

Insight Intelligence: Our Connection with the Universe

A sermon by the Rev. Makaanah E. Morriss

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I want to begin by inviting you to think of a sunrise which stirred your soul. (Or if you are really not a morning person, think of a sunset.) It may have been on a vacation or on a daily walk. It may have been planned – setting the alarm clock, getting yourself to the spot where you could get a good view of the sun, or it may have been unexpected. You may have been in the mountains, on the open prairie, by a lake or pond, in a meadow, by the ocean or even at home in your yard.

Just for a moment remember all the sights or feelings you experienced – the brilliance of the sun, how its light and energy seemed to enter every cell of your being...how its energy form transfixed your heart, mind and imagination...Remember how you felt as though perhaps you had “melted” into that sun and become one with all that is...feel that connection and the openness it invited in your soul...

Now we can explain sunrises and sunsets to a certain extent. We know that really the sun is neither rising nor setting – the earth instead is turning. We have scientific understanding to some degree of what the sun may be composed of and of what the earth is composed and of what we are composed. But we only have some understanding – not full and complete understanding. There is a mystery and a majesty which we can feel, we can describe poetically or artistically but which is larger and more encompassing than our ability to analyze and dissect.

A sunrise or sunset experience is a direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life. This is the first “source” listed in our Unitarian Universalist principles – the cornerstone upon which our search for Truth begins.

This sense of transcending mystery and wonder invites us to be open to truth revealed and found in a multitude of places, in a multitude of ways. We find the Universal Mystery alive in as many ways as there are individuals in this room and then some.

The “ground of being”, the ground of our being, is larger and vaster than our human imaginations can easily comprehend. Some of us may see or think of this “Ground of All Being” as a great ocean of energy – in wave and particle forms, manifesting in various specific ways at times and then returning to the greater amorphous flow.

For others of us the “ground of being” is more like a Creative Source – perhaps with form or not, masculine or feminine or both or neither, a pulsing, pulsating, and creating process which has somehow and for reasons not fully known brought all that is into being.

And for yet others of us the ground of being may be the matrix of life on this planet or in this solar system, the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

However we experience it, however we define it, the Ground of Being or Cosmic Source or

Ultimate Reality invites us into a feeling of unity with others. It invites us into a broader experience of life, invites us out of solitary isolation, and enables us to feel a sense of energy connection within, without and beyond.

Brother David Steindl-Rast, a well-respected spiritual teacher, Benedictine monk and a leader in inter-religious dialogue, in the quote found at the top of your order of service suggests that “The goal of religion is to reestablish broken bonds – to our deepest self, to society and nature, and to the very Ground of Being.”

Brother Steindl-Rast reminds us that the word “spirit” derives from the Latin for “life-breath.” Spirituality, then, is aliveness—super aliveness for it invites us into a sense of wholeness and greater unity. (Steindl-Rast, “Solving the God Problem,” *Spirituality & Health*, June 2005)

The growing fields of holistic medicine and research are showing that spiritual health and physical health are closely entwined. How we view ourselves, who we accept ourselves and others, how we connect with nature and with the larger experience of Ultimate Reality all have implications for our physical health, our mental clarity, our sense of emotional openness and peace.

Steindl-Rast makes the point that “religion ties us again to our own depth, which is one with the fathomless depth from which the whole universe wells.” He writes, “This broad sense of Religion (capital “R”) is the shared mystical matrix of the world’s various religions (small “r”), the spiritual humus from which these varied religions sprout in all their diversity.” (Steindl-Rast, p.58)

As religions have sprouted from this mystical matrix of oneness, however, many have redefined the experience of the Ground of All Being into a separated “God” form, most usually male – separated from us and all matter, an “other” with an existential gap between us and this being. Such a re-definition has enabled authoritarian and hierarchical structures to replace individual and personal spiritual connection.

“Keenly uncomfortable with this gap, an ever-increasing number of people are challenging the dominant God-view on the basis of their own inner mystical Ultimate Reality awareness.

