

Pancakes and Process Theology

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Quest

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Have you ever had to wake somebody up in the morning?

There are lots of ways to do it. In our house, where simply saying “Time to get up!” is never enough, we’ve developed...alternative strategies. My favorite is singing camp songs: “Rise and shine and give God your glory, glory!”

However, my humanist roots sometimes kick in unexpectedly, and theological discussions with one’s internal voices are inadvisable before coffee, even for ministers. So I’ve also used, “Good morning to you! Good morning to you! You look rather drowsy. In fact you look lousy. Is this any way to start a new day?” Post-coffee, I’ve even been known to launch into songs from musicals, like “Good Morning!” or “O, What a Beautiful Morning.” Sometimes I even play reveille.

If singing doesn’t work, it’s time for Plan B, which involves stealing the covers off the bed. Even though this usually results in the famous hiding-under-the-pillow counter-strategy, pillows also can be snatched, leaving the sleeper exposed to the light and cold of day.

If *that* doesn’t work, I usually resort to physically removing the sleeping person from the bed. Small people you can lift up and place on their feet. Larger ones, well, the only option is to drag. I’ve learned that it’s better to drag on the top part because if you grab hold of the feet, not only are they stinky, but sometimes the head winds up bouncing on the floor.



All of this is great fun. But it’s not the BEST way to wake people up. If you really want somebody to get up and get moving, you know what you should do?

Go downstairs and make pancakes.

As the scent of breakfast wafts into the bedroom, noses start to twitch and eyes open of their own accord. People not only make their way out of bed happily, but if you establish rules like “No breakfast until you’re dressed, including shoes and socks,” the whole morning routine unfolds effortlessly and culminates in shiny, happy faces willing to set the table and put out the syrup.

In process theology, God—or the spirit of life, or the creative spirit, or goodness, or love—insert whatever word works for you—God works like the scent of pancakes in the morning, to awaken longings deep in the heart, luring not just people but all of creation forward in a continually unfolding process of growing and becoming.

The father of process theology is Alfred North Whitehead (1861–1947). Trained in mathematics and science, he had a spiritual bent, as well as interests in educational philosophy and epistemology (the philosophy of knowledge and belief).

In the early 20th century, Whitehead watched the laws of Newtonian physics become insufficient for understanding the universe. New scientific knowledge and advanced paths of inquiry revealed complexity and contradictions. As quantum mechanics emerged, the image of God as divine watchmaker, who set the world in motion and then let it do its thing, no longer worked.

First of all, in observing experiments it became clear that things on the smallest level were not as predictable as they should be. On a molecular, atomic, and subatomic level, it seemed almost as if these particles were choosing whether to follow

Pleasure disappoints,
possibility never.
— Søren Kierkegaard

A monthly for religious liberals

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the rules or not. It also became clear that the act of observing had an effect, changing the results of any experiment.

Coming at things from an epistemological standpoint, Whitehead especially struggled with the implication that reality is subjective. Descartes's declaration "I think, therefore I am" expresses doubt about the existence of an objective reality outside of our perception. (As the joke goes, at a cocktail party someone offers Descartes a drink, he answers, "I think not"—and disappears.) Taking in all of this and quite a lot more, Whitehead formulated a metaphysic that more accurately reflected what he saw in the natural world, as well as what he understood about human nature and the creative spirit.

Process theology begins with the assertion that the world exists. The universe really is the universe. There's no possibility that it's all some elaborate delusion. Then ask yourself, what is the universe made of? Whitehead proposes a universe made up of something called "actual entities." We know that organisms and matter are made up of molecules, and molecules are made up of atoms, and atoms are made up of protons, neutrons, and electrons, as well as whatever holds them together. Protons and neutrons are made up of quarks plus something that holds *them* together. We have no way of knowing what quarks are made up of...yet. So to define actual entities, first you have to break matter up into the smallest possible particle. We don't know yet where, or even if, there is an end—a fundamental building block which isn't made up of smaller somethings—but we don't really need to. Just imagine the smallest particles there are.

Now, these theoretical tiny somethings exist in space, but they also exist in time. They are fundamentally temporal somethings. And just as matter can be broken down into infinitely small pieces, so can time.

