

Reflection

Kate and I had both been married before when we met, so we knew something about how marriages progress and some of the potholes to look out for. From the start, there were two projects to which we knew we wanted to devote our relationship:

- we would try to bring a child into the world
- we would do whatever we could to keep the heat and joy alive

In our honeymoon phase, we had no trouble doing what comes naturally toward these two goals, but we knew that they are often at odds.

So we began to seek out wisdom on keeping love alive. We found a lot of good stuff. We eventually hit upon a western adaptation of Indian tantric practices as our main path to keeping our own passion alive.

Briefly, the principles we learned were that your bond with your beloved is the pathway to your own spiritual expansion. Treat your loving as an art form at which you grow ever more skillful and creative over a lifetime. There's much more to it, but that core was already a big leap from our models of marriage. We started to teach this philosophy and its practices, and we had a blast doing it. We addressed physical and spiritual harmony, and to a lesser extent, communication.

We applied the techniques in our own loving, especially when we were coming up on a teaching event. "Gotta walk the talk", we'd say to each other. Teaching was a lot of work, but it was exciting and very fulfilling.

But parental and career responsibilities and the powerful rhythm of household routines eventually absorbed the energy we put into teaching, and we stopped. And for the most part, we also stopped practicing the art we learned. But what kept us working at it over many years, even well past the "honeymoon" phase of our marriage, even while we were raising a young child?

I believe that it was not the teaching itself, though that was fun and rewarding. Nor was it the joy and pleasure of the practices.

I think it was a vision of who we were and would be as a couple. We were on a mission. We talked about getting so good at keeping the spark alive that we would one day teach about loving relationship as a career.

That ambition has receded over the past several years. But without that story we started out with we might not have a love life at all!

My parents split when I was young. My mom moved often, sometimes several times a year while I was growing up. I made and lost friends swiftly, and grew skillful at fitting in.

and letting go.
Both my parents remarried, and then divorced again.
So relationships for me were like flowers, things to be enjoyed,
but destined to pass swiftly.

Marriage was no exception in my mind.
The whole institution made little sense to me.

I did eventually marry, but I saw it partly as a means to another end - to become a father.
I didn't even know exactly why I wanted to do that, just that I definitely did;
Now, 9 years into that adventure I have a clue about why, and I'll say more about that in a bit.

My first wife Maggie, whom I loved and still love dearly didn't
want to be a parent, and we ultimately decided to part ways.
But in the course of our marriage, I learned a lot valuable things.
That my own relationships don't have to fit the models I was given,
That I can live with the toilet paper unrolling from the inside,
instead of the outside as God intended.

That details of how we treat one another matter a lot, but that they
are ultimately subordinate to the questions
"What are we doing together? What is our story?"

Woody Allen said relationships are like sharks - if they don't keep moving, they die.

Our son Isaiah is rapidly growing more independent, and before
we know it his focus will turn toward creating his own story,
one in which we will be bit characters.
But I want to always have some role in his life.
Cheerleader, advisor, whatever he will accept.
Looking back, I think that is part of why I wanted to become a parent.
I wanted a friend I would never have to say goodbye to.

But Isaiah will follow his own path, and it will likely lead away from me and Kate.
That is one reason Kate and I are approaching
a point where we need to reexamine where our relationship is headed
We need to create and move toward a new vision of life together
that is juicy and vibrant.

And here we all are in church -
"What are we doing together? What is our story?"
One answer is that we're building relationships.
How we relate is what the Vision Statement printed on the back of your order of service is all about.
But the vision statement doesn't say anything about our story
As religious people, we're also building a relationship with some ultimate truth
that is larger than our own lives call it God, spirit, human destiny or whatever you want.

Proverbs 29:18 of the King James bible says -

"Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keeps the law, happy is he."
The Christian vision is the story of the bible and the rules laid down there
and I interpret "the people", to mean the bonds of relationship
That is what perishes without a vision.

As Unitarian Universalists, we have no common storybook or rulebook.
But like religious people everywhere, if we want be alive,
we need an energizing story
to move us forward in our relationship with the ultimate
The trick is, *we* have to make it up ourselves.

Unitarian Universalism, and Live Oak Fellowship need *this* kind of vision.
Not the dogma part, but the shared story
that guides us toward a world of meaning and joy.

In this faith and in this community
we truly are the mother birds AND the baby birds
We're here to have our needs met
and we're here to nurture each other and a vision of what our lives mean.

That's what I think we are doing together