



Transforming Times



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Discernment

Discernment: The dictionary defines discernment as having good judgment. In religious traditions it may be defined as the ability to distinguish between good and evil. Personally, discernment is heeding my inner calling to do what feels right.

I have often been told that I am a ‘heart’ person. Although this may seem like a wonderful trait, it can put one into a precarious position. For instance, several years ago I saw several youth beating up on one youth at a bus stop. I pulled over, got out of the car and started yelling at them. I listened to my heart, telling me that an injustice was occurring, and not my head, which would have told me that I could be putting myself and my daughter, who was in the car, at risk.

Being a heart person can also have financial consequences. When I finished my degree in 2007, my husband asked, “So, are you going to go out and get a high paying job now?” My reply was, “No, I love what I do.” He looked at me and jokingly said, “Damn, I really did marry a socialist hippie!”

I did, however, get a part time job that required a degree. But, it isn’t a high paying one. I work part time at Casa de Los Nino’s in the Judicial Supervision Department. I monitor families with problems that have court orders to be supervised under individual circumstances.

I need to work two jobs to support my family and pay for the basic necessities. I have chosen occupations that I feel called to, and I feel make a difference, because I do not have time to volunteer.

Unfortunately, I am aware that careers that make a difference are in jeopardy with the current eco-

nomie situation. Two of the departments I work very closely with at Casa, have just been eliminated. My heart hurts with the realization that many families will suffer the consequences because of these cuts. According to the news, there are more on the way.

I am angry and feel that many of our leaders have not been *discerning* when it comes to these issues.

Many people may need to turn to places of worship in times like these. As difficult as times are for all of us, we still need to give whatever resources we may have, to our chosen places of faith. My heart will not let me abandon what I know is right. I hope yours won’t either.

*With love for community,
Mary*

Transforming Times is organized around theological themes. Each theme plays a part in the development of a well-grounded religious and spiritual life. The church’s offerings are by no means limited to the themes. They do provide common ground for community conversation, a way to gain more meaning and depth. We want to hear many perspectives on each theme. You are invited to submit your original poetry, artwork, or short essays of 350 words or less. Be warned: seriously engaging these themes could transform your life!

September: Diversity	February: Justice
October: Hospitality	March: Discernment
November: Reflection	April: Credo
December: Contemplation	May: Ritual
January: Trust	June: Beauty

Music and Discernment

Almost without thinking I immediately define “discernment” as the ability to make fine distinctions or careful judgments. In *The American Heritage Dictionary* (©1969-1973) I find: “Keeness of discrimination; perspicacity. synonyms at Reason. Discernment is the faculty of discriminating, often through selection, what is apprehensible, relevant or worthwhile.”

In *The Synonym Finder* (J.J. Rodale ©1978), I find similar definitions; but noteworthy in being more relevant to discussions about music, I'd add: “intuition, profundity, divination, clairvoyance, esprit, beholding, discovery....”

I have limited knowledge of theology, the Christian tradition and the vocabulary in which they are expressed, so I was surprised by Scriptural references among definitions for "discernment."

In Wikipedia I discovered: “Spiritual discernment: calling on the Holy Spirit to lead or give direction on a matter. It is how the Spirit shows the church or its people what God wants them to do and be. Discernment is more than just a skill. Discernment is a gift from God before it is anything else.... And spiritual truth is meant to be rationally contemplated. Spiritual discernment is a pursuit that must always engage the mind. We discern truth from error and right from wrong by using our minds to search Scripture, to recall Scripture, and to compare everything to Scripture....[In] the best articles about Calvinism on the web... the user is directed to classic reformed articles and resources of the historical Christian faith.... Man's spiritual blindness [is] shown from John 1:4-5; but ... we are intoxicated with a false opinion of our own discernment.”

I also found references in the Roman Catholic tradition to discernment as the way to search for God's will in determining a calling to religious vocation.

And music? From childhood I sensed a link to the inner divine when I listened to certain classical compositions. I felt an ecstasy, a euphoria, an orgasmic soaring of mind and spirit. Reading about the whirling dervishes of the mystical Islamic Sufi order I felt a kind of kinship with their experience but of course without the physical component.

Babies and young children seem to respond naturally to music. Young people (according to a blog by Ellis Murphree) asked a “pastor friend” about his opinion of “Christian” music. “I began to realize ... that it is more important to teach our youth to become more discerning than it is to give them a list of things to avoid. As I ... witness some of the conversations of young Evangelical and Fundamentalist adults ...; I [observe] that there is often little discernment displayed. If we fail to teach our children discernment, we shouldn't be surprised when they grow up into teens and adults who aren't discerning!”

