

November Theme

Fear: The Practice of Trust

“Trust is to human relationships what faith is to gospel living. It is the beginning place, the foundation upon which more can be built. Where trust is, love can flourish.”

--Barbara Smith

Introduction

Fear is a feeling induced by perceived danger, and it is a universal emotion in that almost all people are experiencing and/or have experienced fear. Psychologists have identified over 500 types of fears/phobias; there is even a word, phistanthrophobia, that means “fear of trust.” While some fear is helpful in that it causes a change in behavior (fleeing, hiding, freezing, or advocating for social change) and thereby increases our chance for survival, other fear is debilitating and/or may prevent us from trusting ourselves and others and thereby prevent us from reaching our true potential.

As Madisyn Taylor writes, “some fear has a way of throwing us off balance by making us feel uncertain and insecure, but it need not discourage us...fear almost always comes alongside anything worth doing in your life.” Fear often lets us know when we are at the edge of our comfort zone, but engaging with that uncertainty is often where real growth occurs. There may be many of you who had some fear when entering our sanctuary for the first time (as oftentimes situations that are new to us can evoke fear), but one would hope that there was also a certain trust- one that grows each time we “show up” for each other at church.

Trust (firm belief in the reliability, truth, ability, or strength of someone or something), may help us to overcome our fears, but having trust is often easier said than done. Ernest Hemingway once quipped, “The best way to find out if you can trust somebody is to trust them.” Unitarian Universalists bring trust to the forefront when practicing some of our principles. The fifth principle is the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large. This requires, as the Reverend Parisa Parsa has said, “trust in the development of each individual conscience—a belief that such development is possible for each of us, as well as a commitment to cultivate our own conscience.”

The fourth principle, “...a free and responsible search for truth and meaning”, may evoke both fear and trust when we put it into practice. When we share our ideas and thoughts for consideration by others in our quest for truth, we may feel vulnerable, just as there may be some element of fear if we hear a sermon that makes us question long-held beliefs. Some of us may even have difficulty trusting our UU principles at all times; for example, people in this beautiful and terrible world may challenge us to ask us if we truly believe in the inherent worth and dignity of all people 100% of the time. Engaging with questions that challenge our comfort level may be difficult and even anxiety-producing, but if we trust that all of us adhere to our principle to accept one another and encourage spiritual growth in our congregations, we increase our chances of engaging with our fears in healthy and productive ways.

This month’s theme was composed by Alan Cantor, Jess Jonas and the Worship Associates.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

1. What are some things/people that you have feared and/or currently fear? Do you trust that you will be able to overcome/embrace these particular fears? If so, what do you place your trust in?
2. When was fear indispensable for your survival? When has fear been a burden to you?
3. When do you lead from a place of fear vs. a place of trust?
4. What helps you to put your trust in someone?
5. Have you ever stopped trusting someone/something?
6. How do you restore trust when it has been lost in a relationship when you would like to be able to trust someone again?
7. What is the relationship between your faith and your ability to trust? How do you trust in the face of fear?
8. Who are the 'teachers' who have offered you lessons in trust?
9. Are you currently experiencing more feelings of fear or more feelings of trust this autumn? If you are feeling more trust, how do you account for that? If you are feeling more fear, how do you account for that, and how do you plan to confront this fear (or not) going forward?

Quotes and Short Readings

A story I found tells of a little girl and her father crossing a bridge. The father was kind of scared so he asked his little daughter: "Sweetheart, please hold my hand so that you don't fall into the river." The little girl said: "No, Dad. You hold my hand." "What's the difference?" asked the puzzled father.

"There's a big difference," replied the little girl. "If I hold your hand and something happens to me, chances are that I may let your hand go. But if you hold my hand, I know for sure that no matter what happens, you will never let my hand go." - Rev. Douglas Taylor

Loving in Fear, A Prayer - Stephen M Shick

Spirit of Life, God of Love, grant me the courage to love boldly in the face of my greatest fears. Grow me in your wisdom and let my actions speak when silence threatens justice and indifference disturbs peace. When gossip, hate, and cruelty arise among friends or in public places, help me bravely walk forward with love. When I defensively assert certainty in the presence of the unknown, grant me the courage to live comfortably in the unanswerable questions of life. Bless me with the eternal gift of not knowing and let it take root in me until it pushes forth shoots of understanding and branches of humility.

