

So, Who Are We Really
UUFP

Rev. Walter LeFlore
September 16, 2018

I don't know that I fully believe in reincarnation---but I find the idea wholly reasonable. I believe there is more than just "dust" for us after death. It's there a law of physics that matter can not be created or destroyed??? In my mind, our essence simply becomes reunited with the all ----in some way or another. I believe we are already connected to the all,,,just in human form during our days or years on earth. Who knows what happens before or after that?

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience. Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

I [do] believe each of us comes into human form with what I call a particular cross to bear. It seems to me, each of us have one/(maybe two or three) issues that resurface in our lives, over and over again. Maybe it's problems with money, or holding a job, or maybe it's being taken advantage of... (said differently... issues of security, betrayal, trusting ourselves)

In that sense, I'm perfectly comfortable with the notion that we're put on earth to learn something in particular or to work through a particular issue.

It seems to me, I've always known we are more than our physical selves, more than our personalities, more than our ego's definition of who we are.

Imagine my excitement when I read a scientific study that “proved” it! Some 20 years ago, it took me almost the entire summer to read *The User Illusion*, by Tor Norrestranders, a Danish science writer. It was dense, but I loved it. He essentially argues that consciousness is as hoax, an illusion.

He uses the computer as a metaphor to explain that our consciousness is not in charge.

He recites an experiment where a person is hooked up to all sorts of electrodes designed to record brain synapses, neural responses, muscle movements, etc. The subject is asked simply to raise a finger...whenever they are ready, simply raise your finger.

The data showed that the person made the conscious decision to raise their finger AFTER the body had already begun getting ready for the muscles to move the finger. The nerve-endings that instructed muscle movement were already in action before the person made the conscious decision to raise a finger!

In some ways, it ought not be a surprise. I think we’ve all had the experience of reacting to a stimulus before we consciously know what we’re reacting to. The most obvious example is tripping over something. We just react, we don’t think about staying upright. The same is true when we react to a word

or gesture. We often don't stop to think about what just happened, or why it happened, or what we should say or do...we just react.

Sometimes we react in laughter, sometimes with a scream, or in anger; sometimes we just brood. Sometimes we verbalize our response—"oops, that just came out!". Sometimes we physically or emotionally disengage.

Often, we judge. I know I have a knee-jerk reaction whenever someone refers to me as boy. Some women have a similar reaction when referred to as a girl. We all have our sensitivities.

I know from experience there are sensitivities to various words within this community. (buckle your seatbelts). There are sensitivities to words such as church, God, religion, Fellowship, sanctuary, worship...to name a few! Christianity, Jesus, minister, authority, to name a few more.

Think for a moment, what words did I left off the list---but think to yourself -- don't say them out loud, so as not to offend anyone!

(We probably should make a congregational list---and see where we'd be if those words were never used!)

There are things we have become programed to react to without thinking. We react almost instinctively, and much too often, without reflection. Such

reactions are the downside of not being aware, the downside of being driven by emotion, past experience, past teaching, past learning. It's a very human dynamic!

The great danger is in not questioning our reactions, our responses, our judgements. A great danger is the comfort of habit.

Tor Norretranders, in the User Illusion, makes the distinction between the "I" and the "me". In the story we heard this morning, he says it was not the "I" that made the decision to crash the bike instead of hitting the person in front of him. He said the "I" was a bystander, an observer. He said, something inside the boy made the decision. He asked who made the decision?

The world is a complex place. And we are complex creatures. I'm about to delve into a level of complexity. Stay with me because I want to try to make some important distinctions.

Norretranders makes a distinction between the "I" and what he calls the "me". (p.258) He equates the "I" with the ego sense of self. Our conscious sense of ourselves. He says the "me" is more than the "I". He calls the "I", the conscious player. The "me" is the person in general.

“The “I” is not at the wheel in many situations; when urgency is required, for example.” But “is in charge of lots and lots of situations where there is time for thought”. The “me” embraces the subject of all the bodily actions and mental processes that are not initiated or carried out by the “I”, the conscious “I”.”

