

The sermon is an orator's art. These notes are prepared and used with the intent of being an aid to my oral delivery--it is not a polished or finished document and is laden with incomplete sentences, spelling-errors and lacks capitalization. If you are open to listening to the actual delivery, rather than reading this document, I encourage you to do so--it will give a more authentic experience. - Dallas

This is My Story - Dallas Bergen

3-MAY-2015

I play Dungeons & Dragons. I mean, not often anymore--it's been a couple of years--but it's a social hobby that I enjoy. People enjoy role-play gaming for a variety of reasons; some people love to delve into an alter-ego, to experiment with being somebody completely different. Perhaps with different morals, motivations and personality traits. I've tried that a few times... but my role-playing experience quickly informed me that I didn't want to play as somebody else; I wanted to play as myself; but a supernatural 'myself'. Playing in a fantasy game world became a place for me to practice being me; or the person I want to be--in a safe and unintimidating, pressureless environment. In the most recent campaign I worked with my companions to break down physical, racial and social barriers in an apartheid state of the 'pure'--the ruling elite unaffected by a post-apocalyptic plague; and the 'changed' or 'tainted' pejoratively. quelling prison riots; opening minds and hearts; giving speeches on inherent worth and dignity and the interconnected web of life.

Now, most nights when I put Noa to bed, she is eager to play "The Story Game", which is just D&D without paper or dice... or armed combat. My most recent character--and iteration of myself, Rahu Laul--appears in Noa's adventure as her sidekick, advisor and moral compass. She confronts her fears, experiences failure, practices skills of leadership, problem solving, quick thinking. And uses her vivid imagination to create new spells, magical items, places and characters.

I blur fantasy and reality all the time.

I blur most all of the boundaries in my life. Work and play. Friendship and professional... I have one email inbox... work related email from multiple jobs and across all acquaintances come to the same place. If you're familiar with the alignments in Dungeons and Dragons, I fall on the cusp of Neutral-Good and Chaotic-Good. Mapped on two axes, law/chaos and good/evil, Neutral good characters

A Neutral Good character typically acts altruistically, without regard for or against Lawful precepts such as rules or tradition.^[citation needed] A Neutral Good character has no problems with co-operating with lawful officials, but does not feel beholden to them. In the event that doing the right thing requires the bending or breaking of rules, they do not suffer the same inner conflict that a Lawful Good character would.

A Chaotic Good character favors change for a greater good, disdains bureaucratic organizations that get in the way of social improvement, and places a high value on personal freedom, not only for oneself, but for others as well.^[citation needed] Chaotic Good characters always intend to do the right thing, but their methods are generally disorganized and often out of sync with the rest of society. They

may create conflict in a team if they feel they are being pushed around, and often view extensive organization and planning as pointless, preferring to improvise.

My interest in Dungeons & Dragons was the first bump in my Christian faith journey... I was forbidden from playing--I grew up in a Mennonite home and church community--not old-order, fairly liberal progressive--but D&D, partly due to its inherent violence, as well as the occult practices, and druidic folklore therein--was heavily frowned upon.

That was ok with me though... I found it easy enough to reconcile my appreciation of slaying monsters. The chaotic good Mennonite pacifist in me took no issue; I was certain god didn't either.

Towards the end of high school, I started to examine my Christian beliefs more closely. One day in my mid teens, in youth group, I said to my teacher, "so, if I understand correctly, there are two types of baptism... the baptism of the spirit which occurs when we make a personal commitment to Christ; and the baptism by water, which is the public testimony of that commitment." "Yes, that's right". "And it's the baptism of the spirit--the personal commitment--that really matters in the eyes of god" "Yes, that's right"... hook, line and sinker! I followed that with, "So what of pre-marital sex? If it is the personal commitment that matters, then why are we forbidden from having sex before marriage when in a committed relationship?" kaboom.

