

Something Larger

(Continued from page 1) **Mystic & Scientist**



heart. And then she answered, "I do not know what you mean by the word 'God,' but I do know that this world is more mysterious and more wonderful than I could ever imagine. I know that you and I are part of something so much larger than our own lives. Perhaps this 'something larger' is what you seek."



The Religious Man then thought to himself. He thought of what he knows and what he does not know. He thought about how he knows what he knows, and how he knows he doesn't know what he doesn't know. He thought about his experience of the world and how it is but one tiny, infinitesimal fraction of all experience. He thought about his dependence on forces larger than himself, and he thought about the interdependence of all existence. He experienced wonder and pondered mystery. And then he knew — he knew in his soul the truth of what the Mystic and the Scientist said — that he is part of something so much larger than his own life. And then, and only then, did he think about what he'd call it.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/practice/workshop5/59475.shtml>

The Ultimate Unity

Atheistic Mystics

Rev. Bill Darlison

I first came across the term "atheistic mystic" in relation to the great psychiatrist and philosopher, Eric Fromm (1900-1980)... Fromm's aim, in each of his many books, was to explore ways in which human beings can live authentic, happy — in his words, non-alienated — lives within the context of a prosperous industrial society which, having lost its spiritual moorings, is becoming increasingly secular and increasingly unhappy.

...Fromm was a self-confessed atheist, but he was also a self-described mystic. To many this might seem like an oxymoron.... The contradiction is more apparent than real because... there is a case to be made that, in a sense, all mystics are atheists. ...all mystics repudiate the narrow, limited and, at times, almost idolatrous concept of God, which seems to characterize so much of religious thought and practice.

...Our ...pressing concern — pressing for our individual sanity and our collective security — is to discover, or re-discover that sense of identity with all that is, the ultimate unity of things, by breaking down the barriers of our separateness. And this cannot be done by external speculation, but only, as the mystics tell us, by internal exploration.

In this, Fromm is in complete agreement with ...the Buddha, who left the ... question of God open because, he said, "it is an issue which does not tend towards edification."

Although he would not put it this way, Fromm stands in the illustrious tradition of those who affirm, ...paradoxically, that atheism is actually a prerequisite for any genuine experience of God.

Source: *Enlightenment and Ice Cream* by Bill Darlison (2007)

Depths of Mystery

Utterly Humbled by Mystery

Richard Rohr

I believe in mystery and multiplicity. To religious believers this may sound almost pagan. But I don't think so.

...This life journey has led me to love mystery and not feel the need to change it or make it un-mysterious. This has put me at odds with many ...who seem to need explanations for everything. Religious belief has made me comfortable with ambiguity. "Hints and guesses," as T.S. Eliot would say. ...The more I am alone with the Alone, the more I surrender to ambivalence, to happy contradictions and seeming inconsistencies in myself and almost everything else.... . When I was young, I couldn't tolerate such ambiguity. ...Now ...it's all quite different.

...My scientist friends have come up with things like "principles of uncertainty" and dark holes. They're willing to live inside imagined hypotheses and theories. But many religious folks insist on *answers* that are *always* true. We love closure, resolution and, clarity, while thinking that we are people of "faith!" How strange that the very word "faith" has come to mean its exact opposite.

People who have really met the Holy are always humble. It's the people who don't



know who usually pretend that they do. People who've had any genuine spiritual experience always know they *don't know*. They are utterly humbled before mystery. They are in awe before the abyss of it all, in wonder at eternity and depth, and a Love, which is incomprehensible

to the mind. ...My belief and comfort is in the depths of Mystery....

Source: <https://onbeing.org/blog/richard-rohr-utterly-humbled-by-mystery/>

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: “The answer is never the answer.

What’s really interesting is the mystery. If you seek the mystery instead of the answer, you’ll always be seeking. ...The need for mystery is greater than the need for an answer.” Ken Kesey



Day 2: “I want out of the labels. I don’t want my whole life crammed into a single word. A story. I want to find something else, unknowable, some place to be that’s not on the map. A real adventure. A sphinx. A mystery. A blank. Unknown. Undefined.” Chuck Palahniuk

Day 3: “When you realize there is something you don’t understand, then you’re generally on the right path to understanding all kinds of things.” Jostein Gaarder

Day 4: “[We are] a mystery ...[that] needs to be unraveled, and if you spend your whole life unraveling it, don’t say that you’ve wasted time. I am studying that mystery because I want to be a human being.” Fyodor Dostoyevsky

