

My opening words this morning were about the Upanishads, part of the sacred text of the Hindus. Let me remind you what they were.

*"Human beings cannot live without challenge. We cannot live without meaning. Everything ever achieved we owe to this inexplicable urge to reach beyond our grasp, do the impossible, know the unknown. The Upanishads would say this urge is part of our evolutionary heritage, given to us for the ultimate adventure: to discover for certain who we are, what the universe is, and what is the significance of the brief drama of life and death we play out against the backdrop of eternity."*

— Anonymous, *The Upanishads*

Human beings can not live without challenge! But oh so many of us wish it was otherwise. We all too often equate "challenge" with unwanted hurdles, problems, difficulties, sadness. The sages would tell us, challenges are opportunities for growth. ...maybe yes, maybe no!

The second line in the opening words says, "we can not live without meaning". In fact, we seek to make meaning out of virtually everything. "Meaning" seems to be THE required roadmap of our lives. How often do we hear, "so what does that mean?", "what did he/she 'mean' by that?"

Whether consciously or not, we make meaning out of how a person is dressed. We make meaning out of where someone lives, the kind of car they drive. A sports car connotes a different meaning than a Prius, than a pickup truck...and certainly, a garbage truck.

We would have a hard time making meaning out of the image of a garbage truck driver wearing a bikini. We so often need to make meaning out of what we see, what we experience. We seem to need things to make "sense"

Just the other day, I was outside and there were snow flurries, not a real snow, just small flakes falling. It caught my attention, not so much because there was no prediction of snow, but because I didn't see any clouds in the sky! I was standing next to a two or three story building, so I moved to get a bigger view of the sky. The only clouds I could see seemed far away. I found myself wondering whether it was possible for snowflakes to be coming from that distance? Was it possible for them to be blown that far by the wind?

Fortunately, I was busy at the time and didn't take any more time to consider the questions in my head. The mere possibility of an answer was enough for me to get back to the task at hand. But I did need to make meaning out of my experience. I needed it to "make sense"!

So how often do we make things up in order to satisfy our need for things to make sense?

Certainly, there are times when it's important for things to make sense. If the mechanic wants to charge me for work done in the trunk of my car when I took it in for an oil change...there's an issue that needs to be resolved. But when I make up a explanation for snowflakes falling, do I really need to be invested it "making sense"?

My point is that we all too often get overly caught up in getting things to "make sense", overly caught up in the meaning we make of things that are said, things we see, events we experience. We all too often, *believe* what we believe, we *believe* what we think.

And all too often, what we believe, is just a belief, something we've made up in order to make our experiences "make sense". This dynamic is shockingly prevalent in society today. So many people *believe* what they believe; we often call our beliefs facts.

So many of us are trying to make meaning out of the words we hear, out of what we see, out of our feelings. The sad part, the even dangerous part, is that our focus is almost exclusively focused on the words and deeds of those we disagree with. Our focus is overly focused on the "them", and how "they" make us feel.

A focus on our own interpretations, our self-made meanings and explanations, is all too often sorely missing. All too often we get lost in our meaning making. We all too often are focused almost exclusively on the external, driven by the world around us. We can become consumed by snowflakes falling from an apparently cloudless sky.

I want to return to the wisdom of the Upanishads. The words of the Upanishads date back to maybe 800 BCE, long before the birth of Jesus. It's not age alone that makes them important or wise. It's the fact they are still considered sacred text, text that lives are built around. They have weathered the test of time. They are texts that continue to hold deep meaning for millions.

I offer you wisdom from the Upanishads.

*"As the sun, who is the eye of the world, Cannot be tainted by the defects in our eyes Nor by the objects it looks on, So the one Self, dwelling in all, cannot Be tainted by the evils of the world. For this Self transcends all!"*

*“You cannot see That which is the Seer of seeing; you cannot hear That which is the Hearer of hearing; you cannot think of That which is the Thinker of thought; you cannot know That which is the Knower of knowledge. This is your Self, that is within all; everything else but This is perishable.”*

Here’s a quote that aligns nicely with our seventh principle of interconnected web.

*“In that unitive state one sees without seeing, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; smells without smelling, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; tastes without tasting, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; speaks without speaking, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; hears without hearing, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; touches without touching, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; thinks without thinking, for there is nothing separate from [Self]; knows without knowing, for there is nothing separate from [Self].*

It sounds like there is a message here folks!

*“Then the well spoke to me. It said: Abundance is scooped from abundance yet abundance remains. “[As] a spring, self-generating, feeding all of itself to the rivers and yet not used up by them, ever at rest.”*

*Here’s an idea from Gandhi. Materialism reinforces a “paradigm of scarcity”: there is not enough to go around, so we are doomed to fight one another for ever-diminishing resources. Spiritual economics begins not from the assumed scarcity of matter but from the verifiable infinitude of consciousness. “There is enough in the world for everyone’s need; there is not enough for everyone’s greed.”*

The Upanishads tells us: *“There is no joy in the finite; there is joy only in the Infinite.” [the infinite] I”.*

I hold up these quotes or translations because I know for myself, these “truths” are hard to find these days. And I have been in need of help of late. Sometimes, we ministers preach to and for ourselves... knowing what Carl Rogers said is very real: “That which is most personal is most universal.”

These are times that are especially problematic. These are times that are scary for many. We live in times of extreme partisanship. There seem to be no “facts” we can agree on; so how do we even have a conversation? Many fear losing our sense of who we are as a nation; a significant number fear we already have.

We harbor feelings of doom and destruction. Many fear for the rights of women, the rights of black people and other minorities. Many fear the imposition of a particular Christian orthodoxy. Some fear the shadow of authoritarian rule.

It seems we all get caught up in the “tweet” of the day. We await the next news cycle carrying “proof” to feed our beliefs and fears. Many feel an obligation to resist.

I share many of these beliefs, many of these fears. I too feel a need to resist. I too am eager to see what's in the news. And I too feel pulled into a whirlwind of drama. I feel there are times I get lost in it, trying to make meaning out of what I see and experience.

I've come to recognize there is no joy in such a whirlwind. There is little optimism in my "meaning making". I've come to recognize that whatever is going on out there, it's been in process for some time now. Whatever our preferred outcome lies in the future; it will take time to unfold.

So I want to grid myself for the long haul. I want to not get lost in the everyday fervor in the news. I want not to get lost in the "rightness" of the meaning I ascribe to events. I want not to lose sight of love and the interconnected web of existence.

So I turn to the Upanishads. I hold up our Unitarian Universalist Principles and values. I hold up a belief that joy is ever-present.

I remind you and I remind myself, to be intentional as we live life. Be willing to fight for what you believe in. Know there is need to be proactive in reaching our chosen destination.

But also know, we need to take care of ourselves and we need to take care of each other. I want us to remember the need to go inward to find our deepest sense of self; that place where *"Abundance is scooped from abundance yet abundance remains"*.

This reminder is a gift we can give one another. It is a principle we can keep alive in our community, in this community. It's how we can feed and care for each other.

Let us agree to nurture one another, knowing:

*"the one [true] Self, dwelling in all, cannot Be tainted by the evils of the world. For this Self transcends all!"*

Ashee, Amen. Namaste