Even still, I had a great connection to my faith and my faith communities. The teaching of Jesus were awesome... at least how *I* chose to interpret them. I went to bible camp, was a camper, CIT, counsellor. Youth cons and camp were some of the most defining moments of my coming-of-age years. It was campfire singing that sparked my love of group singing. Canoe trips and long hikes that fostered my love of the outdoors. But I started to grow more restless... more restrained by the rules and more irritated by the judgment I saw in my religion--perhaps more correctly, by *followers* of my religion. The condemnation of homosexuality became a major point of contention. I also felt that there was so much emphasis on the completely wrong content. We'd sing a camp song on a verse from 3rd Colossians... the well known verse says "whatever you say, whatever you do, do it all in the name of the lord Jesus Christ who rose from the dead to give you new life in him"... well, ok... upon further study I learned that also in Colossians 3 was all of this awesome stuff that said Greek or Jew, Circumcised or uncircumcised, slave or master; we are one. **12** Put on then--you who are holy and beloved--compassionate hearts, kindness, humility, meekness, and patience, **13** and if one has a complaint against another, forgive each other. And above all of these, put on love, which binds everything together in perfect harmony.

Why were we not singing about *that* piece of scripture.

Over the next 15 years I remained relatively comfortable in my Christian skin... I felt at home in the United Church; liberal progressive, committed to social justice. I came to simply ignore the parts of Christian doctrine that didn't resonate with me, and based my faith around the pieces that did; *to do justly, love mercy, walk humbly. Do not worry about what you will eat, drink or wear. do not save up treasures of this earth. look at the birds and the lilies of the field, they neither reap nor sow... love your neighbour, your enemy, give your cloak, do not point out the speck in your neighbours eye when*

you've got a log in your own eye, etc. Jesus was a teacher, a leader, a prophet, a man of love. I could get behind all of that.. but I avoided the whole messianic notion and the sacrificial atonement for sin. If we were going to be 'saved' it was going to come through other people, or from within ourselves.

Seeking out and falling in love with a Jewish Israeli further liberated my beliefs, and soon after our marriage, we settled in Toronto. I eventually made my way here.

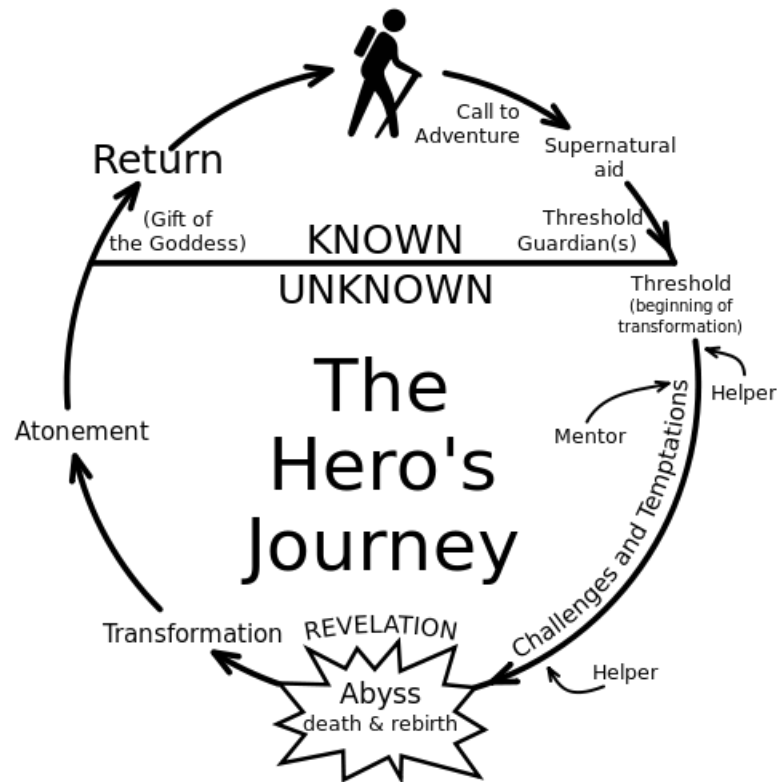
In my application letter I wrote:

I was raised in a Christian home and was baptized in the Mennonite church as a teenager. I have attended United churches for the past decade and have found both denominations to suit my liberal views on faith, pacifism, social-justice and equality. I respect other faiths and enjoy honoring other faith traditions. I am in a mixed-culture/faith marriage as my wife is Jewish and was born in Israel. I am also of mixed ethnicity. The seven principles of Unitarianism seem to resound my own beliefs. I am interested in learning more.

