

## Chalice Lighting

*From a quote on "Color Blindness" by Michael Eric Dyson, 1996*

"The ideal of a color-blind society is a pale imitation of a greater, grander ideal: of living in a society where our color won't be denigrated, where our skin will be neither a badge for undue privilege nor a sign of social stigma. Because skin, race, and color have in the past been the basis of social inequality, they must play a role in righting the social wrongs on which our society has been built. We can't afford to be blind to color when extreme color consciousness continues to mold the fabric and form of our nation's history."

## Prayer and Meditation

*From: An interview with Deepak Chopra on the video Explorations Into Consciousness*

"People have fear of the unknown. What they should fear is the known. The known is all the past training they've had that has locked them into a certain reality. The unknown is what we should be stepping into in every moment of our existence. By doing so, life would become more exciting. There's nothing like getting in touch with yourself."

Now, let us meditate on these words.

**Call for Offertory** (for support of Sandwich-Making, a First Unitarian Social Responsibility Committee project)

#432 from Hymnal:

If someone would scatter seed on the ground  
And would sleep and rise night and day,  
The seed would sprout and grow.  
The earth produces of itself  
First the blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear.  
When the grain is ripe, the harvest has come.

Mark 4

## 1st Reading

*The first reading is from an article entitled White Privilege: Unpacking the Invisible Knapsack. The article is considered a 'classic' by anti-racist educators. Peggy McIntosh is a European-American feminist and anti-racist activist.*

“As a white person, I realized I had been taught about racism as something which puts others at a disadvantage, but had been taught not to see one of its corollary aspects, white privilege, which puts me at an advantage.

Many, perhaps most, of our white students in the United States think that racism doesn't affect them because they are not people of color; they do not see “whiteness” as a racial identity.

In my class and place, I did not recognize myself as a racist because I was taught to see racism only in individual acts of meanness by members of my group, never in invisible systems conferring unsought racial dominance on my group from birth.

My schooling gave me no training in seeing myself as an oppressor, as an unfairly advantaged person or as a participant in a damaged culture. I was taught to see myself as an individual whose moral state depended on her individual moral will. My schooling followed this pattern: whites are taught to think of their lives as morally neutral, normative, and average, and also ideal, so that when we work to benefit others, this is seen as work which will allow ‘them’ to be more like ‘us’.”

## 2nd Reading

A quote from Margaret Young:

Often people attempt to live their lives backwards:  
they try to **have** more things, or more money,  
in order to **do** more of what they want,  
so they will **be** happier.

The way it actually works is the reverse.  
You must first **be** who you really are,  
then **do** what you need to do,  
in order to **have** what you want.

## Sermon

*The first portion of the sermon, concerning the elements of transformation, is quoted liberally from Living Deeply: The Art & Science of Transformation in Everyday Life, by Marilyn Mandala Schlitz, Cassandra Vieten, and Tina Amorik, pages 92-112.*

### “Being Intentional About Racial Inclusiveness”

This morning, I will be weaving together two strains of thought which, I hope, by the end of my sermon will make sense. One topic is the process of ‘being intentional’ and how

that produces transformational action, and the second topic is racial inclusiveness. So, let me begin this weaving.

In the book Living Deeply: The Art & Science of Transformation in Everyday Life the authors outline the four essential elements of transformative practice: intention, attention, repetition and guidance.

They begin by noting that the first step to any conscious transformative path is personal choice -- the will to change, motivation, or put more simply: **intention**. It's an interesting paradox: even though transformation is a natural process -- one that you primarily need to recognize and surrender to -- it also requires making the choice, *each moment of each day*, to be in greater alignment with who you are at your core. In the process, you become a co-conspirator in your own evolution. In other words, intention is a choice you make about where to place your awareness.

Intention not only fuels the transformative process through commitment, it also imbues actions with transformative potential. In other words, bringing strong intention to any constructive action can make that action transformative.

A second key component of the transformative experience is a shift in perspective - you begin to look at the world with fresh eyes. In the process, you begin to notice things in a new way. A transformative practice you can start today is paying greater **attention** to your everyday habits. If you're like most people, transformation may require that you break from some pretty deeply ingrained patterns of thinking and behavior, many of which you may be in denial about. But before changing any of these behaviors, we must become aware of them -- *we must bring them into consciousness*.

Just as physical exercise helps form your musculoskeletal system and improve your cardiovascular health, transformative practice helps you move into a new way of being. Learning to live more deeply requires a third key component, **repetition**. Part of the practice is the building of new habits; it makes sense that you'll need to engage in the process on a regular basis to reinforce them. Since the brain continuously reorganizes itself, repeated transformative practices may allow us to consciously shape our brains and our behaviors.

Fourth, **guidance** from experienced teachers and sacred texts is helpful to learning a practice correctly and staying on course over time. External guidance must be balanced by your own internal wisdom.

