

It's about Balance
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Call to worship

Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship." Worship is about giving great respect for something beyond ourselves. In this season of Earth's equinox, there are worthy lessons to be learned. Like the seasons, we also change and are challenged to maintain our own sustainability. Albert Schweitzer: At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person, each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us. In this way, we are sustained through our faith community."¹

Sermon: It's about Balance

Our renowned 19th century Unitarian minister and lecturer, Ralph Waldo Emerson said, "The happiest man is he who learns from nature the lesson of worship." In this season of Earth's equinox, there are worthy lessons to be learned. Like the seasons, we also change and are challenged to maintain our own sustainability. Emerson elaborates on this idea: "What the natural world does by instinct, human beings must do consciously. But humans hesitate. Therefore we must have trust in the self, our inner core, and we must have courage."² How often have we stifled our thoughts and feelings and failed to heed the promptings of our hearts?

In Emerson's universe, human beings have a special destiny; namely, "to lead things from disorder into order. Every person has a purpose, a mission, or a vocation in life, something he or she is uniquely qualified to do. At the same time, we each possess an unlimited potential to accomplish it."³ These are hopeful words Emerson is giving us.

He goes on, "Only in the instinct of the lower animals, we find the suggestion of a method. The squirrel hoards nuts, and the bee gathers honey, without knowing what they do, and they are thus provided for without selfishness or disgrace."⁴ In our children's story,⁵ the mice, by instinct, were gathering the food they needed for winter's darkness, all except Frederick, who was criticized mightily. He had made a different choice. In the end, the community was fed both by the food gathered, and by the memories and inspiration gathered. Together, they maintained the sustainability of their community. Emerson reminds us, that what animals do by instinct, human beings must do consciously.

Just the other day, I received a notice about a conference being held at Seattle University: the title was "working collaboratively for sustainability." It is a business conference. I believe this headline meets the desires of a faith community...ours. We work collaboratively to sustain each other. There are times to give, times to receive. We keep each other balanced and sustained through shared gifts and collaboration!!

¹ Singing the Living tradition, the Unitarian Universalist Association, #447

² Andrews, Barry M., Emerson as Spiritual Guide. Skinner House books, 2003, p.11.

³ Andrews, p. 16

⁴ Andrews, p. 18

⁵ Lionni, Leo, Frederick.

It's about Balance

What does it mean to have balance in one's life?

By this I mean, what elements of my life should I be thinking about? Such as, what is out of balance? Do I feel some sense of disequilibrium? If so, how do I get myself balanced again? One meaning of equilibrium is "a situation in which opposing forces or factors balance each other out and stability is attained." How can I bring the disorders of my life into order?

"the happiest man is he who learns from nature! " This weekend I am aware of the spring equinox.

This is the time when the **tilt** of the Earth's axis is inclined neither away from nor towards the Sun, the Sun being vertically above a point on the Equator. On one specific day of an Equinox, the centre of the Sun spends roughly an equal amount of time above and below the horizon at every location on the Earth, night and day being of roughly the same length. The exact time of equinox this year was March 20 at 11:44 AM. I wonder about the many ways that other events on the earth were equal, at the same time.

Did you know that the Jewish Passover is determined by the vernal equinox? It always falls on the full moon following the first New Moon after the Northern Hemisphere Vernal Equinox. Also, the Christian churches calculate Easter as the first Sunday after the first Full Moon on or after the March Equinox.

The importance of the equinox is reflected in the Babylonian tradition also. (-300 BC) "The most important festival in the Babylonian calendar was the beginning of the New Year, which occurred at the spring equinox. This was called the *akitu*.⁶ The *akitu* ceremony, enacted the yearly return to chaos followed by a new creation, the ceremony recognized the Bio cosmic rhythms, the system of periodic purifications, such as purges, fasting, which resulted in the periodic regeneration of life."

I have to ask myself, what needs to be purged in my life? What is it time to let go of, in order to get my life back on balance?

I am a saver. Is that a good thing? A bad thing? Am I saving too much stuff? Is my inclination sustainable? This reminds me of a recent story in my life: My daughter was married just a few weeks ago and in the planning stages she said to me, "I would really like to wear some jewelry that is yours. It would make me feel close to you." WOW, what a beautiful invitation. So we sat down and looked through the jewelry I thought appropriate for a wedding. The piece that was just perfect to go with her wedding dress was a crystal necklace and earrings that had belonged to my mother. I was so glad I had saved this jewelry. As I looked at the jewelry, I realized I had never seen my mother wear this necklace. And I myself had never worn it and yet I had saved it for many years. This act of saving was a link between my mother and my daughter. We modernized the earrings for the wedding. The necklace and earrings glistened in the sun all morning and afternoon as she moved through her wedding day. So, now, I think that saving is a good thing!

