

My Spiritual Journey - Sept. 23/12

I hesitate to relate my spiritual journey as I believe everyone has their very own version of their *personal* spiritual journey. However, I have been asked to do so - so here goes

Perhaps we could think about the word "Spirituality"

To Quote the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, N.Y.

"They say you can't define (beauty.) Rather, (you just know it when you see it.) The same can be said of Unitarian Universalist Spirituality. It's an attitude more than a set of beliefs. A way of being in the world more than specific convictions about the nature of the world. One UU theologian put it simply: 'It's an openness to life.' At First Unitarian, we often talk about it in terms of (living and loving boldly.) Our ministers point out that the word (spirit), when used in the biblical texts, is almost always linguistically related to the word (breath) or (wind.) So think about what (breathes) life into you and, from a UU perspective, you're in the realm of spirituality. None of us wants to live lives that feel shallow, empty or flat. We regularly hunger to go deeper, to get beneath the surface of things. That, for us, is the work of spirituality." *end of quote*

I don't know whether or not you have noticed but the word "spirituality" contains the word "ritual". That, I believe, is represented in the lighting of our Chalice and the sharing of Joys & Concerns, among other rituals. I believe that without ritual our lives would be somewhat lacking in fulfillment.

May I bore those of you who have already heard this while

I quote from my sermon of Sept. 14, 2008 titled: "In The Name of The Father, Leviticus 18:22"?

" It was October of 2007, while walking past this church, that I decided to give "religion" one last try. Imagine my surprise when I was warmly welcomed, at the door, by a smiling lady wearing a name tag that had a small Pride rainbow ribbon on it. ----- That lady was, of course, our Doreen Peever.

As a gay person, I had tried denominations from Catholic to Pentecostal, and almost everything in between. All, ALL left me feeling either tolerated or an outcast and an "abomination". So it came as quite the surprise when I didn't experience any of that at the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara.

The unconditional acceptance was, for me, quite simply, *unbelievable.*

It was the Unitarian Universalist Principles that first attracted me, and indeed, made me feel that, at long last, I had found a

spiritual home.

May I take a moment to repeat those seven principles?

We, the member congregations, of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person;

Justice, equality, and compassion in human relations;

Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;

The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;

The goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all;

Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

I wonder if each of us has really thought carefully about these amazing seven principles and understands what they truly mean, in part and in whole? Certainly, for one who has experienced judgment and persecution, they truly come as an invigorating breath of fresh air.

Imagine a church that dares to treat *everyone* with respect and dignity.

Imagine a church that *truly* believes in justice, equality and compassion, not just for some, *but for all*.

Imagine a church that doesn't expect you to park your brain,

along with your car, before you enter in.

Imagine a church that encourages you to think for yourself; to search for and develop your own spirituality and understanding of - "God".

Imagine a church that does not force - feed creed or dogma.

And imagine a church that is a departure from the mainstream, a departure of unparalleled proportions.

For me, that church is *truly* amazing. That *IS* the Unitarian Universalist Church.

I am so very grateful for having found the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara. A church, where because of its seven principles, I have been able to reclaim my spiritual life and find a true home." *end of quote.....*

The word "Journey" might also suggest a searching. That has certainly been my experience, having searched for a spiritual home among so many different denominations and finding none; until, that is, I found the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara.

As a result of my search, and finding a distinct lack of *true* love, I came to the conclusion that there *is* no God. In other words, I am an *Atheist*. Well that's not actually accurate - I *do* believe in God, its just that my perception of God is not as the

"creator of everything, a conventional, vindictive,
self-righteous old man with a long white beard sitting on a
heavenly throne and dispensing judgements thither and yon".

Rather I see God as being a "spirit", living within each of us
and exemplified through the actions of each member of society
and indeed Nature itself.

I see the love of God manifest through:

All the members of our Board: John Mayer, John Northover, Rhonda Armstrong,
Doreen Peever, Roy Blake, Sandra Watson and Carol Riseing:

donating so much of their precious time and effort in keeping the congregation
going

Al & Hilde Wheeler as they care for so very many of us.

Sofia (and now Carol) & Darcy as they work so hard putting our Newsletter
together.

Joan Wiley with her seemingly limitless energy.

Peter Skelton as he looks after the many needs of the property.

Karen Johnson-Hosein as she, in her inimitable way, fulfills her duties as our newest
Lay Chaplain.

Sarah Jordan as she assists Theresa Pothier with their wonderful music.

Jim Glassford conducting the "Building Your Own Theology" classes.

Roy & Penny Blake as they work so very hard for the church.

Did I mention Doreen Peever? Faithfully meeting and greeting everyone, each and
every Sunday, as they come into the church.

Andrea Gravel & Joan Rothman as they tirelessly guide the congregation, through
their many years of service.

Forgive me if I've missed people. There are so many, many

others who do so very much - - perhaps too many to mention.

Yes, the love of God certainly manifests itself throughout the congregation in so many various ways.

The beauty of the Unitarian Universalist denomination is that there seems to be room for all; *even* the declared Atheist.

There are so many denominations represented throughout our church. Many of us come from other denominations and have been unimpressed with what we found, or did not find, there.

We sing the hymn "Spirit of Life" # 123, what do we actually mean by "Spirit"? I'm sure it will have as many different meanings as there are people here this morning. That, for me, is the wonder of the Unitarian Universalist denomination; a denomination that encompasses all.

The following are statements from members of the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, N.Y.

