

**The Chaos and Serenity of Change**  
**Annie Foerster**  
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You're hearing it here first. You may have read about it in the recent issue of the *UU World*, but I'm saying it out loud. This book, *Sum: Forty Tales from the Afterlives*, by David Eagleman, is going to be the next Unitarian Universalist best seller. Someone will lend you a copy, or you will get it from the library, or you'll borrow a copy and you will read it. You will laugh. You will shake your head in disbelief. You will ponder. And then you will go out and buy your own copy so you can turn down the page corners and write notes in the margin. At least, that's what I'm going to do.

Eagleman's premise is that while we are wildly imaginative in creating all kinds of religious myths, we are deadly dull when it comes to the afterlife. Well, perhaps with Hell, we've been a little *too* much in the details, but with Heaven – boring. He has created forty possible stories of an afterlife to choose from and I am hard-pressed to decide which is my favorite. But here's one that captured me recently, as I was preparing for this service. It's called "Prism" and it starts like this:

*God resolved at the outset that he wanted every human to participate in the afterlife. But the plans weren't thought out to completion, and immediately he began to run up against some confusion about age. How old should each person be in the afterlife? . . . He decided it was unfair to keep people the age they were at the end of their lives, but allowing everyone to live as a young adult proved an unviable solution because the afterlife quickly degenerated into unbounded sexual pursuits. . .*

Well, to make a short story shorter, God is looking through a prism one day and sees the light refracting, splitting up into different parts of itself, and he says, "That's the solution." So, now, when you get to Heaven, you are split up into your multiple selves at all possible ages. This is a little chaotic at first until you get used to meeting yourself at different ages, until you settle some of your differences and until you decide who of you you don't want to be in a Small Group with. But underneath, there is a unifying structure. *[We] come to understand with awe, the complexity of the compound identity that existed on earth.* And, when we understand that what we knew as a single multi-dimensional self on Earth is gone, and you get used to the many yous, serenity results.

I read that and I recognized it instantly. I recognized it, because that's what it's like here at First Church. This is that Heaven. What we have at this moment is everyone's First Church refracted through a prism. The chaos we're feeling and attributing to so much change going on a one time is simply that we haven't gotten used to meeting ourselves at different ages yet.

Okay. Okay. I need to back up. It took God a while to get it. You just need a little time. Let me see if I can explain. You, who brought you children here 20-30-, what 40-years ago and then stayed after your children left, there you are, over there.

You've just recently joined and you have no idea yet what this place is going to mean to you and how involved you're going to get.

And you, who have just recently been asked to serve on your first committee and you're feeling a little overwhelmed. I saw you look at that older man over there who comes most Sundays but doesn't do anything, isn't on any committee list you've ever looked at. Do not disparage him. He's you, later, older, after you've been on six different committees and on the board twice, once as president. He's you 25, 30 years from now taking a well-deserved sabbatical.

And you with the cute kids, the ones who get in the front row for singing the chalice song and sing so lustily. That's him and that's her over there. They grew up, went to college, dropped out of church, dated all those – what shall I say? Non-liberals? – and they came back to church with their new spouses and their children. Yah, take a look. That's your grandchildren there that you won't meet for another 20-25 years.

Do you get it? That's what I see when I stand up here and look out. That's what I see happening at discussions and board meetings; at Small Groups and Circle Suppers; at the Heart and Hand Auction and Congregational Meetings. It's all here at once – past and present and future – all of it at once. Everything that happened before is happening again with minor adjustments. It's all you at different ages. Everything that is happening will happen again under similar circumstances. I can see that. No, I'm not God. I'm just the Assistant. Minister. Assistant Minister. She's not God either.

I see the life of this church refracted here, in each of you, child, visitor, newly-wed, 25-year honoree, past-president, president-yet-to-be. I know how hard it must be when the mature you meets the 20-something you in Heaven and blushes in embarrassment for past opinions. I know how hard it is when the working you meets the retired you and thinks, *what a slacker*. But it's what makes it work. It's what makes life work. It's what makes church work. It's what keeps on making it work even when everything around you looks like nothing but change. *I want the old church back*, you say, and I say, *It's here. It's right here. All of it is right here, then and now, when and forever. All of you. Every age of You is right here.*

*And God wanted everyone to participate. And so when you arrive here you are split into your multiples selves at all possible ages. The you that existed as a single identity is now all ages at once. These pieces of you no longer get older but remain ageless into perpetuity. The yous have transcended time.*

So may it be with **all** of your lives. So may it be with all of **your** lives.