

Credo

One of the challenges of ministry is constantly searching the depths of one's being asking unanswerable questions.

What is the origin of the world?

Who am I? Why am I here? What must I do/be/become?

What is the most reliable guide for my life?

What is the role of the church in my life?

What is the nature of God?

How will it all end?

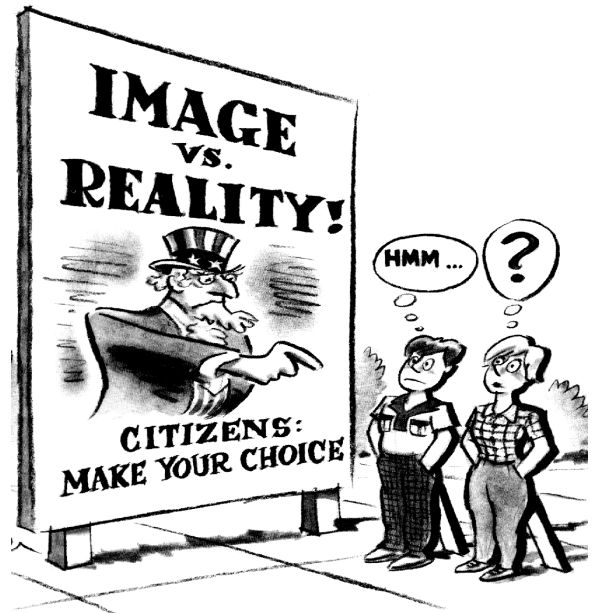
That these questions have no absolute answer is a key article of faith of the liberal religious tradition. While this may not be a complete list of profoundly important unanswerable questions, they are useful as a foundation for this exploration. Though these questions may be absolutely unanswerable, it is imperative that we find provisional answers and be willing to revise those answers as we gain greater experience, insight and wisdom.

Given the current theories of the big bang, the size of the universe and the magnitude of time, our planet seems pretty insignificant on the scale of super novas and black holes. For most of us space and time, as we now know it, began in our mother's womb and will end upon our death. Between the doors of birth and death, each rustle of leaves, each sparkle of light reflected from particles of dust in the air, each breath of

fragrant moist air, brings us in touch with a reality far greater than mental conceptions of the universe. This macro-micro tension infuses the experience of consciousness. Awareness is at once the greatest achievement of the evolution of living systems and the greatest vexation. Awareness put men on the moon and refrigerators in people's kitchens. Awareness also spoils the pleasure of a thick juicy hamburger as visions of burning rain forests, feed lots and slaughterhouses intrude.

Gaining the ability to understand that there was a time before we existed, creates the question of how it all began and how will it all end. The handed down stories of a seven day creation and the fall of humanity through eating of forbidden fruit, of the big bang and evolution from cosmic slime suggest that we are part of something important. The complexity and the mystery of human anatomy will dazzle the most jaded misanthrope.

My favorite creation stories come from the Hindu pantheon. Existence is part of a divine rhythm of creation and destruction, oscillating back and forth. Existence is without beginning or end. This view seems to resonate with current



scientific theories about expanding and collapsing universes.

What I find unsatisfactory about this endless cycle is the lack of meaning it supplies. My life is just another pea in the pot of soup stirred by the gods engaging in their divine play (much the same way mortals are abused by the Gods in Greek tragedy).

Who are these Gods at play? Metaphorically, the powers which create the cradle of existence. Physicists have named them but can only observe their habits. When they get too close, certainty dissolves into probabilities of actions and positions. Since the collapse of rational theology, theologians have struggled to conceptualize an unknowable God.

I believe that everything is God, from the ant carrying a piece of leaf into a tunnel and the sub micron layers of silicon on a computer chip to the lion pulling down an antelope and the hydrogen bomb. This God/Reality has billions upon billions of voices speaking many languages and forms. And God/Reality is more than the cacophony. In the many voices are common messages or truths which are the basis of meaning. The monk in a cave and the scientist in the laboratory can hear the same message through different tongues. In fact all of us are

constantly in touch with the most profound truths of existence. The challenge is becoming aware of the many voices and gaining insight into the patterns.

This is the most important purpose I have yet found for living. God/Reality has no plan for us, no divine task, no ultimate goal to be fulfilled. All God/Reality wants is to be known and remembered. Our life work is the continuing exploration of God/Reality. This work is as simple as lifting a glass of water with awareness of bodily sensations. This work is as complex as casting a statue of a Goddess in bronze or sending the marines to Somalia. The magnitude is of much less importance than the attention. The only connection we have to divinity is found in each attentive moment to what's happening now. No greater challenge has been reserved for us. All challenges unfold in this field of awareness.

The greatness of our tradition is the celebration of the mind which gives us awareness. Our mistake was to limit awareness only to the abstract products of the mind. The emotions, the sensations of the body, and the unsolvable mysteries are vehicles which connect us with the present moment and feed our awareness of God/Reality.

The human dilemma is that we retreat from the present moment and overlay memories of past moments of awareness. I remember meeting a friend and talking with him for half an hour before I realized that he had shaved off his mustache. I was talking with my memory of who he was and not with the God/Reality right before my eyes. We live in the habit of relating to concepts of reality as a way to deal with the magnitude of God/Reality and protect ourselves from it. To survive we need the concept of being hit by a car as we cross

THE FAR SIDE



And for the rest of his life, Ernie told his friends that he had talked with God.

