



Soul Matters

What does it mean to be
a people of MYSTERY?

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Calendar Connections

Click on the name on each event for more information or inspiration.

Interfaith:

- [Advent](#) (Christian) Dec. 2 -24 (more [here](#) and [here](#))
- [Chalica](#) (UU) Dec. 3 - Dec. 9 (more [here](#))
- [Bodhi Day](#) (Buddha's Enlightenment) - Dec. 8
- [Hanukkah](#) (Jewish) - Dec. 2-10 (more [here](#) and [here](#))
- [Yule](#), Solstice (Pagan/Wiccan) - Dec. 21
- Christmas Eve - Dec. 24 (Sunday)
- Christmas Day - Dec. 25 (Monday)
- [Holy Innocents Day](#) (Christian) - Dec. 28
- [Watch Night](#)/Freedom's Eve (Christian) - Dec. 31
- [Kwanzaa](#) - Dec. 26 - Jan. 1 (more [here](#) and [here](#))

National & Cultural:

- [Drunk](#) and [Drugged](#) Driving Prevention Month
- [Seasonal Depression](#) Awareness Month
- [World AIDS Day](#) - Dec. 1
- [Rosa Parks](#) Arrested - Dec. 1 (1955)
- International Day of [Persons with Disabilities](#) - Dec. 3
- [Human Rights Day](#) - Dec 10th
- Anniversary of [Sandy Hook](#) Shootings - Dec 14
- [Montgomery's buses](#) are desegregated - Dec. 21 (1956)
- [Boxing Day](#) (Canada) Dec. 26 (more [here](#))

For Fun and On the Fringe:

- [Nobel Prize](#) Day - Dec 10
- How [the Grinch](#) Stole Christmas shown for first time - Dec 18, 1966
- [Festivus](#) for [the rest of us](#) – Dec 23
- Copyright registration of Star Trek [theme song](#) - Dec 27, 1966
 - Star Trek is credited with the first interracial kiss on prime-time television in the US and the first African American actor in a main character on prime time

Chalice Lightings & Opening Words

Let us Open to the Mystery

Rev. Karen G. Johnston

Life is series and circles of transitions, some known, some mysterious. Transitions are like doorways. When we open a door, we think we know what we will find on the other side, but we can never be sure. So, as we gather together today for worship, let us open to the mystery, the mystery, the riddle and the mystery.
(meant to be paired with hymn from Singing the Journey)

In This Spirit of Searching

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

Out of depths unknown
the spark of life ignites
and we are born
we enter a world, a universe
not of our making
our lives unfold
in mystery and wonder
questions abound
for which there are no definite answers
and so
we gather in community
to seek in one another
assurance
and recognition
compassion
and strength
we gather in community
to be reminded
of what is most ultimate
and what is most sacred
in this spirit of searching
and of reverence
let us worship together this morning

Open to Unexpected Answers

Julianne Lepp

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/open-unexpected-answers>

We seek our place in the world
and the answers to our hearts' deep questions.
As we seek, may our hearts be open to unexpected answers.
May the light of our chalice remind us that this is a community of warmth,
of wisdom and welcoming of multiple truths.

Embrace The Night

Jennifer Leota Gray

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/embrace-night>

Universal mystery,
Guide us away from the desire to
Shine light in all the corners.
Teach us to embrace the night,
For without the darkness,
We never see the stars.

Many of the past generation and many of today... (adapted)

Sophia Lyon Fahs

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/chalice-lighting/56417.shtml>

Many of the past generation and many of today have found three abiding values:
the quiet meditation on life,
the reaching out toward the universal and the infinite,
and the courageous facing of one's profoundest wishes.
With these as our calling, let us sense and share the glory and mystery of everyday things.
Let us look with sympathy upon humanity's age-long dilemmas.
Let no questions be taboo.

These Bodies, These Blessings

Erika A. Hewitt

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/47861.shtml>

"Holy One, You knit me together in my mother's womb."

This is the voice of Psalm 139: "[I] was not hidden from you when I was made in secret, intricately woven in the depths of the earth."