Take an infinitely small particle in an infinitely brief moment of time, and you have an actual entity. Everything that exists is made up of these actual entities, which organize themselves into quarks, atoms, molecules, cells, plants, animals, on up to larger, similarly temporal bodies that Whitehead names systems or organisms or societies. The actual entities that make up the systems or societies or organisms choose to work together in a specific way, and in this choosing, they create the universe as it is.

God is like the smell of pancakes, luring you downstairs to where you'll be nourished.

All of the actual entities and systems are in relationship. Everything has an effect on everything else. That effect might be negligible, or it might be profound. But we are all connected, and so we respect the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

Perhaps the simplest way to access process theology is to embrace the notion that we are part of a universe of free choosers, a universe that is in the process of becoming what the participants in the universe are choosing to become. In a very fundamental way, we are our choices. Our choices define us, and they also define and determine what the universe becomes. We are co-creators of the universe.

So where does God fit in?

To Whitehead, God is a word for the actual entity—in relationship with all other actual entities—that is supreme in seeing and comprehending the complexity of all that is, and supreme in imagining outcomes. God, then, is what keeps pulling the universe forward, pulling it toward life and love and peace and connection, keeping it from descending into entropy, stagnation, and collapse.

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The God of process theology isn't in charge. In a universe of free choosers, God can't make anyone or anything do anything, but God pulls on the heartstrings, and activates deeper, life-giving and love-filled longings. The God of process theology doesn't make rules. Morally, God is ambiguous.

As for the end of the process, God doesn't know how it's all going to turn out. God is not all-knowing. God hopes and lures and loves, but God is in the thick of it, just like the rest of us. God is powerful and essential to the continuance of life, and God is helpless to actually concretely do much of anything beyond luring the universe toward wholeness, toward ultimate goodness, toward unconditional love.

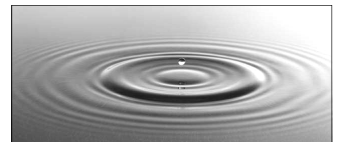
So if God is an actual entity, what are human beings?

Our bodies are made up of societies of actual entities, organized into a society we call the individual self. Individuals are then organized into societies of people, which are integrated into the society of the biosphere, which is integrated into the society of the universe—you get the idea. Everything is connected all the way down to the infinitely small and all the way up to the infinitely large.

Matter is not eternal, just the choices. The choices we make, the understanding we glean, the experiences and the narrative that we claim as our own—they define the individual.

And what are the implications that grow out of understanding the universe this way?

Because our choices are so important, process theology calls us to be very careful in making them. In making choices, we are aware that our actions



have an impact on the world around us. We know this is true because the world has an impact on us. How much of an impact depends on two variables: proximity and intensity. If we imagine an event which takes place very far away, but that is extremely intense—say, the tsunami of 2004—we are affected to approximately the same degree as we are by something which is less intense—say, changing jobs. In the first case, proximity is low, but intensity is higher. In the second, we have close proximity, but the intensity of the experience is lower. Of course, events which are both proximal and intense, such as losing a loved one, have the largest impact.

Similarly, our choices have the most impact on people who are closest to us, but the impact ripples out, and the strength of the ripples depends on the intensity of the original experience. In this way, if I tell you about a friend who has been diagnosed with cancer, you feel the impact even though you have never met the person personally. The consequences of our choices ripple out in all directions, as do the consequences of the choices everyone and everything else makes. Amid the interdependent web, touch one part and the whole web shimmers.

Understanding, in your bones, that everything you do affects everything else can be almost paralyzing. The limitations of reason become pronounced. After all, no one can possibly understand fully all of the ramifications of our actions, of our choices. At some point, you have to trust your heart.

If you believe that God is active in the universe, working like the smell of pancakes to instill longings in our hearts that lure us to the places we need to go, it becomes a little easier. All you have to do is lean into the longing. You listen to your heart for the direction life is luring you, for the choices you can make that help in the creation of a world that is more just, more beautiful, and more loving. And then you follow.

