

# Quest

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## Not What We Have, But What We Enjoy

BY KELLY WEISMAN ASPROOTH-JACKSON, MINISTER,  
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I'd like to tell you a story, a true story, that a friend of mine witnessed firsthand. It's about a congregation in the midst of a holiday food drive for a local food bank. Members of

the congregation were asked to fill brown paper shopping bags with food. The suggestion was that they go to the grocery store and purchase the sorts of things they would buy for themselves, focusing on canned and packaged goods that the food pantry could stock without needing to refrigerate.

When the food drive was finished, and the congregation had collected all of those bags, they had a huge amount of food. So a group from the congregation got together the next morning to sort all of it. Part of their job was to check to make sure that it was all food that could be donated, since public food pantries can't accept badly dented or rusted cans, or boxed or bagged food past its expiration date.

As the volunteers were sifting and sorting, they'd pull out pieces that couldn't be donated and put them in a pile for expired food. In the beginning none of them thought much about it, but then the pile started to grow. For the most part, it wasn't recently expired stuff; it was things that were years out of date: packaging from the early '90s, with brands that had long since gone out of business.

Now at first, the volunteers imagined the kindest explanations they could think of for why someone would donate a whole bag full of expired food. Supermarkets aren't always careful either, and someone might have bought a lot of spaghetti or rice without checking the label. But that didn't explain how much there was. And not everybody can afford to donate a whole bag of food, when they're having trouble keeping themselves and their families fed to begin with. So it might be that some families, ashamed to come to services without a bag to donate, just did the best they could.

But that still couldn't explain how much visibly old food there was, some of it clearly inedible. The only explanation that was left was that some of the folks in the congregation had gotten their bags for the food drive and simply swept in the discarded, forgotten contents of their own pantries.

How narrow our hearts can become, when we do not devote ourselves to opening them wider. Trying to explain the mentality that would allow someone to offer a stranger food they would never serve to their own children, one obvious answer is contempt. Contempt for the poor and hungry among us is common enough in our world, where there are powerful messages from many corners telling us that we deserve what we get. That the rich deserve to be rich, and the poor—well, they deserve that too.

But if all you had in your heart was contempt, why donate anything? Why even go to the service to begin with? When I try to imagine the folks in this situation, what I see are people trying to do what is right, trying to show a kindness to other human beings. But that kindness is hemmed in, forced into a narrow place by fear: the fear of scarcity, the fear that there isn't enough.

A sense of scarcity—that there's not enough to go around, so I need everything I have or can get—can arise from a place of real need. But truly not having enough does not automatically move every person towards that outlook, and it's easy to

“My barn having  
burned down  
I can now see the  
moon.”

—Mizuta Masahide

A monthly for religious liberals

### THINKING ABOUT ABUNDANCE

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take that narrow view even when our basic needs are being met. Comedian Louis C.K. commented on the daily wonders that surround us in the modern age, technologies and experiences that would have been unthinkable a century ago, describing the situation this way: “Everything is amazing right now, and nobody’s happy.”

In Judaism, Shabbat—the Sabbath—begins on Friday evening and runs until just after sunset on Saturday. It’s a time of rest and celebration, and a traditional way of marking it is with good food. Many of you have probably eaten challah before. One of these special foods, it has a distinctive appearance because the dough is braided before it’s baked, and a distinctive taste because it usually has egg in it, and sometimes a sweetener. One of my rabbis once pointed out to me that for almost all



Jews living in Eastern Europe 200 years ago, challah was a special treat. They couldn’t enjoy it every day, because it took extra work to make and was too expensive, so having it on Shabbat was something that made the day special.

Today in America you can buy it in the grocery store, for no more than many other breads sell for. The specialness isn’t there anymore. Challah, like many consumer goods, has become cheaper and more available—it has literally become more abundant—but this material abundance comes at the expense of a larger message of spiritual and emotional scarcity.