Let us remember and celebrate, this morning,
that each of our bodies was woven together in the depths of mystery:
cells multiplying, tissue taking form, organs taking up their function,
all under the silky cover of skin.
Let us gather in reverence for the gift of these bodies,
whatever their ages, their shapes, their abilities,
and may we know them to be channels of the world coming alive through us.

These bodies, these blessings, bring the world to life
through seeing, taste, hearing, scent, and touch.
May we bring to our intricately woven bodies a sense of sacred caretaking.
In doing so, let us also be grateful for the embrace of the Holy:
the Presence that creates and sustains life,
the Mystery that knit together each of our bodies,
and the force of Love that celebrates our desires.

Meditations, Prayers & Blessings

Forged in the Fire of Our Coming Together

Gretchen Haley

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/opening/forged-fire-coming-together>

What's going to happen?
Will everything be ok?
What can I do?
In these days we find ourselves, too often,
Stuck with these questions on repeat:
What's going to happen? / Will everything be ok? /What can I do?

We grasp at signs and markers, articles of news and analysis,
Facebook memes and forwarded emails
As if the new zodiac
Capable of forecasting all that life may yet bring our way
As if we could prepare
As if life had ever made any promises of making sense, or turning out the way we'd thought
As if we are not also actors in this still unfolding story

For this hour we gather
To surrender to the mystery
To release ourselves from the needing to know
The yearning to have it all already figured out
And also the burden of believing we either have all the control, or none

Here in our song and our silence
Our stories and our sharing
We make space for a new breath, a new healing, a new possibility
To take root
That is courage
forged in the fire of our coming together
and felt in the spirit that comes alive in this act of faith:
that we believe still, a new world is possible
That we are creating it, already, here, and now

Mysterious Giver of Being and Freedom

George Kimmich Beach

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/giver-of-being>

Giver of being and freedom, thou who touches our lives in unforeseen ways, who unsettles our ease and upsets our self-satisfactions:

We wait in these moments of stillness to let the hidden processes of healing and growth do their silent work within us, and to let the quiet work of reconciliation be renewed among us.

Because we know that the ultimate issues of life—healing and growth, reconciliation and renewal—cannot be forced, neither by excess of activity nor by tumult of words, we seek out this stillness. We seek the quiet—the resting place—of our restless hearts.

Because we live with mystery, we trust that which is deeper than we know—which touches our hearts—which steadies us and rekindles our spirits—which, finally, in faith, may be named the love that has laid hold upon us, and will not let us go.

Amen.

Into Greater Union with the Mysterious

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

Spirit of Life
Mother of All
Mystery Beyond Our Understanding

Here we are
living breathing creatures
with minds that wonder
and hearts that feel awe
we face questions that we know can't be answered
and tragedies that we know can't be explained
May we find patience
in all that is unanswered
and peace in all that
will never be explained

Here we are
living breathing creatures
with open minds
and tender hearts
May hold ourselves with gentleness
with all that brings us worry
and all that makes our hearts break

May the living breathing creatures that we are
feel the breath of life
moving in us
and through all things
bringing us into greater union
with the mysterious universe of which we are a part

Blessed be.
Amen.

How Does One Address a Mystery?

Gordon B McKeeman

Full meditation found at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/mystery>

“How does one address a mystery?

Cautiously...

Reverently...

Hopefully...

Quietly...”

But what shall I say?

Anything—any anger, any hope, any fear, any joy, any request, any word that comes from the depth of being addressed to Being itself—or, perhaps, nothing, no complaint, no request, no entreaty, no thanksgiving, no praise, no blame, no pretense of knowing or of not knowing.

Simply be in the intimate presence of mystery, unashamed—unadorned—unafraid.

And at the end say—Amen.

The Imprint of Love

Laura Horton-Ludwig

Full prayer at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/prayer/imprint-love>

...light within and without,
mystery from which we have all emerged,
within which we live and die...

At times we may fear that love will not be strong enough.

At times we may question whether love really is at the root of all things...

This is the mystery within which we live and die.

These are the questions that haunt our days and nights.

And yet we are not without hope.

Our struggles and our questions testify to our longing...

