



TOUCHSTONES

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June 2019

Transcendence

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

In everyday language, *transcendence* has the sense of “going beyond,” while *self-transcendence* means going beyond a prior form or state of oneself. Mystical experiences represent a heightened reality in which the sense of a separate self is abandoned.

In philosophy, Rationalism was a school of philosophy that concluded that we can gain knowledge of the world through thinking alone, without experiencing the world. By contrast, the school of Empiricism claimed that our knowledge of the world only comes from experience.

As one writer notes, “Extreme rationalists suggested that we avoid emotions

and focus on rational thinking, extreme empiricists claimed there was no objective rational truth at all and thus all is simply subjective experience.”

Immanuel Kant synthesized these conflicting positions with the introduction of a philosophical system called transcendental idealism. In the opening words in *The Critique of Pure Reason*, Kant suggests that: “There can be no doubt that all our knowledge begins with experience. ...But though all our knowledge begins with experience it does not follow that it all arises out of experience.”

While we depend on experience to know anything at all, we are also able to reason and reach logical conclusions that aren’t necessarily dependent upon a correlating experience. Such knowledge is *a priori*; that which we know regardless of sense-experience. For Kant, the “transcendent,” as opposed to the “transcendental,” is that which lies beyond what our faculty of

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Mussa and Nagib

Adapted from a story by Malba Tahan (pen name for Julio Cesar de Mello e Souza, 1895-1975)

Once, two friends named Mussa and Nagib made a journey through the mountains of Persia on camel back.

They came after a time to a place where a stream flowed by a sandy bank and trees gave shade.

There they had a discussion, which turned into an argument. Nagib grew angry, and for the first time ever, he slapped Mussa across the face.

Mussa was stunned. He felt angry. He wanted to slap Nagib back. But then he thought, “I cannot be too mad at my friend because I could have done the same thing. We are alike, and I care about him, and I don’t want to fight with him anymore.” So he walked over to the trees instead and picked up a stick. With the stick he wrote in the sand, “Today my best friend slapped me.” Then he and his friend stood in silence and watched as the desert wind blew the words in the sand away.



By the time the writing had disappeared Nagib had said that he was sorry. The friends got back on their camels and rode to their destination in a distant city. On their trip back through the mountain pass they stopped again at the same river.

This time the two friends decided to take a swim. Since their first visit, the

(Continued on page 2)

Transcendence & Letting Your Life Speak

Who are you? It seems like a simple question, but it may not be. Who are you becoming? Is it who you want to become? In considering these questions, are you answering, or is there a larger context that holds the answers. One larger context is your life. Parker Palmer writes, “Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you. Before you tell your life what truths and values you have decided to live up to, let your life tell you what truths you embody, what values you represent.” Your life is a larger context than just the self. We begin to embody it through self-transcendence, by going beyond our self. When we do this, our answers must also take into account other people and things. Viktor Frankl wrote that being human always points beyond the self for meaning.

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Let Your Life Speak

True Friendship

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

rains had made the current stronger and the river much deeper. Mussa, the friend who had been slapped, stepped into the water first. Right away, he slipped on a rock, was dragged under by the current, and began to drown. Nagib jumped in without a second thought and pulled his friend to safety.

The two friends again sat in silence for some time until Mussa had regained his breath. Then he rose and went to his saddlebags. There he found a carving knife. This time he went to a rock near the river. Into the rock he carved these words, "Today my best friend saved me."

Again the two friends sat in silence. Finally Nagib spoke, "My friend, after I hurt you, you wrote the words in sand. Now after I saved you, you wrote the words in stone, why?"

Mussa replied, "When someone hurts us, we should write it down in sand where the winds of forgiveness can erase it away. This way our hearts are free from bitterness, and we can renew our friendships. But, when someone does something kind for us, we must engrave it in stone and in our hearts so that we will never forget."

"Thank you my friend," said Nagib. "I am very grateful for our friendship. I don't ever want to hurt you

again." The two friends embraced and continued on their journey together.