Fear is an emotion indispensable for survival - Hannah Arendt

The only thing flat-earthers fear is sphere itself. - Unknown

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

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"Primary fear shows that you are at your edge. Staying with the fear, staying at your edge, allows real transformation to occur." - David Deida

"You gain strength, courage, and confidence by every experience in which you really stop to look fear in the face." - Eleanor Roosevelt

To willingly reside in our distress, no longer resisting what is, is the real key to transformation. As painful as it may be to face our deepest fears, we do reach the point where it's more painful not to face them. - Ezra Bayda

Trust doesn't develop from always doing the right thing. Trust comes from taking responsibility when we do the wrong thing. - Simon Sinek

Link to the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism: <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles>. Click through each one for a brief commentary.

Link to a Unitarian Universalist Association blogpost on Braver/Wiser Courage and Compassion for Life As It Is: <http://www.uua.org/braverwiser/between-wonder-and-fear>

The Power of Fear - Seth Godin

Fear will push you to avert your eyes.

Fear will make you think you have nothing to say.

It will create a buzz that makes it impossible to meditate...

or it will create a fog that makes it so you can do nothing but meditate.

Fear seduces us into losing our temper.

and fear belittles us into accepting unfairness.

Fear doesn't like strangers, people who don't look or act like us, and most of all, the unknown.

It causes us to carelessly make typos, or obsessively look for them.

Fear pushes us to fit in, so we won't be noticed, but it also pushes us to rebel and to not be trustworthy, so we won't be on the hook to produce.

It is subtle enough to trick us into thinking it isn't pulling the strings, that it doesn't exist, that it's not the cause of, "I don't feel like it."

When in doubt, look for the fear.

Where does trust come from?

Hint: it never comes from the good times and from the easy projects.

We trust people because they showed up when it wasn't convenient, because they told the truth when it was easier to lie and because they kept a promise when they could have gotten away with breaking it.

Every tough time and every pressured project is another opportunity to earn the trust of someone you care about.

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FEAR



Forget Everything And Run

...OR...

Face Everything And Rise

It's Your Choice

The Wisdom of Fear - Madisyn Taylor (published in DailyOM)

Anything really worth doing in our lives will always have some fear attached to it.

Anything worth doing will always have some fear attached to it. For example, having a baby, getting married, changing careers--all of these life changes can bring up deep fears. It helps to remember that this type of fear is good. It is your way of questioning whether you really want the new life these changes will bring. It is also a potent reminder that releasing and grieving the past is a necessary part of moving into the new.

Fear has a way of throwing us off balance, making us feel uncertain and insecure, but it is not meant to discourage us. Its purpose is to notify us that we are at the edge of our comfort zone, poised in between the old life and a new one. Whenever we face our fear, we overcome an inner obstacle and move into new and life-enhancing territory, both inside and out. The more we learn to respect and even welcome fear, the more we will be able to hear its wisdom, wisdom that will let us know that the time has come to move forward, or not. While comfort with fear is a contradiction in terms, we can learn to honor our fear, recognizing its arrival, listening to its intelligence, and respecting it as a harbinger of transformation. Indeed, it informs us that the change we are contemplating is significant, enabling us to approach it with the proper reverence.

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You might wish to converse with your fear, plumbing its depths for a greater understanding of the change you are making. You could do this by sitting quietly in meditation and listening or by journaling. Writing down whatever comes up--your worries, your sadness, your excitement, your hopes--is a great way to learn about yourself through the vehicle of fear and to remember that fear almost always comes alongside anything worth doing in your life.

Walking Through Your Fear - Madisyn Taylor

Frequently, in walking through our fear, we discover that the strength of our fright was out of sync with reality.

The situations, activities, and individuals that frighten us remain static. Their relative intensity does not change. Fear, on the other hand, self-magnifies. It is when you are afraid and envisioning all that might go wrong that the energy underlying your fear grows. A tiny flicker of anxiety can easily develop into a terror that manifests itself physically and eventually paralyzes you into inaction. Though frequently, in walking through that fear, we discover that the strength of our fright was out of synch with reality. And we learn that doing what frightens us can lead to great blessings. Confronting your trepidation head-on will help you accept that few frightening scenarios will ever live up to the negative disasters that we sometimes play out in our minds.

