

# On the Journey

Exploring themes for deepening wisdom

2017 Jan



## Mystery

**Definition.** Dictionary.com

1. anything that is kept secret or remains unexplained or unknown: *the mysteries of nature*.
2. any affair, thing, or person that presents features or qualities so obscure as to arouse curiosity or speculation: *The masked guest is an absolute mystery to everyone*.
3. a novel, short story, play, or film whose plot involves a crime or other event that remains puzzlingly unsettled until the very end: *a mystery by Agatha Christie*.
4. obscure, puzzling, or mysterious quality or character: *the mystery of Mona Lisa's smile*.
5. any truth that is unknowable except by divine revelation.
6. (a) a sacramental rite. (b) the Eucharist.
7. an incident or scene in connection with the life of Christ, regarded as of special significance: *the mysteries of the Passion*.

**Etymology.** Online Etymology Dictionary

**mystery** (n) 1. early 14c., in a theological sense, "religious truth via divine revelation, hidden spiritual significance, mystical truth" -- from, Old French *mistere* "secret, mystery, hidden meaning," from Latin *mysterium* "secret rite, secret worship; a secret thing," from Greek *mysterion* (usually in plural *mysteria*) "secret rite or doctrine," from *mystes* "one who has been initiated," from *myein* "to close, shut" (see *mute*); perhaps referring to the lips (in secrecy) or to the eyes (only initiates were allowed to see the sacred rites).

The Greek word was used in Septuagint for "secret counsel of God," translated in Vulgate as *sacramentum*. Non-theological use in English, "a hidden or secret thing," is from late 14c. In reference to the ancient rites of Greece, Egypt, etc. it is attested from 1640s. Meaning "detective story" first recorded in English 1908.

**mystery** (n) 2. "handicraft, trade, art" (archaic), late 14c., from Medieval Latin *misterium*, alteration of Latin *ministerium* "service, occupation, office, ministry," influenced in form by Medieval Latin *mysterium* and in sense by *maistrie* "mastery." Now only in *mystery play*, in reference to the medieval performances, which often were staged by members of craft guilds. The two senses of *mystery* formed a common pun in (secular) Tudor theater.

**Synonyms:** puzzle, problem, secret, riddle -- conundrum, enigma, subtlety, thriller, abstruseness, cliffhanger, difficulty, grabber, inscrutability, mystification, occult, oracle, perplexity, poser, rebus, rune, sphinx, stickler, stumper, teaser, whodunit, brainteaser, closed book, mindboggler.

## Mysterious Ways

Rev. Michael Tino

When my husband Eric and I traded in our old cell phones for iPhones we noticed a subtle but profound change in our lives. Wherever we go, we now have instant access to the internet in our pockets. With Google, Wikipedia, the Internet Movie Database and other sites at our fingertips at all times, most questions that come up in conversation can be answered in a matter of moments. Our shorthand for this phenomenon is “no mysteries.” There are many fewer mysteries in our lives since this technology attached itself to our hips. And that’s not always a good thing.

You see, I love mystery. I love being surrounded by the unknown and the unknowable. I love living in a universe whose known parts are dwarfed by the immensity of parts yet to be discovered. I love being a human whose knowledge is just deep enough to reveal all the things I do not know and never will.

As a child, I devoured mystery books by the dozens, graduating quickly from the Hardy Boys and Nancy Drew to Agatha Christie and beyond. I was invariably upset at the end, when everything was neatly tied up together.

I became a scientist not because I thought it would be a way to find answers, but because it was a field based on questions. I loved asking questions, probing their depths, removing successive layers of ignorance to reveal deeper and more numerous questions at every turn. I loved the mysteries of science. I loved making guesses at the unprovable, amassing evidence for the unseeable, moving deeper into the unthinkable, and asking more questions than I ever answered.

I loved contributing to the mystery of the universe. Ultimately, the mysteries of science weren’t enough for me, though. I moved on to being part of a greater mystery, into a greater question: What is the purpose of our existence?

I know that there will never be an answer to that question that satisfies me. Rather than turning me off from the pursuit, though, it ignites my love, my passion and my drive. I am energized and fed by the pursuit of unprovable knowledge. I am inspired to pay closer attention to all that I experience, lest I miss a clue, a path to the ultimate or an experience of the true.