“Actually Jesus did so in his time. Responding to the inner authority of his mystic awareness, he stood up to outer authority. But many of his followers missed the point. Instead of relying on their own inner authority, as Jesus had encouraged them to do, they turned Jesus himself into the new external authority.” (Steindl-Rast, p. 58)

We as Unitarian Universalists grew from ancient roots committed to returning to Jesus’ original teachings – including trusting and respecting the individual’s sense of connection with the Ultimate Mystery of all Being.

And from our openness to many perspectives and our belief in respecting and encouraging the individual as well as community search for truth and meaning has come our living tradition of multiple sources of wisdom and insight.

As we read together the description of these Sources, as you experience the beauty and energy of the mandalas on the silks on our windows which represent these sources, one or more of them may have seemed most helpful to you at the current point of your life journey.

Any one of these sources can help us find and experience a mystical moment, a “Peak Experience,” a moment of feeling that incredible joy and peace when we know deep within that we are One with all that is.

Some of us find this through experiences in nature. Others through hands-on action to help neighbors and the wider world in painful and challenging situations. Others of us find such experiences in our study and disciplines related to wisdom from Buddhism, Sufism, Taoism and other world religious/philosophical traditions.

For still others of us the simple, profound teachings found in Jewish and Christian writings touch our soul. For many of us the findings of science which both illuminate understanding of material life as well as pointing to a greater matrix of energy existence is most helpful. And as our earth is challenged more dramatically, many, many of us find ourselves turning to the teachings of earth-based spirituality to help us know and feel our kinship with the web of all existence.

Any and all of the sources can help us develop our sense of Universal Connection, our inner “guide,” enabling us to move forward in our individual lives with clarity, courage and compassion. These are not just words. These are not just concepts. Clarity, courage and compassion actually are ways in which to channel our life energies that move us forward in life-enhancing ways not just for ourselves but for all aspects of our web of existence.

The mystical experience, the mystical moment, is not something limited to a few. As Brother Steindl-Rast says, “Mystics are not special human beings; rather, every human being is a special kind of mystic.” Each of us with our own unique perspective, our own individual “connection” with Ultimate Reality, has our own gift to bring into existence.

As our sense of greater connection becomes clearer and stronger, our sense of peace and balance increases. For certain, the challenges and vicissitudes of everyday life occur, but they no longer throw us off-course.

Joseph Chilton Pearce, a noted lecturer and author on human development and spirituality, suggests that most of our modern society is focused on what he terms “the error-correction error.” As a culture, we often do not experience our sense of Ultimate Grounding and thus a generalized and mostly unconscious anxiety runs rampant. This formless sense of dis-ease and worry, negativity and angst, causes us to tend to focus on mistakes or errors instead of our greater, wider, more creative purpose or direction.

If you think back to when you learned how to ride a bike, you’ll remember that when you focused on your wobbling, you only wobbled more and probably fell off the bike. Only when you gained the ability to seek that inner place of balance and to focus on your goal of riding to a particular spot down the road were you able to achieve bicycle equanimity!

This is actually true in all of the activities in our lives. When I am riding my young horse, if I become aware that my position is not centered and I concentrate on this fact, my posture actually only becomes worse and much more stiff.

If instead, I can let myself visualize a point of light energy beaming straight forward from my solar plexus, my third chakra, as well as beaming down to meet and match the center of my horse, my position corrects itself, becomes flexible and my horse, Miracle, and I can flow together in what feels like a dance of eternity.

When I am writing a sermon, if I start to feel hesitant, anxious, unsure of whether I understand the topic well enough to write or preach on it, my fingers freeze, my breathing becomes very shallow, and confusion reigns.

What I need to do is to stand up, walk around a bit, maybe even put the manuscript down overnight. I need to open my mind and heart to my greater sense of flow, vision and connection. What is my goal with this sermon is the question I ask my heart and spirit. I may sleep on this question and often the next morning I can feel, I can sense the direction I need to head.