We live in a world where art, entertainment, and even political discourse are inherently bound up with advertisement—the all-day, every-day effort to convince us that we are not presently

happy, but could be if we just bought something. There is a line by Leonard Cohen that I believe describes the problem. He sings, “You are locked into your suffering and your pleasures are the seal.” It is all too easy to get caught up in the race for signs of success, the things we are culturally trained to want and enjoy. But they are distractions from the way of life that our deepest selves are calling us to live.

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### Epicurus wrote, “Not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our abundance.”

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The ancient Greek philosopher Epicurus felt that life’s greatest pleasures were simple ones: good food and the company of friends. It was a goal of his philosophy to attain *ataraxia*, which means a state of peace and freedom from fear. Epicurus wrote, “Not what we have, but what we enjoy, constitutes our abundance.” Those words have never been more relevant than they are today, in a world driven too much by *having*, and not enough by *enjoying*.

The scarcity mindset that saps our generosity of spirit, that keeps some hungry and others well-fed but afraid, is opposed by an attitude of abundance. Because when we truly enjoy life, we do not fear to share it with others. As we approach freedom from fear, we can begin to trust that there will be enough. Enough food on our tables. Enough love in our hearts.

We need to move, each day, away from the disposability that directs too much of our world, and towards sustainability. For this to be possible requires, first, a reasonable degree of security. While it is certainly possible to think abundantly when you don’t have enough food to eat, or a place to live, or a sense of basic physical safety, that doesn’t make those shortages right.

My grandfather grew up during the depression, and at every dinner for the

rest of his life, he always wanted bread on the table. Simple, sliced white bread. That was what he needed to feel secure, to know that there would be enough for him and his family. If there’s bread on the table, no one has to go to bed hungry. With that security, he could better enjoy the meal and the company. He could live abundantly.

Another essential requirement, after security, is service. Any pleasure that depends on us hiding from the pain of others is fragile and fleeting, and ultimately false; we know ourselves only by knowing others.

Ten years ago, I was a volunteer at the Grace Smith House, a domestic violence shelter in Eastern New York. My work there was not much to boast about: some light childcare, manual labor, household chores and the like. There was one night when I was helping a new arrival get situated in her room. She had an infant daughter whom she had brought to the shelter with her. They’d escaped an unsafe home in the middle of the winter with the clothes they were wearing, a bag of diapers and not much else.

The mom had her hands full with the baby, so I was helping to get their room ready. I got pillows and bedclothes from a storage room, I put sheets on the mattress, and I was spreading out a blanket when she said something. She’d been watching me while bouncing her baby up and down, and said, “I’ve never seen a man make a bed before.” Ten years later, those words still haunt me. They still shape the way I am in the world; they still teach me what sort of husband and father I want to be.

We Unitarian Universalists find meaning in all sorts of places, not only in scripture and ancient revelation, but also in events of the present day. In order to live in a world of abundance, a world in which there is enough for us and for everyone, we not only have to believe it is possible, we also must do our part to make it so. ■

## Finding Abundance

BY HILARY LANDAU KRIVCHENIA,  
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The earth is our horn of plenty. She sends forth all manner of delicious food. She flowers and sends forth fruits and vegetables. She dances wheat into the wind, sprouts and bathes rice, and draws corn toward the sky. Season to season the earth provides.

From ancient time human beings have held harvest celebrations to show appreciation for the abundance of the earth. Sometimes our celebrations have been more propitiatory in character—trying to placate the gods so they would continue to provide. Long ago, sacrifices were made to appease the gods so life would return to the soil and abundance be restored.

I expect we want to think of ourselves as having moved far beyond such primitive ideas of appeasement and sacrifice. But I'm not so sure. For millennia abundance, or the lack of it, was simply taken for granted. It was the mark of a relatively solid and unchangeable social station or caste—perhaps preordained in an earlier life, certainly inherited from one's parents, given to the first born male, and possibly assigned by the gods or by God.