Of these four elements, as I noted at the outset, my focus will be primarily on *Intention as it motivates action*, with reference to the other three elements.

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In order to create real change, we have to be willing to set aside significant blocks of time to work on them. If that means less time to sit in front of a TV, or less time to goof off, or less energy for social pleasures, then that's simply *what it takes*.

No major social movement in America -- or anywhere else -- succeeded without a core group of people putting a wealth of time and energy into its implementation. It *is important to be intentional* in your planning, but without the willingness to put out a lot of 'directed' time and energy, such processes will never change.

Many people think that work on political and social change occur 'when we have the time', as though they are some sort of 'polite social engagement in community work'. But social change is hard work and it takes a lot of time and energy and *dedication*. It's not enough to simply 'intend' to work on social change, it takes rolling up our sleeves and getting dirty.

But as important as it is to be intentional, that is not enough. You must personally be willing to follow-up on your intentions and proactively implement them, instead of simply talking about them or hoping someone else will do it for you.

Hence, critical to any intentionality is the willingness to 'walk your talk'. As we all know, talk itself is cheap and actions speak infinitely louder than words. Good thoughts and fine speeches are positive, but they are worth little without a willingness to follow them with a change in behavior and action.

One of my favorite quotes about transformation is from Joseph Campbell. "Follow your bliss and doors will open where none previously existed."

*In the process of the transformative journey, you create the doors, you walk through them, and then invite others to walk through them with you. You create change and consequences result from every change.*

Now that I've discussed intentionality and the importance of acting upon those intentions, I want to move to the second part of my sermon today.

In the past couple of years, we have displayed a greater willingness to engage in a multi-cultural journey, by initially inviting, via our Welcoming Congregation, lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people into our congregational life. And we have shown success in that effort. On June 30, via the joint efforts of the Social Justice Chairs of First Unitarian of St. Louis, Emerson Chapel, Elliot Chapel and First Unitarian of Alton, Illinois, our four congregations marched together in the St. Louis Pride Parade, visually and vocally proclaiming our support of LGBT civil rights and inviting LGBT people into our congregations. I see that as a very positive development and one which assists us in opening our hearts and minds to the wider culture.

Having done that, I would now encourage us to take more steps on that multicultural journey. As we all know, the world in which we live is becoming more 'global'; the old narrow parochial view of the world, where only a small tribe grouped together, separate from the larger world culture, is becoming a thing of the past.

St. Louis has always been a gathering place for many different cultures; as the 'Gateway to the West', it has historically been a city where many groups gathered as a way-station on the journey further afield. But one of the other major historical legacies of St. Louis as a city was that it was located in a slave state, and, as a result, we have been burdened with a legacy of **institutional racism**. The degree of racial polarity in our city has dragged it down economically and engendered a fair degree of mutual distrust and animosity.

Many residents of St. Louis, of all racial groups, live in monocultural neighborhoods, their children attend monocultural schools, they worship in monocultural religious institutions. Most of their friends are from within the same racial group that they are. Oh, they might interact with other racial and ethnic groups at work or when out shopping, but their social and economic world is largely circumscribed by race. And that limitation is often quite conscious, at least to the extent that they feel a subliminal discomfort in the company of people who don't look like them.

As a person who both grew up in a multiethnic family and later became an anti-racism trainer for the World of Difference Program, I'm always felt a bit incredulous when I meet a person in St. Louis who is white, and they say, in apparent innocence "I don't know what you're talking about when you say there is all this racism in St. Louis. I just don't see it". I now realize that, given the institutionalized racism, they may be 'telling the truth' *from their perspective*.

As Peggy McIntosh pointed out in the reading today, in America people who are white live in a sea of privilege and entitlement. And if you're a fish in the ocean, you are unaware of the ocean around you -- it's 'just reality'.

Generally, when white people refer to 'race', they are talking about people who are non-European white, *as though being white is not a racial group*. Tim Wise, who is a nationally-known speaker on racial sensitivity, speaks about how it is important that white people in America 'own their whiteness', own the fact that being white *is* a racial distinction. Only by doing so can they begin to confront the entitlement that is conferred on whiteness in our country.

That is one of my personal discomforts about the current cultural and legal attack on Affirmative Action. It's as though after 20 years of allowing racial preference to be given to minority groups in an attempt to redress past inequalities and bring greater balance to the academic and economic environment, we are suddenly going to ignore the way in which whites in America have had 400 years of Affirmative Action, where having white skin gave a person a significant racial preference.

When students are given a preference in admissions to the best colleges in the country due to 'legacy' advantages -- because their parents were graduates of that school -- we fail to take into account the fact that until recently, African Americans were not allowed to attend those universities and therefore could not establish a 'legacy' for their own children.

