



Quest

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Just don't give up what you're trying to do.
Where there is love and inspiration, I don't
think you can go wrong.

• Ella Fitzgerald •

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Human Possibilities

BY GARY, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN NORTH CAROLINA

Working at Greensboro Health Care Center, a nursing home, was a rewarding experience for me in many ways. Not the least of these was meeting David. David came to work at the home after I had been there only a short time.

Possessed of a quiet countenance and mild demeanor, David worked as a custodian. He treated every person, without regard for race or age or resident or staff, with dignity and respect.

David was a nature lover, and often took his lunch outside, where I would find him reading Thoreau. I would frequently lunch there myself, simply to have an excuse to join him and listen to his wisdom on the beauty of God's gifts to be found in nature. Our friendship grew, but still remained a casual work-related one, so I was quite surprised when one day in late January of 1983 David asked me to join him for breakfast on the first of February at the downtown Woolworth's lunch counter. Although I'm a history buff, I must sadly confess that the date and occasion of our breakfast didn't register in my mind as significant. That would change forever.

You can imagine my shock when I walked into the Woolworth's on February 1st to find the lunch counter packed, and reporters and camera operators from all the national television networks focusing in on David and three other African-American gentlemen. *What in the world...?* I asked myself. David caught my eye, smiled, and motioned me through the throng of on-lookers and media to take a stool beside him.

"David," I whispered, "What is all this about?"

"Gary, I wanted you to join me for an anniversary breakfast."

"Anniversary? Whose anniversary?" I asked.

"Today is the 23rd anniversary of the Woolworth sit-ins," David replied.

"You mean...you?" I asked in awe.

David just shyly smiled and nodded. I quickly learned that David, the same man who would take the time out of his busy day to read to an elderly nursing home resident, was David Richmond, one of the four students from North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University in Greensboro who, on February 1st, 1960, demanded equal service at Woolworths. The icy winds that swept down North Elm St. in downtown Greensboro were second only to the icy reception that David Richmond and his fellow students received at the Woolworth's lunch counter. Taking stools at the counter, they endured fierce stares from bankers, clerks and lawyers having lunch.

David said, "Sure we were afraid. We were four scared college kids challenging the status quo. Separate but equal was being defied. Jim Crow, nearly one hundred years after our emancipation, was on his deathbed. We were four very frightened young men, but our quest for recognition as equals allowed me and my fellow students to overcome that fear. We were not alone. The spirit of our fathers—their bondage, their blood, their tears and sweat from which this republic was built; their sacrifice made both at home and on the battlefields overseas—their courage was in us."

There were only four, but soon there would be ten, then 50. The numbers were growing daily that would merge into one voice, one message, one song: equality.

David Richmond passed away in 1991. His friendship, guidance and belief in equality of all people will forever remain a part of my heart, mind and soul. His quiet wisdom, thoughtful perspective, rare insight and deep understanding of the human condition is one I shall always miss.

Although I was just a baby during the turmoil of the 1960s Civil Rights movement, I can well recall the hope in the words, songs and speeches of the era's heroes. David Richmond was such a hero, who held a vision of the possibility of justice for all. ■

The Realm of Possibility

BY MEGAN LLOYD JOINER, COMPASSION CENTERED SPIRITUAL HEALTH FELLOW, EMORY UNIVERSITY, AND COMMUNITY MINISTER, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST CONGREGATION OF ATLANTA, GEORGIA

In Lewis Carroll's *Alice Through the Looking Glass*, Alice is talking with the White Queen, who lives in a backwards world where effects happen before their cause. This is massively confusing to Alice, who begins to cry. The queen asks how old Alice is and she responds that she is seven and a half. The queen shares that she is 101 years old, plus five months and one day. (But who's counting?).

Alice can't believe the Queen's age and they have an exchange about what is possible and what is impossible:

Alice laugh[s]. "There's no use trying," she [says] "one can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," [says] the Queen. "When I was your age, I always did it for half-an-hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

Six impossible things before breakfast.

