

Living the Questions...

December 2012

Wonder - the practice of staying awake

Questions

Are wonder and awe encouraged in our society?
Is one-pointed attention the secret of being awake?
Is one-pointed attention difficult in our multi-tasking society?
How has your experience of wonder changed in your faith life?
What helps you stay awake to wonder and awe?

Readings and Excerpts

From wonder into wonder existence opens. - *Lao Tzu*

She/He who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe is as good as dead; his/her eyes are closed.

- *Albert Einstein*

“The invariable mark of wisdom is to see the miraculous in the common.”

- *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

“Youth is happy because it has the capacity to see beauty. Anyone who keeps the ability to see beauty never grows old.”

- *Franz Kafka*

Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.

- *Socrates*

They say that every snowflake is different. If that were true, how could the world go on? How could we ever get up off our knees? How could we ever recover from the wonder of it?

- *Jeanette Winterson*

Never say there is nothing beautiful in the world anymore. There is always something to make you wonder in the shape of a tree, the trembling of a leaf.

- Albert Schweitzer

Wonder is the basis of worship. Worship is transcendent wonder.

- Thomas Carlyle

Lyrics from *The Sun at High Noon*, p. 14 *Singing the Living Tradition*

(Lyrics are from Sydney Henry Knight [1923-] who was minister of the St. Saviourgate Unitarian Chapel in York, England, a leader in the British Unitarian organization, and the editor of two hymnals, including Hymns for Living (1985). The text was inspired by a nursery school teacher on a nature walk. The music is from Thomas Benjamin [1940-] a professor of composition and theory at the Peabody Conservatory of the Johns Hopkins University, who attends the Unitarian Universalist Society of Howard County, Columbia, Maryland.)

The sun at high noon, the stars in dark space
The light of the moon on each upturned face,
The high clouds, the rain clouds, the larksong on high,
We gaze up in wonder above to the sky

The green grassy blade, the grasshopper's sound,
The creatures of shade that live in the ground,
The dark soil, the moist soil, where plants spring to birth
We look down at wonder below in the earth

The glad joys that heal the tears in our eyes,
The longings we feel, the light of surprise,
Our night dreams, our day dreams, our thoughts ranging wide:
We live with a whole world of wonder inside.

A Brahman saw the Buddha resting under a tree in meditation. The Brahman was impressed with the Buddha's way.

He asked, "Are you a god?"

"No, Brahman, I'm not a god."

"Are you an angel?"

"No", replied the Buddha.

"You must be a spirit then?"

"No, I'm not a spirit," said the Buddha.

"Then what are you?"

"I'm awake."

It has seemed to me sometimes as though the Lord breathes on this poor gray ember of Creation and it turns to radiance - for a moment or a year or the span of a life. And then it sinks back into itself again, and to look at it no one would know it had anything to do with fire, or light Wherever you turn your eyes the world can shine like transfiguration. You don't have to bring a thing to it except a little willingness to see. Only, who could have the courage to see it? Theologians talk about a prevenient grace that precedes grace itself and allows us to accept it. I think there must also be a prevenient courage that allows us to be brave - that is, to acknowledge that there is more beauty than our eyes can bear, that precious things have been put into our hands and to do nothing to honor them is to do great harm.

- Marilynne Robinson from "Gilead"

"Miracles"

WHY! who makes much of a miracle?

As to me, I know of nothing else but miracles,

Whether I walk the streets of Manhattan,

Or dart my sight over the roofs of houses toward the sky,

Or wade with naked feet along the beach, just in the edge of the water,

Or stand under trees in the woods,

Or talk by day with any one I love--or sleep in the bed at night with any one I love, (... continued)

Or sit at table at dinner with my mother,
Or look at strangers opposite me riding in the car,
Or watch honey-bees busy around the hive, of a summer forenoon, 10
Or animals feeding in the fields,
Or birds--or the wonderfulness of insects in the air,
Or the wonderfulness of the sun-down--or of stars shining so quiet
and bright,
Or the exquisite, delicate, thin curve of the new moon in spring;
Or whether I go among those I like best, and that like me best--
mechanics, boatmen, farmers,
Or among the savans--or to the soiree--or to the opera,
Or stand a long while looking at the movements of machinery,
Or behold children at their sports,
Or the admirable sight of the perfect old man, or the perfect old
woman,
Or the sick in hospitals, or the dead carried to burial, 20
Or my own eyes and figure in the glass;
These, with the rest, one and all, are to me miracles,
The whole referring--yet each distinct, and in its place.

To me, every hour of the light and dark is a miracle,
Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,
Every square yard of the surface of the earth is spread with the
same,
Every foot of the interior swarms with the same;
Every spear of grass--the frames, limbs, organs, of men and women,
and all that concerns them,
All these to me are unspeakably perfect miracles.

To me the sea is a continual miracle; 30
The fishes that swim--the rocks--the motion of the waves--the ships,
with men in them,
What stranger miracles are there?

- Walt Whitman