Day 5: “We must be willing to fail and to appreciate the truth that often ‘Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived.’” M. Scott Peck

Day 6: “We are born to love as we are born to die, and between the heartbeats of those two great mysteries lies all the tangled undergrowth of our tiny lives. ...And so we walk on, lost, and lost again, in the map-less wilderness of love.” Tim Farrington

Day 7: “It is such a mysterious place, the land of tears.” Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

Day 8: “The most beautiful experience we can have is the mysterious—the fundamental emotion which stands at the cradle of true art and true science.” Albert Einstein

Day 9: “The mystery of love is greater than the mystery of death.” Oscar Wilde

Day 10: “The possession of knowledge does not kill the sense of wonder and mystery. There is always more mystery.” Anaïs Nin

Day 11: “I realized it for the first time in my life: there is nothing but mystery in the

world, how it hides behind the fabric of our poor, browbeat days, shining brightly, and we don’t even know it.” Sue Monk Kidd

Day 12: “The true mystery of the world is the visible, not the invisible.” Oscar Wilde

Day 13: “Reality is merely an illusion, albeit a very persistent one.” Albert Einstein

Day 14: “How terribly sad it was that people are made in such a way that they get used to something as extraordinary as living.” Jostein Gaarder

Day 15: “There are only two ways to live your life. One is as though nothing is a miracle. The other is as though everything is a miracle.” Albert Einstein



Day 16: “Man is manifestly not the measure of all things. This universe is shot through with mystery. The very fact of its being, and of our own, is a mystery absolute, and the only miracle worthy of the name.” Sam Harris

Day 17: “No one’s life should be rooted in fear. We are born for wonder, for joy, for hope, for love, to marvel at the mystery of existence, to be ravished by ...beauty, to seek truth and meaning, to acquire wisdom, and by our treatment of others to brighten ...where we are.” Dean Koontz

Day 18: “Plant a garden in which strange plants grow and mysteries bloom.” Ken Kesey

Day 19: “Listen to your life. See it for the fathomless mystery it is. In the boredom and pain of it, no less than in the excitement and gladness: touch, taste, smell your way to the holy and hidden heart of it....” Frederick Buechner

Day 20: “There is one purpose to life and one only: to bear witness to and understand as much as possible of the complexi-

ty of the world—its beauty, its mysteries, its riddles.” Anne Rice

Day 21: “We never know what is going to happen, do we? Life is always throwing us this way and that. That’s where the adventure is. Not knowing where you’ll end up or how you’ll fare. It’s all a mystery, and when we say any different, we’re just lying to ourselves. Tell me, when have you felt most alive?” Eowyn Ivey

Day 22: “The mystery was gone but the amazement was just starting.” Andy Warhol

Day 23: “Each time dawn appears, the mystery is there in its entirety.” Rene Daumal

Day 24: “Our ignorance can be divided into problems and mysteries. When we face a problem, we may not know its solution, but we have insight, increasing knowledge, and an inkling of what we are looking for. When we face a mystery, however, we can only stare in wonder and bewilderment, not knowing what an explanation would even look like.” Noam Chomsky

Day 25: “Every life is complicated, every mind a kingdom of unmapped mysteries.” Dean Koontz

Day 26: “Not how the world is, but that it is, is the mystery.” Ludwig Wittgenstein

Day 27: “The job of the artist is always to deepen the mystery.” Francis Bacon

Day 28: “As soon as you look at the world through an ideology you are finished. No reality fits an ideology. ...That is why people are always searching for a meaning to life... Meaning is only found when you go beyond meaning. Life only makes sense ...as mystery....” Anthony de Mello

Day 29: “Every religion is the product of the conceptual mind attempting to describe the mystery.” Ram Dass

Day 30: “‘You have been given questions to which you cannot be given answers. You will have to live them out—perhaps a little at a time.’ / ‘And how long is that going to take?’ / ‘I don’t know. As long as you live, perhaps.’ / ‘That could be a long time.’ / ‘I will tell you a further mystery,’ he said. ‘It may take longer.’” Wendell Berry

Day 31: “The ultimate mystery is one’s own self.” Sammy Davis, Jr.



Faith and Theology

The Yin & Yang of Mystery

Five Reflections

1. Strange & Wondrous

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. ...A bleak emptiness overtook me whenever I thought about what was really going on out in the cosmos.

...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 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.

Source: from *The Sacred Depths of Nature* by Ursula Goodenough

2. Awesome & Awful

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle

...Our lives are embraced by a mystery that is baffling yet trustworthy, and our earth-bound purpose lies in surrendering not solving it.

