



"Luminescence: Sharing Our Light"

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When I was a kid, I marveled at my father's ability to recite poetry from memory. At the drop of a hat he'd rattle off Poe's "[The Raven](#)" or Tennyson's "[The Charge of the Light Brigade](#)." He explained to me at some point that he used to get extra credit in school if he could recite a poem by heart, and some of them were still in there.

That's quite a phrase, to know something "by heart." To be so assured of its knowledge residing within you that you can bring it out again and again from that deep place.

I don't have many poems by heart, but there's one I can break into pretty frequently, even though my relationship with it has changed a lot over time. Maybe you know this one, by Edgar Guest, called "[It Couldn't Be Done](#)"?

Somebody said that it couldn't be done
But he with a chuckle replied
That "maybe it couldn't," but he would be one
Who wouldn't say so till he'd tried.
So he buckled right in with the trace of a grin
On his face. If he worried he hid it.
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it!

Somebody scoffed: "Oh, you'll never do that;
At least no one ever has done it;"

But he took off his coat and he took off his hat
And the first thing we knew he'd begun it.
With a lift of his chin and a bit of a grin,
Without any doubting or quiddit,
He started to sing as he tackled the thing
That couldn't be done, and he did it.

There are thousands to tell you it cannot be done,
There are thousands to prophesy failure,
There are thousands to point out to you one by one,
The dangers that wait to assail you.
But just buckle in with a bit of a grin,
Just take off your coat and go to it;
Just start in to sing as you tackle the thing
That "cannot be done," and you'll do it.

Well! That's certainly got THAT sorted! Just throw yourself in with a grin!
Every problem, solved!

But what about the ten thousand and more ways NOT to do it? What about the times we do fail? Because we do, of course. It's part of what I loved about our reading today, both delivered by and written by Karen.

"Can we trust enough to keep going on our path, believing our goals are attainable and trusting that there is no failure unless we give up? Can we say with a smile, 'I'm getting closer. I've just found ten thousand ways that won't work'?"

Ten thousand ways that don't work. Taking the wisdom of what has gone before - for good and for ill - and meeting it not with shame or anger, but with a real sense of curiosity.

Luminescence is not the first - nor, surely, will it be the last - time that Unitarian Universalists have decided to make up their own holiday. It's not

terribly common to find this celebration in our congregations, though it has moved out of California and the Pacific region over the years. When I came here and learned about it, it was entirely new to me. And I didn't love it. Why did we need another holiday? Specifically another candle-lighting holiday? Also the blessings and some other resources I found on the website that the folks at Santa Clarita Valley have put up felt interminably long and wordy. And my goodness, do we UUs love to be long and wordy.

Yes, I include myself in that statement. I know that decrying our wordiness during my own homily is a particularly delicious irony. But stick with me for a moment.

There are as many ways to do spiritual seeking, as many ways to do it both well AND poorly, as there are beings to undertake it. And yes, as far as I'm concerned it can be done poorly. I love our reflection today, and I do think there's such a thing as failure. And I also think that giving up is NOT the same as failing. If we have learned again and again that something doesn't work for us, we are allowed to stop. Or change our approach. Or leave it alone for a good long time before trying again.

But as I have pared down the words of the Luminescence ritual over these last three years, I've become quite fond of it. Look at this light we each have! What will happen if we just sit around and have it and don't do anything with it? Or perhaps, if we don't allow it to invite us into doing more? Learning more? Defending our values in the world more? To acknowledge light - and its equally necessary partner, darkness - within each of us and to also acknowledge that we can do more with that when we are together ... that can be powerful. And maybe, when we're caught up in our words (y'all I threw three poems at you today, and none of them were the reading!), stepping back to consider a ritual of action, a symbol of the constant development of our curiosity and our faith throughout our lives, is something we really need.

How many of us have our faith by heart? How many of us can speak deeply from within on the ways that Unitarian Universalism has called us to grow, to

consider the stories of others in new ways, to live our values more fully in our daily lives? That's one reason I love the "JETPIG" acronym so much - as we consider the ways we name our values and what we are called to do in religious community together, it becomes easy for me to say "Our faith holds love as the highest value, and invites us to express that love as our lived values of Justice, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, Interdependence, and Generosity." I have that by heart.

So even without all the poems and the ten thousand ways of trying, and learning, and trying again - maybe today just consider the five invitations in the Luminescence ritual. There are five fingers on our hands. Maybe when you're feeling stressed or anxious or angry or somehow separate from those things you hold in highest worth - remember, that's what "worship" means! - maybe you can take a breath or tap your hands or close your eyes and count off on your fingers - source, recognition, reflection, refocus, renewal. We have it, we seek it, we attain it together. Just buckle in with a bit of a grin, knowing the seeds you plant will benefit so many others you won't even know.

So may it be.