

Seeking the Sacred Together

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Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church

Opening Words

THERE IS LIGHT

by Eric Williams¹

In the beginning
There was light

Infinite and expansive
Flowing out from an unseen center.

Throughout Creation
There is light
From the steady Sun
The glowing Moon
The flashing Meteor
The twinkling Stars
And the auroras dancing in the northern skies.

Within each part of Creation
There is light

Slowed down and held close
By every cell and molecule
By each atom and element.

Within you
There is light

The same light as the Source
The same radiance that is in all creatures.

May this light
Be a reminder to you
Of your true nature
And your kinship with all beings.

¹<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/there-light>

HYMN

#203 All Creatures of the Earth and Sky

READING

HUMANITY'S PSALM

By Cynthia Frado²

Creator of Life, Source of All Being
It was from the particles of the Universe that you formed me...
Iron and carbon and phosphorous

Mixed with energy, passion and dreams.
I was made in your image, says ancient Scripture.

Made from the colors of the rainbow,
Shaped with bones straight and curved,
Padded with flesh flabby and lean,
Near-sighted, far-sighted, short-sighted, and long in vision.

I was made in your image, says ancient Scripture.
Made strong and tall, short and stout,
Born with hands tender and fragile,
Aged with hands gnarled and mature.
Large nose, small nose, crooked nose
Who knows the mathematical infinitude of your genetic possibilities?

I was made in your image, says ancient Scripture.
Made to give love and receive love.

Your passion courses through my veins.
And when I touch another human being in love,
It matters not what gender ignites the flame,
It matters only that the fire of life brings its light to the
darkened deadness of a world that cannot exist
without love's transformative power.

²<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/humanitys-psalm>

I was made in your image, says ancient Scripture.

But who are you?

I need to know.

I who have eyes that are brown and blue and green and hazel.

I who am intellectually gifted and mentally challenged.

I who speak the languages of the world and no language at all.

I who know scientific equations and musical sonatas,
and know only the magic of a daily loaf of bread,
and the taunting sounds of racism,
and the mockery of my sexual orientation,
and the lack of respect for my aging body.

I who am all of these things and more want to know:
Who are you that I am made in your image?

I am, says ancient Scripture.

I simply am.

I am the Light of All-Being,

I am the Divine Spark.

I am the Source of Love,

The most transformative power

In the Universe.

All life is in my image.

I am in You,

And you are in me.

I am in your siblings.

They, too, are in me.

I am in your pain and suffering,

And I am in your compassion and joy.

I am Light and Love,

And Hope and Possibility...

And so are you.

Creator of All Life, Source of All Being

It was from the particles of the Universe that you formed me...

Iron and carbon and phosphorous

Mixed with energy, passion and dreams.

Forgive me. Forgive me.
I forgot that you are everywhere.
I forgot that I am everywhere.

Thank you for reminding me of who I am.

ANTHEM

Mystery, 14th Century Plainsong (Arranged) Text by Richard Kimball

SERMON

I have always been drawn to the sacred.

I have always had a sense of being connected to something greater than the sum of my present consciousness.

I can only imagine it now, but a few short months after my birth, I was dressed in a white linen gown, taken to the hallowed gathering space, and blessed with purifying waters.

The souls of all of my ancestors were there to celebrate the newest branch on the tree of life.

This was just the beginning. As a young child, this sense of the sacred manifested as a fascination with magic.

I fancied myself a sorcerer- able to command the powerful elements of the earth and able to concoct potions, casts spells, and soar through the air on my spindly broomstick (or vacuum cleaner).

As a young Catholic boy, I was drawn to the church by the beauty of the sacraments, and the transcendent grace of the Eucharist. I was the only altar server to volunteer for the 7AM mass.

I wanted to experience the sacred presence first thing in the morning, and nowhere could I feel it more with my entire body than when worshipping in community amidst billowing incense and resounding chorus at the communion table.

I knew then that my purpose was to facilitate connection to the sacred in community, and though I have often struggled to feel it, the presence of the sacred has never left me.

By my teenage years, I began to feel disconnected from my sacred community. My bisexual identity made me an unwelcome guest at the Communion Table.

I had grown up being told that I was made in the image and likeness of the divine, yet my very being was sinful and unnatural.

