

The Stream of Life

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*The same stream of life that flows through the world,
Flows through my veins, and dances in rhythmic measure.*

*It is the same life that shoots in joy through the dust of the earth
And bursts into tumultuous waves of leaves and flowers.*

*It is the same life that is rocked in the ocean cradle
Of birth and death, In ebb and in flow.*

*My limbs are made glorious by the touch of this world of life,
And my pride is from the life throb of the ages
Flowing in my blood this moment.*

This poem by the great Indian poet, Rabindranath Tagore, might be as close to a creed as I have. The same stream of life that flows through me flows through the world.

The flow, the Tao, the eastern notion of Li, being in harmony with the way of all things. The same stream of life, of energy, of love flows through me and the world. We are all manifestation of the same life. We are all in this together. No exceptions. We are Universalists!

The whole of all of this flow of energy and life and love and being is called, in Process Theology, God. Pretty different than the old man in the sky that many of us learned about as

children and came not only to give up but despise because of all of the horrors done in "his" name.

The same stream of life that flows through me flows through the world. Let this wash over you. The same stream of life. Life in all of its diversity and creativity. Life. Love life. Choose life. Look for signs of life and protect it. How different this is from that image of having dominion over life. We are part of the flow of life. Sentient parts.

If I can hold this image of being an integral part, could I knowingly choose to damage the earth? Could I see someone else as "other"? How could I call anyone else "other," even someone with whom I am in great disagreement? There is no "other" in this new way of talking about the universe. If we can get this deeply, it will lead us to revolutionary acts. There is no one outside of this flow. The good ones and the so-called bad ones. We are all only small bits of the same life and, by the way, there is nothing that is not alive. Categories of animal, vegetable and mineral break down into, at most, slower and faster manifestations of life. All such divisions become arbitrary.

Thirty years ago Alan Watts said that children in the West ask, "Where did I come from?" A good question if you see being human as different than other life. The child raised in the idea of the flow of all life, a child from the East, might ask instead, "How did I grow?" "How did I grow?"

Alan said that as an apple tree "apples", the earth is "people-ing." He said that star travelers seeing our small blue-green planet 25 billion years ago might have said, "Look: a planet making rocks. Let's come back in a few billion years and see what new forms of life are emerging. Maybe it will be people-ing!"

See if you can step through the looking glass and into this metaphor. The old pyramid of life with humans at the top just doesn't make any sense. We are all in this together. We are not only interconnected by caring for one another, but totally dependent on one another and all the rest of life for our very existence. The very web itself is alive. The web is not only dotted with life, the web is flowing with life and new forms of life are emerging. Each new emergence is evidence of life's yearning for itself.

What a shock that modern physics is playing with the same ideas. We get so stuck in our old familiar stories that we can't see how it could be different than it has always been. Tribal warfare. Fighting for power. Winning through force.

Try for awhile to take on this story of flow and process. Let it amuse you and help you to see things from another point of view, then play with a new set of puzzle pieces. If we don't find a way to honor all of life we will continue to seek to dominate life that is not like us. We will continue to hate those who are not like us and to try to wipe out life that is different. That is the way it has been through history.

I know people who put pictures of the most strident, bullying, obnoxious talk show hosts on their altars as a way to work themselves out of hate. Worth and dignity. Hard words to say in the same sentence as our least favorite political figure, but what does our theology matter if we don't use it to challenge ourselves to a higher vision?

I believe that we are at a critical stage in human history and that it is a matter of survival that we look for what we have in common and learn to find something of value in each other. Even those whose rhetoric we despise. Even those who use violence. We have to step beyond the old paradigm, the old "we're right and they're wrong", if we want to bring something new and worthy to birth. If we want to survive.

