

## **Soul Matters 2019-2020**

### **December's Theme: Adventure/Play**

*The Soul Matters Sharing Circles provide an opportunity to explore our congregation's monthly theme from the previous month in more depth. Here's my reflection on this theme from The Beacon newsletter for December:*

I admit it: I love the winter holiday season. I love the carols, the tree decorations, the lights - especially the holiday lights on people's homes. A friend and I have made it a tradition to go see holiday lights. We make a special night of it: we bring hot chocolate in a thermos, wear warm mittens, hats and thick socks in our boots, and we walk along the streets, meandering along with others out on similar adventures. We take the time to stand in awe of the beauty of those twinkling coloured lights, as well as laugh at some of the fun decorations of Charlie Brown and the Peanuts gang, and the Grinch (one of my favourites!).

What makes this ritual so much fun is that we let the child within us come out to play. We set aside whatever challenging aspects come up about our holidays – whether it is challenging family dynamics, fears about the state of the planet, or the stresses of a busy holiday time – letting them fade into the background for our time together.

When will you find time to let the child within you come out to play? It might be with children, grandchildren, or other young ones in your life. It might be on your own or with friends – doing something that brings you simple pleasure. Where could you find a fun adventure to go on in the coming month? (It could be outside or snuggled up at home reading a novel or watching a film.) I look forward to hearing about your times of adventure and play.

I wish us all moments of joy, adventure and playfulness this month, as we enter into the spirit of the season.

Happy Holidays – whether it is Hanukkah, Winter Solstice, Christmas, Kwanzaa, and/or New Years – may you find the blessings and gifts of love and peace.

Rev. Meg Roberts

## A Spiritual Exercise for This Coming Month

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself—something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could. ***I invite you to choose one of the spiritual exercises below and try it out over the coming month.***

### **Option A**

In prayer or meditation, allow yourself to focus on connecting with the source of playfulness in you. You may want to remember times in your life when you were feeling playful or were with others who brought out a sense of fun in you. As you do that, remember what you saw, what you heard, how you felt in your body, emotions, and spirit. You may want to open yourself to connect with the Spirit of Life, which offers us a playful engagement with life simply through being who we are, where we are, right now.

### **Option B**

For one day, do *random acts of smiling*: choose three different strangers and notice something that you like about them—then smile at them. If they smile back, notice your reaction. If they don’t smile back, notice your reaction. At the end of that day, look in the mirror and notice one thing you like about yourself—then smile at yourself. Notice your reaction. Bring compassion and a sense of humour to this spiritual exercise and see how that affects things.

### **Option C**

We Unitarians are a hard-working people, so I invite you in the coming month to find three ways to be playful: in your own personal life, in your involvement with this Unitarian community, and in the larger world. Come up with your own ways to play. Come back to the group with something you learned that you are willing to share about what encourages you to play.

### **Option D**

Go on an adventure this month. It could be planned or spontaneous. Consider how it engages your sense of adventure and come back to the group with a story or an insight about it.

### **Option E**

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme adventure / play? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Come to the group at our first meeting to share what it was like to create this exercise, how it was to do it, and what you learned from it.

## Questions to Live With:

Don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that 'hooks' you most**. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time**. Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.

1. How did your family play together growing up? If they didn't, how does that affect your sense of play now as an adult? Or, if they did, how does that affect your sense of play now?
2. When was a time you were adventurous?
3. What encourages you to let the child within you come out to play?
4. What fun adventure will you go on this month?
5. How can you cultivate a greater sense of playfulness in your life?
6. What can squash your feeling of adventure? What do you do about it?
7. When you go about your day playfully, how does it affect your interactions with others?
8. If you believe in a higher power (however you describe it), how does the sense of play and/or adventure enter into your way of engaging with that higher power?
9. What question do you wish had been included here? Ask yourself that question instead.

