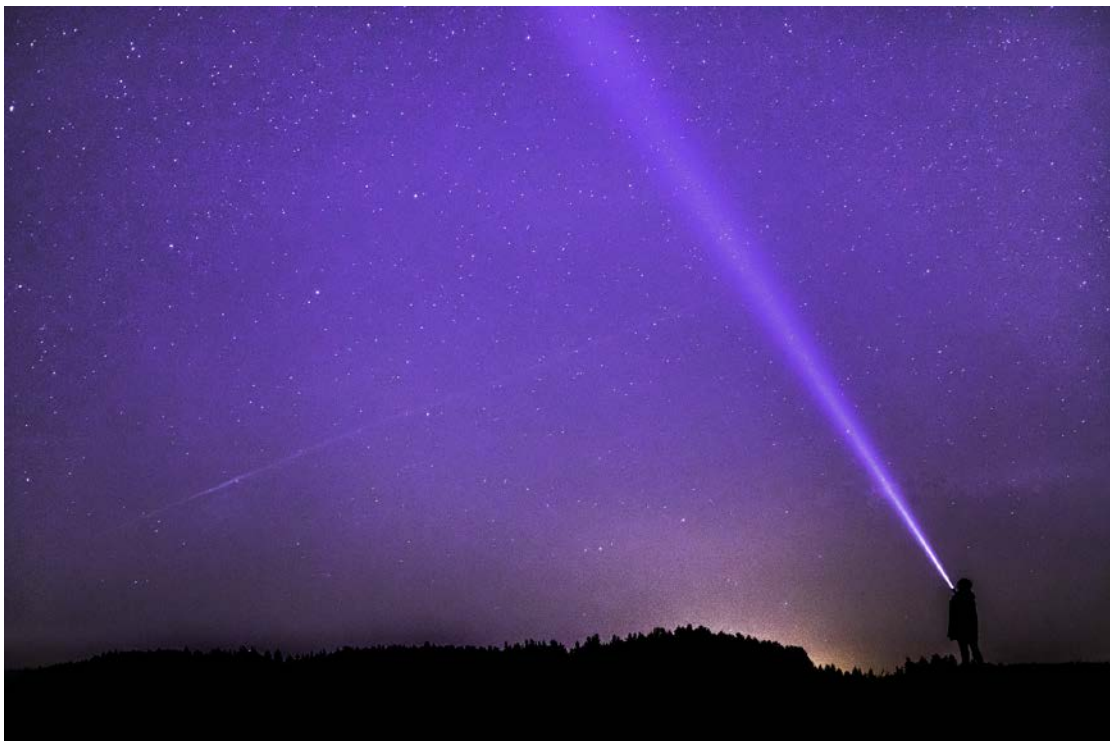


What Does It Mean To Be a People of Wonder?



December 2018

What Does It Mean To Be a People of Wonder?

Our Unitarian Universalist faith draws wisdom and spirituality from sources such as science, poetry, scripture and “the direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder” which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.

In the midst of this busy holiday season it can be a challenge to slow down and take time to notice the wonder, beauty and mystery that surrounds us. Being a people of wonder isn't just about engaging life as a marvelous puzzle it's also about allowing yourself to be spoken to by life's wonder. One of the most elegant articulations of this comes from the poem, *Wild Geese*, by Mary Oliver. She writes:

Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place in the family of things.

Oliver's call to listen for life's announcements implies a letting go. Mystery and wonder are funny this way. You can't make it speak. Indeed, the more you pursue the answers to life's mysteries; the more distant they become. If we want wonder and mystery to speak, it seems we have to be willing to be caught off guard. Haven't all of us faced the wonder and mystery of a sunset, the stars, a baby's first cry or a lover's sweet kiss and thought to ourselves, “Who I am does not end at the barrier of my skin”?

So, this month, let's let ourselves fall in and open up. Let's put down all the puzzling and the figuring out, just long enough to notice that life isn't simply trying to stump us. It's also trying to connect with us.

May you find time during this holiday season to connect with wonder, joy and with a sense of mystery.

