



Summer 2017 Monthly Theme

SPIRIT

the practice of inhaling and exhaling

The intention of the themed year is to help Unitarian Universalists build a robust spiritual and ethical vocabulary. The themes are points of departure for religious liberals seeking to think, speak and act theologically, prophetically and prayerfully. The themes reclaim religious language, casting old terms in a new key to deepen spiritual grounding and sharpen moral reasoning. More at: wbuuc.org/themes or sign up for a circle at wbuuc.org/classes.

QUESTIONS

How have you experienced a spiritual, or sacred dimension, to the everyday world?
When you have slowed down to notice your breath, how has it changed you?

QUOTATIONS

In this very breath that we take now lies the secret that all great teachers try to tell us.

- Peter Matthiessen

It is important to note that in spite of how it feels when you inhale, you do not actually pull air into your body. On the contrary, air is pushed into the body by the atmospheric pressure that always surrounds you. In other words, you create the space, and the universe fills it.

- Leslie Kaminoff and Amy Matthews

POETRY

Imagine then a dancer who,
after long study, prayer and inspiration,
has attained such a degree of understanding
that his body is simply the luminous manifestation of his soul;
whose body dances in accordance with a music heard inwardly,
in an expression of something out of another, profounder world.
This is the truly creative dancer...
speaking in movement out of himself
and out of something greater than all selves.

- Isadora Duncan

Don't measure me with scales and tapes.
I'm not a prize pumpkin that should be reckoned so.
Don't measure me by height or weight,
discard or accept me, judge me or pity me,
love me or despise me
based on the bodily size of me...

I'd ask you to measure the pleasure my words bring,
or the perspective of my paintings
or the depth of my thought...
but I ought not, for in the dark of night,
when words flee and sight's irrelevant
and my brain is incapable of anything more than staying afloat
—of staying alive
(And I'm not talking of physical night,
that falls softly and at dawn, slips away,
but the darkness that thunders 'round my soul,
in plain sight of day...)
What then?
Will I be found wanting when all sense and sanity
have gone away?

Put them away,
your plumb lines and your calipers,
your gauges and thermometers,
scales and tintometers...
Close your eyes, if you must
—what they see is only dust,
though stardust, true, and beautiful...

Now, in the silence and the dark,
feel the beating of your heart
and Spirit, running through.
These things alone are true and they should be
the only measurement of you, or me.

- Ruth Calder Murphy

Ah, it's true.
When our ancestors spoke of heaven,
they were speaking of this moment.
When they went on about nirvana
they imagined a time like this.
When they sang of paradise,
it was this morning they imagined. (*con't...*)

A time when all the mysteries of life and death
are blended in a community of praise,
when the bones of ancient lovers
are given flesh again in our own bodies,
teachers of long ago speaking of love and truth
more than once in lives so ordinary they are
extraordinary.

Blest is our breath, in and out, quiet,
blest is our sitting, our fidgeting, our movement,
blest is our heartbeat echoing
the pounding alleluias of the distant stars,
blest is the silence that is presence,
not absence.

- Mark Belletini

READINGS & EXCERPTS

Mindful breathing is a kind of bridge that brings the body and the mind together. If through mindfulness of the breath you generate harmony, depth, and calm, these will penetrate into your body and mind. If you generate peacefulness in your breathing, that peacefulness permeates your body and your state of mind...If you have been able to embrace your in-breath and your out-breath with tenderness, you know that they in turn embrace your body and your mind.

Peace is contagious. Happiness is also contagious, because in the practice of meditation, the three elements of body, mind and breath become one. You are here for life; and if you are here for life, life will be here for you. Where mindfulness is, true life, solidity, freedom and healing also manifest. Do walking meditation, breathe mindfully, drink your tea mindfully, and cultivate this energy that dwells in you, that illuminates you, and makes life possible...I have arrived, I am home, in the here and in the now. I am solid, I am free. In the ultimate I dwell.

- Thich Nhat Hahn

One beautiful form of meditation is to simply follow the breath. Sit comfortably, and close your eyes. Let yourself become aware of the physical sensation of the breath, feeling the shape, texture, and duration of the inhale and the exhale. Do not change your breathing, do not strain or push in any way. Simply feel the breath breathe itself. Feel the rhythm of the breath, feel its timing, the end of the exhale, the readiness to inhale. When the mind wanders – as it will – do not worry. Simply return your awareness to your breath. Silently note each inhale or exhale, mentally noting in, out or rising, falling. Do this for five minutes at first. What do you notice about the rhythm of rest in your breathing? What do you notice about the rhythm of breath in your body?

- Wayne Mueller

Every time we take a breath, we become the universe. The very moment of creation is contained in us and passes on to rocks and trees, animals and fish. The old ones say the essence of life is in water and wind, earth and breath, fire and bone, but most of all in breath, our first connection to the elk, the hawk, the bear, and the buffalo.

Without breath, no connection. Without connection, no creation.

Without creation, no breath.

This is the sacred circle of life, unbroken.

- Nancy Wood

A person who lives only at the active level is like someone who only breathes out, or like a heart that only releases blood. That would be a strange kind of life, if indeed it were even possible. There is a give and take at all levels of life...we follow the rhythm of breathing in and breathing out. Leisure is not the opposite of activity, productivity, or work. Rather, leisure is the right balance between give and take, between work and rest, and it can therefore be achieved in work as well as in rest...

Still, the question persists: What is leisure? As the balance between work and rest, it is the opposite of idleness because it is the basis from which good work starts and grows. We might say that leisure is the beginning of all virtues in the sense that it is an inner attitude of openness and trust. Its characteristics are "taking it easy" rather than "keeping busy," of "allowing things to happen," not "keeping things under control." Trust is necessary, because we can only let things happen if we believe that things will work out all right. We can open our hands and receive these things without the nagging fear that they are traps. The difference between this inner openness and a kind of nervous choosiness is the difference between an open hand and a clenched fist.

- David Rast

In Louisville, at the corner of Fourth and Walnut, in the center of the shopping district, I was suddenly overwhelmed with the realization that I loved all these people, that they were mine and I theirs, that we could not be alien to one another even though we were total strangers. It was like waking from a dream of separateness, of spurious self-isolation in a special world...

This sense of liberation from an illusory difference was such a relief and such a joy to me that I almost laughed out loud. . . . I have the immense joy of being [human], a member of a race in which [Godself] became incarnate. As if the sorrows and stupidities of the human condition could overwhelm me, now that I realize what we all are.

Then it was as if I suddenly saw the secret beauty of their hearts, the depths of their hearts where neither sin nor desire nor self-knowledge can reach, the core of their reality, the person that each one is in God's eyes.

If only they could all see themselves as they really are. If only we could see each other that way all the time. And if only everybody could realize this! But it cannot be explained. There is no way of telling people that they are all walking around shining like the sun.

- Thomas Merton