

“Outta My Head”
Sunday, July 12, 2020

Welcome & Chalice Lighting Rev. Betsy Mead Tabor

Good morning and welcome to the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of the Eastern Slopes.
Glad to see you this morning!

Some day, we will be together in Tamworth, and I’m excited to figure out a way for everyone in this big, wide Zoom circle to be part of that. Until we feel safe and ready, we thank Zoom for keeping us connected. (Zoom reminders.)

We begin with our Unitarian Universalist principles, which Meghan and Daniel Hodge will share....

Welcome. Here we seek justice and truth and understanding.
Here we celebrate life and contemplate mystery.
Here we seek healing and wholeness. Welcome, all.

Our service is called “Outta My Head.” Who doesn’t spend a lot of time in their head, especially these days? Hardly a minute goes by when we’re not thinking, reading, researching, as if we can figure things out and make a plan. Our brains are working over-time, stress is on the rise, and we need to pay attention to that. So a service about getting out of our heads.

Chalice Unitarian Universalism draws from many sources, among them...

- literature
- words and deeds of prophetic women and men
- wisdom from the world’s religions
- Jewish and Christian and humanist teachings
- the spirituality of Earth-centered traditions

Today we light our chalices in honor of a source that inspires us every day: the direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder. Let us kindle the flame.

Our centering music is an American folk song called “Worried Man Blues.”

“It takes a worried man to sing a worried song,” it goes. “I’m worried now, but I won’t be worried long.” Let us invite our thoughts to slow down. Feel your arms and legs. Gently circle your feet and hands. Take a low, slow breath or two as we center.

Centering “Worried Man Blues”

Shared Affirmation

Hymn “There is More Love Somewhere” This song of resistance during the time of slavery reminds us that, even in times of trouble, of injustice, and of worry, there’s always more for us to

see and understand. There's always more Love to give and receive. Let us respect and feel into this context as we sing.

Time for All Ages Marion Posner

Invitation ~ a poem by Shel Silverstein.

If you are a dreamer come in
 If you are a dreamer a wisher a liar
 A hoper a pray-er a magic-bean-buyer
 If you're a pretender come sit by my fire
 For we have flaxen gold tales to spin
 Come in!
 Come in!

Dreams. Hmmmm....

In a time of changing reality, we try to adapt, but the mind can be inflexible. It waxes critical. It chases negatives.

So we surely need to release and encourage the right side of our brain ~ the dreamer, the poet, the painter, singer, wonderer, wanderer with ideas, laughter.

But how to open the gate? I see a beautifully crafted one in my mind's eye, wrought iron, with curlicues and curves..... It is a little ajar. How to fling it open so I can dance through it?

Here is an idea. I have a recurring dream. I used to think of it as a nightmare, but now it is mentor.

I have spent many years as an actress and story teller performing on stage. In my dream I am backstage waiting to go on. I am nervous. I finger the comfort of the black curtain that hides me from the audience. The backstage darkness cloaks me. "Why'am I doing this?" I ask myself. An inner voice answers, "Because stories, plays, helps people find meaning."

The cue comes. I cross the threshold from safety to exposure. I walk into the harsh bright reality of the stage lights. I walk upstage, face my audience and.....I freeze. I cannot remember a word of the story I was to perform, or the lines of the character I was going to portray. How I long for a script, yearn for somebody to prompt me. No help comes.
 I wake up.

It is no longer a nightmare because when that moment of freezing comes, I know that the gate creaks open as I enter a new reality, the one that my story will embrace. It is no longer about me and my fears.

There was a time when this was made clear to me:

I was to perform to a Boston audience of over three hundred. Three stories were to be told. Mine was to follow one about Nine Eleven. As the teller finished, I had to step up onto the stage. The shock and grief in the ensuing silence were palpable. I stood there, paused. The stage lights

glared down at me. The Nightmare's fingers crept towards me.

