



September 2019 Monthly Theme

CURIOSITY

the practice of opening

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

When do you feel most open to new information, to possibility, to the unknown?

What makes curiosity difficult?

How do you find your mind, heart, and hands opening as part of this community?

QUOTATIONS

There is always a place I can take someone's curiosity and land where they end up enlightened when we're done. That's my challenge as an educator. No one is dumb who is curious. The people who don't ask questions remain clueless throughout their lives. – Neil deGrasse Tyson,

The most beautiful thing in the world is a heart that is changing. — Anasazi Foundation, *The Seven Paths: Changing One's Way of Walking in the World*

Our ideal reader probably has a favorite chair and a pocket large enough to accommodate a tall, thin magazine. A person who appreciates cross-pollination, transoms, and moths clinging to a screen. This person travels with a song in their bones. It's someone with a curious mind and revolution-ready shoes. An explorer, a dreamer, a troublemaker with a sense of humor and above-average peripheral vision. –William Waltz, Founder and Editor of *Conduit*, a literary journal

Exhaust the little moment. Soon it dies. And be it gash or gold it will not come Again in this identical guise. –Gwendolyn Brooks, poet

"I dream of a new age of curiosity. We have the technical means for it; the desire is there; the things to be known are infinite; the people who can employ themselves at this task exist. Why do we suffer? From too little: from the channels that are too narrow, skimpy, quasi-monopolistic, insufficient. There is no point in adopting a protectionist attitude, to prevent 'bad' information from invading and suffocating the 'good.' Rather, we must multiply the paths and the possibility of comings and goings." - from *The Masked Philosopher* by Michel Foucault

POETRY

When Death Comes Mary Oliver

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

My First Memory (of Librarians) --Nikki Giovanni

This is my first memory:
A big room with heavy wooden tables that sat on a creaky
wood floor
A line of green shades—bankers' lights—down the center
Heavy oak chairs that were too low or maybe I was simply
too short
For me to sit in and read
So my first book was always big
In the foyer up four steps a semi-circle desk presided
To the left side the card catalogue
On the right newspapers draped over what looked like
a quilt rack
Magazines face out from the wall

The welcoming smile of my librarian
The anticipation in my heart
All those books—another world—just waiting
At my fingertips

READINGS & EXCERPTS

From **For Guys Reading #MeToo Testimonies** by Courtney E. Martin - Onbeing.com

...

So you, my guy friend — if you are moved by the courage of the testimony you are reading, you must dig in and meet that courage with stillness and softness. Don't be good or right. Don't distance yourself from the possibility of violation and violence. Move closer to your own confusion and earnest desire to understand the sickness at the center of contemporary masculinity, a bit of which, at least a bit of which, you, too, are suffering from.

Reflect on how it might be showing up in your home, in your workplace, in your school. Not just as harassment or assault — as arrogance, as obliviousness, as narcissism, as domination. Consider journaling. Consider reading. Consider therapy. If you think you've figured it out, if you are tempted to explain it, start over. Get really, really humble. This is going to take a long time. A lifetime. Learn how to notice your emotions before you fling them out into the world in some other form. Reclaim the child you were before they told you how to be a man. Remember his tenderness, his curiosity, his wholeness. Realize that your liberation is tied up in ours.

Then, and only then, gather with other men and have incredibly awkward conversations about the feelings that are arising in this moment, in these explorations. Model what it looks like to say hard things in front of other dudes. Be earnest even when you'd rather make a joke. Don't get trashed while you do it. Try to stay sober and look other guys in the eye. Teach each other how to call other men out when they are belittling and overlooking and harassing and abusing other [people].

Don't do this for your daughters and wives and mothers. Do this for your sons. Do this for yourselves. Don't use an apologetic tone in a women's studies class; use an unapologetic tone at the bus stop or at your book club or around the Thanksgiving dinner table, or yes, on Facebook. Take it personally, together. Consider it urgent, together. One of the delusions that privileged people often have is that we can fix things, efficiently and alone. Know this: you cannot fix this. The journey will not be efficient. You cannot go it alone.

From Braiding Sweetgrass by Robin Wall Kimmerer - Chapter 'The Sound of Silverbells'
Robin was teaching pre-med students in the Bible Belt. Her students had a total disinterest in ecology. To aid in their conversion, she took them on a 3 day camping trip in the Great Smokey Mountains. After many miles and many lectures it was Sunday afternoon and she felt she had failed - failed to teach 'a science deeper than data'. Then... "I turned to see the students coming down the trail behind me, a petal-strewn path in gauzy light. One person... began to sing, ever so quietly, those familiar first notes. The ones that open your throat, irresistibly calling you to sing. *Amazing grace, how sweet the sound.* One by one they joined in, singing in the long shadows and a drift of white petals settling on our shoulders. *That saved a wretch like me. I once was lost but now I'm found.*

I was humbled. Their singing said everything that my well-intentioned lectures did not. On and on they went, adding harmonies as they walked. They understood harmony in a way that I did not. I heard in their raised voices the same outpouring of love and gratitude for the Creation that Skywoman first sang on the back of Turtle Island. In their caress of that old hymn I came to know that it wasn't naming the source of wonder that mattered, it was wonder itself. Despite my manic efforts and my checklist of scientific names, I knew now that they hadn't missed it all. *Was blind, but now I see.* And they did. And so did I. If I forget every genus and species I ever knew, I'll never forget that moment. The worst teacher in the world or the best teacher in the world -- neither can be heard over the voices of Silverbells and Hermit Thrushes. The rush of waterfalls and the silence of mosses have the last word.

Continued →

A Daily Dose of Discovery, from by Todd Kashdan, Clinical Associate Psychologist, George Mason University

Research suggests that experiencing novelty is an important factor in both health and happiness. Opportunities for novelty exist virtually everywhere, but to discover and make the most of them, we need to develop our “curiosity muscle” through more regular and intense use. Here are some easy ways to begin expanding your own curiosity capacity:

- When waking: Look with “fresh eyes.” Choose to see some things in your home, partner or family that you may have overlooked before.
- When talking: Strive to remain open to whatever transpires — without assuming, categorizing, judging or reacting. Ask more questions and listen with care.
- When driving: Instead of zoning out on a daily commute, make a point of actively anticipating what the drivers around you are likely to do next. Stay aware of what’s ahead and on the horizon.
- When working: Look for opportunities to challenge and apply yourself in ways that spark your interest and produce great results. Ask questions like: What’s interesting here? How can I make this more fun?
- When exercising: Instead of going through the motions, put your attention on the intricacies and sensations of your own movement and on whatever sights, sounds and smells are within range.

Start by devoting five minutes each day to your curiosity practice. After a week, add a little more time to your training — while cooking, eating, cleaning, bathing, paying bills, sitting on your porch and so on.

Awaken Your Inner Sherlock

Our innate curiosity can easily become dulled by the tedium and familiarity of daily routine. Reawakening it starts with shifting how we pay attention — even in situations we’ve experienced a thousand times before. Here are some tips for shifting our attention and boosting curiosity.

Play 20 questions.

How often have you been at a cocktail party at which no one asks you a single question about yourself? Make it a goal to find out something new about the people you know. Host a party and make sure to ask each attendee a couple of questions about themselves (ones for which you don’t know the answer). Or call up friends or colleagues and ask them 20 questions about their lives, interests, families or jobs.

Explore your passions.

Be curious about yourself. What are your values and motivations? What makes you tick? Are there activities that make you feel fully engaged in life that you haven’t revisited since you were younger? What are they? Do one of them. (For more on discovering your values and passions, see “Embrace a Bold Vision” from the January 2008 archives.)