This idea has evolved over time, particularly as the system of inherited class began to break down a few centuries ago. As that happened, the idea of abundance changed—but ever so slightly—to mean that if you had wealth, enough to eat, a good place to live, etc., it meant that somehow you deserved it, you were entitled to it. You'd found favor in the eyes of God. And those who did not have abundance—well, they had just not found, earned, nor deserved that favor.

The nineteenth century saw a new form of the idea of deserving favor—or

entitlement. It was most clearly articulated by churchman and lecturer Russell Conwell, the founder of Temple University. Although he began as a Baptist preacher, he developed a theology of wealth and preached it around the country. Conwell is best known for his “Acres of Diamonds” speech, which he gave repeatedly. I will quote from it here because I found it so clarifying:

*I say that you ought to get rich, and it is our duty to get rich.... The men who get rich may be the most honest men you find in the community.... 98 out of 100 of the rich men of America are honest. That is why they are rich. That is why they carry on great enterprises and find plenty of people to work with them....*

*Money is power, and you ought to be reasonably ambitious to have it. You ought because you can do more good with it than you could without it.... If you can honestly attain unto riches...it is our Christian and godly duty to do so.... While we should sympathize with God's poor—that is, those who cannot help themselves—let us remember that there is not a poor person in the United States who was not made poor by his own shortcomings.... It is all wrong to be poor, anyhow.”*

Conwell believed that abundance was a sign of virtue, and he has been followed by new generations of similar preachers, touting varieties of the same teaching—that faith brings abundance and poverty is a sign of failure.

It's the power of positive thinking on steroids. On the Reverend Creflo Dollar's website it says: “We are firm believers that the precise understanding of God's Word is the gateway to change in people's lives. From finances to walking in divine health; Creflo Dollar Ministries is committed to equipping people all over the world with the knowledge and wisdom needed to make

decisions that will positively impact their futures.”

Paul Yonggi Cho, minister of the world's largest church in South Korea, has what he calls the “Law of Incubation.” He says, “First make a clear-cut goal, then draw a mental picture to visualize success. Then incubate it into reality, and finally speak it into existence through the creative power of the spoken word.”

Joel Osteen, pastor of the 16,000-seat Lakewood Church in Houston preaches: “God wants you to live an over-coming life of victory. He doesn't want you to barely get by. He's called *El Shaddai*, “the God of more than enough.”

Now, I know that *El Shaddai* actually means Lord Almighty—as in overcoming or victory. If you accept what Joel Osteen is saying it's unsettling, because the overcoming is a military victory—a battle in which one's foes are utterly destroyed. And I have to say that while there are many kinds of God in which I cannot believe, that one's at the top of my list—the powerful destroyer who uses infinite might to crush adversaries into dust.

And what does that mean when it comes to the receiving of abundance? Does it mean we only have enough when everyone around us has been ground to dust?

All these abundance or prosperity preachers teach that money is not the important thing, though. The important thing is faith, and if you don't have faith, you can't have the abundance. If you don't have the abundance, you just didn't have the faith. Simple as that. So the wealthiest one percent must be the most faithful, the ones God has chosen for God's greatest blessings. And those who starve, those who are hungry on city streets or in Sudan, they are just the less faithful.

I believe that there is great abundance on this earth. I believe that there is plenty to go around, and no one needs to



starve. But I'm also sure there is no mathematics that will allow such plenty to flow if the bulk of the world's abundance is held and controlled by a few people.

It's both bad math and bad faith. And I notice that society around us is suffering from this poor equation. There have been times when people have overcome the prejudice of this figuring—times when poverty or scarcity has not been seen as an immutable fact, a personal failure, or as an obstacle to be overcome by individual grit and determination.

We've enjoyed those times of relative generosity and compassion because of the rise of a powerful and dangerous idea. It is a political idea, but it arose from a deeply known and held religious value: that each person is created in the image of the divine and not, therefore, born in sin and evil, but rather equally endowed by their creator with certain unalienable rights.

