



Living the Questions **Monthly Theme Packet**

Each month, our church gathers around a monthly theme and practice to guide our congregational life: worship, small groups, religious education, justice, and classes. Use these readings for reflection around the dinner table, in your own prayer practice, alone or with others. If you are interested in a monthly Sharing Circle, contact:
Rev. Luke Stevens-Royer revluke@wbuuc.org or 651.426.2369

Theme for March: **God : the practice of naming**

Questions

- What does the word "god" mean to you?
- What past experiences have you had with traditional "god" language?
- What can you say about the "god" you don't believe in?
- What possibilities might there be in an expansive understanding of god for you (god, goddess, spirit, wisdom, non-gendered, beyond naming, etc.)?
- What language do you use to name experiences of mystery, wonder, and awe?

Quotations

“Where is the door to God? In the sound of a barking dog. In the ring of a hammer. In a drop of rain. In the face of everyone I see.”

- Hafiz, Sufi Muslim Mystic

“Faith consists in being vitally concerned with that ultimate reality to which I give the symbolical name of God. Whoever reflects earnestly on the meaning of life is on the verge of an act of faith.”

- Paul Tillich

“We do not want merely to see beauty... we want something else which can hardly be put into words- to be united with the beauty we see, to pass into it, to receive it into ourselves, to bathe in it, to become part of it. That is why we have peopled air and earth and water with gods and goddesses, and nymphs and elves.”

- C.S. Lewis

“Religions are, by definition, metaphors, after all: God is a dream, a hope, a woman, an ironist, a father, a city, a house of many rooms, a watchmaker who left his prize chronometer in the desert, someone who loves you - even, perhaps, against all evidence, a celestial being whose only interest is to make sure your football team, army, business, or marriage thrives, prospers, and triumphs over all opposition.”

- Neil Gaiman, *American Gods*

“I hear and behold God in every object, yet understand God not in the least.

- Walt Whitman

Poetry & Lyrics

How shall we address thee who art the One of a thousand names yet ever nameless?
O Vishnu, Maya, Kali, Ishtar, Athene, Isis...Great Mother of Creation, womb of the universe,
The Feminine Divine....Blessed art thou who hast given life to all
And receiveth us at the end, forever thine...Jupiter, Zeus, Apollo, Dionysius...
Lord of creation, the masculine divine, in quest of the golden apples of Hesperides,
God of ecstasy and wine, and reason sublime...Amen, Horus, Aten, Ra...
God of beginnings and endings, the soul, the ka,
Soaring like a bird to the life-giving, light-giving power of the sun,
All life is one...Shiva-Shakti, Yin and Yang...
The dance of life and death from hand to hand, in perfect balance the movement of forces,
As the earth turns 'neath the stars in their courses...
Rama, Krishna, Varuna, Bramah...God of the Upanishads and Rig Veda, mystic priests and
the Bhagavadgita, Om Shanti, the lotus, a holy vow, creating our own karma and
reincarnation, here and now, And the ever present realization, that art Thou...
Buddha, Nirvana, the Enlightened One...
Liberation sought and won, in daily life begun, under a tree, in the sun,
To a state of being indescribable, comparable to none...Allah-Akbar and Ahura Mazda...
There is no god but God, the All, Ah! the One, the Righteous One, purity of Fire.
Goodness and Truth to inspire, fight fire with fire, quench the evil desire,
Let the call ring forth from minaret to spire...El Shaddai, Adonai, Yahweh, Elohim
The God of Peace be with you, Shalom Haveyreem,
ten Commandments and the Law for Gentile and Jew
The birth of conscience and a Day of Atonement to confess, to forgive, to begin anew...
Abba, Spiritus, Logos-Son... God in Three Persons, God in One, God in all persons: prophets,
teachers, daughters and sons, the Kingdom of Heaven is within us, O let thy Kingdom come...
How shall we address thee who art Alpha and Omega, The stars in their courses from Denib
and Altair to Sirius and Vega?
Thou of a thousand names and yet ever nameless,
Let us confess the mystery of thy holiness,
Let us proclaim the wonder of One without a name,
Let the silence praise thee,
And the nine billion stars of thy namelessness.

