

Not All Those Who Wander Are Lost

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READING Excerpt from “*The Fellowship of the Ring*”
by J. R. R. Tolkien

*All that is gold does not glitter,
Not all those who wander are lost;
The old that is strong does not wither,
Deep roots are not reached by the frost.
From the ashes a fire shall be woken,
A light from the shadows shall spring;
Renewed shall be blade that was broken,
The crownless again shall be king.*

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From the very first moment you emerged into this foreign land and glimpsed the light of day, the primordial voice of life that was imprinted upon your DNA said, “*Breathe,*” and your odyssey outside of the womb began. In body, mind, and spirit you were thrust upon a journey of self-discovery whose travelogue is still being written.

**Imagine!** Just imagine...every experience, every encounter regardless of depth or length, every failure and every triumph, every tragedy and every joy, *every adventure and every moment of solitude*, everything that has fed you physically, mentally, emotionally and spiritually for good/bad/or indifferent has all served one purpose...the ultimate evolution of you.

In Loren Eiseley’s epic book *The Immense Journey*, he said “*Out of the choked Devonian waters emerged sight and sound and the music that rolls invisible through the composer's brain. They are there still in the ooze along the tideline, though no one notices. The world is fixed, we say: fish in the sea, birds in the air. But in the mangrove swamps by the*

*Niger, fish climb trees and ogle uneasy naturalists who try unsuccessfully to chase them back to the water. There are things still coming ashore.”*

Well, this morning I wonder what brilliant expressions of our life-force are still waiting to come ashore within us as individuals and as a community? In this world of predictable unpredictability, how are we changing? Out of the choked waters of our birth canals, what great transformative mysteries continue to roll invisible in our brains, in our communal potential? How do we free ourselves from the fixed confinement of thought to embrace these expansive possibilities that are our evolutionary inheritance? What does our Immense Journey look like? What could it look like?

In true Unitarian Universalist fashion, there is no direct path nor one size fits all that might answer any of these profound questions. Yet, I am drawn to the poem by Tolkien to offer us some insight as a starting point for our own exploration. For those of you who are not *Lord of the Rings* fans, the poem I shared with you this morning was in a letter presented by the wizard, Gandalf, to the hobbit, Frodo Baggins, as spiritual clues for the journey that he was about to embark upon. (Since my name is Frado, my friends in college gave me the nickname, Frodo, so I feel ordained to claim this poem as our spiritual guide as we embrace the new journey that we are about to embark upon together.)

### **ALL THAT IS GOLD DOES NOT GLITTER**

Society would tell us that true wealth is reflected in all the accoutrements with which we surround ourselves. Yet, wisdom tells us that what is more precious than all the riches in this world is what we carry within us. Not negating an appreciation for beauty or necessity, we are reminded on this very somber anniversary of the tragedy that was 9/11 that our greatest strength and power does not come from brick and mortar or financial spreadsheets, but rather from the depth of our character and the many ways we bring our love, compassion, talents and service to the altar of our humanity and to the interdependent web of all life. Let us not be seduced by power that claims its authority by being exclusionary or exceptional, but rather let us be inspired by power that is inclusive,

which uplifts and empowers others to recognize their own self-worth and potential.

### **NOT ALL THOSE WHO WANDER ARE LOST**

Contrary to popular belief, life need not be a fixed roadmap from birth to death. Indeed, as UU's we value the diversity of the journey. *For us, it is less about the final destination and more about the intentional stops and unsolicited diversions along the way that contribute to our personal and collective growth.* Indeed, are we not called forth into this life to observe, explore, engage, process and evolve? While our evolution is not fixed, neither are the sources of our learning. In what universal book of life is it written that there is only one way to live, one way to think, one way to be, one way to love, one way to pray? By our very nature we are wanderers moving from experience to experience. Our purpose is not to simply fill-up our days with busyness until we reach the finish line, but rather to be present to the mystery and wonder of each moment that brings us alive (even the ones that bring us to our knees.) I am reminded here of a quote by the late great Douglas Adams, from his book, The Long Dark Tea-Time of the Soul. He said, *“I may not have gone where I intended to go, but I think I have ended up where I needed to be.”*

### **THE OLD THAT IS STRONG DOES NOT WITHER; DEEP ROOTS ARE NOT REACHED BY THE FROST**

The seeds of our faith tradition were planted centuries ago. Out of their deep roots has emerged a religious community whose core values have prevailed over the “isms” that would divide or diminish us because of our differences. Rather, we choose to embrace the many strands of our multiplicity of human expressions which reflect the tapestry of our faith. We are made all the stronger because of it. Nourished by those higher truths that transcend time, the living tradition of which we are a part continues to grow and flourish. Branches continue to sprout, allowing for new leaves of insight and truth to add to our wider canopy of beliefs. It is from this transformative faith that we are sustained for the work of our hands and our hearts.

## **FROM THE ASHES A FIRE SHALL BE WOKEN, A LIGHT FROM THE SHADOWS SHALL SPRING**

When our values and principles are challenged—when we feel the moral decay of society thrusting us into the ashes of despair, we must remember to “blow on the coals of our hearts” as spoken by Job in the play J.B. by Archibald MacLeish. We cannot let the light within us to ever be extinguished by any darkness that would try to overcome us. Indeed, in our most dire of moments, we must be that light for each other, illuminating the shadows that instill fear and doubt, that hide the pain of exclusion and the suffering of those whose own lights have been diminished by illness or loneliness or abandonment. Ours is a tradition that is not afraid to go to the places that scare us, to see the world thru the lens of other perspectives, for wisdom and growth are often born out of the struggle to understand the source of our ignorance, fear, and discomfort.

## **RENEWED SHALL BE BLADE THAT WAS BROKEN, THE CROWNLESS AGAIN SHALL BE KING**

Okay, just how far can I carry this metaphor? In this case I choose the blade of the prophetic word. In Unitarian Universalist ministry, we, who are ordained and called to serve, are given freedom of the pulpit. This allows us to worship the spirit of life that breathes within us all by drawing from all the world’s scriptures, from science and philosophy, from literature and poetry, from history and the social issues of our day. We seek to lift-up truth and wisdom wherever we find it, and we tend to ask more questions than we offer answers.

I suppose you could say that when one ministry ends, the blade or voice of that spiritual leader is separated or broken in service to that congregation and then a new voice takes-up the mantel and carries the charge forward.

But just what is that charge? The charge is to remind you to breathe. The charge is to continue reminding you that you carry the world’s greatest treasure within you. The charge is to listen to your stories and to help you recognize yourselves in each other. The charge is to remind you of your values and to comfort you when you are afflicted and afflict you when you are comfortable. The charge is to “blow on the coals of

your hearts” and empower you when you forget that you have the power to bring healing and change into the world. The charge is to bring a greater awareness of the challenges and opportunities of the immense journey in which we share, and that our faith tradition offers nourishment for that journey. The charge is to **love** you, work with you, cry with you, laugh with you, sing with you, walk, crutch and roll with you, pray with you, prepare you for the next prophetic voice...and when the time comes, to break the blade so that another can take up the mantle and carry the enduring truths of our faith forward, in this community that has served loving hearts for many generations and which will continue to serve many more to come.

Not all those who wander are lost, and I am honored to be wandering with you for the next two years.

Amen and Blessed Be