured out of every winter's death. Where's the body? Right there, under the dead stone, where tiny living beings creep around in secret. The earth teaches us almost everything we need to know.

And the rest? The rest we get from one another. Here, in the Body of Christ is the community of Jesus' friends who have, through the centuries, kept his subversive memory alive and in the process have become friends to one another.

Here in the Body of Christ — past and present, visible and invisible — we sit together in grief when there's nothing to say, until there is; we believe in one another when we can't believe in ourselves, until we can; we pray and protest and agitate for justice together, even when the odds are against us, until they turn.

It may not look like much, but it's all we've got. And it may be all we need. It's certainly all the first disciples had—a little amazement, a lot of terror, a missing body, and one another. Like them, just when we thought the body was gone for good, we lift a stone — or roll one away — and there it is.

So, friends, where's the body? If you can't find it, ask yourself the angels' question: “Why do you look for the living among the dead?” Look to your left and to your right. Look behind you and in front of you. Look in the mirror and on the altar. Climb the mountain; split the wood; lift the stone; break the bread; pour the wine. Know the world — this messy, glorious, awful, beautiful world — and love it and all the bodies in it, love it fiercely, as if and until it becomes the way it should be. And you may at last find what you seek. “Who has known the world,” says Jesus, “has found the body. I am there, and there, and there ... and here.”

High Priestess and Ancestor Pantoum

By Raisa Tolchinsky, MRPL '24

Raisa's latest collection of poetry is Glass Jaw (Persea Books, 2024).

High Priestess

Empty faces asking *where is god*, listing
dead husbands, broken bones, stray cats
lapping up ghost-white tears. All my
loves cut locks of hair for their garden,
cup droplets of blood for their wine.
I rock their babies with candle-flicker
and honey to keep from crying—
smile, smile. Someone's limb
is mended. Someone's son, healthy.
Their thousand faces are my face, empty,
asking, *where is god*. I hold my loves
in my arms, rock their babies
with quiet hands. Honey under the tongue,
under the ghost sky, broken-white.
I keep my happiness from my keepers.
So where is god? No mirrors
to show me my face. To be kept quiet,
one must swallow salt.
To become the dead, I speak.
Smile, smile. No more mirrors.
I husband the remaining broken.
There was happiness, yes.
And there was happiness.



Pravachan on Caste

By Rucha Modi, MDiv '26

Rucha offered this pravachan at the HDS Ganga (Students of Hindu descent) on March 20, 2024.

Good afternoon, everyone. I am so grateful to be in your company. The following excerpt is from *A Hindu Theology of Liberation* by Shri Anantanand Rambachan. It details a story of caste-based violence. All of us speakers this afternoon benefit from caste privilege, as have our ancestors. I invite anyone to leave and return as needed if you don't wish to hear this story.

[Pause]

“Ram, a Dalit man, accompanied by his son, Khelaw, and three other family members, headed for the Shiva temple in the village of Bahera, located in the north Indian state of Uttar Pradesh.

With flowers and sweets in hand, they wanted, like everyone else, to offer worship to the Goddess Durga on the occasion of her festival.

Although some local leaders gave assurances that his visit to the temple would not be an issue, Ram's presence immediately unleashed a storm of verbal abuse and violent efforts to physically expel them. Ramlal Ram and his family stood their ground and edged closer to the Goddess.

Blows rained, stones were thrown, and a rifle was discharged. Ram was hit in the chest and, bleeding profusely, died.

‘We only demanded,’ commented one villager, ‘that we be allowed to pray. It is the people of our caste who build the deity with mud, ink and color. But when it comes to offering puja, we are left out.’”

Dalit is a word whose Sanskrit roots translate to “divided, split, broken, scattered.”

Today, it describes members of the lowest tier in the traditional Hindu social hierarchy.

Food, water, and flowers of devotion offered in the hands of *Dalits* are deemed dirty, corrupt, and incomplete at best, in many South Asian homes, communities, and houses of worship today.

Now, I invite you all to close your eyes.



Pravachan on Caste Continued

By Rucha Modi, MDiv '26

I want you to call to mind someone who is excluded from your community today, not by choice, but by human design.

By virtue of what family they were born into, or what land they were born on,
because of choices in their past or because of who they feel called to be and love in the present.

Picture that person who is prejudicially deemed impure, inadequate, or incomplete in your religious or spiritual community or your natal or chosen family.

Now I invite you to imagine your favorite flower.
Its color. Its shape. Its scent.
Visualize an abundance of them scattered in front of you.

Now, I want you to picture yourself weaving together a garland of these flowers.
Flower by flower.

Now, I want you to return to that person you called to mind earlier.

Imagine them standing or sitting boldly in front of you,
And I want you to gently place the garland you made around their neck.

And then I want you to reach down and touch their feet with both of your hands, symbolizing your respect and then touch your own forehead, symbolizing your reverence, and then touch your eyes, symbolizing your receipt of their wisdom.

Then, when you're ready,
I invite you to take a deep breath and slowly open your eyes.

Many of our traditions ask us to keep *divyabhan*,
they demand us to see the Divine in all people.
It seems simple enough.

But if we saw it, if we truly saw it, we'd act on it.
We'd realize that the Divine has already hidden the roadmap in our traditions,
if only we looked deeply and sincerely enough.

Pravachan on Caste Continued

By Rucha Modi, MDiv '26

If we saw the Divine in all people, if we truly saw it, we'd act on it.
Our courage would swell larger than our fear of losing what was never ours in the first place.

If we truly saw it, we'd spend all our hours weaving flower garlands and touching feet.





The Office of Religious and Spiritual Life, Division of Student Services
Harvard Divinity School, 45 Francis Avenue, Cambridge, MA 02138 USA
617-496-7540; www.hds.harvard.edu/spiritual