

Purpose

The Community Church of Chapel Hill, Unitarian Universalist, Chapel Hill, NC June 2009
Reverend Maj-Britt Johnson

Chalice Lighting

With humility and courage born of our history, we are called as Unitarian Universalists to build the Beloved Community where all souls are welcome as blessings, and the human family lives whole and reconciled. With this vision in our hearts and minds, we light our chalice.

-by the UUA Leadership Council

Silent Meditation

Brief Check-in: What are you leaving behind to be here?

Reading

The following story is told about Theodore Parker, 19th century Unitarian minister, transcendentalist, writer and abolitionist. In many ways it is best suited the topic of conscience. But I think it can be about having a sense of purpose, and the purpose of human life. How do we know what we are deeply meant to do in life as human beings, and how can we hear our call? Is it as easy for us as for the rest of nature?

Here is the story...

“One day Theodore saw a man with a horse hitched to a wagon. The horse looked old and very tired. Its head hung low, it hardly moved. As Theodore walked by the horse stopped. The driver jumped down. He took a whip and started hitting the horse, on the head, the back, the flanks and the legs. The horse stumbled. Theodore wanted to yell, he wanted to say, ‘stop it’ but he thought to himself, ‘I am only a boy. He’ll never listen to me.’ So he did the only thing he could think of doing. He ran all the way home and called to his father. ‘Come quickly. Come quickly. Please do what you can to help this horse!’

When Theodore and his father made it back to the road they found only the horse, on the ground, dead. Theodore was very upset. He felt that the horse’s death was his fault. ‘How do I know what’s right?’ He asked his father. ‘I wanted to stop the driver but I didn’t.’ How do I know what to do?’

‘Sit down’, his father said, ‘let me tell you how you know what to do. You live on a farm. Since you were a little boy, you’ve been watching our plants and animals, the coming and going of seasons. So tell me, who tells the chicken inside the egg that it is time to hatch?’

‘No one’ Theodore said, ‘the chick inside the egg just knows when to hatch. No one tells her, she just hatches.’

‘Who tells the beaver to build a new dam?’

‘No one’, said Theodore.

‘That’s right. The beaver just knows inside himself to build a new dam. No one tells him when or how. This milkweed pod, no one tells it when to burst open and scatter its seeds all over the earth. It just knows. Deep inside, it knows.’

‘The bird inside the egg knows, the beaver knows the milkweed pod knows. And if you’ve been raised close to the earth and understand its seasons, you too can trust what you feel inside you and to tell when to act. You don’t have to be told. No one else has to agree with you. You know it inside you, like the bird, the beaver and the milkweed pod.’

Questions –What does this story awaken in you?

Or: What is your sense of purpose?

Guidelines for Sharing – (leader reads these guidelines, or has another person do it)

We'll each share on either the question or whatever came up after hearing the readings, or both.

We'll each speak for about _____ minutes, with no cross talk or interruptions. It is wise to speak in the first person, "I think, I feel..."

When we are listening: Try to listen to each other as if you were listening to, or watching, your own thoughts. Let others' words simply fall down into your heart. It is not necessary to give the person reassurances that they are being heard, such as nodding or eye contact. By simply listening together we create a holding space for each speaker. That is enough.

When it is your turn to speak it is not necessary to respond to the persons who have gone before you, though you may find yourself building on what has been shared already. Find out what your own inner wisdom wants to say. Together we create a quilt of wisdom, the design is a surprise.

After everyone has shared...

Likes and Wishes – (If there is time, briefly) What did you like about this session? What would you wish to be different if anything?

Extinguishing the chalice and closing words

"There is only one question: *How* to love this world." – Mary Oliver, in the poem "Spring"