



## Journey (Theme for April)

By Rev. Heather Janules

When I served at Cedar Lane UU Church, I enjoyed an informal ritual that took place a few times a year. Volunteers would pull large plastic bins from the recesses of the basement. After sweeping the sanctuary floor, they would open the bins and remove the canvas labyrinth which had been meticulously folded and stored since the last time. With tremendous care, the volunteers would lay out the labyrinth and piece it together so participants could remove their shoes and silently take their meditative journeys.

Members of the community purchased the labyrinth years before and spent many hours hand-painting the lines that defined the walkers' wandering path. This labyrinth was a regular reminder of the congregation's collaborative and questing spirit.

The labyrinth emerged at the summer solstice and on New Years Eve. It was also the centerpiece for an annual silent retreat. Participants who slept over had the rare opportunity to have the sanctuary to themselves as they walked the labyrinth in the middle of the night or as the first rays of sun streamed through the sanctuary windows.

I had never walked a labyrinth before this one. After my first walk, I found the experience strangely meditative. The focus required to follow the path helped prevent the "monkey mind" that often challenges me during sitting meditation.

The volunteers provided reading material about labyrinths at the walks. One book explained that a reason cathedrals and other sacred sites installed labyrinths was for those who were unable to take a religious pilgrimage. A labyrinth allowed the faithful to participate in a pilgrimage – to take a sacred journey – without leaving home.



A stone labyrinth, Brookside Gardens, Wheaton, MD.

"Journey" is a common metaphor for individual growth. It is a fitting one as both a physical journey and a personal odyssey conclude in a different place than where we began. And both kinds of journeys usually involve unexpected delays, detours, obstacles and discoveries.

In this way, like exploring the labyrinth, I believe it is possible to travel a great distance while remaining essentially

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# Holy Curiosity (Theme for March: Curiosity)

By Sam Wilson, Director of Youth Ministries

I'm curious, have you ever met someone who you just knew would be a UU, if only they'd ever heard of Unitarian Universalism? I feel like I meet them all the time, and every time it makes me yearn for our faith to have a better marketing tool for itself. When I try to picture such a tool, I see a radically illuminating light beam radiating with warmth and hospitality while managing to escape any and all glares of evangelism, and, when people are touched with its rays they just get it. Alas, life, faith and our paths toward spirituality are never quite so clear or simple. But wouldn't that be neat?

Speaking of light beams and the future, I recently concluded (based on an article I read by Andrew Murtagh, writing for progressive Christian blog "Patheos") that Einstein would have been one of those people: a UU who hadn't yet "seen the light" (just measured the speed of it!) Did you know that between solving physics equations at a genius level and striking a silly pose with his famous wacky hair (to grace posters in high schools for centuries to come with pithy catchphrases), Einstein actually had a lot to say about philosophy and religion?

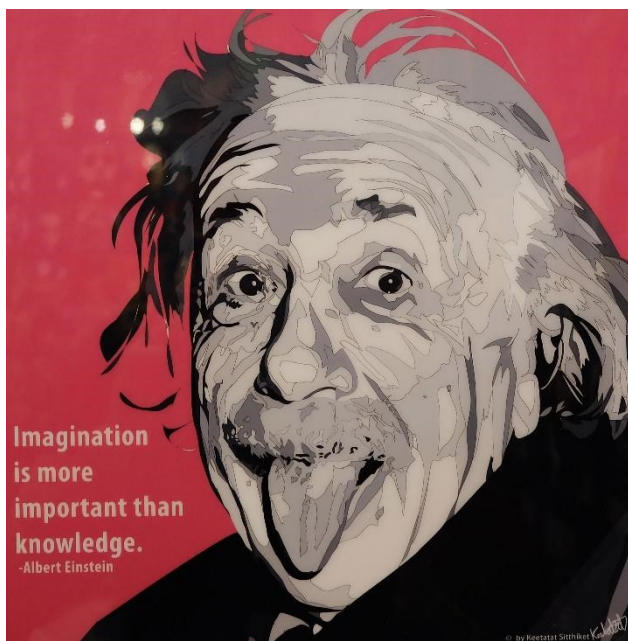
According to Murtagh, "At times, he described himself as a pantheist, believing in 'Spinoza's God, who reveals himself in the harmony of all that exists, not in a God who concerns himself with the fate and the doings of mankind.' At other times, he labelled himself an 'agnostic,' but was careful to distance himself both from traditional religion and atheism, as he preferred an 'attitude of humility corresponding to the weakness of our intellectual understanding of nature and of our own being.'" Certainly sounds like something someone at Winchester Unitarian Society might say!