### Famine is created by our fears and hungers.

That idea caught fire—birthed a nation—and has been in struggle with the preachers of individual abundance ever since. This belief created a very new view of the world: that every person is entitled to basic thriving because there is, in fact, enough to go around if only we live in a social contract that can ensure cooperation over control and generosity over greed.

Where does greed come from? It is not born in evil, but rather in want and fear, in haunting insecurity. It's born in hunger and spiritual famine, because we are trained, taught, primed to internalize that equation of "good equals wealth" from the time we are small. After all, Santa has a list and he's checking it twice and you are only going to get stuff if you were nice. So, if you don't get lots of stuff, well, it's pretty clear you aren't nice.

There was a movie in 2009 called *The Box*, with a haunting premise. A box appears on the doorstep of a couple who learn that if they open it they will be given a million dollars, but someone, somewhere, will die. Now, most of us have problems that could be well solved by a million dollars. It was a test of greed—a test in just the way that greed happens. Not because someone is cackling at someone else's bad fortune, but rather because they are certain that the bad fortune will be far away from them. They might feel bad, but not so bad that they'll keep the lid on the box.

Famine is created by our fears and hungers. It's created because someone dams a river, closes a border, starts a war, prices a medication sky high, prevents a crop from being grown or sold. It happens because two nations can't share the same land or water rights. Famine is created because in one place people have a bottomless hunger and to feed it, they are willing to let others suffer or die. Perhaps it's easier to live with that cost because somewhere, not too long ago, our ancestors were making living sacrifices on the altars of gods they hoped to buy favor with.

But the earth is our horn of plenty, and our real abundance—abundance which allows the plenty to flow, which allows us each to feel safe in our homes, which creates good neighbors, whether next door or around the world—that abundance will only come when we recognize the long-lost child, the orphaned brother or sister who is every person. That abundance will only come when the emptiness inside is filled by the knowledge that we are enough, that each one of us is precious and worthy and deserving and connected.

That abundance will only find us when we understand that none of us is fully nourished until all of us are nourished. And then none shall know famine and all shall be full—in body, in heart, in mind and in spirit. ■



## The Answer is "Everything"

BY ROBIN LANDERMAN ZUCKER,  
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I haven't always been abundance-minded or able to see or believe in life's silver lining. When I was 29, my

vivacious, lovely mother, Flora, died at age 55. It was heartbreaking and confusing to watch her suffer and deteriorate from an inoperable brain tumor. She had been looking forward to her own third act: becoming an interior decorator and adoring future grandchildren. Since then, I've come to realize how ill equipped I was, in so many ways, to cope with the magnitude of this loss.

Since then, despite the many exceptional older women role models I've encountered, I realize that the one I lacked was the very one that could enable me to envision my own third act—my own mother. Over the years, no matter how I tried, I simply could not picture myself as a woman beyond age 55. A friend suggested I get an age progression photo of myself done. I passed on that, although it was tempting to catch a glimpse of myself, silver-haired and etched with wisdom and a life fully lived, posing with grandchildren at high school graduations.

Then something stunning happened. I was enjoying a glass of wine after conducting a wedding in November 2010. It was the last wedding in a long season of weddings during which I had eaten my weight in hors d'oeuvres. My voice was raggedy and hoarse as I shared my weariness with an older guest seated at my table.

She looked at me warmly with sparkling blue eyes and said, "You need to take care of yourself, Reverend. You are going to live a long time."

I was dumbstruck. “How do you know that?” I asked quietly. “Well, because I do,” she replied, her graceful smile framed by shiny silver hair. “Take care of yourself; you’re going to live a long time.”

