

Reading***To Worship by Jacob Trapp***

To worship is to stand in awe under a heaven of stars,
 Before a flower, a leaf in sunlight, or a grain of sand
To worship is to be silent, receptive, before a tree astir with the wind,
 Or the passing shadow of a cloud.
To worship is to work with dedication and skill;
 it is to pause from work and listen to a strain of music.

To worship is to sing with the singing beauty of the earth;
 It is to listen through a storm to the still small voice within.
Worship is loneliness seeking communion;
 it is a thirsty land crying out for rain.
Worship is the kindred fire within our hearts;
 It moves through deeds of kindness and through acts of love.
Worship is the mystery within us reaching out to the mystery beyond.
 It is an inarticulate silence yearning to speak;
 It is the window of the moment, open to the sky of the eternal.

The Window of the Moment: Reflections on Worship
By Reverend Mary Ann Macklin

Surely, surely goodness and kindness will follow me, all the days of my life. And I will live in her house forever and ever. When I first heard this rendition of Psalm 23 many years ago on a tape entitled *Medicine Music* by Bobby McFerrin, I remember my heart just welled and opened. Tears streamed down my face. We all know what it is like to walk in a dark and dreary land, and sometimes being able to discover a house of goodness and kindness. In this song, McFerrin takes the wisdom of the psalm and opens the window of its message a little further through his music and translation. He dedicates the song to his mother. And the obvious love they share is present. The song, I believe, provides a small window of transformation, if we can truly allow ourselves to reside in its message. To dwell in that house where goodness, kindness and love are offered.

Optimally, spiritually, that house is within us, and we can find windows, like McFerrin's 23rd Psalm, which can aid us in our ability to reside there. But we also need physical places to go, where we can dwell in the messages of goodness, kindness, justice, truth-seeking...Places and gatherings to remind us physically of the houses we have within. Where we can shape what is of worth. Where we can worship.

Let us worship. Let us learn to love.

This very room was created for that purpose. It is a place of worship. Where we bring our highest ideals, as Unitarian Universalists, and place them on our altar. *The inherent worth and dignity of every person. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations. Respect for the interdependent web of life of which we are a part* Let us shape these things of worth in our lives. Although we may walk in a dark and dreary land, personally or politically, we come here to remind one another of our highest ideals. And we do this in community.

In this house of worship, where the windows of the moment, (some with blue bottles and flowers, our ever present circle, and for the choir the windows in the back opening to the trees outside) open to the skies of the eternal.

Let us worship. Let us learn to love.

Last Sunday morning I found myself in another type of house of worship. On the grounds of the Tibetan Cultural Center, as part of a delegation of InterFaith religious leaders. We were there with thousands of other people, along with the spiritual leader of Tibet His Holiness the Dalai Lama and Mohammed Ali, to dedicate the Chamste Ling Temple a house of worship to promote interfaith dialogue and cooperation. The name of the temple itself means “the field of love and compassion,”; the 2 hour ceremony that morning embodied the name well.

I sat under a tent amidst the golds and maroons of the Tibetan monks, the beautiful colors of liturgical garb worn by Muslims, Zen Buddhists, Christians, Hebrew, Sikh, Native American, the smells of the trees nearing their autumnal cycle and the feel of grass underfoot, the taste of an early morning Chai tea still on my tongue, and I listened. Not just with my ears, but this ceremony of worship called all of us present to listen with our hearts.

The Dalai said simply, “It does not make so much difference whether one is religious or not religious. What is important is that we create a kind heart inside. One has a good heart. That is important. A place of love and compassion.” He added that the ultimate message of all world religions is love. And that the ceremony we were having was a powerful symbol of the unity of religions.

The ceremony began with the Tibetan monks chanting and reciting prayers, then multi-colored ceremonial ribbons were cut by various religious leaders, then a series of prayers began, many in the language native to that participants or the religious traditions. We listened. Sikh Sardar Singh offered a prayer of God is love in Punjabi. Rabbi Mira Wasserman prayed for the power of compassion in

Hebrew and English and sounded the shofar. Father Damien Thompson offered words of religious inclusiveness. There were other prayers in Navajo, Arabic, and Japanese.

