



Auckland Unitarian Church

Love beyond belief

Unitarian Mysticism as Activism

Sally Mabelle © 23 January 2022

When I was preparing today, I googled 'Unitarian Mysticism' and to my surprise and delight, up came an inspiring 10-week Adult Religious Education course on the Unitarian Universalist Association website (uua.org) called '[Spirit in Practice](#)' by [Rev. Erik Wikstrom Walker](#). This morning, I'll be weaving together some of the stories he tells on that course with readings and quotes from other inspiring authors.

The story of the Mystic and the scientist

One day a Religious Man approached **a Mystic** and asked, "Does God exist?" "Allow me to go within for an answer," the Mystic replied.

After meditating for quite some time, expanding her heart-consciousness to embrace the Spirit of Life and the interconnected web of all existence, she answered, "I do not know what you mean by the word 'God,' but **I do know that this world is more mysterious and more wonderful than I could ever imagine.** I know that you and I are part of something so much larger than our own lives. Perhaps this 'something larger' is what you seek."

Then the Religious Man approached **a Scientist**. "Does God exist?" he asked. "Let me think," the Scientist replied.

And so she thought. She thought about the vastness of the universe—156 billion light-years, or something like 936 billion trillion miles, in diameter—and the almost immeasurable smallness of a quark. She thought of how the energy of the Big Bang fuels the beating of her own heart. And then she answered, "I do not know what you mean by the word 'God,' but **I do know that this world is more mysterious and more wonderful than I could ever imagine.** I know that you and I are part of something so much larger than our own lives. Perhaps this 'something larger' is what you seek."

The Religious Man then thought to himself. He thought of what he knows and what he does not know. He thought about how he knows what he knows, and how he knows he doesn't know what he doesn't know. He thought about his experience of the world and

how it is but one tiny, infinitesimal fraction of all experience. He thought about his dependence on forces larger than himself, and he thought about the interdependence of all existence. ***He experienced wonder and pondered mystery. And then he knew—he knew in his soul the truth of what the Mystic and the Scientist said—that he is part of something so much larger than his own life.***

And then, only then, did he think about what he'd call it.

The Religious man called it God - which as mythologist Joseph Campbell says is 'a metaphor for that which transcends intellectual thought'"

Quaker, Mark Russ, asks in his blog: (jollyquaker.com)

"Have we become too concerned with political activism at the expense of spiritual depth?

Or, are we spending too much time navel gazing rather than getting out there and letting our lives preach?

To use all our gifts and skills and emotions in pursuit of a better world is itself an act of worship. To be an activist IS to be a mystic.

Contemplation is also an action. It's something you do, and it can be hard work. You could even say that prayer and worship are political acts." To open ourselves to the grand mystery of the Spirit of Life is to acknowledge a force higher than the political powers of this world.

It is mysticism that gives us the strength to act, and activism is the fruit of mysticism. We should not assume that contemplative Unitarians are naval gazing and unproductive, nor that active Unitarians are unspiritual.

Some of us may see contemplation, worship and prayer as something that achieves nothing, as wasted time. Activism gets things done. But where does our strength for activism come from? If we rely purely on our own strength, the challenges of activism mean we will soon have nothing left to give. Activism that has no time for mysticism leads to burn out.

These times require more than action - they require spiritual transformation ...

This wisdom and will to save our planet can only come from deep experiences of the sacredness of life

*In his book, **Mystical Activism**, psychotherapist John C Robinson writes “that the healing of SELF and WORLD are one in the same” We are currently experiencing an evolutionary pressure for collective awakening...we each hold the power to change the world right where we are. To call these "end times" is not hyperbole. We are in trouble and the signs are everywhere: extreme political divisions; xenophobic violence; enormous wealth inequality; poverty and homelessness, racism, sexism, and the arms race, etc, etc.*

*We are the cause of these dark times. Driven by left-brain beliefs, illusions and obsessions, humanity races headlong toward the collapse of civilization. Fortunately, the solution to these mounting crises also lies in the human psyche, arising from a most surprising source: the **right-brain's** natural mystical consciousness. Our survival depends on whether we grasp and resolve this paradox in time.”*

This left-brain- right-brain reference reminds me of the story of the HEAD (left brain) and the BODY (right brain)

Once upon a time there was a head. Just a head. By sheer force of will—or maybe it was some kind of psychokinetic energy—the head was able to move itself around, open doors, pick things up. In fact, the head could do just about anything you or I can do.

