

THE EXPERIENCES OF LOVE
#2 – Soulmates and Your Potential for Endless Love
Rev. Jack Donovan – Unitarian Universalist Church
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READINGS

Invocation: *The Ones Whom Our Souls Love*, from The Song of Solomon, Hebrew Scripture

Meditation: *Soulmates*, adapted from The Hebrew Book of Proverbs, chapter 31

Readings: *Honeymoon Cruise*, from Bossypants, by Tina Fey
Mutual Assured Destruction, Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation, O. Judson
Peter, Do You Love Me? from The Gospel According to John, chapter 13

SERMON

It seems to me that one of the most important human potentials is the capacity to find soulmates. Soulmates: My definition is two people who feel a deep connection and intend a steadfast devotion to the well-being of one another – both somehow interested in knowing the other well and in being known well – both somehow attentive to and tending to the other's depths, heights, limits, and potentials.

In Hebrew mythology, ignoring it's Augustinian and patriarchal abuses and usurpations, Eve and Adam are soulmates created to end aloneness, which is a threat to surviving, and to end loneliness, which is a threat to thriving. In Greek mythology, humans are halved souls seeking wholeness by union with their soul's mate. In modern psychology, each personality type is known to benefit from association with personality types of complementary strengths and limitations – soulmates.

Do soulmates make a difference? If only overcoming aloneness and loneliness, would that be enough? If only consoling in grief, would that be enough? If only compensating for our limits, would that be enough? If only for fostering our potentials, would that be enough? If only giving us stability in community, would that be enough?

I imagine there could be debate over whether a person can or should have only one soulmate or many. For the soulmate we call spouse and bedmate, I would argue for only one soulmate, because a soulmate's charge is to protect and nurture, whereas diffused intimacy so often ends up wounding one's partner and one's community. For the nurturance of all other potentials, I'd argue for as many soulmates as one has time and attention for, because multiple resources help our spirits and our communities grow.

Ministers would normally be handicapped trying to give examples of their soulmates from within the congregation. Doing so could lead to a sense of attending to some better than others. Nevertheless, I have found numerous people in this congregation who regularly make my heart smile or my mind sigh with relief and gratitude – and I depend on them and learn from them. And isn't that the basis of a caring community?

Also, as I noted during our Sharing of Joys and Sorrows, along with my beloved wife and my mother-in-law, there are a several people present today from afar whom I would name as soulmates because they have been so good for me for so many years.

So now the question arises, How does one find soulmates?

Mythologist Joseph Campbell references medieval romanticism to endorse the human eye as the window upon soulmates. But millennia of romantic heartbreak make me think there must be a better detector of soulmates than blind love. And though I love the song *It Had to be You*, I would not be easily inclined to let thrill override meanness, crossness, and domineering.

Professor Robert Solomon, a contemporary philosopher and psychologist teaching at the University of Texas describes finding love as a process, starting with attraction (certainly through the eyes), then moving into hope, then investigation to validate hope, then a choice dependent on whether or not you believe this mating would be as you hope. This last step echoes the female voice in the Book of Songs, urging us to keep searching until confident the right soulmate has been found.

For the search and investigation to have merit, I would think it important to have a set of values or virtues as guides. Perhaps the search-guiding virtues would include the characteristics of a good soul and a good mate as listed in the Jewish Book of Proverbs: trustworthy, productive, helpful, nurturing, wise, strong, loyal, kind, generous, caring for the needy, encouraging of the good, energetic, positive, happy, appreciative.

Perhaps the search would also benefit from including some of the values of our UU congregations' covenant: promotion of a sense of worth and dignity, acceptance of others, encouragement of spiritual growth, a sense of wonder, a capacity for helpful truth-telling. And, comfortable or not, I believe the finding of soulmates is most effective as part of a community where there are varieties of people to get to know and be known by.

It strikes me that the investigation of the character of a possible soulmate need not be all or nothing. Jesus' grilling of Simon Peter is a good example, I think. In the Greek language of the Gospels, Jesus asks Peter two times if he loves or cares about him, using the Greek *agape*, meaning, *Is it your will to actively work for my well-being and for what I care about*. Two times Peter answers, "You know I like you very much, Jesus." This is not on the point that Jesus wants addressed. But when he asks a third time, he uses the word Peter uses – *phileo* – for friendship or brotherly love - compassionately accepting, I would say, Peter's limitations in understanding and caring in that moment.

