Isaiah 11:6-8

“The wolf shall live with the lamb, the leopard shall lie with the kid, the calf with the lion... and a little child will lead them...”

My mother, Mary, grew up on a small farm, literally with a little lamb that would toddle alongside her. In my lifetime, people marveled at how easily and happily she connected with children; she’d simply say she “spoke baby.” I believe their voices were perfect to her, each unto themselves, and they responded in kind. She and I bonded over how we “spoke animal,” too, delighting in them for themselves, respecting their natures, sanctity, and place. Quietly following in her path, patch by patch, my mother taught me gardening and building a place of gentleness and peace, where all things were welcome and safe, especially the little ones, and heaven was all around us; the sun, rain, and stars blooming in beautiful abundance at every step, human and animal, sharing grace; every turn of the trowel was a separate story and part of the whole of creation, and every breath a prayer.

“And the lion shall eat straw like the ox, the nursing child shall play over the hole of the asp...”

Gandhi wrote, “To my mind, the life of a lamb is no less precious than that of a human being. I should be unwilling to take the life of a lamb for the sake of the human body.” I stopped eating meat 20 years ago, recognizing its violence; people focus on what I gave up, but what I gained fills my soul as an expression of peace and an act of faith. In Hindu and Buddhist traditions, nonviolence toward all living things is called “Ahimsa,” another of so many beautiful parallels between the religions of our shared world.

As an agnostic, I feel honored to consider everyone’s religion equally beautiful. My heart tells me they are each perfect in their way, unique expressions of the whole, and divine in their differences. It seems paradoxical, but to me our individual uniqueness is what joins us, tells our shared story, and becomes a perfect paean of peace, unnamable because it is all-encompassing and forever becoming.

Thank you for this opportunity to revere Isaiah’s prophecy of peace with you and add my voice to your beautifully diverse chorus and divine work to embrace everyone’s unique identity as our path to peace for all life eternally.