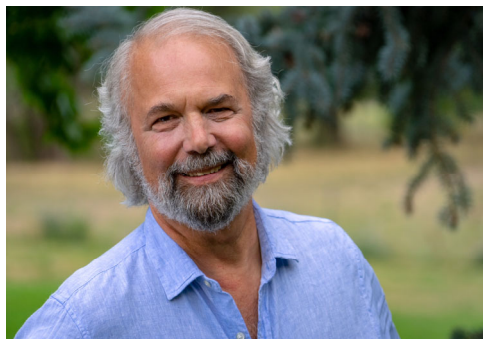


THIS INTERFAITH MOMENT

PULSE OF SPIRIT
MAY 31, 2023



DAVID KARCHERE *is a speaker and workshop leader who assists people to renew their Primal Spirituality—an experience that virtually all human beings know at birth, and that ideally grows as they mature.*

Here is an ancient story of someone who preserved the seeds of Western Civilization and the spiritual lineage of humankind.

There was a boy who grew up in the remains of a great kingdom. In its glory, kings and queens of surrounding countries had visited to wonder at its riches and the wisdom of its leader. The kingdom carried the highest hopes and dreams of humanity in its soul. Its priesthood communed with the Creator.

But before its secrets could be shared with the world, the king lost his way, and the royal family battled with each other for power. The nation fractured.

This boy grew up in a noble family amidst the remnants of the glory that had been. His country's weakness had left it open to invasion by foreign powers. And so, as a youth, he was carried off with many of the people of his native land to the capital city of a mighty empire, while his home was sacked and laid to ruin.

The boy was taken into the emperor's palace and given a name from the language of this foreign land. With his educated background, he was taught the language and culture of his captors, with the hope that he could be of service to them.

When the king offered him meat and wine from this strange place, he refused and ate only a vegan diet. He endured the foreigners feasting and drinking from the holy vessels they had stolen from his homeland. When the king pressured him to be part of the superstitious practices of this alien culture, he refused.

As a young man, he became an advisor to the king, who came to value his counsel. The wisdom of this man and his friends became highly revered.

Years went by. This foreign empire became weak from its own corruption and was overtaken by another, even more powerful empire. The boy had grown into a man and was appointed president by the new king.

Other leaders were jealous. They tested him. They threw him into an enclosure with wild beasts. They didn't know he was an animal whisperer, and his innocence carried the day. The wild beasts didn't harm him.

The king celebrated the man's victory. He acknowledged and worshipped the man's God and declared it to all the world. He declared that this man's God should rule supreme forever.

Then the king returned all the holy vessels to the man's people and sent the people back to their homeland. The empire sponsored them to rebuild their holy city and the temple at its heart.

By now, you might have guessed that the boy's name was Daniel. The capital of his native land was Jerusalem. He was carried away to Babylon. The beasts who spared his life were lions. And it was Persia who sent his people back to their homeland to rebuild their temple.

The Persian empire stretched from the Nile River valley to India. It was the largest empire the world had ever seen, up to that day.

Yes, it was Daniel who preserved the seeds of Western Civilization and the spiritual lineage of humankind.

You might question if this is a true story. But why else would the great empire of Persia decide to set the Jewish people free if not for Daniel? Why else would they return the holy vessels and sponsor the Jewish people to rebuild their temple?

It is true that Zoroastrianism—an early monotheistic faith—was the central religion of Persia, and that might have made them sympathetic to the Jewish people. It is also true that the Persians became known for their religious tolerance. But still, how do you explain their

strong financial and diplomatic support for rebuilding Jerusalem and its temple? It was Daniel who earned their respect, understanding, and support.

The story of Daniel and the lions' den appears in children's Bible story picture books. What is less well remembered than the lions is the declaration of the Persian king. This is how it is translated in the King James Version of the Bible.

Then king Darius wrote unto all people, nations, and languages, that dwell in all the earth; Peace be multiplied unto you.

I make a decree, That in every dominion of my kingdom men tremble and fear before the God of Daniel: for he is the living God, and stedfast for ever, and his kingdom that which shall not be destroyed, and his dominion shall be even unto the end.

Daniel 6:25&26

This was an interfaith moment with global implications; a time of understanding that transcended religion. It was a time that went beyond tolerance for another person's religion, to a vision of a universal faith for all people.

The Jewish people came from two of the twelve original tribes of Israel, together with some of the priesthood. When they were taken to Babylon against their will, the other ten tribes had already been captured and exiled by the Assyrian Empire.