But then the protagonist of my story arrived. A true story in which I had been involved. I knew I must act as him, telling his story not telling it as an objective onlooker., but trying to find empathy with him, find connection. He had lived all his life in the village his forefathers had inhabited. His life knew little adventure or change. He was a bus driver who kept to local routes. But one day he leapt out of his armchair where he had been watching, yet again, the television news and announced to his wife that he was no longer going to be an onlooker of people in Bosnia suffering a war. He was going to drive his bus into the war zone and offer to bring people from the refugee camps back to his village to stay until the warring was done. And he did. It is a story I would like to tell you one day. The audience and I traveled with him that evening, into courage and a good dose of humor.

I suggest that you tell stories ~ of what you see, feel, hear tell of. Tell them not as an onlooker but as a participant. Be a human character, or a plant, or the planet..and after telling it with words, try leaving them behind and telling it with your hands. The vocabulary of your hands will open that wrought iron gate and allow you to dance through to a place where the left brain does not easily reign, at least not all time. In fact, the left brain won't get a word in edge ways!

Reflection Margaret Rieser

At the extremely intellectual college I went to, dancing on Friday and Saturday nights was a lifeline, a ritual of restoration to help us briefly return to a sense of balance, of wholeness. Worries about papers and reading flew out the windows as we connected to the music and entered a state of unified joy with the other people moving, jumping and singing as we danced ourselves out of our heads and into our bodies.

One of our restoration rituals here these days is looking at a poem every Tuesday afternoon. This week we read the poem "Some Call it God", by Jabari Asim.¹ And while some call it God, Asim calls it "Funk". As we do each week, we read the poem out loud three times and by the end of the third reading, we were all smiling, still in our own little Hollywood squares, yes, but oh, so much more connected with energy zinging and zooming from one rectangle to another.

I choose Rhythm, the beginning as motion,
black Funk shaping itself
in the time before time,

I whirl to the beat of the omnipotent Hum;
diastole, systole, automatic,
borderless. Bigger and bigger still:
Bigger than love,
Bigger than desire or adoration.
Bigger than begging and contemplation.

¹ <https://poets.org/poem/some-call-it-god>

I won't speak for anyone else who was present. For me, the poem brought back that feeling I got from dancing in college. I moved from my head into my body. No, that's not quite it. I re-attached my body to this head in which I've been sheltering in place for way too long.

Since mid-March, we've been spending a lot of time hiding out in our heads, relying on our knowledge and problem-solving abilities to get through this. I've read what feels like zillions of articles advising me on how to increase my safety and how to increase my community's safety during this coronavirus pandemic. The descriptions of the virus's effect on the body shut down my ability to go there. Often I don't realize how deep I've gotten into that cold and analytical space until something jolts me out of it.

A few weeks ago I was startled to realize, in an interaction, that I was lecturing when in hindsight I wished I had been listening. As I tried to recall my words later, I found that I could not. I was struck by how difficult it was to engage with another person because I was trapped in my head, alienated from my feelings, rendering myself unable to empathize. These kinds of experiences jolt me out of my mindless brain-space.

While COVID -19 pulls for us to take refuge in our heads, the second pandemic we're facing right now, our growing awareness and intolerance of systemic racism, calls on us to be increasingly aware of our bodies and the bodies of others especially black and brown bodies. In other words, it is critical right now to be connected to ourselves, to feel whole. Dennis Chauvin, the police officer who murdered George Floyd, was not able to have empathy during the time he was videoed. He was utterly disconnected from the man whose neck was under his knee. The other police officers present were equally paralyzed. We are shockingly capable of shutting down our bodies when violence occurs. This is also what happens when people experience trauma.

I am good at occupying my analytical head. I was well-trained and amply rewarded for abandoning my body in favor of my brain. While it is not always easy, it is time to leave the sense of safety and familiarity of living in our heads in order to experience what poet Jabari Asim calls "the wonder and hurt of being," for that is the home of both righteousness and joy.

Joys & Concerns

In these unsettled, uncertain times, we can get lost in our thoughts. It helps to hear from each other. Sharing moments of delight and also sharing what keeps us up at night can help us connect and remind us that we are not alone.

As we reflect on the week gone by, we will hear a 1700s Irish tune played by Shana Aisenberg and Madeline MacNeil. During this time, you are warmly invited to use the Chat space to express what is on your heart.