Moral: With wisdom and compassion, we can transcend even the injury we receive from others—we can transcend the mundane and move into sacred love, as we work together or appreciate each other's gifts.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/tales/session5/123298.shtml>

We are Lovers

One More Step Toward the Holy

Rev. Gordon McKeeman

If we who have chosen the critical, purifying way in religion have neglected some essential, it has been our propensity to diminish and trivialize our religious practices and thus to diminish our effectiveness as liberators, as resacralizers, agents of wholeness, or "the repair of the world." The history of the world bears testimony to the most exalted efforts to bespeak the grandeur, mystery, and wonder of the world. Wherever one looks in the realms of creative endeavor, one finds the greatest architecture, music, art, sculpture, drama, and ritual placed in the service of non-sense, the exalted realm of the ideal, the possible. How is it that our worship is so often uninspired, so mundane, so routinized and diminished, so devoid of a sense of central importance? It is little to be wondered that we so seldom feel refreshed, inspired or energized by it. In part, it lacks the non-sense, the emotive dimension that touches the heart, the passions, the feelings

...We are lovers, we say Yes to each other. Yes to life—to more and more of life—to its brevity, its grief, its disappointments. To its possibilities, its magnificence, its glory. We quarrel—because we glimpse further possibilities, the non-sense—and wish to lay claim to it. We remember death, and that life is brief, and that the time for love is now and more is possible. One more step toward the holy. It is to know the peace that passes understanding, and that there is no peace. It is to love others as they are, warts and all, and to believe that more is possible and to bespeak that wanting. It is to pray "Give us this day our daily bread...." And to know that we do not live by bread alone. It is to remember death, and to love life and to accept them both as holy.

Source: *Ministry: For Such a Time as This* by Rev. Gordon B. McKeeman, 1993 Berry Street Essay

Living Beyond

Secular Transcendence

Tom Krattenmaker

..."Transcendence" can be thought of as exceeding normal limits or "rising above" the mundane. It's usually understood as hierarchical and vertical—[yet] ...transcendence is [also] found on another plane....

...Each of our lives is set in a swirling teem of people.... Each of us stands at a pinpoint in a mind-blowingly long span of time.... All our fates are intertwined across space and time.

This is ...[secular] transcendence.... We live it by extending ourselves not to the heavens but to the horizon.

...We ...have access to meaning, purpose, joy, and transcendence.

We reach them on the horizontal plane: in our relationships with other people, in our love for [nature]..., in our appreciation for the stories and life that have unfolded before us and [that] ...will long outlast us.

...[When] we ...get outside ourselves, we ...taste the transcendent. The question isn't whether, but how, and to what extent. There is potential for a more robust engagement with transcendence. We begin to fulfill this unrealized potential by further extending ourselves ... horizontally....

...From the perspective of principled humanism, we want consolation and perspective not only for ourselves but for our fellow humans as well. Horizontal transcendence stretches us in their direction, for their good, for our good.

Transcendence isn't dying before our eyes [as traditional religion recedes]. ... There's more of it to be cultivated, lived, and shared. We know it's out there, off toward the horizon. If we train our eyes we can begin to see it, if we stretch ourselves we can better grasp it.

Source: <https://thehumanist.com/magazine/september-october-2018/features/a-new-vision-for-secular-transcendence>



Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "There is a human striving for self-transcendence. It's part of what makes us human.

With all of our flaws we want to go a little bit further than we've gone before and maybe even further than anyone else has gone before." George Leonard

Day 2: "The intellect is called intellect when it realizes limitation of itself and helps us to transcend itself, otherwise it is a hard disc or a memory card with more or less GB capacity." Hitesh C. Sheth

Day 3: "As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being." Carl Jung

Day 4: "You have nothing infinite except your soul's love." St. Catherine of Siena

Day 5: "Transcendence is something between a metaphor and a miracle." Mason Cooley

Day 6: "To believe you can approach transcendence without drawing nearer in compassion to suffering humanity is to fool yourself. There can be no genuine personal religious conversion without a change in social attitude." William Sloane Coffin

