



White Bear Unitarian Universalist Church

Grow Your Soul & Serve the World

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Theme for December

MYSTERY – the practice of keeping open

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.

More online at www.wbuuc.org/themes.

QUESTIONS

What about this life and being human is mysterious?

What experiences have inspired you to keep your mind and heart open?

How does being open to mystery influence a free and responsible search for truth?

What role does mystery and ambiguity play in your religious/spiritual/ethical life?

QUOTES

"The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery every day. Never lose a holy curiosity. Do not grow old, no matter how long you live. Never cease to stand like curious children before the Great Mystery into which we were born."

- Albert Einstein

I would rather live in a world where my life is surrounded by mystery than live in a world so small that my mind could comprehend it.

- Harry Emerson Fosdick

POETRY & LYRICS

To go in the dark with a light is to know the light.
To know the dark, go dark. Go without sight,
and find that the dark, too, blooms and sings, and is traveled by dark feet and dark wings.
- Wendell Berry

Accidents of Birth

Spared by a car or airplane crash or
cured of malignancy, people look
around with new eyes at a newly
praiseworthy world, blinking eyes like these.

For I've been brought back again from the
fine silt, the mud where our atoms lie
down for long naps. And I've also been
pardoned miraculously for years
by the lava of chance which runs down
the world's gullies, silting us back.
Here I am, brought back, set up, not yet
happened away.

But it's not this random
life only, throwing its sensual
astonishments upside down on
the bloody membranes behind my eyeballs,
not just me being here again, old
needer, looking for someone to need,
but you, up from the clay yourself,
as luck would have it, and inching
over the same little segment of earth-
ball, in the same little eon, to
meet in a room, alive in our skins,
and the whole galaxy gaping there
and the centuries whining like gnats—
you, to teach me to see it, to see
it with you, and to offer somebody
uncomprehending, impudent thanks.
- William Meredith

READINGS & EXCERPTS

Spiritual Practice: OPENNESS By Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

1. Enhances: Empathy, Flexibility
2. Balances/Counters: Close-mindedness

The Basic Practice

It is important in the spiritual life to keep an open mind, open to ideas, experiences, people, the world, and the Sacred. Openness is an ability to go with the flow, as Taoism puts it, without expecting predetermined outcomes. It means being receptive to new possibilities, without prejudging them. It is an ability to make yourself available to out-of-the-ordinary opportunities. Indeed, openness to the unknown, the exotic, and the bizarre is usually seen as the mark of a free spirit.

You can increase your openness by practicing empathy. Move outside yourself into another's situation. Try to access the other's feelings and ideas. For the purposes of practice, the more eccentric your choice, the better.

Why the spiritual practice of openness may be for you:

The contrast to openness is narrow-mindedness. It is characterized by a rigidity of mind. Pessimistic people who have armored themselves against preconceived disappointments are not open. Dogmatic and stubborn people are basically unapproachable.

How available are you to others? How interested are you in people, especially those quite different from you? How flexible are you? Do you usually think you already know how things are going to come out? Are you willing to try something new? These are the questions to ask to assess your openness and to determine the benefits you might derive from this practice.

Daily Cue, Reminder, Vow, Blessing

- 1 Opening a window is a cue to open my mind to new ideas and experiences.
- 2 When I hold an empty cup, I am reminded to remain open and receptive.
- 3 Seeing a sign, a book, or a film in another language, I vow to be open to the messages coming to me from other cultures.
- 4 Blessed is the Holy One whose openness to us is a model for how we should be open to the world.

Riddle & Mystery: A UU Tapestry of Faith Curriculum for 6th graders by Rick Kimball

In this Unitarian Universalist curriculum, each of the 16 sessions introduces and processes a Big Question. The first three echo Paul Gauguin's famous triptych: Where do we come from? What are we? Where are we going? The next ten, including Does God exist? and What happens when you die?, could be found on almost anyone's list of basic life inquiries. The final three are increasingly Unitarian Universalist: Can we ever solve life's mystery? How can I know what to believe? What does Unitarian Universalism mean to me?

Humanity's list of big questions is not finite, of course, but Riddle and Mystery's list is. Many sources were consulted to determine the questions most relevant to the faith formation of a sixth grader. What you have here is the result: 16 Big Questions for youth to unpack with a wide range of inquiry, activity and exploration as outlined under Program Structure, below.

Unitarian Universalists of every age may usefully consider life's big questions. Why focus a curriculum at the sixth grade level? Because sixth graders are at a critical moment of growth, just turning the corner into adolescence. They face a sometimes bewildering world of increasing independence and choice. They are developing new abilities for abstraction and analysis as they encounter new ideas. Sixth graders need the wise counsel a guided Unitarian Universalist investigation can offer. And, sixth graders are typically open to the mix of deep inquiry and playful spirit that big questions prompt.

You will notice words such as "response," "reaction" and "comment" occurring throughout Riddle and Mystery, more often than the word "answer." Unitarian Universalists do not attempt to answer big questions for each other or for anybody else. Instead, we try to give reflective, generous responses that will help all seekers to their own understanding within the philosophical and theological frameworks expressed in the UU Principles and Sources. This is the intent of Riddle and Mystery.

Riddle and Mystery does not directly pose one of the greatest questions: What is the meaning of life? Nevertheless, its 16 sessions suggest a response: The meaning of life—of human life, at least—is questions. Without them, the essence of humanity would be absent. Without them, the mystery would be lost. Without them, all would be fully known or not known; all would be dull. Life is, blessedly, in the words of the song introduced in Session 1, "a riddle and a mystery."

A few books for children on Pinterest:

<https://www.pinterest.com/wbuucRE/mystery-the-practice-of-keeping-open/>