

“Wisdom of World Religions”

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Reflection

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One of the main descriptive points brought up when someone is describing Unitarian Universalism to the uninitiated is Principle number 4 – A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. When people are trying to describe what it means to be part of a religious community, when they speak about going to church on a Sunday morning, or participating in a faith community, but not wanting to be categorized with all other Christian churches, this often is the line of distinction for many. Each person is encouraged to find their own truth, we are not all expected to believe what the minister speaks, or what the bible says. But we are supposed to find our own truth. But what does that actually mean, and how is it that we are supposed to discern what our truth is. I once heard of Unitarian Universalism being described as a river. And the recognition that a river does not come from one specific place, but it has many sources of water. The melt water that comes from the snow on its banks. The springs that gush out the sides of hills, and the brooks that babble along and join in. Just like we mentioned before, Unitarian Universalism has 6 sources, and because we are a living, and every shifting tradition, it is certainly possible that we will recognize more sources. As we seek our truth and meaning we are encouraged to delve into these many sources, to discover the wisdom of the many different pathways through this world, and through life. We are free to do so as we please, taking pieces here and there, from where ever suits us best. But we are also asked to be responsible to this discovery. We are responsible to do it, and not to just allow others to guide us, or determine that it is not important, or that we really just come here for the community. We have committed to the Seven Principles, and we seek to widen our reaches by sharing the possibilities of our faith with others.

Wisdom from the world’s religions which inspire us in our ethical and spiritual life, is one of the sources that helps to water the river of Unitarian Universalism. Finding our truth and meaning means that we need to seek support from Wisdoms of the ancient traditions, as well as from sciences. So today we have been, and will continue to examine some of the world’s religions, seeking wisdom to help our own searches.

Our story this morning came from ancient Greece, a civilization that was most powerful 12 or 13 centuries BCE (Before the Common Era, or more commonly known as Before Christ) up until roughly 150 BCE, when the Roman Empire Conquest of the land. There has been so much wisdom out of the Greek Mythologies that we can see in our current era. The Owl being considered the bird of wisdom. The olive tree being planted, and representing peace, prosperity and health. There are so many different myths that bring us wisdom, and help us

make meaning today in the world. I could describe to you someone who has Herculean strength. Or explain that my Achilles' heel is chocolate ice cream and most likely everyone in the room would understand what I mean. Hercules and Achilles are both part of the Greek Mythos, and yet, they hold relevance, and recognition for us today. In addition to the mythology of Ancient Greece we also know that modern day science can be clearly linked back to Greek Philosophy. And in fact, Athens, the city from our story, is often considered the birthplace of Democracy.

With a focus on finding truth and meaning, we have lots of reason to offer up gratitude to Ancient Greece, not only for its religious, and mythological truths. But also for its political structure and culture.

It is currently a holy time around the world right now. Christians around the globe are currently celebrating Lent – 40 days of preparation for Easter, many will make sacrifices as a way of bringing themselves closer to God and reminding themselves of the sacrifices that Jesus and his followers made. If you know many Unitarians outside of this Kelowna Community you might see people posting on social media about UU Lent. A practice in which they spend the Season of Lent engaged in a spiritual discipline of deep intention and appreciation of our world, their place in it, and an openness to grace in their daily lives. While trying to find commonality and hold onto the sacred times of our Christian heritage, UU Lent allows us to let go of the self-denial, sacrifice and penance that a Christian Lent holds onto. It is a reminder that we are loved, we are good, and holy, and valuable as we are, and we do not need to shed away our humanity in order to be closer to God.

Also at this time of year there is a Jewish Celebration called Purim. It is a celebration to commemorate the salvation of the Jewish People through the heroism of Queen Esther. The Jewish people were constantly being threatened by outside peoples, most notably the Egyptians – Moses helps to lead God's chosen people through the red sea. But the Story of Esther, in the Torah, talks about another salvation, from the King of Persia. Purim is called the feast of Lots, because the king and his second in command cast lots to determine the day that the Jews would be killed, leaving their death up to chance, an idea that is in direct opposition to what Jews believe, that God is always present and always knows what is going to happen. The Feast of Lots then becomes an ironic quip – because there is no game of chance for the Jews.

Again the wisdoms that are found in Christianity and Judaism offer much to Unitarian Universalist. Although UUs do not hold to the notion that our sins need to be repented, and we keep the wisdom of the universal holy, and good in each of us, there is still a way for us to be closer to our faith, more intentional about our practices, and more engaged with our

spirituality. Having daily practices that allow us to connect with the everyday spirituality of our lives is wisdom that we can hold onto. And while we might not agree with the idea that God is everknowing, and that the world will play out exactly the way God planned for it, Perhaps there is wisdom in the idea that God is everywhere. This is wisdom that I hold to be true. That Relationships (my understanding of God) are everywhere, and as soon as we bring our attention to them we will be able to witness the holy.

One more religious tradition that is about to have a huge celebration is Hinduism. The celebration of Holi will begin tomorrow in India and Nepal, as well as many other countries to a lesser extent. Although the origin story of Holi is no longer clear, the celebration has to do with the triumph of good over evil. During the celebration of holi, chalk paint is thrown everywhere, people are covered in it, dancing and music making and being tricksters all comes alive during this 2 day festival. Enemies become friends, conflicts are left elsewhere, and all of life is celebrated in full colour for 2 days.

Again we can gain wisdom from Hindu celebrations, and we can also see how some of this theology might not work for us. According to Universalist theology there is no evil in our world, there is not anything that needs to be overcome. We are all good, and we are all worthy, and safe. But if we go back to the meditation reading this morning Brahman describes what Hindus believe to be the ultimate reality, or the highest universal principle. In the Upanishads, one of the sacred scriptures from the Hindu tradition, Brahman is described as truth-consciousness-bliss.

Brahman is also described as the connected spiritual oneness in all existence. Brahman "I am the self that dwells in the heart of every mortal creature ... I am the consciousness in the living ... I am the knowledge of things spiritual ... I am glory, prosperity, beautiful speech, memory, intelligence, steadfastness and forgiveness I am the divine seed of all lives."

The wisdom of the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life. There are so many different ways in which we can reject and accept with open arms the wisdom of other religions. I guess one of the problems that I see when I hear about the idea of Unitarian Universalism resembling a river, and the sources of our knowledge, the sources of our truth and meaning can come from multiple places, I am struck by a problem. I worry about the richness, and the beauty of each individual religion getting watered down, or removed from its original contexts. I get worried about the misappropriating from other cultures, and often cultures or religious traditions that are less privileged. So somehow we need to find the balance, between using a Tibetan singing bowl to start our gatherings each Sunday, or singing African American Spirituals and practicing the Dias de La Muertos, Day of the Dead ceremonies. When are we

celebrating with the joy of religious pluralism in our communities, and when are using those items, hymns and celebrations in ways that the owners did not intend. When are we walking alongside people, sharing in the wisdom that they have discovered, and witnessing the truths that they have lifted up, and when are we laying claim to those truths as our own? These are all really challenging questions, that don't always have a clear answer. But I believe one more metaphor might help us get a little bit closer. I would rather my faith, my religious life look more like a salad, in which I can see all of the individual parts, and each piece is distinct from the others, than to have it look more like a soup, where all of the ingredients are blended together, and there is no distinction of each ingredient.