

There's a reason that phrase of Dr. King's:  
tied in a single garment of destiny  
resonates,  
a reason this phrase gets quoted, remembered, repeated,  
especially but not only around days like today,  
when we celebrate what would have been Dr. King's 83<sup>rd</sup> Birthday,  
tied a single garment of destiny.

The reason this phrase resonates is because we feel it,  
because it speaks to that felt reality  
that we, by ourselves, do not make our own life.

Oh, sometimes we buy into the myth, the illusion,  
that we are in control of our life.  
I'm my own person, and I control what happens to me.

Ha!

Ha! I say.

If you are self-disciplined, wise, courageous, and highly self-aware,  
you might, sometimes, control how you react to a situation.  
Sometimes.  
That, ladies and gentlemen, is the extent of our control.

We are bound up together.  
Our past, our present, our future, they are bound up with others –  
yes, with those closest to us, our ancestors, our loved ones, our descendents.  
But they are also bound up with casual acquaintances,  
strangers whose tiny interactions with us change our day, and our life,  
and bound up with those we might never meet in person,  
whose name we might never know,  
but whose hopes, dreams, fears, and lives connect with our own.

Wordsworth –  
isn't that a great name for a poet?  
Wordsworth says that no distinguishable line  
separates from the holy ground from the unhallowed,  
and that we, not just in death but also in life,  
are mingled like many waters.

For a long time, folks like this:  
William Wordsworth, Ralph Waldo Emerson, Mary Oliver  
The Buddha, Lao-Tzu, Jesus, Heraclites and Spinoza  
Margaret Fuller, and so on and so on –  
these folks were labeled "mystics",  
put up on the shelf with the rest of the curiosities.  
Oh, isn't that "interesting."  
Interesting, how you think we are all one family,  
and how all is really one,

and all that,  
but please don't bother me, I'm trying to live my life.

But we are beginning to learn that this sensibility –  
that there is an underlying unity to all things,  
that all things are connected beyond our simple perception –  
this sensibility, it turns out, is accurate.  
It's not just metaphysics. It's physics.  
It's neuroscience. It's biology.

Quantum mechanics and string theory are teaching us that all matter and energy flows, and is connected to all other matter and energy.

At the subatomic level, there really is no distinguishable line.  
Neuroscience is teaching us that while our "brain" might be in our head,  
our mind is a product of the interaction of the world at large with our body, including our nerves and our brain.  
And biology, DNA and evolution, teaches us that we are so much alike,  
not just to every other human being, with whom we share many common ancestors, but to all forms of life,  
who are, whether we like it or not, fancy mutations of pond scum.

The unity of all things, the connectivity of all things,  
this is not just the aspirations of poetry,  
it is not just the foundation for social justice,  
it is the truth of how the universe works.

And it is, I am happy to tell you,  
the solution to our problem.

Last week, I described the four questions asked by the scholar of comparative religion Stephen Prothero.  
Prothero, in his book *God Is Not One*,  
argues that each religion really is different,  
and that you can understand these differences when you understand that each religion identifies different  
problems in the world,  
and thus different solutions to those problems.  
That's questions one and two: what's the problem, what's the solution.  
Question three is about the how – what's the technique for reaching the solution.  
Question four is the who – who are the exemplars who show us the way.

Last week, I said that Unitarians and Universalists were once a species of Christianity – we identified sin as the  
problem and salvation as the solution, but instead of faith or works, we saw character as the technique.

And I argued that we had changed over time, and that we now understood the problem in the world as something  
other than sin –  
namely, we understood the problem as division.  
The division between people over things like race, nationalism, and religion,  
the division within ourselves between our reason and passion, for example,  
the division between ourselves and the earth,  
and the division between ourselves and divinity, the sacred,  
however we might understand that.

We experience these divisions as a problem – a social problem, a theological problem, and an existential  
problem.

So, the second question: what is our solution?

Well, let's look at what we have stood for, preached for, lived for for 200, 300, 500 years.