I love mystery, and I love thinking that there is an unknowable love that surrounds us all—a love that can be sensed, but whose source remains beyond our comprehension. It is this mysterious love that drives my ministry and asks me to seek connections with all of the beings with whom I share this universe.

In their 1991 song “Mysterious Ways,” the group U2 sang of love that came from an unknown and unknowable source. Their song has the added bonus for me of mysterious meaning: it’s unclear whether the song is about love between two humans or the love of God, referred to in the feminine. The song says: “One day you will look back /And you’ll see where /You were held now /By this love while /You could stand there /You could move on this moment /Follow this feeling.”

That mysterious love holds us now — and yet we have no idea where it comes from. One day it might be clear. But for now, just go with it. Follow this feeling, just kneel before it and make yourself humble in its presence. Wherever it comes from, whatever it means, whoever or whatever is its ultimate source — just let the love surround you. It’s all right, they conclude, she moves in mysterious ways.

## **Mysteries and Miracles: An Eastertide Reflection**

Rev. Bill Sinkford

It was the miracles in the Christian story that our Unitarian ancestors rejected, not the moral messages. The virgin birth, water into wine, all those healings. And then the resurrection, that final miracle without which there most probably would not be a Christian story.

My scientific sensibility knows, for a certainty, that those miracles did not take place. Yet, I have experienced healing from a forgiving touch by someone I have wronged. And found that my own words of kindness and honesty have helped lift a veil in another person's life. My scientific sensibility wants to argue, but I know those things for a certainty as well.

There have been times when I have been touched by the spirit, held in the hollow of some hands, surrounded by something I call love. I know that for a certainty, too.

And the yearning for resurrection, the prayer or the wish for spring to come to the world and into our lives arrives each year. So, despite my scientific sensibility, and despite all the violence and the many crucifixions the human community offers with such predictable consistency... despite all of that I find myself affirming not so much the truth of spring, but the urgency for Spring to come.

Max Coots, in a reading in our hymnal, writes: "Unless we move the seasons of the self, and Spring can come for us, the Winter will go on and on." I do not locate the source of my faith in a death and the story of a rebirth long ago. But there is in the yearning for rebirth and the urgency for resurrection a truth I can believe in.

It is a mystery, this business of life and death. I think that is why we celebrate this season again and again. It is the human truth of the life that moves within us, even in the presence of death. Our task, somehow, is not to conquer death, but to be present to that mystery.

## **from The Sacred Depths of Nature**

Ursula Goodenough

I've had a lot of trouble with the universe. It began soon after I was told about it in physics class. I was perhaps 20, and I went on a camping trip, where I found myself in a sleeping bag looking up into the crisp Colorado night. Before I could look around for Orion and the Big Dipper, I was overwhelmed with terror. The panic became so acute that I had to roll over and bury my face in my pillow. All the stars that I see are part of but one galaxy. There are some 100 billion galaxies in the universe, with perhaps 100 billion stars in each one. Each star is dying, exploding, accreting, exploding again. Our Sun, too, will die, frying the Earth to a crisp during its own heat-death.

The night sky was ruined. I would never be able to look at it again. I wept into my pillow, the long, slow tears of adolescent despair. . . A bleak emptiness overtook me whenever I thought about what was really going on out in the cosmos. So, I did my best not to think about it.

But, since then, I have found a way to defeat the nihilism that lurks in the infinite and the infinitesimal. I have come to understand that I can deflect the apparent pointlessness of it all by realizing that I don't have to seek a point; in any of it. Instead, I can see it as the locus of Mystery:

The Mystery of why there is anything at all, rather than nothing, of where the laws of physics came from, of why the universe seems so strange. Mystery. Inherently pointless, inherently shrouded in its own absence of category. . . .

(I've come to see that) mystery can take its place as a strange but wondrous given.

## Transcending Mystery

Rev. Anthony Makar

*“Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.”* (first of the six Unitarian Universalist “sources of the living tradition we share”)

That’s our first Source, as a faith tradition. There are five others, but note very clearly how the Mystery is mentioned first.