And now? I do consider myself a Unitarian Universalist; and proudly. I'm also proud of my Mennonite roots. But neither of these identities complete the picture of my beliefs. What I really believe in is breaking down barriers, creating community and improving quality of life through choral singing. That's at the heart of my religion. Leading people to truth, beauty and goodness. I long to be a great leader and hero of the people.

The quote atop your OOS comes from the Chinese national epic of historical fiction, *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*. Liu Bei is a morally upright leader, bold and virtuous, yet humble (often self-loathing), who desires to restore the decaying Han dynasty and bring peace and prosperity to the people. He surrounds himself with his closest friends, people of like mind and of brilliant talents; great warriors and advisors. They are integral to the manifestation of his dream for the world. His beliefs, founded on Confucian values, are of sacred humanism--that human beings are teachable, improvable, and perfectible through personal and communal endeavor especially self-cultivation and self-creation. Through the cultivation of virtue and maintenance of ethics, Liu Bei strives to achieve peace in the land. For Liu Bei, ritual is a part of deepening connection. In the early chapter of *Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, Liu Bei, and his new acquaintances, Zhang Fei and Guan Yu, gather in a peach garden, eat and drink together, and swear eternal brotherhood and their commitment to a common cause; *We three, though of different lineage, swear eternal brotherhood to one another. We will support each other in difficulty; aid each other in danger. We swear to serve the state and to protect its people. We may not share the same birth, but on the selfsame day we wish to die. May the shining heavens above and the bountiful earth below, read the sincerity of our hearts, and if we turn away from righteousness or forget kindness, may heaven and man smite us*".

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You may be familiar with the story archetype of the monomyth, or hero's journey. It's the template for nearly every epic tale with a central hero. The protagonist is in his/her comfort of their ordinary world--Dorothy in Kansas; Luke on the farm on Tatoonie; Frodo and his friends in the Shire. Then they are torn by some sort of internal or external turmoil and are forced to respond to the call of adventure--of personal growth; of enlightenment. They get some sort of supernatural assistance; a sign from god, a dream, a gift. They refuse the call. Get mentored. Leave home. Struggle. Find another mentor. Descend into hell/despair. Rise from it. Return home with new outlook/knowledge.

Have a look at the outline of the hero's journey. Does your personal journey fit the plot? Where are you at in your journey? What have been those obstacles in your life? Who have been your mentors? What was the 'world of unknown' in your epic?

... and what is your call? Have you heard it? Have you answered it?

Unitarian Universalists love the quote "We are the ones we have been waiting for". Mary Oliver--UU Saint if there is such a thing--has a gem on this theme called *The Journey*.

Then there's the Howard Thurman quote, "don't ask what the world needs; ask what makes you come alive--because what the world needs is people who have come alive!"

Khalil Gibran says:

Work is love made visible.

What is it to work with love?

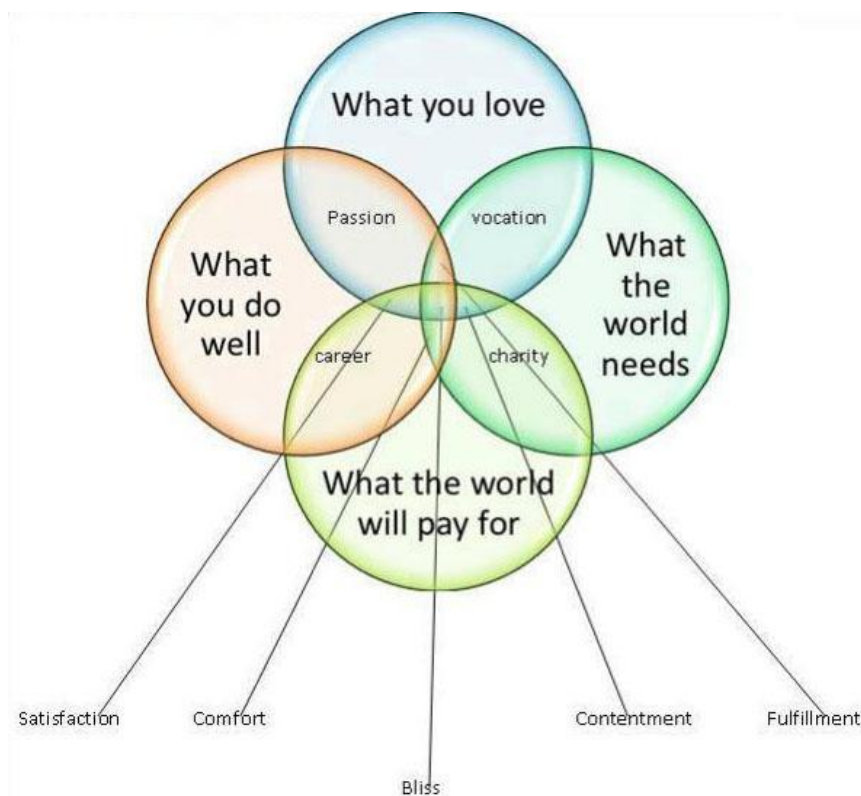
It is to charge all things with a breath of your own spirit.