Not all of the people of the northern tribes left Israel, just as there were Jews that remained when the rest of them were carried off to Babylon. And there were likely Israelites scattered through the Middle East when Daniel was in Babylon. But still, the survival of Jewish culture relied on Daniel and the people with him. More than that, the original promise given to Abraham was the

beating heart of the lineage of the Jewish people. Its continuance relied on Daniel and the support for his cause that he inspired in the Persian king.

And what was that promise originally given to Abraham?

In thee shall all families of the earth be blessed.
Genesis 12:3

And in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed. . . .

Genesis 22:28

This was the hope for the world for which Daniel was responsible. For that hope to stay alive in that lineage, he had to do his job.

The implications of this are vast. We might wonder, *If not for Daniel, would any of the content of the Old Testament have been preserved? Would we have the Creation Story in Genesis? Would we know of Noah, Job, or the Patriarchs? Moses or Elijah? Would we have the Psalms?*

Virtually all of Jewish culture up to that point, and its antecedents in the tales and teaching of all the Children of Israel, passed through their time in Babylon. It was taken there by them, and it was brought back to Jerusalem by them about 70 years later.

Picture an hourglass. All the grains of sand have to drop through the narrow aperture between the top and the bottom of the glass. That narrow aperture was Babylon. The sand is the cultural lineage of the Israelites. The lineage had to survive the experience of captivity to continue and be reborn into the world.

Jesus of Nazareth was born into this lineage almost 600 years later. He lived in the culture Daniel had

preserved. The teaching of love Jesus brought emerged out of it.

Eleven hundred years after Daniel, Mohammad was born in Arabia. While most Arabs of his day were polytheistic, Christianity and Judaism had reached Mecca, where Mohammed was born. The Quran references the characters and stories of the Old Testament, along with Jesus and Mother Mary. And Muslims believe that Abraham was Mohammad's ancestor.

While Muslims see the Quran as divine revelation from the Archangel Gabriel to Mohammed, the cultural context into which it was revealed included Judaism and Christianity, which would not have been present in the way it was if not for Daniel.

Within these three great faiths is the hope of the world. This is not to say that it exists nowhere else. But there it is, the beating heart at the center of Judaism, Christianity, and Islam.

Has that hope been fulfilled? It is easy to point to ways in which the Abrahamic traditions haven't realized this hope. Jesus was clearly frustrated with the Jewish culture of his day and felt compelled to make his own attempt to fulfill the promise given to Abraham. Mohammad was no doubt aware of the Judaism and Christianity of his day and apparently found them lacking. In the midst of all the adversity it faces, it seems so easy for any faith tradition to become oriented in its own preservation and the prosperity of its members, forgetting the original purpose of the faith. So the promise given to Abraham has yet to be fulfilled.

Could the promise be fulfilled without these three great faiths? If Daniel had been unsuccessful with the king of Persia, all that went before could have been scrapped. The promise might have been

fulfilled some other way. But there is no doubt that we would be living in a very different world.

Jewish culture formed a foundation for Christian culture, which has shaped Western Civilization to this day. Jewish culture itself had a profound impact on Western Civilization. And it was Islamic culture that seeded the Renaissance. Without Daniel, none of this would have transpired.

Where are the Daniels of today? Who is awake enough to participate in another interfaith moment in which we see beyond the limitations of our own faith, or anyone else's? When we receive all that is yet unfulfilled in human spirituality and let it be reborn now?

We can only imagine the desperation that Daniel and his people must have felt—their temple in ruins and their city sacked. There is evidence today of broken religious faith lying in ruins in people's lives. Do you ever feel desperation related to your culture, your lineage, or your spirituality?

What is clear from the story is how Daniel opened to an uncommon wisdom and brilliant vision of what was transpiring in his world. And he faced

what appeared to be a terrible circumstance with remarkable courage and hope.

Are you ready to be a Daniel of today? Here are some questions to think about:

- Are there elements of disillusion present in your life experience? How can you leave what is broken behind, while allowing what is meaningful to you to be reborn?
- What are the lions you are facing—those people and circumstances that seem to threaten what is precious to you? How can you be with those people and circumstances to bring peace and create a path forward?
- What opportunities do you have to welcome the people in your world to support what you know to be noble and true?

Welcome to the experience of being a Daniel of today, through whom the promise for all humankind is being reborn.

David Karchere
dkarchere@emnet.org
May 23, 2023



EMISSARIES
OF DIVINE LIGHT

*To receive a weekly e-mail with *The Pulse of Spirit*, send an e-mail to emissaries@emnet.org
Donations to Emissaries of Divine Light are welcome.
To make a contribution to assist in our work, please visit www.emissaries.org*

Copyright © 2023 by Emissaries of Divine Light