

So here we are. Winter time.

That time of year when you come around a corner and hit a patch of ice, and all of a sudden you're sliding.....out of control.

And your reptile brain starts screaming, Oh-my-god-im-gonna-die.

For many of us, life has felt a lot like that since the election. That familiar road we've been driving on has suddenly turned treacherous. It feels like we're sliding out of control, and that damn reptile brain just won't shut up.

(Reptile brain ain't too smart. It has it's uses, and it comes in handy at times, but this isn't one of them.) Because reptile brain has a limited repertoire. Fight, flight, or freeze. And none of these are very helpful when you're skidding.

But if you've had a little training, or you've spent a lot of time driving in ice or mud, you know that when you hit that slick patch and your rear wheels start to slide, you turn into the skid.

In life, turning into the skid means facing the reality of a situation in all its messy complexity.

We now have an unpredictable demagogue as our president-elect. Someone who used racist, misogynist, and nationalist rhetoric to get elected and who has surrounded himself with extremist figures who are opposed to so many of our UU values and so much of what we have worked for as a faith. The future is uncertain.

Many of us are freaked out and afraid, and many people are afraid for their physical well-being. And if you're Muslim, or gay or lesbian or trans or queer, or a woman, or a person of color, or an atheist – or some combination of those – you have every right to be. Your life all of a sudden has gotten more uncertain and more dangerous, and that is not ok. Not at all.

Let me say right now that it is our sacred obligation to stand up publicly and oppose any and all mistreatment of our fellow human beings. Verbal abuse or physical abuse. Especially if we witness it. On the street, or in the line at the grocery store, being a bystander is no longer optional. Neither is being silent. Both our faith and our humanity call us to that task – no matter how challenging or risky it might be.

The inherent worth and dignity of every person. Yeah, we hold the line on that one. No matter who you are, we recognize your worth and respect your dignity. That Universalist value is foundational to who we are, and what we're about as a faith.

That means not accepting bigotry as a normal part of our national conversation. That also means not demonizing people we think are on the other side, no matter how tempting.

Which brings me to some of the messy complexity.

If we imagine the people in this room as representing the population of New Mexico, almost half of you voted for Hillary Clinton, and 40% of you voted for Donald Trump.

Let's stick with that for a minute. Let's just imagine that's true.

I can feel us start to skid...

I know of several ministerial colleagues in the mid-west for whom it is true, who had large numbers of people in their congregations vote for Donald Trump. These are people who voted for Obama twice.

How could Unitarian Universalists do that?

Well, we're just people. People with opinions. People who get moved by different things at different times. We're not political and social robots. We're not some hive that all thinks and acts alike.

One colleague was told that Unitarian Universalism is not a branch of the Democratic party.

I have to agree with that. But we're not a branch of the Republican party, either.

We are a religious community committed to creating a just and equitable society for all. Whatever color, gender, race, class, creed, or political orientation you are.

There are people in this room who have been deeply wounded by the democratic loss. The reality of the consequences of that loss are very real. They are our friends and fellow congregants. They need our love and our compassion and support.

There are probably people in this room who voted for Donald Trump, despite his language and behavior. The reality of the consequences of that win are just now sinking in. They are our friends and fellow congregants. They need our love and our compassion and support.

And somehow we have to find a way to talk to each other and find common ground. Not just here in this room, but in our town, our state, across our country.

To quote UU minister Lee Barker: Anybody can create community with people who believe just like they do. The true test of community rests in the ability to create it with people who disagree with us.

And if we can't do that, who can?

If we can't do that in our religious community, how can we expect to do that in the larger civic sphere?

But wait... aren't those Trump voters uneducated racist misogynist white nationalists?

And... aren't those Democrats smug liberal elitists who think they know what's best for everybody?

Yeah, well maybe so. But the reality is messier and more complex. And it's really easy to stereotype people and walk away from the conversation. Especially when we're afraid, or angry, or confused.

It's really easy to get caught up the us-vs-them mentality and extend that farther than it needs to go. Yes, there are some pretty nasty people out there on the fringes. But I don't believe in my heart of hearts that they are the majority.

The person sitting next to you, or the person next to you in the checkout line, who voted for the other party's candidate is not the enemy.

Our common enemy is an system that concentrates power in the hands of a few. A system that manipulates us to fear each other and drive wedges between us. Wedges of race and class and culture and all the other thousands of differences that make each human being unique.

Because that's how they get power and stay in power.

A people squabbling with each other is a mob. A people united are a force to be reckoned with.

I think a lot about what the words Unitarian Universalist mean. One thing I think they mean is “Bring everyone together.”

But this business of bringing people together is work. It doesn't just happen by itself. It means talking with people and finding common ground, even when you're on what seem like opposite sides. It means being patient and loving. It means being nonviolent. It means trusting that some greater wisdom will emerge from our collective.

And it means standing our ground against the few who want to reverse the gains of the past decade, to push back against bigotry and meanness, to stop the violations of the land and water and people. All in a compassionate way.

I'm here to do the work of bringing people together. I hope you're here to do that work.

And now more than ever, we all need to do that work. It's time to roll up our sleeves and get down in the messy complexity and turn into the skid.