Day 7: "We are all butterflies. Earth is our chrysalis." LeeAnn Taylor

Day 8: "How does the ordinary person come to the transcendent? For a start, I would say, study poetry. Learn how to read a poem." Joseph Campbell

Day 9: "Who would then deny that when I am sipping tea in my tearoom I am swallowing the whole universe with it and that this very moment of my lifting the bowl to my lips is eternity itself transcending time and space?" D.T. Suzuki

Day 10: "To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower, / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour." William Blake

Day 11: "Being in love is the only transcendent experience." Armistead Maupin

Day 12: "Everyone who has a heart, however ignorant of architecture he may be, feels the transcendent beauty and poetry of the medieval churches." Goldwin Smith

Day 13: "Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world." John Milton

Day 14: "Religion is one dimension of culture, a transcendent element of it." Francis Arinze

Day 15: "I want to be a man of mountain-tops: to scale the heights, achieve a sublime transcendence, and breathe in the thin air. Transcendence requires suffocation." Benson Bruno

Day 16: "There is a yearning that is as spiritual as it is sensual. ...Something in the person (dare we call it a soul?) wants to be free, and it seeks its freedom any way it can. ...There is a drive for transcendence...." Mark Epstein

Day 17: "The One, the Good, the True, and the Beautiful, these are what we call the transcendental attributes of Being, because they surpass all the limits of essences and are coextensive with Being." Charlie Melancon

Day 18: "...Isn't our individual longing for transcendence all just part of this larger human search for divinity?" Elizabeth Gilbert

Day 19: "Emerson insists that humankind is the redeemer; the essence of virtue and truth is within the soul, and the individual is able to press forward against Chaos and Darkness, attaining transcendence and harmony." Sheri Gietzen

Day 20: "Information is just bits of data. Knowledge is putting them together. Wisdom is transcending them." Ram Dass

Day 21: "...he liked his transcendence out

in plain sight where he could keep an eye on it—say, in a nice stained-glass window—not woven through the fabric of life like gold threads through a brocade." Neal Stephenson

Day 22: "What I say is that we're capable of a transcendent response, and I think it makes us happy. And I do think beauty produces a transcendent response." Agnes Martin

Day 23: "A total acceptance of yourself brings about a total transcendence of yourself." Adyashanti

Day 24: "Pain is important; how we evade it, how we succumb to it, how we deal with it, how we transcend it." Audre Lorde

Day 25: "Worship is transcendent wonder." Thomas Carlyle

Day 26: "Most humans feel the transcendent temptation, the emotional drive to festoon the universe with large-scale meaning." Paul Kurtz

Day 27: "The West has lost the sense of the transcendent and the sacred." Sohaib Bencheikh



Day 28: "Transcendence constitutes selfhood." Martin Heidegger

Day 29: "Painting is the most magical of mediums. The transcendence is truly amazing to me every time I go to a museum and I see how somebody figured another way to rub colored dirt on a flat surface and make space where there is no space or make you think of a life experience." Chuck Close

Day 30: "Humanity could only have survived and flourished if it held social and personal values that transcended the urges of the individual, embodying selfish desires—and these stem from the sense of a transcendent good." Arthur Peacocke

Day 31: "People talk about the meaning of life; there is no meaning of life – there are lots of meanings of different lives, and you must decide what you want your own to be." Joseph Campbell



The Need for Transcendence...

Vaclav Havel (1936-2011)

from a speech delivered in Independence Hall, Philadelphia, July 4, 1994.

...We enjoy all the achievements of modern civilization that have made our physical existence on this earth easier in many important ways. Yet we do not know exactly what to do with ourselves, where to turn. The world of our experiences seems chaotic, disconnected, confusing. There appear to be no integrating forces, no unified meaning, no true inner understanding of phenomena in our experience of the world. Experts can explain anything in the objective world to us, yet we understand our own lives less and less. In short, we live in the postmodern world, where everything is possible and almost nothing is certain.