Perhaps you know the poem by Vietnamese Zen Master Thich Nhat Hanh, "Please Call Me by My True Names." He describes this same view of the universe through a kaleidoscope of images

*Don't say that I will depart tomorrow—
even today I am still arriving.*

*Look deeply: every second I am arriving
to be a bud on a Spring branch
to be a tiny bird, with still-fragile wings,
learning to sing in my new nest,
to be a caterpillar in the heart of a flower,
to be a jewel hiding itself in a stone.
I still arrive, in order to laugh and to cry,
to fear and to hope.*

*The rhythm of my heart is the birth and death
of all that is alive.*

*I am a mayfly metamorphosing
on the surface of the river.
And I am the bird
that swoops down to swallow the mayfly.*

*I am a frog swimming happily
in the clear water of a pond.
and I am the grass-snake
that silently feeds itself on the frog.*

*I am the child in Uganda, all skin and bones,
my legs as thin as bamboo sticks.
And I am the arms merchant,
selling deadly weapons to Uganda.*

*I am the twelve-year-old girl,
refugee on a small boat,
who throws herself into the ocean
after being raped by a sea pirate.
And I am the pirate
my heart not yet capable
of seeing and loving.*

...

*Please call me by my true names,
so I can hear all my cries and laughter at once,
so I can see that my joy and pain are one.*

*Please call me by my true names,
so I can wake up
and the door of my heart
could be left open,
the door of compassion.*

I've been playing with my definition of what it is to be a Unitarian Universalist, making up my version of that short speech we are supposed to have ready for an elevator ride. When someone says, "You are a Unitarian Universalist? What do they believe?" I can say, "Well, I believe this:

*It matters that each of us was born.
Everything we do makes a difference,
and we are all in this together.*

It matters that each of us was born. Everything we do makes a difference. And, we are all in this together.

This is our annual water service. It seems important to say a little about the water crisis in the world. Only one percent of the earth's water is available and fresh. The rest is oceans and ice caps or inaccessible. Can you imagine that the average person in the US consumes 185 gallons of water a day compared to an average West African who uses a little over seven and a half gallons? In our country and around the world, the systems that have delivered safe water to people are in poor shape and often failing. This gives rise to the global trend to privatize water and water treatment. Companies like Bechtel take the business of purifying water away from public utilities and then try to make a profit. They are in business to make a profit and public utilities are unable to make the improvements and repairs necessary. What a mess.

I ask you today to be aware of our privilege, our own easy access, our level of consumption, and to realize that clean water is not a limitless commodity. One billion people in the world do not have clean water. Eighty percent of human illnesses involve unclean water. This information is from our own UU Service Committee, which has made water and sanitation its major global focus. I say again, we are all in this together.

Today we ritually bring our community back together after our summer adventures and travels. Everyone will be invited to come forward and pour water into the common bowl. As

we pour, we are invited to say a sentence or two about where we have been. If you are a visitor you are absolutely invited to share with us a little glimpse into your life and who you are. If you brought water, pour it in as you say a few words. If you did not bring water, pour some water from the pitcher.

This pitcher holds water from years past. Each year we save some of the water from the common bowl and boil it up and keep it for this and other ritual moments. There are a few drops of water from the stories of members who are no longer with us. Bill Greer and Ainsley Frederickson, who moved to Modesto, have drops of water here. There is undoubtedly water in this pitcher that Clair McMahon poured, and Anne Marie Frost. There is also water from Galen Mockett Hutcherson's naming ceremony. Years from now, there will be a few drops from the water you add this morning.

This community is changed because you are here today with your story and your life. This community is sacred because you are here, because we are here, together.

As we tell our stories we begin another year together. It will be impossible for us to remain unchanged. Our web of stories will be recast and we will again belong to one another.

I invite everyone here to participate, to come forward with your vials and stories.

Share just a sentence or two so that there is time for everyone. By the way, not all great journeys involve travel at all.

We want to hear from everyone who is willing to share so please name only the essence of your journey and leave time for the rest of us.

Please begin to line up and please tell us your name as you begin to speak.