

Live Your Light

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January 9, 2011

So, how many of you have been able to keep all of your New Year's resolutions so far? Hmm...impressive!

How many of you are more like me – you trashed at least 5 of them before the end of January 2nd? Ah...my people!

It is often at this time of the year, as we end one cycle and move into another, that we consider how we are living our lives and at least ponder making changes to be more of who we would like to see ourselves be – kinder, thinner, fitter, timelier, tidier, whatever. Whether we are trying to move away from what we see as a bad habit, or move toward living our good habits more fully, it seems to be in our nature to want to improve and show the world a better version of who we are. And January is often the time when we make these resolutions to change.

I've been watching the snowflakes lately and remembering that they say each one is unique. I haven't done the research to prove it myself, but I trust it's true. And each of us is unique, as well. Imagine, in the history of the humankind, as far as we know, there's NEVER been another person just like you. Yes, there have been others with red hair, or brown eyes, or scrunchy pinky toes, but NO ONE else has been here with the amazing combination of body, mind, and spirit that you have brought to the planet by being alive.

What a gift we have been given! We each are a rare diamond, faceted for our own special brilliant radiance. What opportunity each life presents for the interconnected web! Whatever assortment of gifts, talents, abilities, skills, thoughts, and dreams we have available to us exists in no other person alive today, or who lived before, or who will ever live in the future, just because of who we are. This is our chance – this life – to share what only we can, to experience what only we can do, to create what only we can dream. In light of the unique possibility we each represent in the world, our resolve to be more of our better selves is a gift not only for us to have the better life we imagine, but to create better a life for the world.

These words from author George Bernard Shaw, from his play *Man and Superman*: “Life is no brief candle to me. It is a sort of splendid torch which I have got hold of for the moment, and I want to make it burn as brightly as possible before handing it on to future generations.”

Unitarian Universalists affirm the worth and dignity of every person. Our Principles recognize that each life is important, precious, special, that every person has a unique gift to offer the world. We aren't just talking about other folks. We're talking about ourselves, too – appreciating the specialness that our one precious life represents in the world. Recognizing that who we are represents a once in lifetime chance to show up in the world and let our inner light, our self, be seen and loved and appreciated and well-used in the time we have on earth.

From our Christian roots, we are reminded of this special mission in these words from the Gospel of Matthew, Chapter 5, Verses 14-16:

“You are the light of the world. A city built on a hill cannot be hid. No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lamp-stand, and it gives light to

all in the house. In the same way, let your light shine before others, so that they may see your good work.”

What does it mean to live your light – to let your light shine? It means breathing life-giving breath into that spark within you and letting it grow into an amazing light that the entire world can see. It means embodying your deepest truth. Closing the gap between who you are on the inside and what you show to the world outside. It means you open yourself to growth and to becoming who you are truly, fully, and joyfully meant to be.

Living your light means that you give yourself permission to overcome your fears and wounds, that you embrace and honor your human gifts – your light of life – and you let your inner presence, passion, and purpose be on full display every possible moment of your life. It means questioning your assumptions, taking the risk to grow and change. It means mustering the courage to be who you really are in service of personal freedom, wholeness, and joy.

It is important that you were born, that each of us has made an appearance in this life. Each of us possesses a piece of the truth, a part of the whole, and only we can choose to share this resource with the world. In the words of Neale Donald Walsh, “let your light shine upon the world, so the world will know who you really are, and its people will know why they really are as well, through the light of your example. The darkness of our world awaits you – not to engulf you, but to be transformed by you.” Sharing your light with the world is one of the reasons for your life.

Imagine what is lost forever when we are not able to fully express our shining inner light, when we die with some of our music still in us? I’ve often thought of the implications of this Hasidic tale from the Jewish tradition: Rabbi Zusia said: “When I appear before the Almighty, I am not afraid to be asked, “Reb Zusia, why have you not been like Abraham, the patriarch, or like Moses, our great teacher? The question I truly fear is: “Reb Zusia, have you truly been Reb Zusia?”

So, then, how do we live our light? In the words of writer Amara Rose, we do it “by melting our resistance to being a candle.” And one of the factors we have to face is our fear.

I heard an interview on the CBC the other day, done in the 1950s, with author Lee Deighton, who wrote **The Ipcress File** and other thrillers. He was talking about the nature of fear, and how it inhibits our lives. Here’s the gist of what he said, “When we are children, we’re afraid of the dark. As we get older, this changes into a fear of not knowing. We are afraid we won’t know what to do or we will be caught unprepared, unaware, or unable by something we weren’t anticipating. And, we also have a sneaking suspicion that whatever is out there waiting for us isn’t benign, but rather is waiting to do us harm. And our fear stops us in our tracks.”

Our fear response is a natural, and useful, part of being human. And, it has its place in helping to protect us from the dangers and perils of the world. When our ancestors lived on the savannahs, our flight or fight response was an adaptive way to deal with the very real and present threat of being attacked, whether by animals or others.

