

Move Me Brightly: Inspiration & the Grateful Dead

A service celebrated at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Grand Traverse on 04 February 2007
Chip Roush

WELCOME & ANNOUNCEMENTS

{*welcome, announcements*}

PRELUDE "Some folks trust to reason Others trust to might I don't trust to nothing But I know it come out right" Holy friends, we are all just playing in the band...

{*music: Playin' In The Band*}

OPENING WORDS From a Grateful Dead song, written by Robert Hunter: "Comes a time when the blind man takes your hand says: don't you see? got to make it somehow on the dreams you still believe Don't give it up you've got an empty cup only love can fill only love can fill."

This morning, and for the rest of our lives, may we be filled to overflowing with the deep, boundless ever-widening love at the heart of the universe.

OFFERING

{*collection*}

MUSICAL TEXT The song Jamie just sang, *Sunrise*, was about a Native American ceremony held to honor the death of the Grateful Dead's road manager, Rex Jackson.

Our next song contains the following prayer to Inspiration, an invocation of the Muse: "Inspiration, move me brightly light the song with sense and color, hold away despair More than this I will not ask faced with mysteries dark and vast statements just seem vain at last some rise, some fall, some climb to get to Terrapin"

{*music: Lady With A Fan...drums...Terrapin Station*}

INTERMISSION It is now intermission. For the next two minutes or so, I invite you to get up, greet somebody you haven't met yet, maybe play with some balloons or bubbles. As Bob Weir used to say, "We'll be back in just a little bit."

{*intermission*}

ENTR'ACTE

{The Wheel}

JOYS & CONCERNS Part of our journeying together is the sharing of joys and sorrows.

When something significant occurs to us, or to our family or friends, we share that information directly, with a minister or a member of the Pastoral Care Team. We may also announce it on a Sunday morning.

As I read the cards submitted today, Karen will light a candle for each person.

{joys & concerns} We light one last candle for all of the joys and concerns which remain in our hearts.

PASTORAL PRAYER We make meaning in our lives by seeing them in larger contexts. We use many metaphors for those contexts—

such as God, or Mother Earth, or the Buddha or Great Spirit or any of thousands more. We know that our ultimate concerns cannot be fully contained by any one of those words, but we use them to help focus our minds and hearts as we attempt to live more intentionally.

So take a moment to get comfortable, let your awareness focus into your body... take a deep breath and feel your lungs move... feel the life, pulsing in your veins... Let us pray: Spirit of Life and Death, Source of Change and Unceasing Love, we are grateful for this day; we are grateful for the opportunity to be gathered here together; we are grateful for the experience of being human,

for our joys and sorrows,

our anger, fear and hope;

we desire to feel our emotions fully—

to revel in our gladness

and to accept, honor and move through our suffering;

we desire support in our trials;

we pledge to support others in theirs; we especially raise up

those joys and concerns just mentioned

and those that remain in the sanctuaries of our hearts; we desire a quick and just end to the wars we wage;

we desire strength and comfort for those who have lost their eyesight, their faculties, or their limbs; we desire solace for all those who have lost someone they love; we confess our failures and shortcomings;

we desire forgiveness

and we pledge to forgive; we desire to accept our limited control over our lives and our world;

we desire the courage and wisdom to take appropriate risks; we are grateful for passion and inspiration, which lead us toward bigger or deeper or fuller lives; we are grateful for reason and understanding,

which help us plan and balance our endeavors; we are grateful for the experience of oneness—

that we are linked with,

and have a role in, our evolving world; we desire to feel that oneness more fully, more frequently, and more compellingly; we are grateful for our lives together; we desire that all beings receive enough food, and shelter, and peace of mind today; we pledge ourselves in pursuit of that goal; praise for living. So may we be.

MUSICAL RESPONSE

"Goin' home, goin' home By the waterside I will rest my bones. Listen to the river sing sweet songs to rock my soul." The congregation is invited to join with the Vocal Ensemble when they sing the underlined

words of *Broke-down Palace*, in the insert in your order of worship. For those of you who like to see the musical notation, the chorus melody is printed on the reverse side of that insert.

{Jeremy & the Vocal Ensemble: *Broke-down Palace*}

FIRST READING, One of the hallmarks of a Grateful Dead show was spontaneity. In keeping with that spirit, Karen will now read a poem

{reading}

SECOND READING

New Speedway Boogie Hunter/Garcia

Please don't dominate the rap Jack if you got nothing new to say If you please don't back up the track
This train got to run today

Spent a little time on the mountain Spent a little time on the hill Heard some say better run away Others
say you better stand still

Now I don't know but I been told it's hard to run with the weight of gold Other hand I heard it said it's just
as hard with the weight of lead

Who can deny? Who can deny? it's not just a change in style One step done and another begun in I
wonder how many miles?

