

THIS I BELIEVE

Hi, I am Lynn Joselyn. My husband, Charles Bisantz and I have been members of Wildflower UU since its infancy. We have 2 girls Lillian and Josephine.

When Helen Burnette first asked me to do this my initial reaction was no, there is no way I can get up and speak in front of a group of people especially about what I believe. But as I sat with the idea for a few days I began to trust in Helen's longevity as a UU and her wisdom as a teacher along with her words of encouragement "Everyone who does it is so glad they did (in addition to being relieved); they all say it meant a great deal to them. So, now here's your chance"

I said yes, that was the easy part, for the next month I spent a lot of time in my head trying to figure out how to put into words what it is that I believe. I spent the last week agonizing about what had I gotten myself into and how I could I get out of it. It was not until the last few days that I was able to put my thoughts on paper. After a month of reflection, introspection and a bit of agonizing I can honestly say I am grateful I did this and yes I will be relieved.

In order to try to define where I am now, I reflected on where I came from. I was raised catholic and generally went along with the flow, with out questioning. It was not until after college, I had somewhat of an epiphany; it was one of those Aha moments that change your current path. It came to me that I didn't have to go along with the main flow of traffic but that I could choose which direction I wanted to go. Wow, this was big for me. I don't think I realized at the time but it really opened up my world. Charles and I began to question what it meant to be catholic and if we were living true to that meaning.

It became more and more apparent that by following that path, I was being hypocritical; it just didn't gel with what was true to me. We began to explore UUism and found that there was a church that placed acceptance and non judgment as central to its message and not only that but I saw those characteristics in action.

That reflection brought me to the question "where am I now?" HmMMM this is where the deep introspection came in to play. This is a tough one to answer. I think of all the hats I wear as a mom, wife, daughter, sister, aunt, PA, friend, and wonder what do I believe and how are those beliefs woven into my spirit.

I know that I am on a path of staying present and constantly have to remind myself to return to that present moment.

I believe in the acceptance, and non judgment of all walks of life.

I believe there is a true connection to all that is around us; the earth, the sun, the moon, the creatures, the plant life, the unseen energies and respect of those things is of utmost importance.

I believe that all people deserve to know love and to feel joy.

I believe that we can learn the truest simplest meaning of life from young children if we are open to see it.

I believe in being grateful for all that I have and reminding myself to slow down enough to recognize these gifts.

I believe that with compassion, gratitude and love we can overcome any obstacle and be fully alive in our joys, sorrows and even in the mundane activities of living.

I believe our spiritual journey begins when we are born and the paths we chose throughout this journey give us direction. Many times we find ourselves just traveling along with the flow of traffic, other times we are stuck in a traffic jam or going the wrong way on a one way and yet others we are speeding forward getting all the green lights knowing just when and which way to turn.

This leads me to my last question.

Where do I go from here on my spiritual journey? Forward, moment by moment with love, compassion and gratitude the tools I need to navigate and find direction on the path of life.

Thank you.

THIS I BELIEVE — E. Marie Baker

When I was asked to do one of these brief ‘what I believe’ talks, at first I just laughed because for a few years now I’ve been under the perception that I have no beliefs.

But I said yes anyway and figured I’d think of something to say.

So this has been an opportunity for me to think about what, if anything, I do believe. And why I have difficulty claiming any beliefs.

I realized one of the problems for me is the whole concept of ‘beliefs’. What is a belief anyway?

When I was very young I was trained to recite a statement of belief almost daily for years. Dictated by others, mostly dead white Italian men, the Nicene Creed goes:

‘We believe in one God, the Father, the Almighty, maker of heaven and earth.’ etc...

I don't want to waste one of my six minutes reciting this creed, but if you were raised on it yourself you might want to check it out, to see where you came from on this notion of 'beliefs'.

What I got from my review, is the Nicene Creed is dry- heady, male oriented, it's limiting, very very tight. And it has nothing in it about who I am.

And it feels more like I was force fed a statement of facts, of certitudes, and not of beliefs, and certainly not my own beliefs, that I came to through my effort, through my own thoughts, or feelings or states or experiences.

Maybe I have too limiting an idea of belief, thinking a belief must be held in a stance of certitude, hence my thinking that I have none, when perhaps I do, if I loosen up on the definition of belief.

The other difficulty is that I renounced 'beliefs' when I went through a serious shake up a few years ago. That is when my spouse and I discovered that my spouse was transsexual, not the male I thought I had married 14 years ago. So now I couldn't even depend on 'facts', certitudes anymore. Maybe I shouldn't count on anything. And also, how could the divine and benevolent being I at least hoped for do this to us, to me? When I so wanted and needed the love I was getting from that relationship.