Consider our openness to always learning more, our sense that no single religion or book or tradition or philosophy or way can ever say everything that is to be said about sacred reality, our sense that there’s always more to be known, more to be revealed. Consider that UU congregations are places where atheists and theists worship together—along with goddess worshippers and Buddhists and Jews and agnostics and New Agers and Christians and on and on and on, all together.

What underlying mechanism explains it all? Our shared belief in the Mystery. Sacred reality is a Mystery. To be a Unitarian Universalist is to sense the Mystery. Death happens, birth happens, love happens, illness happens, sex happens, beauty happens, failure happens, war happens, cruelty happens, pain happens, forgiveness happens—all these things of life happen—and with each one, we encounter a face of the Mystery that is larger than we can possibly know.

Quantum mechanics reveals our physical world to be strange beyond imagining. And if this is so, how much more so the nature of God. God is a Mystery. The sacred is fundamentally Mystery.

Call it holy ignorance. Educated ignorance. Knowing that sacred reality is bigger than any single theory and single formulation. They say that your mind can be so open your brains fall out. Perhaps. But it can also be that your mind is so open the Mystery falls in.

To extend our essential Unitarian Universalist belief that sacred reality is a Mystery, to live more deeply into our UU faith, be intentional in being more aware of the Mystery in your life. Sometimes the Mystery breaks in upon us in ways that aren’t so fun: the loss of a love, or a job. An illness. A divorce. A breakdown of some sort or another. In times like this, the best we can do is realize we are undergoing an initiation into the deeper mysteries of life. We can stop resisting and start being more curious about what’s happening. My personal prayer is: *Stay curious, every moment, the mystery unfolds.*

Other times the task is to make room for the Mystery. I believe that the Spirit really is like a shy animal, and if we don’t stop and become perfectly still, we scare it off, it runs away. Grab some meditation time. Before your family devours the meal, take a moment to offer a blessing. Take walks. So many ways to make room for Mystery.

When I say that my life is God’s it has nothing to do with divine intervention. It has nothing to do with giving up personal responsibility. It has everything to do with snatching my life out of my own judgmental hands and putting it in the hands of something far more profound and subtle. It’s about seeing myself as participating in a life that’s larger than I can imagine, a life that is ultimately worthwhile and meaningful and, all things considered, good. Death, birth, love, illness, sex, beauty, failure, war, cruelty, pain, forgiveness, on and on. All faces of the Mystery, all entry points, all initiations into deeper knowing. I am God’s, and so are you, and so are we, and so is the world.

## **I Prayed to a Mystery**

Margaret D. McGee

I prayed to a mystery.

Sometimes I was simply aware of the mystery. I saw a flash of it during a trip to New York that David and I took before we were married. We were walking on a busy sidewalk in Manhattan. I don't remember if it was day or night. A man with a wound on his forehead came toward us. His damp, ragged hair might have been clotted with blood, or maybe it was only dirt. He wore deeply dirty clothes. His red, swollen hands, cupped in half-fists, swung loosely at his sides. His eyes were focused somewhere past my right shoulder. He staggered while he walked. The sidewalk traffic flowed around him and with him. He was strange and frightening, and at the same time he belonged on the Manhattan sidewalk as much as any of us. It was that paradox -- that he could be both alien and resident, both brutalized and human, that he could stand out in the moving mass of people like a sea monster in a school of tuna and at the same time be as much at home as any of us -- that stayed with me. I never saw him again, but I remember him often, and when I do, I am aware of the mystery.

Years later, I was out on our property on the Olympic Peninsula, cutting a path through the woods. This was before our house was built. After chopping through dense salal and hacking off ironwood bushes for an hour or so, I stopped, exhausted. I found myself standing motionless, intensely aware of all of the life around me, the breathing moss, the chattering birds, the living earth. I was as much a part of the woods as any millipede or cedar tree. At that moment, too, I was aware of the mystery.

Sometimes I wanted to speak to this mystery directly. Out of habit, I began with "Dear God" and ended with "Amen". But I thought to myself, I'm not praying to that old man in the sky. Rather, I'm praying to this thing I can't define. It was sort of like talking into a foggy valley.

Praying into a bank of fog requires a lot of effort. I wanted an image to focus on when I prayed. I wanted something to pray **to**, but I couldn't go back to that old man. He was too closely associated with all I'd left behind.

