

Soul Matters 2019-2020

June's Theme: *Memory*

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

June's theme is **Memory**.

As I write this, I've just come off the first online Cross-Canada Sunday Service, hosted by the Canadian Unitarian Council. There were over a thousand people watching that service live, through either Zoom or Youtube. For those who were able to experience that, you'll have your own memories of it. (For others who weren't able to, I hope you'll check out the recording of it on the Canadian Unitarian Council's Youtube channel.)

It got me thinking about the very first Unitarian Sunday service I ever attended. It was 1992, in Montreal, also at the Canadian Unitarian Council's annual meeting - of course that service was in person. It was a beautifully sunny May day. They had built wooden bleachers in the shell of the burnt-out sanctuary of the old church on Sherbrooke Street, with plastic over the top in case of rain. Being new to Unitarian community, I was curious about what it would be like. Just as at today's CUC service, there was beautiful music and inspiring words. I felt drawn to this group of authentically friendly people, these free thinkers. I wanted to learn more about them. What clinched it for me that day was during the postlude, when the brass quintet played ragtime music, people spontaneously got up and danced in the aisles! "Now here," I thought, "are my people!"

What are favourite memories you have of Beacon or other communities? What do you value about those times and those people? How do you want to live now, learning from those past experiences?

I'll be on holidays in July and on study leave the first three weeks of August. Then I look forward to reconnecting. During June, I look forward to hearing your treasured memories from Beacon and from your life. I hope you and those dear to you are well and stay well this summer.

In the spirit,

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 past experiences you’ve had when you’ve felt connected to a higher power/divine source, within the universe, within a personal or work relationship, or with the earth. What comes up for you? In light of what comes up, choose one thing you want to focus your week’s prayer or meditation. If you wish, find someone you trust to share some thoughts and feelings about doing this spiritual exercise and how it is connected to your relating with your higher power.

Option B

In my column above, I mention how memories make us who we are. They are the stories we tell about ourselves and our lives. What precious memories warm your heart or inspire you now? How do we create memories we will love as we look back on this time? Spend time reflecting on these questions while sitting, journaling, walking, and/or drawing, writing poetry, or whatever creative or physical way of engaging is useful in your reflections. If you wish, find someone you trust to share some thoughts and feelings about these precious memories and how they help you be who you are now.

Option C

Humans have both happy memories as well as difficult memories, and other feelings related to other memories. They can evoke multiple feelings. When you are feeling plagued by a bad memory, what are ways you help manage that? If you wish, find someone you trust to share some thoughts and feelings doing this spiritual exercise.

Option D

What is a spiritual exercise that comes to your mind when you think of the theme “Memory”? Create that exercise and share it with the group by email (if you are willing). Share what it was like doing that spiritual exercise with a friend or someone else you trust. See if they have a spiritual exercise or practice they do that they’d be willing to talk about with you that may relate to memories, so it is a two-way time of sharing.

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 do you want to live now, learning from your past experiences of favourite times in community?
2. What are your favourite memories of Beacon or other communities? What do you value about those times and those people?
3. When is a time when you've felt something similar to: "Now here are my people!" What helped you feel part of that community or group?
4. What are you nostalgic about these days? (See article listed end of this packet for further thoughts.)
5. What bad memory are you trying to avoid these days? What do you want to do about that?
6. What is the role of collective memory in our society when it comes to perpetrating racism and working on anti-racism today?
7. How will you create a positive experience today that will make a good memory for tomorrow?
8. 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

June 4 –

"In order to rise from its own ashes, a Phoenix first must burn."

— Octavia Butler. (Octavia Estelle Butler was an American science fiction writer, one of the best-known among the few African-American women in the field.)

June 11 –

"Not everything that is faced can be changed, but nothing can be changed until it is faced."

— James Baldwin

June 18 –

"Most everything you think you know about me is nothing more than memories."

— Haruki Murakami, *A Wild Sheep Chase*

June 25 –

"I can only note that the past is beautiful because one never realises an emotion at the time. It expands later, and thus we don't have complete emotions about the present, only about the past."

— Virginia Woolf

Family Resources – *What are favourite memories in your family? What will you do this month that may become favourite memories?*

Option 1:

Take time to share favourite memories of things your family has done together. Make sure everyone has a chance to share. Inspired by some of those memories, make a plan for one thing you want to do together as a family this coming month or this summer.