So, when I get down to it, is there anything I can claim for myself as a belief? Anything issuing from my own effort, my thoughts, feelings, states, experiences?

Yes! I have three 'notions' I would like to claim today.

The E. Marie Baker Creed:

I believe in Truth.

I believe in Beauty.

I believe in Love.

I intend to live up to them in my life- truth, beauty, love.

Just defining them would be at least another whole 6 minute talk. And I still want to tell you my hopes, hunches, favorite guesses, as my Laura says- 'suspicions'.

This is my current list of 'What ifs':

What if we don't know what's going on because we chose to be blind in this experience we call life in order to get into our roles, to be 'this'.

What if life is a feast we are meant to devour with gusto?

What if the answer to why do bad things, including discovering the one you love is not the sex you thought, the answer to why do bad things happen to good people, is that only

good things happen. What if it IS all good? Every last bit, even the hardest of the hardest bits. And again, we just are too blind to know that, too?

What if when we die, whatever that is, we get it ALL. I mean ALL of it. Every experience-thought-feeling-desire-notion ever ever experienced, thought, felt, believed, desired by anyone, including Bill Gates, including the petunia in your back yard.

What if it's all true? Lord Krishna dances with the gopis; yes, Jesus loves me; Allah is the One; Buddha is; I am who am; and the Live Oak tree on 5th street saves. Om shanti shanti om. Om shanti shanti om.

What if we are one, the one, The One? Not just an idea, but a reality. I am you and you are me. And just for now, we are forgetful, blind to this reality, so we can get into being separate so we can love and appreciate and dance with each other.

What if NOW is all that is real?

What if this is a dream I/we/the ONE is having NOW?

What if we are meant to be truth-sayers and lovers of beauty and it's all beautiful?

What if John Lennon almost got it right: Love is all there is, love is all there is. Om shanti shanti om.

THIS I BELIEVE —Zachary Carter

(Reading delivered January 21st, 2007 at Wildflower Unitarian Universalist, Austin, Texas)

I believe in the principle of sufficient reason, which simply states, that everything that exists is either preceded by a cause, or else contains within itself sufficient reason for its own existence.

I believe in the potency principle, which states that for any system or composite entity, any cause for the whole system is also a cause for every part of the system.

And I believe in the principle of limitation, which simply states, that the existence of a whole, depends on the prior existence of all its parts.

That's not too cryptic or abstract, is it?

OK, perhaps I may catch your attention and make a connection to something more concrete, by mentioning that these three principles lie at the foundation of all modern thought and scientific inquiry. That without accepting the validity of these principles it would, indeed, be essentially impossible to say that we can know or understand anything, about anything.

And I believe there is something very profound in that, because if I accept as I think most of you do, that thinking and scientific inquiry are good things, and that it's nice to adopt as an axiom the notion that we can actually know and understand stuff

about things, then following the reasoning of the late Baha’I mathematician and philosopher William Hatcher, it is possible to prove rather simply and irrevocably that God exists, if by “God” one means a fundamental first cause for the existence of everything in the universe.

Yes, God exists, and this is not a matter of opinion anymore it’s actually been proven, and if you don’t agree with me, well... guess what? You’re wrong.

And yes, I know this is a Unitarian congregation and we’re not supposed to go ‘round saying out loud that other people’s beliefs are wrong. But they are. I mean be honest, deep down inside, isn’t this the one thing that we *really* all can agree on? That other people’s beliefs are, on some level, a little wrong? Or a lot?

I mean, try going to a math class and telling the professor that there are only a finite number of primes. He’ll tell you you’re wrong, the number of primes is infinite, and he’ll show you a proof. Is that wrong? No! It’s right. It’s absolutely right! See what I mean?

This God is a perplexing, mysterious thing to be sure. An indivisible, unchanging entity, a strange atom existing independently of all that we call our universe. A God that perhaps has more in common with eastern notions of the Tao, than with the activist, mercurial, hot-tempered God of history so prominent in the mainstream Judeo-Christian tradition.

I believe that in a fully integrated philosophy there is, almost inevitably, a close connection between one’s spirituality and one’s cosmology. And thus I find it surprising that in the realm of faith, in the year 2007 many religious traditions seem stuck where physics and astronomy were prior to the time of Copernicus. They ask and attempt to answer questions like, why am I here? What is my purpose in life? What should I do? What should you do and... what should I do to you if you don’t? In these questions, earth, and you and I, are at the center of the universe.

But in the last 500 years, the old cosmology has been stood on its head, turned inside out. Cosmologically, we are no longer at the center. In fact, there is no center.