And to hear the head tell of it, life is pretty good when you're a head. No stubbed toes. You never hit your funny bone. No love handles. No stomachaches. No tense shoulders.

Of course, there are also no dips in a hot tub. No lazy days in freshly washed sheets. And while the head could eat food, and taste it just as well as you or I, it could never feel satisfied and full. After a while, the head came to realize that it was incomplete.

So when one day the head saw a body that had no head of its own, the head got really excited. It floated over and suggested that the two might get together. Of course, the body had no ears, and could use only body language to communicate, but eventually the two of them made a connection. And when the head felt what it was like to have a body, and the body felt what it was like to have a head, what else could they do? And the two have been dancing through life ever since.

How is your own mind-body balance? Are you more active or contemplative?

Balance and equanimity are spiritual qualities we can aspire to, as

Affirmed by the wise teacher who was known far and wide as one who had mastered all the great disciplines of a spiritual seeker. She wandered the country, and whenever people heard she was near, they traveled to seek her wisdom and her guidance.

“Great Teacher,” one would say, “I wish to get closer to God.” “By what path do you travel now?” she would ask. “I study the scriptures, diligently applying myself day and night to unlocking their mysteries,” might come the reply. “Then you should put down your books and walk in the woods—thinking nothing, but listening deeply.”

Another would say, “I do good to every person I meet, doing all that I can to serve their needs.” “Then for a time,” the Teacher would reply, “consider yourself well met and strive to serve your own needs as you have so well served others.”

One day the Teacher noticed someone in the back of the crowd, someone not pushing his way to her as most of the others did. She went to him. “What is it I can do for you?” she asked.

“I do not know,” he relied. “I feel in need of something, but I do not believe in God and have nothing you could call a ‘practice.’” “When do you feel most alive?” the Teacher asked. “When I am playing with my children,” the man said without hesitation. “Then play with your children,” said the Teacher. “And you will find what you seek.”

What is it that YOU are seeking???

Once the great Sufi holy man and wise fool Nasreddin was walking down the street when a group of women came running up to him. Obviously distressed, they cried out to him, “Help us, Nasruddin! Help us.”

“What can be done I will try to do,” Nasruddin replied. “What seems to be the trouble?” “Our husbands,” the women cried. “They’ve all decided that they must go out into the desert in order to dedicate themselves to finding Allah. Our children and we have been abandoned.”

“This should not be,” Nasreddin declared, and he set out after the pilgrims as fast as his donkey could carry him. As he approached the band of men, he began to shout, “Help me! Help me, my brothers.”

“What seems to be the trouble, Nasruddin?” the men called back.

“My donkey,” he said. “I’ve lost my donkey and can’t find him anywhere. Oh, help me search. I must find him!”

“But he’s right there,” the men replied, laughing. “Can’t you see that you’re sitting right on top of him? You don’t have to go anywhere to look for him.”

“And why do you,” Nasruddin said, pulling his donkey to a stop, “feel that you must go anywhere to look for Allah? Go back to your wives; go back to your lives.” And that’s just what they did.

As we awaken our consciousness right here at home where we find ourselves, then what?

Young prince Siddhartha had been raised in complete luxury. His life had been so arranged that he knew no suffering, no lack, no want. So when he first encountered suffering—in the form of a sick person, an old person, and a dying person—he was determined to find its cause and its solution.

For six years he endured the most extreme self-denial the Hindu tradition of his day encouraged. Eventually he sat himself down beneath the Bodhi tree, determined to remain in deep meditation until he solved the problem of suffering.

For six days he sat, and then he had an awakening through which he saw the deep truth of reality. He entered a state of perfect oneness and bliss—nirvana. And he was tempted to remain in this state, for here there was no suffering, no struggle, no sorrow, no strife.

But what good would it do for him to have found the solution to merely his own life’s suffering? What would be the result of his determination if he alone attained nirvana while all other beings suffered on?

Siddhartha roused himself and stood. It was the beginning of a new day, and there was much work to be done.

In the words of, cultural anthropologist Angeles Arrian, May we ‘walk the mystical path with practical feet’

AMEN - Amin - Swaha - Blessed Be

Meditation / Conversation Starter:-

What activities make YOU feel most alive and connected to something larger than yourself?

Do you consider these spiritual practices?

Why or why not?

How do those practices serve the world?

