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Karina Lutz - karinalutz@hotmail.com - is a writer and editor living in southern New England. She works in non-profit communications and development. Karina performs her poetry, and read the following poem on September 21 at the **Kripalu Center** in Lenox, Massachusetts.

Encircling earth,
the center of our gravity

I.
Standing, feet naked to the earth.
Walking, the sensation of flow from heel along the outer edge of sole
to outer ball, inner ball, the rhythm of it.
Like the sleek shifting weight of a running cougar:
the ripple and the grace in the movement.
Touching ground, bending knee, taking weight, pushing off,
finding strength and ease in paced fluidity.

We pause to stand in a circle.
Our toes feel grass, leaves, gravel, sand.
We look up and find each other all in a subtle smile.
We want to stop war, yet we are peace.

II.

The astronauts, even, with all their faith in the world's roundness,
could not contain their awe
while pulling away from gravity.

First they could see the depth of the atmosphere;
colors in continuity, lineless mapless reality
 (as distance erased political divisions,
 the map's crazy quilt of color-coded colonies
 must have seemed ludicrous,
 the Great Wall, archaic and quaint);

and lucid blues and greens, buffs and browns, whites and silvers
vivid against the pure black of space.

Even as the space-walkers escaped gravity, they became bound ever more deeply to Earth
by love, by beauty.

With enough distance, the horizon's curve finally touched itself,
became the full circle in their vision
it had always been.

This from the boundlessness of space.

The photo, the poster, the flag
of Earth from space
represents a sphere, not a circle.
Still, this is hard to see
as we set the flagpole in the small dark of soil.

III.

From the Himalayas (a place where some don't know
the Earth as a sphere, have never seen the photo)
lamas brought down
a circle of sand called the Wheel of Time:
the Kalachakra mandala.
Monks form the sand painting flat
on the ground. They slide dyed sands

down straw-like spoons, using breath and gravity,
encircle squares in precise radial symmetry,
align symbols in an archetypal geometry
that leads to and emerges from the center.
The initiates intend to instill peace in those who see it.
It is perfect, a painting made of tiny hills of sand.
Grain leans exactly upon grain.

Then the monks gather the sand to pour in the river.

In Tibet, the Kalachakra mandala
had always been seen from the ground,
obliquely, and only by initiates.
In New York, a photographer somehow suspended herself from the ceiling
to shoot a photo from above the center, to make it appear flat.
Now, hung on the wall, this photo holds sand in place, defying gravity
and time itself, erasing the ritual destruction and pouring and the riverbed flowing just a bit
more slowly than the water itself, micro-streams
of color flowing and dissolving in estuarine eddies,
dragged downstream by water and wave and tide, by gravity and time.

Like a clock, a compass, the Aztec calendar,
mandalas map the way to the still point at the center,
the place where the clock hands don't move,
where they move from.
Standing, I gaze at the mandala photo.
Upright on the wall, a third axis added,
what was flat takes on three dimensions.
The replica now a representation of radiance:
I gaze and suddenly the Earth beneath my feet feels as radiant—
a mandala in at least three dimensions.
The center of the earth
is my center. All beings on earth,
held to this same center
by the same gravity—gravity being nothing else but the attraction
through space of one mass to another, a representation in form,
perhaps, of love, of belonging,

of what makes us land, what brings us home.

IV.

And radiance! All drawn to that center emerges from it again, transformed.
The dissolving, disillusioning wholeness of it all!
At the same time, the patterned
intricacy of balances, each place a piece of the unseen symmetry inside the Earth.
Myself, I am cracking open like a geode.

Now, each step we take brings peace up out of the Earth;
nothing, nothing is out of place.

Now we have really hit our stride.
Each pair of steps makes a figure eight
of shifting weight within the hips,
no starting or stopping, a lemniscate, we keep walking.
The longer-legged walkers turn when they reach the front, curl back
to keep up with the slower walkers at the center of our streaming
(our paths like Van Allen belts feed
the axis of moving forward together,
each at our own pace,
our paths an eddying stream).
We'll keep walking our prayer until peace reaches each heart, until
harm is no one's intention, until peace is the rule.

Even now, this radiance of the earth and all hearts sings,
harm never reaches the core of who we are:
co-creators in conscious and unconscious collaboration.

V.