While modern life continues to offer threats to life and limb, what we more often are faced with now are threats to our ego, to our sense of personhood. In the words of speaker Tony Robbins, we experience F – E – A – R: False Events Appearing Real. Those kinds of threats need a very different response than flight or fight, and we can

learn to deal with our modern day fears more effectively than by being hindered from living our lives fully in light of them.

Remember this morning's responsive reading, those famous words from Marianne Williamson: "It is our light, not our darkness, that most frightens us." Our "playing small does not serve the world." We yearn to be made whole, to live into the fullest sense of ourselves, to utilize all of the talents and uniqueness we possess while we have the breath to do so. We deserve to liberate ourselves from our fear, not only for our own sake, but for the permission that our fearlessness gives to others to liberate themselves, as well. You deserve to live your light and the world needs it, as well.

Life can be joyful and wonderful, and life can also be tough. None of us arrives and thrives in the world unscathed by hurts, wounds, slights, challenges, and pain. That's why we are here for one another; to be witnesses for each other in our struggles, to be cheerleaders for one another as we face our challenges and wounds and find our way through. Our light can help us show compassion and caring, for ourselves and for others, as we seek to heal our wounds in service of a life lived to the fullest.

We must also deal with our own feelings of inadequacy, of fearing that we fall short in the "light" department. What do we do when we think others have more or better "lights?"

One of my favorite cartoons shows a man talking to his therapist, saying, "Of course I count my blessings. But then I think of people who have more and better blessings, and it pisses me off." I certainly can relate to that kind reaction!

In truth, comparing ourselves to others in this way is a losing game. I think that it can always appear that others have been given "more and better blessings;" that they have talents we wish were our own. But, that isn't the potential we arrived with. Our spiritual journey, our quest, is to find out who we are and to make the best of our unique inner light.

Perhaps it is better to be inspired by these words from Universalist minister John Murray, who we credit for being the "father" of Universalism in the New World:

"You may possess a small light, but uncover it, let it shine, use it in order to bring more light and understanding to the hearts and minds of men and women. Give them not hell, but hope and courage, preach kindness and everlasting love."

I'd like to share this story adapted from one by the Rev. Vanessa Southern. She's come up with another way to think about those with gifts and talents we wish we were lucky enough to possess. She writes:

"My mother's family, immigrants from Holland, fell in love with Ella Fitzgerald. My mother and aunts knew the entire "Ella Sings Gershwin" collection by heart and serenaded us at family gatherings. Soon, all the nieces and nephews were able to join in, too.

So, perhaps it is no surprise that if I had a choice and could be anything in the world, I'd be a jazz singer, not a minister. There are some similarities between the two professions – both ministers and jazz singers know life's ups and downs, both reach out across dark spaces to try to connect with others and say, "You are not alone," and "I've been there, too." Both wear a lot of black.

Clearly, there are differences, too. The work hours are totally reversed. And, there's that nagging issue of talent.

I was reminded of the talent issue just the other day. Still singing along with CD, I switched off my car and got out. Without Ella and the big band to accompany me, or drown me out, all I could hear in the silence and echo of the parking garage was me – a waffling voice and missed notes. I remembered how much I yearn to have a voice like Ella's.

At that moment, I had a crazy thought. What if some crazy flip-flop were the case? What if I were to find out that years ago a beautiful jazz singer had dreamed of being me, to have the gifts and talents I possess? Indeed, what if she had dreamed me up and her highest aspirations were supposed to come to be through me? How ungrateful I would be to stand there wasting my time dreaming of being her!

What would happen if each of us were to find out that we were the creation of someone else's dreams? Would it change the way we live our lives? Would we approach life a bit like a treasure hunt and spend our time looking for the gifts hidden in us?

I've decided to spend more of my time wondering what notes Ella had in mind when she dreamed me up. I have no doubt that they are s'wonderful. I just need to find them."

I want to close today with one of my favorite poems, written by Kaylin Haught, titled, "God Says Yes to Me."

I asked God if it was okay to be melodramatic, and she said yes

I asked her if it was okay to be short, and she said it sure is

I asked her if I could wear nail polish or not wear nail polish

and she said honey, she calls me that sometimes,

she said you can do just exactly what you want to

Thanks God I said and is it even okay if I don't paragraph my letters

Sweetcakes God said (who knows where she picked that up)

what I'm telling you is Yes Yes Yes

I wish you the best life possible in this New Year, whether you have chosen to make resolutions or not. I hope that you will fan the flame of your inner light and let it shine. I hope you find more of the answers to those timeless questions: Who am I? What am I doing here? How can I best serve? What do I want to become, create, and accomplish in this life?

Say "yes" to life and live your light. And, as you find your light burning brighter, I pray you resolve to let yourself share more of it this year – with yourself, with this community, with the world.

What I'm telling you is YES, YES, YES. Blessed be.