Another piece of this article really caught my eye when I first read it: Einstein's musings on curiosity and specifically his use of the phrase "holy curiosity." In 1955, Einstein was quoted in LIFE Magazine as saying that "The important thing is not to stop questioning; curiosity has its own reason for existing. One cannot help but be in awe when contemplating the mysteries of eternity, of

life, of the marvelous structure of reality. It is enough if one tries merely to comprehend a little of the mystery every day. The important thing is not to stop questioning; never lose a holy curiosity." I mean, hello! Fourth principle! Search for truth and meaning, anyone?!?

What was particularly fascinating to me was not just that Einstein's own spirituality seemed to be somewhat fluid - like the spirituality of many UU's, but also that his phrase "holy curiosity" illuminates an aspect of our faith that I think sometimes we lose sight of when we worship together. As UUs and members of a pluralistic faith, we recognize the worth of each other's beliefs, but we often feel set in our own and, therefore, do not open ourselves

up with genuine curiosity to those of others around us. As a faith that overtly seeks to accept and honor others' faiths and beliefs, we tend to preach tolerance and diversity while simultaneously exalting our own shared sets of beliefs but not really asking each other what we believe that may be different from one another. Whether we are afraid of being ridiculed or worried about offending someone else, we tend to practice an impoverished religious vocabulary instead of an expanded one because we silence ourselves in our flawed notions of religious diversity.



*My personal favorite poster-from-high-school with pithy phrase and Einstein-silly-face combo*

What then, might happen, if we truly engaged with each other through a mutual sense of "holy curiosity," sought out the places where our vocabulary or belief systems do not overlap, then together began an exploration that could potentially open all of our minds? If we are serious about being a community that seeks true religious diversity and pluralism, then we must ask each other what we believe, and listen. As individuals and as a community, it may behoove us to try and practice "holy curiosity" a bit more.

What do you believe? What does the person sitting next to you, in front of you, or behind you in the pews believe? If you don't know, aren't you just a little bit curious?

## You Are Needed!

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When one of us is in need, WUS volunteers respond. A fresh list of volunteers is invaluable throughout the year when someone needs a ride, a meal delivered, or when a memorial service requires extra hands. Serving in these capacities is a caring and pragmatic contribution to our Church community. If you can be contacted



to help on occasion, we'd like to know.

Please contact [gay\\_mohrbacher@wgbh.org](mailto:gay_mohrbacher@wgbh.org) if you might provide a meal or a ride. And reach out to Vicky Coccoluto at [vcoccoluto@yahoo.com](mailto:vcoccoluto@yahoo.com) if you are willing to help at a memorial service. Thank you!

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## Look Into My Eyes (Theme for May: Beauty)

By Marianne DiBlasi, Intern Minister

Many years ago, I had the great fortune to see a performance of Sweet Honey in The Rock at Boston Symphony Hall. The African-American female a cappella group sang songs that made an indelible imprint on my soul. I was mesmerized by their music, which is rooted in African-American history, culture and vocal music tradition.

One song that tugged at my heart was "No Mirrors in my Nana's House."\* It was a song about a little Black girl who saw herself and the world through the eyes of her Nana who saw beauty in her granddaughter. As the lyrics of the song go...