...Conventional religion has customarily been concerned with mastery over mystery — reducing Life and Spirit, Death and God to creedal phrases and clever doctrines.

...On the other hand, there exists the danger of parched and barren rationalism, where the universe is scrubbed of its imponderables and life is shrunk to the logical and literal. Unitarian Universalism, at our truest, aims to be a faith that neither explains away nor drowns in mysteries. The profoundest realities are often invisible — intangible, yet insistent, downright mysterious.

Furthermore, we recognize that Life's deeper mysteries are profoundly ambiguous, double-edged; they both attract and repel. The mysteries of birth, love, death, sexuality, and the cosmos ...elicit a special feeling, best rendered by the English word "awe" and its derivatives "awesome" and "awful."

...We belong to a religion that pushes our minds as far as they can go and then bows before the mysteries. ...The primary mystery of existence is life itself, a reality we all share.

...Behind mysteries lie other mysteries. It's incumbent upon spiritual adventurers to leap into, or at least lean toward the mysteries of experience, exposing our

souls to their perplexity and power. Unitarian Universalism beckons us to engage life, meet death, surrender to love, wrestle with God. Blessed are those who rather than avoiding or explaining mystery have the courage to encounter mystery, from beginning to end.

Source: *Theology Ablaze: Celebrating the 50th Anniversary of Unitarian Universalism* by Rev. Tom Owen-Towle

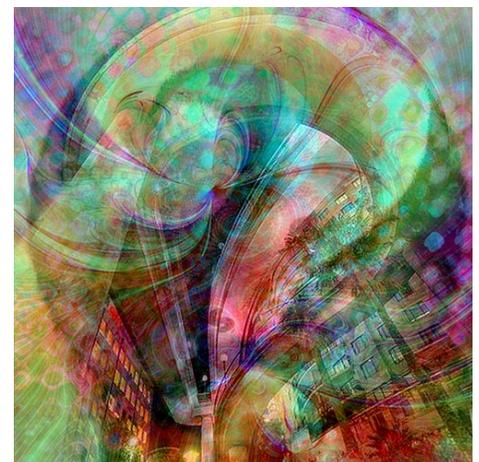
3. Facts & Mystery

Rev. Harold Babcock

...Former UUA ...President William Schulz writes, "Religion is only in part a matter of facts. Religion is in much larger measure a matter of mystery, a matter of values and faith, inference and uncertainty."

...Liberal religion has had a tendency to want to explain all mystery away, rather than to embrace it. "...The demand for explanation," wrote Thomas Merton, "is due to the desire to be rid of mystery." It is this desire which Einstein warned against when he wrote that "He to whom [mystery] is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed."

...Often it is when we peer into the darkness, when we confront the mystery of our being, that an answer is found. In spite of everything, in spite of appearanc-



es to the contrary, we find that life is good, and in the face of the unknown we are forced to our knees to give thanks for the gift of being alive. I cannot explain this. Beyond all reason, we are filled with hope and a sense of purpose and meaning. We are overwhelmed by the love we

(Continued on page 7)

Your Place in Mystery

Rev. Dr. Patrick O'Neil

We begin by giving ... [our children] our love.... Everything begins with that, every life is lost without love. But love ...is not enough. ...To make their way through this world, children will need not only their parents' love and everything we can teach them, but they need a community's love, as well. Never was that more true than today. And never has a loving and supportive community environment been harder to find for our children than it is today.

I want to suggest that this is what [religious education] ...is about — I don't care what denomination we're talking about, or what particular approach it takes, ...giving our children a "community of love" in which to learn self-worth and ethics; an appreciation of right and wrong; a sense of the good and the true and the holy; and the saving grace of justice and empathy and equity; a sense of the sacred center both in themselves and in all of creation [is essential.]

...In our Unitarian Universalist approach, ...we seek to provide [four things], ...**first**, the basic ability to make sound moral decisions for themselves and to know the difference when they don't; **second**, the capacity to choose their own religious community as adults; **third**, a basic religious literacy that acquaints them with what some of the world's great religions have had to say about what it means to be human and what it means to find God; and [**fourth**], ...a profound and loving respect for all of life and for our rightful place in life's mystery.

Source: no longer online

What Do We Want Our Children to Know?

D. Krieger

That the world is magical, / that its wonders never cease, / that its beauty is enormous.

That life is a sacred gift, / that all life has worth, / that life deserves our deepest / respect and reverence.

