

WE ALL EVERY ONE OF US, HAVE TO COME HOME AGAIN

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So good to be back here! With you...and, in this serene worship space that invites us to remember what is of worth in our living as Unitarian Universalists. So good to be back here, with you.

There are these two young fish swimming along and they happen to pass an older fish swimming the other way, who nods at them and says "Morning boys, how's the water"? And the two young fish swim along for a bit and, eventually, one looks over at the other and says "what the hell is water"?

Is it not true that it is easy for us to forget the water, that something, intangible that holds us up and allows us to swim our lives?

All summer I kept singing a line from a song by the African American woman's a capella singing group 'Sweet Honey in the Rock' :

"We all, every one of us, have to come home again".

I don't know why it kept being sung through me, but I noticed its persistence. I would wake up wanting to sing it or it would issue forth intermittently every now and again. I kept meaning to get my CD out and listen to the song because I did not remember more than that one phrase. I kept wondering about the "home" being referred to in the song. I kept meaning to check.

At first I figured that the song was probably referring to the home of heaven...that promised land toward which many religions point. I can understand why. Life is not for cowards, and many find comfort (and centuries of various religions have promised it) in believing that a heaven with God where perfection and bliss reign keeps them keepin' on. I can't quarrel with the impulse.

As Unitarian Universalists we are each free to believe what we find to be true in matters religious. Personally, I have to say that what follows death, is, for me a mystery. For me, I realized, this was not the "home" of my yearning. No, not at all.

I realized very quickly that what was singing in me was not any longing for the "home" of my childhood. After all there is a lot of make believe and myth and sentimentality at its worst around the "homes" of our childhoods that collides with so many other realities. The most true thing to say about home in this familial sense is that it is always a mixed bag. I decided that this was not the home to which the song being sung in me was referring.

Could it be the "home" of the "Self"? Are we wanting to go home to our Self? At first glance it seems like a reasonable home to which we would want to return. But that presupposes that one's "Self" is some discreet entity that, once discovered, one can retreat to for wisdom, for comfort, for the truth. Human

beings have been trying to define what a “Self” is for as long as evolution began to pull us out of our unconsciousness... and into more awareness about our dicey existential situation. Being alive and knowing that we are mortal seems to be a large part of why we keep trying to figure out who we are and why we are here. Woody Allen is so good at expressing this existential angst: “I don’t want to achieve immortality through my work. I want to achieve immortality by not dying. “

Maybe it’s just me, but I personally am far too variable and imperfect and distracted to truthfully say that there is some “SELF “that is a home to go to, reliably. Too individualistic. Too lonely.

We all have to come home again. Does this mean to a specific place like First Parish? Well, now we are getting slightly warm. This space for instance, it’s white and its light...it’s dark wood and its resonant history. There is something in this place to which the singing refers to be sure. But the song’s “home”...while related to this place is not a physical place at all. That would be far too limited and static. While spaces, in their beauty, can nudge us toward what sings in us, the home of our yearning is not limited to a place nor is it limited to beauty or peace or perfection or life- as- easy...or to any one religious tradition.

I kept meaning to listen to the song to get the intended meaning.

Two days ago I met a woman who is 104 years old. She was playing scrabble. She seemed to every last one of her wits about her...and looked not a day over 85. Someone introduced her as who “Iris-who-is- 104.” She didn’t seem to take umbrage at this rather objectifying description. She chuckled and said to me, “I am not wanted up there (pointing to heaven), or down there (pointing to hell)..... so I’m here.”

So are we, here. I realized that the “home” of the song must be the present right where we are. We are already at “home”...already swimming around in that for which we yearn.

Perhaps you saw the story in the ‘UU World’ (the magazine published by the Unitarian Universalist Association). Last summer the world class violinist Joshua Bell was asked by a reporter from the Washington Post to sit in subway station and play his violin. Bell selected what he thought was the most beautiful music ever written for the violin and sat in the subway and played for hours. The whole thing was videotaped.