Our Unitarian ancestors were called Unitarians because they believed in the unity of god instead of the trinity, but that wasn't the only unity they believed in.

They also spoke out for the unity of humankind, that all people should be treated with dignity because all people were children of that one god; they spoke out of the unity of reason, science, and faith – arguing that reality itself is unified, and so our ideas about reality whether those ideas be scientific or theological, should cohere with each other and correspond to what we observe in the natural universe through the scientific method.

And our Unitarian ancestors argued for the unity of the religions, that though we might have a variety of ideas about god and ritual and so on, we could agree on the ethical principals of justice, peace, and compassion, and act together on those principals to build a better and more peaceful world.

Our Universalist ancestors were called Universalist because they believed in the (still) heretical doctrine of Universal Salvation – that every person would, in the end, be reconciled with God, and no person would be cast into a pit of hell forever. They believed that sin, because of the way it distorted our soul, was its own punishment in this life, and they believed that God's love was so great, so infinite, that it overwhelmed our petty transgressions, even our great and terrible transgressions, and so all would be saved and none would be damned.

It wasn't too hard for them to move from this idea of Universal Salvation to a larger sense of Universalism - - that there was truth and power and value in each religious way of being, and in the natural world. And of course, they believed, strongly, that they should treat others as God would treat them – with love and welcome – because we are all brothers and sisters.

The goal, then, that we strive for as a religious people, the goal of life as identified by our religious tradition, is unity.

Unity.

But not, let me be clear, not unity in the sense that our individuality is washed away. Not unity in the sense of the fascist, totalitarian erasure of personality, or the false equivalence of mass culture, where we are unity only because we watch the same commercials. No.

Francis David, the founder of Unitarianism in Transylvania some 450 years ago, said, “we need not think alike to love alike”, and it is in this sense that we mean unity – a unity of love, a unity of ideals,

a unity with the wider powers and movements of existence,  
a unity into which our lives are joined,  
like beautiful and unique squares of cloth,  
its own color and pater and texture,  
unique but not apart –  
woven together with others,  
into, yes, a single garment of destiny.

Our goal is not just unity,  
but unity in diversity.

We are different –  
shaped by different forces, with different personal hopes, fears, and lives.  
We learn in different ways, we respond in different ways.

And our goal, our hope, to the reality of these differences is that,  
instead of division we move to unity –  
instead of being divided, apart, separate because of our diversity,  
we come together and learn from and grow from our diversity,  
that we be made richer and more whole,  
both individually and in community,  
by our unity in diversity.

One soup, many ingredients –  
brought together, the abundance surprising as we discover we have more,  
we are more, then we think we are,  
that we are more together, when we contribute together,  
then we can ever be by ourselves.

In addition to soup, the great metaphor here is music –  
many are the languages that human tongues employ,  
many are our instruments, our tones and sounds.  
Yet one is the love, one is the song,  
that we make together.  
Is there anything more lovely than harmony?  
Different sounds, different tones, brought together,  
to make a new sound –  
music is a synergy – it is what social scientists and physicists describe as  
an “emergent” phenomenon.  
It is the “more than” that comes out of when the “sum of the parts”  
interact to create something new, something that didn’t exist,  
and can’t be reduced to its elements.

Division is a problem – it is a problem socially, theologically, and existentially.  
And unity in diversity is our goal – it is our goal socially, theologically, and existentially.

Socially, we seek the unity in diversity that Dr. King described so often  
in his sermons, a unity in diversity that was preached by the social gospel movement before that, and which  
prophets have long foretold.

We dream of the world where all shall dwell together,  
as the song says, “secure and manifold” –  
manifold, in many ways, secure, in peace,  
that we might dwell together.

This vision of society, where each person is respected and included,  
where folks are free to live their best life, their own life,  
in a society of mutual respect and love –  
this is our vision.

