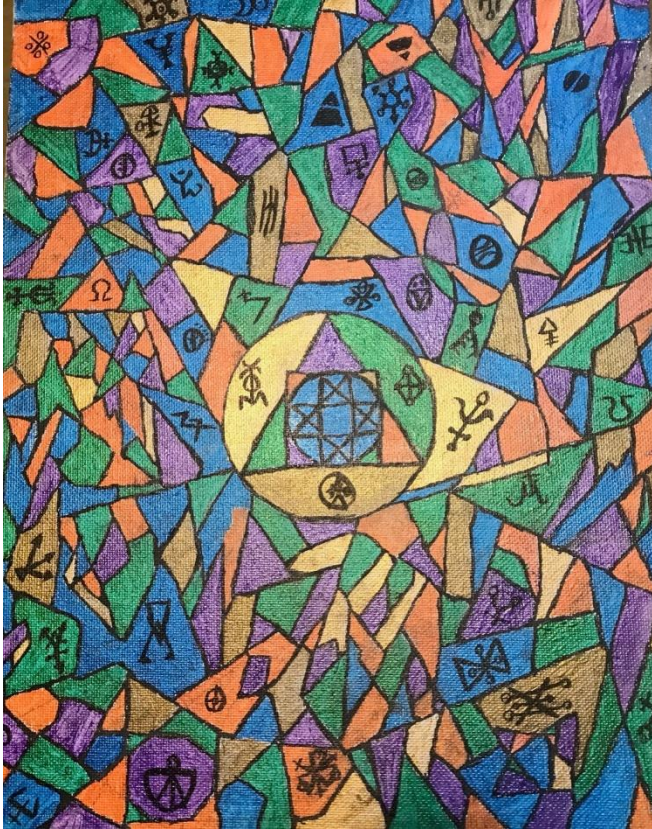


June 2021

Holy Curiosity



Credit: Kamdon Perry

What does it mean to be called together spiritually to holy curiosity?

Definitions (from Oxford dictionary)

Holy (adjective)

1. Dedicated or consecrated to God or a religious purpose; sacred
2. Used in exclamations of surprise or dismay

Curiosity (noun)

1. A strong desire to know or learn something
 2. A strange or unusual object or fact
- 'Curiosity is the unbridled desire of those who seek to know more than they should.'*
-- Iconologia (1593), Italian author Cesare Ripa

Definition (from authors)

Holy Curiosity

For UUs, embracing holy curiosity is to seek truth and meaning.

This Soul Matters Packet was shepherded by Suzy Farrell, Ira Srole, Tom & Anne Perry with thanks to the Rev. Margalie and the Packet Writing Team

Dear Curious People,

“HOLY CURIOSITY,” screeched the cat, having just discovered catnip in her yard. She danced and twirled in ecstasy until she retreated to her favorite sunlit spot for a period of deep meditation. In this case, curiosity did not kill the cat. Instead it took her into a new dimension. That’s where we hope you will go with this month’s theme. Most likely minus the catnip.

Land acknowledgement: we live, work, love and engage in spiritual deepening on land stolen from the Seneca people, part of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.

What does it mean to be called together spiritually to Holy Curiosity? Isn’t that the basis of spiritual deepening? This year we explored sacred imagination, we listened to each other’s stories and held nothing back. We indulged our holy curiosity to consider what practical hope and embracing accountability mean. We delved into the juxtaposition of finding harmony in head and heart and then abided deeply with UU theology. After contemplating the meaning of being at the water’s edge, we took the leap into trust in transformation. All this spiritually deepening work exhibits our commitment to Holy Curiosity.



Credit: NASA Images

Beyond the Soul Matters context, curiosity is embedded in our principles and mission.

We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote: . . .

4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

Our own First Unitarian Mission statement says we are “Open to Wonder and Transformation”. The double meaning of the word “wonder” is delightful. It can mean awe, ‘the wonders of the universe’ or it can mean curiosity, ‘I wonder what would happen if I mixed yeast with flour and water’.

As we navigate the seas of transitioning into a more diverse, inclusive and equitable Beloved Community, each of us may exercise Holy Curiosity with people who are different. This may involve deep listening to that person’s story with a mind that is open to wonder, transformation, and connection. I’m reminded of musician Daryl Davis who focused on tackling racism through education. He engaged Ku Klux Klan members in conversation. He began with a shared love of boogie-woogie music and he disarmed them with his knowledge of the Klan. Once engaged, he was able to chip away at their ideology. Over 30 years, he collected Klan robes from over 200 people as he talked them through leaving the Klan. For the full story, <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/20/544861933/how-one-man-convinced-200-ku-klux-klan-members-to-give-up-their-robes>.

