

SERMON

“Decolonizing our Spirituality”

Sermon Notes: [AWAKE!: Decolonizing our Spirituality \(johncrestwell.blogspot.com\)](http://johncrestwell.blogspot.com)

First, I want to begin by reframing the quote we just heard from Barack Obama’s newest book “A Promised Land.” The excerpt you heard was from the preface. I want to put a UU twist to his words because our faith is quintessentially an American faith; and our fate is tied to the country’s fate.

“Do we care to match the reality of **Unitarian Universalism** to its ideals? If so, do we really believe that our notions of beloved community, individual freedom, and equality of opportunity apply to everybody? Or are we instead committed, in practice if not in statute, to reserving those things for a privileged few? I recognize that there are those who believe that it’s time to discard the myth—that an examination of **Unitarian Universalism’s** past and an even cursory glance at today’s headlines show that **this faith’s** ideals have always been secondary to a racial caste system and rapacious **elitism**, and that to pretend otherwise is to be complicit in a game that was rigged from the start... And I confess that there have been times **during the course of my ministry, as I’ve reflected on my 11 years**, when I’ve had to ask myself whether I was too tempered in speaking the truth as I saw it, too cautious in either word or deed, convinced as I was that by appealing to what Lincoln called the better angels of our nature I stood a greater chance of leading us in the direction of the **Unitarian Universalism** we’ve been promised.”

Obama, Barack. A Promised Land (p. xvi); adapted. Crown. Kindle Edition.

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Sit with that.... I didn’t have to change very many words... These words gave me pause. As I thought about this message today and my time as a leader in this faith tradition.

The first thing that came to mind is the word “colonize” which means that a group establishes power over another group that was indigenous to a particular land.” Therefore, to “de-colonize” something is to establish power WITH those same people, and perhaps by humbling ourselves we learn from “those people”. Power OVER vs Power WITH. Power is a neutral word. It simply means the “ability to act”. It’s all about what we do with it, how we harness it and use it not for just ourselves but for the sake of others.

Obama’s words speak to us. What are we creating as citizens of this country; as UUs and human beings? Today, I hope I won’t be too tempered—but direct in giving you some context for today’s world; and perhaps, even some comfort...

Decolonizing our Spirituality is all about becoming free. It is about creating a table that is round where all are equal and welcome. It does not mean there isn't order or structure or hierarchy, but it does mean that each person knows that the whole is the sum of its parts. Being free means deprogramming those stories that hold us back; those narratives that tell us we are powerless or tell us we are better than them or superior to those people. Being free means that we don't need to feel better than anyone to have value and worth. Lustful power is not freedom. It means you are a slave. Lustful power is merely an outward expression of one's inner insecurities. Once you see that ALL people are powerful and worthy of being at the table, your mind sees new vistas and possibilities. True freedom means you take your seat with the circle and you know that you are a part of a giant wheel of life.

People all over, are crying out for freedom—a new way of being where there is less suffering and more living with meaning and purpose that does less harm. We all crave intelligent, smart, and compassionate leadership and that is necessary for structures and organizations to thrive. We are all growing tired of inept and ignorance, self-serving leadership. The call today is for empathic leaders who love the people and hold them accountable. We want leadership with heart and soul; love and compassion. We want an end to modern tribalism—that pits one against the other; we need to leave this part of our socialization behind because it represents power lorded over others in the name of a mad king or queen. Rather, we want honesty and accountability in religion, politics, business, and one-on-one relationships. We want POWER WITH when leaders reflect the needs and diversity of the populations they serve. We want leaders who can love more than just those in their household, and see themselves in the other and say, “If these were my children or family would I make this decision?” We want decent and humble human beings to move us from US versus THEM to US AND THEM. And we have to protect our democratic systems from narcissistic, tyrannical, and psychotic people who crave attention and winning at all costs even if it costs the lives of thousands or millions. This is when individualism becomes evil. And we have to name it when it shows its ugly face. And we must protect ourselves, the nation, and faith from those exhibiting these repulsive tendencies. This is a Dis-EASE that we must protect our society from experiencing again.