On the other hand, on a different occasion when our grandchildren were coming for a visit, I was looking for some bubble wands. We have a closet in the patio where we keep things for outdoor fun. I found the bubble wands; and I also found the down hill

⁶ Heinberg, Richard, Celebrate the solstice, Quest Books, 1993. P52

skis that haven't been used for ten years. I called to my husband; "Are you going to be using these skis any time soon?" "I don't think so." Together, we went through the closet, cleaned out all sorts of things we would never use again. A few things were good enough to take to Goodwill; some things went into the garbage. I think sorting through closets and throwing out what is no longer useful is a very hard job. But to keep piling more things into a closet that is already full is not sustainable. The clutter alone keeps me from finding what does have value. It felt so good to get rid of old stuff. We were both excited to find what still had potential for fun!! Saving in this instance was out of balance. Purging was a way to find balance, sustainability and rejuvenation.

I think there was a method to what happened. I value sustaining my connection to my mother, through some of her things. This created a reason to keep something for a long time. In the second, there was no value in keeping the old skis and other stuff in that closet. So to bring order out of disorder, I benefited from getting rid of stuff.

It's about Balance

What does it mean for me to have balance in my life?

Is it all about stuff? Or are there other elements of my life I want to think about? The Rev. Dr. Douglas E. Wadkins, current minister in Bellingham. Presented a similar thought at a Winter Eliot, a few years ago.⁷ He called it "Seasons of the Soul: finding Balance, finding your way"

"Perhaps as old as human awareness is the perception of the cycles in human life. Much like the seasons we observe in nature, we continue to change. Some of these places within us are joyful and some are painful, but each serves some purpose on our journey. If we think of these 'familiar places,' these seasons of the soul as being a natural part of living a meaningful life; and believe that there is something to be gained from each season of our life, then perhaps it can make it easier to travel our journey with grace." Being alone, being in nature, seems to be the method some people have for figuring out where the disequilibrium is and therefore what is needed to regain balance and sustainability. I do believe one must have a way to assess, or weigh the choices we make daily about our own lives.

I came across an essay by Wendell Berry that got me thinking. It comes from his book of essays, *What Are People for?*⁸ The essay that got my attention was titled, "Why I am not going to buy a computer" which was first published in 1987. He begins, "As a writer I work with a pencil and a piece of paper. My wife types my work on a Royal standard typewriter bought new in 1956 and is as good now as it was then. As she types, she sees things that are wrong and marks them with small checks in the margins.

I don't see that computers are bringing us one step closer to anything that matters to me: peace, economic justice, ecological health, political honesty, family and community stability, good work. What would a computer cost me? The cost is not just monetary. If I buy the new technology, must I then replace my old technology? Which is not only my royal standard typewriter, but my wife, my critic, my closest reader, my fellow worker. Furthermore, I disbelieve the assertion that I or anybody else could write better or more easily with a computer than with a pencil.

⁷ UU winter Eliot, Seabeck conference center, Dec. 2003-January 2004

⁸ The Sun magazine, March 2009, p. 12

To make myself as plain as I can, I should give my standards for technological innovation in my own work:

1. The new tool should be cheaper than the one it replaces.
2. It should be at least as small in scale as the one it replaces.
3. It should use less energy than the one it replaces, because I hope to be less hooked to energy corporations.
4. It should be purchasable and repairable as near to home as possible.
5. It should not replace or disrupt anything good that already exists, and this includes family and community relationships.”

What I love about this essay is he has standards. I am not convinced about the merits of computer usage necessarily. But I admire that he has thought enough about his life, when to make changes, when things need to be more in balance, through the development of his own values. He asks, how am I living my life as compared to what I value most? Peace, economic justice, good work, family and community stability. What are my reasons for making a change in my life? I need to look at my values first!! What values sustain me?

Personally, I am sustained by the values I have embraced by becoming a Unitarian Universalist. I need to be a UU. The living tradition we share draws from many sources, one of which is “direct experience of that *transcending* mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;”

Another value I depend on is “to draw on spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.”⁹

As a congregation, we already have standards to guide us. We already have values that we can use to measure our own sustainability, as individuals and as community. I believe when we begin with our values, it is easier to have the courage to take the next step. We need our conscious self to make choices about how to live a life that is balanced; that is sustainable.

There is so much to keep in balance, in order for our lives to be sustained. Perhaps we need to balance more as the gyroscope does, considering many dimensions, rather than the simple carpenter’s scale, which measures only two dimensions at once.

I like what Galileo said, “the sun, with all those planets revolving around it and dependent upon it, can still ripen a bunch of grapes as if it had nothing else in the Universe to do.” This sounds like balance to me.

⁹ Singing the Living tradition, the Unitarian Universalist Association, UU covenants, listed in the preface.