

Submission for weekly column “Space for Reflection” in The Current
“Your Original Face”

Ya gotta love musical legends such as Bob Dylan and Van Morrison. They may be getting on in years, but they just keep pouring out soulful lyrics and powerful music. Besides their unique instrumentation and distinctive voices, both of these classic singer-songwriters poetically describe human yearning and striving.

Van Morrison in particular often conveys spiritual searching or insight in his songs. One song I like is called “Till We Get the Healing Done.” It’s about the different ways we’ll know that the healing we need has taken place. One example is the line: “Till you know your original face.” And the words of the Morrison song “Before the World Was Made” refer to “your original face/before time and space.”

Isn’t that a compelling concept? “Your original face.” What does that mean? It makes me think of identity and nature—who we really are. Identity was the subject addressed in this year’s Convocation and selected as the overarching theme of the year for the Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences. Mark Nerenhausen, President and CEO of the Broward Center for the Performing Arts, and Dr. Emily Schmitt, recipient of the Farquhar College of Arts and Sciences Full-Time Faculty Excellence in Teaching Award, both gave interesting and inspiring talks on the topic of identity. While the messages and styles of the speakers were different, both emphasized the fact that the college years are a time for us to discover for ourselves who we really are. We have the opportunity to claim, and to some degree create, the person we want to be and the ways we want others to identify us. We can determine what constitutes a worthy life in our eyes, what holds value for us. This is a time to consider what our goals are and what we want our legacy to be.

What constitutes a person’s identity? Some factors are situational—for example, I am a resident of Florida and a graduate student at NSU. Some factors are relational—I am Jack’s wife, baby sister to five siblings, friend of many, “mother” of two dogs and a cat. Other factors are cultural or social—you may identify yourself by nationality, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion. But if we take away the situational and relational factors, the cultural and social factors, is there anything else to our identity?

“Your original face, before time and space” suggests something that exists beyond where we were born, what school we go to, whom we consider our friends. It points to something more fundamental—our essence, our spiritual nature. Each one of us embodies a unique combination of qualities such as compassion, intelligence, humor, creativity, patience, integrity, courage. And each of us expresses our qualities in entirely individual and distinct ways. Perhaps these qualities are the “stuff” of our spiritual identity.

It’s a vast subject, and our understandings of identity will certainly vary. I’d be interested to hear your thoughts on the subject: How do you figure out who you are?

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