– Joy Collins says

"I have an enormous white oak in my back yard. It has dozens of branches and a huge weather-scarred trunk. It is my favourite tree. On a windy day, while the branches wave some, the trunk never does. My white oak is a metaphor for what I believe.

I believe I have many guiding inner voices, like the many branches of my white oak. One branch is the "needy, scared, pay-attention-to-me" voice. Another is my "confident, know-better-than-others" voice. A third branch is my rational, data-driven "show me" voice. I need to respect them all. And sometimes each comes in handy.

I also believe we each have a paradoxically unique AND universal deeper inner voice. And my life's task is to tune in, honour and follow this voice of mine. This is not a BRANCH of the tree, but the trunk. Hence I have labelled it my "tree trunk voice."

It's hard to hear and differentiate this wise and oldest part of me. This voice is quiet, unassuming, unwavering, like my giant white oak. She sends subtle signals, not words like my other voices. She has a wisdom that is greater than my life experience. This puzzles me and I can't explain it, but while she is my unique special voice, I believe she also speaks a universal truth that is shared by others.

I only hear my tree trunk voice when I make on-going quiet time. She encourages me to reach out in loving ways, gives me the courage to speak at the right moment, and suggests totally irrational, but somehow "right" ways for me to proceed.

She does not allow me to sit in comfort in the face of others' suffering. I'm slowly learning to believe in this special voice. My Unitarian Universalist faith encourages me to humbly and respectfully clear the clutter so I can hear and act on this quiet tree trunk voice of love and justice. And of course UUism also teaches me to keep questioning her wisdom!

So, *this I believe*: I am a unique, increasingly weather-worn "tree" in the universe with many branches, and my tree trunk is a divine echo of the infinite, that is shared with each of you."

– Steven Buckley writes

"I believe that by picking up the crumpled coffee cup on my way in from the parking lot and by holding the door open for someone I am restoring balance to the world."

– Carole Haas

"As a Catholic grade school and high school student, and then as a nun for seven years, I led a life of certitude. My goal was heaven... My belief system led me to a life of *STRIVING*..... striving to be better than I was, to be worthy. Within this context, there was never a point of "good enough." Frailty, failure, flaws often sowed seeds of discouragement and depression in me. And there were always niggling fears about

"the others," those who did not believe in this *One True Church*. What would happen to them?

"It has taken me many years to have the courage to listen to my own inner voice... My beliefs now are far fewer and far simpler than those of my childhood. I believe that the journey is more important than the destination. (Parenthetically, it is also more interesting... and more *FUN!*) I believe in my fellow journeyers... and letting myself be supported by them.

I believe in *SAVORING* all that life offers, having gradually given up the delayed gratification that heaven implies. I believe in my "good-enough" Unitarian Church. I believe in my "good-enough" self."

– Anne Perry

"I believe in the potluck. It's a proven fact that if you have 6 people for a potluck, you'll have a square meal. People who want to tell me what to bring to a potluck drive me *nuts*. What if I don't *want* to make a salad that day? What if I *want* to bake a dark chocolate espresso cake?

But, they say, "what if everyone brought dessert?" And I answer, "what's wrong with that?"

So I tell people that I have faith in the potluck and I'm an uncompromising evangelist for my faith. I often urge others to

share my faith in the potluck. Faith in the potluck really has a much larger meaning . . . faith in community. When we live in community, we find that each person brings her own gifts and needs. It's just a matter of matching up the person with the gift and the person with the need. It's faith that if at some time I have a need, there will be someone within my community who will be there for me. It's faith that if someone within my community needs me, I will be there for them."

– Kindle Perry

"This I Believe: that I am nothing and everything.

This I Believe: that God is nothing and everything.

This I Believe: that space and time and all that's made of matter are all that *really* matters, and that I know nothing definite about any of it at all.

This I Believe.....

It matters nothing and everything what I believe about the heavens. The stars will still fall for me to wish on.

It matters nothing and everything what I believe about the canyons. The stones I throw in will never fill them.....

This I Believe: that everything is energy,

Dancing madly in the mystery, that's all.

This I Believe.

It matters nothing and everything what I believe.

This I Believe. This I Believe."

– Juanita Steinman

"I believe in people.

I believe in the goodness in people

**I believe in family. I believe my parents were extraordinary
people. I believe in my husband and my children. The whole
kit and caboodle.....**

I believe mistakes are okay.

I believe in forgiveness.

**I believe you should be able to use as much ketchup as you
want.**

I believe if you hurt someone you should tell them you're sorry.

I believe you can always learn something.

I believe it is okay to cry.

**I believe vacations and banana splits are a necessary part of
life.**

I believe in trust.

I believe in Halloween I *love* Halloween!

**I believe in the adage that "home is the place that when you go
there they *have* to take you in".**

**I believe you should never underestimate the hurt someone
may carry.**

I believe you should tell people you love them.....

This is what I believe."

And one final statement

– Libby Moore

**"I believe that God lives in and between all of us, and that
when we shut ourselves off from others, we are shutting out
God....."**

In silence, I believe, we find our souls and God. But we find them also in glorious music, and in the sounds of nature – water rushing in a stream just off the ice, geese honking overhead at sunset, wind blowing through pine branches in the woods. And we find them in the laughter of children and the voices of loving friends and those dearest to us....."

I share the above sentiments, because this is what I too believe.

And so this IS My Spiritual Journey.

I have finally found a home in the Unitarian Congregation of Niagara.

Thank you one and all.

Amen & amen