## Other Resources

### Quotes for the weekly e-news update: Beacon This Week

#### December 5 -

"No, no! The adventures first, explanations take such a dreadful time."  
— Lewis Carroll, *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland & Through the Looking-Glass*

#### December 12 -

"You must not ever stop being whimsical. And you must not, ever, give anyone else the responsibility for your life." — Mary Oliver, *Wild Geese*

#### December 19 -

"Bring your playful soul." — J. Wolf

#### December 26 -

"Don't ever live vicariously. This is your life. Live."  
— Lavinia Spalding

**Family Resources** - How does your family want to increase their sense of adventure and/or play into your lives and relationships? Let Meg and Ashley know how it goes and if you want to share it with others at Beacon!

Option 1

Talk to your family about an adventure they'd like to have this month. Come up with a way to that incorporates as many ideas they have as possible and that everyone is willing to do together. See if there is a way to make it fun for everyone! Notice how it influences your relationships with each other in the days afterwards.

Option 2:

Set aside an evening during the holidays to play together. It may be an existing game you enjoy playing together; it may be something you have wanted to try out and haven't found the time; or you may want to look through the local paper or online for fun activities over the winter holiday season.

*Please let me know what you think of these family resources and what else we could provide that would be useful about this and other monthly themes.*

## Quotes

“The heart of a child is soooo beautiful. It doesn't come with any, how do you say, preconceptions? So it can be so playful and take so much joy from the moment.”

— Jay Ebben, *Painted Hives*

“I want a life that sizzles and pops and makes me laugh out loud. And I don't want to get to the end, or to tomorrow, even, and realize that my life is a collection of meetings and pop cans and errands and receipts and dirty dishes. I want to eat cold tangerines and sing out loud in the car with the windows open and wear pink shoes and stay up all night laughing and paint my walls the exact color of the sky right now. I want to sleep hard on clean white sheets and throw parties and eat ripe tomatoes and read books so good they make me jump up and down, and I want my everyday to make God belly laugh, glad that he gave life to someone who loves the gift.”

— Shauna Niequist, *Cold Tangerines: Celebrating the Extraordinary Nature of Everyday Life*

“Seriousness is too boring to the playful human condition. A heart of stone that has a long face can never express love.”

— Michael Bassey Johnson, *Master of Maxims*

“Playful, positive sarcasm is different from negative mean sarcasm, and many people don't know the difference.”

— Bryant McGill, *Simple Reminders: Inspiration for Living Your Best Life*

“Keep reading. It's one of the most marvelous adventures that anyone can have.”

— Lloyd Alexander

“Love, like everything else in life, should be a discovery, an adventure, and like most adventures, you don't know you're having one until you're right in the middle of it.”

— E.A. Bucchianeri, *Brushstrokes of a Gadfly*

“Why O why did I ever leave my hobbit-hole?” said poor Mr. Baggins, bumping up and down on Bombur's back.”

— J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Hobbit, or There and Back Again*

## **Worship Resources**

*Chalice Lighting by Atticus Palmer*

We call this light before us in hope that we may always remain a strong community, working together to make the world a better place.

When we are grieving or sad,  
When we are challenged,  
When we need help,  
This flame guides us out of the darkness.

When we are cheerful,  
When we celebrate,  
When we accomplish a great task,  
When we return to a place that makes us happy,  
The chalice reminds us to share our happiness with others.

*Chalice Lighting by Cynthia Landrum*

Mindful that

With great power comes great responsibility,

We light this chalice in the hopes that

In brightest day, in blackest night,

Our faith will

Flame on!

—Spiderman, Green Lantern, & the Human Torch (compiled by Cynthia Landrum)

*Benediction by Heather Rion Starr*

May whatever gatherings or activities we engage in this Sunday afternoon  
help restore us —

our connections to one another;

our sense of hope, beauty, and fun in this world;

our deep knowing that we have to take care of ourselves and each other  
with love and joy if we are to soulfully survive the world's mayhem.

*Note: Rev. Heather Rion Starr wrote this benediction for use on Super Bowl Sunday.*

*Closing Words by Susan L. Van Dreser*

Let us sing the magic of imagination by which we know one another and learn the lives of  
eras gone by.

Let us sing the magic of creation by which we build the world of our soul and teach its  
wisdom to others, young and old.

Let us sing the magic of our lives together, holding and shaping by the movement of breath  
from heart to lung all new life that is to come.

Go now with singing. Go now with magic in your fingertips. Touch this world with life.