

## **“Reflected Light”**

Rev. Dr. Jan Carlsson-Bull  
Unitarian Universalist Church in Meriden  
Meriden, CT

October 25, 2015

It never occurred to me that there would be a time when I would savor being awoken in the middle of the night to an alarm that sounds something like, [dog bark]. Actually I don't savor this in the first few moments of vacillating between turning over and going back to sleep and then finding myself awake and ready to take our puppy Pablo out for a necessary walk. Once I've put his leash on, gathered the requisite blue plastic bag and flashlight, bundled up for the late October chill, and headed out into the night, I'm awake. I'm sufficiently awake to pay attention to where I'm walking and to pay attention to the night sky. On a clear night, the three stars of Orion are unmistakable, and I marvel at the myriad cosmic eyes that wink through the clusters of clouds wafting across the celestial ethers. Inevitably I find myself tracking the waning and waxing of the moon.

“Pablo,” I hear myself saying, “Look, it's waxing. In just a couple more nights we'll have a full moon, a Harvest Moon!” Of course he takes it all in, pulling at his leash and checking out every other blade of grass. Occasionally he hovers over a patch that picks up a shard of moonlight. On rare occasions, he's slept through the night; but when the Harvest Moon that is the Full Moon that is also a Super Moon appears this coming Tuesday, I trust that I'll hear his call to wake up, get up, and head out. Just four days shy of Halloween, the Great Pumpkin, as the iconic character Linus would recognize it, will inhabit the night sky.

What is it about moonlight, especially a full moon moonlight that evokes legends and myths that have spanned centuries? Ancient Wiccans “gathered to worship ‘She Who Is’ during the Esbats or Full Moon celebrations.” The moon is commonly connected with the feminine, while the sun is linked with the masculine. Well over a millennium ago a holiday in honor of the moon was established in China. In mid-Autumn or the time of the Harvest Moon, a “Moon Festival” is celebrated, during which people ascend to their rooftops or nearby hills or even mountains “to view and honor the moon.”

In Shakespeare's “*Midsummer Night's Dream*,” the moon figures almost as a character in its own right. In her essay on this topic, Nicole Smith observes that the title of the play itself “refers to the night, which conjures images of the moon and stars immediately” and that Act I Scene I introduces the lovers Theseus and Hippolyta anticipating their marriage, “which is four long days away.” Theseus laments the long wait:

“Four nights will quickly dream away the time;/  
and then the moon, like a silver bow/  
New-bent in heaven, shall behold the night/  
Of our solemnities.”

I recall as a child gazing upon “the man in the moon,” wondering if everyone saw the same visage that I beheld, convinced that there really was a man embedded in that sphere of light that seemed intimately close and unimaginably distant.

But wait, the moon is not a sphere of light. I know that. You know that. What we witness is reflected light. How is it that light reflected carries a mystique so intensely evocative, perhaps even more so than the direct light emanating from the sun? It is the sun that generates light; the moon basks in it, as we bask in the light of the moon, as we too bask in the reflected light of the earth during what we call day and the reflected light of the moon during what we call night.

Reflected light invites reflection. Contemporary Turkish novelist, playwright, and economist Mehmet Murat ildan, deems reflection as

“...a good reminder of the truth! You may turn your eyes away from the truths,” he writes, “but the reflections will remind them to you! ...anything which describes a truth well is a reflection of that truth! Turn your eyes away from the Moon, then the lake will remind the Moon to you.”

Reflected truth—not quite the whole truth and nothing but the truth, but a facet, a spoke, a ray of truth that calls attention to a core truth. Reflected light invites us to consider core light, just as moonlight invites us to consider the source of that light, the sun.

Is this not what we seek to do in worship—experience multiple modalities (silence, song, story, poetry, prayer) for considering truth? While we can never express or receive core truth, whatever that might be, we partake of its reflections as, “good reminders of the truth,” adapting the words of Mehmet Murat ildan.

So too we kindle our chalice as a reflection of a greater truth that is dynamic. One of the principles of this faith that we share carries this understanding—that is, “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” It’s implicit that we never “find it,” that we never land on the essence of truth. Like the flame in our chalice, like the sun that generates light, it flickers; it’s dynamic. Reflected light also flickers. Reflected light is also dynamic.

It’s dynamic in yet another way that I invite us to consider. Several years ago our larger Unitarian Universalist world, and perhaps this congregation along with it, embarked on a “journey toward wholeness.” The prevailing issue was the brokenness that emanated from the white privilege that fueled racism—not simply “racism out there,” but racism that laced so much of the history, including recent history, of Unitarian Universalism. How to bring this into the light of day for those among us who were/are culpable? By recognizing the brokenness implicit in the perspectives and practices of racism, whatever the intentions to the contrary, and by embarking upon an intentional journey toward wholeness.

Back to reflected light. Back to the entities that receive that light. Back to the moon. Move in your mind’s eye to the hemisphere of the moon that does not receive light. It’s no less the moon, but we can’t see it. We’re not gazing upon the moon from an angle that allows us to

see it. I speak of the shadow side of the moon. As each of us is the recipient of reflected light, so too each of us has a shadow side.