This state of affairs has its social and political consequences. The single planetary civilization to which we all belong confronts us with global challenges. We stand helpless before them because our civilization has essentially globalized only the surfaces of our lives. But our inner self continues to have a life of its own. And the fewer answers the era of rational

knowledge provides to the basic questions of human Being, the more deeply it would seem that people, behind its back as it were, cling to the ancient certainties of their tribe.

...The abyss between rational and the spiritual, the external and the internal, the objective and the subjective, the technical and the moral, the universal and the unique, constantly grows deeper.

...How can generally respected mechanisms of peaceful coexistence be set up, and on what set of principles are

they to be established?

...The artificial world order of the past decades has collapsed, and a new,

more-just order has not yet emerged. ...

Many believe this task can be accomplished through technical means. That is, they believe it can be accomplished through the intervention of new organizational, political, and diplomatic instruments. ...But such efforts are doomed to failure if they do not grow out of something deeper....

The idea of human rights and freedoms must be an integral part of any meaningful world order. ...

Paradoxically, inspiration for the renewal of this lost integrity can once again be found in science, in a science that is new—let us say postmodern—a science producing ideas that in a certain sense allow it to transcend its own limits. I will give two examples:

The first is the Anthropic Cosmological Principle. Its authors and adherents have pointed out that from the countless possible courses of its evolution the universe took the only one that enabled life to emerge. This is not yet proof that the aim of the universe has always been that it should one day see itself through our eyes. But how else can this matter be explained?

...[W]e are not at all just an accidental

anomaly, the microscopic caprice of a tiny particle whirling in the endless depth of the universe. Instead, we are mysteriously connected to the entire universe, we are mirrored in it, just as the entire evo-

lution of the universe is mirrored in us.

Until recently, it might have seemed that we were an unhappy bit of mildew on a heavenly body whirling in space among many that have no mildew on them at all. ...

The second example is the Gaia Hypothesis. This theory brings together

proof that the dense network of mutual interactions between the organic and inorganic portions of the earth's surface form a single system, a kind of mega-organism, a living planet—Gaia—named after an ancient goddess ...an archetype of the Earth Mother.... According to the Gaia Hypothesis, we are parts of a greater whole. If we endanger her, she will dispense with us in the interest of a higher value—that is, life itself.

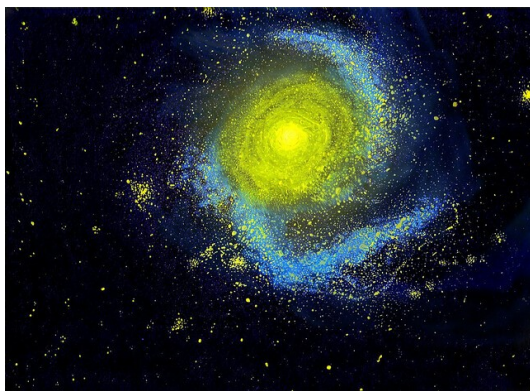
What makes the Anthropic Principle and the Gaia Hypothesis so inspiring? One simple thing: Both remind us, in modern language, of what we have long suspected, of what we have long projected into our forgotten myths and perhaps what has always lain dormant within us as archetypes. That is, the awareness of our being anchored in the earth and the universe, the awareness that we are not here alone nor for ourselves alone, but that we are an integral part of higher, mysterious entities against whom it is not advisable to blaspheme. This forgotten awareness is encoded in all religions. ...

...The only real hope of people today is... a renewal of our certainty that we are rooted in the earth and, at the same time, in the cosmos. ...

It logically follows that, in today's multicultural world, the truly reliable path to coexistence, to peaceful coexistence and creative cooperation, must start from what is at the root of all cultures and what lies infinitely deeper in human hearts and minds than political opinion, convictions, antipathies, or sympathies—it must be rooted in self-transcendence:

- Transcendence as a hand reached out to those close to us, to foreigners, to the human community, to all living creatures, to nature, to the universe.
- Transcendence as a deeply and joyously experienced need to be in harmony even with what we ourselves are not, what we do not understand, what seems distant from us in time and space, but with which we are nevertheless mysteriously linked because, together with us, all this constitutes a single world.
- Transcendence as the only real alternative to extinction.

