

**First Parish Church UCC
Brunswick, Maine
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It seems each year as we prepare for Independence Day, we are forced to ask the question, “Are we truly free?” Many members of our American society are still carrying the old cudgels. We cannot be free as long as government is breathing down our backs. Others point to the inequities of society; the rich get richer and the poor get poorer, and above all, the motto seems to be “falsehood shall make you free.” Many of us, resenting the hand of authorities, sit and scheme, “What are the loopholes?” How do we circumvent the legal barriers that restrain our daily activities. So few of us address the illness itself. Scripture tells us, “Don’t rely on *nedavim* –bureaucrats, overblown public officials. Despite their promises, they cannot help. Salvation, or any other measure of self-fulfillment, isn’t in their hands. So why rely on them, or on their promises?

Every four years, the highest office of the land is judged. Great sums of money are spent by all candidates, who proffer themselves and denounce their opponents. Half-truths, innuendos, waft through the airwaves. It’s all sound and fury, signifying nothing. For the true issues of the day are ignored.

The true issue is civility. How do we accept each other? Are we members of a common brotherhood known as the United States of America or not? The sad fact is that civility seems to vanish by the minute. The very moment after the United States Senate passed a civility bill, the Vice President, acting as the President of the Senate, shouted out the unacceptable F-word, directing it at Senator Leahy of Vermont because he dared to challenge the integrity of the Vice President’s former company, Halliburton. The fact that this company was awarded the sole contract for rebuilding Iraq was not mentioned. The fact that Halliburton has been challenged by many for its kickback policies had been ignored. The fact that Halliburton had delivered an empty rail car, submitted the bill (for food intended for our troops but never delivered) likewise wasn’t mentioned. The fact that Halliburton is acting like the sexton of the poorhouse, doling out crumbs to the rest of the world, is overlooked. But the fact that Senator Leahy had the guts, the nerve, to challenge this blatant chicanery, is waved like a crimson flag before a dashing bull. The fact that the vice president, to this day, has not shared his acts of intrigue, which led to the energy fiasco in California, is left to rest, to be covered by the dustbins of history. Where is the civility passed by the Senate while VP Cheney was President of that body?

Much more can be said. When Scripture admonished us, “Don’t trust political leaders,” it knew of where and of what it spoke. The term known as the *Ethics of the Fathers* states, “Those who proclaim themselves as political leaders indulge in acts of falsehood. They befriend you when you can be of use to them. Afterwards, they act as if they had never met you.” So few of our political leaders seem to have the courage of those mentioned in *Profiles of Courage*. **They** listened to their hearts and souls, and not to the pandering sounds of their egos. **They** knew that a yes is a yes and a no is a no.

So, here we are again, asking ourselves, citizens of the land of the free and the brave, “Are we really free?” Isn’t it time for us to say that the freedom we seek cannot be purchased or doled out? Isn’t it time we said to ourselves, as the great teachers of old said, “The freedom you seek lies within you. It was given to you as a birthright. At creation, the Creator infused the first human with a part of the Creator’s self. Whenever a human relates to the God-part within him, or herself, he is free, not bound by human scriptures, not bandied about by the winds of the world and of the marketplace. He can be compared to one of Dostoevsky’s characters, so at ease with himself, so in turn with the Divine within himself. Nothing stands between him and life. He is free. He is filled with peace, with hope, with joy, with purpose. He knows his way in the world. He is aware of his destiny. He sees himself as the link in the chain called the human. He is linked to another, and is at ease with whomever he meets. He feels his purpose in life is not defined by public acclaim. He doesn’t feel the burden of sin is upon him; in fact, “sin”, the word, the concept, is foreign to him. He rejects all notions of inherent sin. No one is born in sin, no one needs to seek ways, highways, or byways to rid himself of sin. Since he has found the Divine spark, it serves as a guide, forever lighting his way in the world. He is free of the artificial chains others would put upon him. God is his witness. God and he are in sync. He doesn’t feel, as others do, that a chasm separates him from God. He doesn’t feel, as others do, that he is an inheritor of Adam’s (or anyone else’s) sin. In fact, he says, sin is not an appropriate word. It doesn’t describe his spiritual condition. He hasn’t rebelled against God; in fact, being in possession of the original breath of God (rather than the original sin of Adam), his life is filled with hope, with joy, with a daily sense of accomplishment. When he speaks to others, they respond. When he enters a room, he knows his presence is felt. He is forever finding causes for concern. Others have not searched for or found the Divine spark. Most are fearful, alert to imaginary terrors and dark clarion calls of our thought police, our homeland security police and others. They send out daily alarms. It reminds me of a nursery rhyme. When Chicken Little said the sky is falling, it never did, so no one paid attention to the chicken. When the catastrophe did occur, they were unprepared. Too often has the alarm been sounded, and too often it turned out to be a false one.

