

Soul Matters 2019-2020

February's Theme: Shadow

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 February:

February 2nd is Groundhog Day when, according to a Germanic tradition brought over to North America, if the groundhog emerges from its burrow that day and sees its shadow, it will return to its burrow and we will get six more weeks of winter. If it doesn't see its shadow, then spring is on its way. A popular film, "Groundhog Day," with actor Bill Murray, tells the story of a man who, no matter what he does, ends up in a time loop waking up on same Groundhog Day. At first, he does things that he thinks he can get away with – binge eating and drinking, reckless driving, and robbery. Then he tries to do things that will better himself and the community – learning how to play piano, speaking Italian, trying to help a homeless man. Still he wakes up in the time loop, repeating the same day. Finally, he comes into the self-knowledge that he has to share his love for his co-worker and realize that spending time together is what truly makes him happy.

Psychiatrist, Carl Jung, coined the phrase "shadow" to describe those parts of our personality we don't like and would rather repress into our subconscious so we can ignore them. When we reject those aspects of our personality, we often project them onto others as a way to avoid owning them. Sometimes it comes out in impulsive behaviour like:

- Pointing out the flaws in someone else that we subconsciously don't like in ourselves
- Judging other people (even though we would hate to be judged that way)
- Unconscious biases and prejudices

Most of us have aspects of ourselves we may not like. If we repress those or try to ignore them, they take on greater power. It is like Bill Murray's character: with self-knowledge comes an opportunity to face those parts of ourselves we may not be proud of and try to change our behaviour and feelings. It isn't always a straight, simple process, and yet it is one that can yield new growth – like the coming of spring.

What will you choose this month – to ignore it or try to see your shadow?

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, focus on what shadow means in your spiritual life. What arises? You may want to open yourself to connect with the Spirit of Life, which offers us insights into our lives, who we are, where we are, right now. Consider what you may want to share with the group at our next Soul Matters Circle about this spiritual exercise.

Option B

Watch the film, “Groundhog Day.” As you watch it, consider what you might do if you were in the situation of the main character: what might you try to get away with? What would you do to contribute to the community? After the film, take time to reflect: What insights did you gain about yourself? Is there one thing you are willing to do this month as a result of these insights? If it harms no one, do it. Come back to the group with thoughts to share about what you learned about your shadow from doing this exercise.

Option C

During this month, observe what aspects of your shadow you might be projecting onto others (as described in my newsletter article on page 1, or do some research and learn more about this concept on your own). If it helps, journal, draw or paint, or talk to a trusted friend about it. Come back to the group with a response you’d like to share about what you learned about your shadow from doing this exercise.

Option D

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme of “shadow”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Come to the group at our next 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 is my shadow-self trying to teach me right now?
2. What flaws in others do I notice that I subconsciously don't like in myself?
3. Where is the shadow in my spiritual life? What are the sources of light? (Consider that "shadow" does not have to be negative and "light" does not have to be positive.)
4. Since three of four groundhogs didn't see their shadow on February 2, spring may be coming sooner rather than later. What am I looking forward to doing this spring? How can I prepare for it this month?
5. How will I celebrate Valentine's Day, so it reflects who and what I love?
6. If you believe in a higher power (however you describe it), how does "shadow" factor into your relationship with that higher power?
7. 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

February 6 -

"How can I be substantial if I do not cast a shadow? I must have a dark side also If I am to be whole."

— C. G. Jung

February 13 -

"No matter how far you travel, you can never get away from yourself. It's like your shadow. It follows you everywhere. -Komura"

— Haruki Murakami, *After the Quake*

February 20 -

"I thought the most beautiful thing in the world must be shadow."

— Sylvia Plath, *The Bell Jar*

February 27 -

"... there are shadows because there are hills."

— E.M. Forster, *A Room with a View*

Family Resources – *How will your family explore the role of shadow and light in your lives?*
Let Meg and Ashley know how it goes and if you want to share it with others at Beacon!

Option 1

For Valentine’s Day, as a family, decide how you want to show your love for each other, for the earth and the animals who may also be part of your family.