Source: <http://www.worldtrans.org/whole/havelspeech.html>



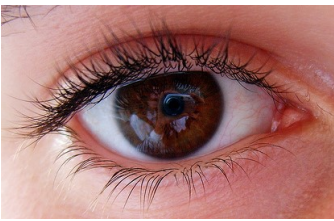
Family Matters

Teaching Transcendence

Maren Schmidt, M.Ed.

Transcendence refers to the universal virtue that consists of the ability to express an appreciation of beauty and excellence, gratitude, hope, humor and spirituality. Positive psychologists see these characteristics as being part of 24 personality strengths that create healthy and happy people.

The virtue of transcendence helps us create connections to everything in the universe. These connections in turn help us create meaning and under-



standing in our lives. William Blake in his "Auguries of Innocence"

wrote: *To see a World in a Grain of Sand / And a Heaven in a Wild Flower / Hold Infinity in the palm of your hand / And Eternity in an hour.*

It is the power of transcendence that helps us connect a grain of sand to eternity. With our observations and understanding we begin to notice beauty and appreciate excellence in all aspects of the world.

No matter how modest our circumstances, we can learn to see the beauty that surrounds us. It is this ability to see the wonder-filled, the awe-inspiring and the miraculous that helps give our life meaning and sustenance.

Developing an attitude of gratitude creates another character strength. Being thankful for our lives, the people in our lives, our experiences, our comforts and even our tough times creates a resiliency in our character. This resiliency sustains us during the times that our lives on this planet are not going as expected. Taking time to express thanks to those around us and to a higher power will develop an inner strength that is not easily diminished.

Source: <https://marenschmidt.com/2015/11/teaching-transcendence/>

When I look into the night sky

Lori Henriques

Henriques was inspired to write this song to the melody of *St. James Infirmary* based on a quote by astrophysicist Neil deGrasse Tyson.

*When I look into the night sky
And I see the bright, round moon
My full heart reaches up high
And I know that I'm not alone*

*Here among the stars and planets
We are floating in midair
We know that what we're made of
Is the same stuff floating out there*

*Every atom that's inside us
Used to live inside a star
We sparkle and we marvel
What is near has come from afar
And whatever may be out there
And whatever may be true
The beauty and the wonder
How it moves me through and through*

Link to song: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AhZ78ffjboI>

Family Activity:

Imagination as Transcendence

Children experience transcendence in concrete ways through play, through stories, and through movies. Pulaski (1973) theorized about the transcendence index, writing that it was based on "the number of imaginary items supplied by the child as opposed to what was already supplied in a given ...situation."

A way to use imagination with your children is to have them help you make up a story. Stef Lewandowski created the following when he began making up stories with his children: "Once upon a time there was a _____ who lived in a _____. Every day she/he _____ and everyone was happy. One day _____ happened, so _____. Our hero had to _____ and as a result _____. Everyone was happy again. Yay she/he!" Story prompts can be found at <https://www.journalbuddies.com/journal-prompts-journal-topics/story-writing-prompts-for-kids/>, but you can create your own and write them on strips of paper and put them in a jar to pull out and make up a story. Make notes about the story you make up and use them to expand on that story at another time.

Eve's Apple?

Transcendence for Atheists

Rev. Dennis McCarty

...We humans are limited in what we can experience. The finite human nervous system can only absorb about 10% of the information around us. The other 90% goes unprocessed: unseen, unheard, untasted, untouched, unfelt—unimagined.

...Grasp an apple. You can see it, feel it, touch it, taste it, smell it. Your senses are all over it. But try tasting, touching, smelling even the nearest star.

...That pushes us toward an important word: "transcendence."

...In Webster's Dictionary...: "exceeding usual limits" and "lying beyond the limits of ordinary experience." ...Under the dictionary definition, applying what neuroscientists now know about our nervous systems, 90% of everything around us is, in fact, transcendent!

...A wormy apple ...hanging on the tree in my back yard, is transcendent. There's so much about it I still don't know. Wanting to know—getting a kick out of some subtle new piece—is the on/off switch to transcendence.