That humans are caretakers, / not the masters, of our frail planet. / That this is the only planet we have.

That there is much we don't know, / even the wisest among us, / that there is much we disagree upon, / and that it is alright to disagree.

That knowledge is precious / and wisdom even more precious. / That we have learned from the past / and must contribute to an uncertain future.

That life has purpose / which is for each of us to find. / That we are each a part of the whole / of human kind.

That our hands are for building, and holding, / for hard honest work. / That our hearts are for loving. / That our minds are for creating.

That we must each learn to judge right from wrong, / and must act for what we know is right.

That life will be painful at times, even hard and cruel. / That what we give of ourselves / will be its own reward.

Source: no longer online

Family Activity: Jigsaw Puzzle



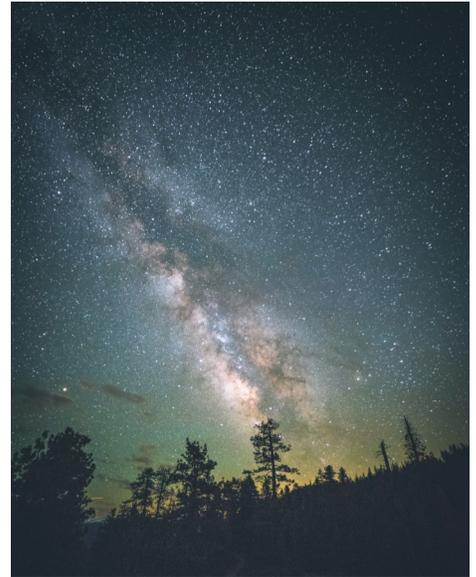
Buy a blank jigsaw puzzle (12 pieces) at a school supply or craft store. Give each family

member 3 pieces that go together and invite them to draw two pictures: one on one side of the three pieces and a different picture on the other side. All of the pictures should be on one theme: nature, animals, flowers, etc. Then take the pieces apart, mix them up, and begin to assemble the puzzle. As the pieces are assembled, each person will try to guess what the eight pictures (4 on each side) are. At the beginning, it's all mystery, but as the pieces are assembled, the mystery will be revealed. Before turning the puzzle over, ask each person three questions about the picture they drew on the other side of the puzzle. The questions can only have an answer of yes or no. Then try to guess what each of the pictures are before turning over the puzzle.

If We Do Not Venture Out

Rev. Marni Harmony

If, on a starlit night,
with the moon brightly shimmering,
We stay inside and do not venture out,
the evening universe remains a part of
life we shall not know.



If, on a cloudy day,
with grayness infusing all
and rain dancing rivers in the grass,
We stay inside and do not venture out,
the stormy, threatening energy of
the universe remains
a part of life we shall not know.

If, on a frosty morning,
dreading the chilling air before the sunrise,
We stay inside and do not venture out,
the awesome cold, quiet, and stillness of
the dawn universe remains
a part of life we shall not know.

If, throughout these grace-given days of ours,
surrounded as we are by green life and brown death, hot pink joy and cold gray pain and miracles—always miracles—
If we stay inside ourselves and do not venture out
then the Fullness of the universe shall be unknown to us
And our locked hearts shall never feel the rush of worship.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/if-we-do-not-venture-out>

So You'll Learn to Love Mystery

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme** changes us, even if we do not reach it,/ into something else, which, hardly sensing it, we already are;/ a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave.../ but what we feel is the wind in our faces."

It is a very simple poem. It's just about a walk up a hill in sunlight. Except, he says, we are grasped by what we cannot grasp. Something grasps us that has an inner light, a reality that is elusive, but commanding. Something grasps us and we stop by the side of the road to weep at the breathtaking beauty of the Canadian Rockies. Something grasps us and we know if we step out of our selves, if we move just beyond the boundary of the body, we will break into blossom. I have in mind breaking into a common dandelion, now bright and yellow, now snowy white, a bouquet of seeds about to be dispersed by the wind.



These epiphanies, these peak experiences, these moments of grace, these encounters with mystery change us, Rilke says, into something we already are. Isn't all of life change in which each change brings us closer to our true nature? Yet most of the time we miss what is happening. Life or God, you choose the name to call what is most precious and most profound, waves to us, beckoning, but what we feel is the wind on our faces.