He writes, “empirical evidence from measurements of...subliminal perception,...and experiments, shows that the “I” does not decide nearly as much as it thinks it does. The “I” tends to take credit for decisions, computations, realizations, and reactions carried out by the “Me”. In fact, the “I” refuses to acknowledge that there is a “Me” (that’s) not identical to the “I” itself. The “I” cannot account for the “ME” but just goes on pretending.”

Norrestrand goes on to say “ people are not conscious of very much of what they sense; people are not conscious of very much of what they think; people are not conscious of very much of what they do....We have to face the fact that we are far more than we believe ourselves to be; that we have far more resources than we perceive; that we leave our mark on more of the world than we notice.”

We are far more than we believe ourselves to be...

we have far more resources than we perceive...

our mark on the world is far greater than we know.

I suspect many of us know this at some level of our being. Why else immerse ourselves in gardening or nature, why else take up yoga or meditation? Why else buy into the notions of Buddhism? Why seek out a community of faith?

I suspect that many of us know we are more than our mental capabilities; more than our ego sense of self. I think most of us have had experiences of knowing things our rational minds can not explain...we even have names for it. We call it coincidence, a good guess, or synchronicity.

Even when we locate such information as residing in our bodies...intuition, or a gut feel...we tend to treat these things as if they are not real. As a society we place so much emphasis on rational thought, on knowing, we so highly value individualism... as the ego sense of self. As was quoted earlier: the “I” refuses to acknowledge that there is a “Me” (that’s) not identical to the “I” itself.

I believe the kind of knowing that is not the product of rational thought, scares the hell out of the “I”, the ego sense of self. We are so often frightened by “not knowing”. We’re frightened by the thought of not being good enough, “wrong” or looking foolish.

I can’t tell you how many times a week, a day, I find myself “thinking my way through” an issue, question or problem. Even though, experience tells me I’m

often much better off, just being quiet, going inside myself and listening for the answer or direction. More than once I've made the mistake of listening to my head rather than accepting what my internal compass was telling me.

We're about to head into the home stretch now. Thanks for hanging in with me.

What I so want to communicate to you this morning is the power of community. But not just any community. The power of a faith community. The power of a spiritual community, a religious community.

I know some people have a knee jerk reaction to the term religion or religious. I get that. I understand that. I know some people question whether Unitarian Universalism is a religion. I get that. I understand that.

But I want us to get out of intellectualizing, step away from our conscious concepts, our rational constructions and beliefs. I'm intending to talk to your "me"...the you that includes your body, your senses, your inner knowing. That's the part of you I want to speak to. That's the place I intend to speak from.

Please know that the inner self includes your conscious thoughts. And recognize that your conscious thoughts can not account for your inner being. Conscious thought does not know your spiritual being, your inner most self. Your

conscious thought can not know your soul or purpose for being. To your rational self, those are just concepts.

It seems to me, the primary purpose of a faith community, a religious community, a spiritual community, is to always try to speak to your innermost self, the essence of who you are. Its purpose is to support and enliven spiritual growth, to feed your soul.

Our seven principles are the backbone of our belief system. Our covenant reinforces and helps us to manifest our principles. Together they undergird and drive our mission.

In short, our principles, our covenant and our mission are intended to speak to and feed the “me” of who we are; our deepest sense of self, the part of us that encompasses the totality of who we are. Our faith calls us to seek to engage the “me” in each other and the larger world.

In all honesty, and I mean no disrespect, our faith community is not particularly interested in your ego sense of self. We do not exist to stroke and feed your egos. Instead, we seek the bigger you, the wholeness of who you are. We want for each of you to be the biggest, best self you are able. For, at some level, we know, we are all:

far more than we believe ourselves to be...

we have far more resources than we perceive;
that we leave our mark on more of the world than we notice.

May it forever be so, Ashee and Amen