In faith,

Andrea Johnson
Chalice Circle Coordinator

Our Spiritual Exercises

Option A:

Return to an Ordinary Moment of Deep Meaning

We've all experienced it: the mystery and wonder of an ordinary moment that suddenly unfolds and offers deep meaning. The everyday becomes luminous. This exercise invites you to remember some of those luminous moments and revisit the gift they gave. To do this, simply make some time to watch and meditate on the following video:

The Moment: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNVPaINZD_I

As you watch, think of moments you've experienced when life suddenly and mysteriously lit up and reminded you of the marvel and preciousness of being alive. And think about how that lit you up - move you from a feeling of "the same old, same old" to a feeling of dancing with the sacred. Go one from there to imagine images from your own life that you'd include if you were making your own video. Then keep watch during the following hours and days to see if this meditation changes the way you perceive or dance with your "ordinary" days.

Come to your group ready to share what the exercise opens up in you or the gift it gave.

Option B:

Connect with Wonder on a Clear Night

Since the beginning of our existence, star-gazing has been a primary way we humans contemplate mystery. For scientist and mystic alike, it is a central way we sort out our mysterious place in the universe and the mystery of who we are. As we connect with the universe we connect more deeply with ourselves. This exercise invites you to lean into this connection between the stars above and deep meaning within.

To do this, make room on a clear night to listen to the following podcast while you gaze at the open sky:

Space - RadioLab: <https://www.wnycstudios.org/story/91520-space>

The podcast tells the stories of numerous people's efforts to connect with and make meaning of the mystery that lies beyond. As you listen, treat each story as an invitation to see something new in the vastness overhead. Simply allow this visual and auditory meditation to soak over you. When the podcast ends, continue to sit or lay in the quiet

stillness and listen for the new story that your own voice starts to tell. Come to your group ready to share what this clear night clarified for you.

Here's some additional inspiration:

- **Stargazing In Yosemite National Park:** <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JuhNNmzHP-c>
- **The Soul of the Night by Chet Raymo:**
- [https://www.amazon.com/dp/B009D16QVE/ref=dp-kindle-redirect? encoding=UTF8&btkr=1](https://www.amazon.com/dp/B009D16QVE/ref=dp-kindle-redirect?encoding=UTF8&btkr=1)
- **A New View of the Moon:** <https://vimeo.com/259818647>

Option C:

Take A Walk Until the World Lights Up

You might want to start early in the morning or in the evening right after dinner. You could also set aside a Saturday afternoon. But whenever you start, your one rule is that you can't stop until wonder has crossed your path. In a sense, this exercise is an act of faith – faith that awe and wonder is scattered all over the place waiting for us to notice it rather than believing that wonder is this one rare thing that only shows up a precious few times in our lives.

Come to your group prepared to talk not only about how long a walk you had to go on, but also about how you got yourself into a space to see and notice what was waiting for you.

Your Question

As always, don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply or take a picture the one that "hooks" you most and let it lead you where you need to go. And then come to your small group meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. Are you a collector, appreciator, seeker, integrator or ignorer of moments of awe and wonder? Do you seek them out or just notice them when they come along? Do they seem to pass you by? Or when they do cross your path, do they slip through your fingers and evaporate into the air?
2. Some say that when we fail in wonder we fail in gratitude. The response to wonder is calling attention to the world in order to praise it. Is this true for you? What is your response to wonder?
3. Does noticing awe and wonder require the "eyes and mind of a child"? Many religious traditions claim this to be the case. Has this been true for you?
4. Does a life without wonder count? Do you believe that human beings are in some sense "created for awe and wonder?" Do we have a "responsibility to wonder"?
5. What was the first mystery to capture your imagination? How does that still shape you today?
6. If you had to name one "holiday miracle" you believe in, what would it be?
7. Has mysterious "meaningful coincidence" ([synchronicity](#)) ever pointed you in the direction you needed to go, right when you were not sure of your way?
8. Pico Iyer says that "The opposite of knowledge isn't always ignorance. It can be wonder. Or mystery. Possibility. And in my life, I've found it's the things I don't know that have lifted me up and pushed me forwards, much more than the things I do know." When has "what you don't know" pushed you forward into new possibilities and greater knowing?