Joyce Hardin



Audacious Hope for 2009

Orloff Miller is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister living in Germany. Miller served UU congregations in Colorado, California, and Germany. He marched with Martin Luther King, Jr. in Selma, Alabama and was with his friend and colleague, James Reeb, who was martyred in the cause. What follows is a letter expressing Miller's reflections on the election of Barack Obama as president of the United States. (printed here with permission)

Dear Friends and Family,

Upon selection of Barack Obama to become 44th President of the USA, I received many joyful messages. Most were from you, my friends and family, recalling the March from Selma to Montgomery - and events before and after. You recognized that the election in 2008 of our first African-American president was made possible by an epic struggle for voting rights in and around Selma, Alabama in 1965.

I treasure especially this e-mail, from a loved one in our African-American extended family:

THANK YOU....for "walking" and believing in the struggle...so many years ago.....that walk of oh so many....has led to this historic moment.....

That struggle for voting rights cost three lives, black and white, male and female. Their names are all but forgotten today. The historic March from Selma to Montgomery was first conceived as a protest following the death of Jimmie Lee Jackson - shot by a state trooper during a nighttime demonstration for voting rights in nearby Marion AL. The 50 mile trek from Selma to the state capitol, begun on March 7th, was inauspicious - until TV cameras caught the sheriff's posse on horseback - riding down and clubbing marchers - including women and children - at the foot of the Selma bridge. Scenes of "Bloody Sunday" were flashed across the world. I saw those scenes on TV in Boston.

Within two days clergy from across the US, responding to a call from Martin Luther King Jr, attempted to resume that march. They were

turned back by the sheriff's posse backed by state troopers - but without violence. That night outside a soul-food restaurant in Selma, three of the clergy were attacked - including Jim Reeb who died two days later. President Johnson sent yellow roses to his hospital room and called him "that good man." I was one of the two survivors.

Two men named Jim had died, and both were eulogized by MLK. But whereas the first death was little noted outside Alabama, the second Jim was a white clergyman - and the world took notice. The march for voting rights was resumed - this time under federal protection, limited to 300 persons for most of the 50+ miles. But the march grew to 25,000 by the time we reached the capitol steps in Montgomery.

That night, having driven a load of marchers back to Selma, Viola Liuzzo, a white mother from Detroit was gunned down by Klansmen as she was returning to Montgomery for another load. A young Negro riding with her survived the attack - as did an FBI informant posing as one of the Klansmen. Viola died, but the demand for voting rights did not.

In Washington DC on August 6, 1965, seated in the same room off the Capitol Rotunda where 104 years earlier Abraham Lincoln had signed the Emancipation Proclamation, President Lyndon Johnson made the Voting Rights Act the law of the land. On January 20, 2009, forty-three years later, Barack Obama, an African-American will be inaugurated our 44th president. And I will be sobbing tears of joy.

For, truth to tell, I have come to believe that the March from Selma to Montgomery in 1965 was a series of very early ballots cast on behalf of Barack Obama - and the decisive votes were cast by Jimmie Lee Jackson, James Reeb, and Viola Liuzzo.

Peace, love, and audacious hope!

Orloff

I'm late on the scene to the world of GPS – the Global Positioning System that will tell you exactly where in the world you are. My new cell phone has a navigational system. Gone are the days when phones exist simply to make phone calls. Now my telephone can tell me not only exactly where I am, it tells me how to get where I'm going. How cool is that? Never again do I have to be late for an appointment or a meeting because I am lost. My cell phone even corrects my route according to current traffic and road conditions. No thinking on my part is required, only the ability to follow directions.

If only the rest of life were that simple. Discerning a path from where you are to where you want to be never seems to be quite that easy. No gentle, reassuring voice tells you where to turn. No persistent voice consistently guides you to your goal, except maybe, that still, small voice within. Some call it the voice of conscience, some, the voice of God.

Discernment is the process of listening for guidance, listening for wisdom, listening for truth. In a noisy world with many distractions, it can be difficult to separate the wheat from the chaff, knowing what is truly of value in our lives. It begins with a quiet attentiveness: calming the body, stilling the mind.

A religious community such as ours plays a vital role in knowing where we are and how to get where we are going. Church can be like a Global Positioning System. When we come together on Sunday morning, it is an opportunity to reorient our lives, pointing ourselves in the direction of what is most true and worthy of our attention. Together we ask the important questions and listen together for the answers.

In the most traditional sense of the word, discernment is the process of determining what it is we are being called to do in the world. What is the congregation of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Tucson being called to do in the world? What gifts do we have to offer in the service of humanity?

In times such as these, there are no easy answers. Undoubtedly, course correction is required as we navigate current global conditions. A spirit of patient discernment -- listening for the still, small voice within -- this will lead us in the direction of our highest goals. The directions may never be as clear as "go two blocks and then turn right," like the voice on the GPS navigating system. That's where patience comes in.

The way of discernment is the way of the wise heart. Where might this congregation's wise heart lead us?

See you in church!
Diane

