



January 2018 Monthly Theme

DISCIPLINE

the practice of following your heart

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 is our understanding of "discipline" different from our understanding of "self-discipline"?

What is the relationship between discipline and surrender?

How can discipline aid in following your heart and how can it get in the way?

ORIGINS

From Old English *discipul* and *discipula* and from Old French *descepline* (teaching), both from Latin *discipulus* (a pupil, learner) which comes from *discere* (to learn).

QUOTATIONS

Everything, all beauty and rightness, seems to turn upon a right subordination of the outward to the inward, the transient to the permanent, in our lives and thoughts. Yet this right subordination cannot be achieved in a hurry. If we are to learn to assign to the weightiest matters their true place and predominance, we must allow ourselves, or rather we must steadily resolve to secure for ourselves, quietness enough not only to know our own minds, but to listen to the still small voice of conscience, or of God, speaking in our own hearts. ~ Caroline Stephen

When I dare to be powerful - to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid. ~ Audre Lorde

In the process of telling the truth about what you feel or what you see, each of us has to get in touch with himself or herself in a really deep, serious way. ~ June Jordan

***Train Your Heart. Don't Just Follow Its Moods!* by Ajahn Chah**

Listening to your own heart is really very interesting. This untrained heart races around following its own untrained habits. It jumps about excitedly, randomly, because it has never been trained. Therefore, train your heart!

Buddhist meditation is about the heart; to develop the heart or mind, to develop your own heart. This is very, very important. This training of the heart is the main emphasis. Buddhism is the religion of the heart. Only this! One who practices to develop the heart is one who practices Buddhism.

This heart of ours lives in a cage, and what's more, there's a raging tiger in that cage. If this maverick heart of ours doesn't get what it wants, it makes trouble. You must discipline it with meditation, with *samādhi* (meditative concentration.) This is called "Training the Heart."

At the very beginning, the foundation of practice is the establishment of moral discipline (*sīla*). *Sīla* is the training of the body and speech. From this arises conflict and confusion. When you don't let yourself do what you want to do, there is conflict.

Eat little! Sleep little! Speak little! Whatever it may be of worldly habit, lessen them, go against their power. Don't just do as you like, don't indulge in your thought. Stop this slavish following. You must constantly go against the stream of ignorance. This is called "discipline". When you discipline your heart, it becomes very dissatisfied and begins to struggle. It becomes restricted and oppressed. When the heart is prevented from doing what it wants to do, it starts wandering and struggling. Suffering (*dukkha*) becomes apparent to us.

This *dukkha*, this suffering, is the first of the four noble truths. Most people want to get away from it. They don't want to have any kind of suffering at all. Actually, this suffering is what brings us wisdom; it makes us contemplate *dukkha*. Happiness (*sukha*) tends to make us close our eyes and ears. It never allows us to develop patience. Comfort and happiness make us careless. Of these two defilements, *dukkha* is the easiest to see. *Therefore, we must bring up suffering in order to put an end to our suffering.* We must first know what *dukkha* is before we can know how to practice meditation.

[In Buddhism, dukkha refers to the implicit unsatisfactoriness, incompleteness, imperfection, insecurity of all conditioned phenomena, which, because they are always changing, are always liable to cause suffering. Dukkha refers to all forms of unpleasantness from gross bodily pains and the suffering implicit in old age, sickness and death, to subtle feelings such as being parted from what we like or associated with what we dislike, to refined mental states such as dullness, boredom, restlessness, agitation, etc. This is one of the most misunderstood concepts and one of the most important for spiritual development.]

In the beginning, you have to train your heart like this...You will develop the virtues of patience and endurance. Whatever happens, you endure, because that is the way it is. For example, when you begin to practice *samādhi*, you want peace and tranquility. But you don't get any.

You don't get any because you have never practiced this way. Your heart says, "I'll sit until I attain tranquility". But when tranquility doesn't arise, you suffer. And when there is suffering, you get up and run away! To practice like this cannot be called "developing the heart." It's called "desertion!"

Instead of indulging in your moods, you train yourself with the Dhamma of the Buddha. [Dhamma, or dharma, is the liberating law discovered and proclaimed by the Buddha.] *Lazy or diligent, you just keep on practicing.* Don't you think that this is a better way? The other way, the way of following your moods, will never reach the Dhamma. *If you practice the Dhamma, then whatever the mood may be, you keep on practicing, constantly practicing.* The other way of self-indulgence is not the way of the Buddha. When we follow our own views on practice, our own opinions about the Dhamma, we can never see clearly what is right and what is wrong. We don't know our own heart. We don't know ourselves.

Therefore, to practice following your own teachings is the slowest way. To practice following the Dhamma is the direct way. *Lazy you practice; diligent you practice.* You are aware of time and place. This is called "developing the heart."

In standing up, our body forms the number one, a reminder of the Oneness of God. It also forms, in Arabic, the letter *alef* (the equivalent of "A," the first letter of alphabet), which begins both Allah and the word *insan* ("human being"). So, we as human beings have our origin in God, and our return is to God.

How lovely to be this majestic!

How luminous to be human!

How beautiful, how made in God's own image, with 70,000 years of [divine glances](#) for each and every single one of us.

And yet, this luminous station is not a place that we can operate from exclusively. If we did, surely we would turn into arrogant beings. We also have to learn humility. We also have to remember that without the Divine, we are nothing. We are no thing, for every thing and every one has its origin in God.

So we bow. The same head that we hold high in pride, we lower. So we prostrate ourselves, taking the head that would wear the crown of majesty and putting it on the same dirt that we come from.

But we cannot be simply dirt. We are not merely humility and nothingness. There is also joy and majesty and honor that come from bearing the crown jewel of the cosmos: Divine spirit. This is why each and every single child matters, because each of us is a living, walking, breathing receptacle of Divine breath.

So we stand, and we bow.

We are majestic, and we are nothing.

We are spirit, and we are dirt.

We are the representative of the Lord of the Cosmos, and we are nothing.

We pray, therefore we are.

Let us seek the heart of prayer. Yes, Lord, teach us how to pray. Teach us the heart of prayer. Teach us the prayer of the heart.

***To Be of Use* by Marge Piercy**

The people I love the best
jump into work head first
without dallying in the shallows
and swim off with sure strokes almost out of sight.
They seem to become natives of that element,
the black sleek heads of seals
bouncing like half-submerged balls.

I love people who harness themselves, an ox to a heavy cart,
who pull like water buffalo, with massive patience,
who strain in the mud and the muck to move things forward,
who do what has to be done, again and again.

I want to be with people who submerge
in the task, who go into the fields to harvest
and work in a row and pass the bags along,
who are not parlor generals and field deserters
but move in a common rhythm
when the food must come in or the fire be put out.

The work of the world is common as mud.
Botched, it smears the hands, crumbles to dust.
But the thing worth doing well done
has a shape that satisfies, clean and evident.
Greek amphoras for wine or oil,
Hopi vases that held corn, are put in museums
but you know they were made to be used.
The pitcher cries for water to carry
and a person for work that is real.

MUSIC

Let the Way of the Heart

I Know This Rose Will Open

Wayfaring Stranger

Be Thou My Vision

Find a Stillness

RESOURCES FOR YOUTH

Giraffes Can't Dance by Giles Andreae