This is the title businesswoman Anne Halsall chose for her 2017 article on entrepreneurship and uncertainty that appeared on medium.com. She writes: "Entrepreneurs have a unique relationship with reality. Entrepreneurship is defined by risk. Founders are risk-takers who put their financial security, their careers, and their reputations on the line in pursuit of something as insubstantial as an idea."

She tells the story of being approached by a man looking to recruit her as a web developer for his start-up in 2008. He had this crazy idea that he could create a website where people would offer rooms in their homes for rent for a night or a week or a month.

Halsall thought he was nuts: "Who would pay to stay on someone else's couch? Who wants to give strangers access to their home?" she thought. She sent back a note saying thank you very much, but she was happy at her current job.

Ten years later, Airbnb was valued at \$31 billion. Halsall writes:

Most entrepreneurship, and certainly the case of Airbnb, involves true uncertainty. While many successful businesspeople in organizations of all sizes are good risk-bearers, what is unique to entrepreneurs is their ability to be uncertainty-bearers.... In short, they believe impossible things—that other people don't.

When was the last time you believed something impossible? Was it before breakfast? Or long ago? Life has a way of beating out of us the ability to believe or even imagine the impossible. At seven and a half, Alice is already out of practice. But what would it look like to regain this skill?

Unitarian Universalists have long prided ourselves as a people who believe in scientific fact. Our tradition has been significantly influenced by the Humanist Movement, which was instituted in the 1930s and 40s by men one might call "religious entrepreneurs." They imagined a new way of being religious that offered much to our understanding of who we are as Unitarian Universalists.

The Humanist Manifesto, written in 1933, includes an introduction and fifteen statements, outlining the Humanist point of view. I am especially interested in the eleventh statement and its impact on Unitarian Universalist thought and culture.

The eleventh statement of the Humanist Manifesto reads: *Man will learn to face the crises of life in terms of his knowledge of their naturalness and probability. Reasonable and manly attitudes will be fostered by education and supported by custom. We assume that humanism will take the path of social and mental hygiene and discourage sentimental and unreal hopes and wishful thinking.*

Ah ha. I think we may have stumbled upon something here. Something that led to our being out of practice imagining the impossible. Our spiritual forbearers—the religious entrepreneurs of the mid-twentieth century—actively discouraged it.

To imagine the impossible would have been to be “sentimental” and have “unreal hopes.”

Their view was presented as counter cultural to what they saw as the dangers of belief in the supernatural, in religious stories that denied reality. Instead, people should, they believed, “learn to face the crises of life” in terms of their “knowledge of their naturalness and probability,” and so be “reasonable and manly.”

While I agree that religion must adapt and change to meet the needs of the age, I think that perhaps in trying to meet the needs of *their* age, our forbearers swung the pendulum so far in the opposite direction that we forgot that science itself requires imagination and thinking beyond what we already know.

Imagination moves us from the realm of the known to the realm of the possible. Or the not-yet-possible. Or the seemingly impossible which could yet become real. ■

Living As If

BY NELL NEWTON, MINISTER, AMARILLO UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST FELLOWSHIP, TEXAS

Back when I was still new to Texas I met up with black eyed peas for the first time. I was not impressed. Despite the seasonings, to my Upper Midwestern palate they tasted like dirt. So I avoided black eyed peas for several years, until I was talking with a friend from Alabama and the subject of the peas came up. I probably wrinkled my nose and said “I don’t get what the fuss is all about. They taste like mud.” My friend tipped her head and said “Well, that’s part of their charm.” Hmmmm... Once I realized that it was part of their *charm*, I tried them again, but this time approached them *as if* that muddy taste might be charming—and within a few more tries, I was hooked. Now, I might love a red bean or a butter bean a bit more, but I have truly found the muddy charm of a black eye pea.

Living *as if* flies against strict rationality that tells you to deal with only and exactly *what is*, and encourages you to consider *what might be*. I consider it a way to break up my certainty and remain flexible in this world.

