

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

Light Within (Buddhist/Hindu)

There is a Hindi phrase of greeting and leave-taking with which two beings acknowledge that place of light, love, truth and peace in each other: The Divine Oneness – The Pure Light

Now a word in our contemporary lexicon, "Namaste" simply means, "I see the god within you." It is a greeting and a farewell that recognizes that within us all there is a place of common ground which exists because we are all sharing a lifetime on this earth together. The hands are put together like a knife so that people may cut through all the differences that may exist and immediately get to that place which is shared between all people across all cultures throughout the world.

"Namaste" is said because it is best to start a relationship from that place within us that is equal. If there are great differences then those will surface. But we know for sure that there will always be a place within us that we can come back to for the shared experience of being human beings moving our way through life on this plane of existence. Namaste - I see the god, the light, within you – please offer a Namaste greeting to your neighbour.

Chalice Lighting written by Rev Debra Faulk

A chalice lit in our midst is a symbol of our liberal faith,
A faith built on the foundation of freedom, reason and radical inclusion
A faith sustained by acts of kindness and justice
A faith that visions a world flourishing, with equality for all her people
A faith that demands the living out of goodness
A faith that requires thoughtfulness
A faith of wholeness
This tiny flame is the symbol of the spark of all this within each of us.

Reading: On Beauty (edited) from the Prophet by Kahlil Gibran

Where shall you seek beauty, and how shall you find her unless she herself be your way and your guide?

And how shall you speak of her except she be the weaver of your speech?

...

In winter say the snow-bound, "She shall come with the spring leaping upon the hills."

And in the summer heat the reapers say,

"We have seen her dancing with the autumn leaves,
and we saw a drift of snow in her hair."

All these things have you said of beauty, ...

Yet in truth you spoke not of her but of needs unsatisfied,
And beauty is not a need but an ecstasy.

It is not a mouth thirsting nor an empty hand stretched forth,
But rather a heart enflamed and a soul enchanted.

It is not the image you would see nor the song you would hear,
But rather an image you see though you close your eyes and a song you hear though you shut
your ears.

..., beauty is life when life unveils her holy face.

But you are life and you are the veil.

Beauty is eternity gazing at itself in a mirror.

But you are eternity and you are the mirror.

Responsive Reading: *#659 For You – Walt Whitman

The sum of all known reverence I add up in you, whoever you are;

Those who govern are there for you, it is not you who are there for them;

All architecture is what you do to it when you look upon it;

All music is what awakes from you when you are reminded by the instruments;

The sun and stars that float in the open air; the apple-shaped earth and we upon it;

The endless pride and outstretching of people; unspeakable joys and sorrows;

The wonder everyone sees in everyone else they see, and the wonders that fill each minute of
time forever;

*It is for you whoever you are -- it is no farther from you than your hearing and sight are
from you; it is hinted by nearest, commonest, readiest.*

We consider bibles and religions divine -- I do not say they are not divine; I say they have all
grown out of you, and may grow out of you still;

It is not they who give the life -- it is you who give the life.

Will you seek afar off? You surely come back at last, in things best known to you, finding the
best, or as good as the best --

*Happiness, knowledge, not in another place, but this place -- not for another hour, but
this hour.*

Message: Let Your Light Shine

*Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond
measure. It is our light not our darkness that most frightens us. We ask ourselves, "Who am I to
be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" Actually who are you not to be?*

*You are a child of God. Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing
enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you.*

*We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It's in everyone, and, as we let
our light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are
liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others.*

That is the full quote that provides the inspirational diving board for my reflection this morning.
The quote comes from Marianne Williamson's book, A Return to Love, though it has often been
credited to Nelson Mandela as he used it in his inaugural speech upon taking leadership in South
Africa following the decision to end apartheid.

What is it that we fear about our own light and power. What are the culturally mandated biases,
social pressures and even denominational confines that have us withhold from true expression of
our unique and universal greatness, the expression of which would add to the overall flourishing
of life and goodness on this planet.

One of the confines emerges through the language of the quote in its entirety. I do hope that hearing the word God did not terminate attention to the intention of the quote as can sometimes happen for Unitarian Universalist. For some the term God elicits the involuntary reaction of rejection.

Perhaps we were not “born to make manifest the glory of God within us”.

We were born because a male and a female of the species copulated or insemination occurred, sperm and egg uniting, at the correct time during the female's cycle, allowing fertilization, gestation, and birth and this is true, yet when I looked upon the face of my new-born child, and fully recognized what I had been the vessel of creation for, I felt God move in me or at least was stirred by some force far greater than myself, that connected me in that moment to everything, to all creation, to every mother of every species throughout time - and I most definitely saw magnificence, glory, in that tiny face.