This encounter caused me to examine how little confidence I had in my longevity, and how that had affected my daily wrestling match with life. I thought about how controlling I could be, how frantic I felt at times to get things accomplished, to see my children through milestones, to sustain normalcy. I would hold my breath waiting for results from annual physicals and mammograms. At times, I worried that I was cursed and destined to repeat my mother’s karma. I had trouble planning for old age because I didn’t have any tangible sense of it. Some days it felt like I was just tearing pages off a calendar in some doomsday countdown.

And I grew tired of this cycle. I made the decision to set a new course and embark on a new road, and I moved home to Pittsburgh. Then I turned 55, the same age as my mother when she passed. How could this be? It made no sense. I feel so young, so full of life. How could she have died at this age? I went to visit her grave on my birthday to read the inscription we had chosen: “Beautiful and Noble Spirit.” And the tragedy of her early demise took on a new dimension.

Later that day, I was out walking my dog, feeling a familiar malaise again—the old fear, the belief that the future had no shape and was too flimsy to grasp. And a question came to me, somewhat self-pitying, given all my relative blessings: *What can I look forward to?* The toxic chatterbox in my head was stirring up trouble again. *Nothing*, she sneered. The loop began: *I’m not partnered; I’m not sure what will happen in my ministry or career. Really, what can I look forward to? Nothing.*

As I ambled along Mifflin Ave, crocuses were popping up through the spring soil, and a different voice (perhaps the voice of the wise wedding guest or my mother) broke through the gremlin’s drone and said softly, *Everything, Robin. You can look forward to everything, if you choose to. Looking forward is a choice. Being willing to look forward to everything, come what may, is a decision that is open to you now. The answer is “Everything.”*

The answer is “Everything.”



The CLF exists through the abundance and generosity of its community. Some give with their time, some with their presence, and some with money—and we are thankful for every gift! For those who can give abundantly, please make a contribution of \$100 (more if you can and less if you can’t) by visiting [www.clfuu.org/give](http://www.clfuu.org/give) or call 1-800-231-3027 and help Carry the Flame a little further. ■

## Be a Stream, Not a Swamp

BY MEG BARNHOUSE, SENIOR MINISTER, FIRST UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF AUSTIN, TEXAS

I invite myself to grow my sense of abundance in these ways:

1. Remind myself to bless other people, even if it’s only by saying “I like your laugh,” or “It’s good to see you this morning.” Blessing can be asking a question about the other person’s life or family, and then listening with full attention to the answer.
2. Serve people, especially people I don’t know. Make some food for them, serve at a soup kitchen, lobby for legislation that will make soup kitchens less necessary, learn the names of the children in my congregation.
3. My spirit deepens into abundance when I practice gratitude. For the food I eat, for the beauty around me, for conversations and encouragement, for the things on my body that still work well, for hot water that comes right out of a tap in the wall, for family and love, for a car that runs, for the chickens in the yard, for the congregation I serve, for the feel of wind and water. For the bravery I see every day, for kindness and unexpected good, I am grateful. When I remember to be.
4. I grow spiritually by giving, even when I don’t have that much stored up. One writer, Victor M. Parachin, put it this way:

*Be a stream, not a swamp. Remember, it is the mountain stream that carries fresh, life-giving water because it flows out. However, the swamp is stagnant. A swamp collects and retains water that comes its way. Don’t be the kind of person who seeks to accumulate much before allowing a little to flow through.*

When I own things I don’t use—clothes, furniture, even books—spiritual teachers will say that those things don’t belong to me. I need to let them go find their rightful owners.

When I lose track of a sense of “enough-ness,” it becomes a sickness of the spirit, and I start feeling stagnant, anxious and swampy. I heal my spirit by finding abundance in what is already there, and by keeping it flowing like a stream.





## From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY  
SENIOR MINISTER,  
CHURCH OF THE  
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

The story is told of Mulla Nasrudin, the Sufi wise fool. A rich man came to see him and said, “Nasrudin, if only you would learn to flatter the emperor and be subservient as I do, you would not have to live on chickpeas and bread.” The Mulla countered, “If only you would learn to live on chickpeas and bread, as I do, you would not have to flatter and live subservient to the emperor.”

