

A few more Thoughts about the
Sources of our UU Living Tradition

7/30 Christina CN Earth Centered Wisdom

8/6 Jan VH Judeo Christian Wisdom

8/13 Ari C Humanist Wisdom

Over the last few weeks, Worship Planning Team members Christina, Jan, and Ari have shared thoughts about some of the Sources of our Unitarian Universalist Living Tradition. I thought I might share some thoughts about the other sources while also addressing briefly the state of the world in which we find ourselves this week. You should find an insert with our Unitarian Universalist Living Tradition Sources which along with our UU Principles describes in the UUA By-Laws that upon which we most broadly agree.

The living tradition which we share draws from many sources:

- 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;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

As I read our 6 Sources, I hope you heard the challenges posed by each to the current administration of our nation. From the heart and soul of our Unitarian Universalist heritage, these sources of our Living Tradition remind us to choose and practice life and love, to learn from religions, philosophies, prophetic people, and science. We are called by our Sources and Principles to shape a healthier, more accepting and inclusive world, but we are not called to accept racism and hate.

On Friday a few of us gathered with representatives of other faith communities in a rally called by Faith in the Valley San Joaquin to protest the riot in Charlottesville and President Trump's failure to unequivocally condemn the hate speech and actions of the white supremacists involved which killed 32 year old Heather Heyer.

In the decades since the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., was assassinated, race riots had become less frequent until recently. In the half century since the Civil Rights Act was passed, some things have gotten better for blacks, but racism has never really disappeared. Actions and words of the Trump campaign and administration have brought racial tensions across this nation to a level not seen since the 1960s. Many of us continue to hearken back to the words and deeds of Dr. King for prophetic inspiration. King called our nation and its leaders to renounce the racial violence of the past and choose justice, acceptance, and love. Today we are again forced to call upon leaders of our nation to put aside hate-speech and hate-filled actions and practice justice and love. The divisiveness of racism has too long tarnished our national self-understanding. Our 2nd source calls us to follow the wisdom of prophets like King and Lincoln and Obama to transform our world into a place of peace and harmony and love. Throughout human history, many religious and political prophets have arisen to challenge the failings of their time. Many prophets are speaking against the evils and failings of our time. Our failure to heed the warnings of climate scientists may result in great harm to humanity and earth itself. The failures of the Trump regime have also raised again the specter of Nuclear War. A century of progress in Race relations and religious and gender balance are at risk.

There are many prophetic voices today whose words have not been heeded. There are prophets of culture and religion and there are prophets within the scientific community who are warning us of the dangers to continuing the current course. The arrogance of the current administration is unbounded and unbelievable and yet there remain millions of people apparently supporting Trump's actions. When will they ever learn? When will we ever learn?

Our 3rd Source invites us to learn from the religions of the world as we grow in our ethical and spiritual lives. There are many practices which may heal our bodies and open our minds to the wisdom of the world, the galaxy, the universe. There is wisdom more ancient than that of the Judeo-Christian tradition to which we may open our awareness. There are also core teachings of every tradition which are remarkably similar. One of the most amazing things about Unitarian Universalism is that we are not bound by any creed or doctrine but are free and encouraged to discover our own understanding of religion, spirituality, morality, ethics, truth, wisdom, and our relationship to all that is in this vast and expanding universe. We practice the freedom of mind and heart and encourage each other to explore and discover as we will so long as we do not harm others by what we do.

Many Unitarian Universalists have found wisdom in Buddhist teachings and meditation over the last several decades. Others have studied Hindu traditions and Yoga, while others have studied and learned from Islam. Each wisdom tradition has things to offer and each has practices which may help us to reach enlightenment. It is a great gift that our tradition offers the freedom to explore these and other wisdom traditions to discover our own journey toward truth and wisdom.

Our first source is in many ways the most difficult to describe to the scientifically minded in that it affirms *the direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder* which may from time to time come to us. These might include Paul's Conversion Experience on the Road to Damascus as well as many different Mountain Peak Experiences,

moments of transcendent awareness which might be aided by the overwhelming experience of nature, religion, spirituality, moments out of body, or even chemically assisted trips. These experiences may be world changing, life-changing, or merely curious, but they are part of the human experience and as such are worthy of our attention. For some they may be far more dramatic than for others, but each experience has a place in our journeys.