When you're sliding, there's an urge to slam on the brakes. This is wrong thing to do. The tires lock up, and you have even less control. No, we don't stop. We give it a little gas. There's also the urge to try and turn away from the direction of the skid, or away from some object you want to avoid. What happens then is that you end up sliding sideways. Or backwards.

And of course, there's never time to consciously figure out which way you are skidding. You have to act.

So here's the trick. Don't panic. Look where you want to go, and steer in that direction.

We know where we want to go. A just and equitable society. We know we want as many people possible with us, even if we disagree at times. And I mean disagree, not agree to disagree.

We are not powerless. We may be sliding, but we have a steering wheel that keeps us pointed in the direction we want to go.

We have our values, and our principles. We have the example of the teachers and leaders who have gone before us. We have our intelligence and our imaginations. And our hearts.

Psychologically and spiritually, turning into the skid means embracing one's shadows, the things you refuse to acknowledge as part of you. The things you consider to be ugly or unnecessary or weak or sinful or wrong.

All of America's shadows, the ones that seem to have suddenly been unleashed in this election – the racism, the fear and hatred of the other, the misogyny, all of that – they're part of us, and they've been there all along. But that's the thing about shadows – when you suppress or ignore them, they come back stronger.

Here's the tricky bit. To all those we see as motivated by those things, we're their shadow. We're their shadow. That's why we scare them. And they scare us.

Are we skidding yet?

I want to invite you into an act of imagination, to see our current situation from another perspective. I want to share an ancient story with you that I first heard from Michael Meade. The story comes from Borneo and it goes like this:

Once upon a time, there was a boy child born in the village who was only half a child, half a head, half a chest, one arm, one leg. He wasn't very pretty to look at, so he was ignored a lot, and this made him cry a lot.

As he grew older he became even more distressed and cried and moaned so much that the other villagers finally ignored him completely. Even his parents ignored him.

Eventually, the boy decided he must leave the village and go away. As he dragged himself in the dust out of the village no one stopped him to ask where he was going, no one asked if they could help and no one even seemed to care what he was doing.

After much arduous dragging and resting and more dragging he eventually came to a river. As he lay there, thinking of drowning himself and already half-dead from his efforts he noticed another half boy struggling towards him down the river bank.

The half boys meet and they notice they are the mirror of each other. One is all left side and the other is all right side. Moved by some visceral impulse, they immediately engage in a struggle.

As they struggle, they fall into the river which immediately begins to boil up from the heat of their conflict. After a while the river becomes calm and peaceful again.

It's silent for a long time. Then suddenly the two half-boys are flung up on the river bank where it is now clear that they are no longer two half-boys but one boy. There is a left arm and a right arm and a left leg and a right leg. Two eyes, two ears, a whole head. The new boy tries to stand and stumbles, tries again and manages it but very awkwardly.

Coordinating this new wholeness is not easy, but eventually he learns to walk, and to begin to journey back to the village. When he arrives at the gates of the village, he meets an elder who says he has been waiting for him and invites him to dance back into the village with him. When they see this, the whole village begins to dance.

In stories like this, we are everything in the story. We are the villagers who ignored the half boys. We are the half boys, and the elder, and the village. We are the dust and the river. We are the dance.

Where are we in the story? Dragging our half body through the dirt? Fighting on the riverbank? Boiling in the river?

It doesn't feel like we're at the point where the half-boys are a whole person.

Or to make a metaphorical leap, a whole country. In the deep mytho-poetic sense of the story, it feels like something is missing. Like we're incomplete, and that makes us uneasy and scared. I think this is why the half-boys fight. They see their own incompleteness and pain and anger reflected in each other.

Is it possible for us to bring the left side and the right sides of our country together? I don't know. But it sure would scare some people.

The wisdom in the story is that we embrace and integrate the mirror other to become whole.

But it isn't easy. Wholeness is alien and unfamiliar. We don't really know what it looks like. It takes struggle in the deep waters. The outcome isn't guaranteed. But neither half is ultimately capable of thriving alone. Like a half-boy, a house divided cannot stand.

I guess I'm wondering if we can see the goal of our struggle as one of transformation, integration, and wholeness rather than victory over our neighbors. Of blue over red, or red over blue.

That doesn't mean we condone racism, bigotry or oppression. It means being humble, and realizing that we don't have all the answers about justice and liberty and compassion, while still fighting for what we believe in.

And not having all the answers means we are called to use our imaginations, to be creative, to come up with new ways to move forward when things look bleak. It means we trust our processes: Reason and democracy and inclusion.

There is much to be done socially and politically in the coming years. For all of us, it means keeping our political leaders accountable to the collective good. It means defending our rights, and our democracy. It means providing refuge and support, aiding and protecting those most at risk, and to offer them shelter against physical and moral harm. It means protecting and restoring our land and water and air. I urge each of you to pick one thing that is important to you, that needs saving or protecting, and get to work.

And as we work, let us remember the tale of the half-boy, and the mystery that is at the heart of the story. We don't know how the transformation occurs. We only know it takes place in the deep moving waters of the collective soul.

I invite us turn into the skid. To creatively engage with our neighbors, even if that engagement is contentious, and trust that we may rise from the waters as a whole community again.

As a people to be reckoned with.

May it be so.