As I listened to the unique sounds and beauty of each language, my heart again welled and tears flowed down my face. We were gathered in a house, which, for that moment, offered an earnest message of love, compassion and peace. My watery gaze fell upon the many windows of the temple before us. A temple which would not have existed if Thubten Norbu, retired IU professor and brother to the Dalai Lama, had not pursued a lifelong dream. His dream, this temple of many windows for interfaith connections. Each window, perhaps, open to the eternal in ways unique to each religious tradition. My tears flowed too for a dream not deferred.

The Dalai Lama later echoed this interfaith sentiment, “ Within this world, among human beings, the spiritual inclinations and interests of individuals are so diverse that we need diverse spiritual traditions to be able to fulfill the needs of this richly diverse humanity.” Indeed.

After the prayers several of us were asked to bring forth symbols of our faith traditions to be placed in the Chamtse Ling Temple. I was honored to offer a cobalt blue chalice to the Dalai Lama for the temple. At the last moment we were asked to say a very brief statement about the meaning of our symbol. After being introduced as a Unitarian Universalist minister I said this, on behalf of UU s, “ I present this flaming chalice, a symbol of our liberal religious faith, which affirms religious pluralism and our ongoing efforts for social justice and interfaith cooperation throughout the world.” And I meant it. Let us worship and let us learn to love.

The Dalai Lama also encouraged each of us present to take our faiths seriously. And as I sat in that house of peace in that field of love and compassion,

looking at the many windows of the temple. I wondered what is it that really lets us take ourselves seriously as Unitarian Universalists?

The question reminded me of my early seminary days at Christian Theological Seminary in Indianapolis, one of my professors used to chide me with the question, “What’s the difference between a Unitarian Universalist Church and the local co-op?” His answer, “A co-op has food”. Well, obviously he had not been to one of our potlucks. We are as good as any Lutheran or Methodist gathering in that arena. But I knew his point, and initially I did not have an answer. His point? As Unitarian Universalists with our non-creedal, broad spectrum of pluralistic religious beliefs, we have no theological center. We are like any voluntary association. A co-op without food.

Then the answer came to me through a colleague and friend, Rev. Carl Scovel. What’s the difference between a UU Church and a Co-op. We worship. We gather to worship. We gather to worship and dare say, in a society where cynicism is often rewarded, that we gather in hope, in peace, and sympathy now and then. We gather to worship and learn how to love. Amidst our own limitations and awkwardness. We gather to worship and are free. We gather to worship and are free.

Rev. Carl Scovel says, “I believe that the authority [theological center] of a UU congregation is derived from its act of public worship. Through worship the people of a given congregation establish their relationship with the sacred as they understand it....If we do not believe in our bones that our worship and our life in the sacred define and empower us, then I would guess that we have probably lost our religious identity and become one voluntary organizations among many. [Through our worship] we have the opportunity to show others how people of

differing faith perspectives can move beyond tolerance and enrich each other in the common quest for the sacred.” As each person defines that for herself and himself.

I believe we each have a choice as we come here each Sunday to worship and search for meaning in our lives. Will we embrace the person next to us whether they are humanist, deist, Buddhist, Christian, Pagan, Atheist, Agnostic, Muslim, Jew, Spiritual Seeker, Humanist, Justice Maker? Can we affirm their theology? Their worship? Can we worship and learn to love?

To attend to these questions, let me be a good Unitarian Universalist and add another question. One that many of you may have encountered before. Recently, my good friend and colleague, Rev. Linda Johnson, a priest at Trinity Episcopal and an excellent theologian in her own right, presented this very query in her inter-faith efforts to understand Unitarian Universalism “So, if y’all, Unitarian Universalists do not believe the same thing, how is that you worship? What do you worship?”

