

A new interpretation of the nature of spirituality is apparent, and what it means to be divinely human and humanly divine are joining and often replacing more codified beliefs. Organized religions have a lot to offer us, but more and more, people are discovering that ultimately we are responsible for our own souls and the path we travel, and need to keep our hearts and minds open. We cannot become so rigid in our belief system that we dismiss the spiritual disciplines followed by other “believers,” choosing to ignore that which might touch our hearts in ways we had never imagined.

The work he (Dalai Lama) speaks of is an inner work, one that develops the seeds of peace within each of us. Inner work, that which learns compassion and peace of mind, is key to being human and is the key practice in spiritual traditions. His Holiness the Dalai Lama believes “Everything starts with us, with each of us. The indispensable qualities are peace of mind and compassion.... We can reject every form of religion, but we can’t reject and cast off compassion and peace of mind.”¹

We may be reinventing the wheel on our spiritual paths, but it is becoming a wheel of our own making, and we seem to enjoy this endeavor... Every time we pray or meditate or find our spiritual center, we must feel that moment. We must embrace it on behalf of all beings everywhere. We are all connected, and we are all expressions of one life. No matter where we are, our prayers are heard around the world. Thus we are all one...

When we pray, we are still, and we open ourselves to a myriad of spiritual possibilities. Channels and paths are available during prayer and meditation that are sometimes lost in our fast-paced, wireless, cellular world. And we are communing with all others who are sharing in a region of “sacred space” that singular moment of transcendence of the mundane and ordinary in our lives.

And though our social/religious circumstances may differ from continent to continent, all religions indeed have a goal of living in peace and practicing some variation of the Golden Rule. So we need to understand that the basic tenets of all religions are the same. We must learn to work together, for only by working together can we achieve peace. God is too large to be contained by any one religion.

Different religious traditions can engage in dialogue with one another in a true spirit of ecumenism. Dialogue can be fruitful and enriching if both sides are truly open, if they really believe that there are valuable elements in each other's tradition and that they can learn from one another, they will also rediscover many valuable aspects of their own tradition through such an encounter. Peace will be a beautiful flower blooming on this field of practice.²

We must not be content to build churches and temples and ashrams and houses of worship and ignore the teachings we receive there.

We know we can positively heal and transform each other and our planet by the thoughts we choose to think and the ways in which we put those thoughts into action. In 1957, Hugh Everett III discussed parallel universes and something he called “choice points”.

A “choice-point” is a moment in time that offers an opportunity to change the course of events. Conditions arise that create a path between “business as usual” along our current path, and a new path leading to new outcomes. A choice point is like a bridge making it possible to be on one path, and then change course completely to embrace a new path leading to a different outcome. A choice point presents itself when one becomes aware of a spiritual imbalance and visualizes a path to bring harmony to the dissonance.

...Buddhists decided to do both (things)—to go out and help people and to do so in mindfulness. We call it engaged Buddhism. Mindfulness must be engaged. Once there is seeing, there must be acting. Otherwise, what is the use of seeing?³

We are not sole and ultimate determiners of history, even though we like to think of ourselves that way. But we are not pawns either. We are collaborators. Navigating our course through life is a group process. One of the purposes of any religion is to provide a community where one can not only feel support for their beliefs and values but where they can join together to effect positive change in the world. It is said that geese fly together because they get an aerodynamic lift from one another and they fly faster and farther than when they fly alone. This is true for us as well. We cannot ignore those who choose to be adherents of different religions. We must understand that their faith is equally important and trust that faith is to become our common bond. When we fly on wings of faith, we do better together than alone. Sufi Mystic Hafiz reminds us that:

Everyone

Is God speaking.

Why not be polite and

Listen to

Him?⁴

And along our journey we must move with Spirit to heal our world, to realize one of the core principles of Unitarian Universalism, “the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all”... and to this end... reverence is our vehicle. Paul Woodruff believes that,

“Reverence runs across religions and even outside them through the fabric of any community, however secular. We may be divided from one another by our beliefs, but never by reverence. If you desire peace in the world, do not pray that everyone share your beliefs. Pray instead that all may be reverent.”⁵

Often we hear an expression, “marching to the drumbeat of war”. But what if that drumbeat sounded a different music, one of an inherent commonality among nations and people of all religions in a world seemingly fractured beyond our comprehension. Might we one day “march to the drumbeat of peace?” A folk song from Senegal speaks of this more harmonic resonance.

*I have carved the many names of God
onto all the trees
within the sacred grove of my heart
from which His music plays.⁶*

Peace needs to remain a focus in our world today. In the absence of peace, we step backward from what is important. If peace is present, all is possible...

love, compassion, and forgiveness. But first we must find peace within ourselves, through prayer and meditation, and reach an equilibrium of sorts that allows us to embrace and express a willingness to live as one with others. Our spiritual journey, no matter where it leads, must bring us to this realization. Only then will peace be mirrored in the world. Thich Nhat Hanh describes the fruits of such prayer and meditation,

*Meditation is stopping, calming and looking deeply. When we are mindful, touching deeply the present moment, we can see and listen deeply, and the fruits are always understanding, acceptance, love, and the desire to relieve suffering and bring joy.*⁷