Our new flag will not be flat:
our new flag will be a dandelion gone to seed: all radiance from the sacred center,
sphere within sphere, waiting for wind.
Our new flag will be the twirling scarves of Chinese acrobats and Sufi dancers: circle-making,
spiraling to the center.
Our new flag is the turning of the earth itself;

and the stream of us pilgrims walking, walking towards peace,
turning back the war, unmaking the hatred:
'one people, one earth.'

VI.

Before the Catholic pilgrims lined the way to Santiago with their stamps and their shells,
before Saint James's bones were carried to Spain,
before Jerusalem became too dangerous a destination for Europeans,
before the Crusades,
long before Jesus Christ,
Pagan pilgrims paced that same highway, streamed through the Pyrenees to the sea,
to the westernmost sea to see the sun kiss, float, swim, sink,
to see the end of the earth as they knew it.
Forever, it seems, walking has been a prayer of gratitude and seeking:
Jains in their wandering, Aborigines on their Walkabout.
As the very mountains themselves seem to call out of the earth
—Shasta, Olympus, Kilimanjaro, Fuji—
Spirit calls us, compels us.

Ours is a new pilgrimage, a pilgrimage with no destination:
for if we keep going straight any direction on this earth,
we will end where we began.
Our way will be home. Going will be return.
We're coming home, sacred sphere, turning to honor your Spirit,
though we still smell of spent gunpowder, making our feeble prayers
sting like incense in the eyes; yet in your generosity, nothing, nothing is out of place.

We will return. Meanwhile, why wait?
Let's turn where we belong, in our 'beloved communities,' turning
like a planet,
like an orbit,
like galaxies.
Like atonement:
turning from harm, turning to love, turning to heal.

VII.

Deep in the earth, where the center pulls us, is a heat so bright it cannot be seen.
Like blue blood flows red at the wound,
we only see magma when it bursts into air, where it burns red and gold and white.
What we think of as earth, its loamy mantle,
dips into the blackbody of space to cool each night,
keeps our feet from the fire, allows us
these fragile skins and wet eyes to feel and see
the swirls of colored sands along the streambed,
the swirls of clouds around the green-blue Earth,
and a glimpse of Earth's inner star as revealed
by the volcano when it dances its own defiance of gravity.

I stood straight, felt the plumb line from my crown through my centers
to the center of this Earth, and listened to what pulls me here.

VIII.

This world is a rotten fruit,
the seeds of its own regeneration within itself, already whole.
It is a perfect world. I can see this in the faces of the walkers:
peace is already here.

Of course, we know perfection as impossible: we are taught
original sin, life as suffering, thorns with roses, power/struggle, but here is an undeniable truth:
all is created of the one stuff.

Error, the appearance of harm, may simply be misunderstanding.
Delusion but temporary understanding
(yes, the earth is flat, right here, flat enough to hold this circle of sand)
or misinterpreted sign
(this photo for permanence, this dandelion for death).

Delusions may be the fallen fruit of wisdom, perfection a matter of perception.
'Evil' but the compounding of error and illusion and elusion,
a confounding of the unfolding, for now, is all.
(This is much easier to conceive
those moments we are free from fear of death.)

But the injustices boggle: multiplied genocides, victims who turn tyrant
...trauma begetting fear begetting violence begetting trauma begetting fear...
the betrayals, the torture, the lying spies,
the bombs dropped from a distance that makes it easy to fly away
and deny.

IX.

A man carried an ember from Hiroshima home.
It burned like his searing anger, his 'never again.'
His grandmother placed the fire on her altar, kept it alive,
fueled it with love for him, cultivated compassion for his hatred,
for the wasteland, for the poison dripping in all their kin's blood,
for all those who 'survived.'
From 1945 they've kept the fire alive.
And his heart healed, lived to breathe fully again.

Anger can pass through us or into others. The flame could die or multiply.

Pilgrims carried the flame back last year:
crossed the Pacific by boat,
walked it across the Northwest,
through mountains and desert,
returning it to the origin of the fire at Los Alamos.
They chanted,
beat their drums,
prayed for peace

and extinguished the flame
in the earth.

X.

Spirit compels us to weave this garland for our mother,
and many have been called, many have begun.
From Vancouver Island, some carried a carved totem
to the grieving people of New York City.

Before them, Peace Pilgrim, Granny D.,
the Nipponzan Miyohoji.
Satish Kumar's Path without Destination and Mahatma Gandhi's Great Salt March,
the March on Washington and Pilgrimage of the Middle Passage
the NorthStar Pilgrim,
and all kinds of Sojourners (for) Truth.