## **Everyone a Mystery to Every Other**

Charles Dickens

A wonderful fact to reflect upon, that every human creature is constituted to be that profound secret and mystery to every other. A solemn consideration, when I enter a great city by night, that every one of those darkly clustered houses encloses its own secret; that every room in every one of them encloses its own secret; that every beating heart in the hundreds of thousands of breasts there, is, in some of its imaginings, a secret to the heart nearest it! Something of the awfulness, even of Death itself, is referable to this. No more can I turn the leaves of this dear book that I loved, and vainly hope in time to read it all. No more can I look into the depths of this unfathomable water, wherein, as momentary lights glanced into it, I have had glimpses of buried treasure and other things submerged. It was appointed that the book should shut with a spring, for ever and for ever, when I had read but a page. It was appointed that the water should be locked in an eternal frost, when the light was playing on its surface, and I stood in ignorance on the shore. My friend is dead, my neighbor is dead, my love, the darling of my soul, is dead; it is the inexorable consolidation and perpetuation of the secret that was always in that individuality, and which I shall carry in mine to my life's end. In any of the burial-places of this city through which I pass, is there a sleeper more inscrutable than its busy inhabitants are, in their innermost personality, to me, or than I am to them?

## What is Mystery?

Rev. Meredith Garmon

This word “mystery” is itself somewhat mysterious, isn’t it? It seems to invite examination of the division one makes between “stuff I know” and “stuff I don’t know” – with the latter called “mystery.”

“Stuff I know” doesn’t imply *certainty*. Some of what is in my “stuff I know” folder might actually belong in “false beliefs.” For now, I have it in “stuff I know” if (a) I believe it is true, and (b) I have some reason or evidence for believing it true (though the evidence might not be conclusive), and (c) it matters, in some way, to my life and my understanding of the world.

“Stuff I don’t know” comes in a variety of flavors:

1. Stuff I temporarily don’t know, but some people do, and I could find out. This would include more-or-less agreed-upon facts of history (Who was the English monarch just prior to the King Harold who died at the Battle of Hastings in 1066?) and science (What is the chemical composition of benzene?)
2. Stuff that is known, by someone, but that I can never know: government or corporate secrets, for example.
3. Stuff that is known, by someone, and isn’t a secret, but I lack the aptitude or the will to learn to comprehend – such as how to solve certain very complicated problems in theoretical mathematics or quantum physics.
4. Stuff that no one knows now but that will, or conceivably could, become known. This includes future events: Who wins the 2017 World Series? It also includes possible discoveries: What other planets have life? What is “dark matter”? Is cold fusion electrical generation possible?
5. Stuff I don’t know because I’ve adopted an agnostic stance on the subject. I do this when I’m aware of strong arguments on both sides and I don’t need to have an opinion on the matter. Did the boxer Hurricane Carter commit the 1966 murders of which he was convicted? I don’t know. Is Renoir or Monet the greater painter? Should the US build more nuclear power plants? Some people have opinions on these questions. I do not.
6. Stuff that no one knows or ever will know because the question is nonsense. Is the Earth upside-down? This is a nonsense question because the concept “up” only has meaning within the context of Earth (or whatever planet or body the speaker is standing on). Standing on Earth, “up” means “away from the center of the Earth.” The Earth itself floats in space, and that’s not a context in which “up” has any meaning. Sometimes it isn’t clear whether a question is really a nonsense question or not. Is “What is the meaning of life?” a nonsense question? One might argue that “meaning” occurs only within the context of a life, just as “up” occurs only within the context of Earth. Various things move up and down within the Earth context, but “up” doesn’t and can’t apply to the Earth as a whole. “Up relative to what?” one would ask. Likewise, various things have meaning within the context of a life, but

“meaning” doesn’t and can’t apply to life as a whole. “Meaning relative to what?” one would ask.

7. Stuff that no one knows or ever will know because . . . well, just because it’s unknowable. Ah, this is the interesting one. Now we’re talking proper mystery. These questions hover on the border of nonsense – but we cannot quite dismiss them that way. Why is there something rather than nothing? The agnostic stance might seem attractive, but the question is too compelling to dismiss that way either. What is mine to do in this world? What is love?