When asked this question, I initially point out that worship need not be a transitive verb. One doesn’t necessarily have to worship something, one can simply be in a state of worship...worshipful. The word worship, as many of you know, comes from the Anglo Saxon *Woerthscippen*, “to shape what is of worth”. What is of worth to you?

My colleague Rev. Kendyll Gibbons provides the following excellent definition of worship for us liberal religious seekers:

Worship is participation in a community’s intentional creation of a dramatic, symbolic work of art, which re-presents what is real and valuable in its world, in response to the power of the pain and the promise of human existence.

To re-present what is real and valuable in this world, in response to the power of the pain and promise of the human existence.

Bobby McFerrin's 23rd Psalm does this. The consecration of the new Chamtse Ling Temple does this. And we do this. Every Sunday when we gather here, we re-present what is real and valuable in our world, not what some of our political leaders or advertisers or social cynics, would present to us. We re-present what is real and valuable, our shared principles, in response to the power of the pain and the promise of the human condition.

Our worship is communal. We enter into worship together...our Prelude signifies the beginning, followed by Opening Words and Chalice Lighting, We sing together, hear one another's voices "gather the spirit of heart and mind". We laugh and greet one another in a friendly manner. We are silent, receptive. To the voice of a child singing. To the mystery within reaching out to the mystery beyond. We light candles of joys and sorrows The pains and promise of the human condition. We make our offerings to sustain this imperfect liberal religious community and our greater Bloomington community. We pause and listen to a strain of music. The voices of a choir.

And if we allow, we can be open to the window of the moment. Opening to that which is sacred for each of us. Allowing for mutual transformation. Mutual transformation involves intention. It means each of us gathered here is vitally important. My colleague David Rankin elaborates on this idea,

What people bring to the church on Sunday morning is vitally important. When the worship service is viewed only as a performance, the choir and the minister critically appraised like a dog show, then the purpose of the hour is completely neglected. To a large extent, the posture, attitude and prior commitment of the individual determines the worship experience....

We so often fail to realize that worship is an inner event. It is not a noun, but a verb—an action of intense concentration. What's required is a posture

of humility, an attitude of openness and a preparation of awareness. Worship is seeing what is otherwise hidden. Far from a passive observation, it involves a prodigious amount of personal energy. All we need is what you bring.

There's a saying in Unitarian Universalist clergy circles that our members do not attend worship so much to hear "what the minister is thinking," but more importantly, "is the minister thinking?" In other words, our intellectual exploration, like our spiritual exploration, is not one-way. We all gather together. We worship together to mutually access, explore, and be challenged by our sense of the sacred.

Let us worship and learn to love.

And let me suggest that before you enter this house of worship, before you sit and look out the windows, ponder what you will bring to worship. What are the ideals you will place on the altar? How will love guide you? If you have children, talk to them about this. What can we bring to worship? If you are rushed, pause just for a moment, that window of a moment. And prepare an attitude of awareness and openness.

Ideally do this before you enter any house or abode. Particularly your own. But you can practice here. Each Sunday, you can practice. Let us practice together.. Let us re-present what is real and valuable in this world in response to the pain and promise of the human condition. Let us create kind hearts and a peaceful dwelling within. Let us dream. Let us believe that dreams can come true. Let us fight for justice non-violently. Let us shape what is of worth. Let us worship and learn to love. If exiled Tibetans can do this, exiled from their homelands...their houses, their houses of worship, then surely so can we. Let us create kind hearts.

At the dedication of the interfaith temple in the field of love and compassion, Hana Ali read these words from her father who stood nearby;

If peace we wish to attain, then peace must start within. Before there can be peace in the world, there must be peace in our everyday lives. There should be peace in our actions, peace in our thoughts, peace in our voices when we speak and peace in our hearts.

And I say, Let us worship and learn to love.

The window of the moment is always there.

May goodness and mercy follow you all the days of your lives

And may you dwell in her house forever and ever.

Amen.