Consider something that is uncomfortable, annoying, muddy-tasting, or flat-out ominous, and go exploring into how you can engage or respond to it differently. In psychotherapy, this practice is called “reframing.” Cognitive reframing consists of identifying and then displacing certain thoughts with ideas or thoughts that are more positive.

It’s a useful way of reducing the power that fears have over us. Examine your thoughts and see if you can shift them in a less fearful, more affirming direction. Dreading an upcoming conversation? Think about how it might go well, how you will probably learn something that you didn’t know before, about who you want to be after the conversation. And then go have that conversation *as if* all of the positive things are possible. It might still be difficult, but you will have more control over how you respond to and interpret the outcome.

What about an impending snow storm? What if it gets icy? What if, while going out to pick up the newspaper, I slip on the ice and bust my backside? Yes, that is possible. But, instead, I can reframe my anticipation of the cold weather differently. If it gets icy I can stop to marvel at the ice patterns on my windows and notice how the sunlight is broken into a million shimmering rainbows on the grass in my front lawn. Perhaps then I will walk *as if* this world is filled with beauty instead of danger. I might also just wait for the snow to melt and read the news online, or take a cue from the weather and just not pay attention to the news for a day.

What might this mean in terms of our interactions with one another? Do you find yourself disappointed by other people on a daily basis?

How would you go about your chores and errands *as if* every person you will meet today has a gift—including you? What would be different if you acted *as if* each person matters—even a person who is really different from you? What might be different in your interactions with that person? Can you still see a spark of the divine in them, or a gift, or their simple desire to be a good person?

If your life was made difficult by another person, consider living *as if* that person had been trying to do their best. Most people are. They might have harmed you and made a wreck of things, but unless they were seriously unwell, they probably thought they were doing the best thing. It might take some visits with a counselor and some serious reframing work, but in time the pain can be eased.

Here's another way I practice living *as if*: When we do some of our Tai Chi forms, we move in a way that imitates animals and elements of nature. We imitate birds and snakes and tigers. We create waves of water, grow like trees, rise up like mountains, and blow like the wind. I know that I am not a tree, an ocean, or a snake, but in moving *as if* I were, I come to understand them better. By drawing the shape of branches and leaves, or moving my arms like wings, I have more awareness of what makes a tree beautiful and what makes a bird powerful.

What would be different if you lived *as if* animals have feelings and important concerns? Would you have to adjust how you interpret their behaviors and your own? Would you eat them differently?

How would you conduct yourself, living *as if* your life were an ongoing process of discovery?

What might happen if you carried on *as if* there were a Great Mother who was with you during the awful moments? A love that abides with you and laughs at you and nudges you to be your best you?

What would be different if you prayed *as if* prayers you utter were heard by the universe and manifested as change within you and ultimately out into the world?

What might happen if you went about *as if* the world wanted you, was expecting you? Would you show up and participate more fully? Could you dance more freely and say “yes” more sincerely when a flower blooms at your feet?

I would suggest that all these are possibilities. It's worth a try. ■

Possibility in an Age of Ecological Despair

BY **HEATHER CONCANNON**, MINISTER OF FAITH FORMATION, UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST AREA CHURCH, SHERBORN, MASSACHUSETTS

In February of 2015 I went to the Unitarian Universalist Minister's Association Institute for Excellence in Ministry, and I had the opportunity to spend a week in a workshop with activist, eco-philosopher, writer, and spiritual elder Joanna Macy.

Joanna is well-known in spiritual and ecological activism circles. Her work focuses on Work that Reconnects, naming ways that we have been disconnected and how that feeds despair and apathy, and working to build community and connection in response to the reality of ecological devastation and destruction.

We know that our world is facing a climate crisis. And there is much that could be said about the science, the statistics and the rising temperatures and the extreme weather events and the NASA reports and parts per million. I'm not here to talk about any of that. My own eyes start to glaze over at the numbers, and when I zoom out, I just feel my own helplessness and overwhelm welling up inside me until I want to shut it all out and push it away, pretending I never heard any of it.

