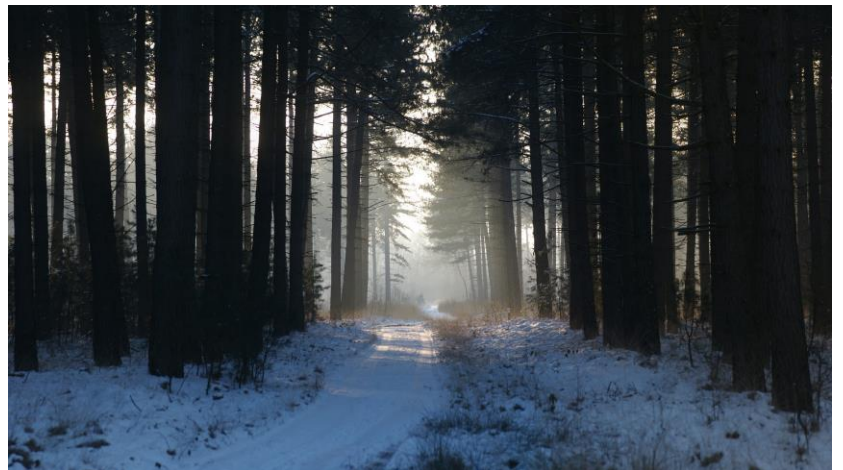


December Reflection
The Path of Wonder

*The sky is full of the sun and the stars
The universe is full of life
Among all these I have found a place
And in wonder and amazement I sing.
I have pricked my ears
I have opened my eyes
I have bared my heart to the world
In the midst of the known
I have sought the unknown
And in wonder and amazement I sing.*

-Rabindranath Tagore

The Soul Matters theme for December is "The Path of Wonder." Wonder seems like the perfect theme for this time of year and it offers many opportunities for spiritual exploration. Wonder as a noun is a feeling of surprise, admiration or awe. We've all experienced wonder in our lives. Have you ever stood outside on a clear night and felt a wonder beyond words as you looked at the



stars or watched a meteor streak across the sky? Or perhaps you've been at the ocean and known awe at its sheer immensity and power either as it moves in its ancient rhythm of the tides or it thunders with ferocity during a storm. Maybe you've heard a piece of music, a melody or a song that moved you in ways words can never express. Or you've known the beauty and mystery of seeing a newborn child and had your heart filled with the hope and potential this new life brings to the world.

Wonder need not be limited to the unusual or those "once-on-a-lifetime" moments. Wonder can be found in the everyday, in the ordinary, even within ourselves. Saint Augustine wrote, "People travel to wonder at the height of mountains, at the huge waves of the sea, at the long courses of rivers, at the vast compass of the ocean, at the circular motion of the stars... and they pass by themselves without wondering." One of

my favorite poems about wonder is by Mary Oliver, whose gift is finding wonder in the natural world and the simplest of things. This is an excerpt from her poem "Messenger".

*Let me keep my mind on what matters, which is my work,
which is mostly standing still and learning to be astonished.
...Which is mostly rejoicing, since all the ingredients are here,
which is gratitude, to be given a mind and a heart
and these body-clothes, a mouth with which to give shouts of joy...*

The Soul Matters packet for this month suggests a way to find wonder in the ordinary is to take "an awe walk", in which instead of thinking about that to do list or a struggle you are currently having, focus on the world around you, noticing things you might not otherwise see. This is a spiritual practice known as mindfulness and helps us experience wonder by being fully present to the moment and the many wondrous things awaiting discovery if we will only take the time to truly see what is around us all the time. Soul Matters says: "There is no one right way to do this. Your walk can be in a familiar place or somewhere brand new. It can happen in nature or in the middle of a city. It can be about seeking out a stunning mountain view or just strolling by your neighbors' flower beds. Do it once or do it daily for a week. Keep it general or structure the walk by focusing on sounds, then colors, then the new, then the curious."

Wonder and awe are part of our faith as Unitarian Universalists. Although our tradition affirms the use of reason and insists that our beliefs must be tested and verified, there is room for the unknown, for mystery, for those things in life which are not factual, which cannot be measured or explained. This is captured in the first and most important of our six Sources (which are statements of the religions, philosophies, and world views which we use in our search for spiritual wisdom and truth). Our First Source, which we can trust above all others, is our personal experience of something we know to be greater than ourselves, which is expressed as "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". To experience wonder is the heart of the religious experience and it has the power to renew us and connect us to the creativity that is at the heart of Life.

We can not only experience wonder, but we can let it shape our lives in the way we respond. Both Mary Oliver and Rabindranath Tagore invite us to react to wonder with rejoicing, astonishment, singing and gratitude. That may not be the easiest thing to do right now for any number of reasons. As the pandemic continues to affect our lives, we may be feeling a lot of fear and uncertainty about the future. This may be a hard time of year because of the loss of a loved one, the onset of seasonal affective disorder as

the days get very short and the nights long, pressure to participate in holiday events (whether we want to or not), or feelings of loneliness and isolation. But if we will take the risk of opening ourselves to the gift of wonder for even a moment, it promises to renew our spirits and bring us joy.

Here are some questions for reflection:

- When have you recently experienced wonder in your life?
- Do you have places that help you experience wonder?
- Is wonder a part of your spiritual life?
- How does wonder renew your spirit and feed your creativity, hope, and energy for living?
- What if you could get a daily dose of wonder online? Here's a link to a playlist of 31 videos:
https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLvXOKgOQVYP7kGFJOQQHnr-0nCJWSf_eC
- What would make your holidays more wonder-filled?

Wishing you joy, wonder and all the blessings of this season of light and hope,
Rev. Steven