

(Moses and the Burning Bush experience is a way for us to think about turning aside from our routines to experience something awesome and unexpected. Lily Tomlin's character in *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* illustrates the experience of awe through her "little space chums.")

*The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe* –

Remember it – the play and then the movie?

by Jane Wagner - starring Lily Tomlin.

I can't remember what year I saw it.

Did anyone see the play?

Lily plays all the characters in this collection of personalities.

They kind of represent the social history of the 20<sup>th</sup> century –  
in only the way Lily Tomlin can portray them.

The central character is – Trudy – the bag lady.

Trudy is a character. She wears her wig inside out to keep the good side clean.

Trudy talks to these little aliens from outer space - her little space chums.<sup>1</sup>

Of course, nobody else can see them –

but Trudy has endless conversations with them as the play goes on.

This is one of those plays where you find yourself laughing out loud at one moment  
and then in amazed silence – or perhaps tears in your eyes - at the next.

And then - at the end of the play Trudy comes to the edge of the stage  
and talks directly to the audience in that raspy voice:

"Hey, what's this?" She finds a note in her pocket.

"It's a letter from my little space chums. Let me just read it to you."

"Dear Trudy, thanks for making our time on earth so jam-packed and fun-filled.

We have orders now to go to a higher bio-vibrational plane.

Just want you to know that the best thing that happened to us on earth  
was *the goose bump experience*."

She says to the audience, "Did I tell you about that?"

I took them to see a play.  
They were at the back of the theatre standing there in the dark.

All of a sudden one of 'em tugs my sleeve."  
"Look, Trudy," he said.  
"Yeah, goose bumps," I said. "You definitely got goose bumps.  
You really like the play that much?"

They said it wasn't the play that gave 'em goose bumps.  
It was the audience.  
I forgot to tell them to watch the play – they'd been watching the audience!  
All those strangers sitting there in the dark - laughing and crying about the same things -  
that just knocked them out.

They said, "Trudy, the play was soup.....the audience.....art."  
"So, they're taking goose bumps home with 'em - Goose bumps!

I like to think of them out there in the dark, watching us.  
Sometimes we'll do something and they'll laugh.  
Sometimes we'll do something and they'll cry.  
And maybe one day we'll do something so magnificent,  
everyone in the universe will get goose bumps."

Moses probably had goose bumps that day -  
for he had to be in awe – touched by a kind of out-of-this-world experience.

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I don't know about you – but I have been having some goose bump experiences  
this week with the Democratic convention -  
especially when I hear stories of the candidates as they grew up –  
or about their mothers – or fathers  
or when their parents guided them in a way that helped them go in a life direction of public  
service – of moving beyond themselves -  
of learning to articulate what they see in the world - and how they might make a difference -

and how to talk about it - how they might be a leader.  
This is what Moses learned from God in the burning bush.  
Something else that happened that day with Moses – he learned  
how to speak when he went back to Egypt.

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But, back to this week -  
We know the planners of conventions and the staffs of the candidates work hard  
to put the best foot forward for us (the audience) to see.  
For it is certainly a show – and they want our votes.  
We will see it again next week with the Republican convention.  
I guess you can see the process is dear to me.  
And I will have tears then too - and I will be in awe  
when I hear the stories of childhood and parents and pivotal events in their lives  
that caused them to turn their lives in the directions they have.  
And I will have goose bumps at the whole process  
of how we do this in this United States.  
But more so, I am in awe of people – individual people rising to be leaders -  
from such a wide array of circumstances.  
And Moses - as a part of our early story – is one of them.

For me the conventions are goose bump experiences.  
I have learned to pay attention to the speakers  
and not to the commentators, or the pundits, who chatter incessantly -  
making sport of the aspirations of those who put themselves forward -  
and will do their best to beat the life out of each of them for the next few months  
before we elect one the leader of the free world.  
And, we will all be a part of it – whoever wins.  
That is a good bumps experience.  
I wonder if Moses' experience was similar –  
going from that pasture on the mountain – where he had little voice –  
to gain a voice and fulfill the awesome task of bringing them out of slavery.  
We will read more about Moses in the weeks ahead.

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What are goose bump experiences?

They are times when we experience something that touches our emotions  
sometimes with fear – sometimes love - but certainly awe.

Sometimes we turn aside for a moment to think about what it means.

A goose bump experience is about being an audience to something pretty special.

Moses was the audience to God – in the burning bush that day.

Sometimes goose bumps alert us to do something.

Would anything have happened if Moses had not turned aside?

That we can't answer.

But, when the Lord saw that Moses turned aside to see,

God called to him out of the bush. Moses! Moses!

And Moses said, "Here I am."

Moses may have thought his only job was to watch the flocks of his father-in-law.

And then - he looks up and that was the beginning of something big.

You would turn aside – wouldn't you? - I think I would.

But then sometimes I get so focused on what I am doing  
and what I am expecting to see or hear - that I don't see or hear.

I can be a dull audience.

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Surely God would have found another way to speak even if Moses had not stopped.

Yet, there is also a sense that Moses' turning aside brought forth God's speech.

Nothing happened really until Moses responded – until a relationship was established.

Then a lot happened. I wonder if it is like that with us – when God speaks to us.

What are some ways you turn aside – so that you might hear God's call?

When do you turn aside? How do you turn aside?

Many people turn aside sometime each day to be aware of the sacred,

for prayer, for meditation, for study, for worship.

Many United Methodists turn aside each day and read *The Upper Room* –  
the little magazines published monthly and available at both entrances to the church.

Others read *Alive Now*, or any number of other devotional materials.

You may meet regularly with others  
for the purpose of keeping one another accountable in your spiritual journey.

The early Methodists had something called class meetings.

The twelve-step programs, AA in particular, draws from them as a model.

AA grew and flourished and has changed thousands of lives.

The class meetings were a way to turn aside and recognize the presence of the sacred  
and let it claim us.

Maybe that is a way of saying - let it give us goose bumps.

Moses encounter with the burning bush is a way for us to think about  
how receptive we are to the awesome presence in our lives.

But, Moses first had to turn aside and listen – and begin relationship.

Thomas Merton writes about this in a short piece  
called "Our True Identity."

Love is our true destiny.

We do not find the meaning of life by ourselves alone -  
we find it with another.

We do not discover the secret of our lives  
merely by study and calculation in our own isolated meditations.

The meaning of our life is a secret that has to be revealed to us in love,  
by the one we love.

And if this love is unreal, the secret will not be found,  
the meaning will never reveal itself,  
the message will never be decoded.

At best, we will receive a scrambled and partial message;  
one that will deceive and confuse us.

We will never be fully real until we let ourselves fall in love -  
either with another human person or with God. <sup>2</sup>

*Goose Bumps*– based on Exodus 3:1-15  
Aspen Community UMC  
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It is all to say that being in awe of the living God  
and turning aside to let it do something with us  
is a pretty special thing to do.

Then our lives and our effect on the world around us  
just might give more goose bumps – to Trudy's little space chums  
- if they are somewhere out there watching from somewhere.

Surely there is the possibility that we are more significant than we often assume.  
And, that if we let the awesome presence (like that found in the burning bush)  
call us out of our routines – we might be really surprised.

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<sup>1</sup> Adapted from a sermon entitled "Turning Aside" by Barbara Lundblad

<sup>2</sup> Thomas Merton. Love and Living as reproduced in Behold: Arts for the Church Year. Pentecost 1 2008 (Year A).. 24.