

Soultypes: Discovering Your Spiritual DNA

A sermon by the Rev. Makaanah Elizabeth Morriss

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“This is the wonder of time, this is the marvel of space,  
out of the stars swung the earth, life upon earth rose to love.  
This is the marvel of life, rising to see and to know;  
Out of your heart, cry wonder: love that we all may live.”

(adapted from Robert T. Weston)

Sandra’s solo this morning of the song, “I Believe” and Robert Weston’s reading on the cosmogenesis of life are exquisite examples of the breadth of possible perspectives, experiences, and senses of the sacred which are available to us as human beings.

We gather in this space each Sunday made sacred we believe by our presence as gifts of the miracle of life. We are surrounded in this space by images of the sacred in the mandalas on the windows and at the front of the Sanctuary, by the Star Quilt at the back of the room. Each image inviting imagination, connection, and wonder. One may speak more to me; another may speak more to you. That is fine and as it should be. This diversity of spiritual calling creates the vibrant tapestry of our community.

The Rev. Alicia Forde, past member and president of this congregation and now a Unitarian Universalist minister in Loveland, Colorado writes:

“...a [religious] community is an environment where you can find a home in each other’s heart and soul. It is a living entity with spirit as its anchor, where a group of people are empowered by one another, by spirit, and by the ancestors to be themselves, carry out their purpose and use their power responsibly.”

We join together each Sunday to wonder, to explore, to question, and to connect. We gather to find comfort, seek new understandings, experience peace and transcendence. We come as many minds but join as one heart. We come with our individual gifts and our unique “spiritual DNA” and in our interactions we find our purpose made more clear, and our hearts made more strong.

Robert Norton and Richard Southern. in a book entitled *Soultypes: Decode your Spiritual DNA to Create Life of Authenticity, Joy and Grace*, offer some interesting insights and perspectives into what we as Unitarian Universalists have long celebrated as the tapestry of religious, spiritual and philosophical approaches.

Norton and Southern are church consultants. Over the years, as they have traveled the country helping congregations become clearer about their sense of purpose and vision, the “spiritual DNA of a given congregation,” they began to recognize that the same principles could be applied to individual spiritual/philosophical journeys.

DNA – now that’s a good strong scientific term; DNA – Deoxyribonucleic acid, a long chain which carries genes whose molecular products make possible the replication of the chain. In essence, DNA is a code that stores information.

The mystery and miracle of DNA is that it holds both the potential for replication as well as for individuality and uniqueness. It seems to hold memories of the past while permitting aspects of endless variety for an unfolding future. Each of us here today represents the combining of the DNA of our biological mother and our biological father. Each of us brings genetic history, family history, cultural history and even religious history to the unique life journey that we then create. We are the same and we are different.

Bob tells me that we and pumpkins share 70% of the same DNA – so there are aspects of ourselves that one might say are very pumpkin-like. And we and chimpanzees share over 98% of the same DNA. These DNA parts which are similar perhaps help us feel our connection as parts of the interdependent web of all existence.

But what we also know is that the percentage of DNA which is different, which is human and not pumpkin or chimp makes a difference, a big difference.

Robert Norton and Richard Southern use the metaphor of DNA and the reality of energy-connection to offer us a map for understanding our individual soul path, affirming the many differences which may occur.

They also use modern science in their approach reporting on the new field of neuro-theology which explores the link between spirituality and the brain.

“Sir John Eccles (a renowned scientist who won a Nobel Prize for brain research) tells us that the brain is not a producer of energies as once thought, but actually seems to be more a receiver that picks up impulses and transposes them into data that our ego-consciousness can then comprehend. Sir John suggests, that in the case of meditative transcendent states, the energies themselves seem to be coming from a realm currently inaccessible to human measurement, from a purely spiritual level that can only be experienced.” Sir John is saying that perhaps the brain plays a vital role in awakening to the presence of the Creative Source, The Ultimate Mystery, what some may call God/Goddess. (*Soultypes*, p. 101)

Sir John’s words echo those of medieval philosopher-scientist Moses Maimonides said that not only is science the surest way of knowing God, it is the only way. And down through the centuries, he was joined by other scientists, notably Nicholas Copernicus, Francis Bacon, Galileo, Johannes Kepler, Isaac Newton and Albert Einstein. Good strong, rational company to be sure. (*Soultypes*. P. 4)

Then what is meant by “spiritual DNA”?

Author and creative educator, Julia Cameron writes, “When I speak of ‘spiritual DNA,’ I am talking about a stamp of originality that is as definite and specific as my blue eyes, my blond hair, medium height. Just as our physical potentials are encoded at conception, it is my belief that we carry the imprint, or the blueprint of our gifts and their unfolding.” (*Soultypes*, p.7)

In our story for all ages this morning, Sandy Eisenberg Sasso begins by saying “The voice of God is in the uniqueness of each and every person.” In the story, as you remember, each person had a slightly different perspective on what the Mystery, the Holy, the Source might be. Each person’s perspective came from their unique life path, their work, their role in life.

