

## **Soul Matters 2019-2020**

### **November's Theme: Openness**

*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 November:*

My friend and colleague, Rev. Wendy Luella Perkins, is a songwriter and community minister. You may know the song in our teal hymnal she wrote, # 1010 "We Give Thanks."

Oh, we give thanks for this precious day,  
For all gather'd here, and those far away;  
For this time we share with love and care,  
Oh, we give thanks for this precious day.

The second version switches out the word "time" for "food" and it becomes a meal blessing song.

Wendy has been leading groups for many years in what she calls "Soulful Singing" – using simple songs she's written. By repeating them, you deepen your understanding of the words and allow the emotional connection to be made to the music and the rhythm. It's a form of meditation, of prayer, of focus – depending on your own theological understanding. I am always so glad at ministers' meetings when Wendy leads us in Soulful Singing as a spiritual practice before breakfast – it opens me up to the beauty of the day, to what I value about those I'm with, and also to what I value about my life.

This August during my study time, as I was preparing for working with you here at Beacon, I took a 4-day spiritual retreat. During one of my meditation walks in a forest, I was thinking about our coming year together. I was pondering how I wanted to approach our shared ministry together – what was my intention? Then one of Wendy's songs came into my head. The lyrics are:

Open my heart, open my heart  
Listen deep, listen deep

Open my heart, open my heart  
Listen deep, listen deep

What is my intention here?  
Open my heart, listen deep.

Open, open  
Listen, listen  
Open, open  
Listen, listen

They are simple words – and when sung, they can be profound. If you'd like to hear the song, visit her website for her chants CD:

<http://www.wendyluellaperkins.com/music.php>

It's the first song on it. Or come to the November 24 service when I'll be sharing it.

So, now that the year together has started, I can share with you what I do when I'm driving to Beacon meetings. Whether it's with the Board, Sunday services, Worship Services Committee, Pastoral Support Team, Connecting and Membership (to name a few), I try to remember to sing that song. Why? Because it opens me up to those things that are important to me: Being present to those I'm with. Being open to what is being said and listening deeply to what is felt and shared and meant. Trying not to just bring what I want to say or what I think, and instead seeing what comes up between us as a group. Sharing the ministry: being grounded in our principles and, out of them, serving each other and those beyond our community.

What helps you stay open to those around you? Are there songs that open your heart? Your mind? Your spirit? I look forward to hearing your responses when I see you - or drop me a line. I wish you moments of openness this month – perhaps yielding unexpected experiences with pleasant surprises!

In the spirit of life,

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**

Do a spiritual exercise of praying or meditating about bringing more openness into your life right now. What comes up for you? What is your response this month to what came up? Come back to the group with your reflections on your experience.

### **Option B**

This month choose a song to sing as a way to open your heart, mind, body and spirit. It could be the one that I mention in my column (above) or one of your choosing. Take time during the month to consider how singing this song affects your approach to people and to what is happening in your life. Come back to the group with something you learned and are willing to share about doing this spiritual exercise.

### **Option C**

Watch this TED Talk: “We’re all hiding something. Let’s find the courage to open up”  
[https://www.ted.com/talks/ash\\_beckham\\_we\\_re\\_all\\_hiding\\_something\\_let\\_s\\_find\\_the\\_courage\\_to\\_open\\_up?utm\\_campaign=tedsread&utm\\_medium=referral&utm\\_source=tedcomshare](https://www.ted.com/talks/ash_beckham_we_re_all_hiding_something_let_s_find_the_courage_to_open_up?utm_campaign=tedsread&utm_medium=referral&utm_source=tedcomshare)

“In this touching talk, Ash Beckham [Equality Advocate] offers a fresh approach to empathy and openness. It starts with understanding that everyone, at some point in their life, has experienced hardship. The only way out, says Beckham, is to open the door and step out of your closet.”

Consider a time when you were struggling with having a hard conversation with someone. What did you learn from that experience? What helped you to have that conversation? If there is a conversation you have been putting off because it is hard, muster up your courage and apply Ash Beckham’s 3 suggestions for that conversation. Come back to the group with something you learned about opening up that you are willing to share.

### **Option D**

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme “Openness”? 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. What does it mean to be open to the world around you?
2. What helps you stay open to those around you?
3. Which songs open your heart? Your mind? Your spirit?
4. When you go about your day, open-hearted, how does it affect your interactions?
5. When is a time you were open-minded to someone with different ideas than you have? What was that like?
6. 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

#### November 7 -

"Are you open-minded? If not, leave the door open to it."  
— Frank Sonnenberg

#### November 14 -

"Always be open to inspiration. You never know where it may come from. Begin with an open mind, end with an inspired heart."  
— Sheri Fink

#### November 21 -

"Sunlight is said to be the best of disinfectants."  
— Louis D. Brandeis

#### November 28 -

"The real journey is how we travel, not where."  
— Marty Rubin

**Family Resources** - How does your family want to bring greater openness 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

Look through the Unitarian Universalist World magazine's family pages on "Sing a Prayerful Song": [https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/2017\\_spring\\_families.pdf](https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/2017_spring_families.pdf)

Choose an activity that appeals to you and your family. Set time aside to do the activity and see what it teaches you about being open to doing something new.

### Option 2:

Spend time together as a family and try to be open to the ideas your child/children come up with about how to spend that time together. Try them out even if you have initial reservations about them. If things go differently than hoped for, use it as an opportunity to talk about what you've learned from the experience and could do differently next time. Thank your children for putting forward their ideas.

*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**

"Make your ego porous. Will is of little importance, complaining is nothing, fame is nothing. Openness, patience, receptivity, solitude is everything."

— Rainer Maria Rilke

"Openness is like a sport, we need to practice it every day to get the best ability to be open to others' ideas after some time."

— A.A. Alebraheem, *When Life Makes Sense: Exploring the meaning of life through science, philosophy and faith*

— "An encounter with other cultures can lead to openness only if you can suspend the assumption of superiority, not seeing new worlds to conquer, but new worlds to respect."

— Mary Catherine Bateson, *Composing a Life*

## **Worship Resources**

Chalice Lighting by Julianne Lepp

We seek our place in the world  
and the answers to our hearts' deep questions.

As we seek, may our hearts be open to unexpected answers.  
May the light of our chalice remind us that this is a community of warmth,  
of wisdom,  
and welcoming of multiple truths.

Blessing by Eric Williams:

Blessed is the Sky,  
And all that is warm and filled with light.  
Blessed is the Air,  
And all that is open and free.  
Blessed is the Earth,  
And all that is steady and firm.  
Blessed is the Sea,  
And all that is hidden and deep.

Blessed Are We – by Andrea Hawkins-Kamper

Blessed are we who gather with open hearts, together, in this space, today.  
Blessed are we: the chalice-lighters of resistance, justice, love, and faith.  
Blessed are we: the heretics, the outcasts, the walkers of our own way.  
Blessed are we: the border-crossers, the refugees, the immigrants, the poor, the wanderers  
who are not lost.  
Blessed are we: the transgressors, the trespassers, the passers-by, the cause-takers, the  
defiant, the compliant.  
Blessed are we: the hand-extenders, the sign-makers, the protestors, the protectors.  
Blessed are we: the trans women, the trans men, the non-binary, the cisgender, the  
multigender, the no gender.  
Blessed are we: the friend, the stranger, the lonely, the hidden, the visible, the authentic.  
Blessed are we who rise in solidarity, blessed are we who cannot, blessed are we who do  
not.  
Blessed are we for this is our Beloved Community, and this is who we are.