Except for one woman who recognized him, and for most of the children...no one paused to savor this beauty. He collected only \$30 in the hat. These same people may have paid \$200 to hear him at the symphony, but because he was not expected to be in this setting, and because everyone (except the children) was rushing toward their future destination...they missed a slice of heaven in the here and now .

Psychologist Mary Pipher goes on to say about this experience: “We tend to greet every minute with demands such as: “I want this. I want more of this. I want less of that.” We have ideas about what our minutes should or should not be. We want sunshine or rain, quiet or company, work or rest. We are such yearning organisms. Yet there is a sense in which many of us are fighting for our lives. We are struggling to be present for our own experiences. There is no more important task before us, nor anything that could bring us more love and joy.” (Mary Pipher from *Chronicles of the Worst Buddhist in the World*)

(Singing) We all, everyone of us have to come home again.

To be present in our own lives.

I spent a big chunk of my summer with my mother in Montana helping her get ready to move. She has Alzheimer's, so her short term memory is not often available to her. Now, there is no way that I would ever romanticize this disease.

On the other hand, being with her was a lesson for me in how attached I am to what has just happened as a way to be in what is happening now. My mother made banana bread one day...painstakingly under the circumstances. She worked hard and long and it smelled delicious. When I asked her a few hours later if she would like some banana bread, she asked "what banana bread?"

I started to learn that expecting her to find pleasure in the present from something in the immediate past was frequently painful. I started to teach myself to enjoy the taste of the banana bread with her without needing her to remember that she made it. Quite revealing how much is not absolutely necessary in order to live with joy in the moment.

I felt that I finally knew something of the "home" in the phrase of the song. Like the little fish I so often forget what the hell water is, and that I am already home in it.

Yesterday I finally listened to the song.

We all, everyone of us, have to come home again.

We all, everyone of us, have to come home again.

Some of us were born on the bottom...lived on the bottom...grew up from the bottom.

Then we declared, that we'd never.... return to the bottom.

We all, everyone of us, have to come home again.

We all, everyone of us.

Imagine my surprise as I realized that the "home" being referred to was something quite different. Not an internal awareness at all, but utterly outreaching.

This "home" is a place of essential equality between people.

The true home of our beings has no bottom, no top, no "we and they", no saved and sinner, no democrat or republican, no black or white. Until we are all home, we are, none of us home in the fullest sense of this radiant possibility.

Dearest people, our country needs our voices right now. The wound of racism utters forth impulsively from the floor of Congress...reminding us of the deep work that still needs to be done. Our

President has had 400% more threats of assassination than his predecessor. And we see the tactics being used to demonize him as Hitler-like are themselves Hitler-like.

We all, everyone of us, have to come home again...

... to live fully in as many moments as we can with joy and gratitude...for our home is only here and now, and we are born to be more than hostages of anxiety about what was or what will be.

But that is not all of the movement toward home. Until we all, everyone of us, realize that all are home or none of us is...we must keep being the voice for that possibility.

One of the most beautiful passages about what our true home is I share with you now. It was written by David Foster Wallace in a college commencement speech called "This is Water"

In speaking of the various things we worship: money, power beauty, Wallace writes:

Look, the insidious thing about these forms of worship is not they they're evil or sinful; it is that they are unconscious. They are default settings.

Our own present culture has harnessed these forces in ways that have yielded extraordinary wealth and comfort and personal freedom. The freedom for all to be lords of our tiny skull-sized kingdoms, alone at the center of all creation.

This kind of freedom has much to recommend it.

But of course there are all different kinds of freedom, and the kind that is most precious you will not hear much talked about in the great outside world of winning and achieving and displaying.

The really important kind of freedom involves attention, and awareness, and discipline, and effort, and being able to truly to care about other people and to sacrifice for them, over and over, in myriad petty little unsexy ways, every day.

This is real freedom. This is water. This is water.