What's your question? Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

Companion Pieces

Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Wonder.

Word Roots

Wonder: a feeling of surprise mingled with admiration, caused by something beautiful, unexpected, unfamiliar, or inexplicable. Desire or be curious to know something or to feel admiration, amazement and marvel.

Wise Words

The Unitarian Universalist faith draws from six sources. Our first source is the “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.”

When we fail in wonder we fail in gratitude. The response to wonder is calling attention to the world in order to praise it.

~Esther de Waal

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and all science. He to whom this emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand rapt in awe, is as good as dead: his eyes are closed

~Albert Einstein

“In a glorious historic cathedral or in an ancient magnificent mosque I feel awe - not because of the particular religious creed it was built to glorify but because it somehow transcends that and honors the mystery that we don't understand.”

~Unknown

What if life is not a problem to be solved, but a mystery to be lived?

~Professor Emil Homerin, University of Rochester

I have a friend who speaks of knowledge as an island in a sea of mystery. Let this then, be the ground of my faith: All that we know, now and forever, all scientific knowledge that we have of this world, or ever will have, is as an island in the sea. Still the mystery surrounds us.

~Chet Raymo

The opposite of knowledge, in other words, isn't always ignorance. It can be wonder. Or mystery. Possibility. And in my life, I've found it's the things I don't know that have lifted me up and pushed me forwards, much more than the things I do know.

~Pico Iyer

“I am mentally preparing myself for the five-year-old mind. I want to come down to their physical limitations and up to their sense of wonder and awe.”

~ Shinichi Suzuki

I remember once I stood near a pear orchard late at night. I had been taking a walk by myself at midnight. The blue-black shapes of the trees gathered in rows beckoned to me. The air was damp but warm and laden with the scents of nocturnal herbs I could not name. Crickets soothed me. The stars were in their full glory over the orchard which was set away from the orange glare of the streetlamps. For some moments I stood there, when suddenly I was “struck” as if I

were a temple bowl-gong. I shivered in the warm air, overcome with the “that-ness” of everything, knowing my “me-ness” was not an isolation but a continuity with the stars which appeared to me as fragrant pears ripe for the picking. I no longer knew where I left off and “everything else” began. I was filled with such a sense of joy, joy that “I” was alive to experience that moment at all, that I no longer felt myself to be the son of Elisa and Louis of Detroit, but the co-equal companion of them, and all women and men and children, and each tree and every dear star, and the vast processes of life and death and, yes, “God.”

~ Rev. Mark Belletini (UU minister)

On the way to the play we stopped to look at the stars. And as usual I felt in awe. And then I felt even deeper in awe at this capacity we have to be in awe about something. Then I became even more awestruck at the thought that I was, in some small way, a part of that which I was in awe about. And this feeling went on and on. My space chums got a word for it: ‘awe infinitum.’ ‘Cause at the moment you are most in awe of all you don’t understand, you’re closer to understanding it all then at any other time. And I felt so good inside, my heart felt so full, I decided to set time aside each day to do ‘awe-robics’.”

~ Lilly Tomlin as “Trudy the Bag Lady”

I believe God is everything ... Everything that is or ever will be. And when you can feel that, and be happy to feel that, you’ve found it... My first step from the old white man was trees. Then air. Then birds. Then other people. But one day when I was sitting quiet and feeling like a motherless child, which I was, it come to me: that feeling of being part of everything not separate at all. I knew that if I cut a tree, my arm would bleed. And I laughed, and I cried, and I run all around the house. I knew just what it was. In fact, when it happens, you can’t miss it.

~ Alice Walker’s description of her enlightenment in the *Color Purple*

Live amid the play of infinite thought

~ Thomas Starr King)

“I believe that if, on every Sunday morning before going to church, we could be lifted to a mountain-peak and see a horizon line of six hundred miles enfolding the copious splendor of the light on such a varied expanse; or if we could look upon a square mile of flowers representing all the species with which the Creative Spirit embroiders a zone; or if we could be made to realize the distance of the earth from the sun, the light of which travels every morning twelve millions of miles a minute to feed and bless us, and which the force of gravitation pervades without intermission to hold our globe calmly in its orbit and on its poise; if we could fairly perceive, through our outward senses, one or two features of the constant order and glory of nature, our materialistic dullness would be broken, surprise and joy would be awakened, we should feel that we live amid the play of Infinite thought; and the devout spirit would be stimulated so potently that our hearts would naturally mount in praise and prayer.”