■

Born and Reborn Again



BY LYNN UNGAR,
MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN
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LARGER FELLOWSHIP

*(i who have died am alive again today,
and this is the sun's birthday; this is
the birth
day of life and of love and wings: and
of the gay
great happening illimitably earth)
how should tasting touching hearing
seeing breathing
any—lifted from the no
of all nothing—human merely being
doubt unimaginable You?*

How, in ee cummings words, could we doubt unimaginable you? Well, that's easy. We're UUs. We can doubt just about anything. We are the denominational flip side of Lewis Carroll's Red Queen, who bragged that she could believe six impossible things before breakfast. The resurrection of Jesus from the dead—doubt it. The encounter of Moses with a blazing bush that was not consumed by fire—doubt it. Visitation from a magical bunny who carries around colored eggs—same category, definitely doubt it.

And yet, through all of our highly justified and reasonable doubts there is Easter, come again like it did last year, and all of us here to greet it. Believe in it or not, Easter has its way with us. Eostara, the German goddess of rebirth for whom the holiday is named, calls:

*Shake off your winter drowsiness
and see. The bushes are blinking
open the tiniest of green eyes. Daffodils
are starting to stretch their petals
as they arise from their winter
beds. Wake up! Already the wild
geese have started their journeys,
following the magnetic pull of the
north. Don't you want to follow?*

*Aren't you packing for some journey
of your own, if only from the heated
security of your house into the open
air? Breathe in, can't you smell it?
Even the grass understands resurrec-
tion. That is how the world turns
green.*

Oh yes, believe in her or not, Eostara is calling. How can we keep from answering with cummings: “now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are opened?”

Ah, but that's just metaphor, mythology. There isn't a *real* Eostara, any more than there is a real Persephone returned from the underworld whose joyful mother Demeter gives us spring in jubilation at her daughter's return. It's just a story made up by people who didn't have a sophisticated enough understanding of biology to really grasp the truth of how seeds come alive into plants and trees open up out of their winter dormancy.

“Mmm...” mutters Eostara, “and do you? Do you really know how it all works? If you understand it all so well, let's see *you* make it happen.” She has a point. Metaphor or not, there is a certain magic to this season which people have been celebrating for millennia—not out of ignorance, but out of joy and gratitude and hope. I wonder sometimes if we may have forgotten as much as we have learned.

The less our livelihoods depend on a direct connection to the earth, the less we are likely to remember that the cycles of our planet are the cycles of our own lives. The more our technological accomplishments allow us to take control of the details of our own individual environments, the less likely we are to see ourselves as part of the whole ongoing, cyclical story of the earth. We see our lives moving not in cycles or in the inevitable reenactment of sacred stories through the repeating course of the year, but rather straight ahead, progressing “forward through the ages, in unbroken line,” as one of our UU hymns proclaims.

We live, not in the ancient, circular world of myth, but in the linear world of history, of events unfolding over time. That linear worldview, interestingly enough, is a gift of the Hebrew people, whose earth-centered religion developed, over centuries of nomadic life, into the concept of a single god, not bound to any particular place, who had a covenant, an agreement, with them as a people.

This covenant with God, the notion that people had reciprocal obligations with the divine, led them to look at life as the unfolding of this covenant through time and led them to see their religion as happening through history, from the past into the future. The job of humans in this new scheme was not simply to remember and reenact the divine stories, but also to be part of the creation of religious stories themselves.

Scholars believe, for instance, that the observance of Passover originated in two seasonal festivals, one belonging to sheep-herders who celebrated the birth of the spring lambs with a ritual sacrifice, and the other belonging to farmers who celebrated the new crop by eating the flat, unleavened bread which was the first farmers' food. Reminders of the original spring festival also continue in the tradition of eating hard boiled eggs and greenery such as parsley—both traditional symbols of new life.

But over the top of these ancient symbols the Jewish people lay a different type of story—one based, however loosely, in history, on real human lives. Passover celebrates the release of a people from slavery. It honors the courage of a man, Moses, who dared to challenge authority and lead his people to a new life. It tells of a partnership between the human and the divine, and speaks of both God's longing for people to be free and the necessity of human action in order for that freedom to come about.