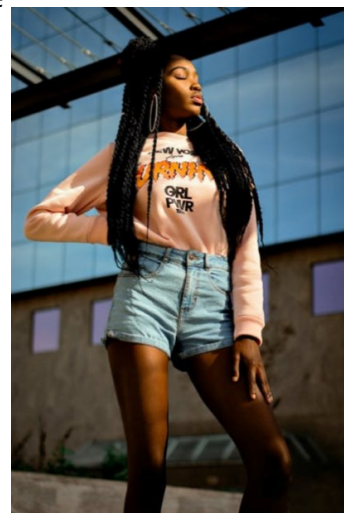
*There were no mirrors in my Nana's house  
No mirrors in my Nana's house.*

*And the beauty that I saw in everything,  
The beauty in everything  
Was in her eyes.*

*So I never knew that my skin was too Black  
I never knew that my nose was too flat  
I never knew that my clothes didn't fit  
And I never knew there were things that I missed  
And the beauty in everything  
Was in her eyes*

I imagine the Nana knew the cruelty of hate and the pain of being oppressed because of the color of her skin. The harsh reality of living in a country where the dominant culture often associates the color white with good and beautiful; while black is often associated with bad and scary. I imagine the little girl's Nana wanted to protect her from the abusive ways she knew others in the world would see and treat her. I imagine the Nana wanted to fill her granddaughter up with enough self-love and self-trust to know that she is beautiful and good, no matter what anyone else says.

There is a proverb that says, "Beauty is in the eye of the beholder." This is true, but what happens when the dominant culture beholds white skin, blonde hair, and thin bodies as the standard for beauty? The result is a strong tendency for anyone who is different than the norm to experience internalized oppression and low self-esteem – when a



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## Pledge Poetry

Did you miss the Pledge Pie Party on February 3rd? WUS folks were challenged to write haikus in support of this year's pledge drive. Here are some of the responses.

A traditional Japanese haiku is a three-line poem with seventeen syllables, written in a 5/7/5 syllable count. Try your own at home. Maybe you'll be published in the next Mystic Messenger!

Winchester UU  
Hoping to get lots of cash  
Give generously

We'll make a difference  
Money here and in the world  
All together now

Give thought to your values  
Use your resources for your values  
And how did you do

She who pledges well  
Is sure to skirt UU hell  
And saintly banks swell

Next year a pledge dance  
With buns—Let's all celebrate  
The great a-bun-dance

Lean in to the church  
Together we build something  
Values across time

Seek community  
W-U-S provides  
that and more plus pie

This is a great place  
But unlike air it's not free  
Give generously

Winchester UU's  
are generous, kind, and good  
Time to pledge. Give lots.

Do not know how to  
make a haiku but we do  
need the funds badly

My community  
of friends, love, action, and hope  
I am proud to give

Stained glass and smiles  
Generations of still, small voice  
We keep it vital!

in the same place. It depends on the intentionality one brings to the path and what they observe and learn at each turn.

Is this  
where we  
are meant  
to be?

As we approach the theme of "journey," I invite us to consider the path we are taking in this time, the ways in which it does – or does not – resonate with our inner lives and the gifts and difficulties we are finding along the way. If we keep going in this direction, where are we bound to end up? Is this where we are meant to be?

Many blessings to you on your journeys, literal journeys and the journeys within...

## 2018-19 Concert Series

**Folk Musician Tracy Grammer**  
**Friday, March 22<sup>nd</sup>, 8pm**

Celebrating the release of her new album *Low Tide*, singer-songwriter Tracy Grammer brings her springwater-clear alto, inspired guitar playing, and gifted storytelling to our sanctuary. Of Grammer, Joan Baez has said: "Tracy Grammer is a brilliant artist and unique individual. Her voice is distinctive, as is her mastery over the instruments she plays."



**Tickets available at the door**  
**(adults \$25/seniors \$15/students \$5).**

person is oppressed over a period of time, they often believe and make part of their self-image how society sees and treats them. In the White dominant culture in the U.S., the little Black granddaughter is at high-risk for seeing herself as ugly and bad because of the color of her skin.

According to Dr. Welansa Asrat, a New York-based specialist in cross-cultural psychiatry, "Exposure to [society's] anti-black bias is a risk for internalized racism and low self-esteem. However, a pro-black identity can protect against that risk."\*\* The wise Nana knew this and empowered her granddaughter with a "pro-black identity" – her super power of self-love.

