

There's More Light
UUF

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Turning the clocks forward one hour, whatever the weather, signals the changing of the season. While we lose an hour of sleep, we gain an hour of daylight. The changing of the clock heralds the lengthening of the day which brings more light into our lives...at least our waking lives.

Turning the clocks forward an hour, gaining more daylight, prompted the thought of more light in our lives. It occurred to me that having more light in our lives, does not necessarily mean there is more light in our lives.

Yes, I did say, having more light in our lives does not necessarily mean there is more light in our lives. This morning I want to engage the metaphor "having more light in our lives".

More light, even bright light, all around does not affect the amount of light we carry within us. The amount of light we carry within, might be referred to as some form of enlightenment. While we all would like to think of ourselves as being enlightened...I mean no offense, but, it ain't necessarily so.

We are creatures of the modern age. Some say we've moved past the modern age into a post-modern age. I won't quibble. But it is true that we are creatures of the modern age, which was built on concepts of the Age of Enlightenment.

European intellectuals, mostly philosophers, brought us the age of Enlightenment during the 17th and 18th centuries. There was a great focus on reason and individualism. The time was marked largely by a rejection of traditional social, religious, and political ideas, with an emphasis on rationalism. Folks like Descartes, Locke, and Newton, followed by Kant, Voltaire, Rousseau, and Adam Smith. (a band of old dead white guys).

There is another interpretation of the term enlightenment. It refers to a “state of being”. The state of *being enlightened*. It implies having insight, awareness, understanding, a certain type of knowledge. People who are thought to be enlightened are said to be open-minded, broadminded, having sophistication, being advanced.

If there are any such people among us this morning, prepare yourselves. I intend to challenge the concept. It’s said that one of the jobs of ministers is to comfort the afflicted and to afflict the comfortable. You may soon know which camp you reside in.

The Age of Enlightenment brought us many good things. The scientific method, a deeper understanding of human nature, and ways to think about governmental systems. But it has also run us down an increasingly difficult road with unintended consequences.

I blame Descartes. In large measure, Descartes separated mind from body. He laid the groundwork for us to think of ourselves as wholly rational beings. “I think, therefore I am”.

It’s a great concept...as far as it goes...but it’s not the whole story. It significantly distorts human reality. It gives us a false image of ourselves. It’s too narrow to capture the fullness of who we are. Remember? Paul Raszor said our liberal modern understanding of ourselves as autonomous individuals is an illusion.

Unitarianism and Universalism largely grew up within the context of the age of enlightenment. Both have been significantly influenced by rational thought. Both were counter cultural, in opposition to traditional religious belief systems. Both rejected commonly held religious thinking and beliefs.

In an address at the Harvard Divinity School, in 1838, Emerson declared that religious authority should be grounded in an “inner consciousness”. He talked about finding a spark of the divine within. He helped to create what became called Transcendentalism.

Since then, especially with the development of Humanism, Unitarianism seems to have migrated back towards Descartes. I think, therefore I am. We seem enthralled with thinking. We act as if the only thing that matters is rational thought, logic and the scientific method.

We may not truly believe rational thought is all that matters, but we very often act that way. Despite taking a religious tax exemption, many of us seem unwilling to claim Unitarian Universalism as a religion. We act as if a belief in God is irrational. Even silly.

A belief in God may well not be rational...but so what? We do not live our lives based exclusively on logic and rational thought.

Are we in love because we *think* we are in love? Certainly many of us have thought we were in love at one time or another. But who thinks their way to love? Love is not an end result of thinking.

Do we consciously decide to be lustful? Who thinks in order to induce feelings of lust? Let me reframe that. Many of us have thought about being lustful, I'm sure. But the actual feeling of lust is not a conscious choice. Rational thought doesn't go far enough to encompass the human condition.

As a congregation, last year we voted to approve a mission. It reads:

The Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Poughkeepsie is a welcoming congregation rooted in the liberating message of Unitarian Universalism. WE INSPIRE spiritual and intellectual growth. WE NURTURE a supportive and diverse community of members, families and friends. WE ACT in service to the broader community.

What do these terms mean? For the most part we know what "act" means. But what about inspire? Not only inspire but inspire spiritual growth! These are not physical or material things. They are not measurable or quantifiable. Yet we have sufficient belief in these terms to use them as a compass to guide our decisions and actions

What about Nurture? How do we define it? We can't measure nurture. It lives outside the realm of the scientific method. We might be able to measure the absence of or find some correlations with what we think of as nurture—good health, emotional wellbeing, etc. Nurture is a concept, it's ephemeral.

As a community we have agreed to commit ourselves to Inspire spiritual growth. We've committed to Nurture a supportive and diverse community.

And it's a wholly rational thing to do for a faith community. Because as a congregation, a faith community, we deal in the liminal space between thought and feeling. We hold dear, things that are not provable, that are not measurable. We believe in spirituality, we believe in spiritual growth, at the same time we believe in rational thought and intellectual growth.

In order for us to go beyond a belief in words and concepts, we must ACT. And in order for us as a community to act with integrity, I'm convinced we need more light. We need more light internally. You might even call it a form of enlightenment.

A quick story. During the early years of my learning to work with energy I came upon a profound discovery. In order to recognize, experience and shift energy, I did not need to learn something new and different. Instead, I found it was much more profitable to simply stop doing what I had been doing. It wasn't about what To Do but what Not to do.

I discovered I could not think my way to an experience of energy, the life force, some call it Chi. I found I hampered myself when I lived out of a belief about energy, a belief about what was right and wrong. It was when I stopped believing my beliefs that I discovered what was there all the time.

I tell you this because I believe---yes it may be just a belief, but my lived experience tells me otherwise—I believe in order for us to live into our mission, we as a community, we as individuals need to stop doing some things.

We need to stop focusing on our hurt, pain and disappointment from prior encounters with religion. We need to stop being held captive to a definition of God that we have come to reject.

The majority of Unitarian Universalists have come out of another religious belief system, one that they have rejected. Many others came to UUism with little or no prior experience with a religious or faith community. Most of us come with a deep seated need to **NOT** be controlled or imposed upon. We need to let go of the Not and seek the “is”.

Our lives are diminished when we decide to never love again because we’ve been hurt by love. Our lives are constrained when we refuse to take risks because we have known failure. It’s hard to inspire or support those with beliefs we belittle or reject.

I seek to Inspire Spiritual and intellectual Growth. I seek to Nurture a supportive and diverse community. I want to be in a faith community with people who actively seek spiritual growth; with people who actively nurture and support one another. I want to be with people who act in service of spiritual growth; who act in service of nurture and support.

Let us mourn and grieve the demise and death of beliefs that no longer serve us, that we no longer believe. Let us bury the definition of a God we have rejected. And with it, the pain and disappointment we’ve experienced. It’s time to move on with our lives. Let this be a time of new beginnings.

Let us let go of the confining and restrictive beliefs about religion, church or synagogue that we no longer associate with. Let us bury those religious beliefs that we continue to have an allergic reaction to, in order to make room for the new.

If there are some among you who would like to bury some bad experiences or would like to bury old worn out beliefs...I offer my services in conducting a memorial ceremony. I want to conduct a memorial service for dead beliefs, for worn out thoughts, old pains.

It’s by letting go that we gain, by giving that we receive.

Consider opening ourselves to a new beginning. Consider the possibility that God Is Love. Can a new and revised version of God be of benefit?

Our UUA president, Peter Morales says: "I believe religion is much more about what you love than about what you think".

Lets focus on love, self love and love of other. And let that love inspire, nurture and support us all. What a generous gift that would be!

Amen and Ashe