I do consider it a gift to have been raised Unitarian for many reasons one of which is that I do not have a rejection reaction to words such as God. In our Sunday school classes we looked at so many different concepts of what God might be - Source, Great Spirit, Universal Energy, Gaia, conscience, love, process, connection and more - all this meant that the opportunity for a personal dynamic relationship with the concept of God stayed intact. It is at this early age that we began to engage in a free and responsible search for truth and meaning and were encouraged on a life-long path of spiritual growth. These are core articulate principles of this UU faith tradition and those principles provide the foundation for children's religious exploration programs as well.

When the great father interpretation was presented it was as protector, a way to identify feeling safe in the world, sanctuary for the soul rather than an external entity controlling and judging us. Children can use the term with ease and know God personally. I remember my son Dan coming home one day and informing me that God lived at the end of the block, in the house with the metal fence... his reference a kindly bearded gentleman who always waved.

A dear friend of mine and I were attending a workshop on a curriculum called the Virtues Project. The Virtues project draws on wisdom from many faith traditions finding common ground in the virtues espoused. It used ‘god’ language and my friend expressed her discomfort with such language. The facilitator suggested she add an ‘o’ Godo - she questioned before recognizing the inference of “good”?

A denominational confine to standing in fully connected light may be the removal or sanitizing of the concept of "God" for this can perhaps inhibit or minimize a personal connection to that which is greater than the body self. As human beings we do long for connection.

While this may be a risky topic in Unitarian circles - we have each experienced awe-filled moments, through connection with another being, with nature, with an idea, with our personal intuition, the awe-fullness of connection.

Let me continue with the risk of using somewhat taboo Unitarian words, "someone once said that sin is doing the same dumb things over and over". That might be too casual a definition, but it is food for thought. The key idea is that if we do not learn from our mistakes, we continue to make the same mistakes, not because of accidental repetition, but rather because we refuse to learn. The universe will keep providing opportunities for us to get the lesson. In *The Road Less Traveled*, Scott Peck called sin militant ignorance.

A Dutch definition expands the idea saying that sin is the refusal to grow in the direction which conscience dictates. In all cases, there is a sense of deliberate, even willful, disregard of our own knowledge of what is good - of what leads to wholeness for ourselves and others and a disregard of the greater good in which we all live and move and have our being.

The Greek definition of sin is a separation from source. Always, sin is separation and severance. Always it is the rejection of our most true selves.

I am reminded of the story of Lenny on his death bed. As he drifted in and out of consciousness, Lenny made several trips back and forth across the bridge between the realities of time and eternity. One time he got the sense of final judgment on the other side. He trembled terrified that he would be judged negatively because he wasn't as wise as Solomon, as brave as Moses, or as compassionate as Jesus.

Lenny's fears were known and the response came "Never mind Lenny, you are not going to be judged on why you weren't Solomon, or Moses or Jesus, only on why you weren't Lenny?" "Lenny came back to his body with a wonderful new insight. he told his family, "I know what you have to do in life - become yourself.

"We can say, then, that sin is the willful refusal to become yourself, to grow into who you really are when fully realized, alive, creative, loving, and expressing the power of love."

We ask ourselves, "who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?" - Actually who are you not to be? Actually, it is a sin not to be. Why is it that as human beings we do not allow the natural unfolding of our true beauty, be as a flower blooming into full magnificence.

Imagine a flower, a trillium, saying to itself, I better not be too bright, don't want to offend the tulip, or the rose's internal voice suggesting it stay a bud, not quite fully bloom so as not to call attention to itself.

Cultural biases and social pressures impede standing in full bloom. Williamson said "Your playing small doesn't serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you." yet how many people are there in your individual lives that you can speak your own greatness to with out concern for being interpreted as conceited, selfish or seen as "full of your self".

Then there is the social pressure of being good enough or rather having our light diminished by being told we are not good enough. As a child I would dance, skip or cartwheel rather than walk, painted purple skies with orange grass and often sang rather than talked. This creative spirit was encouraged in my home and my Unitarian Sunday school. Then I went to Mrs. Cook's first grade class. Skies are not purple and grass is not orange I was informed, even if that is how I saw it in my imagination, it was not how we draw as school – then I joyously joined the choir and she said I couldn't sing on key and so I began to lip-synch so I could still participate without further shaming. So many of us, perhaps all of us have had a Mrs. Cook in our lives, often more than one.