Readings

Falling into the Sky (Based on a Poem by Zen Monk Muso Soseki)

David Breeden

<http://bluelyrareview.com/tag/falling-into-the-sky/>

Years end ways
I dug and dug
Deeper into the earth
Looking for blue heaven
Choking always
On piles of dust rising
Then once
At midnight
I slipped
And fell into the sky

Of Course

Janet Hutchinson

Full poem found at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/course>

Look how big the sky is...
Little speck, that's you;
laughable speck, that's me...
Our truth is just a pinprick
in mystery's velvet curtain...

Knowledge as an Island in a Sea of Mystery

Chet Raymo, professor of physics and astronomy, and former science writer for the Boston Globe

From *Honey from Stone: A Naturalist's Search for God*

Every accumulation of knowledge is full of rabbit holes. Enter a rabbit hole – quantum physics, say – and that hole has its own rabbit holes leading to yet other exotic terrains. One doesn't have to be a Lord Kelvin or an Einstein to find a place to enter. A leaf of grass will provide ingress to Infinity. The ancients believed that the stars were pinholes in the dome of the sky, through which shone the light of an outer, more wonderful world. And it is true: Every star is a rabbit hole into another world. In the course of a lifetime of starry night I could not explore them all.

I lie on my back and the light of 10,000 stars enters my eyes. Ten thousand subtle but distinct wavelets of energy enter my eyes at slightly different angles from out of the depths of space, and by some miracle my eyes and brain sort it all out, put each star in its proper place, recognize the familiar patterns of the constellations, and open my soul to a universe whose length and breadth exceed my wildest imagining. Starlight falls upon me like a gentle rain. It blows across me like a furious wind. I am soaked and shaken.

I have a friend who speaks of knowledge as an island in a sea of mystery. Let this then, be the ground of my faith: All that we know, now and forever, all scientific knowledge that we have of this world, or ever will have, is as an island in the sea. And still the mystery surrounds us.

Robbing The Mystery of a Cloud

[Henry David Thoreau](#)

I witness a beauty in the form or coloring of the clouds which addresses itself to my imagination, for which you account scientifically to my understanding, but do not so account to my imagination. It is what it suggests and is the symbol of that I care for, and if, by any trick of science, you rob it of its symbolical-ness, you do me no service and explain nothing. I, standing twenty miles off, see a crimson cloud in the horizon. You tell me it is a mass of vapor which absorbs all other rays and reflects the red, but that is nothing to the purpose, for this red vision excites me, stirs my blood, makes my thoughts flow, and I have new and indescribable fancies, and you have not touched the secret of that influence. If there is not something mystical in your explanation, something unexplainable to the understanding, some elements of mystery, it is quite insufficient. If there is nothing in it which speaks to my imagination, what boots it? What sort of science is that which enriches the understanding, but robs the imagination?

Utterance of the Timeless Word

Angela Herrera

Full reading found at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/utterance-timeless-word>

You bring yourself before the sacred, before the holy,
before what is ultimate and bigger than your lone life...
You stand at the edge of mystery, at the edge of the deep...
Meanwhile, the armful of worries you brought to the edge of mystery
have fluttered to your feet...

Braiding Sweetgrass

Robin Wall Kimmerer, botanist, enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation,

Source: <https://whitebearunitarian.org/dreams-and-bones-04-09-17-sermon/>

[We humans] are embedded in a beautiful poem, written in the language of chemistry. The first stanza goes like this, Carbon dioxide plus water combined in the presence of light and chlorophyll in the beautiful membrane-bound machinery of life yields sugar and oxygen.

Photosynthesis, in other words, in which air, light and water are combined out of nothingness into sweet morsels of sugar – the stuff of redwoods and daffodils and corn. Straw spun to gold, water turned to wine, photosynthesis is the link between the inorganic realm and the living world, making the inanimate live. Plants give us food and breath, respiration – the source of energy that lets us farm and dance and speak. The breath of plants gives life to animals and the breath of animals gives life to plants. My breath is your breath and your breath is mine. It's the great poem of give and take, of reciprocity that animates the world. Isn't that a story worth telling? The very facts of the world are a poem. In long-ago times, it was the elders who carried sacred stories. In the twenty-first century, it is often scientists who first hear them. The stories of buffalo and salamanders belong to the land, but scientists are their translators and carry a large responsibility for conveying their stories. Science is the process of revealing the world through rational inquiry, bringing the questioner into unparalleled intimacy with the mysteries of the more-than-human world. I dream of a world guided by stories rooted in the revelations of science and framed with an indigenous worldview – stories in which matter and spirit are both given voice.