In this month of Holy Curiosity, we hope you will engage in the search for truth and meaning in wondering about the wonders of life, the universe and everything.

In faith and love,

Anne J. Perry

First Unitarian Church of Rochester, Soul Matters Packet Writing Team

When selecting or writing these exercises, we look for a variety of experiences, some that will be easy and comfortable, some challenging, that draw on different practices or modes of accessing the sacred. We assume that participants will have a variety of life experiences, different mobility and access needs, and cultural norms, and we write with that in mind.

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

Select one of the exercises below to practice and come prepared to discuss the experience and your thoughts and feelings about it with your group.

Exercise A. Who Am I?

In the book How, Then, Shall We Live?, author Wayne Muller addresses four simple questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I love?
3. How shall I live, knowing I will die?
4. What is my gift to the family of the earth?

During the course of one day, with every change of activity, allow the following question to arise gently: "Who am I?" Ask it silently, and try to be aware of any ideas, words, feelings or images that come forth in response. Who am I, right now? The leader, the learner, the teacher, the inquisitor, the failure, the collaborator, the light of the world? Then when you move to another interaction, ask, "Who am I in this moment?"

The point is to explore the breadth of who you are, and who you think you are, in your everyday life. What do you notice? How does your sense of self change? Who, in each moment, do you think you *are*?

Notice which words or descriptions seem most accurate to you, which seem to reflect more precisely your sense of your deepest nature. Come prepared to share your discoveries.

Exercise B. A Spiritual Remedy for Pandemic Dis-Ease?



"I spent many nights in the last year contemplating God's wisdom and purpose, while fielding the despair and weariness of many Muslims who sought my counsel. They wanted to know, was COVID a pandemic or the plague, and what was the difference? Was it God's wrath or God's cleansing? Was there a collective spiritual remedy to make it all go away?" Taymullah Abdur-Rahman, Imam
Photo Credit WBUR

The past year and a quarter has been like none other in our lifetimes. Every aspect of our lives has been upended. We have been forced to keep our distance from strangers and have needed to define who is in our pod or bubble, as fragile as that may be. In one way or another, it is likely that we will be dealing with the impact of this time for the rest of our lives. Consider deeply the Imam's questions. Is there a collective spiritual remedy to our dis-ease?

On each of the next 7-10 days, set aside a time to write about an area of your life that has been upended by the pandemic. Take a break to consider and come back to record your remedy for

your dis-ease. What will continue to be upended? What will change going forward? [Note: see Resources, “We Asked 10 People to Imagine Life After The Pandemic.” by Cloe Axelson.]

Exercise C. Overcoming the Intoxication of Ignorance

“Are you willing, my young friends, who are just coming upon the stage of action, in your various relations in society, to aid in carrying forward this great movement? Will you be faithful in this great work, by example and precept, and ‘walk worthy of the vocation unto which ye are called?’” From “A Sermon to the Medical Students,” Lucretia Mott, 1849.

Mrs. Mott’s “great movement” was that of temperance, or “total abstinence from that which intoxicates.” Perhaps we may broaden the definition of “that which intoxicates” to include ignorance of the truth, or, more properly, refusal to even seek the truth. To what extent are you willing and eager to seek the truth, thereby overcoming the intoxication of ignorance? Are you prepared to walk in the direction of “the vocation unto which ye are called?” Why or why not? Have you ever called upon someone to step up to that vocation? Or have you been faced with that type of challenge? How did it feel to be that person?

Exercise D. Curiosity About Another

Read about how Daryl Davis, a Black man, connected with White Klan members and changed their minds. Now, you are challenged to connect with someone who is different from you. It could be different race, culture, gender, age, class, etc. It could be a church member, a co-worker or a neighbor. Tell each other your story. What differences did you find? What commonalities? Did you have insights into where that person is coming from? Did anything you said or heard change your mind or opinion? Did it help you to understand why that person may behave in certain ways? <https://www.npr.org/2017/08/20/544861933/how-one-man-convinced-200-ku-klux-klan-members-to-give-up-their-robos>.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

These questions aren’t “homework” that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions.