Clearly, Nasrudin and the wealthy man have different understandings of what it means to live an abundant life. It is tempting for those of us who are economically comfortable to romanticize Nasrudin’s sense of abundance, and to dismiss the rich man’s. Yet, if I am honest, I live somewhere in between the two.

Sometimes I look back on “the good old days” when I paid bills month-to-month in my collective household, biked across town because I didn’t have bus fare, worked for minimum wage and only part-time at that, went without healthcare. There was always plenty of time to hang out with friends, do political work, bake bread, sing and dance. And yet, that isn’t the life I ultimately chose. I have opted for a work-centered, home-owning, middle-class life with comforts and luxuries—vacations, a reliable car, meals in restaurants.

I know people who live with much more than I do, and people who live with much less. And what I have observed is that the sense of abundance that people live with is not always directly correlated with what people have, but more with how they feel about it. I was stunned a while ago

when someone I know made an off-hand remark about my being “rich.” I questioned her and said I was confident her household made significantly more than mine. When we compared numbers, I was right. Her income was almost twice what mine is.

Why, I asked her, did she think I had more? “Because,” she said, “I am always worrying about money, and you never seem to.” And I realized that she was right. Not worrying about money is, indeed, tremendous wealth.

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**Striving to live debt-free means that each day we care as much as possible for the business which is ours to care for, so that tomorrow we don’t carry still more of a burden.**

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When J.K. Rowling went from welfare mother to millionaire with her first Harry Potter book, a reporter asked her what she was most excited to buy. She responded that the reporter didn’t understand at all what it was like to be poor. What was best about being rich wasn’t thinking about treats to buy; it was the privilege of not thinking about money at all!

I worked with a teacher named Ruth Hayden—check out her excellent books—about money and planning for retirement. One statement that Ruth made really stayed with me. Her definition of debt is “anything that you pay today for yesterday’s living.” This definition goes far beyond bills racked up on credit cards or student loans, although they are included. It extends to all of the things we have to take care of today because we didn’t take care of them yesterday. This might include too much stuff in our houses, appliances in need of repair, rotting teeth, extra weight on our bodies, damaged relationships. Hayden encourages people

to get rid of all of these kinds of debt so that we can truly live in the present.

Of course, many of us inherit debts at birth and build them during our lifetimes in ways that we have no control over. We were born into an alcoholic family, where a relationship of trust and honesty is impossible, and the lies built up. We were born into poverty, and learned to worry about money when we are far too young to be able to earn or save any. We were born into a society which has historically disrespected our race, or gender, or physical ability, and we must live with that historic and present day marginalization, even as we try to be full participants in the world.

Any theory of getting out of debt which does not respect the real differences between the kinds of debt that people inherit borders, I believe, on cruelty. And yet, even amid this mess of inequality in wealth, love, and respect, people still find peace of mind—abundance—in a variety of ways. The choice to live as debt-free as possible is an admirable one for all of us. Ridding ourselves of past debts is our best shot at experiencing abundance, day to day.

Striving to live debt-free means that each day we care as much as possible for the business which is ours to care for, so that tomorrow we don’t carry still more of a burden. Of course we’re human, and we do it imperfectly. But each day, we do what we can to stay even with ourselves, whatever that looks like in our world. We do our best to offer what we have to help others attain a similar place of abundance. Only when we have the trust and generosity to give to others and know we’re still going to be okay, will we know true abundance. ■





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## REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP



What gives you a sense of abundance—a feeling that you have plenty, that you are satisfied, that there is enough to go around? I have to say that I get a certain sense of abundance from having paid my bills, and from having leftovers in the refrigerator, and from having a full tank of gas in my car. And I get a wonderful feeling of abundance when we have a good, soaking rain, and I know that the garden has been thoroughly watered.

Somehow, a sense of abundance has to do with a feeling of security, of knowing that there is enough. We feel safe in the presence of abundance, able to let go of some of our worries.