How could I be sacred and sinful at the same time, I wondered? How could an all-loving god be opposed to love? How could a creator so cruel be sacred, worthy of reverence?

I struggled with this through my early teen years, and felt deeply guilty for seeking out love where it was so patently forbidden. To top it off, the deaths of the principle members of my support network including my father, grandfather, grandmother, and aunt left me feeling completely abandoned by my god.

I lived in shame for a good long while, until one day, while I was out on a solitary stroll, I realized that I could not believe in an all-loving god that was opposed to different forms of love and family.

I lost my faith and my purpose; I no longer felt the presence of sacred connection in my life.

I was desperate to feel that sacred connection I had once felt. I needed a theology that made my authentic identity sacred.

I became a seeker. I spent countless hours planted in a comfy chair in the religion section of my local bookstore, scanning texts, looking for truth, looking for a religious path that would lead me back to the sacred.

One day, I found something! It was a star of David necklace dangling from my maternal grandmother's neck. My mom's mom was a quiet woman, who I did not see very often as a child, so I had no idea that I had Jewish heritage, but there it was. Suddenly, I felt like I found the answer.

My Catholic upbringing had connected me deeply to the Italian ancestors on my father's side of the family, and now Judaism would connect me to another eternal lineage— I would rediscover my connection to the sacred.

I began to meet with a rabbi to learn about my lost heritage. I felt like I had found a sacred home.

The reform tradition of Judaism accepted me and my identity, but what really drew me into Judaism was how present the sacred was in every aspect of daily living.

Jewish law, for daily living, called halakhah literally means “the path one walks”. Therefore every step along the path of daily life is an expression of divinity. An observant Jew lives in constant gratitude and praise of the sacred world before him or her. There are hundreds of blessings of thanksgiving that can be recited throughout the day.

These Blessing express gratitude to the divine not only for extraordinary gifts such as seeing a rainbow, or the birth of a new child, but also for daily gifts, such as waking, enjoying a meal, or being able to see—things easily taken for granted.

As a Catholic, I had to wait until Sunday to go to church to experience the transcendence of holy connection, but through Judaism, every moment of my life could be a celebration of the beauty and wonder of creation.

This was an awakening experience for me. My eyes became open to the beauty of creation all around me. I truly started to notice the little miracles of everyday life.

Everything began to feel sacred, from the miracle of a sunset resplendent in color to the mysterious curls of steam emanating from my morning cup of coffee.

Life felt worth celebrating again. Life felt sacred again. I felt sacred again. I felt so drawn to the daily expression of divinity and beauty that I experienced through Judaism that I even changed my name to Israel.

Judaism, however, eventually stopped feeling like an authentic expression of spirituality for me. There was one small problem...

I realized that I no longer believed in the personified idea of god. I realized that the mystery and the beauty of creation was enough for me, that I no longer felt compelled to view it through the lens of a creator god.

I felt that the world was sacred enough for me, and I didn't need God to explain it. But what a wonderful world it is!

Albert Einstein once said, there are two ways to live your life: One is as though nothing is a miracle; the other is as though everything is a miracle. Life for me is a celebration of the miracle of existence.

The underlying message for me is that the world is full of unnoticed beauty and opportunities for transcendent connection. The sacred is everywhere, and it doesn't necessarily have to be a supernatural sacred either.

Whether you prefer to call it mystery, beauty, spirit, higher power, god or goddess, the universe is one miraculous interconnected web that we are all a part of. We cannot separate ourselves from it, we are all made of the same stardust.

But sometimes we fail to notice it.

How do you experience the sacred in everyday life?

Do you experience the sacred in everyday life?

I have spent a greater part of my life searching for the presence of the sacred, the presence of the divine, the presence of a god—something greater than myself to connect to, to move through me and inspire me to live joyfully, authentically, and lovingly.

Much of this time I spent searching, was spent looking for something outside myself, up there—

I compartmentalized the sacred, I compartmentalized experience of the sacred. It was something set aside for morning prayer, or Sunday morning, or Friday evening or even a Saturday afternoon hike.

No wonder I was never satisfied with my searching!

We cannot seek the sacred outside of ourselves, because it is in us,

It is all around us.

It is us.

We are it.

We are made in its image and likeness, because we are it, and it is us.

We simply need to become aware of it, to feel it.

For many people, saying a prayer is a personal way to connect to the sacred.

