

## SPIRITUALITY GROUP NOTES: Oct. 01, 2013

We met at Helen's, our gratitude at being together heightened by the arrival of Richard, a welcome presence as he continues to recover from his surgery and its following complications. Our meditation began with concentration on Andrea and Dennis, who remain close in our hearts and thoughts.

Gudrun provided a recap of our last discussion about the possibility of the human brain being wired for spirituality/religion. Gudrun, as well as Sandy, have each read *Consciousness Beyond Life* by Dr. Pim van Lommel. Sandy described some elements of near death experiences as described in Dr. Lommel's book. They include:

- Ineffability--being unable to describe the experience,
- A feeling of peace, joy and bliss
  - no longer feeling connected to the body,
- Intense pain gone,
- An awareness of being dead,
- Out of body experience,
- Being pulled abruptly into a dark space,
- Meeting and communicating with known deceased people,
- Perception of a brilliant, beaming light
  - sometimes perceived as a being,
- Perception of an unearthly environment,
- Panoramic life review,
- There appears to be no time or distance,
- Perception of a border that if crossed, one could not return to life,
- A conscious return to the body.

Maureen shared text from an article entitled "The Genetics of Belief," written in 2005 by Dr. Chet Raymo and published in "Notre Dame Magazine." Dr. Raymo is Professor of Physics at Stonehill College in Easton, Mass. For 20 years he wrote a weekly column titled "Science Musings" for *The Boston Globe*. Some of the information in Dr. Raymo's paper follows.

Genes are DNA sequences that reside in every cell and are passed largely intact from generation to generation--they shape our bodies and some behaviors. Memes (a coinage of biologist Richard Dawkins, pronounced 'meems') are self-replicating units of culture, ideas or concepts passed from one individual to another through writing, speech, ritual and imitation. Memes can be as trivial as jump rope rhymes or as profound as a full-blown theology.

Dean Hammer of NIH, who wrote *The God Gene: How Faith is Hard-Wired into our Genes*, suggests that some part of spirituality may be an inherited ebb and flow of monoamines in the brain, but the forms and practices of religion are cultural and passed from one person to another by learning or imitation.

Dr. Raymo states that although scientists might be less traditionally religious than most, his experience has been that they are no less spiritual. He quotes from microbiologist Ursula Goodenough's book, *The Sacred Depths of Nature*, where she writes: "We have throughout the ages sought connection with higher powers in the sky or beneath the earth, or with ancestors living in some other realm. We have also sought, and found, religious fellowship with one another. And now we realize that we are connected to all creatures. Not just in food chains or ecological equilibria. We share a common ancestor...We share evolutionary constraints and possibilities. We are connected all the way down."

In revealing the universe of the galaxies and DNA, science opens our eyes to a creative power of far greater majesty/mystery than the divinities of our ancestors. Cultural historian and Passionist priest Thomas Berry urges us to assimilate the scientific story of creation--what he calls the New Story--into our religious and prayerful lives. He says the universe is a unity--an interacting, evolving and genetically related community of beings bound together inseparably in space and time. Our responsibilities to each other and to all of creation are implicit in this unity. Each of us is profoundly implicated in the functioning and fate of

every other being on the planet and ultimately, perhaps, throughout the universe.

Richard spoke of his recent hospitalization. Pietro encouraged Luci to urge Richard to perform a Buddhist practice, to simply ‘breathe and smile.’ Attached is another health aid sent to Richard, entitled “Reclaiming One’s Natural State of Health.”

Attendees recommended several items, and I shall list them below:

*How God Changes Your Brain* by Andrew Newberg and Mark Robert Waldman (Richard’s suggestion).

*The Shack*, a novel by William P. Young (recommended by Helen, as well as others).

“Defending Your Life,” a movie starring Meryl Streep and Albert Brooks (enjoyed by several).

We meet again on Nov. 5<sup>th</sup>. Hold the date—details will follow.