

When I first came to Nora as a visitor with Vicki, I had this feeling of coming home. I couldn't put in words why I felt that way until I was at a "learning session" with Don Rollins. It was there that he explained about Unitarian Universalism as being a covenant based church in comparison to a doctrinal based church. Here, it is the people who are holy and we stand in and around and under or are lifted by each other. We carry that value as we walk in this world. Each is on his/her own journey and we celebrate each person's strengths, their truths, their differences instead of competing to make them like ours. For me I could see the dogma/doctrinal effect in the world we live. It rips apart more than it weaves strength into the fabric of this earth. Truth with either a capital or small "T" is as unique as we are. When this diversity is celebrated together it weaves a sustainable tapestry.

Always, for me, is the question of how do I recognize and own my truth? I'd like to share something written by another seeker, Rainer Maria Rilke.

Late in his life, the Czech poet Rainer Maria Rilke maintained a correspondence with a young poet, Franz Xaver Krappus. Young Franz, on reading a collection of Rilke's poetry, spontaneously sent Rilke some poetry of his own for Rilke to read and offer some advice. The following is part of his response which captured my attention as well as my imagination and heart.

He said:

"Try to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."

Sometimes there is a knowing that transcends our heads, circles our hearts and lies deep within our beings. Gnosis is a Greek word which stands for “knowledge of spiritual truths reputedly possessed by the ancient Gnostics, who believed them to be essential to salvation”. That is the level of “knowing” that I am referring to.

There was this early Christian community who called themselves Gnostics. There are the Gnostic gospels that Dana referred to a couple of weeks ago written by Thomas, Peter and Mary Magdalene. In this community of the very early church, they honored each individual's capacity to know truth, how to be in commune or how to connect with the creative life force and to live that connection in this world.

For them there was no need for a leader nor any hierarchical based authority as each person lead from the living out of their own gnosis- their own relationship with truth. In their understanding of Christianity, Jesus had said how the law was written in their hearts, not on stone tablets and he demonstrated how to live that way. To Know others was to know more. The individuals in the community mattered and were a great source of strength.

This idea of 'gnosis' has been around for a long time. Oftentimes one's own knowing flies in the face of conventional or societal norms or mores. Such is the case of Abraham. Abraham, of the OT, was someone who had a powerful relationship to the Divine or the Life Force and lived as if his truth, with the small “t” was the truth with the capital “t”. Just take his adventure with his only son, Isaac. Abraham planned to kill Isaac as a sacrifice to demonstrate his love and faith in God. He knew God was asking this of him. Now, any way you look at that action, if you or I'd have happened upon that scene, any one of us would have been appalled and hauled Abraham's biscuits off to jail for attempted

murder. Yet somehow that story has never been told from such a negative perspective. Instead, Abraham has been honored for the courage and faith of living what he knew to be true.

The Russian author, Dostoyevsky dealt with this same theme in his book *Crime and Punishment*. In it, one man knows that the community he lives in will be better off without the presence of an "evil" landlord. It is an interesting foray into one's truth as it impacts the mores and values of society. There are many other examples throughout our societal history. The folk hero Robin Hood is another.

Into the here and now. I am a new member of this community and don't know many of you nor do you know me well. I would like to share one of my experiences of knowing which I live as if it were true.

At the age of 14, I knew that there was no hell. At least, not the hell I'd been taught about in my family and Catholic education. I remember piecing things I'd learned together and none of it adding up in my 14 year old brain. Basically, if I really believed as the Catholic Church taught that I was created in the image and likeness of God, if that was truly who I was and so was everyone else, then to earn or even choose hell would mean that we would have to totally deny who we were on all levels of our being.

To me that level of denial of self was impossible.

I brought this idea to the dinner table. My father had converted to Catholicism as an adult. My mother always said that converts make the best Catholics. So as I put forth my questions or proposals, my efforts were met with a crusader-like force and intensity. We had many long dinner table discussions. We went to hell and back many times. However, deep within my 14 year-old self, there was an unshakable, peace-filled knowing, that not even hell nor the fear of going there (which was my father's worry) could diminish the veracity of what I knew to be true for me.

As I've grown and lived this knowing or truth for me, I have come to see that it is a path which leads away from my making choices based on fear... to one where I am called to demonstrate greater love. It is like going from a black and white life to a technicolored life. Choices are easier in black and white; just one or the other, right or wrong. In Technicolor there are so many more choices and choosing one color or a color that lies in between the hues changes the whole pallet.

About six or seven months ago, I had told my parents about my decision to join Nora church. I knew it was going to be difficult for them to hear, but I was "locked and loaded" for their angst and assault. At the end of our conversation, my dad said that he saw how much consideration I'd given this and he too, as an adult had converted and knew how hard of a decision it could be. I was pleasantly surprised at his response.

Hell came back for a visit this past December when my father was dying. He was in a hospice home and one evening about five days before he died I came to visit him. We were alone and I was asking him to think of some sign or signal we could set up so that I'd know when he was around me after he died. It was a stretch for him even to think this was possible and he worried about how he'd ever remember our sign. I told him not to worry, that I knew somehow he'd remember. We settled on seeing feathers.

A bit later that evening, by his bedside, his deathbed, he told me that he did plan to come back with many helpers to help him bring me back to the Catholic church. His reasoning was that he didn't want to spend eternity without me or any of his children.....

I was silent. Speaking from the deathbed, a parent to a child, is like the Pope speaking "ex-cathedra". (Infallibility)

All I could do was to hug and kiss him, tell him that I loved him and then I had to leave. Outside, in the parking lot, I threw up. The upheaval was as emotional as it was physical.

Of course five minutes later I was in the car calling Vicki. She was, as usual, the voice of calm and reason and insight. She affirmed for me that I had given my father the gift of allowing him to speak his truth to me. By not arguing or defending myself, I wasn't in that black and white world, but rather in a world of beautiful colors by honoring him with my listening.

However, now he gets it and hopefully he gets me and knows we'll have an eternity together.

Vicki wrote this little poem:

My truth may not be your truth.

It may not be fact.

It may be disputable and full of holes.

It is however "mine" and it is a necessary part of my journey.

It is the flashing light that keeps me from shattering my soul on the jagged rocks of life.

It is how I choose to live.

It is my covenant with all that I may not know or understand.

I'd like to open this as a dialog and hear your truths, what it is that you know.

I will close by sharing again with you Rilke's words.

"Try to have patience with everything unresolved in your heart and to try to love the questions themselves as if they were locked rooms or books written in a very foreign language. Don't search for the answers, which could not be given to you now, because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps then, someday far in the future, you will gradually, without even noticing it, live your way into the answer."