Where it gets tricky is that as often as not the things that make us feel safe are exactly the opposite of what will help us to experience abundance. When we avoid trying something new and challenging, we generally feel safer than if we branch out.

Staying home and watching TV feels a lot more secure than going out to try salsa dancing. Eating at a chain restaurant tends to feel much safer than going to a place where you can't read the menu. Talking only to people you know at a gathering is a lot more secure than going out of your way to introduce yourself to someone new, especially if that someone new looks or sounds different than the people you most often hang out with.

But that kind of security comes from a place of fear, not abundance. Those kinds of fears—of not looking right or sounding right or knowing the right moves—are inevitable. Nobody likes feeling ignorant or out of place. But when you choose the security that comes with sticking only with what you know, the walls of your little room can start to feel awfully close,

and it's hard to stretch into a feeling of abundance.

You might also think that the best way to feel secure, that you have enough, would be to hang on to what you've got so that you don't have to worry about going without. But it turns out that what provides people with a genuine sense of abundance is, in fact, *giving things away*. This is scientific knowledge, with lots of experiments to back it up. Most people think that winning the lottery and having all kinds of money to buy the things they want will make them happy. But it turns out that people who do that tend to spend even more money than they have, and end up more broke and less happy.

Michael Norton, a social science researcher, discusses this in a talk called "How to Buy Happiness." He and his colleagues did a bunch of experiments in various countries, with various people and amounts of money. Some folks got money that they were instructed to spend on themselves, and others got money they were to spend on someone else. That was all the direction the people got. And the experimenters had the participants fill out a survey about their happiness level before and afterward.

It turns out that those who spent money on themselves were neither happier nor less happy than before they got the money. Nothing happened to their sense of abundance one way or the other. But the people who spent money on others—whether they were in Canada or Uganda, whether they bought a present for their mother or helped a neighbor whose child had malaria—the people who gave their money away became happier.

It seems odd, in a way. When you buy something for yourself you have more than you did before. You have a pair of earrings or a dessert that wasn't there before. When you buy something for another person, what do you get? Well, it turns out, quite a lot.

The Buddhist monk Thanissaro Bikkhu writes in an essay entitled "Generosity First":

*When you give, you put yourself in a position of wealth. The gift is proof that you have more than enough. At the same time it gives you a sense of your worth as a person. You're able to help other people. The act of giving also creates a sense of spaciousness in the mind, because the world we live in is created by our actions, and the act of giving creates a spacious world: a world where generosity is an operating principle, a world where people have more than enough, enough to share.*

"A sense of spaciousness in the mind... A spacious world...where people have more than enough." That's a pretty good definition of abundance. When we step outside the boundaries of our own fears, when we give out of a conviction that there is enough to share, then we live in the spacious world of abundance.



Abundance is not wealth. It isn't even having the bills paid, gas in the car or leftovers in the refrigerator—although those things are pretty nice. Abundance is knowing that there is, by definition, enough soup in the pot to invite someone in for dinner, enough time to attend patiently to a child with a project or a friend who needs a listening ear, enough space in the mind to entertain ideas that come from an unexpected source.

Abundance is a world of spaciousness where we are all invited to dwell. ■



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## Raspberry

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING,  
CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Almost October, and there it was,  
draped over the fence,  
ripe as July, and as seductive—  
a stranger's bit of paradise.  
It wasn't mine. Perhaps  
I should have left it there,  
flashing like a cardinal  
in the autumn light.  
But, still, the world offers itself so lavishly, as if  
it will not be refused.

Sometimes I call this "grace."  
Sometimes I simply taste it  
as a perfect raspberry, out of season,  
savored seed by seed,  
Persephone's fruit.



*From Bread and Other Miracles, poetry by Lynn Ungar, published in 2012, and available at [www.lynnungar.com](http://www.lynnungar.com) or through Amazon or Barnes and Noble online.*