It would be, of course, misleading to call this story historical in the usual

sense of the word. Clearly, it is nothing like an objective newspaper report of the events of that long-ago time. In a sense Moses is just as mythological as Eostara or Persephone. What his story and the story of the Jewish people fleeing Egypt provides, however, is a reminder that the possibility of re-birth exists not only on the grand scheme of nature, but also on a more human scale.

Passover draws those who celebrate it into remembering primal joy as the

Spring is a season which demands that we operate by faith—...the ability to see beyond what is immediately present, the courage to trust in the possibility of new life....

year turns once again to spring, bringing new life and the promise of sustenance for another year. However, as much as anything Passover celebrates the reality that people like us make changes; that against all odds, courage and determination can take us into a new land, lead us toward a new home, bring us into a new life in which we are no longer slaves—whether that slavery be to Pharaoh, or to our own prejudices and fears.

Passover is a celebration of Spring, of the joy of new life, but it is a celebration without illusion about the difficulties and dangers which accompany change. The Exodus story is the tale of people who abandoned all they knew for the possibility of a life of freedom. It is the story of genuine, flawed human beings who made mistakes, complained when the going got rough, and spent vast chunks of time lost and wandering. It is a springtime story not in the romantic sense of pastel flowers and sweet bunnies, but in the reality of this unpredictable and shifting season that holds so much of both promise and disappointment.

Spring is a season which demands that we operate by faith—not faith as a passive acceptance, simply giving into things as they are, but rather faith as the ability to see beyond what is immediately present, the courage to trust in the possibility of new life and to make that new life real.

I suppose that kind of faith is, for me, at the heart of these festivals of spring, Passover and Easter alike. For me the Easter story of the resurrection is moving, is real, as a story of that kind of determined faith. Jesus, like Moses, dared to challenge authority, tried to lead people to a new, freer life. Perhaps his task was even greater in that he took on the authorities of his own faith, as well as those of the foreign government, and given that he was pointing toward a freedom based in justice and compassion in each person's heart rather than in a land far away.

However, the faith of the Easter story is different from the Passover story in another significant detail. Jesus, unlike Moses, lost. The authorities, the ones too attached to the status quo to admit any possibility of change, sent him to a painful and ignominious death.

And yet, like the crocus which springs to life from beneath the snow, Jesus' message of radical love has survived not only his death, but the 2000 or so years which have come in between. Yes, of course I know as well as you do the persecution and narrow-mindedness which has taken place in his name. Human beings have just as great a fear of change now as they did 2000 years ago—perhaps more, since we have had to go through so much of it. It is no easier for a rich man to hear "Sell all you have and give it to the poor" now than it was then. Understanding that your enemy is a neighbor to be cared for has not gotten simpler over time, and perhaps people have not really gotten better at it, regardless of who they claim to be following.

But still, as with the lives of so many others who refused to be intimidated

out of their convictions, the Easter story continues to move me with its sense of spring, the power of faith in new life over all obstacles. Perhaps it is Jesus' voice I hear, along with Eostara and Moses: "Wake Up! New life surrounds you if you will only open a place in your heart." They deserve an answer, one which Cummings provides at the end of his poem. "now the ears of my ears awake and now the eyes of my eyes are opened" as new life is born and reborn again. ■

Notice of Annual Meeting

Notice to all members of the Church of the Larger Fellowship, Unitarian Universalist

Per Article VII, Sections 1 and 2, of the Church of the Larger Fellowship (CLF) bylaws, the 42nd Annual Meeting will be held via conference call and screensharing on **June 19, 2014 at 6:00PM Eastern time.**



We will post all the necessary documents and contact information to the CLF website

(www.questformeaning.org/annualmeeting) by June 10, 2014. You can download the ballot and other materials, print them, fill out the ballot and send it along to the CLF office at 25 Beacon St., Boston, MA 02108. Or call the CLF office at 617-948-6166 and request a paper copy.

The purpose of the meeting is to: elect a moderator to preside at the meeting from among members present, and to elect from the slate of candidates presented on the ballot three members to 3-year terms on the board of directors, one member to the nominating committee, the clerk, and the treasurer.

