



Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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“Searching for Truth & Meaning”

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Centering Thoughts:

Knowledge is not intelligence. In searching for the truth be ready for the unexpected. Heraclitus

Question everything! Maria Mitchell

My religion is searching for the truth in life and life in the truth, though knowing that I do not have to find it while I live; my religion is fighting incessantly and tirelessly with the unknown.

Miguel de Unamuno

Reflection:

Many of you, I’m sure, have been on a mountaintop or out on a plain where city lights don’t pollute the night sky, where you can see what Maria Mitchell might have seen nearly 200 years ago. When I’m up at The Mountain, the Unitarian Universalist camp & conference center in North Carolina, on cloudless nights a multitude of stars fills the sky. The Milky Way stretches from horizon to horizon. That brilliant band of stars appears so close to Earth that I feel sure, if I reached up, I could pluck a star out of the sky and hold it in my hand.

Seeing the incredible vastness of space, knowing that some of the starlight twinkling at me originated billions of years ago and took light years to reach me—it makes me tremble and fall down, overwhelmed by wonder and awe.

My thirst for knowledge about comets, black holes, quarks, the big bang, and more, makes up a central part of my search for answers to the questions religions traditionally ask. Where do we come from? Why are we here? Is there life out there? What is my place in this grand universal drama I find myself in?

Of that thirst to know, Maria once wrote, “The world of learning is so broad, and the human soul so limited in power! We reach forth and strain every nerve, but we seize only a bit of the curtain that hides the infinite from us.” Astronomers, biologists, chemists, physicists, and even non-scientist folks like me and many of you, we seek to pull back the curtain. In our own way, we are theologians seeking to solve the mysteries of life; who want to reveal the truth behind the curtain.

Maria's life was devoted to seeking answers to her questions. She was single-minded in her quest, perhaps more so than any of us here. But I imagine the mysteries that lie beyond our knowing also call you to ask questions. I imagine it prompts you to come here, if not seeking answers to questions, at least seeking companions for the journey, whether you call that journey spiritual or not. And, I imagine many of you look up to the night sky in wonder, as I do.

I know some of you gaze through telescopes. And many of you looked at the recent solar eclipse. It's not hard to understand how the mysteries of the universe drew Maria to look up each night in wonder, waiting to be surprised by what she might discover there. She attributed the workings of the universe to an unnamed, unknown Creator, and, using Stephen Hawking's more recent phrasing, she wanted to know the mind of God.

Maria seems like a modern UU, given her inability to accept religious truth wrapped up in a neat package by religious authorities. She needed to know the truth for herself, she couldn't accept it simply because it was tradition. She couldn't accept it even when threatened with the label heretic. She knew her own mind would not be satisfied by blind faith.

Maria's life as an astronomer, mathematician, and adherent of the scientific principle embodies our 4th Principle. But what about *your* search for truth and meaning? What truths are you finding? What meaning do you make of your life?

My search tells me life is a precious miracle, each of us unique and unrepeatable. Not created by supernatural fiat, but by a series of natural events that might not have occurred anywhere else in the universe. If life doesn't exist elsewhere, then I believe we bear a responsibility to make sure we don't kill ourselves off through war, disease, climate change, or even arrogance and stupidity.

Even if life does exist elsewhere, the particular life form known as Alison Eskildsen will not be repeated elsewhere. Nor will any of you have a doppelgänger. Even reincarnation cannot guarantee you'll know yourself another time around.

Earth occupies the right 'Goldilocks' distance from its source of energy, the Sun; comets swing by and meteors crash into Earth, possibly seeding life's ingredients into the primordial soup; geological, chemical, biological, and other processes produced water and an atmosphere; and, our Sun has lasted long enough for primitive life to emerge from the sea and over time, to become the global zoo we know today. That's a miracle described by another early Unitarian, Charles Darwin. It is a starting point for my search for truth and I find meaning in it.

May you also find truth and meaning for your life, and may the inspiration and activities of this Fellowship and its members be your companions on that journey.

Questions for Reflection or Discussion:

1. What are you curious about or want to know more about? Where is your search leading you?
2. Is there a spiritual path you would like to know more about, and if so, what is it and why?
3. Have your beliefs changed significantly over time? What contributed to these changes?
4. What keeps you on (or leads you to) a Unitarian Universalist path? What story or meaning do they suggest about your particular faith journey?