...It's a very fine word, transcendence. It expresses the gift and challenge of exploring beyond the automatic: beyond what we think we already know.

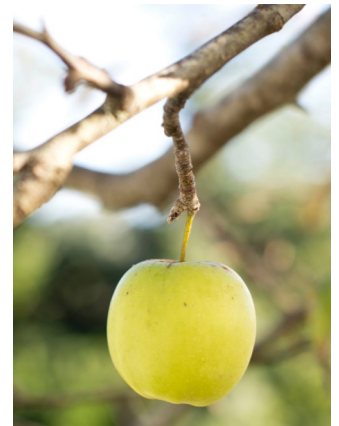
... "The world offers itself to our imagination...." We journey through the poem that is the world: immeasurably larger than our senses or who we think we are or what we

think we know. The world asks questions. You may not have the answers. I know I don't.

...To breach the mystery, you're going

to have to engage the worm right along with the rest of the apple. All too often, that's where the transcendent is hiding.

Source: <http://revdennismccarty.com/transcendence-for-atheists/>



Transcending

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

knowledge can legitimately know. With others, Kant concluded that it was impossible to achieve any knowledge of the reality we call God, thus we could neither prove nor disprove God's existence.

In theology, the concept of transcendence is related to the idea of God being wholly other and existing beyond the world. Our first Unitarian Universalist source does not use the word "God" as the object of transcendence. Instead, it refers to the "Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life." As with Kant, this source is agnostic, while pointing to mystery itself.

Paul Tillich, a German-American theologian, immigrated to America in 1933 and taught at Union Theological seminary, Harvard Divinity School, and the University of Chicago's Divinity School. He came to believe that the word "God" as a symbol pointing to a transcendent reality had ceased to be meaningful or useful. He even said, "The God of theism is dead." In place of the word God, Tillich spoke of both the **Ground of Being** (*Where do you stand and why? What are your roots? What values connect you with the depths of life? What anchors you?*) and **Ultimate Concern** (*What transcends you? What commands your loyalty? What do you live for? What would you die for?*). Assuming a vertical dimension between these two, you can construct your own theology.

Pantheism imagines that God interpenetrates every aspect of nature and extends timelessly beyond the universe, while pantheism holds that the divine is not a distinct being, but is synonymous with the universe itself. Moving along this continuum, we arrive at religious naturalism, which views elements in nature as sacred, but does not find God a useful construct. (see *What is Religious Naturalism?* on the next page.)

Beyond Words

Transcending Wonder

Rev. Douglas Taylor



Transcendence is one of those numinous words that are tricky to really grasp, it is a word that points to a reality beyond our words, a reality that many people have experiences of but few talk about.

...Transcendence. "Trans," meaning: beyond, across, over; and "Scandere," meaning: to climb, as in 'ascend.' The roots of the word call to mind early mythic stories of ascending a pole, climbing Jacob's ladder, sliding up a shaft of light, or riding a golden chariot into heaven—into the realm of the gods, or some higher plane. In Fred Campbell's book, *Religious Integrity for Everyone*, the author notes how the word "transcendence" implies "larger than." He explained that "Communities are larger than individuals [and] God is a word used to point to some inclusive reality much larger [still]."

But a story of transcendence does not need to be a story about God.... A story of transcendence might be about an experience in nature or an encounter with suffering, it might be a story about connections or creativity or compassion. ... The story of transcendence you tell does not need to conform to some set of expectations, all it needs is to be yours.

Peak experiences, that's what we're talking about. Lifted moments, mystical flashes or in some way spiritual experiences! It is in these moments we experience an abandonment of mere self and a connection with that which is larger than the self. It is the moment when wonder breaks through and lifts us into new awareness.

