

## **Finding Your Drumbeat**

April 2, 2006

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The UU minister Rev. Scotty McLennan is probably best known for being Garry Trudeau's Yale roommate in the late 1960's, resulting in his being immortalized in Trudeau's Doonesbury cartoons as the inspiration for Rev. Scottie Sloan. For 15 years Scotty was the Chaplain at Tufts University where he helped many students to find their spiritual identity. About six years ago Scotty wrote a book called "Finding Your Religion", subtitled "When the faith you grew up with has lost its meaning", in which he described the struggles of teenage Americans to make their own sense of meaning independently of what their parents had taught them.

Of his experience as a Chaplain to young people he wrote: "I've come to feel like a mountain guide. There is a spiritual mountain that all of us (or at least a lot of us) are trying to climb. There are many paths up that mountain – many paths that can reach the top, although very few people actually get to the summit of this very high mountain. Those paths may be rough or smooth, steep or easy, boring or colorful, tiring or exhilarating. Yet, they are all on the same spiritual mountain, and ultimately, they all converge at the very top, as mystics of all religions have told us."

Between his time as an undergraduate at Yale and becoming the Chaplain at Tufts, Scotty explored many different spiritual paths. He meditated for a time at a Hindu ashram in Bali, he followed a Buddhist guru in India, he studied Zen in Kyoto, Japan, law at Harvard Law School, and Unitarian Universalism at Harvard Divinity School. In the end he tells the story about a wise teacher who watched him struggling with all of these strange and foreign religious paths before kindly and gently sending him back to make sense of the religion he grew up within, the religion that provided the context for his meaning making, the path that would most surely lead him up the mountain. For none of us get very far by being a critic of religion, describing only what appears to be unfit about each and every path, but never following any of them beyond the first bend. Scotty advises spiritual seekers that if you want to be serious about religion: "It's time to pick a religious path and start walking. Once you are open to change, and you've opened your mind and senses, the mountain beckons... No more walking

around the base trying to decide on the best way up. No matter how many guidebooks you read and how many pictures you take of its majesty from a distance, you'll know very little of the mountain until you begin climbing and feel its slopes under your own feet. You might be tempted to avoid any of the well-trodden paths, but bushwhacking usually doesn't get you very far, especially if you are an inexperienced climber. Committing yourself to one trail instead of another need not be forever. There will be trail crossings ahead, and you'll become aware of other options as you climb that you couldn't see from the bottom. There's no chance of getting out of the valley and gaining any perspective, though, until you start walking up and get [at least] to your first vista."

Eddie Spears reminds us of this lesson in his piece "Belief". He says every religious path points to essentially the same goal of meaning making. "What ruins everything is misinterpretation." Because of the clear abuse and destruction conducted in the name of religion, Eddie tells us "I have nothing against those who embrace the presence of God... The want, the need to have faith in God to solve problems and to give guidance is compelling. But [he says] I've resigned myself to living my life on my own." This is indeed an ethical response to the harm and destruction done in the name of God, yet as Scotty McLennan reminds us, no matter how the view looks from the base of the mountain, you can't really judge the path until you start walking up and get at least to your first vista. Eddie has chosen an apophatic way of coming at meaning making through negation, defining first what you do not believe to be true. This path is an old and respected one, as long as there have been wisdom teachers, some have warned that the best path for each person is the one of their own devising, trusting only your own experience. Eddie is likely to walk a very interesting path as he makes his way into meaning making outside religion.

Jared Paul's "ABC's for Roger" which Mike Sandmel rapped for us is a rap on contemporary social ethics critical to any true path. It is a prophetic path naming the sacrifice, injustice, greed and ignorance. It is an ABC's of how the world deviates from our sense of the beloved community and what we can do to try and bring ourselves a little bit closer to the possibility of its reality. It is prophetic because it holds up for us the shortcomings of being while at the same time holding forth the opportunity of becoming. This style of theology is as old as the Torah and the Prophets, and it too invites us into a path up the mountain of our being and becoming. I believe that Mike is

also on a very interesting path to meaning making out of social action on behalf of social justice.

So what is your path and how do you find your way? While the young people have put this service together with me today, this is not just a young person's issue. How do you find your true path? How do we come finally to know the sound of our own drumbeat? There are those who would call the path described by Eddie finding meaning through reflection. There are those who call the path described by Mike finding meaning through using your hands or social action. There is yet a third common path up the mountain that is best traversed by way of the heart, and is the path generally preferred by musicians. The four musicians who performed during the offertory perhaps gave us a foretaste of this path. This path of direct knowing and feeling our way carried upon the chords of the music that transform us and prepare us to ascend to a higher place.

The hymn we just sang can have that effect upon me, not when I sing it alone, but certainly when I hear an entire congregation singing it with feeling. And the first hymn we sang speaks of all three paths: "Wake now my senses and hear the earth call, feel the deep power of being in all... Wake now my reason reach out to the new, join with each pilgrim who quests for the true...take as your neighbor both stranger and friend, praying and striving their hardship to end." How we each choose to blend some combination of these three approaches to meaning making determines whether we find our own unique tune to drum, to sing, or whether our search is just a cacophony of spiritual views (what Scottie McLennan would call bushwhacking our way up the mountain). These are three well worn paths up the mountain. Where and how do you find your way, and what combination of paths will call you into your own fullness of being?

This is the challenge posed for each of us this morning, and being Unitarian Universalists our individual answers will be as diverse as our personalities and backgrounds. But there are a few sign posts along these trails for the observant and intentional traveler: listen to you life the way you would listen to group of great musicians jamming together. There will be a core theme or melody that sets the context for the rest, but then each will join in with his or her distinctive voice and rhythm. The drummer especially must pick a beat that can under gird and support the flights of fancy of the string or wind instruments. Listen to your life, what is calling out to you, what is the emergent rhythm that seeks to be your drumbeat under girding the way

you intentionally live your life? For that is the challenge we all face in living a life of truth and meaning making. Amen.