- Richard M. Fewkes

Naming It Love by Carol Caouette

Written for the August 1, 2013 WBUUC Wedding Day service in celebration of marriage equality.

Someone, somewhere asked the brave question
Why can't I be with the one that I choose
Someone, somewhere changed the direction
We're living a spiritual, unfolding miracle
We claimed the future by naming it Love.

We said, "Fathers, daughters, mothers and sons,
It's time to do right and stop what is wrong."
Just as our ancestors live in our bones,
The work that we do now will live on and on.

She said, "I am recognized, I am relieved;
as though I am free and now I can breathe."
We're called to a covenant and to our whole lives,
to have and to hold, to be fully alive.

He said, "Now I belong in a way that is true;
what matters to me now matters to you.
One conversation led to another;
links in our chain increased with our power.

Readings & Excerpts

In *adam* and *adamah* there is an obvious play on words, a practice that the Bible shares with other ancient literatures. This should not, however, be mistaken for mere punning. Names were regarded not only as labels but also as symbols, magical keys, as it were, to the nature and essence of the given being or thing.

- Ephraim A. Speiser

In life, you discover that people are called by three names: One is the name the person is called by his father and mother; one is the name people call him; and one is the name he acquires for himself. The best one is the one he acquires for himself. (*Tanchuma, Vayak'heil 1*)

Each of us has a name given by God and given by our parents. Each of us has a name given by our stature and our smile and given by what we wear. Each of us has a name given by the mountains and given by our walls. Each of us has a name given by the stars and given by our neighbors. Each of us has a name given by our sins and given by our longing. Each of us has a name given by our enemies and given by our love. Each of us has a name given by our celebrations and given by our work. Each of us has a name given by the seasons and given by our blindness. Each of us has a name given by the sea and given by our death.

- Zelda, "Each Man Has a Name," as adapted by Marcia Falk

When we speak the word "God" we are moving out of our normal way of speaking and into a special religious communication system. It is a communication system which speaks about ultimate concerns and as such helps us to understand and express answers to such universal questions as:

- What is the source of all that is?
- What causes the changes in life: birth, growth and death?
- What happens after death?
- Why do the bad things in life happen?
- Why is there suffering and evil?
- What will protect me, heal me, forgive me?
- What rules for living shall I follow?
- What will bring about justice, peace and love?
- What makes life worth living?

Underlying the variety of ideas and images of God in this curriculum are three important concepts which come to us from our Unitarian Universalist traditions. The first is that ultimate reality is understood to be a oneness, a unity, a wholeness which reflects the interdependence of all that is. The second is that ultimate value is perceived to be a universal love and worth which bestows dignity on all. The third comes from our traditions of freedom and openness to change which signify an awareness, whether acknowledged or tacit, that understandings of ultimate reality and values will always be tempered by ultimate mystery.

The oneness is the ultimate source of the diversity of forces we find, such as: female and male; birth and death; light and dark; silence and sound. The oneness holds these forces together in an interrelated and interdependent whole. If we use the word "God" to symbolize ultimate reality, then God can be understood as a oneness which can take many forms. Love and worth permeate all this is and convey an inherent value which is universal to all that is. This sense of dignity of all is the source of justice and peace; compassion and forgiveness, and joy. If we use the word "God" to symbolize ultimate value, then God can be thought of as love and worth which can take many different forms. To be a Unitarian Universalist is to cherish one's own freedom to explore answers to the ultimate questions and, at the same time, to respect the quests of others. This implies an understanding that hearing different views can be helpful, and the change, at times, reflects truth best. If we use the word "God" to symbolize ultimate mystery, then God can be thought of as a mystery which can take many forms.

- Maryann Moore, *Stories About God* curriculum introduction

