Burnt fields throughout the West Coast of the United States. 6 million acres charred. Ecosystems, with all of their inhabitants, destroyed. Majestic trees laid waste. Towns burnt to the ground. Precious lives extinguished.

Just when we thought things couldn’t get any worse, they did. The plagues besetting us only seem to multiply, rather than diminish.

It certainly feels like we are being tested. And prodded to go deeper and deeper in our explorations of ultimate meaning. Our very lives hang in the balance these days. We must get to the heart of things, to the essence of the Universe, so that we may find understanding and insight there, as a remedy to the crises that are sweeping so many of us away, in so many different ways, right now.

So, we spiritual companions sit with one another, on the barren and carbonized fields of our expectations and dreams, and the life’s work of so many, decimated. Trying not to give in to despair and desolation, and waiting for hope to arise again.

The always illusory distinction between our temporal and spiritual selves has been shattered under the brute force of the pressures of our time. And as those pressures increase, our souls struggle mightily to be released from them, springing forward new life from parched cracks.

We are forced to till our soil, like gardeners working the fields of our burnt expectations and traumas, allowing us to compost them, and to use the fertilized ground that results so that our new spirits may emerge, like flowers fighting the elements and thriving despite them.

continued on next page
On Love (Continued)

Our despair then turns into the fuel of faith, moving us forward towards our guiding light, Universal Love.

A Forever Love this, not the transactional or studied kind, but organic and intuitive, omnipotent and serene.

Why else do we persevere but for that promise and invitation to “step outside the circle of time and into the circle of Love,” as Rumi once said?

And what is all of this life on our little planet, less than a micro fraction of a dust particle in an infinitely growing universe, if not all the proof we need of the manifestation of the possibilities of Love?

This does not deny the temporal realities of almost inconceivably evil monstrosities like the Holocaust, or the cruelties of chance and circumstance, like those snatching loved ones away in seemingly random and indiscriminate ways these days.

It’s at times like these that we are forced to remember that all of the things of this world, good and bad, are temporary and impermanent. We may wish it weren’t so, but how can we deny it?

There is, however, a Love that is eternal, and never separate from us, before we were, as we are, and as we will be. This Love does not bend or fracture, but pervades and infuses always. When all things fall away, it remains as the one true constant. There is nothing and no one that escapes its reach.

We are here to recall each other to this Universal Love. In fact, we need each other to remember and fulfil it, and to remind ourselves and each other of its power and reach.

May its promise heal all of our wounded hearts.

Rev. Seifu Anil Singh-Molares
Executive Director, SDI
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The garden cairn
lost its balance.
It happens. Things topple.
Gravity overcomes friction.
Maybe a slick bit of moss on a rock,
or the exuberant gesture of someone walking by.
It doesn’t take much.
One of the falling rocks landed on-end
and stood in the garden
like Jacob’s pillar.
Remember Jacob’s dream
about angels on a staircase?
Jacob up-ended the rock that had been his pillow,
anointed that rock with oil.
Decades later,
when he and his children were in a mess of trouble,
God said, “Go back there.” Go back to the upended.
Dwell in the place that amazed you.
Rest on the pillows of vivid dreams.
Anoint them.

Rita Willett serves as a chaplain in a women’s prison. She is a graduate of Earlham School of Religion and Shalem Spiritual Guidance Program. The toppled cairn inspired her while walking in a garden with her spiritual director.
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This tree in the woods
That cloud-hanging sky
That darkening moon
This eye through the night
The blind of this fog
The silence in snow
That deer in the road
The voice of that crow
The cry of that child

The man with the cup
The face of the stranger,
The end of a friendship,
The white on this line
The stone on this grave
The failure of words
My knees on the ground

...is my prayer

Marcia Klepper-Smith is an ordained UCC minister, has served as a Pastoral Counselor and a Hospital Chaplain, and now devotes much of her “free” time in creative endeavors.

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We WELCOME your feedback on any aspect of this issue of LISTEN, or on SDI as a whole. Please send your comments to LISTEN@SDIWORLD.ORG
“What is to give light must endure burning.”

Viktor Frankl, *Man’s Search for Meaning*