The one who has found the Divine spark and is in possession of it feels secure. He is in communication with a higher power, the power of God, a power unlike any other. It’s an inclusive power, not an exclusive one. It teaches that all of nature, all of humankind, stems from a single source. It doesn’t speak in elitist terms, of a specially chosen group of people. It says that the energy that stems from it is pervasive. It doesn’t destroy; it builds. It doesn’t bind; it opens the eyes. It doesn’t divide mankind into the saved and the lost. It knows, affirms, and asserts from the day of the creation of the universe, its task is to tie one to another, to speak, and the prophet spoke. To ignite the spark that heals, that mends, that brings one to another, so we may call one another brother, sister, mother, father. To quote the prophet, “Have we not one father?” Don’t we all stem from the same two beings? It says, in God’s name, they’ve never been condemned by me. They’ve never been told they were abandoned. When we isolate ourselves from the divine spark within us, we’re lost, we become the wanderers of the earth. But if we allow the spark to be the guiding force of our daily existence, then no barrier is too great, no chasm is too wide, no experience is beyond redemption, and no moment beyond hope and faith.

So you say to me, “Granted, the spark exists. How do I find it? How do I connect with it?”

This question was posed centuries ago by the Jewish mystics. They said God, in his mercy and kindness, infused us with His spark, and also infused some souls with the dedication of *malakhim* (messengers, angels) so they can help us in our quest for the inner spark. They said that every human has his, or her, *malakh* out there to act as a guide and a trigger, so that we may be in sync with our spark. The spark is there; it's for us to find it. And we do when we meet our divinely appointed messenger who will lead us to it.

Think for a moment. I'm sure you've had the common experience of sitting in a train or a bus or a plane. You look across the aisle and you see someone. You say to yourself, "I know him or her. Where did I meet him?" You walk over and say, "Your face is familiar. I know I've met you. My name is..." The other one looks at you, a blank stare in his eye, and yet, he too senses there's more than meets the eye. If you persist, you might hear, "I can't say I know you, but something rings true." At times, you feel a sense of unease, as if this encounter were long overdue. You might hear yourself saying, "I feel as if I know you all my life." It sounds strange, yet it is part of the mystical message: you've met the destined messenger. He's been waiting for you. And you know God's presence is here, and I didn't know it. God's presence, saying to you (in fact, to all of us) I am here, I am with you, I'm an integral part of you. Claim it, it's yours.

When that happens, the sun is brighter, the wind is calmer, the waves even in their roar, seem to be saying to us, "I am with you." Everything is brighter, even the color of your garments. You want to sing, to dance, to recite every *Hallelu-Yah* known to you. God and you are one, together forever, never to be separated.

At the moment, we are truly free. The shackles of public opinion melt away. The prejudices of previous generations are set aside. The fear of the morrow is no longer viable, the regrets of past acts and activities have been mitigated. The exodus of souls from their prisons is complete. We are free. We are free to believe whatever we want to believe, to follow the instinct of our bodies and minds. We see ourselves as serving our Self, the essential part of ourselves. We forgive ourselves for the misdeeds of the past, and we encourage ourselves to have faith in the future. And above all, we find ourselves living at last in the land of the free and the brave. Amen.