So here was Joanna Macy, 84-year-old spiritual elder, grounded in the Buddhist tradition, brilliant and effusive and leading this workshop alongside the young activists of Movement Generation, an environmental justice organization led by low income young people of color committed to a just transition away from profit and pollution and toward healthy, resilient and life-affirming local economies.

Throughout the workshop, Joanna kept saying "What a wonderful time to be alive!" And I found myself thinking "Yeah, right, Joanna, have you read the news lately?"

Joanna had us begin in her four-step process of the work that reconnects, which begins with gratitude. And let me tell you, I wasn't feeling too much of that, so I thought it was a particularly annoying place to start. Mostly, what I was feeling was anger.

That anger was primarily directed at my parents' and grandparents' generations. The generations immediately preceding me had not left things in better condition than they had found it. I felt a sort of "What on earth are we supposed to do with all this mess?!"

So gratitude wasn't quite happening for me yet.

Then Joanna asked us to honor our pain for the world—and that I could do. Pain at the ways we see violence and oppression destroy families and communities, pain at the ways that we see suffering all around us, pain for the ways we are so disconnected from one another, from our natural world, from God, from our own deepest desires.

And then, Joanna announced that we were going to time travel—we were going to talk to a descendent from seven generations into the future—which is estimated to be about 200 years. She assigned half of us to be present day beings, our own selves (I was in this group) and the other half of us would be seventh generation beings—humans from around the year 2215. She then facilitated a conversation with imaginary ancestors and descendants, talking together about this time we live in.

We present-day ancestors began. The future beings—our imaginary descendants, asked us a series of questions about the time we, all of us, live in here and now. The questions were along the lines of “ancestor, I’ve heard stories about the critical time you live in—how much of a crisis your world was in. What was it like for you to live with that knowledge every day?” and “You must have felt confused and lonely at the beginning. How did you get started in helping our world to heal?” and “You must have felt scared and discouraged throughout it. Where did you find the strength to continue?”

Those of us embodying the role as present-day beings each answered these questions, and then we got to hear from these pretend future beings, reflecting back what they had heard about these hard times we live in.

This was when my moment of personal transformation happened. Because in my answering of these questions, I felt defensive, like it was me, my generation, young adults who won’t be young adults forever, trying to offer an explanation for the world we might leave to the future beings. And yet all of these people in the workshop—the ones roleplaying our descendants, who in reality were older than me—were part of a generation of people I had just hours before felt that flare of anger toward. And then, all of a sudden, I had this rush of compassion, a flood of transformative understanding and patience and deep knowledge of the critical questions the next generation might hurl toward mine.

My point is this: none of us alone created our climate crisis, and in part it was created by a very short view of time—a view that expects immediate profit or loss, a view that can’t fully comprehend the consequences of our choices beyond our own lifetimes. And it wasn’t until I was invited, albeit skeptically at first, to literally converse with our descendants that I had an emotional connection to the future that allowed my moral imagination to take root.

We need a moral imagination of the possibilities we hold if we are going to stop ourselves from exporting our problems to the future. We need this sense of deep time when we think about problems that span across generations, and when we are making choices that will affect future generations.

In this, there is cause for hope. Joanna Macy again: “Passive hope is about waiting for external agencies to bring about what we desire. Active hope is about becoming active participants in what we hope for. Active hope is a practice...it is something we do, rather than have.” Joanna makes very clear that active hope does not require optimism, but rather a clarity about the outcome we would like to see, letting our intentions and our values, rather than our calculations of likely success, be our guide. Active hope cannot be discovered in an armchair or without risk. In active hope, we choose our response and act on that choice. In active hope we not only envision new possibilities, we create them for ourselves and for generations to come. ■

Facing the Impossible

BY TROY, CLF MEMBER INCARCERATED IN OHIO

What could a convict have to say about possibilities? At a time before prison, I would have thought *Not very much*. Then, there I was, no longer free, in jail, asking myself: *How could this happen? How is this possible? Who takes the time to consider such a thing, especially before the fact?*

On the other hand, what are the chances of simply having a negative thought—and acting on it? Well, there I was, one of many behind those walls, enclosed, confined.