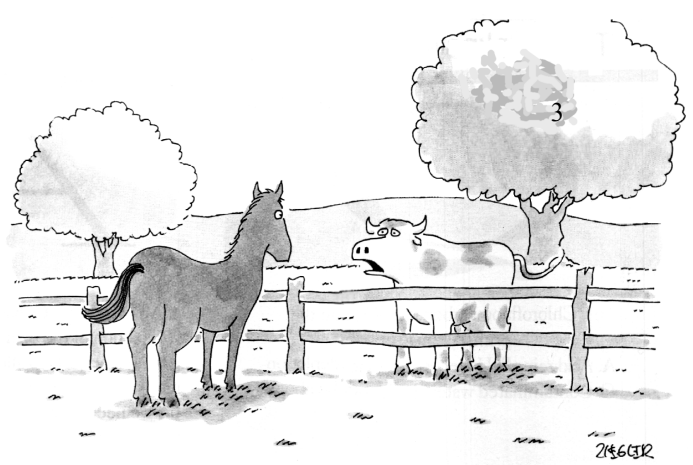
a busy street. We also need to look both ways and hold hands.

Sin is allowing concepts to limit our awareness. "My father didn't like Muslims so they must be bad and I will avoid contact with them." "The world's lost anyway so I'll pray to Jesus to save me." "I have nothing against Gay and Lesbian people." "I earned everything I've gotten by my own efforts." "God loves me and will protect me." There are a thousand mirages we project on the world that have no God/Reality save as creations of imagination.

A Holy life begins by understanding the projective nature of the mind and committing to the cultivation of awareness in relationship with these projections. We cannot be free of projections but we can see them clearly and respond to them in an equanimous way. It is a conscious choice made in each moment.

There are endless varieties of ways to cultivate awareness. For some the Bible provides the clues to seeing God/Reality at work. Others find access through ritual and song. Yet others find it in silence observing the breath. None are better or worse but suit the temperament of the individual. In the work of cultivating awareness the individual is of tremendous importance as each moment is unique and particular. In the particular are the messages which awaken. The particular is always now.

Why confront the false projections if all the world's a stage for a Divine Comedy? What will it get me? The great benefit of even the smallest drops of awareness is being in touch with God/Reality which conveys the experience of meaning and fulfillment. The runner absorbed in the flow of running, the scientist getting the first analysis from the computer, the artist



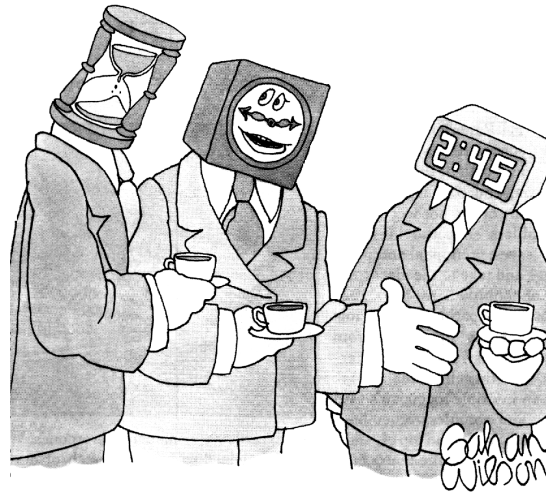
"I've been a cow all my life, honey, Don't ask me to change now."

seeing the patterns of color, the singer projecting the high E, are at one with existence and not separate from it. They are engaged dancing with the moment. Even in the agony of pain can come a profound joy and energy found in absorption in the present moment. My own experiences of these moments and the reports I have from others suggest that in the moment of absorption, the questions of meaning disappear.

This is no omega point at the end of one's life or the end of time in some heaven realm but right now. Unitarian Universalists believe in life before death. There are no preconditions, no courses which must be completed, no meditation practices to be mastered. Awareness is unconditional --- love.

For me dwelling in awareness is dwelling in the realm of love. Real love (and not hormone crazed obsession) is being in relationship with what is and not turning away but turning towards. This is the message on the tongues of the billions of voices of God/Reality. And it is hard. It is the hardest work in the world. It can be very painful. Awareness/Love often sharpens that pain. And to really enter the work is to abandon all the formulas and codes. The only security will be the guarantee of mystery.

A church is a place where people can gather who have made this commitment, no matter how tentative or conditional, to cultivating awareness and responding to its truth. Gathering to share this journey not only nourishes our individual efforts but makes God/Reality present in the congregation. We literally build a community of God/Reality by our intention to do so. The stone and mortar become infused with this intention. The commitment echoes in the architecture. People gathering to know God/Reality magnifies the glory of the work.



"Basically, we're all trying to say the same thing."

No matter how we choose to live out our lives, the religious aspect of life is always there calling to us. We cannot escape the unanswerable questions but we can live them with awareness and find provisional answers each day. That answer can be as disturbing as a feeling of empty meaninglessness. That answer can be as rewarding as the grace of ecstasy. No matter what answer is found it will remain provisional. All is impermanent in human existence save one thing - awareness which is one with God, which is one with Reality, which is one with our own Being.