



August 2020 Monthly Theme

JOY

the practice of living in the midst of fear

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 are joy and fear different now than they were six months ago? How are they the same?

What is your practice toward recognizing joy in daily life? In community life?

What separates you from Joy?

Sometimes it can be hard to allow ourselves to feel multiple, seemingly conflicting emotions at the same time-- how can we be better at giving one another permission to express both feelings of joy and fear?

QUOTATIONS

“When you practice looking deeply, you see your true nature of no birth, no death; no being, no non-being; no coming, no going; no same, no different. When you see this, you are free from fear. You are free from craving and free from jealousy. No fear is the ultimate joy. When you have the insight of no fear, you are free. And like the great beings, you ride serenely on the waves of birth and death.”

— Thích Nhất Hạnh, [No Death, No Fear](#)

“I choose to be fully human in resistance to the constant invalidations of my humanity. I choose to exhibit a full range of emotions in a world that wants to make black women two dimensional. I choose joy because I've been told all Black girls get is pain.” -from the article "I'm an Activist, and Joy is My Resistance", By Brittany Packnett

“Some of you say, “Joy is greater than sorrow,” and others say, “Nay, sorrow is the greater.” But I say unto you, they are inseparable. Together they come, and when one sits alone with you at your board, remember that the other is asleep upon your bed.”

— Kahlil Gibran, [The Prophet](#)

"10,000 Sorrows, 10,000 Joys" - Zen Teaching

lawyer and Sikh activist Valarie Kaur "What if this darkness is not the darkness of the tomb--but the darkness of the womb?"

from a young father of a newborn in our congregation: "I feel tremendous joy when my little one looks up into my face and makes a little sound of recognition."

Do not get lost in a sea of despair. Be hopeful, be optimistic. Our struggle is not the struggle of a day, a week, a month, or a year, it is the struggle of a lifetime. - John Lewis

So I say to you, walk with the wind, brothers and sisters, and let the spirit of peace and the power of everlasting love be your guide. - John Lewis

Plants are deceptively hard to care for. It's so easy to get seduced by some pretty little green thing at your local nursery, only to find out your particular species of houseplant needs to be complimented in French or your supposedly hardy flowers needs twice-daily spritzes of chilled spring water to stay perky. Maintaining a healthy plant family requires time, intuition and more than a little patience. But isn't that true of all good things that bring us joy? Rarely do we get to be spectators in the creation of our own happiness. We have to be down there in the dirt, week after week, tending and nurturing and using our own gifts to make things grow. (From CNN The Good Stuff, July 25)

POETRY

[Touched by An Angel](#) (Maya Angelou)

We, unaccustomed to courage
exiles from delight
live coiled in shells of loneliness
until love leaves its high holy temple
and comes into our sight
to liberate us into life.

Love arrives
and in its train come ecstasies
old memories of pleasure
ancient histories of pain.

Yet if we are bold,
love strikes away the chains of fear
from our souls.

We are weaned from our timidity

In the flush of love's light
we dare be brave
And suddenly we see
that love costs all we are
and will ever be.

Yet it is only love
which sets us free.

~ by William Blake

Joy and woe are woven fine,
A clothing for the soul divine,
Under every grief and pine,
Runs a joy with silken twine.
It is right it should be so,
We were made for joy and woe,
And when this we rightly know,
Through the world we safely go.

READINGS & EXCERPTS

Focus on The Present Moment from Daily Stoic by Ryan Holiday:

The temptation exists for all of us to let our imagination run wild envisioning all the ways things can go wrong. Of course, such an exercise can be useful in preparing us for the future and making us ready for adversity, but Marcus Aurelius well understood that it can become crippling fear that will paralyze us from any useful action. As he put it, *“Don’t let your imagination be crushed by life as a whole. Don’t try to picture everything bad that could possibly happen. Stick with the situation at hand, and ask, “Why is this so unbearable? Why can’t I endure it?”*

Then remind yourself that past and future have no power over you. Only the present—and even that can be minimized. Just mark off its limits.

From Kaia Roman

So, how do we escape the grip of fear? Believe me, I am asking myself this question multiple times a day. Here are some easy actions:

1. **Take deep breaths.** Oxygen signals the amygdala that it's safe to stop sounding the alarm. Even one minute of slow, deep breaths can calm an active amygdala and free up the prefrontal cortex. You can take deep breaths anywhere, anytime, all day long.
2. **Get angry.** This may seem like strange advice from a mindfulness teacher, but anger is more proactive than fear. Like fear, anger isn't an ideal state to stay in perpetually, but at least there's motivation in anger, whereas fear can often feel paralyzing. Anger can be a stepping stone out of helplessness.
3. **Take action.** Turn your fear into action (preferably one other than fight, flight, or freeze). That action might be helping others, donating money, making phone calls to voice your opinion, or simply taking a walk outside to cool down. Do your best to turn toward solutions rather than amplify problems.
4. **Zoom out.** Fear can really take over when we become so focused on what's right in front of us that we forget the larger picture we're all part of. Remember, humans haven't been on the planet all that long in the grand scheme of things, and we still have a lot to learn. Adversity has always led to our growth and it will again and again.
5. **Choose optimism.** Optimism decreases the stress hormone cortisol and calms the amygdala. Studies show that optimists are faster at solving problems, as well as more creative with their solutions. Luckily, optimism is a habit that can be learned. It starts with catching yourself dwelling on the negative and choosing a positive thought or response instead.
6. **Cultivate an attitude of gratitude.** Even in the midst of fear, gratitude is always an option. And the brain cannot be in a state of fear and gratitude at the same time. What are you grateful for today? Make a list, over and over. Gratitude is a powerful antidote for fear.
7. **Find joy.** In times like these, joy is an act of resistance. Your joy shines the light for others to follow when they've lost their way. Joy is not the same thing as happiness. You don't have to be happy with everything that's happening around you right now. Joy isn't dependent on outside circumstances, it wells up from within and sustains through changing conditions.

Excerpts from Courtney Martin’s essay “The Little Grief Alongside the Big”

<https://courtney.substack.com/p/the-little-grief-alongside-the-big>

...we *must* acknowledge the little griefs... Is it death or COVID or unemployment or hunger or police murder or state violence. No? Most certainly not. But that’s irrelevant. The big losses exist

alongside the little ones, and it's not indulgent to acknowledge them all in proportion. Some of us have weathered big grief this season. [All of us have weathered little ones](#). My hunch is that if I let myself feel the little grief, I will be better at showing up for the big grief--in my own life and in the lives of my friends and fellow Americans. ... Life is like this--generation after generation, losses big and small, enveloping and finite. ... We survive, and reckon with the real state of things, and dance, even if in small doses, together.

MUSIC

All This Joy [John Denver](#)

All this joy, all this sorrow
All this promise, all this pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love

City of joy, city of sorrow
City of promise, city of pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love

World of joy, world of sorrow
World of promise, world of pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love

All this joy, all this sorrow
All this promise, all this pain
Such is life, such is being
Such is spirit, such is love
Such is spirit, such is love

The only way
to hold each other now
is not to.

Spirit, let this be enough for now
and when the crisis passes
let us rush rejoicing
into one another's arms.

A PRAYER FROM VICTORIA

<https://www.instagram.com/wbuuc/>