Peter did not pass the test to be a trusted soulmate or deep spiritual friend to Jesus, only a confused follower. They say that in time Peter grew into the job. But you never know when a person will get it. Probably if you have come to care about such a person, you forgive their limitations and go on and be a soulmate on your side until they can be a soulmate on theirs.

It seems to me, the more soulmates you have in your life, the better. It is not of course a competition. One person can be a soulmate to a number of people without diminishing any of the relationships. But there is a limit to time and attention, which are the hallmarks of being a soulmate. Perhaps that is where the church comes in, being a gathering whereby sharing can be multiplied - your songs, your dreams, your rainy days, your sunny days. Gradually people get to know you and join you in companionship for sharing solace and sharing joy.

Despite these standards and the clear benefits, the finding and keeping of soulmates must be worked at. Dr. Tatiana's sobering perspective, that life-long monogamy and fidelity are rare among species, makes the individual and societal challenges evident. Who and how much can you trust? How can you find soulmates who will protect and nourish your soul? Dr. Tatiana herself says the best bet is to invest yourself in your mates. Give them your time and attention. Or, like the traditional singers of "Roll in My Sweet Baby's Arms," spend time enjoying your soulmates' companionship and your life together – time and attention.

Sometimes the attention must, I think, be expressed as appreciation. Recently I saw a Facebook posting from Meaghan, a young woman whose wedding service I performed about two years ago in Gainesville. She wrote, "May I express my pride in my husband, serving our community tirelessly." The accompanying photos were of her young husband, R.D., director of a program that restores the houses of impoverished homeowners to livable standards. "May I express my pride..." That, I think, is soulmate appreciation.

Lastly, I'd say honesty is an ingredient for keeping a soulmate – exemplified by the reading from *Saturday Night Live's* Tina Fey. Let your soulmate know the true state of your soul if you hope to grow together. Tina's anecdote also suggests that communication is complicated – and the best response may be a laugh and a living into the answers. But people cannot move closer to you or support your growth if they do not know where you truly are. Perhaps your best influence on the spiritual growth of your soul and your soulmates' souls is to listen for where they are and tell them truly where you are.

Let me close by referencing today's holy day on the Christian world's calendar, Transfiguration Sunday. The Gospel of John says Jesus took three of the apostles to a mountaintop and they experienced him there as radiant of pure profound light.

To me the story represents the moment when Jesus recognized his identity with the source of life within him and within all – and he was, according to the Greek word *Metamorphosis*, transformed, transfigured, deeply changed. Returning down the mountain to the multitudes whom, as the Gospel reports, he saw as harassed and helpless, he recognized that they were not at all aware of the divine power within themselves and that they were literal children of God.

Seeing the people disconnected by oppression from awareness of their divine ever-faithful soulmate made him turn toward Jerusalem, where the Passover would be celebrated in two weeks. It was time to remind the people and the throne of earthly power of their oneness in the power of the Being of beings. It was time to speak as eternal soulmate and call to the people and the powers and principalities once again, Let my people go.

I conclude with this Transfiguration story because, in our Unitarian interpretation, it claims that we are soulmates with the source of life and that's how we become soulmates with every other person and being on Earth. And in our Universalist interpretation, it proclaims that we are soulmates with every person and being, called to help fulfill their potentials in endless love – and that's how we become soulmates with the source of life. Perhaps by adopting a phrase like "My People," we lay claim to be soulmates to one and all. That could be our sign and our prayer - "<My People>My People<My People>"

READINGS

Prelude *It Had To Be You* by Jones & Kahn

It had to be you, it had to be you
I wandered around, and finally found - the somebody who
Could make me be true, and could make me be blue
And even be glad, just to be sad - thinking of you

Some others I've seen, might never be mean

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Might never be cross, or try to be boss
But they wouldn't do - For nobody else, gave me a thrill
With all your faults, I love you still
It had to be you, wonderful you, It had to be you