Possibilities are essentially pathways, alternative spaces, but jail is, by design, restriction and stagnation. In such a place I was surrounded by others who had exercised bad thoughts followed by bad actions. This kind of environment is, on the surface, full of hostility and wickedness, trickling falls of futility and hopelessness flooding in like bad waters, pooling up bit by bit, rising.

Prison brings physical harm, but also psychological damage. Consider the favored prison wisdom phrase: “It is what it is.”

Think about that string of words. What do they convey? I have always cringed at its sentiment, considered it unhelpful at best and unwise at worst. It implies that there are no alternatives, and its essence is surrender.

No alternatives? This could not be so. I needed options, second chances. I heard that arrogant phrase of so-called wisdom, with its absolute conviction, over and over again, and watched as others lived by it. Try and understand the context of such a mindset in the prison environment: *What’s done is done. My limits are what they are. My reality is what it is.*

No, no, no, I thought. That is the wrong way to view our situation. The mantra stank of defeat, and defeat means that it’s over and can’t be undone. There was a feeling of being lost, with no sense of direction or even destination. I kept replaying the past in my head, wondering. Things had appeared so set in place, so inevitable. Refusing to give in to the flow of my surroundings, refusing to filter life through a layer of impossibilities, I had to admit to myself that the path taken—the one that led to prison—was not the only option I had. Wrong thought and wrong action on my part had kept me on a single course. I had been my own worst enemy. I was following poor directions, and could not afford to continue.

Okay. So in the past I had had options, but didn’t heed them and wound up here, in prison. What now? Inside, dealing with the rising swells of obstacles, what remained? At first it seemed that the answer was bleak. I struggled as waves of stress and doubt trapped me, threatening to drown me.

I was ready for anything, and without realizing it, I had found a life preserver—only it didn’t look like one, at least not at first. Help came as soon as pen met paper. When I came across an address, any place offering resources to the incarcerated, I responded. I wrote letter after letter. Using the written word, I extended my consciousness beyond the perils of prison, seeking reprieve.

Merriam-Webster’s thesaurus lists several words as related to or synonyms for possibility. These words were reflected in my actions: My thoughts were *potentiality*. Paper and pen, stamps and envelopes, were *attainable*. Writing and corresponding were *practicable*. Fortunately, too, I had *available* family and friends who supported me. Soon I had several correspondences. And momentum.

From the seclusion of my bunk I could very easily have stared at the fuzzy ceiling, raised a white flag and given up. Instead, I learned from my past, acknowledged my terrible choices, maintained right thought during tough times, and discovered that possibilities could still happen. Writing became an opportunity for me, a way of having control and exercising better principles, like empathy and sharing and being proactive. This is a new journey I look forward to, but is it an easier trek now? No. I see it this way: the journey will always have its difficulties. Had I focused my

outlook on a limiting philosophy, gotten lured in, I could easily have been hooked and sunk by its impossible weight.

Possibilities are hope and hope is possibilities. Sometimes those are closer than we realize. Mine was right under my nose. In most cases it was cheap, if not free, and became easier to find and more rewarding with each new word. It is what it can be—if we are willing to believe. Don't give up. Keep searching. Keep trying. Keep the hope alive and keep your outlook open because the possibilities are out there, even in the toughest of circumstances. ■

From Your Lead Ministry Team

BY **AISHA HAUSER**, LEAD MINISTRY TEAM, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

The November issue of *Quest* will be completed and mailed long before we know the outcome of the most important election of our lifetimes. It is hard for me to write about possibilities in this context. It is August as I write this, and COVID is continuing to wreak havoc, the uprising centering around the state-sanctioned violence against Black and Brown people continues with no sign of abating, and of course there is the ever-present danger of the effects of climate change. It almost seems a forgotten afterthought on some days. “Oh yeah, climate change,” I think every now and then.