"Spirit of Life

Meditation and Prayer

We give thanks
for this week's rain
for summer's soft air, its greens and blues, its blossoms

We are grateful to have come through these several months
and to gather in this circle of care.
For each other's company, for you who sustain the life of this Fellowship with your time and
energy, your serving on committees and groups, your creating beautiful worship and showing up
as you do, we give thanks.

Today, we pray for patience
with each other and with ourselves
May we have the wisdom to make time in our day
for quieting our minds - appreciating our loved ones
and for hoping and praying for all who suffer.

In our own community, both Warren Lindsey and Mary Dominguez are home from scheduled
hospital visits this past week and beginning to recuperate. We hold them in the light.

Today we remember Harvey Stephenson with love. Harvey died a year ago yesterday, two weeks
short of his 100th birthday. We will long treasure his passion for justice, his love of visitors, and
his zest for life. May he rest in peace. Amen and blessed be.

[Respond to Joys & Concerns.]

Reading From "My Stroke of Insight" TED Talk by Jill Bolte Taylor² Read by Sam Perry
Our reading comes from a TED Talk by Jill Bolte Taylor, called "My Stroke of Insight." She
tells the powerful story of suffering a stroke a few years before. A brain researcher, she realized
what was happening in the moment as she rapidly began to lose function of the reasoning,
figuring, analytical left-hemisphere of her brain. Eventually, she recovered it, but the experience
of having only the right hemisphere working – the place of imagination, insight, creativity,
connectedness – was transformative. This is how she described it:

"Our right hemisphere is all about this present moment. It's all about right here right now. ...
Information, in the form of energy, streams in simultaneously through all of our sensory systems.
And then it explodes into this enormous collage of what this present moment looks like – what
this present moment smells like and tastes like, what it feels like and what it sounds like.

I am an energy being connected to the energy all around me through the consciousness of my
right hemisphere.....At first, [she says,] I was shocked to find myself inside of a silent mind.
But then I was immediately captivated by the magnificence of energy around me. And because I
could no longer identify the boundaries of my body, I felt enormous and expansive....like a
genie just liberated from her bottle. My spirit soared free like a great whale gliding through the

² https://www.ted.com/talks/jill_bolte_taylor_my_stroke_of_insight

sea of silent euphoria. Harmonic! I remember thinking there's no way I would ever be able to squeeze the enormosity of myself back inside this tiny little body. ... I felt at one with all the energy that was, and it was beautiful there.”

Reflection Rev. Betsy Tabor

Is this pandemic is a re-set button – one last chance for us to look at the mess we’ve made and do something about it? Like the Etch-a-Sketch, remember? The two knobs you use to draw or write, then flip it over and shake it to clear the screen. You get to start over.

A palate cleanser acts like a re-set button, too – the sorbet in a fancy meal that refreshes your mouth to make ready for whatever comes next.

Moments that take us out of our heads are like re-set buttons. These crazy days fatigue our minds. Thinking all the time stresses us, doesn’t it. March and April frightened us badly. We retreated to our homes. Even they, even our beloveds, felt unsafe. We stopped seeing people, rarely left home. And we’re still riding the Corona-coaster, now fearful, now taking it all in stride, now undone by this time of transition, when we don’t know the difference between what is safe and what might kill us.

Uncertainty lives with us 24/7. Moreover, everyone is fed the same diet of news. We choose what flavor, then talk with the other people who like that flavor. Thinking the same thing, reading the same headlines, gives our lives a sameness, have you noticed?

And then something happens that takes us right out of our heads. Call it what you will. Some of us will refer to brain synapses. Others will find meaning in mystery or coincidence. Some will use the word “God.” And some of us are so busy thinking that we don’t notice the invitation to stop thinking and just be.

That’s what happened the other day with the God is Funk poem. You never know who will show up on poetry Tuesday, but we wade in and see what happens. Do come – it might just take you out of your head. This poem seemed unlikely in that regard – we doubted we’d get it. But hearing it several times moved the seven of us into a surprising exuberance. There was a religious element: God or Funk is everything – beauty, creation, dance, skin, aliveness. Like magic, it took us into our bodies. We nearly danced in our chairs – a welcome break from pandemic mind.

