

## CONSIDER THE SOURCE: The Relation Between the Source and Our Potentials

Rev. Jack Donovan – Unitarian Universalist Church - St. Petersburg, Florida - 9/9/18

### READINGS (texts printed below, after sermon)

- Gathering** from The Man Who Invented Florida by Randy Wayne White  
**Invocation** *Beginning*, adapted from Genesis 1 & 2  
**Meditation** from *The Divine Milieu* by Teilhard de Chardin  
**Reading #1** *The Big Being Theory* from The Gospel According to John, chapter 1  
**Reading #2** from *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind*, by Yuval Noah Harari

### SERMON

We just heard a reading from the beginning of Yuval Noah Harari's magnificent book Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind in which he said, "prehistoric humans were insignificant animals with no more impact on their environment than gorillas, fireflies or jellyfish." That's a dramatic start to the telling of history.

But despite the ecological truth of that statement, have we *homo sapiens* ever been insignificant to ourselves? We have communal burial sites that were once carefully conceived and maintained that date to early humans at least 200,000 years ago. From 40,000 years ago we have carvings of divinities, mainly female, revered for our most expansive gift – creativity – and from that same age we have cave wall paintings of animals and hunters representing, it seems, the sacred forces of life - and with them are the haunting open handprints of cavern artists and cavern celebrants seeming to say, "Hello out there. I am here. We are here."

I believe that is a record-keeping of significance. It signifies to me that we are glad we are here and we want to continue here in person and posterity, deepening our understanding of life, deepening our caring in relationship, deep within the cavernous and magnificent womb of life.

It can be argued reasonably, I think, that with the dawn of self-consciousness human beings could begin to earn the label *Sapiens* or *Wise*. It was then that we could recognize that we have potentials – not sure guarantees, but potentials - for surviving and thriving - potentials that need to be sustained and developed to become significant. We could then begin to see that these potentials emerge through all the stages of our lives and can be influenced by a number of forces internal and external to ourselves.

So it becomes important and wise for us, I think, to ponder the positive and negative influences on our life potentials, including both the potentials and the influences that come directly from our Source. Anthropologists and psychologists posit that this is why everybody has a creation story, whether conscious or unconscious – a story identifying the Source of Being and its relationship with the human being – a story telling of how and where we fit in, helping us find

our moorings in the waters of life. As Shakespeare wrote, “This thing of darkness I acknowledge mine. There is nothing more confining than the prison we don’t know we are in.”

And by becoming conscious of the story – our life-guiding map – we can redraw it as we understand more – making it ever more likely that we will reach our destination and destiny and deliver what it is of worth that we are shipping. Becoming conscious of our story is part of our worship.

So, what’s your Creation story? Does your story of you include having potentials for surviving and for thriving? Does your story include telling how your Source brought your potentials into being and whether the Source is now involved in and influencing their fulfillment?

*Homo Sapiens* have envisioned many different creation stories which may be like yours. There are Nature-centered traditions which envision an all-encompassing great spirit Source – again, often female - that incarnates as or gives birth to many forms on earth, each revealing some of the Source’s creative capacities that might be available as human potentials, be we bear clan or turtle clan or eagle clan. Is there something significant here for you?

There are Vedic traditions as in Hinduism which envision a Being of beings emanating or manifesting as archetypal divine powers that can be sided with human well-being through proper ritual. There are other Vedic traditions, as in Buddhism, which envision a flow of fundamental creative energy that can be accessed through the human potential for deep internal centering. Is there something significant here for you?

Further east, Taoist traditions envision an original pure energy that will empower the human potential for creativity if we strip away the inhibiting customs of culture.

Or the Taoist way may be adapted to the Confucian vision, channeling the original pure energy through beautiful ritualized social behavior.

Or again the Taoist way may be adapted to the Buddhist vision, delving down to one’s own beginner’s mind in order to connect fully with the unencumbered peaceful and caring energy of the original Beginner’s Mind. Is there something significant here for you?

Westward, the Abrahamic tradition envisions a divine Creator, separate and entirely other from the Creation - who, by power of will, brings into creation each separate human being with a god-like potential for free will to choose blessing through covenant or curse through breach. Is there something significant here for you?

Or there is the vision –blending insights from Abrahamic covenantal religion with Greek theology and science – where a god-like potential for sharing the light of love and truth may be activated by opening to and more fully receiving the creative power of life, which is sometimes called grace. Is there something significant here for you?

There is lastly the evolving evolutionary vision of modern science – in some ways compatible with the ancient religious beliefs, in some ways vigorously challenging them, as they do each other. Much like Buddhism, Science offers an empirically developed vision of what came after the creation moment – only after that moment because it is aware that its instruments cannot yet observe nor its methodologies yet describe or explain the actual beginning point. But Science can imagine – and it imagines a greatly compressed energy Source – and what is observed thereafter seems to be that the energy Source suddenly expands Itself into vast fields of energy, vibrating itself somehow into particles of light, heat, and matter.