One of the ways I keep from plunging headfirst into despair is through reading. I gain strength and inspiration during these times from Black activists, and literature by Black authors. One of my favorites is Octavia Butler. Butler. One of the best science fiction writers who has ever lived, she wrote Afro-futurism and books that center Black female protagonists. The book that is most often cited as prescient of modern events in the United States is her *Parable of the Sower*. In it, the United States is a failed state that is being run by corporations and there are fights over water. The main character, Lauren, is an 18-year-old Black woman who leads a group of survivors north in search of a place to call home that has water and relative safety. Through the book, Butler offers ways to think about how to navigate horror by building community and by caring for our earth. It is through community and working together that humanity has any hope of surviving and thriving.

Possibilities are limited by our imaginations and by systems that seek to oppress some and privilege others. I imagine and hope for the possibility of communal care and a world where we don't put people in cages, where we practice transformative justice and don't leave anyone behind. To those reading this who are part of our Worthy Now Prison Ministry, know that you are affirmed in the fullness of who you are and how you show up in the world. You are not forgotten. ■

Autumn Leaves for Shannon

BY **MICHAEL TINO**, LEAD MINISTRY TEAM, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

My friend Shannon was one of a kind. She had a huge heart, full of love and loyalty to those of us in her chosen family. Shannon believed in the power of kindness, and, though her snarky streak was strong and deep, she practiced kindness as she preached it. Fiercely and consistently. Shannon made everyone she loved believe that great—and even magical—things were possible for them.

When Shannon moved to Florida, she told me that the thing she missed the most was the blaze of color in autumn. Leaves don't change in Tampa—it's green all year there. And so, I decided I needed to bring her the possibility of fall in Florida.

I began an annual tradition of collecting colorful leaves and mailing her a large box of them. Wherever I went through the fall, I'd pick the very prettiest leaves up from the ground and carefully stow them away until I had enough to send Shannon. It did her heart good to know that she could count on receiving the box that meant I had paid attention when she told me of her heartache.

For a while, this became a ministry of mine: the ministry of autumn possibility. I've sent boxes of bright autumn leaves to far-flung friends, making fall possible in San Diego and Austin. I've helped homesick interns and recently relocated friends. It has been fun.

When Shannon died in October of 2018, I had already collected leaves for her—bright, colorful maple leaves from the Adirondack Mountains. And as I grieved the loss of my friend, I had this bag of red, orange, and yellow leaves, quickly drying out and turning to dust. So, mixed with the tears of sadness and anger, I returned those leaves to the Earth.

We gather in religious community in part to bear witness to each other's lives. That sacred witness we offer one another gives us room for memories, for stories, for retelling the reasons we are who we are today. We share moments of kindness and transformation, examples of times when our lives were touched by others, so that we can hold those gifts close to us.

As we bear witness to one another in the fullness of our being, we make new things possible. Love. Justice. Magic. Maybe even fall in Florida. ■

Nominating Committee Seeks Leaders

FROM THE CLF NOMINATING COMMITTEE: AISHA ANSANO, CATHY CHANG, JORDINN NELSON LONG, DIANA SMITH

The CLF's Nominating Committee seeks members to run for positions beginning **June 2021**:

- Board of Directors—three for 3-year terms
- Nominating Committee—one for a 3-year term

Board members focus on mission, set policy and approve the budget. The Board meets in person twice annually and periodically by video calls. Nominating Committee members put forth nominations for the Board.

For more information, visit questformeaning.org/clfuu/about/. You may nominate yourself or another CLF member for any of these positions. Please contact the Nominating Committee at nominating@clfuu.org or the CLF office at [617-948-6150](tel:617-948-6150) by **January 15, 2021**.

REsources for Living

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

I like to think of our theme of Possibilities in terms of walking on a winding path through the woods. There are hills and valleys, twists and turns, and you never know when you might come upon a beautiful vista or the call of an unknown bird. There are endless delights, just waiting to be discovered.

What I prefer not to think about is that there are, of course, also endless pitfalls. There is always the possibility that what waits around the corner is a rattlesnake, or a rock where you will trip and fall, or a nest of angry hornets. Possibility doesn't really imply anything about good or bad, welcome or unwelcome. It just means that we don't know what we're going to get.