Source: <http://uubinghamton.org/2015/03/transcending-wonder/>

Transcendent Vision

A World of Beauty

Bede Griffiths

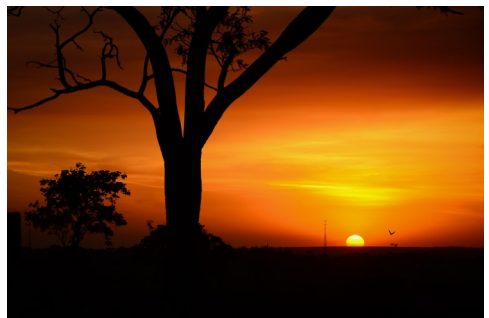
I was suddenly made aware of another world of beauty and mystery such as I had never imagined to exist, except in poetry. It was as though I had begun to see and smell and hear for the first time. The world appeared to me as Wordsworth describes with "the glory and freshness of a dream."

The sight of a wild rose growing on a hedge, the scent of lime-tree blossoms



caught suddenly as I rode down a hill on a bicycle, came to me like visitations from another world. But it was not only my senses that were awakened. I experienced an overwhelming emotion in the presence of nature, especially at evening. It began to have a kind of sacramental character for me.

I approached it with a sense of almost religious awe and, in a hush that comes before sunset, I felt again the presence of an almost unfathomable mystery.



The song of the birds, the shape of the trees, the colors of the sunset, were so many signs of the presence, which seemed to be drawing me to itself.

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes/497838-i-was-suddenly-made-aware-of-another-world-of-beauty>

Transcendent Vision

What is Religious Naturalism?

Rev. Jerome Stone

The following 8 points summarize Jerome Stone's *minimalist vision of transcendence*. As a religious naturalist, he expands the concept of religious humanism to include nature in the tradition of Thoreau. While rejecting the idea of God, religious naturalism adds the element of reverence to religious humanism. He writes,

1) "...[S]acred events are not understood as manifestations of something deeper. ...There is a "depth," not apart from, but right in the midst of things.

2) There are no clear boundaries around the sacred. Some events are clearly sacred. Others are perhaps boundary line cases. ...

3) The sacred is not a separate sphere of life. It is not to be found separate from the pursuits of truth, justice, beauty and selfhood. ...

4) Religion could be thought of as a self-conscious acknowledgment of the sacred. In that case, there is no clear separation of the sacred and the secular, yet there is still a role for the deliberate recognition of the presence of sacred things. ...

5) Spirituality can be thought of as the attempt to cultivate an awareness of the sacredness of things and an attempt to live out the revised sense of the importance of things which sacredness brings. ...

6) It seems that almost always sacred things have a dual aspect. They both challenge and support the people that acknowledge their sacredness.

7) My own vision is that the sacred is probably plural in nature. ... It may be that there is a web or matrix nature to the sacred. ...Indeed the sacred may be a patchwork or mosaic. ...

8) This version of religious naturalism, like all versions, must speak to issues of social justice, environmental care, and repudiation of idolatry. ..."

Source: http://faculty.uml.edu/rinnis/2000_stone_2_1.pdf

Let it be a Flower

Time in the Rock—Canto XI

Conrad Aiken

Mysticism, but let us have no words, angels, but let us have no fantasies, churches, but let us have no creeds, no dead gods hung in crosses in shop, nor beads nor prayers nor faith nor sin nor penance:

and yet, let us believe, let us believe.

Let it be the flower
seen by the child for the first time,
plucked without
thought
broken for love and as soon forgotten:

and the angels, let them be our friends,
used for our needs with selfish simplicity,
broken for love and as soon forgotten;

and let the churches be our houses
defiled daily, loud with discord, —
where the dead gods that were our
selves may hang,
our outgrown gods on every wall;
Christ on the mantelpiece, with down-
cast eyes;
Buddha above the stove;
the Holy Ghost by the hat rack, and
God himself
staring like Narcissus from the mirror,
clad in a raincoat, and with hat and
gloves.