Inexplicable

Rev. Karen G. Johnston

Inexplicable.

How we rise each morning,
instead of burying our heads
under bedcovers,
sewing them shut.

Why we keep on
welcoming babies
with bone-deep joy
to this sordid world.

How we fill burlap sacks
with grit and gratitude,
our hands shredded
as we drag one over the other.

How we refuse the daily pull
towards greedy dark,
keeping at least one toe,
some of us whole torso,
in the light.

Inexplicable.

It's what makes a poem
worth writing, worth reading,
worth flooding the world
with redundant, flawed attempts
at explanation.

It's just the way it is.
There is no other way.
Stumbling every time,
practice or no.

Just part of the bargain...
the unavoidable,
intractable,
inexplicable
bargain.

In Reverence Before Intangible Things

Sophia Lyon Fahs

We gather in reverence before the wonder of life—
The wonder of this moment
The wonder of being together, so close yet so apart—
Each hidden in our own secret chamber,
Each listening, each trying to speak—

Yet none fully understanding, none fully understood.
We gather in reverence before all
intangible things—
That eyes see not, nor ears can detect— That hands can never touch
that space cannot hold,
and time cannot measure.”

Take This Sunset

Rev. A Powell Davies

Take this sunset, I said to myself. There is no soul in it. It is just something that clouds do to a source of light. And what are clouds? They are nothing but moisture suspended in the earth's atmosphere. And what is this sea that reflects the sunset? It is just a great waste of waters, bleak and desolate. Not one thing that composes this sunset is aware of the sunset. Not even the sun, for the sun is nothing but a ball of fire. And my eyes that see all this, what are they but water and dust, briefly blended for the short space of a human lifetime, so that this insignificant blob of protoplasm that I call myself may see something that isn't altogether there? But isn't it altogether there? I immediately asked myself. If I am not seeing this sunset with my eyes alone I am seeing it with a sense of wonder and joy of beauty, and the solace of it is slowly pervading me even while I stand and look. I am seeing it with what I can only call my soul. If I do not call it that, I cannot call it anything; yet there it is. I cannot define it--no, but this sunset as a thing of beauty is definitely real. Indeed, the sunset is not only in the sky; it is in my soul.

Wild Geese

Mary Oliver

Full poem found at http://www.phys.unm.edu/~tw/fas/yits/archive/oliver_wildgeese.html

“...Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting—
over and over announcing your place in the family of things.”

Days Pass When I Forget the Mystery

Denise Levertov

Days pass when I forget the mystery. Problems insoluble and problems offering their own ignored solutions jostle for my attention, they crowd its antechamber along with a host of diversions, my courtiers, wearing their colored clothes; cap and bells. And then once more the quiet mystery is present to me, the throng's clamor recedes: the mystery that there is anything, anything at all, let alone cosmos, joy, memory, everything, rather than void: and that, O Lord, Creator, Hallowed One, You still, hour by hour sustain it.

Winter Solstice

Rebecca Parker

Full poem at <https://movementfromwithin.net/winter-solstice/>

Let there be a season when holiness is heard,
and the splendor of living is revealed...
There are inexplicable mysteries.
We are not alone.
In the universe there moves a Wild One
whose gestures alter earth's axis toward love...