As members of a larger Unitarian Universalist religious tradition which has a strong history of working for social change in America, we have distinct advantages in our overview of the world around us. But in confronting 'race' in America, being 'race-blind' is NOT advantageous. Culture *does* have a place in our dialogue, and ignoring racism around us does not cure the problem.

Being 'liberals' does not necessitate that we fail to notice our differences; in fact, to do so makes the problem worse. We are different *and* we are similar. It is equally important to be aware that skin color has historically separated us from one another, often for very illogical reasons, and at the same time to remember that 'race' is a cultural myth. This myth was promulgated in the 16th & 17th centuries as a way to divide groups and make it appear that people with darker skin were 'mentally' inferior and 'deserved' a lesser role in the economic sphere of the society. The 'lie' to that myth is that all humans share 99.9% of the same genetic markers, and that except for skin color, there is only one 'race' -- the human race.

It has been said that "Sunday is the most racially segregated day of the week." That has been historically true in our nation, not simply a legacy of our racist past here in St. Louis. While that has allowed us to gloss over and ignore the racial polarity around us, I would encourage us to actively challenge the cultural acceptance of the observation. Our congregation, the only Unitarian Universalist congregation in the city of St. Louis, located as we are 3 blocks south of the 'Delmar Divide', is in an excellent position -- and I would argue in an advantageous location -- to 'act upon' helping to bridge that racial divide.

We needn't start from scratch in creating that bridge. The National Conference on Community and Justice has sponsored a Dismantling Racism Conference since the mid-1990's for leaders in our region. FOCUS St. Louis has sponsored a Bridging the Racial Divide program for many years. The Jewish Anti-Defamation League, through their World of Difference Program, has been working on confronting racism in our community. Nearer to home, the Holy Ground Collaborative here in the Central West End has for the past 10 years been fostering interfaith and interracial dialogue in our neighborhood. And the Unitarian Universalist Association has many resources for engaging in multicultural workshops, that encourage congregations to become more racially aware.

On a more practical level, what kinds of steps can **we** take, as a congregation, to achieve both racial diversity and inclusiveness?

- We can partner with a politically progressive African American congregation on joint projects and in the pursuit of mutual education (much like CRC has done with Cote Brilliant)
- We can use the materials and resources listed on the UUA website pertaining to multicultural change.
- We can engage in adult education courses on racial sensitivity.

- We can view, together, films such as “Traces of the Trade”, a documentary about how the New England states actively fostered the slave trade in America, by building the ships that ferried slaves across the Middle Passage. Racism in the northern states has it’s own historical legacy -- it’s not just a southern issue.
- We can engage in discussions about these issues and ways in which we can become ‘part of the solution’.

Further -- and more importantly, I would encourage our congregation to:

- Actively invite African Americans into our congregation, by promoting awareness of Unitarian Universalism among communities of color.
- Encourage our present and future African American members to become leaders in the congregation, first as Chairs of church committees, and then as members of the Board of Trustees (Policy Board, Church Council).
- Educate ourselves on how to truly become a ‘welcoming congregation’ on many levels, not just welcoming lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people, but also encouraging actual racial diversity in our membership.
- Promote ‘Standing on the Side of Love’ in all aspects of our congregational life, learning how to be more effective advocates for social change.

In conclusion:

Will we make mistakes along the way, as we implement these changes in our congregational demographics and move toward a multicultural & multiracial religious community? That’s a guarantee. Mistakes are part of any journey. We ARE going to make mistakes and are likely to feel embarrassment about those mistakes. But what is critical is to learn to forgive ourselves, get up again, dust ourselves off, and continue the journey with open hearts and minds. Mistakes are all part of the practice, and being perfect will never teach you anything of value.

It is important to remember:

What is the one most truly paradoxical aspect of this life, that is continual, timeless, and never changes? **Change.**

We can simply ride the wave of change and let it take us where IT chooses, or WE can choose to become ‘change agents’. I believe the second option is more valid, and infinitely more empowering.

Hence, with all four elements of the transformative journey, we can ‘make the change’ into a consciously multi-cultural, racially inclusive congregation, by:

- (1) being intentional,
- (2) paying clear attention to the steps we take and educating ourselves about what constitutes ‘right relations’,
- (3) repeating the lessons we are going to learn, as we all grow together, and
- (4) all the while being guided by our Unitarian Universalist theology and history, hand-in-hand with thoughtful anti-racism teachers in the present.

I believe it is time to move our Beloved Community into the 21st century, allowing us to once again be the “Beacon on the Hill”, our hearts open and ready for dynamic change.

### **Benediction**

We have the opportunity to lead the change in our church community in vital ways that include becoming consciously aware of racial entitlements that get in the way of being a truly welcoming congregation.

As you leave church today, I encourage you to take hold of the spirit of this transformation as a clarion call, and go out into the world, knowing that **WE can be the change that we seek.**