Rebecca Scott, Clerk
April 1, 2014



Night of Blood and Fire

BY MEG BARNHOUSE,
SENIOR MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN, TEXAS

My father was coming to visit for the first time in 14 years. He met my older son ten years ago in Philadelphia. He had never met my 11 year old. It would take a book to tell all the reasons for the distance between us. It is enough to say I was seized up with dread and going in circles strategizing about how to handle it. My son, now 14, is going North to school. He will be an hour from my father, and I am determined that my son will not be hurt by his grandfather's lack of family skills. My father and his wife and their two children, the ages of my two children, were coming for a short visit. One afternoon, one supper.

The night before the visit I put tenderloins on the grill. In fifteen minutes I went out to check them. They looked great, and I turned them. As I got back into the house, my friend Patt Rocks called and reminded me that her cable show I'd been on as a guest was airing right then. I had been promoting my new CD and talking to her about my new adventures as a singer/songwriter. "We're darling!" she said. I turned it on. "We *are* darling," I said. "You are more darling than I am, but not by much!" I watched it for the next half hour. When it was over I was smiling, feeling happy. Until I remembered the grill.

I bolted out to the carport and saw the smoke. It smelled like tires burning at a landfill. I pulled up the lid and flames shot up as high as my head. The handles to turn off the gas were nearly too hot to touch. After the gas was off the flames kept licking up higher. The sides of the grill were on fire. I ran to the kitchen to get a pitcher of water, grabbed a ceramic jug

with a broken handle that was waiting on the counter to be fixed. I filled it with water and ran back out to douse the flames.

When the smoke cleared I saw the charred remains of the next night's supper. As I turned to go back in the house, the pitcher slipped and smashed on the concrete floor. The broken handle gashed the knuckle of my little finger, and it began bleeding heavily. At the sink, washing the blood off, I looked up and saw that blood had somehow splattered the wall and the cabinets. I went to sit on the sofa. I had the thought that I was NOT having a good evening.

Telling a friend about it the next day, he said "You made animal sacrifices and splashed blood on the wall of your home. Like Passover! Keeping the Angel of Death from killing your first born son."

As it turned out, the visit went miraculously well. My father was charming and sweet, his wife was dear, and his children were great. My sons got to meet their grandfather on their home turf, and he got to see the fine human beings they are. I got to sing for everyone and they loved the songs I'd written. For the first time my dad wasn't critical or judgmental of me and my work. I had done lots of work over the past years letting go of my anger and pain about him. Maybe all that work did some good. Maybe he has been working too.

It felt like a healing time, our one afternoon, our one supper. The angel of death didn't come to bother any of us. Was it the therapy? Was it the prayers? Was it the sacrifice of meat and the spilling of blood? Some things we may never know. ■

From Waking up the Karma Fairy: Life Lessons and Holy Adventures, published by Skinner House in 2003, and available through the UUA bookstore (www.uua.org/bookstore or 800-215-9076)

The End Is Not Near

BY ERIKA HEWITT
MINISTER, MIDCOAST
UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST
FELLOWSHIP,
DAMARISCOTTA, MAINE



It was Mary Magdalene and Joanna and Mary the mother of James and the other women who told the disciples [of the resurrection], but these words appeared to the disciples as nonsense, and they would not believe them.

Bending over, [Peter] saw the strips of linen lying by themselves and he went away, wondering to himself what had happened. [Luke 24]

Remember: their world has been turned upside-down. In disbelief, in anguish, perhaps in rage, they watched the State humiliate their beloved teacher. He was stripped bare, given a cross to carry through the streets as the crowds jeered. They watched, some of them, as he was put to death painfully, slowly, brutally; and then they received his broken body and wrapped it tenderly in linen, arranging oils and scent to prepare him for burial. And now, the women find his body... *gone*. In its place is a messenger, telling them that Jesus is not there; that his presence is and will be alive in the world.

You can't blame the disciples for thinking that the women were speaking nonsense. You can't blame any of them for feeling bewildered. They'd seen his body; they'd touched it, held it. End of story. What's more irrevocable than death? The story ends there.