Music

Soul Matters Music Resources

Check out these five sources of support for music:

1. **Monthly Small Group Packet:** Our small group packets also contain music recommendations on the theme. These are intended for personal devotion and inspiration not community worship, but often the list does contain songs that can be used for worship services.
2. **UUMN (UU Musicians Network) Online Database:** The wonderful leadership of the UUMN have added our monthly themes to the UUMN music database. This provides a centralized place for Soul Matters musicians to post and share music ideas with each other. You also get to tap into the suggestions from other UU musicians from around the country. You can access the UUMN Music Database [here](#). More detail is provided on the "[music resources](#)" page in the members-only section of our Soul Matters website.
3. **Soul Matters Music Support Facebook Page:** This support page is for on-going sharing among Soul Matters musicians. Click [here](#) to go to the Facebook page.
4. **Soul Matters Worship Support Facebook Page:** This support page is for on-going sharing among worship leaders and teams. It is also a great source of music support. Click [here](#) to visit the page.
5. **Soul Matters Spotify Playlists:** We create a [Spotify](#) playlist for each month that includes a number of songs on the monthly theme. This is intended to provide inspiration for our small group participants but might be useful to musicians. Click [here](#) for links to the Spotify playlists for each month.

Suggestions from Soul Matters Music Resources Coordinator, [Sara Brandt-Doelle](#)

Hymns -Easier to Lead & Sing

- #23 Bring Many Names
- #26 Holy, Holy, Holy
- #2 Down the Ages We Have Trod
- #55 Dark of Winter
- #352 Find a Stillness
- #389 Gathered Here
- #1003 Where Do We Come From?

Recommended Choral or Vocal Pieces

- Let the Mystery Be (Iris Dement)
- Sweet Radiant Mystery Catherine Dalton - <http://www.catherinedalton.net/works/sweet-radiant-mystery>
- Victoria's setting of "O Magnum Mysterium"
- High Flight (John Turner)
- The Rainbow Connection
- "Glow," by Eric Whitacre
- Abbie Betinis's "Lumen" - <http://www.abbiebetinis.com/works/lumen.html>
- Mystery by the Indigo Girls
- I am Light India Arie

- Touched in Love - Sydney Guillaume <https://www.collavoce.com/component/zoo/item/touched-in-love-36-22021?highlight=WyJ0b3VjaGVkliwiaW4iLCJsb3ZliwibG92ZSdzliwidG91Y2hlZCBpbilsInRvdWNoZWQgaW4gbG92ZSIsImIulGxvdmUiXQ==>
- Mystery by Joshua Long - <https://soundcloud.com/joshualong6/mystery-ft-danny-g>
- Praise the Wet Snow Falling Early by Elizabeth Alexander - <https://www.seafarerpress.com/works/praise-wet-snow-falling-early>
- Kore Evohe by John Schrag (From A Solstice Ritual by Julie Middleton)
- Gustav Holst The Heart Worships - https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=v_ZapW7In7g
- Mystery (Jeremy Geffen) - JW Pepper, or Jim Scott's Earth and Spirit Songbook (Found in "In the Missa Gaia/Earth Mass (written by Jim Scott with the Paul Winter Consort) Jim wrote a choral arrangement for solo with SATB that's published by Hal Leonard Corp)
 - Worcester MU First UU Choir: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gK1gu5PK89I>
 - First Parish Lexington: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2FI2o8P32cY>
 - Eric Hansen and three Rivers Chorale: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qEXIb8mLBB0>
 - Teresa Thomsen - jazzed up version, taking some interesting liberties: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=H8ImR7OD6cE>

Stories For All Ages

The Mystic and the Scientist - The Mystery of God

In Tapestry of Faith; Spirit in Practice; Mind Practices

<https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/practice/workshop5/59475.shtml>

“One day a Religious Man approached a Mystic and asked, “Does God exist?” “Allow me to go within for an answer,” the Mystic replied.” - from the story. Invite a real scientist and mystic to speak the parts.

Theme connection: Pondering mystery helps us feel a part of something bigger than ourselves and invites us to focus on *the experience* of something greater, not arguing about what to call it.

The Messiah is One of Us

By Megan McKenna

<http://www.awakin.org/read/view.php?tid=2255>

“...they were told the mystery, the truth that their life was based upon, the source of their strength, the richness of their life together: The Messiah is one of us.” - from the story. Invite everyone to look into their neighbor’s eyes and say, “The Messiah is one of us.”

