

## OPENING WORDS

Shivani Singh

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Good Morning and Welcome to All Souls. My name is Shivani Singh and I have been a member here for a little over 18 months. When I first moved to Manhattan in June of 2015, I felt besotted. My friends and family would say: “well that’s not surprising, its after all the epicenter of everything”. Sadly this feeling wilted in just about a week for me, as I was thrust into a grueling fellowship. I was sleep-deprived, hated my commute, became a slave to seamless and was living either in the past or in the future: to cut to the chase and not tell you everything, I was really quite miserable.

Then on a crisp October morning, in the haze of my troubled mind, I remembered a plaque at the entrance of a hospital back in England where I had spent many years as a junior doctor. The plaque had inscribed on it the famous words of the British-Indian Sufi poet Idries Shah: “It will pass, whatever it is”. In that moment, I decided to become more present. Amongst a few other things, I changed my meet-up city from London to New York and immediately spotted a meet-up listed for 80<sup>th</sup> and Lexington.

They said it was Adult Education. I thought I could do with a dose of that. The meet-up guy said he would be wearing a red hat, but when I got here I could not find any such person in a red hat. I waited, looked at all four corners of the intersection and then decided to come in. I walked right into this room. I felt at ease and sat down, I listened and sang, I felt more present than I had done in a long time. At the end of some fantastic music and a great sermon, I followed the crowd. Downstairs whilst I was still looking for my meet-up guy, my thoughts were fortunately interrupted by a charming voice at the welcome table that said “Can I help you?”.

In the weeks and months that followed, I was repeatedly drawn here. Having lived my life as a liberal Hindu, I personally have always been religiously plural and spiritually self-motivated but it was only here that this was reinforced and reverberated for me. Soon I realized that albeit unwittingly, I perhaps had also lived my life as a Unitarian Universalist. I learnt about the seven principles, about nuclear disarmament, about immigrant rights, about deeds not creeds, about community and about so much more at Sunday sermons. It was Idries Shah and Adult Education that got me here, and I found a niche in Religious Education. But most of all, it is the love that I have found here that fills me up with fortitude and thinking back, I had known immediately on that crisp October morning that I had found my spiritual home. Thank you and wish you all a very Happy Thanksgiving.