Invocation: *The Ones Whom Our Souls Love*, from The Song of Solomon, Hebrew Scripture

We seek the ones whom our souls love; we seek, but find naught;
we call, but get no answer;
we go about the city, in the streets and in the squares;
we seek the ones whom our souls love, but we find naught.
We ask the sentinels as they go about the city,
'Have you seen the one whom my soul loves?'
They shrug and move on.
And yet, we seek, and suddenly we find
and hold on and will not let go
and bring the one our soul loves into our parents' house,
to the place of our beginning.
O youth of Jerusalem, be wise and happy:
Do not open love until you find it joyfully ready.

Meditation: *Soulmates*, adapted from The Hebrew Book of Proverbs, chapter 31

Soulmates - who can find them,
more precious than jewels?
in whom the heart trusts,
in whom there is only blessing,
bringing good, never harm
with willing hands all the days of their lives,
bringing nourishment and health to the household,
investing wisely, planting well,
staying strong, keeping faith, creating good,
opening to the poor, reaching out to the needy,
encouraging the family in noble work,
laughing and dignified toward the future,
wise, appreciative, kind and energetic in the moment.
Their children and spouses
know them to be happy and praise them with thanks.
They are wondrous; they are lovely,
They live in wonderment at love.

Pre-Sermon Reading #1: *Honeymoon Cruise*, from Bossypants, by Tina Fey

About a week after we have to abandon our honeymoon cruiseship due to the fire,
we get a letter of apology in the mail offering us a free cruise as compensation.
And I turn to Jeff and ask, "What were you thinking when we were holding hands diagonally across the
women's and men's evacuation lines?"
Jeff says, "I was thinking, 'It's going to be so hard for her when she chooses not to get on that lifeboat
and stay with me.'"

I decide I can't start this marriage with a lie. "Really?" I say. "'Cause I was thinking that it was going to be so hard for you when I got on the lifeboat and you had to stay behind."

He is appalled. I plead my case. "Remember when we saw *Titanic* how mad I was at Kate Winslet when she climbed out of the lifeboat and back on the ship? I think she encumbered Leonardo DiCaprio. If she had gone on the lifeboat then he could have had that piece of wood she was floating on and they both would have survived. I would never do that to you." Jeff just laughs. And with that settled, we begin our married life.

Pre-Sermon Reading #2: *Mutual Assured Destruction*, Dr. Tatiana's Sex Advice to All Creation, O. Judson

Real happily-ever-after, till-death-do-us-part romance is almost unheard of in nature.

Who does have it – and under what circumstances does it evolve?

For most boys and girls, wedding rings are made of fool's gold –

real, true love is precious and rare, the confluence of bizarre biological forces.

Several factors may contribute to monogamy,

but you'll find that true love works best when it is absolutely MAD -

(that is, when the consequence of emotional or physical wounding of one is Mutual Assured Destruction for both).

Pre-Sermon Reading #3: *Peter, Do You Love Me?* from The Gospel According to John, chapter 13

When they had finished breakfast, Jesus said to Simon Peter, 'Simon son of John, do you love me more than these others do?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Then feed my lambs.'

A second time he said to him, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' He said to him, 'Yes, Lord; you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Then tend my sheep.'

He said to him the third time, 'Simon son of John, do you love me?' Peter felt hurt and he said to him, 'Lord, you know everything. So you know that I love you.' Jesus said to him, 'Then feed my sheep.'

And then Jesus said 'Really, I'm telling you the way it is. When you are younger, you fasten your own belt and go wherever you wish. But when you grow old, you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will fasten a belt around you and take you where you do not wish to go.'

Closing adapted from *The Prayer of St. Francis*, for Transfiguration Sunday:

Where there is hatred, let us bring love.
Where there is injury, pardon;
Where there is doubt, trust.
Where there is despair, hope;
Where there is darkness, light;
Where there is sadness, joy.
Where there is grief, consoling.
Where there is misunderstanding, listening;
Where there is need, caring.
For it is in giving that we receive,
in pardoning that we are pardoned,
in dying to self that our souls are born into life.