Consider the adding the song “One of Us” by Joan Osborne <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B4CRkpBGQzU>

Theme Connection: Mystery calls us to expand our view. When we expand our view of each other, we can’t help but treat each other as sacred.

Sermon Seeds

Angles, Ideas & Twists To Get Your Sermon Started!

Don't forget to explore the small group packet for additional sermon seeds. It contains quotes and poems to enhance your sermon, as well as numerous sermon angles in the questions and the spiritual exercises.

Quote: Excerpt from a sermon entitled *On the Way*

Luke Stevens Royer

<https://whitebearunitarian.org/on-the-way-03-20-16-sermon/>

My prayer is that... we focus on what this church means to us in the positive rather than how it is better than, different than, more evolved than, more intelligent than, more educated than, more justice-seeking than, someone else's faith, creed, hopes, or dreams... to remember we don't have all the answers, that our openness to mystery and questions doesn't become an absolutism of rejection of any tradition that offers something different; and that we don't assume we are the only ones who are open, loving, have questions, love mystery, or have different ideas about religion and faith and God and love and humanity...

Poem: How Does One Address a Mystery?

Gordon B McKeeman

Full piece found at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/mystery>

Offers a handful of compelling angles on the theme of mystery. Maybe a guide to a sermon series or a sermon that looks at mystery from multiple lenses...

"How does one address a mystery?

Cautiously...

Reverently...

Hopefully...

Quietly..."

Book: In the Face of Mystery: A Constructive Theology

Gordon Kaufman

https://www.amazon.com/Face-Mystery-Constructive-Theology/dp/0674445767/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1531262009&sr=8-1&keywords=in+the+face+of+mystery+by+Gordon+Kaufman

"Kaufman is also a kind of mystic. The matters with which theology deals—the purpose of human existence, the nature of ultimate reality, etc.—are unknowable mysteries. Accordingly, all of the things humans have said about such matters over the millennia are just that: human. Theology is and always has been the effort of finite human beings to find orientation and construct meaning in face of the mystery of life. "My piety toward the mystery qua mystery compels me to acknowledge that when we [theologize] we come up against the very limits of our language and our minds, we really do not know what we are saying" (IFM, xii). The failure to fess up to our agnosticism is tantamount to idolatry."

Book: When God is Gone Everything is Holy (*offers a religious naturalist perspective on mystery*)

Chet Raymo

https://www.amazon.com/When-God-Gone-Everything-Holy/dp/1933495138/ref=sr_1_1?ie=UTF8&qid=1531336800&sr=8-1&keywords=when+god+is+gone

"A "late-life credo" by renowned science writer Chet Raymo... As a scientist, Raymo holds to the skepticism that accepts only verifiable answers, but as a "religious naturalist," he never ceases his pursuit of "the beautiful and terrible mystery that soaks creation." Raymo assembles a stunning array of scientists, philosophers, mystics, and poets who help him discover "glimmers of the Absolute in every particular." Whether exploring the connection of the human body to the stars or the meaning of prayer of the heart, these challenging reflections will cause believers and agnostics alike to pause and pay attention."

Book: Effing the Ineffable (*contains readable and clear meditations on the mystery*)

Wesley Wildman

https://www.amazon.com/Effing-Ineffable-Existential-Mumblings-Language/dp/1438471238/ref=sr_1_1?s=books&ie=UTF8&qid=1531337023&sr=1-1&keywords=effing+the+ineffable

"Contains readable and clear meditations on mystery. Our species is obsessed with trying to eff the ineffable—to limn the liminal, to conceive the inconceivable, to speak the unspeakable, to say the unsayable. This obsession shoots colorful threads through the tapestry of human language, and especially religious language. The primary aim of this book is to trace some of those threads... Each chapter of the book is a self-standing philosophical essay on an existentially potent aspect of life: Dreaming, suffering, creating, slipping, balancing, eclipsing, loneliness, intensity, bliss... Most importantly, these essays show that there is room for emotion and for fun even in demanding religious philosophy."