My day often starts with a walk. It takes a half hour for whatever’s swirling in my head to stop. Arriving in the present moment is worth the wait. And get this – smelling a rose short-circuits the process. It’s true Some have no scent – but when they say “stop and smell the roses,” they mean the old fragrant ones. They’ll take you right out of your head. Bending close and breathing in a rose goes right to the belly. Mine does a flip-flop. Every time!

What reliably takes you out of your head?

It was a devastating stroke. That morning as her brain filled with blood, Jill Bolte Taylor said, “I could not walk, talk, read, write or recall any of my life.” And yet, losing the rational left

hemisphere showed her another way to be in the world. She said she experienced a sense of peace like no other--she called it Nirvana. [The world felt] filled with beautiful, peaceful, compassionate, loving people...at one with all there is.” All stress was gone: “I felt a sense of peacefulness.”...A lifetime of emotional baggage vanished, “I felt euphoria,” she said. This changed her life.

Eight years of recovery later, she became an advocate for getting out of our thinking heads, the separateness and finitude of our individual identities. She teaches that we can CHOOSE to invite that place of peace, that beauty of all things lovingly connected. We can make “that choice,” as she puts it, “to not spend all our time with our thoughts but to enter the ‘deep inner peace circuitry of our right hemispheres.’ ”

We are not just human doings. We are human beings. Getting out of our heads and connecting with our physicality is a gift of being human. In her reflection today, Margaret connected the work of antiracism with body awareness. You know, every one of us who attended GA this year came home with a fierce desire for UUFES to engage in the work of dismantling systemic racism, especially in our own lives, in our own white state. So thank you, Margaret, for making the connection. Whatever is going on in our own heads, we must always keep the dream of Beloved Community front and center. Hatred of Black and Indigenous and other people of color focuses on their bodies. Think of the cold scrutiny of helpless naked women and men and their children at the auction block. Think of the insidious notebooks that kept track of the productivity of each enslaved person, measured in pounds of cotton picked.

Think of the Selma monument where each block hanging from above represents a person, a body. TaNehisi Coates’s contemporary letter to his teenaged son, “Between the World and Me,” centers on the Black body in America – and the dangers it faces everyday.

In the work to dismantle white supremacy, the white antiracist must center her body too. She must notice the way it can automatically react to people of color. She must come to see the despicable undeniable fact that she has been socialized all her life to fear non-white people. This is white supremacy.

Today’s antiracist also has intellectual work to do. He must inform himself and learn what school never taught him. There’s no one book to read. Remember, no one led the way when our friend Harvey Stephenson urged us to read Roxanne Ortiz-Dunbar’s book, *An Indigenous People’s History of the United States*. With no road map, our congregation’s reading it generated hours of antiracist soul-searching and social action. It upended our understandings and transformed many of us. So, we antiracists need to educate ourselves. At the end of the service, Sandy will put a list of books up on Chat. Any one will do to get started.

So much for our minds. We antiracists also need to get out of our heads. We can’t think our way out of this world that upsets us, pits us against each other, and keeps us up at night. UU churches are notoriously full of people who love to think. Who put a premium on reason and science and opinion. Let us also remember our hearts. They will guide us to Beloved Community.

How do we get out of our heads, then? At General Assembly, antiracist crusader Chris Crass led a huge workshop on having hard conversations about race – 650 of us on the screen. To dismantle white supremacy, he urged the roomful of thinking, intellectual “above the neck” UUs to move out of our heads and into our hearts.

WHY do we want to do this anti-racism work? What is it that gets under our skin? That GETS to us? And he threw down the gauntlet, inviting someone to tell us a story. Not a story of facts and figures, but a story of “What’s churning inside you that you can’t let go of...that keeps you in this work???”