Spent a little time on the mountain Spent a little time on the hill Things went down we don't understand
but I think in time we will

Now I don't know but I been told in the heat of the sun a man died of cold Do we keep on coming or stand
and wait with the sun so dark and the hour so late?

You can't overlook the lack Jack of any other highway to ride It's got no signs or dividing lines and very
few rules to guide

Spent a little time on the mountain Spent a little time on the hill I saw things getting out of hand I guess
they always will

I don't know but I been told if the horse don't pull you got to carry the load I don't know whose back's that
strong Maybe find out before too long

One way or another One way or another One way or another this darkness got to give

DRUMZ children to clap this rhythm...all to clap...thighs...stand & clap...overhead...DeDe?

{body percussion}

HOMILY How many of you know the first law of thermodynamics? How many know what "entropy" is?
How many of you have ever had a day, or a week or a decade, where it seemed like you just could not
win, no matter what you tried? It's kind of the same thing.

The first law of thermodynamics is about the conservation of energy: we cannot create energy, only
convert it. The second law of thermodynamics is about entropy, which is the fact that whenever we use or
expend any energy, we lose some of it in the process.

In my high school physics class, we reformulated these laws in a way that was easier to understand: we
cannot win we cannot tie we cannot get out of the game.

In other words, the physical laws of the universe are stacked against us: if we cannot win and we cannot
break even, all we can do is lose. And we have to lose, because we cannot stop the game.

Leaving aside the question of whether or not our high school version of these laws is adequate, it does
seem to be the case that many of us know how it *feels* to be in a situation where we can't win, and we
can't tie, and we can't get out of the game.

This seems to be a pretty common human experience. There may be a few of us here, who have not ever felt that way. And there are probably several who have dealt with it a lot— either from sheer bad luck, or because we differ somehow from the “norms” and expectations of a dominant culture, or both.

At any rate, there were quite a few hands that went up to indicate they have felt that way at least once in their lifetime. The members of the Grateful Dead knew how it felt. They sang about it quite a bit.

In the song we heard right after intermission, the Vocal Ensemble sang, “The wheel is turning and you can't slow down You can't let go and you can't hold on You can't go back and you can't stand still If the thunder don't get you then the lightning will.”

I once had a coworker who was appalled by those lyrics— she found them too negative, even nihilistic. I find them more realistic than pessimistic, I guess, but beyond that, I find them liberating. If the odds are stacked against us, from the beginning, and if we all die at the end of the game, anyway, no matter what we've done or not done, then we might as well have fun while we're losing. We may as well follow our heart, and do what we most want to do, as passionately and enthusiastically as we can.

The song ends with the lyrics, “won't you try just a little bit harder? couldn't you try just a little bit more?” If we can't win, and can't tie, and can't get out of the game, we may as well try our best while we're playing. For me, the song is *more* hopeful than others, because it recognizes the paradoxical, difficult context of our lives, and it still finds meaning there: “If the thunder don't get you, then the lightning will”— so get on out there, and live as fully and richly and passionately as possible, until whichever gets you, gets you.

This passion, that the Grateful Dead had for their music, is part of what made them so successful. Not only did it make their music more fun to listen to, it inspired the same passion in their coworkers and their fans. A lot of musical technology was invented or tested or attempted because the musicians in the Grateful Dead wanted to push the boundaries of the possible. Playing through computers, wireless guitars, and speaker technology like their “wall of sound”— a literal wall of speakers— were all things with which the band experimented. Their passion for music attracted people who were equally passionate about their careers, so the sound systems and beautiful set designs and light shows and even the process of selling tickets were improved and enhanced.

The audience was also inspired. People made beautiful clothing, to wear and/or sell at shows; they created incredible artwork— on their vans & buses, and on paper— and delicious food, and jewelry. There were even people inspired to compile books of lyrics, and lists of concerts, detailing what songs were played when.

And, of course, there were fans inspired to do good works. Some folks passed out garbage bags, to minimize the mess left behind in the parking lot. Some followed the Dead's lead, and worked to save our rainforests. Others worked for other good causes. This is why I think many Deadheads would make good UUs. Both groups value personal freedom, and the right of conscience, although both groups also recognize the need for personal responsibility, and both groups encourage people to find whatever moves us, deep down inside, and express it, fully and passionately, in our lives.