But what if we thought of prayer not as the recitation of words to a higher power, but as a way of being, a way of living, a way of interacting with the world?

What if we thought of the sacred not as something that is, but rather as an active embodied intentionality that we approach our lives and the world with?

Last week, before the close of the service, Rev Myke offered up a blessing from the Dineh, commonly referred to as the Navajo people. The Dineh blessing is a reminder to walk in beauty.

In beauty I walk
With beauty before me I walk
With beauty behind me I walk
With beauty above me I walk
With beauty around me I walk
It has become beauty again

To “Walk in Beauty” means to walk in harmony with all living things.

To walk in a state of awareness, where you feel connected to everything around you.

To walk in beauty is to experience the sacred as an active process, to see and feel, experience, and be goodness and light in every moment of living.

The Dineh, like the observant Jew, rejoices in every moment of daily life.

The Dineh consecrates life by living it, by walking the path, by walking in beauty.

The actual word that the Dineh use for beauty is Hózhó.

In the Dineh language there is no word for religion, nor for art. The only word that could be used to describe both is hózhó- a word that defines the essence of Dineh philosophy.

It encompasses beauty, order, and harmony, and expresses the idea of striving for balance. Every aspect of Dineh life, secular and spiritual, is related to hózhó.

According to the Dineh worldview, the purpose of life is to achieve balance, in a continual cycle of gaining and retaining harmony.

But to walk in hózhó, to walk in beauty, to strive to restore balance means that the sacred comprises both good and evil, beauty and ugliness, peace and horror.

But what's sacred about a pile of rubble in a war ravaged city. Where's the sacred in horror, hatred, and violence? Can we find the sacred in someone whom we loathe?

What if the sacred is not something that is, but rather an attitude or intentionality we bring to a situation?

What if the sacred is possibilities? The possibilities of reconciliation, beauty, and peace that exist amidst that war ravaged pile of rubble.

What if the sacred is a call to action?
The call to beautify the world and restore balance.

I offer up that the sacred is both in noticing the beauty that is before us as it is in noticing the beauty that is absent, the beauty that could be. The beauty we are called to create together.

How do you notice the injustice? How do you notice the beauty that could be?

I also offer that the sacred is in our relationships with one another.

Elizabeth Dominguez, a feminist Philippine theologian says that Asian women view God or the sacred not as an individual, but as a community.

She says that “To be made in the image of the sacred is to be in community. It is not simply a man or a woman who can reflect the sacred, but it is the community in relationship.’...This community is characterized by 'interdependence,' 'harmony,' and 'mutual growth.’”

The sacred is the spark that reminds us of our interdependence and calls us to work together to give life to the possibilities of peace, harmony, and beauty.

The sacred is a deafening call to make a way out of no way and create the beauty that can be.

Therefore the sacred is in the communal struggle.

It is the communal struggle for beauty, the communal struggle for love, the communal struggle to give birth to the goodness and the justice and the beauty we know deep down in our hearts is possible.

Living a sacred life is to be awake to these possibilities.

To see the light through the darkness.

Fear and Complacency are the opposites of the sacred.

Resistance is sacred, striving for justice is sacred.

Revolution is sacred.

Noticing the light present in our everyday lives helps us to envision the light that is absent. Noticing the beauty and the sacred all around gives us a vision for the beauty that could be possible.

But we have to be present to notice the beauty and to feel the sacred. We have to be present to notice the injustice. We have to be present to imagine the possibilities.

The Lakota people say their goodbyes to each other with the phrase “Walk in Beauty.”

This is my wish for all of us today. May we know that no matter what we choose to call it: Beauty, Possibilities, God, Goddess, or the Sacred... is always with us,

is all around us, is us: The power to restore harmony and peace and balance to the Earth is us.

May we feel that power in ourselves
May we feel that power in our coming together
May we consecrate our lives by living them
May we walk in Beauty

HYMN

#1064 Blue Boat Home

CLOSING WORDS

Adapted from words by Gordon B. McKeeman³

Please join hands

Worship need not cease when we leave this place.
It can echo in our lives,
in our words,
in our deeds,
in our moods,
in our dreams.

Carry the spirit of worship with you wherever you may go.

As we extinguish the flame of this chalice,
let each of us carry its light into every day of our lives.

Go in peace.

³<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/closing/5381.shtml>