~Universalist and Unitarian minister Rev. Thomas Starr King, from a 1863 sermon entitled “Lessons from the Sierra Nevada”

Poetry

Expect Life

Elizabeth Tarbox

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/reading/5935.shtml>

Do not live too far in the past or the future.

Live now.

In each moment expect a miracle: ten kinds of birds at the feeder, and the tracks of a fox in the snow.

Pick up a magnifying glass and scrutinize that crocus. See the pollen at the center of the daffodil, life's dust, death-defying life. Be astonished at the flower, arrested by its beauty.

Run naked through the garden early in the morning and hope the wild geese fly by. Get silly and laugh loudly with your grandchildren or your grandparents. Refuse to leave the dead behind, but bring their memory to all your chores and games and corners of quiet, warm tears. Know always that joy and sorrow are woven together; one cannot be without the other. If you love, know that sometimes your love will bring you tears; if you grieve, know it is because at some time you were willing to love. Do not be afraid to die today. But expect life!
Source: "[Evening Tide](#)"

Boundaries

Lynn Ungar

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/boundaries>

The universe does not revolve around you. The stars and planets spinning through the ballroom of space dance with one another quite outside of your small life. You cannot hold gravity or seasons; even air and water inevitably evade your grasp. Why not, then, let go? You could move through time like a shark through water, neither restless nor ceasing, absorbed in and absorbing the native element. Why pretend you can do otherwise? The world comes in at every pore, mixes in your blood before breath releases you into the world again. Did you think the fragile boundary of your skin could build a wall? Listen. Every molecule is humming its particular pitch. Of course you are a symphony. Whose tune do you think the planets are singing as they dance?

The Road Not Taken

Robert Frost

<https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poems/44272/the-road-not-taken>

Two roads diverged in a yellow wood,
And sorry I could not travel both
And be one traveler, long I stood
And looked down one as far as I could
To where it bent in the undergrowth;

Then took the other, as just as fair,
And having perhaps the better claim,
Because it was grassy and wanted wear;
Though as for that the passing there
Had worn them really about the same,

And both that morning equally lay
In leaves no step had trodden black.
Oh, I kept the first for another day!
Yet knowing how way leads on to way,
I doubted if I should ever come back.

I shall be telling this with a sigh
Somewhere ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—
I took the one less traveled by,
And that has made all the difference."

Falling into the Sky (Based on a Poem by Zen Monk Muso Soseki)

Rev. David Breeden (UU Humanist Minister)

<http://blueyrareview.com/tag/falling-into-the-sky/>

Years end ways
I dug and dug
Deeper into the earth
Looking for blue heaven
Choking always
On piles of dust rising
Then once
At midnight
I slipped
And fell into the sky

Drops of God

Tess Baumberger

Full poem:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/5471.shtml>

God, God is water sleeping
in high-piled clouds.
She is gentle drink of rain,
pooling lake, rounding pond,
angry flooding river.
She is frothy horse-maned geyser.
She is glacier on mountains and polar ice cap,
and breath-taking crystalline ideas of
snowflakes.
She is frost-dance on trees.
And we, we are drops of God,
her tears of joy or sorrow,
ice crystals
and raindrops
in the ocean of her.

God, God is air wallowing
all about us,
She is thin blue atmosphere embracing
our planet, gentle breeze.
She is wind and fiercesome gale
centrifugal force of tornado and hurricane,
flurry of duststorm.
She is breath, spirit, life.
She is thought, intellect, vision and voice.
And we, we are breaths of God,
steady and soft,
changeable and destructive.
We are her laughter and her sighs,
atomic movements,
(sardines schooling)
in the firmament of her.

God, God is fire burning,
day and night.
She is sting of passion,

The Moment of Magic

Victoria E Safford

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/moment-of-magic>

Now is the moment of magic,
when the whole, round earth turns again
toward the sun,

and here's a blessing:
the days will be longer and brighter now,
even before the winter settles in to chill us.