We are grasped by what we cannot grasp: by mystery, by love, by the spirit of life itself. Such is the nature of spirituality, but what we feel is the wind in our faces. The Hebrew word for spirit is wind or breath. We can explain the wind, measure its direction and velocity, and relate its intensity to changing weather systems and various atmospheric conditions. We can experience the wind, but we can't control it. We can feel the wind in our faces, but it is much harder for many of us to embrace

with our arms or our minds the wonder and mystery of life. In truth, too often we are asleep, which is why Annie Dillard reminds us (Buddha-like) that, "We wake, if ever at all, to mystery."

The capacity to value mystery is enhanced by awareness; by a sense of awe, wonder, and gratitude at the reality of being alive and being a witness to existence; by an appreciation of the mystery that extends beyond the boundary of human knowledge (a boundary that is always changing as human knowledge evolves); and by the meaning and purpose that we create or discover, including the way we live in response to that meaning and purpose.

Our lives are not merely a series of questions to be answered, but a mystery to be lived. The question, then, is "What puts us in contact with mystery?" The answer is Life. Eduardo Galeano writes about a gift given to a child by his parents when he was born:

"they gave him a little bottle sealed up tight [and said]: 'Don't ever, ever open it. So you'll learn to love mystery.'"

We can, and often do, take this mystery for granted. Nevertheless, at times something breaks through and we are, for a moment, transfixed, if not transformed. James Hillman reminds us that, "Moments come when we feel outside time, seized by a longing, moved by an image, in touch with invisible voices." "We realize," he continues, "that we do not live in one world only." Or perhaps we realize what it really means to live in this world, to make contact with the mystery of existence, the mystery of being. It may happen when all we intended to do was go for a walk.

Someone said, "Life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived." This is an invitation to life, each day, an invitation to explore mystery, consider possibility, and create meaning and purpose. The truth is each of us is a puzzle, each a mystery to our self and to others, as they are to us. This means that our opportunities

for growth are lifelong and profound. We swing on the pendulum of life, as Unitarian Universalist minister Don Forester-Vaughan suggests, seeking to penetrate the mystery of life and then simply trying to live this day well. Our religious tradition invites us to experience the mystery of life, to ask questions. Some of our best questions are those that will never yield answers, but they keep the quest for life alive in us. This is why Einstein said, "Never lose a holy curiosity," for with a holy curiosity you will always find yourself alive in the mystery.

I'm reminded of Lily Tomlin's inspired performance in Jane Wagner's one-



woman play, *The Search for Signs of Intelligent Life in the Universe*.

Tomlin played Trudy, a bag lady who believes that aliens are visiting the earth in order to determine if human beings are an intelligent life form.

Near the end of her encounter with the aliens, Trudy observes,

"All this searching, ...all this data, and all we really know is how little we know about what it all means. ...[The aliens] said, 'Trudy, we see now, intelligence is just the tip of the iceberg. The more you know, the less knowing the meaning of things means. So forget the meaning of life.'

"I didn't tell them, of course, I [already] had.

"See, it's not so much what we know, but how we know, and what it is about us that needs to know. The intriguing part: Of all the things we've learned, we still haven't learned where did this desire to want to know come from? ...We're thinking maybe the secrets about life we don't understand are the 'cosmic carrots' in front of our noses that keep us going. So maybe we should stop trying to figure out the meaning of life and sit back and enjoy the mystery of life. The operative word here is what? Mystery! Not meaning."

Even our desire for knowledge is a

Life is a Riddle & a Mystery

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology** have received and by the love we are capable of giving.

...May we continue our journeys into the mystery of life, expectant always, explaining what we can, resting in the questions we cannot answer. And may the mystery itself provide us with the comfort we are seeking. ...

Source: no longer online

4. Weird & Wonderful

Rev. Mark Ward

Mystery ...[can] simply mean letting go of the need to seek out an ultimate reason behind all things.

...Instead of limiting our imagination or understanding, mystery invites us into more expansive awareness. It's an awareness that ...leads us not away from religion but into it, religion that accepts the givenness of the world, ...religion that calls us to celebrate and to live attuned to the world's rhythms, that invites us to appreciate ...all life as an interdependent whole.

It's a perspective that we see in ...Walt Whitman: "I believe a leaf of grass is no less than the journey-work of the stars, / ...a grain of sand, / ...And the running blackberry would adorn the parlors of heaven, / And the



narrowest hinge in my hand puts to scorn all machinery, / And the cow ... surpasses any statue, / And a mouse is a miracle to stagger sextillions of infidels."

Each of us sorts out how to make our way in ...the world of our experience and the circumstances of our upbringing. The result is a faith that orients us in our lives.