These questions are not to be answered, but *lived into*. True mystery is not to be dispelled and isn’t dispellable. Rather, we live in and with the mystery.

There is always something beyond what we know. One way to say this is: *There is always more to learn about anything*. Another way to say it is: *Existence is shot through everywhere with mystery*.

Every experience, every moment, presents itself, and we bring to it our “stuff I know” folder. *This is an oak tree*, we say. Or, *Here is my office*. We know these things, these places. But in each moment and experience there is also the presence of the unknown – something about it that will never go in the “stuff I know” folder, can never be encapsulated, articulated, filed and cross-referenced. Every moment whispers, *what is ineffable here?* This is an unanswerable question (because any answer would be effing it, and then it wouldn’t be ineffable) – but is it unanswerable because it is nonsense? I’d say, rather, that there is an unspeakable quality in everything. We cannot speak it, but we can nevertheless be present to it.

It is possible to go through life doing no more than responding to every situation with the knowledge we have, as best we can – bringing our concepts and purposes to bear on everything we encounter. This is a grave mistake. In addition to the “stuff I know” – and in addition to the first 6 categories of “stuff I don’t know” – there is something else present in everything you see, hear, touch, taste, or smell. It is the unspeakable – the silence inside the sound, the darkness inside the light, the stillness inside the motion. It is the mystery. It holds us always.



## Mysterious Ways

U2

Johnny take a walk with your sister the moon  
Let her pale light in to fill up your room  
You've been living underground  
Eating from a can  
You've been running away  
From what you don't understand: Love

She's slippy  
You're sliding down  
She'll be there when you hit the ground

It's all right, it's all right, it's all right  
She moves in mysterious ways  
It's all right, it's all right, it's all right  
She moves in mysterious ways

Johnny take a dive with your sister in the rain  
Let her talk about the things you can't explain  
To touch is to heal  
To hurt is to steal  
If you want to kiss the sky  
Better learn how to kneel (on your knees boy)

She's the wave  
She turns the tide  
She sees the man inside the child

It's all right, it's all right, it's all right  
She moves in mysterious ways  
It's all right, it's all right, it's all right  
Lift my days, light up my nights

One day you will look...back  
And you'll see...where  
You were held...how  
By this love...while  
You could stand...there  
You could move on this moment  
Follow this feeling

It's all right, it's all right, it's all right  
She moves in mysterious ways

It's all right, it's all right, it's all right  
She moves in mysterious ways

We move through miracle days  
Spirit moves in mysterious ways  
She moves with it  
She moves with it  
Lift my days, light up my nights

## Newton

Alfred Noyes

Fools have said  
That knowledge drives out wonder from the  
world;  
They'll say it still, though all the dust's ablaze  
With miracles at their feet; while Newton's  
laws  
Foretell that knowledge one day shall be song,

This universe  
Exists, and by that one impossible fact  
Declares itself a miracle; postulates  
An infinite Power within itself, a Whole  
Greater than any part, a Unity  
Sustaining all, binding all worlds in one.  
This is the mystery, palpable here and now.  
'Tis not the lack of links within the chain  
From cause to cause, but that the chain exists.  
That's the unfathomable mystery,  
The one unquestioned miracle that we know,  
Implying every attribute of God,  
The ultimate, absolute, omnipresent Power,  
In its own being, deep and high as heaven.

"I know not how my work may seem to  
others"

So wrote our mightiest mind--"But to myself  
I seem a child that wandering all day long  
Upon the sea-shore, gathers here a shell,  
And there a pebble, coloured by the wave,  
While the great ocean of truth, from sky to sky  
Stretches before him, boundless,  
unexplored."



