



Summer 2018 Monthly Theme

WONDER

the practice of opening the windows

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.

Is wonder the same as curiosity? Is it the same as awe?

QUOTATIONS

It takes grace in our time to keep our minds open to wonder, to be ready for the tug from God, the push from the Spirit, and the revelation of deep things from the hearts of ordinary people. It takes grace, but it is a great gift. ~ Lewis B. Smedes in *How Can It Be All Right When Everything Is All Wrong?*

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead —his eyes are closed. ~ Albert Einstein

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. ~ Albert Einstein

Einstein said, "This huge world stands before us like a great eternal riddle." Why couldn't any of my teachers have told me that? "Listen," they could have said, "no one has any idea what the hell is going on. We wake up in this world and we don't know why we're here or how anything works. I mean, look around. Look how bizarre it all is! What the hell is all this stuff? Reality is a huge mystery, and you have a choice to make. You can run from it, you can placate yourself with fairy tales, you can just pretend everything's normal, or you can stare that mystery in the eye and try to solve it. ~ from *Trespassing on Einstein's Lawn: A Father, a Daughter, the Meaning of NOTHING and the Beginning of EVERYTHING* by Amanda Geffer

POETRY

From Blossoms by LI-YOUNG LEE

From blossoms comes
this brown paper bag of peaches
we bought from the boy
at the bend in the road where we turned toward
signs painted Peaches.

From laden boughs, from hands,
from sweet fellowship in the bins,
comes nectar at the roadside, succulent
peaches we devour, dusty skin and all,
comes the familiar dust of summer, dust we eat.

O, to take what we love inside,
to carry within us an orchard, to eat
not only the skin, but the shade,
not only the sugar, but the days, to hold
the fruit in our hands, adore it, then bite into
the round jubilation of peach.

There are days we live
as if death were nowhere
in the background; from joy
to joy to joy, from wing to wing,
from blossom to blossom to
impossible blossom, to sweet impossible blossom.

Wonder and Joy by Robinson Jeffers

The things that one grows tired of—O, be sure
They are only foolish artificial things!
Can a bird ever tire of having wings?
And I, so long as life and sense endure,
(Or brief be they!) shall nevermore inure
My heart to the recurrence of the springs,
Of gray dawns, the gracious evenings,
The infinite wheeling stars. A wonder pure
Must ever well within me to behold
Venus decline; or great Orion, whose belt
Is studded with three nails of burning gold,
Ascend the winter heaven. Who never felt
This wondering joy may yet be good or great:
But envy him not: he is not fortunate.

From Antigone by Sophocles

Numberless are the world's wonders, but none
More wonderful than man; the storm gray sea
Yields to his prows, the huge crests bear him high;
Earth, holy and inexhaustible, is graven
With shining furrows where his plows have gone
Year after year, the timeless labor of stallions.

The light-boned birds and beasts that cling to cover,
The lithe fish lighting their reaches of dim water,
All are taken, tamed in the net of his mind;
The lion on the hill, the wild horse windy-maned,
Resign to him; and his blunt yoke has broken
The sultry shoulders of the mountain bull.

Words also, and thought as rapid as air,
He fashions to his good use; statecraft is his
And his the skill that deflects the arrows of snow,
The spears of winter rain: from every wind
He has made himself secure--from all but one:
In the late wind of death he cannot stand.

READINGS & EXCERPTS

Spiritual Practices: Wonder by Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat

The Basic Practice: Wonder begins in the senses, comes alive in the imagination, and flourishes in adoration of the Divine. It arises from our natural curiosity about the grand adventure of life. It increases our capacity to be a bold inner space tripper and an avid explorer of the physical world.

There is no end to the things that can awaken our wonder, from the majesty of the night sky to the smell of lilacs in the spring to the turning of the leaves in the fall. And it is all right here, a feast of epiphanies and astonishments in the daily round of our spiritual lives.

The first step in this spiritual practice is to rejoice in the play of our senses: smell, touch, taste, hear, and see. Slow down and tune into the varied world of this and that. You'll never get anywhere with this practice by rushing.

Why This Practice May Be For You: Indifference — that listless, blase, and detached feeling — is the contrast to wonder. We can never be astonished, awestruck, or surprised when we are either overwhelmed or underwhelmed. Feeling the first, we don't notice the subtle blessings in our surroundings; we don't take the time to stop and smell the roses. Feeling underwhelmed, we couldn't care less. "So what?" becomes our response instead of "ah-ha!" Wonder is an antidote to both conditions.

This spiritual practice spices up our life with a constant parade of new delights. Most glorious of all, it enhances sensuousness, that elixir that keep us forever young in spirit!

Opening the Hand of Thought: Reflections on Wonder by Dawna Markova

I invite you to sit with me under the wide umbrella of the old fig tree that was planted behind this house before we were born. All around us life is breaking open: the orange trees are covered in white buds, which, softened by yesterday's rain, will release the rapturous scent that always reminds me of new beginnings and weddings. It is a perfect time to visit.

I want to remind you of a way of thinking and offer you the gift of a practice. Both have helped me travel across the tumultuous terrain of learning to live the life I love and love the life I am living.

I am asking you to reclaim what may have become a dusty and numb habit and transform it into a practice of breaking open into a new aliveness. There's no time for small talk or even medium talk. Instead, let's have an experience of what is involved in opening our minds in wonder. I invite you to read the next paragraph, then pause for a moment and try this practice for yourself.

Step 1: Fold your hands in your lap the way you've been doing since you were a child—the way you did when you were taught to “pay attention.”

Step 2: Bring your attention to your hands and notice how you folded them. Is the right thumb folded over the left, or vice versa?

Step 3: Unfold your hands.

Step 4: Refold your hands in the opposite, nonhabitual way (if right was over left, then place left over right, etc.).

Step 5: Go back and forth between the habitual way and the nonhabitual way while asking: Which way feels the most awkward? Which way feels the most secure? Which way feels the most alive?

The first time I did this, I was amazed to discover that the habitual way felt so secure that I barely noticed my hands were there. They were numb to me. The nonhabitual way was much more awkward but also more alive. In and of itself, that has been a major lesson: in order to feel more alive, I need to allow myself to feel a little awkward. Even more important was what I noticed in step three—the uncertainty that exists after unfolding my hands and letting go of the comfort of habit and before refolding them into the new possibility. Step three is the place where wonder can grow.

Wonder is how we open “the hand of thought.” It can lift our minds out of the mud of rational resignation and open them into wild relational cartwheels of insight. Wonder is the place where prejudices fall away and our capacity to notice life increases. You have known how to do it since you were a child.

A warning though: As your mind opens and your thinking begins to diverge into possibilities, you may experience what is commonly called “confusion.” When you were young, you didn't mind confusion any more than you cared if your tummy stuck out a little after eating too much. But many of us were shamed when we were confused.

You and I are hard-wired to enter the unknown and transform chaos into ingenious possibilities. It is our birthright. And it is as simple as flying a kite. You don't have to know anything or be anything.

I invite you to remember that you've drifted into this way of imagining possibilities your whole life.

Wonder is a pilgrimage toward what is most original and shining in you.