Such transcendent experiences may dramatically change our lives, leading us in new and different directions, changing the focus of our work and beliefs, leading us to a new awareness of the holy. Rudolph Otto in *Das Heilige* (translated as *The Idea of the Holy*) wrote vivid descriptions of the experience of sacred and life-changing Awe. Abraham Maslow wrote of Peak Experiences and the impact they may have in a chapter of *The Farther Reaches of Human Nature*, and in his little book, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences*.

Several Christian groups have made conversion via a dramatic Damascus Road experience as described by Paul to be normative, while other groups do not require such drama and favor a pledge of allegiance to a Christian creed. Some who have studied ecstatic religious experiences also sometimes note the similarity to certain sexual experiences. In my own experience, it is the broadening of awareness that has come from looking out from mountain tops and seeing the vast vistas below particularly around dusk as lights are coming on and the stars are coming out that I most cherish. For me it is helpful to get some distance from the struggles of the day, and the upheavals of the political realm, to see great panoramas of earth and sky so that I may remember that we are all one. My recent drive across Arizona, New Mexico, and Utah with mountains, volcanoes, and amazing rock formations also was centering and reassuring even in these dark and difficult times.

There are also writings from great prophets that remind me of the humanity we share, but it is particularly at sunset and in moments under a starry sky that I find a great and full silence to calm my troubled soul.

Such moments will revive my soul and spirit and help me return again to the challenges of this life.

Mystery and Wonder are such important parts of our human existence. In my recent travels I heard my grandchildren asking, “Why?” just as my children did and as I did and as I imagine every human child does in the curiosity of those early years. Tomorrow, millions of people will look carefully at the Sun as it is hidden behind the moon. Before scientists explained eclipses, they caused fear and trembling as people saw in them the anger of the gods or at least important portents. Even today, the ‘Great American Eclipse’ has been heralded on the news for weeks everywhere in this country while towns in the path of complete eclipse have been overrun with people hoping to experience darkness during daytime. Even the most skeptical of us still find vestiges of mystery and wonder as we look to the heavens at times like these!

Our UU Principles call us to action, but it is the sources of our living tradition which ground us for the work of transformation to which we are called. Our source traditions teach us that transformation is possible and remind us of the previous successes around the world throughout recorded time. In the writings of prophets and in the sacred texts of many traditions are chronicled the successes of many underdogs, individuals and communities who triumphed against overwhelming odds to bring about needed changes, to call nations and leaders to act with justice and compassion. Again today, our small tradition is called to bring about transformation for our society. In the face of overwhelming ignorance, we are called to return justice and compassion to a nation overrun by the greed of those currently wielding power.

All these sources of our Living Tradition are examples of the broad panorama of human wisdom and experience from which we may learn and grow along the pathways of our individual journeys. Though they cover a great range of human religion, spirituality, and philosophy, the sources are still more illustrative than comprehensive. All human wisdom and experience may contribute to our living tradition.

Our Sources of Living Tradition and Principles comprise an amazing religious statement. They expand the tolerance of early Unitarianism into an acceptance of the beliefs of many traditions and multitudes of people. Neither creed nor doctrine, the UU Principles and Sources describe a unique level of religious understanding, a welcome to many and a challenge to all. We eschew the fundamentalisms and exclusivity of every tradition while embracing the openness and creativity of the more progressive parts of every tradition. We have the understanding of religion, spirituality, and people that the world needs, but somehow the world has trouble finding us! Our acceptance of many beliefs and many paths makes Unitarian Universalism the ideal tonic for the current wars of religion and culture. But our Principles also challenge us to a level of action which is hard to maintain. When we claim our Principles and Sources, we must challenge ourselves to make our beliefs more than mere words. We must take up the mantle of our faith and actually strive to live by the lofty principles we espouse.

Critics of Unitarian Universalism have often charged that UUs can believe anything or nothing, but our principles and sources call us to believe a great deal and further to act on those beliefs. We are both limited by the values of our principles and sources and also called to a great work of finding common ground with all people. As a movement we are too small to accomplish much alone, but in collaboration with those from other traditions, we can accomplish all that is needed.

I leave you with this challenge today. Study our principles and the sources of our living tradition. Consider how well you are living the principles and how well you understand and welcome others according to our sources. Share with others what you believe. Come back next week ready to think about how we live together in covenant with the beliefs we share!

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