What can we do to help the Nanans protect their precious grandchildren as they leave home and are living in the White dominant culture? One way is to look into the eyes of Black children and grown adults and see them as beautiful and good. We can let their beauty and goodness be reflected in our eyes.

To view an animated rendition of "No Mirrors in my Nana's House" sung by Sweet Honey in The Rock, visit <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=GD57KULelqg> or go to YouTube and search for "No Mirrors in My Nana's House tubeligin."

\*The song "No Mirrors in My Nana's House" performed by Sweet Honey in The Rock. Lyrics and Music by Ysaye M. Barnwell (c)1992. <https://www.ymbarnwell.com/song-lyrics/>

\*\*The Root Staff. "The Doll Test for Racial Self-Hate: Did it Ever Make Sense?" *The Root*, May 17, 2014, accessed February 5, 2019, <https://www.theroot.com/the-doll-test-for-racial-self-hate-did-it-ever-make-se-1790875716>.

## Grief, Loss & Transitions Group

Lee Barton, John Loewy and Heather Janules invite those coping with grief and those dealing with concerns beyond bereavement, such as transitions and uncertainty, to participate in this safe and confidential circle.

**4<sup>th</sup> Thursdays in March, April, May**  
Mar 28 • Apr 25 • May 23  
**7:30-9 pm**

Parlor, Winchester Unitarian Society  
478 Main St, Winchester  
**Open to all • No RSVP needed**



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*Minister Emeritus*

## *Testimonial*

*Testimonial by Betsy Bowles, February 17, 2019. Edited for print.*

Following a glowing review of Unitarian Universalism and a kind invitation from John and Maggie Russell, my partner Pat Meny and I first stepped in to this sanctuary in September of 1998.

I remember being amazed at how truly beautiful it is.

Pat had been raised in a Catholic family and remembered the emotional abuse some children suffered during her years in Catholic school. My grandfather was a minister and I was raised in a strict Church of Christ household. I remember the teachings of a merciless God and I remember the feelings of shame directed at those of us that struggled with our sexual preferences.

Pat and I agreed we would attend the services here six times to see if they suited us. She cried during each of those first six services. The messages relating to our Unitarian principles spoke to us, the minister spoke to us, and the members of the congregation spoke to us. It was amazing: there was inspiration here, there was kindness here, there was a sense of well being and *there was no guilt*.

We were the first family to sign the book in the year 2000 and we did so to stand with fellow congregants in opposition to a homophobic policy then used by the Boy Scouts of America that met in our building. *It was the right thing to do*. It began our many years here of participation in doing the right things.

If you look around you'll notice many people here that are known for their "doing good in the world." As I stand here, I know that Pat Meny's name is inscribed on the plaque to my left and also the one to my right. I've experienced firsthand the good work done by our Pastoral Care Associates. During life changes and deep sorrows, they do things for you that you didn't even know you needed.

It's the right thing to do to help serve breakfast to the homeless community in Boston on Saturdays at the Women's Lunch place. It's the right thing to do to fill Thanksgiving baskets for families in need. It's the right thing to do to clean the Aberjona Creek, and to care for our aging building and offer your voice in our wonderful choir.

We served our fellow Americans after Hurricane Katrina flooded the Gulf Coast. Hundreds of New Orleans families have been helped, hundreds of homes are in better condition now, because our volunteer group, Gulf Coast Volunteers for the Long Haul, began here. Our youth group goes on annual service trips. We fill the Symmes Room with gifts for kids during the holidays. And we will gladly recycle our belongings at a Rummage Sale this June 1st, to raise money for our general fund. (Save the date!)

I am still amazed in this beautiful place. I believe I stand on holy ground. I believe by us gathering here, with people we hold so very dear, we are closer to the divine, no matter how we worship.

Some Sundays I have to really tune in to find that one amazing thing. I suggest that, if you are present, if you open your heart and your head, if you look and listen carefully, you will find it. It's here. I promise.