In keeping yourself with labour, you are, in truth, loving life.

And to love life through labour is to be intimate with life's inmost secret.

Life is indeed darkness, save when there is urge. And all urge is blind save when there is knowledge. And all knowledge is in vain save when there is work. And all work is empty save when there is love. When you work with love you bind yourself to yourself, to one another, and to God.

Work is love made visible.



Flip over your insert... Here's a little something that might help you. It's a terrific Venn diagram... take a look at it. What is that one thing that you possess that is so uniquely 'you'--a skill, a passion. Find that out... what rests in that sweet spot in the middle. That spot denoted "bliss".

Carry this question to coffee hour and into the coming week. What does "bliss" mean for you? Are you taking steps towards that place?

I have had plenty to celebrate these past few weeks. I recently returned from a 1-week tour to Cuba with Univox. 27 of my choristers participated in our first international tour--in our 10th season. I had been pushing this for 10 years, trying to get the buy in. I'd say, "when you're on your death bed

looking back on your life, remembering the greatest moments of your life, you will think of those times on tour, watching the sun rise above the mist from the top of a Mayan pyramid, snorkeling with sharks and rays with your closest friends, a cross-cultural romance. On the very first night, we had the full group sitting by the pool and sharing our innermost secrets; the pain of losing both parents; struggles with body image; with depression. This first night set the tone for the rest of the tour. The outpouring of posts on facebook has been incredibly affirming... singers expressing how the experience opened, educated, transformed them. Most affirming was the way in which choir members cared for one another; how they were patient, tolerant, accommodating; didn't complain... just rolled with it. I now have 27 members, who with certainty, will be fully on board for our next tour. They'll probably even step up to make sure it happens. This was a huge milestone for me and my organization.

On Wednesday, Regent Park School of Music had their annual gala fundraiser, Crescendo, at the Daniels Spectrum. That was a job I had planned to have for only a year. It has become one of the most enjoyable things I do--those kids... their growth, their appreciation, how impressionable and malleable they are. They're special. The show closed with kids from all of the RPSM choirs singing the iconic anthem *Rise Up*, alongside Lorraine Segato of Parachute Club. A celebratory anthem for peace, freedom and equality, it was the perfect end to an evening dedicated to supporting the programs of the school and its mission to provide subsidized music lessons to underprivileged children and youth.

And on Friday, right here, we witnessed the tremendous array of talent from members of our family at first. To see the great artistry, poise and courage of so many in our congregation was incredibly moving, and no doubt inspired many, strengthening the fabric of our community.

Our lives are precious... truly. We are so much more than ordinary. Each of us has unique principles and passions that we hold deep in our hearts. To live a life not heeding the call that lives in each of us is to squander life's greatest opportunity to bring meaning to our own lives--and in turn, to heal this weary world. We each have a story to tell--an epic to live; we are heroes and sages; prophets and rogues.

Go forth, awakened to the call to live a life of purpose; of meaning; of virtue. You are both author and protagonist in a great epic. May you bring fantasy, magic, and heroism to the extraordinary tale of your most precious life. Amen.

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Invictus [WILLIAM ERNEST HENLEY](#)

Out of the night that covers me,
 Black as the pit from pole to pole,
I thank whatever gods may be
 For my unconquerable soul.

In the fell clutch of circumstance
I have not winced nor cried aloud.
Under the bludgeonings of chance
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this place of wrath and tears
Looms but the Horror of the shade,
And yet the menace of the years
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate,
How charged with punishments the scroll,
I am the master of my fate,
I am the captain of my soul.