

Sermon – 2019 7-14 –

**First Source of our Living Tradition – The Direct Experience 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 that create and uphold life.**

## **Our Opening Words are by Victoria Safford**

What if there were a universe in which a world was born out of a smallish star, and into that world (at some point) flew red-winged blackbirds, and into it swam sperm whales, and into it bloomed crocuses, and into it blew wind to lift the tiniest hairs on naked arms in spring, and into it at some point grew onions, out of soil, and in went Mt. Everest, and also **the coyote** we've spotted in the woods about a mile from here, just after sunrise on these mornings when the moon is full? (The very scent of him makes his brother, our dog, insane with fear and joy and ancient inbred memory.)

Into that world came animals and elements and plants, and imagination, the mind and the mind's eye.

If such a universe existed and **you noticed it**, what would you do?

What song would come out of your mouth, what prayer, what praises, what sacred offering, **what whirling dance**, what religion and what reverential gesture would you make to greet the world,

Every single day that you were in it?

## **Sermon – The Direct Experience of that Transcending Mystery**

**By Joyce Ramay**

Every Sunday, we sing *Spirit of Life*, come unto me. How often have you thought about what the words are saying? It's one of my favorite hymns – you may have noticed how I emphasize the message with my arms and body, and yes, my wings – for birds are my spirit animal. It's all about having the personal, direct connection and experience of Life – with a capital L!

Today our hymn is *Mysterious Presence – Source of All*. We are encouraged to invite the flow from that fount of Life, with a **willing mind** that can hold the light, love and power of that Presence.

Last Sunday, Joseph gave us a direct experience of his connection with the harmonic vibrations of the universe, when he sang into the piano and the piano resonated his tune back to him. Joseph, for those who may not have been here last week, and those who were here and loved it, will you please repeat some of that music for us. (*Joseph sings with the piano*)

That is what direct experience is all about.

This week I was looking for something of interest on TV, and I found an author speaking on C-Span about his book: *Digital Minimalism: Choosing a Focused Life in a Noisy World*. He talked about the need to turn off our phones, TVs, computers, and take some time of **freedom from other people's thoughts**. Wow – I realized that's what our first Source is all about – freedom from **other people's thoughts**.

You have to clear the clutter so that you can open yourself to your own genuine personal relationships, with people, with the planet and with the universe.

If you look at our Sources on the bookmarks that were handed out today, you will see that only the first one is about your own personal experience. The rest are about finding inspiration from other people's thoughts, wisdom, revelations, scriptures, and practices, which are indeed valuable Sources, but they are not for us fixed dogma, or sealed scriptures, or the words of the finality of prophethood, or infallible words from a hierarchy.

Why did the UUA start with this one Source – **the 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 that create and uphold life.**

I think it has to do with our particular emphasis upon the legitimacy and importance of the actual living engagement of each person with the mystery, finding inspiration and enlightenment, awakening awe and wonder, and the resultant development of a reflective conscience to guide us in our spiritual practices of faith and our daily lives. There is validity in our own experiences, and as we mature in our spiritual lives, we realize more and more that we can trust our own imaginations, intuitions, and inspirations.

UUs respect and seek to expand our spiritual lives by learning more about the various faiths and beliefs in the world.

External sources not only provide insights and inspiration, but they also serve as a necessary balance, so that we don't become too arrogant, self-righteous and full of ourselves in our assertion of autonomy.

While we seek to broaden our knowledge and understanding of the faiths of many others, we believe that it is essential for each person to be his or her own prophet, his or her own spiritual guide, and his or her own decision maker about what motivates him or her to become a better person and to lead a more meaningful life.

Being sensitive to the fact that some of our people did not particularly like certain attributes often associated with the "God" word, Rev. Wayne Robinson frequently spoke about "developing our spiritual lives by engagement with the mystery before which we all stand."

Likewise, we use other sacred words in our hymns – like *Spirit of Life – Mysterious Presence*.

Whatever words you prefer, they all point to that which is greater than ourselves, that which lifts us up, that which facilitates creation and engenders life in all the universe.

Many of my most sacred experiences were found with nature.

When I was a small child, we had a lake home in Minnesota where we would go on weekends and summer vacations. Behind our house there were wild sumac bushes that were home to fireflies. I would go out in the evening to catch the fireflies in a glass jar with a cover that had holes punched in it to let in air.