Mysticism, but let it be a flower,
let it be the hand that reaches for the
flower,
let it be the flower that imagined the
first hand,



let it be the space that
removed itself to give
place
for the hand that
reaches, the flower to
be reached —
let it be self displacing
self
as quietly as a child
lifts a pebble,
as softly as a flower

decides to fall, —
self replacing self
as seed follows flower to earth

Source: <http://poetshouse.blogspot.com/2006/07/conrad->

The Rapture of Being

On Being

Joseph Campbell

Bliss: Now, I came to this idea of bliss because in Sanskrit, which is the great spiritual language of the world, there are three terms that represent the brink, the jumping-off place to the ocean of transcendence: sat-chit-ananda. The word "Sat" means being. "Chit" means consciousness. "Ananda" means bliss or rapture. I thought, "I don't know whether my consciousness is proper consciousness or not; I don't know whether what I know of my being is my proper being or not; but I do know where my rapture is. So let me hang on to rapture, and that will bring me both my consciousness and my being." I think it worked.

Transcendence: Heinrich Zimmer once said, "The best things can't be told; the second best are misunderstood; the third best have to do with history." Now, the vocabulary through which the best things are told as second best is the vocabulary of history, but it doesn't refer to history; it refers through this to the transcendent. Deities have to become, as one great German scholar said, "transparent to the transcendent." The transcendent must show and shine through those deities. But it must shine through us, too, and through the spiritual things we are talking about. And as long as you keep pinning it down to concrete fact, and declare something isn't true because it didn't happen, you're wrong. We don't say that about fairy tales, and so we get the truth of them. We should read our religions that way.

Being Alive: People say that what we're all seeking is a meaning for life. I think that what we're really seeking is an experience of being alive, so that our life experiences on the purely physical plane will have resonance within our innermost being and reality, so that we can actually feel the rapture of being alive.

Source: *The Power of Myth* by Joseph Campbell, 1991

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Transcendence

Preparation: Read the issue of *Touchstones* on the theme.

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “And I have felt a presence that/ disturbs me with the joy of/ elevated thoughts;/ A sense of sublime of something far/ more deeply interfused,/ Whose dwelling is the light of/ setting suns,/ And the round ocean and the/ living air,/ A motion and a spirit, that impels/ All thinking things, all objects of/ all thought,/ And rolls through all things.”

William Wordsworth

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story (p 1 & 2).

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections on page 3. There are approximately 30 readings. Going around, participants should read one reading each until all have read 3 or 4 readings. Don't read the name of the author. Leave a few moments of silence after each reading to reflect on the meaning of the words.

Sitting in Silence: Sit in silence together (5 to 10 minutes), allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “We are all of us more mystics than we believe or choose to believe—life is complicated enough as it is, after all. We have seen more than we let on, even to

ourselves. Through some moment of beauty or pain, some sudden turning of our lives, we catch glimmers at least of what the saints are blinded by; only then, unlike the saints, we tend to go on as though nothing has happened. To go on as though something has happened, even though we are not sure what it was or just where we are supposed to go with it, is to enter the dimension of life that religion is a word for.”

Frederick Buechner

Living the Questions: Explore as many of the following questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Have you had experiences of transcendence, those peak experiences where you have gone beyond yourself? What were they like? What effect did they have?
2. Martin Luther King, Jr. said that, “The religion that ends with the individual, ends.” How can Unitarian Universalism “transcend us” in the kind of religious community we create, in the way that we live our lives, and in our daily actions?
3. Where do you fall on the theist, panentheist, pantheist, religious naturalist continuum? Given your location, where do you find meaning in life?
4. How do you connect with whatever you consider to be the most precious and profound in life?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words by Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Stop Running

Kairos, not Chronos

Sarah Ban Breathnach

Chronos is clocks, deadlines, watches, calendars, agendas, planners, schedules, beepers. Chronos is time at her worst. Chronos keeps track. ...Chronos is the world's time. Kairos is transcendence, infinity, reverence, joy, passion, love, the Sacred. Kairos is intimacy with the Real. Kairos is time at her best. ...Kairos is Spirit's time. We exist in chronos. We long for kairos. That's our duality. Chronos requires speed so that it won't be wasted. Kairos requires space so that it might be savored. We do in chronos. In kairos we're allowed to be ... It takes only a moment to cross over from chronos into kairos, but it does take a moment. All that kairos asks is our willingness to stop running long enough to hear the music of the spheres.

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/quotes>

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