In fact, it doesn't. I hope it's not a spoiler to say this: the story's not over. It's taken a wild, unexpected turn—a swift, sudden reversal: not even Death has the last word. I don't believe that the dead can come back to life, but death is always part of a larger story that continues. Even when we think that "the end is near," it may be just the beginning.

I know this because last winter I was felled by an unexpected personal crisis. Some of my boldest choices were rigorously tested, their consequences made manifest. The choices were mine; they were brave and right for me; they weren't mistakes. None of this is to complain or ask for pity, but for longer than was comfortable, I walked through a fairly thick forest, discerning my way into the light.

That fall before the snow arrived, I went running in the Maine woods at dusk and got lost. For real. Trying to find my way to safety, I remember squinting through the dim twilight to find the next blue blaze of the trail marking. Once my panic settled, I realized that I didn't have to find the whole trail or deduce the topography of the mountain; all I had to do was stand under the tree with that small blue hatch of paint and then look for the next one. It worked. I found my way out—exceptionally cold and frustrated, in the dark and feeling fragile, but safely. And wiser.

During those painful, haunting months that forced me to sift through the pieces of some choices gone wrong, the story that I imagined for myself took an unexpected turn. My "good news" is twofold: the story wasn't over; it just changed direction, and it's still unfolding. I'm grateful to have soaked up all kinds of love from people who have known me and supported me for years. Being known is one of the most powerful forms of love we humans are capable of—that's the other good news—and that love brings me to my knees. That love holds me steady when I'd rather sit down, spent and defeated, on my wandering in the wilderness.

When my linear friends ask me about my "plan," I dodge the question with a more important answer: I have faith in awaiting further instructions.

I know what this swath of the trail looks like, but that's the only trail-marking visible right now. I don't need

to know more than I know right now. When I need to know more, I'll know more: there will be another tree with its blue blaze, signaling me in.

Often, we don't need to know more than we know right now. We know what we know now, and we can choose how to respond to feeling "lost." When we're caught up in challenges that we didn't enter voluntarily, I believe that we can still ask:

What do I choose? Am I choosing to let this struggle define me? Do I choose to be faithfully curious about how this struggle might end, or do I choose to allow my heart to shut? Am I choosing to give up my convictions and my truth, or do I choose my integrity?

Where is this struggle leading me? Am I being drawn towards people and values that I care about? Might I be led into the vulnerability of being seen and held by people I trust? Or is this struggle taking me into isolation, or estrangement, or rupture with those I care about?

I can't really answer those questions for myself, let alone for you. All I can offer is this prayer, in the spirit of declaring that The End is Not Near:

Guide of the Ages, at times we find ourselves in a wilderness of not-knowing. Like a hiker lost in the woods, filled with rising fears, we lose the ability to take in the beauty around us. We search for the "right" path out of the wilderness, for signs that will help us recognize where we are.

All our lives we live in mystery. We are always journeying, seeking direction, awaiting instructions.

Help us remember, Gentlest of Ways, that there is no "lost." We may feel confused, fearful, overwhelmed, paralyzed... but we are not lost. When the trail disappears and darkness presses in, you abide nonetheless.

Guide our feet, Sweet Mystery, even as we find home in ourselves and in you.

■



From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

When I was in my twenties, so many possibilities about what life might hold for me beckoned from so many directions that the upshot was I was fairly immobilized. Many futures were possible, but none of them called my name. Then one day, I stopped into a bookstore and picked up a book.

I was always picking up books. But this book—well, it might as well have said on the cover, *Your Destiny*. But it didn't. It said: *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation*, by Mary Daly. On the back, it had a blurb from a poet I liked, Adrienne Rich, who said the book was "...a milestone in the movement toward human liberation." I began to read it right there in the bookstore and was astonished several hours later when I was told they were closing. I took it home and finished it that night.

By the time I had finished that book, there was only one future I was interested in. I didn't know exactly what it would look like, but I knew I would dedicate my life to theology, like the author of this book.

I don't remember noticing that the book was published by a press called Beacon Press, or that the inside cover mentioned that "Beacon Press books are published under the auspices of the Unitarian Universalist Association."