Carl Jung, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century Swiss psychoanalyst, understood the psyche as comprised of the ego, or the executive function, and the shadow. In his paper on “The Shadow,” Jungian analyst Christopher Berry notes that Jung was keenly interested in “the process of assimilating “the thing a person has no wish to be””—that is, the shadow. It is our dark side of the moon. Just because we don’t see it doesn’t mean it’s not there. Who we think we are, how we think others see us, rarely integrates our shadow side. It’s as if we turn our backs on ourselves!

Recognition of our shadow holds considerable promise for our psychic “journey toward wholeness.” Denial feeds our brokenness.

“... the shadow,” observes Perry, “contains all sorts of qualities, capacities and potential, which if not recognised and owned, maintain a state of impoverishment in the personality and deprive the person of sources of energy and bridges of connectedness with others.”

Almost always we encounter our shadow by projecting onto others what we don’t like about ourselves, though we don’t initially own it as a trait or tendency that we hold. Transformational change consultants Ria Baeck and Helen Titchen Beeth describe the shadow developmentally. From our earliest years, it is that part of us that is

“...not allowed to live in the full light and so retreated into the shade. By the time we are grown, we are convinced it is the other who carries the shadow, not us.”

They have more to say:

“It takes courage and sensitivity to open up and remember it as part of ourselves; when we do, we encounter the hurt child who needs space attention and recognition. These shadow parts...are essential to our true authenticity. They hold the gift of who we are; a gift we can bring to the world only when we are fully present...”

How to realize the fullness of this gift? How to shed light on our shadow? Through the good fortune of psychoanalysis, which may also cost a fortune, we can move through such a process. But Baeck and Beeth frame it differently. By “building the capacity for authentic collective wisdom” we can realize “a circle of presence”—in other words, by participating in a community that holds the treasure of shared genuine, authentic wisdom, wisdom that is worthy of our common trust.

This is not easy. Such community may sound utopian. But consider that we *aspire* to such community. We encourage spiritual growth and affirm “a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” We refer to “speaking the truth in love.” We refer also to “speaking truth to power.” Neither is easy. Love is tough. Power is stubborn. Caring committed community holds the promise of “a circle of presence” that makes this possible.

In a faith community grounded in love, we bathe in reflected light. We stand shoulder to shoulder and we stand on the shoulders of women and men who have gone before. The words of the late Rev. Dr. Peter Raible, a Unitarian Universalist minister for half a century, echo:

“We build on foundations, we did not lay.  
 We warm ourselves at fires, we did not light.  
 We sit in the shade of trees, we did not plant.  
 We drink from wells, we did not dig.  
 We profit from persons, we did not know.  
 We are ever bound in community. “

If we bring our whole selves, light and shadow, to the table, those to come will stand on our shoulders.

Today we have commissioned Megumi, Lisa, John, Jeff, Barbara, and Peg as Worship Associates. Part of that charge is the challenge of leading worship in this community of faith and doubt—“to be open to the multiple beliefs and theologies of the membership and honor the common good of our spiritual life.” Part of that charge is the understanding that “everyone who is fully engaged in congregational life practices ministry.”

May we each commit to a circle of presence that reflects light that shines and flickers, truth that is dynamic, and relentless love that grounds who we are and who we are becoming.

May it be so. Amen.

### Sources:

“Ria Baeck and Hellen Titchen Beeth, “The Circle of Presence: Building the Capacity for Authentic Collective Wisdom,” in *Kosmos: Journal for Global Transformation*, Fall/Winter 2012, <http://www.kosmosjournal.org/article/the-circle-of-presence-building-the-capacity-for-authentic-collective-wisdom/>

Mehmet Murat ildan’s Blog, June 12, 2015,  
[https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3164882.Mehmet\\_Murat\\_ildan/blog](https://www.goodreads.com/author/show/3164882.Mehmet_Murat_ildan/blog)

The Moon in Religion and Mythology,” <http://www.moonlightsys.com/themoon/Religion.html>

“Moon Legends and Tales,” <http://www.moonlightsys.com/themoon/legends.html>

Christopher Perry, “The Shadow,” *The Society of Analytical Psychology*,  
<http://www.thesap.org.uk/the-shadow>

Obituaries: Peter S. Raible, *UU World: The Magazine of the Unitarian Universalist Association*, Sep/Oct 2004, [http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi\\_qa4071/is\\_200409/ai\\_n9428062/](http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_qa4071/is_200409/ai_n9428062/)

Nicole Smith, "The Symbol of the Moon in 'A Midsummer Night's Dream' by Shakespeare,"  
ARTICLEMYRIAD, posted on December 6, 2011, <http://www.articlemyriad.com/symbol-moon-midsummer-nights-dream/>

Who's Who in Turkish Culture and Art,  
<http://www.turkishculture.org/whoiswho/literature/mehmet-murat-ildan-1087.htm>