

## **"On Spiritual Yearning"** **A Chorus of Voices**

### ***Chorus of Voices, Part One***

*It may well be that "For Real" [the song by Bob Franke which Kate sang earlier] and "Love Dogs" [the poem of Rumi's recited by Peter] are all that need be said about Spiritual Yearning... but we are UU's after all, and so we want to look at this issue from a variety of angles and religious traditions. Come with us now as we journey together, through prose, poetry, and song, to hear other Love Dogs attempt to express the inexpressible, and wrestle with the longing that tugs at the human heart.*

*Let's start with some fundamentals:*

We all want to be happy, and we're all going to die....You might say these are the only two unchallengeably true facts that apply to every human being on this planet.

– William Boyd

Have you ever seen an inchworm crawl up a leaf or a twig, and then, clinging to the very end, revolve in the air, feeling for something, to reach something? That's like me. I am trying to find something out there beyond the place on which I have footing. – Albert P. Ryder

It is true that religion has its limitations, some of which can be harmful (divisive dogma, antiquated rituals, abuses of authority), but the longing of the soul for union with the Divine transcends formal religious boundaries and leaves belief systems in the dust. At the core of every one of the world's major spiritual traditions lies a heart that burns with yearning for a Presence that cannot be defined by membership in any particular mythic system and cannot be explained by the most precise theology. Longing for God is a trans-religious phenomenon...

-- Mirabai Starr

It is popularly supposed that between those who use the word "God" and those who do not there is a great gulf. But the gulf lies elsewhere. It lies between those who dogmatize, either positively or negatively, and those who recognize in great humility that something within them bears witness to realities which may be momentous in our lives, but which lie beyond the grasping net of our categories of thought.

– Phillip Hewett

### ***Chorus of Voices, Part Two***

*Some people think that before we took human form, each of us was pure spirit, connected to The Divine, connected to everything, and that we spend our lives trying to recapture that connection.*

At the innermost core of all loneliness is a deep and powerful yearning for union with one's lost self.

– Brendan Francis

There is the Hindu story of the child in the womb who sang, "Let me remember who I am." And his

first cry after birth was, "Oh, I have forgotten."

– Source unknown

We are here to awaken from the illusion of our separateness.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

We shall not cease from exploration and the end of all our exploring will be to arrive where we started and know the place for the first time.

– T.S. Eliot

### ***Chorus of Voices , Part Three***

*Sometimes our yearning is born out of the incomprehensibility of this life:*

We do not know what anything is. The summarization of our existence is Mystery, absolute, unqualified confrontation with what we cannot know. And no matter how sophisticated we become by experience, this will always be true of us.

— Da Free John

God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity, but we die on the day when our lives cease to be illumined by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason.

– Dag Hammarskjöld

The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when one contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structures of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day. Never lose a holy curiosity.

– Albert Einstein

The world is not a prison-house but a kind of spiritual kindergarten where millions of bewildered infants are trying to spell God with the wrong blocks.

– Edwin Arlington Robinson

### ***Chorus of Voices, Part Four***

*The natural world is, for some, their most reliable connection to The Divine:*

When on the tomato plants I find  
twelve green balls no bigger than peas  
and the iceland poppies wave sheer silk  
and robins hop comically over the lawn  
and mourning doves coo their soft agenda  
and not one shadow comes

between me and the summer sun,  
I who have no dealings with deity  
say to someone, whomever there is to hear,  
please, please,  
I must have another day like this,  
I must.

-- Ruth Levitan

For 99 percent of the time we've been on Earth, we were hunters and gatherers, our lives dependent on knowing the fine, small details of our world. Deep inside, we still have a longing to be reconnected with the nature that shaped our imagination, our language, our song and dance, our sense of the divine.

– Janine Benyus

*Some would maintain that connection to The Divine cannot be maintained without service to others:*

Saint John of the Cross, alone in his room in profound prayer, experienced a rapturous vision of Mary. At the same moment, he heard a beggar rattling at his door for alms. He wrenched himself away and saw to the beggar's needs. When he returned, the vision returned again, saying that at the very moment he had heard the door rattle on its hinges, his soul had hung in perilous balance. Had he not gone to the beggar's aid, she could never have appeared to him again.

– David Whyte

*And some would warn that to expect connection all the time is folly.*

Anyone who imagines that bliss is normal in life is going to waste a lot of time running around shouting that he's been robbed. The fact is that most putts don't drop, most beef is tough, most children grow up to be just people, most successful marriages require a high degree of mutual toleration, and most jobs are more often dull than otherwise. Life is like an old-time rail journey – delays, sidetracks, smoke, dust, cinders, and jolts, interspersed only occasionally with beautiful vistas and thrilling bursts of speed. The trick is to thank God for letting you have the ride. – Jenkins Lloyd Jones

*And others would argue that connection to Spirit is only a breath away:*

Are you looking for me?  
I am in the next seat.  
My shoulder is against yours.  
you will not find me in Buddhist stupas,  
not in Indian shrine rooms,  
nor in synagogues,  
nor in cathedrals:  
not in masses,  
nor kirtans,  
not in legs winding around your own neck,  
nor in eating nothing but vegetables.

When you really look for me,  
you will see me instantly —  
you will find me in the tiniest house of time.  
Kabir says: Student, tell me, what is God?  
He is the breath inside the breath.  
--Kabir

*What every seeker knows and seems to agree on, is that to experience that connection that we so yearn for is to taste a joy that makes life worth living:*

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all those people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world, the world of renunciation and supposed holiness ... This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud ... I have the immense joy of being a member of a race in which God became incarnate ... There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.  
– Thomas Merton