

CHAPLAIN'S CORNER

Larger, Freer, and More Loving

BY NATHAN

*If the concept of God has any validity or any use,
it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving."*

- James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*

I had a striking conversation with a student recently about their evolving and changing understanding of the Divine. They mentioned how much their thoughts have changed in the short few years they have been on campus. As they described this spiritual journey, the student shared how at times they have been disillusioned by spirituality yet have developed a desire for a deeper understanding of the Divine. They have fewer answers, more questions, and yet somehow find that exciting and hopeful.

At the end of our conversation, I was asked if we could meet again so that I might field questions about my own spiritual journey and the ways in which I navigated such experiences. They hoped my answers may give more guidance as they explore an expansive spirituality.

I could not help but think of a quote from James Baldwin's *The Fire Next Time*. In it, he encourages his young nephew to "divorce himself from all the...hypocrisies" of religion and goes on to say, "If the concept of God has any validity or any use, it can only be to make us larger, freer, and more loving."

I sense this student was on such a journey. In their quest to divorce themselves from hypocrisy, they are becoming larger, freer, and more loving. To be honest, it is quite easy to see in students and it's one of my greatest joys in chaplaincy. More often than not, just when students are questioning the concept of the Divine, they often find themselves closer to the Divine than they had initially hoped. As they doubt, ask questions, and even deconstruct, they are building something much more sacred. They are becoming freer and more loving before our very eyes.

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Our role as chaplains is *not* to change someone else's religion, convince someone to follow our chosen religion, or shame a person into living a different way. Instead, we are to be present to their spiritual exploration, journeying with them through suffering, pain, or grief, and being a traveling companion as they become larger, freer, and more loving.

Within the last few weeks, Christians, Jews, and Muslims have celebrated Easter, Passover, and Ramadan. These are some of the holiest days for each tradition. Although they are celebrated at different times and in different ways, each holiday allows its followers to become larger, freer, and more loving.

Wherever you find yourself on the spiritual journey, take heart that you have traveling companions willing to be with you, present to questions, and honored to see you become larger, freer, and more loving.

Sympathies, Concerns, and Congrats

Congratulations to:

- **Laura Cole '17, '19** M.A. (Daura Gallery) and her husband, Cody Cole '17 on the birth of their daughter. Joanna Katherine Meisner Cole was born on March 25, 2022.

Our sympathies are extended to:

- The family, friends, and former colleagues of **Dr. James "Jim" L. Campbell** (retired, English) who died on April 12, 2022. Link to full obituary can be found after the images in the email.

The Chaplain's Corner is a newsletter published by the Spiritual Life Center (SLC) at the University of Lynchburg. We share campus concerns and updates, spiritual life events and activities, and words for the journey. If you have a joy or concern you'd like to share, reply to this message, email the SLC office - spirituallife@lynchburg.edu, or call 434.544.8348. We only share with your permission. Current and previous issues are on the SLC page of the University website - go to Link in signature (www.lynchburg.edu/spiritual-life) and click on "Newsletter."

For more information about the Spiritual Life Center, including info on student spiritual life groups, go to our webpage - link in the email signature. You can also visit our Linkt.ree (link is in email).

Dates to Remember

April 2 - May 1
RAMADAN
in the United States

Monday, April 25
7 p.m. on the Dell
MOVIE OF THE INDIAN CINEMA
"Bahubali: the Conclusion"

Tuesday, April 26
10 a.m.. on the Dell
HAWAN CEREMONY
Garam Masala's Hindu Ritual

Wednesday, April 27
6:30 - 8 p.m. in the Ballroom
SOUND BATH with Greg Burns

Thursday, April 28
6 p.m. in Snidow Chapel
YOM HASHOAH SERVICE
Holocaust Remembrance Day