

## Curiosity

*The life of a congregation is a rich community tapestry of people, programs, ministries, and worship. We lift up the patterns of this tapestry at Unity Church with the threads of monthly themes woven through our worship and programming. These themes deepen our understanding of our own faith and strengthen our bonds with one another in religious community.*

What does curiosity mean to you? I'm curious. Is it something you cherish and cultivate, or does it mark the beginning of a long slippery slope down which you'd rather not slide? Does it make a difference if it's *your* curiosity, or someone else's?

Curiosity, in fact, has had a checkered past with mixed opinions about whether it should be fostered or fenced. In contrasting creation stories of different people and faiths, one story says curiosity is the apple-eating downfall of the human race; while another suggests it is a desirable instinct that led to creativity, collaboration, and the birth of an interdependent world. Tracing the historical arc of attitudes within Western thinking alone, the ancient Greeks considered curiosity as a path for elevating the soul, while Augustine and the early Christian Church regarded it as a sinful diversion.

Today, the dictionary defines curiosity simply as a "a strong desire to learn or know something." But is there a distinction between curiosity and interrogation? Between a question that seeks to learn and one that strives to know? *Inside every question is a quest trying to get out*, observed Phil Cousineau. What is the quest at the core of curiosity when regarded as a spiritual practice?

The root of *curiosity* is related to the root of the words cure and care. Perhaps a spiritual practice of curiosity involves a quest for both healing and relationship. Curiosity also awakens

wonder with an openness to mystery — and an interest in what is unknown or unfamiliar. It asks us to be, as the poet John Keats put it, present to "uncertainties, mysteries, doubt, without any irritable reaching after fact and reason." By which I understand "irritable" to mean premature. Not that fact and reason are bad, but that reaching for them too soon can precipitate an early closure of answers irritably latched down by facts.

Curiosity keeps the door open to mystery and relationship, even after an answer is given. It defies the small thinking that one perspective or understanding, or any single story, is ever enough to express the full truth of our interdependent web of life. We all learn a bigger truth when we share our own perspective or story while also asking others (and pausing to really listen), *How do you understand or experience this? And what might we learn by putting our distinct perspectives together, side by side?*

Google, of course, has dramatically impacted the 21st-century experience of curiosity, both feeding it and squashing it with answers so ready at hand, we don't even need to finish our question before Google or Siri completes it and suggests several answers. This quick reply removes what author Ian Leslie has called "creative friction," closing the "information gap" before our curiosity can even develop or mature. How might this impact our relationship with mystery? Or our willingness to live with the friction of paradox and

contradiction, to love the uncertainty of questions that defy quick and easy answers (as so many do in this time of upheaval and change)?

Writing to a young poet long ago, Rainer Marie Rilke said "... try to love the questions themselves like locked rooms and like books that are written in a very foreign tongue. Do not now seek the answers, which cannot be given you because you would not be able to live them. ... live everything. Live the questions now. Perhaps you will then gradually, without noticing it, live along some distant day into the answer."

Curiosity, then, is a matter of attention, patience, and longing. Of hunger. Of thirst. Raising the conundrum named by poet Kazim Ali, who wondered, "should I ask for my thirst to be quenched or for unquenchable thirst—" It is a question one could live with, unanswered, for a very long time.

*By Karen Hering on behalf of this month's theme team: Ahmed Anzaldúa, Drew Danielson, Janne Eller-Isaacs, Rob Eller-Isaacs, Ray Hommeyer, KP Hong, and Laura Park.*

### Curiosity Theme Resources

For further reflection on this theme, a variety of resources including books, poems, videos and audios, are listed in this month's Chalice Circle packet available online at [www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html](http://www.unityunitarian.org/chalice-circles.html) and by request from [karen@unityunitarian.org](mailto:karen@unityunitarian.org).