When I first discovered Unitarian Universalism, I was in my early thirties. I had rejected “organized religion” as being too hypocritical, in college, but I hadn't yet found something to replace it. I was searching for community, without much luck, until a friend— also a Deadhead, also a minister— recommended the UUs. I did locate the nearest UU church, but I resisted going. Finally, on a Wednesday night, when there were no cars in the parking lot, I sneaked in, and read all the bulletin boards, and grabbed a handful of pamphlets, and ran out, before somebody could talk to me.

When I got home, I read straight through all the literature, and loved what I was reading. Here was a place where I would not have to say or act as if I believed a certain thing, if I didn't actually believe it! And, even though they allowed this freedom of belief, they still did a lot of good work in the community, and in the wider world. I decided to try a Sunday morning. I timed my arrival so I'd get there just as the service was beginning— like most UUs. I sat toward the back, and I left as soon as the service ended, without talking to a soul. Gradually, I worked my way up to staying for coffee hour, although I still didn't talk to many people. I browsed the books in their bookstore, and signed up for a committee or two, and a Men's Group, and eventually helped start a Young Adult Group, where I met Becky and fell in love.

But on that first Sunday, all that was in the future, and I was still worried that someone would spot me, and corner me and try to convert me and make me commit to something I didn't want to do.

It was a lay-led service, that morning, about alcoholism and recovery, and the path to healing which is very different and ultimately the same for each of us. They played some Beatles music, and told their own stories, and we read Rob Eller-Isaacs' Litany of Atonement: "we forgive ourselves and each other; we begin again in love."

By the time I finished that reading, tears were streaming down my face, and I felt like I'd found a home.

For the next several Sundays, I would still sit toward the back, then I'd practically sprint to my car, and write in my journal. I wrote about my heart feeling full, almost overflowing, and how joyful I was to have found a place that actually encouraged me to be me!

Ten years later, there are still moments that take my breath away, where I am struck dumb with gratitude that I have found this movement, and these people, to walk together on our journey.

Just as I am proud to be a Deadhead, just as I honor the freedom and responsibility that the band promotes, I also celebrate that Unitarian Universalism promotes them, too— and that it provides a sturdy theological grounding for them.

Looking around our sanctuary this morning, I am astonished and overjoyed at the various ways our different passions have been expressed. In somewhat alphabetical order, I can remember the excitement on Cal's face, as he volunteered to Photoshop the artwork on our order of worship; I know DeDe has sung more in these services than she usually does in public; Gretchen loves to tell children's stories; Jamie fell in love with the song *Sunrise* and got a chance to sing it today; her dad, Jeremy, took on a huge task of recruiting and rehearsing a band and arranging parts for non-Grateful Dead instruments like the clarinet and cello, because he loved the idea of the project; Karen found three different readings for this morning, and made a special trip to buy bubbles for the service; Linda searched much longer than usual to find dancing bears, with which to decorate our order of worship; Nancy was so enthusiastic that she went home and arranged the song *Broke-down Palace* for the Vocal Ensemble— in one evening! and the many members of that Vocal Ensemble, who spent extra hours to learn the surprisingly complex rhythms and lyrics of these songs.

All of these people got in touch with an inner passion, and gave it expression through their lives.

And that doesn't even include the passion that Sally brings to the beautiful settings she creates for virtually every service we have here; and the people that wore colorful clothing this morning; and all the musicians who shared their gifts; and the folks who made coffee, or operated the sound system, or passed out orders of worship, or babysat our infants and toddlers, or are planning to attend the Social Justice and Action committee meeting later this afternoon.

Different people have different passions. Part of our job as a church is to help each other discover our passions and then help live them out, as fully as possible. Because, as I've quoted before, Howard Thurman says, "Do not ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and then go and do that. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive."

People who have come alive give me, and Howard Thurman and many UUs and lots of Deadheads, hope: hope for daybreak on the land, hope that, one way or another, this darkness got to end, hope that, every time this wheel turns round, it's bound to cover just a little more ground.

So may we be.

CLOSING HYMN I'm still walking, so I'm sure that I can dance. Through the good times and the bad times, too, let it be a dance! Please rise as you are willing and able and join us in singing #311, *Let It Be A Dance* Please remain standing for our closing words.

{singing}

BENEDICTION Adapting the words of another Grateful Dead lyricist, John Perry Barlow: "Fare thee well now.

Let your life proceed by its own design.

Nothing to tell now.

Let the words be yours, I am done with mine.” Go in peace; go with passion. So may we be.

CHALICE EXTINGUISHMENT & BELLSOUND We now ritually close our sacred worship time, and re-enter “normal time”— which, of course, is also sacred, if only we recognize it.

As we extinguish this flame, let us each kindle the chalice of our own heart, and carry that warmth out into the world. {cymbals} So may we be.

ENCORE

{music: *Turn On Your Lovelight*}