Option 2:

Story Time – from the UU World Family Pages (Winter 2018, p.2)

Take turns telling stories with someone whose age is quite different from yours.

Grandparents, neighbors, or family friends may know parts of your history, like how your family became a family, or why you live where you live today.

A fun way to start is “Two Truths and a Wish.”

- Have everyone think of two things they have really done and one thing they wish to do.
- When it’s your turn, say you have done all three things and see who can guess which is the wish.
- Then share your true stories—all the details!

https://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/18_winter_families.pdf

Please let Ashley or Meg know what you think of these family resources and what else we could provide that would be useful during this time as well as about this and other monthly themes. Also, check out Ashley’s “Quarantine Kit: Weekly package of resources to help families in this time of quarantine.” Email her if you aren’t yet receiving it then share it with friends, family and neighbours: dre@beaconunitarian.org.

Quotes

“The advantage of a bad memory is that one enjoys several times the same good things for the first time.”

— Friedrich Nietzsche

“A clear conscience is the sure sign of a bad memory.”

— Mark Twain

“But who can remember pain, once it’s over? All that remains of it is a shadow, not in the mind even, in the flesh. Pain marks you, but too deep to see. Out of sight, out of mind.”
— Margaret Atwood, *The Handmaid’s Tale*

“It is strange how we hold on to the pieces of the past while we wait for our futures.”
— Ally Condie, *Matched*

“Memories, even your most precious ones, fade surprisingly quickly. But I don’t go along with that. The memories I value most, I don’t ever see them fading.”
— Kazuo Ishiguro, *Never Let Me Go*

Worship Resources from the Unitarian Universalist Association’s Worship Web

Chalice Lighting – by Laurel S. Sheridan

Take from life its coals, not its ashes.
Fan the flames of love and justice;
join hands and hearts in common endeavor;
and there will be no limit to what we can achieve together.

Chalice Lighting by Israel Buffardi

The road that lies ahead of us is a long one, and the pace of progress will sometimes feel glacially slow.
Never forget that glaciers over time can carve out grand canyons and great lakes.
Moving tectonic plates can rise up mountains over millennia, or they can explode awe-inspiring volcanoes in milliseconds.
Our commitment to love and justice can do the same.

Affirmation by Loretta Williams

We, bearers of the dream, affirm that a new vision of hope is emerging.
We pledge to work for that community in which justice will be actively present.
We affirm that there is struggle yet ahead.
Yet we know that in the struggle is the hope for the future.
We affirm that we are co-creators of the future, not passive pawns.
And we stand united in affirmation of our hope and vision of a just and inclusive society.
We affirm the unity of all persons:
We affirm brotherhood and sisterhood that allows us to touch upon each other’s humanity.
We affirm a unity that opens our eyes, ears, and hearts to see the different but common forms of oppression, suffering, and pain.
Yet we are one in the image of God, and we celebrate our hopes for human unity.
Within ourselves and within the gathered community, we will discover the strength not to

hide in indifference.

Affirming that hope, publicly expressed, energizes and enables us to move forward.

Together we pledge action to transcend barriers — be they racial, political, economic, social, or religious.

We pledge to make our tomorrows become our todays.

Source: *Been in the Storm So Long* (edited by Mark D. Morrison-Reed and Jacqui James, features more than 40 selections from the voices of 29 African-Americans available at the Unitarian Universalist Association's website.)

Benediction by Bill Hamilton-Holway

If I were to wish you peace,

it would not be for long.

It would be peace

to rest, to reflect, to make ready

for the coming day,

that the full force of your creativity and love

might be released and shared.

I do wish you peace.

Closing by Debra Haffner

As we enter another week of uncertainty in the world, let us remember that there is only one side – that of humanity, and planet Earth. May we pray for peace; may we raise our voices with our elected officials and engage as we can in acts of resistance; and may we remember to take very good care of ourselves, each other and those we love.

May we remember these words, adapted from the Unity Prayer:

The light of Love surrounds us;

Love enfolds us;

The power of Love protects us;

Love watches over us;

Wherever we are, Love is!

Resource

Article: “The Psychology of Nostalgia During COVID-19

Is escaping into the past such a bad thing?”

by Matt Johnson, Ph.D., *Psychology Today* online, posted May 26, 2020

Engaging in nostalgia isn't just enjoyable. Research suggests that it also may be beneficial.

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/mind-brain-and-value/202005/the-psychology-nostalgia-during-covid-19>