1. In reference to the below Closing Words, “Deep, Deep, Deeper Go,” how different is “the depth of ourselves” from “the face we present to our neighbors”?
2. Can you think of a way nature urges us to have holy curiosity? Where does it resonate in your body? Does it bring up a good memory? Does it take you into scientific investigation? What is the process?
3. Thomas Merton, Trappist monk, author and spiritual guide, said, “There is in all visible things... a hidden wholeness.” How would you describe the characteristics of such wholeness? And what makes it hidden?
4. There are many words or phrases that refer to our inner voice. Some people call it “true nature” or “still small voice”. It is what steers our inner compass. What are your words for this? When do you use this phrase and why?

5. As Anne Perry suggests in her opening letter, the spiritual deepening work done this year shows our commitment to holy curiosity. Have you tried an approach that hasn't worked? What was the stumbling point?
6. How has your experience of the pandemic affected how you interact socially with others, with our church community and the world? Are there changes that you have holy curiosity about?
7. If you came to First Unitarian from another faith tradition that discouraged searching, how did you become a truth-seeker and what was the curiosity that led you to First Unitarian?

GROWING OUR SOULS

These questions are the same each month and invite us to connect this work of spiritual deepening ...

1. How will our discussion today cause you to be different in the world?
2. Within our church community, where can you help to make changes related to this topic?
3. How does this discussion relate to other activities in which you are engaged at church (e.g., parenting, religious education, social justice, worship, music)?

ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

Just as we select spiritual exercises that speak to a diversity of experience, we draw from a diversity of sources and include a diversity of voices here. We explicitly seek voices and perspectives of people with disabilities, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), Women, Trans and NonBinary People, other members of the LGBTQ community, children and youth.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING



Chalice Lighting

“And so in order to wake up, the one thing you need the most is not energy, or strength, or youthfulness, or even great intelligence. The one thing you need most of all is the readiness to learn something new. The chances that you will wake up are in direct proportion to the amount of truth you can take without running away. How much are you ready to take? How much of everything you've held dear are you ready to have shattered, without running away? How ready are you to think of something unfamiliar?” - Anthony De Mello, S.J.

Closing Words

Deep, deep, deeper go.

In the holy quiet of this time we seek out the deep things of life.

*Together we search the depth of ourselves,
beyond all surface victories and defeats,
beneath the face we present to our neighbors.*

Excerpt from meditation entitled “Deep, Deep, Deeper Go” from In the Holy Quiet by Richard Gilbert

QUOTATIONS



So much universe, so little time.

Photo by Marija Zaric on Unsplash

Education is the kindling of a flame, not the filling of a vessel. ~ Socrates

Three things cannot be long hidden: the sun, the moon, and the truth. ~ Buddha

Genius might be the ability to say a profound thing in a simple way. ~ Charles Bukowski

One's philosophy is not best expressed in words; it is expressed in the choices one makes. In stopping to think through the meaning of what I have learned, there is much that I believe intensely, much I am unsure of. In the long run, we shape our lives and we shape ourselves. The process never ends until we die. And, the choices

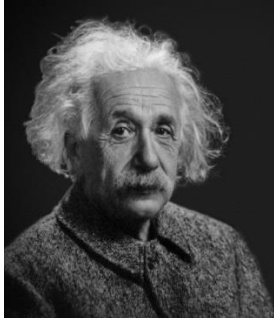
we make are ultimately our own responsibility. ~ Eleanor Roosevelt:

Let your curiosity be greater than your fear.
~Pema Chodron:

The questions which one asks oneself begin, at least, to illuminate the world, and become one's key to the experience of others. ~ James Baldwin

The truth may be puzzling. It may take some work to grapple with. It may be counterintuitive. It may contradict deeply held prejudices. It may not be consonant with what we desperately want to be true. But our preferences do not determine what's true. We have a method, and that method helps us to reach not absolute truth, only asymptotic approaches to the truth--- never there, just closer and closer, always finding vast new oceans of undiscovered possibilities. ~ Carl Sagan

Be patient toward all that is unsolved in your heart and try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. And the point is, to live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer. ~ Rainer Maria Rilke



FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Curiosity gets a bad rap, as in “Curiosity killed the cat.” But Unitarian poet E.E. Cummings wrote, “Once we believe in ourselves, we can risk curiosity, wonder, spontaneous delight, or any experience that reveals the human spirit.” ~ Rev. Lynnda White, Universalist Unitarian Church, Peoria, IL

POETRY EXCERPTS

The Guest House
by Rumi

This being human is a guest house.
Every morning a new arrival.
A joy, a depression, a meanness,
some momentary awareness comes
As an unexpected visitor.
Welcome and entertain them all!
Even if they're a crowd of sorrows,
who violently sweep your house
empty of its furniture,
still treat each guest honorably.
He may be clearing you out
for some new delight.
The dark thought, the shame, the malice,
meet them at the door laughing,
and invite them in.
Be grateful for whoever comes,
because each has been sent
as a guide from beyond.

