

THE MORE THINGS CHANGE, THE MORE SOME STAY THE SAME!

Darwin/Evolution Day

I don't think I have ever met a Unitarian Universalist who denies the consensus of Climate Scientist's findings that humans are a significant part of the problem that is resulting in Global Warming and Climate Change. Nor have I met a UU who would think that it is a good idea to eliminate watchdog agencies merely because they infringe on the profits and freedoms of corporations. But we live in interesting times, when lies told about other candidates can elect an unqualified President, when someone who is absolutely opposed to Public Schools can become the Education Secretary, and, well, you know the rest! Most of the agencies that protect consumers' rights are at risk of being dismantled. It is more clear than ever before in my lifetime, that corporations rule the world. Where once Kings and Emperors reigned, it is the modern Princes of Industry that pull the strings of too many wholly owned representatives and officials here and around the world.

For decades after the Second World War, it seemed as if Science and Reason were in the ascendancy, that they had effectively routed most of the irrational forces that dominated humanity throughout the dark ages and that the future was looking ever brighter for a sensible world. In fact the forces of modernity had been reshaping the world since at least the mid-1800s, encouraged by enlightenment thinkers. By the beginning of the 20th century there was already a non-rational fundamentalist backlash developing within religion, but societal progress was being driven by science and industry.

Through the 1960s, technology was still accessible to mere mortals! I remember well into the 1980s when I could perform most of the service needed on any car I happened to drive or own, or at least understand how it worked. Perhaps it is the very magic of computers that has driven the resurgence of irrationality. Most of us understand only in its barest form how computers and

everything run by them can now process information so quickly that magical games and millions of applications are now available.

I still remember my first vehicle with electronic ignition. That little black box module could control functions that previously had to be adjusted by hand and eye, bringing greater efficiency but making it impossible to fix other than by replacing that module. The only repairs I felt competent to accomplish after that were on older vehicles! For the last several years, I just take the car in and let them plug in the computers!

I think we now must live in Oz, where the wizards behind the curtain actually make the magic happen. Since so many people don't understand programming or even how to plug the hardware pieces together, computers and the devices they run have taken on a magical aura, with programmers, software developers and hardware techs becoming wizards of the modern world. I suppose it is ironic that the device on which the tweeter-in-chief sends his messages is a product of the very science he now denies.

Of course it is hard to pose the lengthy testing required by the empirical scientific method against the certainty of the instantaneous revelations which apparently are received by President Trump which give him the special knowledge in so many areas that nobody else has. It must be nice to be omniscient and nearly omnipotent, but only God would also be benevolent. The all-knowing Donald and his advisor, the Bannon, must know better than millions of scientists and researchers and bureaucrats what America needs, right? Perhaps he is not the wizard savior that we have been looking for, perhaps it is he who is the fraud behind the curtain.

Though science is currently under siege and likely to lose out in so many contests against those things we all wish were true, I do believe that facts and science and reason will eventually triumph over wishes, dreams, and lies. After living my life in a world where I had to explain religious faith in a way that was rational and made sense, it is strange to be thrown into a world in which the universe revolves around the Donald, people can just make up alternative

facts to justify whatever they want, and outsiders can just be banned from the country, blamed for whatever horrors of which some small number of their co-religionists might be guilty. This is not the world I would ever choose, nor the way I would have anyone treated, in summary judgement by beloved leader. Even beyond the test of science and facts, this is a test of our judicial system, our tri-partite government, and the kindness and generosity for which our nation has long been known. This election has shaken the foundations of our system and possibly thrust us back into feudal times where many of us will be beholden to the lords of the realm for health care, food, housing, and employment, and of course, religious truth.

We were headed for sunnier times in a rational universe with justice, equity, freedom, and compassion. We were making progress in so many areas, though often too slowly. Science was making breakthroughs frequently in health care, efficiency of machines, modes of travel, batteries, and ways of understanding our planet and the universe. And even if 40% of Americans did not believe in evolution and accepted the teaching that the earth was only 6,000 years old or so, the rest of the populace largely were convinced that the dinosaurs were gone long before humanoids began to dominate the earth.

Modern science and its methodologies owe much to the work of one gentleman scientist whose careful studies, observations, and notes led to deeper understandings of how animals, plants, and human beings developed. Naturalist Charles Darwin undertook a 5 year mission aboard the H.M.S. Beagle in the 1830s from which he developed the theories that came to be called evolution.

Though nominally Anglican in respect for his wife Emma, Darwin, born on February 12, 1809, had connections to Unitarianism especially from his mother's family, so our movement has long claimed him to be one of our own even if science interested him far more than religion. Darwin hardly set out to challenge religion, he merely followed the logical extension of his observations beginning with his voyage as Naturalist on the H.M.S. Beagle from 1831-36. Darwin had begun studies for the ministry at Cambridge after failing in studies

for medicine. He was born to wealth, his father a physician and his mother the daughter of Josiah Wedgwood, the potter.