We all know now that when our systems fail to empower healthy leaders who are emotionally, culturally, and racially literate, we all suffer whether in business or government or religion, great damage is done. Why? Because these kinds of leaders are stuck in a **narrative** that has disconnected them from Source—the ground of being. It's a dog eat dog, winner takes all narrative. They have individuated to a point where *they have forgotten that the world was created for all of us not just some of us*. It's ignorance. And these individuals when they show up, they create too much imbalance which, as I said, which creates dis-ease and anger and suffering and distrust, and war. Look at history and you will see this pattern emerge in religion, business, or government. When leaders disconnect from the earth and other humans they lose their conscience.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN—to disconnect from the earth?

We are ALL spiritual beings. That's the language I use but use whatever words you want. We know intuitively that we share a relationship with trees and animals, and dirt, and people. We know this because we were once collectivist and communal people. Anthropologists have shown us that the will of the tribe was more important than personal ambition. As an example of how fractured we are as individuals in a country called the United States, ask yourself why can't we get on the same page with COVID-19? It is because of the illusion of separation we've created.

Closer to home, western civilization and Christianity lost its connection to earth-based religion or spirituality, although it is still embedded in the rituals. There's power in ritual. The loss of the direct connection to the earth left us under the illusion of POWER OVER instead of POWER WITH. We're slowly healing but taking off the veil and seeing that we are ALL THINGS—nature and art, math, science, and spirituality; logic and mystery. We are the earth, sea, sky; the fire.

We got civilized and expanded west and east as far as we could go and we lost our connection to the earth-centered traditions and how our ancestors lived in harmony with the earth. **Nearly all the symbolism (vestments, postures, etc.) that you see in most religions come from the original people of the land and how they aligned and harnessed the powers or energies and the elements in everyday life.**

How did things get screwed up? The story-tellers got “drunk with the wine” of their own power and control. Power over... The original storytellers were a part of the highest caste in societies—the priestly class or caste. Look that up. In almost all cultures, the most powerful humans are those who can harness the elements and commune with the gods. They are the magic ones. So, yes, I blame the clergy. We—the teachers of the sacred symbols lost our way. We got obsessed with the power... The original preachers were the priestess and priest, the medicine men or shamans—the original story-tellers. This is why the priestly caste in India and America and all over are still the most powerful on the planet? They/we are the myth-makers. Today there are still rabbis, preachers, priests, etc., but the priestly caste is also in the arts and entertainment world. So, television producers, movie stars, writers, artists, musicians—are all modern-day myth-makers. An aside, **holly wood** is what they make magic wands from (holly or holy wood) you get it? Hollywood—magic—stories—so many subtleties showing us how the stories are manufactured so that we can change them and carry the tradition onward. These stories also harness the powers through art and literature. And, right now, those narratives are colliding—power over vs power with. Old and new stories are clashing. The mass media and social media are in a power clash over who will bring these stories to the world.

The cool part is that technology is freeing us from one primary narrative of how to live. Many are waking up and realizing the matrix we have been in. That's good news! All these centuries, what we thought was freedom was really POWER OVER disguised as power with. People, more and more are saying “we were meant to live for so much more! I'm quoting the song by Switchfoot... It goes like this: *“We were meant to live for so much more; Have we lost ourselves? Maybe we've been living*

with our eyes half open; Maybe we're bent and broken? We want more than this world's got to offer. We want more than the wars of our fathers. And everything inside screams for second life! YEAH!"

People want to be free. And the stories are changing due to this technological explosion. Some have been sucked into lies and conspiracy theories, used by people who want POWER OVER. They love using debunked, asinine, and fear-based narratives to scare people into submission. But there are also other new ways of living emerging on the planet; in other places, we are reconciling our past and owning a new narrative that's more egalitarian and not so one-sided. And these young innovators and older creatives appear to be in touch with the earth thereby connecting them to the ancient powers. Mother Earth connects us to POWER WITH.

The author Daniel Quinn described it this way: there are takers and leavers. We need both—but the world has been mostly subjugated by the takers (Quinn says in his book *Ismael*)--the agrarians (expanding at all costs). And the leavers, the earth-based or hunter-gatherers, have been dominated into submission. It's simplistic but makes sense. Today we are at a Tipping point...