Book: Earthy Mysticism: Spirituality for Unspiritual People

Tex Sample

https://www.amazon.com/Earthy-Mysticism-Spirituality-Unspiritual-People-ebook/dp/B00AKJYPZC/ref=sr_1_7?s=digital-text&ie=UTF8&qid=1537654076&sr=1-7&keywords=mysticism+and+spirituality

Book: Christian Mystics

Matthew Fox

"Fox laments the fact that both fundamentalists and academics seem to be blocked on the mystical spiritual path... The book contains quotations from 32 mystics (including Julian of Norwich, Dorothy Day, Thomas Merton, Thomas Berry, Bede Griffiths, Howard Thurman, Dorothee Soelle, and Oscar Romero) along with the author's commentaries on such fertile topics as the wedding of spirit and matter, the sacredness of the earth, deep ecumenism, the omnipresence of God, darkness and shadow, beauty and joy, ecological justice, creativity, meditation, awe, gratitude, letting go, healing, and celebration." -

<http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/view/20900/christian-mystics>

Video Interview: Rupert Sheldrake & Matthew Fox Discuss Mysticism

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=otxxJ7Gnpq8>

"What mysticism means to me is primarily is the experience of awe and the opening of the heart that happens from the experience of awe..."

Article: The Mystical Core of Organized Religion

David Steindl-Rast

Full article found at <https://gratefulness.org/resource/dsr-mystical-core-religion/>

Excerpt: “We’ve come to understand mysticism as the experience of communion with Ultimate Reality... The question we need to tackle is this: How does one get from mystic experience to an established religion? My one-word answer is: inevitably... One of the great surprises is that the fire of mysticism can melt even the rigor mortis of dogmatism, legalism, and ritualism. By the glance or the touch of those whose hearts are burning, doctrine, ethics, and ritual come aglow with the truth, goodness, and beauty of the original fire. The dead letter comes alive, breathing freedom...”

Reflection: Mystery is Endless Knowability

Richard Rohr

Full reflection at <https://cac.org/mystery-endless-knowability-2016-08-23/>

“Many mystics speak of the God-experience as simultaneously falling into an abyss and being grounded. This sounds like a contradiction, but in fact, when you allow yourself to fall into the abyss—into hiddenness, limitlessness, unknowability, a void without boundaries—you discover it’s somehow a rich, supportive, embracing spaciousness where you don’t have to ask (or answer) the questions of whether you’re right or wrong. You’re being held and so you do not need to try to “hold” yourself together...”

Quote: Background for the Mystery of God

Mary Anne Moore

<https://www.questformeaning.org/family-quest/big-questions-family/background-for-the-mystery-of-god/>

“Whatever concepts of God are believed, whatever myths and symbols image God, all religions include mystery as an attribute of God. It is a common belief that God is something totally other, something utterly unknowable for humans, something ineffable... The Native Americans of the Plains call God, Wakan Tanka, the Great Mysterious. The Medieval Christian mystic Meister Eckhart described God as “A mystery behind mystery, a mystery within mystery that no light has ever penetrated.” In the Hindu Bhagavad Gita, Krishna says of himself, “I am the silence of mysteries”. The Tao Te Ching says, “The unnamable is the eternally real. Naming is the origin of all particular things. Free from desire, you realize the mystery. Caught in desire you see only the manifestations. Yet mystery and manifestations arise from the same source. This source is called darkness. Darkness within darkness. The gateway to all understanding.” (translation by Stephen Mitchell) One of the ninety-nine names of God in Islam is The Hidden. Zen Buddhist koans and other exercises attempt to make an experience of the paradox and mystery possible.”

Article: Living with Uncertainty in a Certainty-Obsessed Culture

Maria Popova

Full article at <http://www.dailygood.org/2015/03/16/living-with-mystery-in-a-certainty-obsessed-culture/>

Excerpt: “Our human definition of ‘everything’ gives us, at best, a tiny penlight to help us with our wanderings,”... Carl Sagan captured this idea in his masterwork *Varieties of Scientific Experience*, where he asserted: “If we ever reach the point where we think we thoroughly understand who we are and where we came from, we will have failed.” This must be what Rilke, too, had at heart when he exhorted us to live the questions. And yet if there is one common denominator across the entire history of human culture, it is the insatiable hunger to know the unknowable — that is, to know everything, and to know it with certainty, which is itself the enemy of the human spirit...”