Which can be deeply unsettling. When we don't know what's going to happen, it's very hard to know how to behave, what to do. If the possibilities in front of us are beautiful and exciting, well, then we should just keep marching on to discover what's up ahead. But what if there are unknown dangers? What do we do now? Go forward? Turn back? Look for another route?

I learned a distinction the other day which I found helpful, which was the difference between fear and anxiety. Fear is a response to something in the environment which you perceive as dangerous. We are likely to feel fear if, on our hike, we suddenly come upon a bear in the middle of the path. Anxiety is what you experience when you are worried about something that *might* be in the environment. If you are out hiking, and you are worried that there *could* be a bear around every corner or behind every bush, that is anxiety.

Anxiety is a response to a continued awareness of those negative possibilities. It's an extremely uncomfortable, and potentially disabling state to be in. Some people, for reasons of experience and/or brain chemistry struggle with anxiety much of their lives. For others, it's an experience of the moment, before an important test or a challenging adventure.

But in the midst of a pandemic, it's pretty much unavoidable. There is something life-threatening that is lurking, unseen, around us. People with no signs of illness can spread the disease. Surfaces we touch can look clean but not be safe. It is always potentially there, and we must take steps to protect ourselves and those we love. It is also always potentially *not* there. And we want to be able to live our lives to the fullest, to be in contact with people in all the ways that bring joy and meaning to our lives, as well as having to serve basic needs like making an income.

So how are we to live in the midst of this pervasive, unavoidable, totally justified anxiety? Some people respond by simply denying that the danger is there. If you don't imagine the danger, you don't feel the anxiety. Of course, then you also don't take steps to protect yourself and others, so that route around anxiety can be extremely hazardous.

Other people resolve the anxiety by being as cautious as possible, avoiding all situations in which they could come near others, disinfecting groceries and mail, staying inside. Of course, many people don't have access to even the basics needed to be safe, or are stuck in situations that are both egregiously unsafe and beyond any possibility for them to control.

There isn't a right answer—there are a vast range of factors that affect what are reasonable choices for different people in different circumstances. It's complicated.

Which is where being a Unitarian Universalist comes in handy. Because we are used to the answer “it’s complicated.” Do you believe in God? It’s complicated. What does it mean for a minister to be ordained, and what is their source of authority? It’s complicated. Are UUs Christian? It’s complicated. We are a faith tradition that doesn’t try to relieve anxiety by providing simple answers. We believe in the importance of science and rationality *and* in the power of myth and imagination. We believe in the importance of the individual and their rights *and* in the many complex ways we are beholden to the web of all life. It’s complicated.

I don’t have a simple solution to dealing with anxiety in a dangerous world, or a one-size-fits-all answer as to how to be both safe and connected in a world where so many of the things that I love best, like singing and dancing in community, turn out to be high risk behaviors. We all have to do our best to keep up to date on the best of what science has to tell us in the moment and match that with our personal circumstances and the needs of those around us.

But I do believe that the habit of mind that understands—even enjoys—the fact that life is complicated is key to thriving in a world full of so many possibilities, both delightful and dangerous. We don’t know what will happen. We never did. But we are on a journey that is full of beauty as well as hazard. It is good to be on the path together. ■

The possibilities of what the CLF might offer the world are endless—and have never been more essential. What makes those possibilities real is your support. Please give as you are able in the enclosed envelope or at clfu.org/give

The End

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

Perhaps you’ve held this image
in your head since you were young—
the meteor blazing toward earth,
the seismic shock of impact,
a lethal rain of molten rock
falling from the sky, followed by
months or years of dusk and winter.
Dinosaurs—gone. Lush jungles—ash.
Teeming seas—empty. Billions of years
of evolution wiped from the earth.

Only, of course, not. After all,
a paltry 65 million years later,
here we are. I don’t know
what kinds of small and scuttling creatures
found a way to make it through.
Nor do I know how. All I know is that
there was an explosion of new life
the likes of which the world had never seen.
Evolution is the predicate of death.
The sentence is not complete.
The end of the world as you know it
is not the end of the world.

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