It's only been 3 years since I found this gathering of people called UUSS, and from day 1 felt a connectedness - it manifests in many forms: individual friends who I now feel like I've known a lifetime, members of my two Spiritual Deepening Circles, fellow competitors at Friday night game nights and now the Mah Jongg groups, my valued colleagues in the Worship Associates/Religious Services Committee, the sole-salving of 20 minutes with Elaine in the office, the joy we ALL felt when we returned to this beautiful UUSS "place" last September, growing my first tomatoes with lots of help from other Urrthsong gardeners and my plot buddy, Colleen, enriching times I've shared with Roger and Lucy furthering my spiritual journey, doing UUSS business, or just talking as friends.

I am convinced that this interconnectness continues, even in the afterlife. When you reach the end of

your eighth decade, you do start to ruminate a bit on "the afterlife".

David Eagleman, a gifted neurosurgeon, has written a remarkable book: **SUM: Forty Tales from the Afterlives**. He presents several versions of what the afterlife may be like, each tale presenting a stunning lens through which we can also see ourselves in the here and now.

I resonate most with his tale, "Narcissus", where I learn that our purpose here on the Earth is to collect data. We have been seeded on this planet as sophisticated mobile cameras. We are equipped with advanced lenses that produce high-resolution visual images, calculating shape and depth from wavelengths of light. The cameras of the eyes are mounted on bodies that carry them around – bodies that can scale mountains, spelunk caves, cross plains.

We are outfitted with ears to pick up air compression waves and large memory sheets of skin to collect temperature and texture data. We have been designed with analytic brains that can get this mobile equipment on top of clouds, below the seas, onto to the moon. In this way, each observer from every mountaintop constitutes a little piece of the vast collection of planetary surface data.

We were planted here by the [CAPITAL C] Cartographers, whose holy books are what we would recognize as maps. Our calling is to cover every inch of the planet's surface. As we roam, we vacuum data into our sensory organs, and it is for this reason only that we exist.

At the moment of our death we awaken in the debriefing room. Here our lifetime of data collection is downloaded and cross-correlated with the data of

those who have passed before us. By this method, the [CAPITAL C] Cartographers integrate billions of viewpoints for a dynamic high-resolution picture of the planet. They long ago realized that the optimal method for achieving a planet-wide map was to drop countless little rugged mobile devices that multiply quickly and carry themselves to all reaches of the globe. To ensure that we spread widely on the surface, they made us restless, longing, lusty, and fecund.

We were built to become curious and independently develop refinements and enhancements. The design specification was that our efforts were not prescripted; instead, to conquer the unpredictable variety of landscapes, we were subjected to natural selection to develop dynamic, unforeseen strategies. The [CAPITAL C] Cartographers do not care who lives and dies, as long as there is broad coverage.

They are annoyed by worship and genuflection; it slows down data collection.

When we awake in the giant spherical windowless room, it may take a few moments to realize that we are not in a heaven in the clouds; rather, we are deep at the center of the Earth. The [CAPITAL C] Cartographers patiently pushed us out to the surface and watched for millennia as we spread out providing images of every region.

Even though there was initial success, the [CAPITAL C] Cartographers are profoundly frustrated with the results. Despite their planetary coverage and long life spans, the mobile cameras collect very little that is useful for cartography. Instead, the devices turn their lenses directly into the gazes of other compact lenses – an ironic way to trivialize their technology. On their sophisticated sensory skin, they simply

want to be stroked. The brilliant air-compression sensors are turned toward the whispers of lovers rather than critical planetary data. Despite their robust outdoor design, they have spent their energies building shelters into which they cluster with one another. They build communication networks to view pictures of one another remotely when they are apart.

Day after day, with sinking hearts, the [CAPITAL C] Cartographers scroll through endless reels of useless data. The head engineer is fired for it is finally realized that

he has created an engineering marvel that only takes pictures of itself.