

Living with Uncertainty

Covenant Group Session: Stephanie Certain Matz, Countryside Church UU, Palatine, IL
(Sept. 2008), from FUU San Jose, CA

Preliminaries

Chalice Lighting

We gather this hour as people of faith
With joys and sorrows, gifts and needs.
We light this beacon of hope,
sign of our quest
for truth and meaning,
in celebration of the life we share together.
--Hymnal #448, by Rev. Christine Robinson

Check-in.

Meditation--

Living On Paradox Drive

by the Rev. Richard S. Gilbert

Life is a controlled fall.
As we take each step,
We throw ourselves out of balance.
I don't recall the author; it does not matter;
It is the truth of the words that counts.
We all yearn for stability,
For equilibrium,
But they are elusive.
We work ourselves up into anxiety
Or down into depression,
Longing for the time when all will be on an even keel.
I do it too:
If only I can manage these next faltering steps, all will be well.
And, happily, there are moments of blessed calm,
Of centering.
But they are merely a pause in the ongoingness of living.
Life throws us off balance once again,
And we thrust one foot forward seeking to regain it.
The process repeats itself for--
A lifetime.
Yet strangely,

It does seem infinitely better than standing still.

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

1. How is uncertainty affecting your life right now? Is there a particular situation in which you're waiting for an answer?

2. How do you cope with the uncertainty and ambiguity in your life?
3. Has your attitude toward uncertainty changed during your lifetime? What has influenced the change?

For the Facilitator

Do you think of uncertainty as an unwelcome aberration in your well-ordered existence -- a threat -- or as a fact of life?

Unitarian Universalism has a bias toward spiritual/religious/philosophical uncertainty. We talk all the time about embracing the mystery of life, unlike orthodox religions with doctrines that tell people how to live and revelation that dictates where they're going to end up. How does your UU faith influence the way you live with uncertainty?

Check-out

Closing Reading/Extinguishing the Chalice

Go your ways,
Knowing not the answers to all things,
yet seeking always the answer
to one more thing than you know.
-- Hymnal #687 by John W. Brigham

Amen. Shalom. Blessed be.

Preparation for CCUU Session: Living with Uncertainty

Food for Thought

When we feel most concerned about certainty, may we let it be a mindfulness bell, calling us to open to this inner core of who we are. - *from a sermon by the Rev. Mary Grigolia*

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We live in the midst of change -- and the uncertainties that come with change. From the mundane happenings of day-to-day existence -- flat tires, rescheduled meetings, unexpected rain -- to major life events -- birth, death of a loved one, serious health issues -- uncertainty is a constant. And we must deal with it not just in our own individual lives but also in our community, nation and in the world as a whole.

Some uncertainty is of our own choosing. We might, for example, opt not to make hotel reservations before we leave on a trip, preferring the adventure of the unknown. We might be adopting a puppy or kitten of unknown parentage from the animal shelter. And, of course, we never know how any new friendship or romantic relationship will develop when we enter it.

Most uncertainty, however, occurs in situations that are partially or wholly out of our control. It can lead to asking questions such as these: Will I lose my job in the next round of layoffs? Will I get into my first-choice college -- or any college at all? What will the biopsy show? Will my kids turn out OK? Will I like our new minister? Is the U.S. going to pull out of Iraq? Should I avoid air travel because of terrorism? When and how will I die?

As you prepare for this session, reflect on the uncertainties in your life. Think about how you've dealt with them in the past and are dealing with them currently.

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Readings

The only certainty is that nothing is certain. - *Pliny, the Elder*

If you are afraid for your future, you don't have a present.
- *James Petersen*

Life means living with uncertainty ... feeling your way through life, letting your heart guide you like a lantern in the dark
- *Dan Millman*

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From *The Women's Book of Confidence* by Sue Patton Thoele

Enduring the unknown is draining for most of us. Whether it is waiting for the results of a test, wondering about the outcome of a job interview, or questioning whether a particular relationship is healthy for us, we have a tendency to want the answer *now*. Especially difficult is having the patience and wisdom to allow our inner sorting process to happen naturally--sitting with our "I don't know"--rather than forcing ourselves into decisions and commitments before we really *know* what is best.

Just as babies take months to develop and seeds take days or weeks to sprout, most of our answers unfold from an internal questioning period in which the only honest and authentic reality *is* "I don't know." Our task is to accept this process as creative and productive, honor and embrace our questions, and trust that, if we allow it, the best choice will eventually evolve. ...

Although sitting with our "I don't knows" may feel like an endless free-fall, it allows our astute interior computer to gather the information necessary to make valid decisions.