The journey of healing, of fully letting our light shine, from these negative impositions can be challenging, and necessary. For me the reclamation of my voice, came as a gift one day leaning against a tree, the beginnings of a song came to me. Eventually, it became a whole song that debuted as a duet sung by me and my then 8 year old daughter during the talent night at a UU family camp. I told the story of how the song came to me and dedicated it to Mrs. Cook – than not only was I going to sing the song, I wrote it. It was a powerful moment for me and the final

circle of healing happened when a young girl came up to us after and said she like the song and especially the story because she had a teacher who said she couldn't draw, and she was never going to listen to her again.

As social beings we are influenced by others perceptions of us, both positively and negatively. I recall facilitating a women's solstice ritual where participants were called forth to speak their greatness out loud in a circle. So much of what was expressed was based on the perceptions others out in the world, being a good parent, efficient administrator, effective message therapist. It was a process to get to the place of acknowledgment of the pure light within and recognition of the same in the rest. That recognition brought with it a sense of being expanded and immense and connected.

I personally believe that we can make the greatest contributions to ourselves and the world when we are thus self-full.

Let me use the analogy of a jar. We all recognize the need for cookies in our lives, we need two cookie jars. One is only for ourselves, the Self Jar. The other is for giving away, the Hospitality Jar. Now these jars are filled either by our baking cookies or by our receiving gifts of cookies.

When I speak of self-full, I mean that our Self Jar must be full first. It is important to give only from the Hospitality Jar and it is only filled after the Self Jar is full.

Giving to other than yourself from the Self Jar is sacrifice, it is burn out, it is unhealthy and also encouraged in our society.

Co-dependent relationships are based on reciprocal feeding from Self Jars, depression occurs when the Self Jar is empty, or the Hospitality Jar hoarded, abuse occurs when one individual steals from another's Self Jar, love happens when a cookie gifts go into the Self Jar, esteem is built when we bake cookies, commitment happens when we share our baking or abundance.

Now it is also important that the cookies be eaten, stale cookies are a drag. Feed yourself, feed others, bake often, cookies fuel the light.

Oh but I can't bake, I don't know the recipe, I'm allergic to wheat and chocolate (there go double chocolate chip), I can't afford the ingredients, too busy to bake, I could never make as good cookies as...

Were there ever cookies as good as the mud ones you made or that were given you by a child. Baking soul cookies is not about perfection or comparison. It is about the action of baking; being of service. Service is love in action. As Mother Teresa said: "Love cannot remain by itself - it has no meaning. Love has to be put into action and that action is service." If we are not in service we resist the action of love.

Now by service, I do not mean that each one of us ought always to be out doing good deeds for others, though that has its import. There is service also in taking the time to appreciate a glorious sunset, in reading a good book, in being with people we care about, in laughing really hard and long, there is service to self in making sure that your own cookie jar is full before filling the Hospitality Jar.

There is service in sharing. There is service in not "shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you" and in letting our light shine so others are safe and encouraged to do the same.

We can each easily think of shining lights in our own lives, be it personal mentors, teachers, friends or family or the public exemplars, contemporary or historical, who offer guidance, clarity and inspiration by their example; people whose lives and actions encourage us to live and act more justly in the world.

There are certainly people here today who have provided service to this or the wider community. I urge us to keep telling their and our own stories. Perhaps we can think of situations in our own lives when we have put love into action. Often times we may be unaware of the influence of our actions. Singing my song at camp was an action of healing for me, shining the light on fear to release it, it was in that moment an act of courage. That a young girl listening would be able to tap into her own courage by my example was unexpected. It was a moment of grace.

May we encourage one another and express gratitude to each other for shining the light of our own being evermore brightly, illuminating the dark areas of fear in our lives. May our collective actions illuminate injustice and fears as we strive to be agents of change and transformation in the world.

Let me conclude these remarks with words from John Murray, Universalist minister in the late 1700s – slightly edited

Go out into the highways and the byways.

Give the people something of your new vision.

You may possess a small light, but uncover it, let it shine,
use it in order to bring more light and understanding
to the hearts and minds of [men and women] all people.

Give them not hell but hope and courage;
preach [the] kindness and everlasting love [of God]

Shine On

Closing Words & Extinguishing the Chalice

**# 599 Light Within (Sikh) Tegh Bahadur*

Why do you go to the forest in search of the Divine? God lives in all, and abides with you too.

As fragrance dwells in a flower, or reflection in a mirror, so the Divine dwells inside everything;
seek therefore in your own heart.

* From the Unitarian Universalist hymnal *Singing the Living Tradition*