# Mystery Quotations

“Our task isn’t about clearing up the mystery, but rather making the mystery clear.” —Robert Aitken

“Worship is the mystery within us reaching out to the mystery beyond; It is an inarticulate silence yearning to speak; it is the window of the moment open to the sky of the eternal.” —Jacob Trapp

“The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery.”  
—Anais Nin

“These black times go as they come and we do not know how they come or why they go. But we know that God controls them, as he controls the whole vast cobweb of the mystery of things.” —Elizabeth Goudge

“Carrying my babies was a marvelous mystery, lives growing unseen except by the slow swelling of my belly. Death is an even greater mystery. ... The God I cry out to in anguish or joy can neither be proved nor disapproved. The hope I have that death is not the end of all our questions can neither be proved nor disproved.” —Madeleine L'Engle

“The great beauty of life is its mystery, the inability to know what course our life will take, and diligently work to transmute into our final form based upon a lifetime of constant discovery and enterprising effort. Accepting the unknown and unknowable eliminates regret.” -Kilroy Oldster

“Dance as if you got lost in the mystery and beauty of life.”  
—Debasish Mridha

“No, I would not want to live in a world without dragons, as I would not want to live in a world without magic, for that is a world without mystery, and that is a world without faith.”  
—R.A. Salvatore

“The Cosmos is all that is or was or ever will be. Our feeblest contemplations of the Cosmos stir us – there is a tingling in the spine, a catch in the voice, a faint sensation, as if a distant memory, of falling from a height. We know we are approaching the greatest of mysteries.” —Carl Sagan

“The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” —Oscar Wilde

“I don't know what I may seem to the world, but as to myself, I seem to have been only like a boy playing on the sea-shore and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered before me.”  
—Isaac Newton

“The important thing is not to stop questioning. Curiosity has its own reason for existence. One cannot help but be in awe when he contemplates the mysteries of eternity, of

life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of this mystery each day.” —Albert Einstein

“Science cannot solve the ultimate mystery of nature. And that is because, in the last analysis, we ourselves are a part of the mystery that we are trying to solve.” —Max Planck

“I don't think that faith, whatever you're being faithful about, really can be scientifically explained. And I don't want to explain this whole life business through truth, science. There's so much mystery. There's so much awe.”  
—Jane Goodall

“Mathematicians have tried in vain to this day to discover some order in the sequence of prime numbers, and we have reason to believe that it is a mystery into which the human mind will never penetrate.” —Leonhard Euler

“Every branch of human knowledge, if traced up to its source and final principles, vanishes into mystery.”  
—Arthur Machen

“I do not at all understand the mystery of grace - only that it meets us where we are but does not leave us where it found us.” —Anne Lamott

“Mystery is at the heart of creativity. That, and surprise.”  
—Julia Cameron

“The mystery of the beginning of all things is insoluble by us; and I for one must be content to remain an agnostic.”  
—Charles Darwin

“The ultimate mystery is one's own self.” -Sammy Davis, Jr.

“Each person is an enigma. You're a puzzle not only to yourself but also to everyone else, and the great mystery of our time is how we penetrate this puzzle.” Theodore Zeldin

“We're here on this earth to unravel the mystery of this planet. The planet is asking for it.” —Yoko Ono

“Remember that you don't choose love; love chooses you. All you really can do is accept it for all its mystery when it comes into your life. Feel the way it fills you to overflowing then reach out and give it away.” —Kent Nerburn

“Community begins in mystery and ends in administration. Leaders move away from people and into paper.” —Jean Vanier

“A friend is a beloved mystery; dearest always because he is not ourself, and has something in him which it is impossible for us to fathom. If it were not so, friendship would lose its chief zest.” —Lucy Larcom

“Love is an endless mystery, for it has nothing else to explain it.” —Rabindranath Tagore

# Our Spiritual Exercise

## **Consciously Dwell in Mystery** (adapted from Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat)

### The Basic Practice

To be spiritual is to have an abiding respect for the great mysteries of life — the profound distinctiveness of other souls, the strange beauty of nature – the worlds of flora and fauna – as well as the ineffable complexity of our inner selves, the unfathomable depths of the universe, inner and outer. The wisdom traditions challenge us to live within a cloud of unknowing.

To practice mystery means cherishing the baffling, curious, hidden, and inscrutable dimensions of your existence and the world around you. Live with paradoxes. Give up the idea that you can always "get it."

### What This Practice Is Good For

The practice of mystery enhances our understanding of the complexity of reality. It is an affront to the modern need have answers to every question and our tendency to create tidy systems with a cubbyhole for every problem and aspiration. Of course, some people simply ignore the mysterious because it lies outside the hallowed precincts of reason and logic.