Darwin became a controversial figure because he asked questions, observed carefully, and put forth a cogent theory of how change happens in the biological world. We know so much more now about the mechanisms by which biological evolution occurs, through changes in strands of DNA, than Darwin could ever have discovered with the science of his time. Yet Darwin stands out as a singularly important figure because he dared to challenge the beliefs of his day. Other gentleman scientists were discovering the same things that he discovered, but he dared to present his findings to the public. Even today Darwin remains notorious to some religious groups for daring to challenge the notion that God has personally made every change and created everything visible throughout the universe. And yet Darwin never saw himself as an atheist, nor through much of his life as even agnostic. He always allowed for the possibility of at least a deistic kind of God who had set all in motion according to some magnificent set of universal laws.

Knowing that his findings would be controversial, Darwin did not rush to publish his work. He probably would have hesitated even longer were not others preparing to put their evolutionary ideas into print. He separated out his work on the evolution of humans, giving only a few hints about it in *The Origin of Species*, published in 1859. He waited another dozen years before publishing his observations on sexual selection and the evolution of humans in the two volumes of *The Descent of Man*, first published in 1871.

Today, on his birthday, we look back in appreciation to Darwin for his contributions to science and especially to evolutionary science. So much of modern biology stands on the shoulders of Darwin and others who dared to quietly speak truth to power. Evolutionary thought has also been applied to the social sciences with the understanding that societies can develop. Today we see evidence that societies can also devolve, returning to earlier less effective and less accepting patterns under certain circumstances. Our expectation had been that our nation would continue to get better, growing more egalitarian, more accepting, and more successful. Recent setbacks have shown us the fallacy of that expectation.

Whereas over a long period of time modern thought seemed to foresee such setbacks as only likely to occur through some kind of apocalypse, reality has shown us that stagnant pay, limited opportunities, and lies told by effective conmen seem to have lowered the expectation and catalyzed the return to an earlier time, even in the face of the widening chasm between the wealthy powerful and those in every other class. Thus we find ourselves in a time when science has become suspect, only Christianity is acceptable, and women and minorities are expected to submit to the men in control. For those of us feminists who have been working for racial, interfaith, sexual, and LGBTQIA equality, this is a serious problem and a huge setback.

We are no longer living in a rational world. The scientifically based values that dominated the latter part of the 20th Century and the early 21st Century have been overturned in favor of a new reality in which our beloved leader and his congress are re-defining how things are and should be. Now of course we know that this can only last until rising seas, storm intensification, and changing patterns of flooding and drought are recognized as effects of climate change, but for now the removal of data from government websites can even extend the period of denial. Just as those without telescopes had a hard time realizing that the heavens did not revolve around the earth, and those without ships could not discover that the earth is not flat, without information many will believe those who speak loudest and can spread even the most egregious lies.

As members and proponents of a rational faith, what shall we do to prevent the kind of loss of knowledge that fueled the dark ages? Perhaps we ought to remember that it was Islam that preserved knowledge and supported scientific exploration during the last great period when Christians were destroying the products of science and philosophy and denying things that had been discovered in Greek and Roman times. Science has experienced a great resurgence and expansion over the last 3 and more centuries within the Western Christian world, but the power of Conservative and Fundamentalist Christianity harnessed by Trump and his cronies could be enough to thrust us back into the Dark Ages. Hopefully enough power is held by progressives to prevent that, but the world we know and love is at risk against the irrationality of those currently in charge of the Executive and Legislative Branches of Government here in these not very well United States.

Science requires a different kind of faith, as I once argued in a sermon not well received by certain rocket scientists in Southern California, but there is still an element of belief in things unseen that is required. Yes, I understand that science is based solely upon the empirical method, but unless we each perform the experiments ourselves we must trust the results that others report. We must accept a certain compendium of facts that have been proven by others over an extended period. We must be educated about the meaning of those facts, we must understand and accept the empirical method, and we must either embrace the discoveries of science, conduct our own experiments, or deny any of it that might be in conflict with other beliefs.

He who must not be named denies the validity of anything that conflicts with his personal beliefs, whether proven scientifically or not. He has already ordered various agencies to remove data that conflicts with his vision of the world. Fortunately, scientists are cataloguing and releasing most of the information on other sites, but what a surprise to suddenly be unable to access such important information in this information age!

Our sense of being beyond the conflicts of history has left us complacent, just remember how many people thought it didn't matter to vote. We need to support the work and freedom of the courts, we need to keep people energized over the next 2-4 years, and we need to be ready to reclaim our country in the next elections! As people of a rational faith, there is much for us to do. We need to send e-mails, write letters, make calls, march, demonstrate, and work to prevent harm to persons of other faiths, persons of color, women, and LGBTQIA persons. Our values, our Principles, our beliefs call us to make a difference and work for justice now!

May we respond to that call!

Shalom, Salaam, Namaste, Blessed Be, and Amen!