He called on two people. Both of them began by launching into their analysis. Chris hung in there, brilliantly, patiently urging them to dig a little deeper, to say more. Finally, after what seemed like an eternity, one of them touched on something....”Well,” she said, “there was this moment, this liquefied moment...” He jumped on it. YES THAT’S IT! She had keyed in on something almost indescribable. I don’t remember the details, just that moment of getting out of her long discourse and accessing something else. “A liquefied moment.” What we all heard was: “Get out of your head and feel this work” :-)

I don’t know what God is. Or if God is. But for sure, life is more than facts. More than thinkng. More than a lecture series. Thankfully, those re-set-button moments pull us out of our heads now and then. What a beautiful thing that is.

So here’s the thing. Notice what tugs on your heart. Notice moments that lighten your load...and free you from your lists or your worries or your anger. Notice your dreams and your dream like moments. They are gifts to our busy, weary minds. Watch for them. You know how it goes: like a muscle, the more you work it, the stronger it becomes. The more you notice them, the more they’ll come.

Let us embrace our wholeness and choose the gift of inviting the “deep inner peace circuitry” of the brain. May we bask in life’s liquefied moments. What better way to start over?

Offering “God Be in My Head”

Community Response Betsy

We’ll take a few minutes here to think about what takes us out of our heads. We tried something last week, that we learned at General Assembly, which is just to type a few words into Chat to get our wheels turning. Think about what helps you clear your mind. What feels like a “re-set button” for you? What can you count on to help get yourself out of your head and into that place of connectedness and peace? What helps you find that Etch-A-Sketch chance to start over?

Marion P: Certainly the roses! And I see in the congregation today two dear, dear friends, and their friendship, as friendship should be, frees me.

Ellen W: Hiking as often as I can with my wonderful dogs and watching them race around and be real dogs!

Responses in Chat:

Sunrise and sunset - UUFES! - mt chocorua: that great rocky peak - watching ripples spread out into the Universe on the lake - swimming - a good dunk in the cold Swift river - lake and mountains - bird songs - a walk in the woods - tides - my dog - listening to music, walking my apple trees - exercise (riding my bike), yoga, binaural beat recordings - all the bird activity on my front lawn - moths at night - being out on the lake in my kayak.....following the loons - a long liquid swim - UUFES - breezes — light and fierce - my grandson - jigsaw puzzles as a focus that slows the spinning mind - wind today; refreshing - baking bread - playing with young children - dancing - tending the garden - fireflies and petting my dog - colors of flowers, chipmunks, rippling water, the wind's whisper - eating Hope's bread! - singing, chanting, dancing, meditation! - teeny frogs - conversations with my grandkids - working our land, sweating, harvesting - long walk in the woods! - walking - stroking the cat, hearing his purr - blues music - listening to Marion and Margaret and Betsy - Sam's reading!!! - rowing to see the loon chicks on Silver Lake - just knowing we have loon chicks! - hearing the loon calls - a deep breath....

Hymn "Do You Hear?"

Chalice Extinguishing

Benediction

Our benediction is a traditional prayer song from Ghana:

Journeying god,
pitch your tent with mine
so that I may not become deterred
by hardship, strangeness, doubt.
Show me the movement I must make
toward a wealth not dependent on possessions,
toward a wisdom not based on books,
toward a strength not bolstered by might,
toward a god not confined to heaven.
Help me to find myself as I walk in others' shoes. So may it be. Amen.

Postlude Shana's postlude "Over My Head," is a gospel song you might know. It goes:

Over My Head, there is music in the air,
Over My Head, there is music in the air,
Over My Head, there is music in the air,
There must be a God somewhere.

In 1961, civil rights leader Bernice Johnson Reagon changed the words to "Over my head/I see freedom in the air...."

This service can be viewed until October 12 at:

[https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/-
utbEzCvz1tOQNL29kPPc_AxRLu7eaa81nBP8vYInk5LnU5MnWWIQZ3cict-TfJA](https://uuma.zoom.us/rec/share/-utbEzCvz1tOQNL29kPPc_AxRLu7eaa81nBP8vYInk5LnU5MnWWIQZ3cict-TfJA)

Access Password: 0d\$9^?\$2