Also, here’s a link to a UU Valentine to share with your sweetheart if you have one, created by Tim Atkins (who serves as the Director of Lifespan Religious Education at Cedar Lane Unitarian Universalist Church in Bethesda, MD.):

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/image/lets-let-our-interconnected-webs-interconnect>

Option 2:

Read Robert Louis Stevenson’s poem “My Shadow” out loud:

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/43196/my-shadow>

Have fun playing with your shadows: direct a bright light onto yourselves and see the shadow on the wall; make shadow puppets; go outside on a sunny day and play with your shadows. Enjoy being silly playing together.

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 shadow is a moral problem that challenges the whole ego-personality, for no one can become conscious of the shadow without considerable moral effort. To become conscious of it involves recognizing the dark aspects of the personality as present and real. This act is the essential condition for any kind of self-knowledge.”

— Carl Jung, *Aion*

“If only it were all so simple! If only there were evil people somewhere insidiously committing evil deeds, and it were necessary only to separate them from the rest of us and destroy them. But the line dividing good and evil cuts through the heart of every human being. And who is willing to destroy a piece of his own heart?”

— Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn

Above two quotes and notes on Shadow from Carl Jung:

Blog at <https://highexistence.com/carl-jung-shadow-guide-unconscious/>

“So don't be frightened, dear friend, if a sadness confronts you larger than any you have ever known, casting its shadow over all you do. You must think that something is happening within you, and remember that life has not forgotten you; it holds you in its hand and will not let you fall. Why would you want to exclude from your life any uneasiness, any pain, any depression, since you don't know what work they are accomplishing within you?”

— Rainer Maria Rilke, *Letters to a Young Poet*

“What men call the shadow of the body is not the shadow of the body, but is the body of the soul.”

— Oscar Wilde, *A House of Pomegranates*

Worship Resources

Chalice Lighting by Annie Foerster

Come we now out of the darkness of our unknowing
and the dusk of our dreaming;
Come we now from far places.
Come we now into the twilight of our awakening
and the reflection of our gathering.
Come we now all together.
We bring, unilluminated, our dark caves of doubting;
We seek, unbedazzled, the clear light of understanding.
May the sparks of our joining kindle our resolve,
brighten our spirits, reflect our love,
and unshadow our days.
Come we now; enter the dawning.

Chalice Lighting by Jennifer Leota Gray

Universal mystery,
Guide us away from the desire to
Shine light in all the corners.
Teach us to embrace the night,
For without the darkness,
We never see the stars.

Poem – “A Blessing for Traveling in the Dark” by Jan Richardson

Go slow
if you can.
Slower.
More slowly still.
Friendly dark
or fearsome,
this is no place
to break your neck
by rushing,
by running,
by crashing into
what you cannot see.
Then again,
it is true:
different darks
have different tasks,
and if you
have arrived here unawares,
if you have come
in peril
or in pain,
this might be no place
you should dawdle.
I do not know
what these shadows
ask of you,
what they might hold
that means you good
or ill.
It is not for me
to reckon
whether you should linger
or you should leave.
But this is what
I can ask for you:
That in the darkness
there be a blessing.
That in the shadows
there be a welcome.
That in the night
you be encompassed
by the Love that knows
your name.

Prayer by Celie Katovitch

Spirit of life and death,
Thou who art as present to us in our suffering
As in our wellbeing,
Abide with us in this permeable time
Between dusk and dark.
Soothe the secret pains we carry.
Bless us with the courage to move toward our grief
And not away.

When all is hidden—
When we find ourselves moving among the shadows—
When we do not know the way—
Quiet our hearts; still our restlessness.
Help us to embrace the unknown:
To hold the mystery,
And to let ourselves be held by it.
For Thou art the great Hiddenness,
And yet we know that our breath is not so close to us
As thy presence.

Abide with us, O spirit of compassion,
As the power of healing,
The assurance of peace,
The Love that will not let us go.
This prayer was written for a Tenebrae service (Good Friday)

Closing by Heather Christensen

Each week as we gather
we light a common chalice.

We sing and celebrate,
we pray and think.

Then we each gather strength from the flame
and go out from here,
taking the light with us.