We must become a living example of compassion and peace, “practice what you preach” some would say, and become the conditions of our desires from within... The Bible tells us in Matthew 5:9, “*Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God.*” We will never get this day back so we must live it with enthusiasm and an acknowledgment of what it is we truly believe in, and how best to honor that. We must be aggressive in working toward a more peaceful world and resist the temptation to “hide” behind a faith that professes to have “the only answer.” We need to step forward in a shared faith in pursuit of that dream... Matthew Fox asks,

*Is it not time for our religions to get back to their essentials—which is meant to be the teaching of spirituality—and to contribute wisdom to an increasingly despairing world? This is not a time for denominational one-upmanship. It is a time to call wisdom from any and all its sources and to let folly go.*⁸

Life is a journey, and it is our responsibility to make our life journey a successful one, pursuing with passion that which we care deeply about. If,

indeed, peace on earth is important, then we must be a living, breathing manifestation of that peace. As the Apostle says, “*Faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.*” Faith is a subtle chain that binds us to the infinite... Faith is the centerpiece of a connected life. It allows us to live by the grace of invisible strands. No person will find him or herself in a peaceful world who does not first believe in its existence, and who does not sincerely believe that they might overcome any obstacle placed in their way.

There was a story in Kentucky when I was a child that an old mule fell in a dry well, hopelessly trapped. The old farmer gathered a few neighbors to assess the situation. They determined that Old Beau was done for, so they started shoveling dirt to fill the well. So Beau, mules being stubborn you know, felt the dirt hit his back and had a decision to make. He could be smothered to death, or shake off the dirt and step up. And that’s what he did, shook the dirt off and continued to step up, until his head peered out of the well, surprising the farmers.

We are in a similar situation, either sit back and let whatever is going to happen to us and our planet just happen, or become pro-active, shake off all the dissenters, step up, and do our part to bring about peace in the world. We must continually rejuvenate our spirituality and seize the boundless opportunities presented to each of us for healing our planet and our fellow travelers on our life journey.

We were not created to be a reservoir that is always collecting, but rather a river that is always flowing; a reservoir becomes stagnant,

especially if it has no source of fresh water, and nothing flows out to humanity... Celtic spirituality addresses the importance of finding a source for these divine, healing waters:

The land of Ireland was understood in ancient times as the body of the goddess. Wells were revered as special apertures through which divinity flowed forth...⁹

These waters continually flow from the one source, Spirit, and are available to those in need. Ochun is seen as the River Goddess among the Yoruba people of West Africa...

Ochun is Mama of All Waters, on Earth and in the heavens. Her cooling waters are believed to soothe any person, emotion or situation, and she will send them to those in need.¹⁰

When we connect with Spirit and feel its waters rush over us, it fills our hearts with the desire to reach out to others with true compassion. Though we may see a world of peace and harmony as a distant dream, we need to return to the present moment and manifest peace within ourselves, becoming a “river of compassion” as it were. Thich Nhat Hanh believes:

If we cling to our idea of hope in the future, we might not notice the peace and joy that are available in the present moment. The best way to take care of the future is to take care of the present moment...the well is within us. If we dig deeply in the present moment, the water will spring forth.¹¹

Our most important weapon against any person who does not share our vision of peace and justice and compassion for everyone is our

imagination. The real cause of neurosis is using our imaginations and creativity to punish ourselves instead of using them in pursuit of the world we desire... or to build better, more efficient implements for killing.

We can make use of our imagination and creativity to work toward a more compassionate, peaceful world quietly, with no other purpose than to bring ourselves and those we touch a sense of peace. Lao-tzu spoke of this path, *“When there is no desire, all things are at peace. Let your workings remain a mystery. Just show people the results.”*¹²

Recently Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld questioned the need for Chinese government expenditures for their military, since no one was threatening them. The Chinese spent \$35 billion on their military last year. Imagine what they could have done with that \$35 billion, but then again, of the \$1.06 trillion the world governments spent on their militaries last year, the United States total expenditure was \$455 billion.

If we could reverse that mentality and invest \$1.06 trillion in building a world community of peace and compassion, truly, as Julian of Norwich might say, *“all will be well, will be well...”* We are blessed, and we must learn to temper our tendency to doubt with a capacity to believe... for as Jesus tells us in Mark 9:23... *“If you can believe, all things are possible to one who believes.”*

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 - 3 Fox, M. (2000). *One River, Many Wells*. New York, New York, Jeremy P. Tarcher/Penguin, P. 380.
 - 4 Ladinsky, D. (1999). *The Gift: Poems by Hafiz*. New York, New York, Penguin Group, P. 269.
 - 5 Woodruff, P. (2001). *Reverence: Renewing A Forgotten Virtue*. New York, New York, Oxford University Press, Inc, P. 15
 - 6 Braybrooke, M., Ed. (2002). *Lifelines*. London, Duncan Baird Publishers Limited, P. 145.
 - 7 Fox, M. (2000). *One River, Many Wells*, P. 190.
 - 8 *Ibid.*, P. 8.
 - 9 *Ibid.*, P. 120
 - 10 *Ibid.*, P. 128.
 - 11 Hanh, P. 179.179
 - 12 Mitchell, S. (1988). *Tao te Ching*. New York, New York, HarperCollins Publishers, Inc, P. 36.37.