“The important thing is not to stop questioning... Never lose holy curiosity,” ~ Albert Einstein

Be curious. Be constantly, consistently, indiscriminately curious. ~ Maria Popova

But to be curious, genuinely curious, we have to let go of certainty, let go of conviction, let go of the ways we've always perceived things, or how others do things, or the way things have just always been. And that takes courage. ~ Rev. Ellen Quaadgras, Westminster Unitarian Church, East Greenwich, RI

FROM SACRED TEXTS

Buddhist Tradition of the Sangha. This community provides support, nourishment and care for an individual. The group is made up of fellow seekers and kindred spirits, friends we rely on and trust. There is a collective energy of mindfulness.

Tao Te Ching by Lao Tzu-
Without going outside, you may know the whole world.
Without looking through the window, you may see the ways of heaven.
The farther you go, the less you know.
Thus the sage knows without traveling;
He sees without looking;
He works without doing.

Genesis 3: 6-7

6 So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. 7 Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths.

PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

If Black English Isn't a Language, Then Tell Me What Is? by James Baldwin.

Now, if this passion, this skill, this (to quote Toni Morrison) "sheer intelligence," this incredible music, the mighty achievement of having brought a people utterly unknown to, or despised by "history"--to have brought this people to their present, troubled, troubling, and unassailable and unanswerable place--if this absolutely unprecedented journey does not indicate that black English is a language, I am curious to know what definition of language is to be trusted.

<https://soundcloud.com/bizdrummer/if-black-english-isnt-a-language-then-tell-me-what-is-baldwin-essay> [~12 minutes]

A Hidden Wholeness by Parker Palmer

This book lays out a specific process and structure for creating Circles of Trust where our shy souls can speak with us more directly - or perhaps, where we can hear our deepest authenticity more clearly.

How, Then, Shall We Live? By Wayne Muller

The author takes a stab at the big questions of life: Who am I? What do I love? How shall I live, knowing I will die? What is my gift to the family of the Earth?



Why Aren't We Curious About the Things We Want to Be

Curious About, by Daniel Willingham, NY Times, Oct 18, 2019

"...Curiosity feels like it's outside your control, and trying to direct it sounds as ill conceived as forcing yourself to find a joke funny. But if you understand what prompts curiosity, you may be able to channel it a little better..."

<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/10/18/opinion/sunday/curiosity-brain.html>

We Asked 10 People To Imagine Life After The Pandemic. Here's What They Said reported by Cloe Axelson

We know this pandemic won't last forever. But what happens next? WBUR asked ten people to image life after the pandemic. Listen to the short audio summary (~8 minutes), enjoy the image at the top of the file, then read the short essays by each participant.

<https://www.wbur.org/cognoscenti/2021/03/17/imagining-life-after-the-covid-19-pandemic>

"Why Do Children Ask Why," by Dr. Rebecca Palacios, 2/19/2017, Huffpost

"...Even as adults, we question the "why" of many things not in our control. For children, "why" questions help them make sense of the world around them that they are just beginning to learn about. These "why" questions also help spur and accelerate learning. Our adult responses are crucial and pivotal..."

https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-do-children-ask-why_b_9233266



Awakenings- 1990 film starring Robin Williams playing a fictional character, neurologist, Dr. Malcolm Sayer, who had an unorthodox approach to “seeing” and treating his patients. The movie is based on a memoir of the same name and written by Dr. Oliver Sacks. By studying his patients with deep curiosity and respect, Dr. Oliver Sacks unveiled the true nature of patients often overlooked by society.

The Confessional with Nadia Bolz-Webber

Episode 101: Megan Phelps-Roper (former member of Westboro Baptist Church)

NBW: And so the thing I think is so interesting to me about your story of you changing and your thinking changing is that it didn't happen as a result of people yelling at you on Twitter, it happened as a result of people having compassion for you and curiosity about you.