Though fear is literally an evolutionary gift meant to sharpen your senses and energize you during times of great stress, it can nonetheless become a barrier that prevents you from fulfilling your potential by causing you to miss out on rewarding, life-changing experiences. During the period before you face your fear, you may have to deal with a barrage of negative thoughts and emotions. Walking through it, whether your fear is public speaking, taking part in an activity that makes you nervous, or asserting yourself when the odds are against you, may be equally as difficult. But once you have emerged unscathed on the other side, which you will, you will likely wonder why you assumed the worst in the first place. As you spend time worrying about what might happen, it's good to know that your fear probably won't happen at all. It may feel like a great weight has been lifted from your shoulders, and you will likely feel a sense of passionate pride. Walking through your fear can mean taking risks and can require both practice and patience. Since it is challenging to act when you are gripped with fear, start small.

Each step you take into fear will strengthen you and help you confront future fears with poise, courage, and confidence. You will also find that when you are willing to stare your fear in the face, the universe will always offer you some form of aid or support. When you see the heights of accomplishment and personal evolution you can attain when you walk through your fears, your faith in yourself will grow, allowing your next step to be easier.

Pistanthrophobia: The Fear Of Trust (Yes, It's An Actual Phobia) - By S.J. Catherine

Trust is a thing that's hard to earn yet easy to break. It's fragile. It's a leap of faith. It's a terrifying thing to allow yourself to be vulnerable and open up to someone else. For one thing,

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what if they don't like what they see when you tear down all those walls you put up and show them your raw personality? That, I would say, is one of the most terrifying things when it comes to love.

Meeting new people has a thrill to it. You get filled with an outpouring of emotions as you begin to learn all about this person, their insecurities, their fears, their passions, their fascinations... it's exhilarating. You begin to grow attached to this person. You love seeing this person's name light up on your phone, instantly bringing a smile to your face.

You strive to bring a genuine smile to his or hers face and your willing to do whatever it takes to keep it there. You are willing to forego rationality, and plunge into the depths of faith, hoping, in the long run, this person will pull through and be the person you believe they will be. Your emotions trump the truth screaming in your face because you give in too easily to the desire to wrap your arms around his or her neck again.

Opening up to people is one of the most vulnerable things an individual can do. It's not only about showing this other person all your talents and joys, it's about allowing them to accompany you to fight off your fears and insecurities. Hoping they will stand by your side through everything, and continue to fight alongside you all the way. I mean, why shouldn't they? Why wouldn't they be willing to try and understand all the little things going through your head... helping you sort them out, preparing to overcome them step-by-step. Like I said, terrifying.

As a college student, I've been on the outside looking in, and the inside looking out when it comes to relationships and trust issues. I've watched friends in long-term relationships get cheated on, but still find it in their hearts to fight, through the heartache and betrayal, to build a better, stronger relationship than they had before. Taking their insecurities and working on them, together, as a team. For some, all it takes is one betrayal of trust to believe that all men, or all women, are the same way.

They'll find themselves second-guessing everything their future partners say or do. They'll find it hard to completely open up again because their worried that they'll only get their heart broken again. I've seen people struggling, doing everything they can, to make a long distance relationship work. It's like their constantly grasping for the threads of hope that are dangling in front of them, but still somehow find their fingers slipping into thin air. I've also seen all these relationship problems, affect any new relationships they are about to take part in.

However, in the end there is only one thing you must overcome: Pistanthrophobia. And that is your fear of trust. No matter who we are, what we've been through, or whom we've trusted this is a fear instilled in us. It may not be easy to let others in, or get close to those who let us in, but run with your emotion and know that moving on with that fear within you takes strength.

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“There are only two emotions: love and fear. All positive emotions come from love, all negative emotions from fear. From love flows happiness, contentment, peace, and joy. From fear comes anger, hate, anxiety, and guilt. It’s true that there are only two primary emotions, love and fear. But it’s more accurate to say that there is only love or fear, for we cannot feel these two emotions together, at exactly the same time. They’re opposites. If we’re in fear, we are not in a place of love. When we’re in a place of love, we cannot be in a place of fear.” — Elizabeth Kubler Ross

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