Now is the moment of magic,
when people beaten down and broken,
with nothing left but misery and candles and
their own clear voices,
kindle tiny lights and whisper secret music,
and here's a blessing:
the dark universe is suddenly illuminated by
the lights of the menorah, suddenly ablaze
with the lights of the kinara, and the whole
world is glad and loud with winter singing.

Now is the moment of magic,
when an eastern star beckons the ignorant
toward an unknown goal,

and here's a blessing: they find nothing in the
end but an ordinary baby,
born at midnight, born in poverty, and the
baby's cry, like bells ringing,
makes people wonder as they wander
through their lives,
what human love might really look like,
sound like,
feel like.

Now is the moment of magic, and here's a
blessing:
we already possess all the gifts we need;
we've already received our presents:
ears to hear music,
eyes to behold lights,
hands to build true peace on earth
and to hold each other tight in love.
Source: "[Walking Toward Morning](#)"

First Breath

Adam Lawrence Dyer

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/first-breath>

That first breath must be delicious.

It must be more tantalizing,
more intoxicating than any drug,
fragrant like no flower will ever be

enticing like no body scent.
It must be all of this, and more
yet without words or memories, how do we
know?

That first glorious rush of air
wants us to keep breathing
wants our hearts to keep beating
wants our eyes to open and see
wants our souls to open and say “yes.”

The first breath wants us to live all our life
saying,
please God,
let me live
let me breathe
for just one day more
until we breathe our very last.

Articles, Podcasts and Videos

What Happens When We Wonder?

Katie Steedly

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=291>

The noise of life fades. A silence akin to speechlessness falls when we experience wonder. A gentle hush that is beyond words eases tension. Reflection paints wonderful moments with reverence. Wonder is calm in the chaos of the world. I learned this on the road to Hana in Maui, when I had to be reminded that my iPhone was not as important as the majesty of a volcano. I had to let the noise go and be present to the wonder of the moment.

“The Most Outstanding Fact”

Neil deGrasse Tyson

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9D05ej8u-gU>

Murmuration

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iRNqhi2ka9k>

A short film that follows the journey of two girls in a canoe on the River Shannon and

how they stumble across one of nature's greatest phenomenons; a murmuration of starlings.

“The Observable Universe”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiN6Ag5-DrU&nomobile=1>

“Camille Seaman: Photos from a Storm Chaser”

http://www.ted.com/talks/camille_seaman_photos_from_a_storm_chaser.html?utm_source=newsletter_daily&utm_campaign=daily&utm_medium=email&utm_content=image_2013-06-21

Reverence Protects Life

Gary Zukav

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2180>

As you work toward becoming reverent, your tendencies toward harming others and other forms of life diminish. As you acquire a sense of reverence, you develop the capacity to think more deeply about the value of Life before you commit your energy to action.

The Beauty of What We Will Never Know - TED Talk

Pico Iyer

https://www.ted.com/talks/pico_ayer_the_beauty_of_what_we_ll_never_know#t-308328

“The opposite of knowledge, in other words, isn't always ignorance. It can be wonder. Or mystery. Possibility. And in my life, I've found it's the things I don't know that have lifted me up and pushed me forwards, much more than the things I do know....”

The Madness and Mystery of Love - Shots of Awe

<https://www.facebook.com/jasonsilva/videos/1684768068454138/>

The Mystery and Miracle of a Moment

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jNVPaINZD_I

A video meditation to help open us to the mystery and miraculous of ordinary moments...

The Amazing Mystery Within and Around us

A video meditation on the size of the universe

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uaGEjrADGPA&list=PLjTi_2sPB4uYFnL8SpKFy_ey8OMrUZmc4&index=9

The Meaning & Mystery of the Incarnation - Brené Brown

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/travis-reed/brene-brown-love-made-file_b_8090422.html

Living with Uncertainty in a Certainty-Obsessed Culture

Maria Popova

Full article at

<http://www.dailygood.org/2015/03/16/living-with-mystery-in-a-certainty-obsessed-culture/>

Excerpt: “Our human definition of ‘everything’ gives us, at best, a tiny penlight to help us with our wanderings,” ... Carl Sagan captured this idea in his masterwork *Varieties of Scientific Experience*, where he asserted: “If we ever reach the point where we think we thoroughly understand who we are and where we came from, we will have failed.”

