

Reflection: Spirit of Oz
Marjorie J. Loring
June 18, 2006

Similar to the “Wizard” of another story, we, as weary spiritual travelers, hold on to the belief that if we find the Great Spirit of Oz, we will be given the very thing that we believe we are missing.

In the Wizard of Oz, Dorothy starts her journey with a wish: a wish that her dream world might really exist - even if somewhere else - somewhere over the rainbow. Every day, when she looked around her old farm, she saw all the things she didn't want and imagined all the things that she didn't have - and this is what framed her world in Kansas. So - unhappy, angry, and hopeful, she ran away.

When we come to this congregation each week, how many of us become Dorothys? The truth is there are probably many Dorothys among us that can imagine a better spiritual place: those of us who tend to only see the things we don't like and those who are discouraged by the things we don't yet have.

What if our Dorothys, like the Dorothy of Kansas, run away? Where will our journey take us? Let's take that journey together... let's imagine that we land in a new spiritual world somewhere over the rainbow... our hopes are up, we look around us, and overall... things are looking pretty good.

The Dorothys

And so our journey begins with those who have the spirit of Dorothy: those who just want to find their ideal spiritual home. The road ahead becomes that search. The Dorothys find themselves on a path that they are told will lead them to the Great Spirit of Oz, for it is this Great Spirit of Oz who will lead the Dorothys to their spiritual home. A home, with all its comforts: a bowl of stone soup, warm conversation over a cup of hot coffee, and the laughter of kids playing and learning together. And with all the security of home: where no matter how far you stray, no matter how long you are gone, you can always come back - it will always be there for you. And with all the nurturance of home: a place where others are there for you when you're sick or just need help or encouragement. You see, there's no place like a spiritual home for the Dorothys. And so they set off to see the Spirit, the wonderful Spirit of Oz.

The Scarecrows

Along the way, the Dorothys come upon those with the spirit of Scarecrow. As they begin to talk, it is clear that the Scarecrows just want to figure things out. A spiritual home to them is a place where knowledge and ideas are shared. For the Scarecrows, the search is for something very different... they want to know what, how, and why. They want to find answers and reach higher levels of understanding. The Scarecrows want to be challenged with profound thoughts. They want problems to solve, ideas to ponder, and exposure to other ways of thinking and believing. You see, the Scarecrows want to find their Spiritual Mind.

These UU scarecrows are looking for:

A free and responsible search for truth and meaning, and the right of conscience and the democratic process.

Of course! A spiritual brain! If the Spirit of Oz can provide the Dorotheys with a Spiritual Home, maybe the Spirit of Oz can provide the Scarecrows with a Spiritual brain! Do we have any Scarecrows among us?

Why don't you join the Dorotheys and continue down the road together. What have you got to lose? Once again you're off to see the Spirit, the wonderful Spirit of Oz.

The Tin People

At the edge of an unfamiliar forest, you encounter the Spirit of the Tin People. It seems for them, the most important thing is to experience how life feels. They are natural caregivers, believing that the spirit of humanity is found outside of logic and rational thought. They believe instead that a Spiritual home is filled with emotions like love, empathy, affection, and reverence. They long to have experiences that make them feel deeply. Their emotions are what guide them through life and give them spiritual strength.

It appears that just like the Dorotheys and the Scarecrows, the Tin People are searching too, and the thing that they want the most is to find their Spiritual Heart.

The UU tin people seek:

The inherent worth and dignity of every person, acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth, and respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The Dorotheys and the Scarecrows agree that the great Spirit of Oz certainly can help the Tin People find their Spiritual Heart! So, you invite the Tin people to join you on your journey. With hopes high, you continue down the path to find the wonderful Spirit of Oz.

Do we have any Tin people here?

Join us on the journey and maybe you'll find your spiritual heart!

The Lions

Of course, not everybody fits in comfortably right away. Not every encounter starts off on a friendly note, and differences have the potential to release anxieties and fears - and these can create tension. This you soon discover when your journey leads you deep into the forest, right into the land where the Spirit of the Lions roars. Ah, the Lions... It seems that they always want to challenge things. They're always looking for something to go up against... and they can be pushy ... and they can be loud - relentless in their quests! But wait... let's listen closely to their roar.

The UU lions are looking for:

Justice, Equity and Compassion in Human Relations, and a world community with peace, liberty and justice for all.