As a society and culture we are also much more focused on error-correction than course-correction. Error-correction keeps us locked into limited, closed-loop solutions to problems which keep reappearing.

Course-correction invites us to take a wider, a much wider view. It invites us to open to our uniquely individual sense of greater universal connection and Ultimate Being, so we can receive new and creative insights into how to make changes which return us to the course of oneness with all.

If we were to respond to the current societal experience of devastating hurricanes from a “course-correction” viewpoint, how might our strategies change for helping those in danger, helping to re-build destroyed areas, and responding to environmental changes due to global warming? What would be the questions we would ask? How might our individual lifestyles change?

When we ask the questions in relation to the sense of oneness of all, many things become simpler, not always easier, but somehow much clearer and filled with a sense of heart, of compassion.

The Pueblo chief, Ochwiay Biano, told Carl Jung that white people were “...always upset, their faces lined with wrinkles...a sign of eternal restlessness.” Ochwiay said the whites were crazy since they maintained that they thought with their heads, whereas it was well known by his people that only crazy people did that. Indians, he said, thought with their hearts.” (Pearce, *Spiritual Initiation*, p. 59)

The pervading sense of anxiety which is found in our modern society is a reflection of the loss of our sense of connection with the Ground of Being. Anxiety is the most powerful and pervasive of all emotions. It is a subtle process and can distort perceptions, stunt decision making and make learning almost impossible. Anxiety is an alarm bell without a specific focus – it is merely saying

“watch out...there is something not quite right here...I’m not sure what...but something feels ‘off’.”

Fear is quite different from anxiety because fear has a focus – we are afraid of something definite. We can talk with others to sort out our feelings of fear. We can ask for their support and their protection. We can find a way to deal with the situation.

Anxiety is much more amorphous and thus very destructive of us as individuals and as a society. Anxiety over a prolonged time breeds arrogance – a shallow and rigid stance of superiority.

The arrogance of many conservative approaches to Christianity today is a good example of what can happen when the Creative Source and Mystery of Life is defined as separate from and judgmental of humans.

Anxiety is a sign that we no longer are feeling rooted and grounded in the matrix of all being. This is one of the reasons we, you and I, need each other in this spiritual and religious community. We need each other as we search for our sense of Ultimate Reality, as we heal our sense of deepest self, as we reconnect to nature and our visions of a whole and just society. We need each other in order to learn from one another, to laugh with one another, to be present for each other in times of sorrow and pain.

The Six Sources of our liberal religious faith, the many possible experiences and teachings which enhance our understanding and help us develop profound wisdom, are why we look for a community of fellow seekers.

Brother David Steindl-Rast suggests that there are three questions that can help guide us on our individual and shared journey to cosmic and sacred understanding, to developing our own sense of greater and universal direction, our own internal sense of guidance toward clarity and compassion.

In solitude and silence, alone and in the company of others we need to ask ourselves:

“What is real?” and we will find that we are confronted with a silence more real than anything else; it goes beyond what we can grasp or put into words.

We need to ask “Who am I?” and we will find the “Ultimate More and Being” in that depth of our own hearts that thoughts cannot fathom nor words fully express.

And we need to ask, “What is life all about?” and we will find that our own living and loving is participation in an inexhaustible Ground of all Being, a sense of Ultimate and Universal connection, of life and of love. (Steindl-Rast, p. 86)

Deep within each of us lies this point of connection. It is ours to honor, to use, to strengthen. It is a gift, a gift from the Mysterious Source of All, a gift to us. As we use this connection, as our sense of greater connection becomes clearer and stronger, a sense of peace and purpose, joy and

equanimity will flow through us and into the world. This is not some magical process but instead is the birthright with which we arrived on Planet Earth.

And so I invite you to take the next few moments in silence as I play the chant Om Namah Shivah, which can be translated as “I honor the divine within”, a chant whose gentle repeating tones invites us into an experience of being at one with the heart beat of the universe.

May your sense of connection be strong...may our experience of Oneness bring you peace...may your life direction of clarity and compassion bring you a fullness of days.

So may it be.