Evolution and Wonder: Understanding Charles Darwin

James Moore

<https://onbeing.org/programs/james-moore-evolution-and-wonder-understanding-charles-darwin/>

In our time, Darwin is widely depicted as a godless naturalist. The publication of his theory of natural selection is imagined as an instantaneous parting of the ways between science and religion. But in reality, the great scientists who inspired Charles Darwin — Copernicus, Galileo, and Newton — saw the pursuit of science as a divinely ordained gift and responsibility.

Movies

The Diving Bell and The Butterfly

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/the_diving_bell_and_the_butterfly_2007

An immeasurably moving film about the mystery and miracle of inner life.

The Tree of Life

https://www.stltoday.com/entertainment/movies/reviews/article_0753e1aa-1f34-55b1-82dc-c2f6e9abe9e6.html

“Ideally, you would bathe in a film like this without striving to decipher it. As it's a film about what we can't get our heads around, we are probably not meant to get our heads round it.” - reviews

Awakenings

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/1032970_awakenings?

The much-loved Robin Williams film that wakes us up to the mystery, miracle and preciousness of human awareness and connection.

Waking Life

https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/waking_life

“If there was ever a film that made ontological exploration fun, this is it.” – review

Books

Year of Wonders

Geraldine Brooks

https://www.amazon.com/Year-Wonders-Plague-Geraldine-Brooks/dp/0142001430/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1542315910&sr=1-1&keywords=year+of+wonders

An unforgettable tale of a brave young woman during the plague in 17th century England

10 poems to change your life

Roger Haudsen

https://www.amazon.com/Ten-Poems-Change-Your-Life/dp/0609609017/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1542316012&sr=1-1&keywords=10+poems+to+change+your+life

Great poetry calls into question everything. It dares us to break free from the safe strategies of the cautious mind. It opens us to pain and joy and delight. It amazes, startles, pierces, and transforms us.

Freethinking mystics with hands: Exploring the heart of Unitarian Universalism

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle

<https://www.amazon.com/Freethinking-mystics-hands-Exploring-Universalism/dp/1558963677>

Wonder: From Emotion to Spirituality

Robert C. Fuller

Wonder opens us to an unseen world beyond ourselves, Fuller asks us to think of wonder more as a religious sensibility than an emotion. Fuller offers stories of John Muir, William James and Rachel Carson to show how these three saw the world around them as an ineffable mystery whose organic unity calls for an experience of wonder rather than a cold scientific explanation.

The Wondering Brain: Thinking about Religion With and Beyond Cognitive Neuroscience

Kelly Bulkeley

https://www.amazon.com/Wondering-Brain-Thinking-Cognitive-Neuroscience/dp/0415938414/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1542316139&sr=1-1&keywords=the+wondering+brain

A masterwork of integration with a fascinating theory of wonder as a source of spiritual growth

I Asked For Wonder: A Spiritual Anthology

Abraham Joshua Heschel

https://www.amazon.com/I-Asked-Wonder-Spiritual-Anthology/dp/0824505425/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1542316379&sr=1-1&keywords=I+asked+for+wonder

"Life passes on in proximity to the sacred, and it is this proximity that endows existence with ultimate significance. In our relation to

the immediate we touch upon the most distant. Perhaps the essential message of Judaism is that in doing the finite we may perceive the infinite."

When God is Gone Everything is Holy

Chet Raymo

https://www.amazon.com/When-God-Gone-Everything-Holy/dp/1933495138/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1531336800&sr=8-1&keywords=when+god+is+gone

In what he describes as a "late-life credo," renowned science writer Chet Raymo narrates his half-century journey from the traditional Catholicism of his youth to his present perspective as a "Catholic agnostic."

This packet was created based on the Soul Matters Sharing Circle model of small groups by Andrea Johnson. To be used at Unity Church only.



<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/>