To my mother's great dismay, I would take the jar to my bedroom and release all of the fireflies around my bed, so that I was encircled by beautiful brilliant lights as they flew overhead in the dark. It was a miracle – how could those little creatures emit all that sparkling light? We are all made of stardust!

Joseph and I have talked about one of the benefits of living in the far north - the magic of being surrounded by the Aurora Borealis, the northern lights. I recall one memorable night when the sky was swirling with dancing plumes of green, gold, purple and pink. One could feel the increased

radiation and connection with the particles that came from the sun. Chills ran up my spine, as I felt a new intimate identity as one with the universe.

One of the most mystical experiences I have had was while snorkeling among the coral reefs at Cozumel, Cancun and Xel Ha in Mexico. As I floated, everything was in harmonious motion with the currents and waves – and everything beneath me was alive and glowing with florescent colors and light. The sparkling clear water buoyed me up as I joined in communion with the mysterious life in the sea. I **knew** I was connected with majestic creation at its absolute ultimate.

A sense of the sacred mystery can also be experienced in precious moments with our loving partners. Unfortunately, with all the negative associations of sex with sin, or with pornography or perversion,

we in the West have too often lost our ability to feel the spirituality of the loving connections we have when we embrace our beloved soul mates.

So I invite you to open yourselves to recapture the rapture of the pure attraction of love.

I would like to share words from Richard Rohr, a Franciscan priest.

**Aliveness by Richard Rohr** Friday, May 10, 2019 - “God is a verb more than a noun, God is a flow more than a substance, God is **an experience** more than a deity sitting on a throne. And we live naturally inside that flow of love—if we do not resist it. Infinite love is planted within humans and all of creation. Everything is attracted to everything: life is attracted to life; love is attracted to love; God in you is attracted to God in everyone and everything else. This is what it means for everything to be created in the image of God (Genesis 1:26-27). God placed this alluring attraction of life toward life in everything that God created.

“Once we allow the entire universe to become alive for us, we are living in an enchanted world. Nothing is meaningless; nothing can be dismissed. **It's all whirling** with the same beauty, the same radiance. In fact, if I could name the Big Bang in my own language, I'd call it **the Great Radiance**. The inner radiance of God started radiating at least 13.8 billion years ago. We must realize that we are the continuation of that radiance in our small segment of time on Earth. We can either **allow it** and let the Flow *flow* through us, or we can deny it, which is to deny the divine image.

“This is nothing I can prove to you. This is nothing I can make logical or rational. **It can only be known experientially in the mystery of love when you surrender yourself to it**, when you grant subjectivity or a blessed I-Thou relationship to every other thing—a plant, an animal, a single tree, the big blue sky, “Brother Sun, Sister Moon,” as my Father Francis of Assisi put it.

“The contemplative mind refuses to objectify things. It sees similarity, likeness, symbolism, communion, connection, and meaning everywhere. It becomes a fully symbolic universe. (He ends with this advice.) **Use whatever words you want, but with this vision you will live in a fully alive and congenial universe where you can never be lonely again.**”

**In conclusion:** Sometimes UUs define themselves by what they used to be and rejected – I call them the **Formers** –

or they start by telling us what they don't believe in from other faiths – the **Rejecters!**

We UU's do have Principles, and we do have respected Sources of our Living Tradition.

We cannot live fulfilling lives only by denial and rejection. We need more positive **Affirmers** and **Appreciators**. Tell us what you do believe. Tell us what you appreciate. Tell us what you love!

There is abundant beauty in our universe that can and will inspire a deep sense of mystery, wonder and awe – if we open ourselves to the direct experience that is waiting for all of us.

Here at All Faiths, we are in a sacred place, a home of love, inclusion, compassion, and the pursuit of truth.

**May that pursuit lead you to your own 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 that create and uphold life.**

May it be so.

## **Closing Words – Albert Einstein**

**The fairest thing we can experience is the mysterious.** It is the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science. He who knows it not and can no longer wonder, no longer feel amazement, is as good as dead, a snuffed out candle.

The religion of the future will be a cosmic religion. It should transcend definitions of God and avoid dogmas and theology. Covering both the natural and the spiritual, it should be based on a religious sense arising from **the experience of all things as meaningful unity.**