The process of uncovering our “spiritual DNA” is quite simple and direct although it does require committed reflection and attention. It begins by asking us to look at four questions in depth:

Who Am I? – what is my identity.

What’s important to me? – what are my core values;

Why am I here? – what is my life purpose;

And Where do I want to go with my life? – what is my life vision.

Each of these questions is part of what might be seen as a building block for one’s unique sense and expression of the spiritual or universal connection.

Who Am I? This is the first question. One way of exploring this is through reflecting on one’s name, one’s given name (or in the case of some of us like myself, one’s chosen name) as well as one’s surname. What is the derivation of your given name? What is its meaning?

When I was born I was given the name of “Nancy” which means filled with grace. Although I did not dislike the name “Nancy” it never seemed like it was me and thus as a young adult, after considerable study and meditation on names, I chose a new name, the name Makaanah – which is a Hawaiian name meaning “gift of life.”

I liked the meaning and the sound of the name Makaanah and I think I also liked the sense of energy connection with an indigenous religious group. I am not Hawaiian by ancestry, but I do have, as we all have, indigenous spiritual ancestors, whose spiritual DNA flows through me. It is often interesting and helpful to be aware of such ancestors and to allow ourselves to be open to these ancient callings on our sacred journeys.

In many indigenous cultures, the names which infants are given are chosen intuitively to help them live out their sacred purpose.

Do you feel you fit your name? If you changed your name, what would you choose?

The second foundational question is “What is important to you?” What are your core values? On what do you base your life decisions great and small? Core values are things like acceptance, honesty, integrity, assertiveness, dependability, creativity, family, financial security, generosity, compassion, etc.

We can uncover our core values as we reflect on questions like, “What are the three or four primary factors that influence the decisions I make?” or “What brings profound meaning to my life?” (*Soultypes*, p. 29)

As Norton and Southern write, “Knowing your core values allows you to live life with ease

and grace. If you are not sure of your core values, you can waste valuable energy just trying to determine what's the 'right' thing to do." (*Soultypes*, p.24)

The third foundational question is "Why are you here?" What do you discern as your life purpose? Now this one is a "biggie" to be sure. As religious liberals we believe that each person has a unique role to play on this planet. Each person has individual gifts and talents and in an ideal world, one in which everyone had sufficient food, shelter, creative education and empowering opportunity, each person would be able to maximize upon their contribution to the global village.

We do not live in an ideal world that is for sure but that only makes the finding our unique life purpose all the more important – for it is our way to bring healing and wholeness to ourselves and our neighbors on this planet.

Your purpose is not your job. Circumstances will change throughout your life journey, but your purpose can remain constant. Sometimes we gain glimpses of our purpose early in childhood. I have a friend who shared with me that since her son was about 7 or 8 he has loved studying Greek mythology and history. As he has grown older this love has expanded to studying the Greek language. He is fortunate for he has discovered early on some important gifts and talents that are his to use.

I remember my mother always used to say that she wished we were each born with a tag tied to our wrist saying what we were supposed to do with our life. That would make it much easier.

It was an interesting image and for sure it would make things clearer. But part of the process of claiming our gifts, is the journey to discovering and affirming what they are.

Questions you might want to reflect on to help with this process include: "What am I really good at?" "What do I really enjoy?" "What are my greatest strengths?" "What do others see as my strengths?" "When I look at my life, what activities do I consider of greatest worth?"

It is suggested that the final version of your purpose statement (and this may take many re-writes – it did for me) should be: no more than a single sentence, easily understood by a twelve-year-old; and easy to recite from memory (so you can recite it to yourself under trying circumstances).

My purpose statement in its most current form goes like this: "My purpose is to help unlock myself and others so that the healing love, truth, creativity and compassion deep inside each one may shine forth."

The next question to help unlock your spiritual DNA is "where do you want to go?" What is your vision for your life three, five, ten years from now? Your vision is a positive picture of your desired future. It needs to be realistic, believable, and attractive. It is a dream in action, a launching pad for the future.

“Vision requires stretching reality beyond the present by looking and thinking ahead. It does not fixate on the present; nor does it attempt to replay the past. Not every vision culminates in success, but without vision no success is possible. Visions encourage you to grow, develop and create.” (*Soultypes*, p. 34)

Your core values are a precise definition of what you stand for. Your purpose statement is developed to define your sense of your unique reason for being, what you are called to do. Your vision is your ideal image of the future.

Norton and Southern suggest that there are four soul types which are the ways in which we live out our identity, values, purpose and vision. All four types reside within each of us as possibilities but most of us choose one or two to focus on more directly. As I share a description of each of these types, listen to see which ones strike a chord for your sense of personal identity, values, purpose and vision.