And for millennia we have circumambulated the sacred:
Muslims the Ka'aba; Christians the labyrinth at Chartres, Buddhists their pagodas,
Three religions the one mountain, Kailash, and now all of us
the One Earth itself.

It is a big earth for small feet. But each of us only needs walk our piece.
Our continuity will blend into one stream
the many sands, people of all religions and none, people who make peace
by their walking, by talking, by listening,
who make peace by holding these truths:
 peace is possible,
 peace is essential,
 peace is sacred.
We walk to sanctify the whole world and all on it.

XI.

So begin to walk from here, the country that our leaders say wants war,
stream from west to east, north to south, join people from every religion calling for peace
in their own languages.
Every people has prayers for peace. Humanists and socialists'
work for justice is a call for peace. Diplomats invent careful rituals of peace.
Peace is under all the warmaking, rumbling like a readying fault in the earth,
waiting for the moment the wars end.
Peace is even how the warmakers sell war:
they say we'll have security, safety, freedom
from harm if we disarm
[them].
They name bombs Peacemakers, label troops Peacemakers,

know what we really want,
implicate us,

take our taxes and our young.

Listen... we can begin to hear the answers.

Each who has prayed for peace since this latest war began rumbling
will hear her own answer, will hear, and it is not much, not grandiose, what we are called to.

Simple things, like listening.

Like being peace.

As simple as not doing anything at all:

not going, not paying.

Like not training and arming our future enemies.

And bigger steps, like honoring the rule of law,
discovering old and creating new systems of true justice.

Like us white Americans eating enough of the Thanksgiving gift of turkey medicine
that we finally turn and begin to give back.

Begin the Great Give-away, from north to south,

west to east, forgive the debt,

and pray to be forgiven our stealing.

Pray there still is a place on this earth we belong.

Pray to find the place on this earth we belong.

XII.

Chanting 'we shall overcome,' we walked in Washington to end war: Muslims and Jews,

Christians and Wiccans, Buddhists and yogis,

socialists in a rainbow of splinter groups, anarchists and no-name atheists,

we watched the agitprop and the Five-Times-Prayer,

heard Raging Grannies sing and living saints speak.

For years I adored this speaking truth to power, saw it as the only way to make change.

I had such need to be heard, need for justice, need to stand my ground.

Now power is listening, spying, fearful as ever and ready to risk everything with all-out war:

they would rather kill us all than live with their fear, or greed, or loss of their giddy-making power,

they want to instill their fear in us peacemakers to stop us from scaring them.

Now I want to hear them, these strange men in power, not what they say on TV,
but where the fear comes from, how it might be healed, who they really are as they hide
behind their masks of macho and shields of mass destruction.

I want to listen to the release of pain of the Palestinian boy that will come only
if he is heard or by suicide.

I want to listen to the Israeli fear and hope for Zion:
why? Where does anyone belong? How far back in history does blame go?
What would justice look like? Wouldn't it look like, taste like, be
peace?

This same Earth, holding us here. How can we share it, and the graves of our ancestors?
Gaia, help us hear. Release our fear,
so we might listen again, so we might be heard and healed and find a way,
a just and peaceful way.

I hear the chant gear up, "no justice, no peace" and turn to the man with the megaphone to say:
"Justice, peace." He stops. Sometimes, it is as simple as that. Satyagraha works.

XIII.

We will keep walking.

When we come to an ocean, we will sail.

When we come to a border we will cross like an unstoppable wave of refugees,
or we'll meet pilgrims from the other side and pass

the torch, the beat, the momentum;

we'll hand over a new ark, exchange seeds, medicines, signs of peace.

No destination, just movement.

No goal but to radiate from the center of our gravity,

the earth our wheel,

our path the tread,

our walking the medicine.

When we close the circle,

we will have made a medicine wheel with Earth's center as hub.

We will know at last the Earth as round.

We'll finally sense that space is, in fact, curved.

As we stand, this divine light that comes in through crown

and out through feet is the same beam, straight through the earth, curving through space,
returning to us.

It threads through all centers,

it is the one center, everywhere, of this divine, infinite, beloved universe.

I know if each answers her own call, his own piece of the peace, the world will be transformed.

As exquisite as that closing circle of the horizon,

this will have been the Pure Land all along.

“All will be well.”

All will belong.

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