But the book...the book centered me, moved me from infinite possibilities and no purpose to one purpose that might lead to a few good possibilities. I began investigating theology schools right then and there. I have since heard dozens of women clergy say that it was this very same book that woke them up and whispered "Yes" in their ears, just as it whispered in mine.

I've since learned that Beacon Press books have opened eyes and ears and possibilities for people all over the world, and in many ways. Books that are each, in their own way, "a milestone in the movement toward human liberation." In a way, I think of these books as ministries of Unitarian Universalism, because they whisper "Yes" in the ears of their readers in the same way that our faith affirms human liberation. Many of these books have larger congregations than will ever sit in the

**Good books keep
offering new
possibilities, generation
after generation.**

pews of any church, and these people are inspired, transformed, motivated to work for justice. All the things we hope church will accomplish.

Good books keep offering new possibilities, generation after generation. *Man's Search for Meaning*, written by psychiatrist Victor Frankl after he survived three years of labor in Nazi concentration camps, was first published in German in 1946. Beacon Press did the first English printing, in 1959. The book holds that our primary drive in life is not pleasure, as Freud maintained, but the discovery and pursuit of what we personally find meaningful.

Recently, Oprah Winfrey was interviewing parents whose six year old child had been killed in the tragic massacre at Sandy Hook Elementary School. Asked to describe how they were surviving this loss, the couple referenced Frankl's book as if it had been written yesterday. They are choosing to find purpose and meaning, even in their abject grief. Across the decades, a Beacon Book has whispered "Yes" to their making meaning out of suffering.

Some of Beacon's books don't whisper, they shout YES! to human liberation. James Baldwin's *Notes of A Na-*

tive Son. The Pentagon Papers, Jean Baker Miller's *Towards a New Psychology of Women*, and so many other cutting edge feminist books. Martin Luther King's prayers and Gandhi's autobiography.

Helen Benedict wrote a 2009 Beacon Book called *The Lonely Soldier*, documenting the prevalence of sexual assault against women in the military. The book inspired an award-winning documentary on the topic (www.TheInvisibleWar.com) which in turn caused Congress to finally hold hearings on the topic, where Benedict testified. Another milestone in the movement toward human liberation!

There are dozens more of these stories, stories of individual transformations and social change movements that have been nurtured and supported by Beacon Press.

For many of us, even in this world of blogs and tweets and Facebook updates, books remain a central, transformational, conveyor of possibilities. Our prisoner members find inspiration and connection to a world that they are locked away from in books. So many of us are in book groups; we have dozens of books lying about in various stages of being read, we compare notes with friends about what we are reading. In case it's not clear, I could not be more proud of the history of Beacon Press, and its connection with Unitarian Universalism allows me to claim the work as part of my religious movement.

In the Sikh tradition the final in a series of prophets is not a person, but rather a book of wisdom. That book, the Guru Granth Sahib is the living guru of the Sikhs, and each copy of the book is treated with due reverence. We Unitarian Universalists do not designate prophets, or even canonical holy books. But maybe what we have is not a book, but a rather a publisher which speaks to our deepest dreams and commitments, calling us to ever deeper engagement with the truth. ■



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Everything is Waiting for You

BY DAVID WHYTE

Your great mistake is to act the drama
as if you were alone. As if life
were a progressive and cunning crime
with no witness to the tiny hidden
transgressions. To feel abandoned is to deny
the intimacy of your surroundings. Surely,
even you, at times, have felt the grand array;
the swelling presence, and the chorus, crowding
out your solo voice. You must note
the way the soap dish enables you,
or the window latch grants you freedom.
Alertness is the hidden discipline of familiarity.
The stairs are your mentor of things
to come, the doors have always been there
to frighten you and invite you,
and the tiny speaker in the phone
is your dream-ladder to divinity.

Put down the weight of your aloneness and ease into
the conversation. The kettle is singing
even as it pours you a drink, the cooking pots



have left their arrogant aloofness and
seen the good in you at last. All the birds
and creatures of the world are unutterably
themselves. Everything is waiting for you.

*Published in David Whyte's book Everything is
Waiting for You by Many Rivers Press in 2003. ■*