I’ve contemplated as many of you have, what science tells us of the scale of all that we see when we look out across the heavens. If there were a road that could take us there, walking 24 hours a day at a reasonably brisk pace, it would take us 9 years to reach the moon from where we’re standing or sitting right now. That foolishly inconsequential, minor ball of rock and ice that had the audacity to be formerly known as the ninth planet Pluto is 10,000 times farther away. The nearest star Alpha Centauri is 10,000 times further still. The cosmological event horizon, the limit of the observable universe, is several *billion* times further still.

And now contemplate with me if you will, that the part of the universe we will never be able to see, all that stuff lying beyond the event horizon, is probably 10,000 times larger than what we can see. Reflect on the worth and relevance of all our pride and problems, our greatest accomplishments and greatest embarrassments, in this context. Why am *I* here?

Let me stand on my head for a second. The universe, this vast place of which we are collectively such an inconceivably small part, all 6 billion of us and counting... why is it here? What is the universe to God? I’ve been thinking about this question off and on for years. And I’d like to share with you what I’ve come up with so far.

Nothing. Absolutely no idea.

I'm no further along in answering that question than I was the day I asked it. And you know, I think I'm actually pleased by that. For me at least, interesting questions that never go away are like good friends. They don't always have words of wisdom to offer, but they're always entertaining, and can always be counted on to comfort you when all else fails. (Actually, now that I think about it this question is like a good dog. People are never this nice).

OK, a different question I've posed myself. What is it like to be God? Again a puzzle. How can I answer that when I'm so handicapped by the limitations of my own experience, and God is so far beyond me?

When I can't make any progress proving a positive, I sometimes find it useful to fall back on that old trick of logic, the *reductio ad absurdum*. I try asking myself, what can I disprove about the negative?

So one day I asked myself, how might it *not* be like to be God? I know myself pretty well, I reasoned, and I have in mind a rough outline of God's major characteristics, omniscient, immortal, all-powerful. It seemed like a road not yet traveled that might lead somewhere interesting.

So what if, say, I didn't need to feed myself to survive? What if it were impossible for me to die of overexposure to the sun, or freeze to death in the cold? What if my very existence was not dependent on the biological imperative, that so often finds its expression in what we poetically call love? What senses, what emotions, would I have need of or use for?

The more I asked myself these questions, the more isolated, empty, and lonely I felt (these questions are not a good dogs. They're more like unpleasant roommates). Immortality, that thing I had so often and so fervently wished for as a younger man, could it really be what it seemed in the light of these questions: a barren, trackless waste?

And then this idea burst on me: what if all that we are, all that we find beautiful and worthwhile about our experience in this world, is somehow intimately tied to the fact that we are such absurdly fragile, insignificant creatures, entirely co-dependent on the equally fragile web of life around us, our entire existence bounded by such a pitifully small extent of time and space?

If that is so, I thought, then life is precious only where there can be death. Pleasure precious, only where there can be pain.

From this I've come to believe just in the last few weeks, that we are magnetic creatures leading magnetic lives, the opposite poles of our being and experience forever inseparable.

And it is not just these abstractions that have me convinced. If I look back at my own life I see that wherever I have tried to change this fundamental truth, to have the equivalent of a magnet with only a north pole, or a south pole, I have ended up with broken thoughts, broken feelings, broken friendships, broken loves.

To be whole and stay whole, I believe we must embrace all of our experience.

I don't believe in dualism anymore. The notion of a separation between body and spirit now seems to me a holdover from some pre-Copernican metaphysics.

I don't believe it's any accident, that so often when we speak of spirituality we associate that word with a sense of seeking. To seek is to change. Nor do I believe it any accident that often when we feel most spiritual, it seems as though we are being lifted up

and borne along in a larger stream. For I believe that spirit is flow. And for there to be flow, there must be something to do the flowing.

Some thing/flow, matter/spirit, two sides of the same coin, forever inseparable.

We cannot retreat from this world, for without it, there is no place to leave, and no place to go to. Nothing to be, and nothing to become.

Let me return at last to that question I avoided earlier. Why am I here? Why are you here?

When seen from the proper perspective, from nowhere near the center (because there isn't one), I believe the answer to that question goes something like this. We are here, not to see beyond this world, but see further into it. Not to free ourselves from God's material creation, but to accept that everything we are is inextricably bound to it. Not to hope for liberation from our limitations, but to understand that it is from our limitations that our possibilities arise. Not to be like God, but be unlike it, because to be unlike it is exactly what it created us to be. And be unlike it is what we inevitably must be, because we were given no choice in the matter (pun intended).

I believe we are here, not to find spirit outside the material, but to create spirit in the material.

And I believe this a worthwhile, even beautiful thing to keep in mind: in every word uttered, every action taken, in every moment of every day, we create spirit. To be asked within all of us then this question: right here, right now, what kind of spirit do I want to create?

What kind of spirit do you want to create?

--Zachary Carter