...Each of us comes to frame our own sense of where our heart rests in our astonishing encounters with the world around us.

...There is something to be said for ...ceasing to worry about the firmness of our footing and turning our gaze to the weird and wonderful world around us as we wade with uncertain steps into the

mystery that is riffling around us and tugging at our knees.

Source: <http://uuasheville.org/sermon-wading-in-mystery-audio-only/>

5. Embarrassing & Nourishing

Rev. Dr. Sandra Fees

The Southern Gothic novelist Flanner O'Connor wrote that "Mystery is a great embarrassment to the modern mind." Mystery can be hard to accept [or] ...to live with. In a rational, information-driven society, mystery can be perceived as a problem to be solved, a question that must be answered, a thing to be googled, rather than a question for reflection.

Mystery threatens the modern mind because it reminds us of what we don't know and what we may never know. To admit our not-knowing is humbling. And humility seems to be in short supply. So often humility is misconstrued as being weak....

...Mystery threatens the modern mind with all we don't know. We still haven't been able to prove or disprove the existence of God or have any clear answers to what happens after we die. And ...we aren't ever going to have clear answers to those questions. ...It would be easy to get caught up in thinking that [we're] ...supposed to have definitive answers.

...Unitarian Universalism teaches us not to be embarrassed or threatened by mystery. ...[Our first source] ...draws on "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 that create and uphold life."

Mystery nourishes and stimulates the modern mind. ...Humility, openness, makes space ...for us to take in the vastness of the universe, the dignity of others, and the perplexing nature of reality. It makes space for renewal, creativity, for what upholds life.

Source: <https://www.uuberk.org/sermon/bowing-mystery>

Too Many Fragments

The Mystery of Me

Maria Popova

It's so strange how we're able to carry forward this *mystery* of personal identity even when our present selves are so different from our future selves and from our past selves most of all. I think a lot about this question..., "What is a person?" Am I the same person as my childhood self? Sure, we share the same body, but even that body is so different. It's unrecognizably different. Our lives are so different. Our ideas and ideals are so different. ...This question of what it means to be human is always a question of elasticity of being. It's never an arrival point....



But I want to ...[consider] ...this notion of ... fragments. ...We're kind of a mashup of what we let into our lives. But at the same time, we live in a culture of dividedness. ...People being divided amongst themselves ...people being divided within themselves. Our language reflects that.... Consider the things that we encourage when we talk about a full life: wholeheartedness and mindfulness. ...Yet, we compartmentalize our experience.... We divide it into these fragments to be divided and conquered. ...Virginia Woolf ...says, "One can't write directly about the soul. Looked at, it vanishes." And she talks about the slipperiness of the soul and the delicacy and complexity of the soul. ...The people most whole and most alive are always those unafraid and unashamed of the soul. And the soul is never an assemblage of fragments. It always is.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/programs/maria-popova-cartographer-of-meaning-in-a-digital-age-feb2019/>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion

Mystery

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “The first step to the knowledge of the wonder and mystery of life is the recognition of the monstrous nature of the earthly human realm as well as its glory, the realization that this is just how it is and that it cannot and will not be changed. Those who think they know how the universe could have been had they created it, without pain, without sorrow, without time, without death, are unfit for illumination.” *Joseph Campbell*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “I stood willingly and gladly in the characters of everything—other people, trees, clouds. And this is what I learned, that the world’s otherness is antidote to confusion—that standing within this otherness—the beauty and the mystery of the

world, out in the fields or deep inside books—can re-dignify the worst-stung heart.” *Mary Oliver*

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. When did you first “know” that you didn’t know? How old were you when you encountered mystery? What were the experiences of “not knowing” and discovering mystery like for you?
2. Where do you stand on the continuum between the rationalist and the mystic? What experiences led you to stand in this place? How does where you stand influence how you interact with people in different places along the continuum?
3. Do you experience mystery as a challenge, a problem, or as a resource? Why?
4. How do you relate to Eric Fromm’s concept of an Atheistic Mystic?
5. How are you a mystery to others? How are others a mystery to you? How are you a mystery to yourself?
6. If Carl Sagan is correct that, “somewhere, something incredible is waiting to be known,” how can you cultivate openness to what you do not yet know, or to what is not presently understood within yourself or the world?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Wisdom, Beauty

The Most Beautiful Thing

Albert Einstein

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. ...[Those] to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, [are] ...as good as dead —[their] ...eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness.

Source: *Living Philosophies* by Albert Einstein, 1931.

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