We have acknowledged, for many centuries, that this vision of unity in diversity  
cannot be achieved if the relations between people are dramatically unequal,  
or if one group is able to subject its will on another.  
That's why we opposed slavery, and fought for suffrage,  
and work for peace –  
it's why, when Dr. King called for people of faith to come to march in Selma,  
Unitarian Universalists went in droves – the best represented denomination to make the trip. One of our number,  
a white minister who worked with the poor in Boston, James Reeb, died in Selma, murdered by white  
supremacists –  
and in Dr. King's eulogy for James Reeb, he preached these words:

“James Reeb was martyred in the Judeo-Christian faith that all men are brothers . . . his crime as that he dared to  
live his faith; he placed himself alongside the disinherited black brethren of this community.”

At the end of the eulogy, Dr. King enjoined the audience to carry forward the work of the civil rights movement  
as a way to honor James Reeb;  
we today do this because it honors Reeb, and King himself, and hundreds, nay thousands of others who gave their  
lives for the cause. King said, then,

“if we will do this, we will be able . . . to transform the jangling discords of our nation into a beautiful symphony  
of brotherhood.”

Unity in diversity is our social commitment, it is our goal for society and the relations between human beings.  
That we will be a symphony, all our diverse sounds and tongues and beats making beautiful music together.

And unity in diversity is our theological goal, too.  
This is why we are so committed to the multi-religious journey,  
why we talk about “many windows, one light” –  
the Rhenberg window in the narthex,  
the symbols of these religions united into a pattern –  
each keeping their own identity and integrity,  
but lit by one light, held together by one frame.  
What Richard Grigg said in our reading about how pluralism can enchant the world,  
can give us a truer picture – not a true picture, because we are always finite,  
but a truer picture of divinity and humanity and everything –  
when we are together with others,  
and we celebrate our diversity,  
and we bring together all the ideas and witnesses and traditions,  
it enriches our lives, our faith, our future.

Our theological goal of unity in diversity is also eschatological –  
that's a big ole' religious word, it means our vision of paradise,  
our vision of the future –

Now is the time approaching,  
and then all that has divided us will merge,  
and then compassion will be wedded to power,  
and then all will live in harmony with one another and the Earth –  
this is a vision of how we want the world to be.

We don't believe that that vision will come true just because we wish it, though, or that some power external to us will force it on us – instead, that vision is worked for, every day, in little actions and big ones, in how we work and raise our kids and eat and vote and speak. We work for this vision of unity in diversity.

And our goal of unity in diversity is existential – it is about those starlings flying together you saw if you were here last week, that lifted up feeling that happens with the music comes together, and the whole world seems to sing. It is when between the tops of the poplars, the sky gives its blessing of eternity.

When we are united together with others in the spirit of love – when we feel that sense of connection with everything – that wow! that's good stuff.

One of our youth was telling me, last week, about their trip the Quaker meeting, and being silent with them, and feeling a connection to the whole universe – she said, I want to do more of that! Others of you have told me about times in your life when you stood on the mountain, or by the river, or danced, or made love, or broke bread, and just felt the boundary fall away. And when we come, in this house, to celebrate and remember a life, now ended, I almost always close with these words from Elder Olson:

**"Nothing is lost; the universe is honest,  
Time, like the sea, gives all back in the end,  
But only in its own way, on its own conditions:  
Empires as grains of sand, forests as coal,  
Mountains as pebbles. Be still, be still, I say;  
You were never the water, only a wave;  
Not substance, but a form substance assumed."**

It is the words of mystics, yes.  
But it is also the teaching of science.

We stand out for a brief moment, conscious of our own life, but then we return – and Einstein and Heisenberg teach us: nothing is lost, all is connected, energy and matter dance together, and we are one, we are one with the stars, of whose dust we are made and to whose dust we shall return, and we are one, with our brothers, our sisters, our cousins which is all of life, everywhere and always, and we are one, celebrating the diversity of our quests, the great variety of our voices and lives, but one is seeking to love, to be loved, and to make the world, which we share, a place we can be together, secure and manifold.

So, next week – the how.

If unity in diversity is our goal, then what is our method?

How do we make it so?

But for now, let's sing together, make unity together.