“Heart-centered spirituality,” the practice of gratitude, appeals to folks who see life as something to be gratefully experienced and embraced in the here and now. Being in touch with the heart, feelings, and emotions is important to these people, not just to understand them cognitively but to use them as a way to make one’s life more sacred, more joyful and more filled with gratitude. Personal renewal or transformation is central on this path. There is a hunger for a sense of the Sacred Source, the Divine, to live in one’s heart. Heart-centered types grow spiritually by incorporating gratitude into all aspects of their lives, the good and the difficult. They are often very adept at turning negatives into positives. (*Soultypes*, p. 67 and 75)

Soul-centered spirituality, the practice of contemplation, is a path followed by those who believe the purpose of life is to achieve union with the sacred, who prefer to listen for the sound or experience of Ultimate Oneness, known by many names. For these folks, the real world is the interior world. Intuitive, introspective, and contemplative are adjectives used to describe this form of spirituality. Often those following the soul-centered spiritual path see themselves on a mystical journey into a sense of Oneness with All, the holy, and they value opportunities to pause on the journey for quiet renewal of the spirit. They appreciate times of retreat and daily meditation. Their goal is to empty the mind of the concerns and chatter of the outer world and to simply be in the presence of the Sacred Source. (*Soultypes*, p. 79)

Practices which are connected with this type of spirituality include meditation, centering prayer, sacred contemplative reading, sacred sound and sacred movement.

Mind-centered spirituality, the practice of awareness, is a path pursued by those who see life as a puzzle to be solved and who prefer intellectual exploration and orderly thought. Discovery based on knowledge is significant to those on this spiritual search, so words, mental constructs and complex ideas provide spiritual and philosophical nourishment. These folks expect intellectual substance from a spiritual community. Listening to others and having others listen to them is important them.

Interested in the meaning and intent of sacred and philosophical and scientific writings and literature, they are likely to be attracted to an in-depth study and discussion of various topics. (*Soultypes*. P. 100)

Mind-centered spirituality invites one to see the wonders of existence and the Creative Source all about without preconceptions. This path invites us to be more open to the potential for paradigm-shift and not to remain locked in our present mode of perceiving life and situations. There is a recognition that all paradigms are in truth illusions and that clarity of vision requires the courage to drop such illusions. There is a willingness to look at the world in completely new ways.

Strength-Centered Spirituality, the fourth soul type, is the practice of active commitment. Those following this path see life as an opportunity to create a better society, to build the Commonwealth of All here on Earth. For these folks, spiritual growth means being able to serve others, and it begins with a personal and clear commitment.

Serving others may take the form of support, advocacy, or direct action in relation to a moral or ethical issue, or it may be manifested through helping others in compassionate service. Formal belief systems are less important than the vision of a transformed world.

Our Unitarian Universalist approach to religion often includes such an approach. Our monthly Comea Shelter Dinners, our support of the Cheyenne Diversity Coalition, our work with the Cheyenne Interfaith Hospitality Network are all examples of how folks in this congregation nurture this aspect of their spiritual journey. The joining of mind, heart and hands in a shared endeavor is life changing and rewarding for all those involved.

One Sunday, several months ago, one of our members and a past president of our congregation, Luanne Gearhart, brought to our attention a potential change in how Pharmacists in Wyoming might be allowed to respond/or not respond to certain prescription requests especially related to HIV/AIDS patients.

During Coffee Hour that day, those who were concerned about these possible changes took the opportunity to write letters to the Pharmacy Board. When the Pharmacy Board met they decided not to implement the proposed changes given the letters they had received, a large percentage of which had come from folks in our congregation. This was the practice of commitment in action.

Out of the stars we have come, out of the mystery of Creation with a mind and a heart, with a free will and a sense of purpose. Our identity, our values, our purpose, our vision weave into a soul-filled path which is both similar to those who have gone before and is also of our own unique design.

I would like to close with a reading from Ursula Goodenough, Professor of Biology at Washington University and one of America's leading cell biologists. She describes her life journey eloquently in this way,

"I start with my egg cell, one of 400,000 in my mother's ovaries. It meets with one of the hundreds of millions of sperm cells produced each day by my father. Astonishing that I happen at all,

truly astonishing. And then I cleave, I implant, I grow tiny fetal kidneys and a tiny heart.

The genes of my father and the genes of my mother switch on and of and on again in all sorts of combinations, all sorts of chords and tempos, to create something both eminently human and eminently new.

Once I am born, my unfinished brain slowly contemplates its maturation in the context of my unfolding experience and during my quest to understand what it is to be a person, I come to understand that there can be but one me.

And so I lift my head, and I bear my own witness, with affection and tenderness and respect. And in so doing, I sanctify myself with my own grace. To the extent that I know myself, I am known. My yearning to be Known is [strong], and I sing my own song with deep gratitude for my existence.

With this comes the understanding that I am in charge of my own emergence. It is not something I must wait for, but something to seek, something to participate in achieving, something to delight in achieving. As my self-knowledge deepens and evolves, I find myself in spiritual alignment with the voice that calls to each of us so poignantly [from the depths of the profound Mystery of the Universe, the Source of All Life and Love.] (Goodenough, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, pgs. 60-61)

So may it be.