The antidote to these reductionist approaches is to rest in the riddle of not knowing. If you sometimes think that answers are wisdom, it is time to try practicing mystery.

1. Discern the questions – deep and meaningful questions that resist easy answers. Look at “What is...?” questions like, What is evil? What is love? What is faith? What is justice? Discern the questions that seem to you to point toward something mysterious. Discernment begins in taking some moments for quiet reflection, and continues throughout your day as you hold the question in the back of your mind. In this case, the question is: What are my questions? Perhaps write down several questions in your journal.

2. Repeatedly ask yourself your questions, but without seeking an answer. If an answer pops up, make a note of it and set it aside. Keep repeating the question. The point is not to come up with an answer, but to simply delve into and be with the mystery to which the question points.

3. Use cues to remind you to practice mystery.

- Sorting clothes and wondering what happened to the other sock: my cue to practice mystery.
- Passing a funeral parlor or a cemetery: my cue to contemplate mysteries.
- Hearing someone applying a system of explanations for good fortune or illness: my cue to remind myself to respect the complexity and mystery of life.

Create additional cues for yourself to bring yourself back at various points during the day to your intention to consciously dwell in mystery.

# Your Question

*Don't treat these questions like "homework" or a list that needs to be covered in its entirety. Instead, simply pick the one question that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go.*

1. What is the mystery in your life?
2. How has your experience of mystery changed from when you were a child?
3. Where and how do you experience our first source, "transcending mystery and wonder"?
4. Are there mysteries that you live by? Do you have faith in something unprovable?
5. Is there a comfort for you in mystery? A comfort in knowing?
6. Should your life have more mystery in it? What might "more mystery" look like for you?
7. "Our task isn't about clearing up the mystery, but rather making the mystery clear" (Robert Aitken). What does this mean? How does one "make the mystery clear"? Why is this "our task"?
8. "We're here on this earth to unravel the mystery of this planet. The planet is asking for it" (Yoko Ono).
9. "Worship is the mystery within us reaching out to the mystery beyond; It is an inarticulate silence yearning to speak; it is the window of the moment open to the sky of the eternal" (Jacob Trapp). How does this connect with your experience?
10. "The great beauty of life is its mystery" (Kilroy Oldster). How is this true in your life?
11. "Accepting the unknown and unknowable eliminates regret" (Kilroy Oldster). Does it? How?
12. "The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible" (Oscar Wilde). Is it? How so?
13. "Every branch of human knowledge, if traced up to its source and final principles, vanishes into mystery" (Arthur Machen). How have you experienced this?
14. "Mystery is at the heart of creativity. That, and surprise" (Julia Cameron). How have you experienced mystery "at the heart of" your creative activity?
15. "A friend is a beloved mystery; dearest always because he is not ourself, and has something in him which it is impossible for us to fathom. If it were not so, friendship would lose its chief zest" (Lucy Larcom). Does this describe your friendships? Do you wish it did?
16. "That mysterious love holds us now — and yet we have no idea where it comes from. One day it might be clear" (Michael Tino). Might it? If it did, would that be a good thing?

# Format for Journey Group Meeting

## Chalice Lighting / Opening Words

Words of Kent Nerburn: “Remember that you don't choose love; love chooses you. All you really can do is accept it for all its mystery when it comes into your life. Feel the way it fills you to overflowing then reach out and give it away.”

## Check In Questions

(1) What's has your last month been like? (2) How is it with your soul today? (3) What does “mystery” evoke for you?

## Our Spiritual Exercise

## Your Question

[Optional, if time allows: **Which of the Quotations or Readings was most meaningful for you? How so?**]

## Check Out

From everything we've shared during this time together, what overall message stands out for you?

## Chalice Extinguishing / Closing Words

There is something else present in everything you see, hear, touch, taste, or smell. It is the unspeakable – the silence inside the sound, the darkness inside the light, the stillness inside the motion. It is the mystery. It holds us always.

**On the Journey** is produced by the Unitarian Universalist congregations of Westchester County, New York. It is for use in the congregations' program of small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme. The groups are open to new participants who accept the covenant to maintain the confidentiality of what is shared in the group. To participate in a group, contact the Westchester Unitarian Universalist congregation near you.