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 Arlington Street Church
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Taking the Road Not Taken

On his thirtieth birthday, Dr. Richard Moss was sitting in a restaurant reading Franklin Merrell-Wolff's book *Pathways to Space* when the words began to dance on the page. He writes, "As I looked around, everything seemed alive with energy. The very air itself was on fire with radiant light, and my body felt like an atomic reactor gone wild."

Dr. Moss walked outside, feeling as though he might explode. "A shimmering brilliance pervaded everything," he says, "and I began to dissolve into the world around me.... 'I' and the world 'out there' were almost, but not quite, indistinguishable.

"The part of me that was observing all this was trying to regain control.... I became afraid.... My medical mind ... offered a chain of distressing diagnoses: ... stroke, ... psychosis.... I could feel my heart pounding.... I tried to breathe deeply in order to center myself. I found nothing I had learned gave me any authority over this experience. I told myself to let go, but then I began to dissolve even more and the fear became overwhelming.

"... Everything was significant.... Everything was connected. Everything *made sense* – not rationally, but because it was all part of one living thing."

Richard Moss was experiencing what even the most devoted spiritual practitioners can only imagine: an awakening to non-separative consciousness or, as we express it in Unitarian Universalism's seventh principle, awakening to the interdependent web of all existence.

I'm struck by the irony of his sense that he's going crazy, that it's somehow crazy to blur the lines and between self and "other," me and you, secular and sacred ... that it's somehow crazy to really get it, at a gut level – to grok it, soul-deep – that everything is connected.

Unitarian minister and essayist Ralph Waldo Emerson named that which connects us *soul*. “Within one [person] is the soul of the whole;” he writes, “the wise silence; the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal ONE. And this deep power in which we exist, and whose beatitude is all accessible to us, is not only self-sufficing and perfect in every hour, but the act of seeing and the thing seen, the seer and the spectacle, the subject and the object, are one. We see the world piece by piece, as the sun, the moon, the animal, the tree; but the whole, of which these are shining parts, is the soul.”¹

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Dr. Moss continues, “This state of intense energy continued uninterrupted for ... five days.... I was standing at the edge of an abyss, afraid and unable to let go, yet too anguished to remain where I was. The level of excitation, often mixed with intense anxiety, made it almost impossible to sleep.... For whatever reason, I could not surrender....

“[Finally, I] reached a state of resignation.... I had done everything I could think to do.” And here are my favorite words: “All that was left,” he says, “was acceptance. I vowed to myself that I would live one moment at a time, and even if I knew nothing but this misery, I would learn to be grateful.”²

Richard Moss writes of his experience, “I had been profoundly humbled. Even today, there is a part of me that remains in awe. I can trick myself into thinking that I had achieved something, but I know that it was only by Grace that it became the doorway into a new life. The ineffable opening had given me everything.... While it was never as intense as the first five-day episode, I relived dozens of mini-versions of the same process.... I would be afraid and reactive, then gradually bring myself fully into what was happening and suddenly enter a state of peace and radiance.”³

Our awakening to non-separative consciousness, to our soul-deep interconnectedness, may or may not be so dramatic. We can seek it – open to its truths – or we can run from it. We can persist or we can resist. But this awakening is a necessary waypoint on the spiritual journey, this path with heart we are walking together.

Zen teacher Karlfried von Dürckheim was born in Munich in 1896. In his early

1 Ralph Waldo Emerson, “Over-soul,” from *Essays: First Series*, 1841

2 Dr. Richard Moss, *The Black Butterfly*, pp. 17-24

3 Dr. Richard Moss, *op cit*, p. 29

twenties, while reading Lao-Tzu's *Tao Te Ching*, he says, “Suddenly, it happened! I was listening, and lightning went through me. The veil was torn asunder. I was awake! I had just experienced 'it' ...Another Reality had broken through this world... Everything existed and nothing existed... I myself existed and did not exist... I ...[was] linked ... once and for all, to the circuits of the True Life.”

In his book *The Way of Transformation*, Karlfried von Dürckheim writes, “The [person] who, being really on the Way, falls upon hard times in the world, will not, as a consequence, turn to that friend who offers ... refuge and comfort and encourages [their] old self to survive. Rather, [they] will seek out someone who will faithfully and inexorably help [them] to risk [themselves,] so that [they] may endure the suffering, and pass ... through it ... courageously. Only to the extent that [we expose ourselves] over and over again to annihilation can that which is indestructible arise within [us]. In this lies the dignity of daring.”⁴

Sooner or later on our spiritual journey – and sometimes both sooner *and* later – we will arrive at a crossroads, and the choice will lie before us: to retreat into the illusion of our separateness, or to awaken and celebrate our interdependence. Here is Robert Frost's poem, *The Road Not Taken*:

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no steps had trodden black.
Oh, I saved the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

⁴ see en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Karlfried_Graf_Dürckheim

I shall be telling this with a sigh
 Somewhere ages and ages hence:
 Two roads diverged in a wood, and I –
 I took the one less traveled by,
 And that has made all the difference.⁵

What would it mean to us – to you, to me, and to the world – to seek and see and celebrate this view, and choose to take the road not taken?

I return again and again to Alice Walker's *The Color Purple*, to the scene in which Shug is talking to Celie about the evolution in her understanding of the idea of g*d, leaving behind the picture of g*d as an old white man and arriving at an experience of non-separative consciousness, soul, interdependence. No, she doesn't say it that way! But she means it.

“Here's the thing, [says] Shug. The thing I believe. G*d is inside you and inside everybody else. You come into the world with G*d. But only [ones] that search for it inside find it. And sometimes it just manifest itself even if [you're] not looking, or don't know what [you're] looking for. Trouble do it for most folks.... Sorrow, lord....

“... G*d ain't a he or a she, but [an] It....

“Don't look like nothing, she say. It ain't a picture show. It ain't something you can look at apart from anything else, including yourself. I believe G*d is everything, say Shug. Everything that is or ever was or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you've found It....

“[Shug] say, My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet, ... it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything, not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed.”⁶

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Unitarian Universalist author Dan Wakefield called his spiritual memoir *How Do We Know When It's G*d?* Shug's answer is that it's *always* g*d. When one of my friends,

5 Robert Frost, “The Road Not Taken,” in *Mountain Interval*, 1920

6 the entire passage, in dialect: Alice Walker, *The Color Purple*, pp. 175-179

who is an atheist, or perhaps agnostic, first heard Shug's theological treatise, she said, "That's the g*d I *do* believe in!"

Beloved spiritual companions, our path with heart will lead us to an intersection of diverging roads.

May we open to a deep consideration of the choices before us,
and help one another risk all for all.

May we journey, together,
to an understanding of non-separative consciousness,
an experience of soul-deep interconnection,
and a joyful affirmation of our interdependence.

I am so grateful to be walking with you.
That has made all the difference.