<https://nadiabolzweber.com/101-megan-phelps-roper/> [~26 minutes]

Why I, as a black man, attend KKK rallies. | Daryl Davis | TEDxNaperville

In 1983, a chance occurrence after one of his performances led him to befriend a member of the Ku Klux Klan. This eventually led Davis to become the first Black author to travel the country interviewing KKK leaders and members, all detailed in his book, *Klan-Destine Relationships*. Today, Davis owns numerous Klan robes and hoods, given to him by active members who became his friends and renounced the organization.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ORp3q1Oaezw> [~19 minutes]



Photo Credit: Ira Srole

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2013/04/12/philip-ball-curiosity/>

The Difference Between Curiosity and Wonder and How It Shaped the Science vs. Scripture Divide, by Maria Popova

Philip Ball quote: “There was nothing frivolous or hedonistic about wonder. It instilled awe, reminding us of our powerlessness and insignificance before the glory of God. That is why wonder in the face of nature’s splendour was seen as the educated response, and a willingness to believe in marvels and prodigies was not only praiseworthy but virtually a religious duty. Curiosity, like skepticism, was a sign that you lacked devotion and faith.”

The Diffusion of Useful Ignorance: Thoreau on the Hubris of Our Knowledge and the Transcendent Humility of Not-Knowing, by Maria Popova

Thoreau quote: “Which is the best man to deal with — he who knows nothing about a subject, and, what is extremely rare, knows that he knows nothing, or he who really knows something about it, but thinks that he knows all?”

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/05/14/thoreau-walking-ignorance-knowledge/>

Science from a Native Perspective: How do we Educate for a Sustainable Future, From an interview with Gregory Cajete, *In Motion Magazine*:

“The essential teaching of Native Science is that ... to be a human in the world requires a form of education that instills and embeds this understanding of relationship, respect, and responsibility for our natural world. I use the metaphor that comes from many of the Native languages where the focus metaphorically of the ritual or ceremony is introduced by the term

“for life’s sake we do this,” which implies that we do this for ourselves, for the perpetuation of our community, but also for the purpose of perpetuating life as a whole.”

Dr. Cajete is the director of the Native American Studies Program at the University of New Mexico. This long form interview focuses on themes presented in his sixth book, *Native Science: Natural Laws of Interdependence*.

<https://inmotionmagazine.com/global/cajete/gregory-cajete-int2015.html>

8 Habits of Curious People, by Stephanie Vozza

Vozza quotes: “We are born curious, but when answers are valued more than questions, we forget how to ask. ... Curiosity often must be instilled intentionally; it comes from intentional pauses.” <https://www.fastcompany.com/3045148/8-habits-of-curious-people>

Systematic Wonder: A Definition of Science That Accounts for Whimsy, by Maria Popova

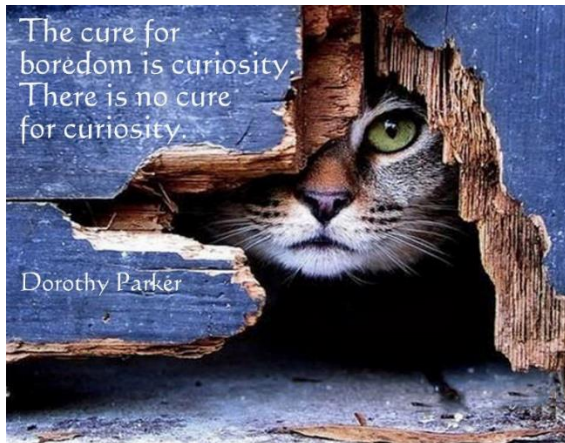
Quote from *A General Theory of Love*: “Science is an inherent contradiction — systematic wonder — applied to the natural world. In its mundane form, the methodical instinct prevails and the result, an orderly procession of papers, advances the perimeter of knowledge, step by laborious step. Great scientific minds partake of that daily discipline and can also suspend it, yielding to the sheer love of allowing the mental engine to spin free. And then Einstein imagines himself riding a light beam, Kekule formulates the structure of benzene in a dream, and Fleming’s eye travels past the annoying mold on his glassware to the clear ring surrounding it — a lucid halo in a dish otherwise opaque with bacteria — and penicillin is born. Who knows how many scientific revolutions have been missed because their potential inaugurators disregarded the whimsical, the incidental, the inconvenient inside the laboratory?”

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2012/02/23/systematic-wonder/>

Humor

Ever wonder what a helicopter sounds and looks like on Mars?

<https://weather.com/science/space/video/hear-mars-helicopter-ingenuity-flying-on-mars>



from Dawn Productions



from UU Hysterical Society