These are the UU spirits who seek the courage to make it to the front lines where they can defend the rights of all.

To the Lions, a spiritual home is found in courageous actions: actions like marching for peace, standing up for human rights, speaking out for animal rights, defending the underdogs, and demonstrating against poverty and injustice.

The Lions believe that a spiritual home is found wherever there are mobilizing actions and voices that are demanding a more just world: a world of peace, justice, and equality.

The journey for the Lions must end with the attainment of Courage.

You're sure that the wonderful Spirit of OZ will give them the Spiritual Courage they are looking for! I'm sure we must have some Lions among us. So, you invite the Lions to join you, too, in your journey to find the great Spirit of Oz. After all... you're almost there!

In the original story of the Wizard of Oz, each character was looking to get something different from the Wizard: A Home, A Brain, A Heart, and Courage.

In our story, we seek to find the Spirit of Oz, even though spiritually, we, too, are looking for different things.

We have:

Those who are looking for the comfort and security of a spiritual home, complete with a spiritual family.

Those who are looking for thought provoking ideas and mind challenging concepts and beliefs that address who we are and why we are here.

Those who are looking for a place to stop and connect with each other and with the moment – with all the feelings and emotions of life within this interdependent web.

And we have those who take up the front lines, working to create social change that will help make the world a better place for this and future generations

And right now, we are all here - together. Some of us are Dorothys, some are Scarecrows, some Tin people, and some Lions. And just like in the original story, I believe that what we are looking for is something we already have to share.

You might look around this congregation on Sunday, and all you see is the farm, the pigpen, the daily chores, mean old Miss Gulch, and tornadoes ... but you are in Oz with the rest of us.

Look at the person sitting next to you. Do you see a Dorothy, a Scarecrow, a Tin Person, or a Lion?

Now, think about the part in the Wizard of Oz where, after the wicked witch threatened to set the Scarecrow on fire, and to make a beehive out of the Tin Man, the Scarecrow immediately made a commitment to get Dorothy to the wizard whether he got his brain or not, and how the Tin man made the same commitment to Dorothy whether he got his heart or not.

Now that you can see the character in the person sitting next to you, how important is it to you that they get their spiritual home, their spiritual brain, their spiritual heart, or their spiritual courage?

Yes, maybe it is different somewhere else ... But if we actually went there, wouldn't we realize that all we really wanted was what we already had and couldn't see?

Think about it. The characters in Oz were the same characters that had been in Dorothy's life in Kansas... but in Oz, she saw them very differently. Maybe by going there, even in our imaginations, we too can learn to see each other differently. Maybe we could learn to honor each other's spiritual differences... and maybe even enjoy them!

We are Unitarian Universalists. We rely on diversity within our communities to sustain us. We need to learn how to appreciate seeing others enjoy their favorite kind of spiritual service – to appreciate it as much as when we enjoy our own favorites.

After all, when the Wizard pulled a diploma out of his bag for the Scarecrow, the Tin Man didn't say "Hey, what about my heart?" Instead, he shared in the Scarecrow's joy of receiving his gift from the Wizard. Then, when his turn came, his joy was shared in return.

By working together, with respect and reverence for what was important to the others instead of to themselves, the characters in the Wizard of Oz gained something much bigger than the one specific thing they thought they were missing.

Look at how the Lion started off by being aggressive - claws out and defenses up. And how by the end of their journey, in the scene, "If I Were King of the Forest", all the characters honored and played out the Lion's ritual of being that king.

They respected the tradition and the ceremony - from placing the crown on the Lion's head, to holding up his long train behind him as he walked. It was his moment, and because it was important to the Lion, it was important to all of them.

Can we, too, work together like that, with respect and appreciation for the different kinds of spirituality that is important to each of us?

In the original story, it turned out that there really was no great and powerful Wizard of Oz. It was just a person: a person behind a curtain that the people of Oz chose to glorify. And once the anger and disappointment at discovering this subsided, it was this person

who was able to show them that what they wanted so desperately, they possessed all along.

Is this, too, what we will learn when we come face to face with our own wonderful spirit of Oz?

As we search for a new settled minister, let us keep in mind that he or she will be - just a person - not here to give us a spiritual mind, heart, home, or courage, but rather someone who will challenge us to discover what we already possess – both as individuals and as a community.

May it be so, may we live in blessing.