As we go forward and back to find ourselves as a species, we keep what is useful to us and we discard that which is no longer useful. Today in the U.S., it seems that at least 51% of us are moving forward. Actually, the percentage is more than Malcolm Gladwell's recommended 25% he mentions in his best-selling book *Tipping Point*. This is a massive shift we are looking at on the planet. One day history will look back and see just how pivotal 2020 was for HUMANE-BEINGS in our evolution.

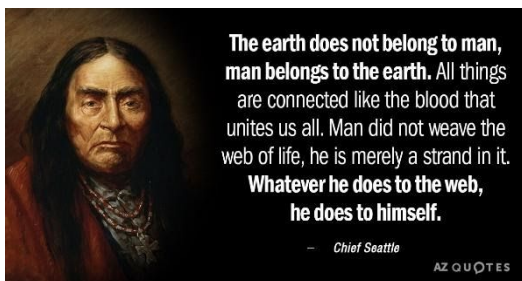
Power WITH means we think in terms of the ALL, not in terms of just the self. We realize that the self IS the ALL and the ALL is the self. And this shift can be profound!

We will adjust to this new era of conspiracy theories, made up narratives that are not grounded in sacred energy, fact, or historical precedent. Humanity is flailing right now looking for something to hold on to. The old ways; the old religions are dying. The old values that have not evolved are being left behind. Evolution goes onward and upward—onward and outward forever. There is no turning back. Therefore, this message is all about change theology; change cosmology; change psychology. It's all about change. This message is all about the embrace of death and rebirth.

How does this relate to Decolonizing our Spirituality? The new spirituality that is here and emerging will be based on exactly what I've already been talking about—the ideas, stories, and music will come not just from one culture but from many traditions, and therefore what will emerge (the new story) will be more inclusive and empowering for ALL. You are already seeing this in TV commercials and on Hulu and Netflix movies, on cable TV, social media-- everywhere. We are looking at ourselves from many angles today and that is wonderful. ***The world is restoring itself or re-storying itself. We are reforming or Re-forming our narratives*** and that is why this is such a crazy but exciting time to be alive. And, as the world becomes more progressive—there will continue to be push back from those who feel left behind. The keyword is adaptation. Adapt.

Many today are also pushing back against this wave of progressivism—and diversity; they are fighting against the natural engine of evolution which seeks to refine and unite humanity. Some thought evolution stopped with one culture. Oh, know. Reconciliation and evolution are happening to all people, places, and things where there is energy in motion (emotion). Therefore, the next big thing is not monoculturalism. The next thing is not the old agrarian and manufacturing ways of doing business. The days of subjugation; and people being treated as widgets is almost done. That society reached its apex.

As UUs and humans, we will have to go back to the earth to go forward. Our earth-based teachings ground us with the ancient ways of worship. They did not have our technology, but they had soul connection—showing them that we are not just human beings but beings having human experiences. They understood the cycles and seasons; that we are not the masters of the earth, but the earth is our master, as Chief Seattle put it.



The rituals and elements have meaning. We must go deeper. The movement toward the earth, moon, or sun mattered. It was not some random practice—it had a depth of meaning. They used percussion; they told stories that were relevant to their lives. They saw themselves as a part and not separate from nature. They knew they were individuals, but they also knew that the pack was only as strong as its Alpha and Omega; that it took all of us using our unique gifts, collectively, to build the nation.

So, I say to you, let the esoteric become the exoteric—the hidden become known. Pay attention, the powers are being unleashed on this planet to WAKE US UP like never before so that we can become that new species—HUMANE-BEINGS—who will preserve this planet. It's an exciting time. This is the restoration or RE-STORYING that is here to refine and define us.

That's what decolonizing our spirituality means. And what does this do for us? It frees us and unites us. We realize that we can never be alone; that we are powerful and don't have to give our power away to those who are unworthy. It means ALL are the priestly caste. We are all the story-tellers, energy movers, and myth-makers. This is what I see for Unitarian Universalism's future—the kind of freedom and power to create beloved communities wherever we go in life.

Will you take up this challenge to become decolonized, spiritually-speaking, for the sake of your freedom and humanity's freedom? If the answer is yes, then I look forward to exploring this new promised land of possibilities with you. Amen.

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