



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:
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Theme for April: **Brokenness : the practice of being wholly human**

Questions

How have you experienced brokenness in your own life?

In a culture of high expectations, how might claiming your own “brokenness” be freeing and a reminder of the imperfections of being wholly human?

What are the personal risks in being more aware of what’s broken in the wider world?

What does it mean to you to be “wholly human” and what practices help you experience that reality?

How has an awareness of your own or the world’s brokenness provided possibilities for growth, transformation, or change?

Quotations

The wound is the place where the Light enters you.

- Rumi

To be fully alive, fully human, and completely awake is to be continually thrown out of the nest. To live fully is to be always in no-man's-land, to experience each moment as completely new and fresh. To live is to be willing to die over and over again.

- Pema Chödrön

One does not become fully human painlessly.

- Rollo May

Knowing life is short, enjoy it day after day, moment after moment. It is through practicing and living through a series of agreeable and disagreeable situations that we realize full awakening.

- Shunryu Suzuki

Brokenness is not necessarily a bad thing if it can be seen as fertile training ground.

- Anonymous

“Ring the bells that still can ring, forget your perfect offering. There is a crack in everything; that’s how the light gets in.”

- Leonard Cohen, Anthem

When the Japanese mend broken objects, they aggrandize the damage by filling the cracks with gold. They believe that when something’s suffered damage and has a history it becomes more beautiful.

- Barbara Bloom

If you look closely at a tree you'll notice its knots and dead branches, just like our bodies. What we learn is that beauty and imperfection go together wonderfully.

- Matthew Fox, theologian

Spirituality is a measure of humanity – personal depth, conscience, deep responses to the brokenness of our world, the threats to our planet home, the crisis points in our own lives, and the pleas and plight of human beings around us.

- Catholic Bishop Pedro Casaldaliga

Poetry & Lyrics

In My Quiet Sorrow

Hymn #1006 in *Singing the Journey, Unitarian Universalist Hymnal*

I am worn, I am tired, in my quiet sorrow.

Hopelessness will not let me be. Help me.

I won’t speak of this ache inside me, light eludes me.

In the silence of my heart, I’m praying.

I keep on, day by day, trusting light will guide me.

Will you be with me through this time, holding me?

You’re my hope when I fear holding on, believing.

Deep inside I pray I’m strong, Blessed be.

From the composer: Written to honor "those things which are not expressed, kept within the silence of our hearts." This song was written to acknowledge the concerns or sorrows in our hearts that sometimes go unexpressed--with a prayer for support, love, and guidance. We all have times in our lives that are challenging; sometimes we need to ask for help, but we don't know quite how or when.

I'm like one of those Japanese bowls
That were made long ago
I have some cracks in me
They have been filled with gold

That's what they used back then
When they had a bowl to mend
It did not hide the cracks
It made them shine instead

So now every old scar shows
From every time I broke
And anyone's eyes can see
I'm not what I used to be

But in a collector's mind
All of these jagged lines
Make me more beautiful
And worth a much higher price

I'm like one of those Japanese bowls
I was made long ago
I have some cracks you can see
See how they shine of gold
- *Japanese Bowl*, Peter Mayer

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert, repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body love what it loves .
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting-
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.
- *Wild Geese*, Mary Oliver

Readings & Excerpts

Dave: What does it mean to be fully human?

Carl: A different question might be, Can we be fully human without awareness of our debt to everything which sustains us? I think we sometimes are more sensitive and awake to these connections. When we are, we are called to be humble and more responsible. That seems like a good start on the long pilgrimage to find our humanity...

I don't believe there is a pristine state that we come from or strive towards—no noble savage, no sainthood, no innocent childhood. Everybody wrestles with the same problem faced by the toddler—do I play with this toy by myself or give someone else a turn? If I am hungry, do I eat the cookie by myself or share it? We are steeped in the myth of progress, both spiritual and material. We have the story of the pilgrim, toiling on the path to God. We have the story of civilization, up from savages, building the shining city on the hill.

I like the idea that being human or building a culture is more like making bread—you take disparate elements, and through work, skill, and love you create something that is entirely different than the sum of its parts, that can be beautiful and sustain life. There is no final goal of perfection. There is the need for constant renewal. Death, rebirth, growth, death, rebirth. We are participants in a terrible and beautiful cycle. While a sin may be a trespass against our best nature, in being fully human we learn to forgive and appreciate sin as a part of our process of growth.

I don't believe that we are traveling from a pure state through a corrupted state to a pure state. There is no goal. There is the opportunity to bring light to any particular moment, or to enjoy the darkness or shades of grey. There is the chance to gain understanding, to forgive, to grow in competence and confidence, to accept losing competence and confidence, failure, and death. It's a rough road but a fascinating one.

- *Excerpted from an interview on the website www.beingfullyhuman.com with Dave Kopacz, psychiatrist & Carl Riesman, attorney*

Humans are imperfect. We are each uniquely made and live our lives uniquely. Yet we often compare ourselves to others, finding a standard of perfection against which we undoubtedly fail. Lacking a skill or feature we wish we had, we may feel incompetent or inadequate. We forget to value our capacity to learn, grow, and contribute to our communities in our own unique ways. Unitarian Universalism celebrates the beauty of each individual—imperfections and all.

- *From Windows and Mirrors, from the Unitarian Universalist Tapestry of Faith Program*