The functioning of this universe has enormous capacity for evolution into more and more complex forms. Each particle and atom and entity seems to have the capacity to respond to the basic cosmic forces. Whether or not that capacity is a form of consciousness, it leads to greater complexity of being and perhaps then to nascent forms of consciousness until finally water is added to carbon to yield organic life.

That is when we know consciousness of the world emerges - and thereafter consciousness of self emerges – and thereafter consciousness of the self of others emerges. And with consciousness of both self and others, the potential emerges for that slight pause of reflection that can develop into the potential for free will and wise choice. Therein, it seems, is the great potential for experiencing and understanding life and for living in caring relationships. Is there something significant for you here in science’s vision?

To close, I would say that despite this array of visions and understandings, as a species and as a diversity of cultures and individuals, we have not yet fully realized the significance of our potentials, nor adequately learned how to develop and use them skillfully – and the price that life on our planet pays for that shortfall continues too often to be horrific.

That, I believe, is why we must continue exploring – sharing with one another and going deeper into ourselves to find the actual current of life and liberate it to be springs of light for the world. I believe we have the light within. But we are still learning to see it and help it grow and shine forth. There are tipping points toward good and evil. Often it just takes a few more people to cause the tip.

Dust we are. But what kind? Golden stardust that keeps moving to make new life and shine great light? Whatever kind, it calls out, “Is there anybody out there?” and it answers with an upheld hand to say, “I am here. I am here.”

Gracias.

## READINGS

### Thoughts for Gathering

“All living organisms derive from a single unit that generates complexity.... It’s kind of like freeze-dried food. To create life, you just add water.” - fictional chemist Ken Kern in Randy Wayne White’s The Man Who Invented Florida

“You are the light of the world.” Jesus of Nazareth, Gospel of John

**Invocation**    *Beginning* adapted from Genesis 1 & 2:

In beginning **may we call the Spirit of Life to fullness within us.**

May it come as at the first calling, **from dark formlessness to the goodness of time and light.**

May it come as at the second calling, **to the goodness of fluidity and space.**

May it come as at the third calling, **to the goodness of forms and objects.**

May it come as at the fourth calling, **to the goodness of water and air and earth.**

May it come as at the fifth calling, **to the goodness of creatures of sea and sky and land.**

May it come as at the sixth calling, **to the goodness of the peoples, empowered to transform and care.**

May the Spirit of Life come as at the seventh calling, **to the great goodness of *shalom*.**

**Meditation**    *The Divine Milieu* Teilhard de Chardin

We must try to penetrate our most secret self,  
and examine our beings from all sides.

And so, for the first time in my life perhaps  
(although I am supposed to meditate every day!),

I take the lamp and, leaving the zone  
of everyday occupations and relationships

where everything seems clear,

I go down into my inmost self,

to the deep abyss whence I feel dimly that my power of action emanates.

.....

But as I move further and further away from the conventional certainties  
by which social life is superficially illuminated,

I become aware that I am losing contact with myself.

At each step of the descent a new person is disclosed within me  
of whose name I am no longer sure,

and who no longer obeys me.

.....

And when I have to stop my exploration

because the path has faded from beneath my steps,

I find a bottomless abyss at my feet,

and out of it comes—arising I know not from where—  
the current which I dare to call *my* life.

**Reading #1**    *The Big Being Theory According to the Gospel of John*

In the beginning was the Expression of Being;  
All things come into being through it,  
and without it not one being  
comes into being.

What comes into being is life,  
and life is the light of all people.  
The light shines in the darkness,  
and the darkness cannot overcome it.

The true light enlightens everyone,  
though the world does not know it.  
Light comes to its own,  
and its own does not accept it.  
But all who accept it and trust in it  
have power to become of the divine -  
new born, not of blood or of flesh  
or of human will,  
but of Being Itself -  
full of grace and truth,  
grace upon grace.  
You, then, are the light of the world.

**Reading #2**    from *Sapiens: A Brief History of Humankind* by Yuval Noah Harari

About 13.5 billion years ago, matter, energy, time and space came into being in what is known as the Big Bang. The story of these fundamental features of our universe is called physics.

About 300,000 years after their appearance, matter and energy started to coalesce into complex structures, called atoms, which then combined into molecules. The story of atoms, molecules and their interactions is called chemistry.

About 3.8 billion years ago, on a planet called Earth, certain molecules combined to form particularly large and intricate structures called organisms. The story of organisms is called biology.

About 70,000 years ago, organisms belonging to the species *Homo sapiens* started to form even more elaborate structures called cultures. The subsequent development of these human cultures is called history.

The most important thing to know about prehistoric humans is that they were insignificant animals with no more impact on their environment than gorillas, fireflies or jellyfish.