Quote: The Gift Of Threshold Moments

[Sam Kee](#)

The proper name for the experience of unknowing is not mysticism but wisdom. When Socrates was told that the Oracle of Delphi said he was the wisest man in Greece, he replied that it could only mean he knew what he did not know. Wisdom comes from the certain knowledge of our ignorance, and it teaches us that we dwell within a small circle of light surrounded by an immense mystery. According to tradition, the owl--- the symbol of Athena, the goddess of wisdom--- spreads its wings only with the arrival of dusk.

Quote: The Rabbi Lawrence Kushner

A mystic is anyone who has the gnawing suspicion that the apparent discord, brokenness, contradictions, and discontinuities that assault us every day might conceal a hidden unity.

Quote: Sam Harris, from Waking Up: A Guide to Spirituality Without Religion

I once spent an afternoon on the northwestern shore of the Sea of Galilee, atop the mount where Jesus is believed to have preached his famous sermon. ...As I gazed at the surrounding hills, a feeling of peace came over me. It soon grew to a blissful stillness that silenced my thoughts. In an instant the sense of being a separate self—an 'I' or 'me'—vanished. Everything was as it had been—the cloudless sky, the brown hills sloping to an inland sea...but I no longer felt separate from the scene...The experience lasted just a few seconds, but it returned many times as I looked out over the land where Jesus is believed to have walked, gathering his apostles, and worked many of his miracles.

Quote & TED Talk: Pico Iyer

The opposite of knowledge, in other words, isn't always ignorance. It can be wonder. Or mystery. Possibility. And in my life, I've found it's the things I don't know that have lifted me up and pushed me forwards, much more than the things I do know.

TED Talk: https://www.ted.com/talks/pico_ayer_the_beauty_of_what_we_ll_never_know#t-308328

Quote: Andre Malraux

The great mystery is not that we should have been thrown down here at random between the profusion of matter and that of the stars; it is that from our very prison we should draw, from our own selves, images powerful enough to deny our nothingness.

Quote: Thomas Moore

It is only through mystery and madness that the soul is revealed.

Poem: The Mystery of Meteors

Eleanor Lerman

Full poem at <https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/mystery-meteors>

"I do believe a net of glitter is above me
You would not think I still knew these things:
I get on the train, I buy the food, I sweep, discuss,
consider gloves or boots, and in the summer,
open windows, find beads to string with pearls
You would not think that I had survived
anything but the life you see me living now..."

Four voices to help UUs understand the mystery of the incarnation:

Love Made Flesh, by Brené Brown

https://www.huffingtonpost.com/travis-reed/brene-brown-love-made-fle_b_8090422.html

“The story of the Nativity of Christ is not just a lovely, starlit moment of precious magic and calm adoration. It's the story of God's subversion of the world, through no power at all except love. Read the stories (one in Matthew, one in Luke) without romanticizing and you see a story of God's vulnerable presence amidst poverty, oppression and danger. The manger is not a cute image. It's about a family that is homeless, at risk, and coping. The magi work knowingly around political and military repression. The family escapes death squads and becomes refugees. And where is God in all this? In a baby. This is the story of God's incursion into our power structures, to transform them from the inside out with nothing but radical presence and compassion. God does not act as a king or a warrior, but comes as a vulnerable, powerless child, who makes rough shepherds tender, who draws kings to worship on their knees, who threatens Herod and reorganizes society. God does not impose laws for us to follow: God gives us love to fall into.”

Rev. Steve Garnaas-Holmes

“In the Incarnation the whole human race recovers the dignity of the image of God. Henceforth, any attack even on the least of [humanity] is an attack on Christ, who took the form of [human-beings], and in his own Person restored the image of God in all that bears a human form. Through fellowship and communion with the incarnate Lord, we recover our true humanity, and at the same time we are delivered from that individualism which is the consequence of sin, and retrieve our solidarity with the whole human race. By being partakers of Christ incarnate, we are partakers in the whole humanity which he bore. We now know that we have been taken up and borne in the humanity of Jesus, and therefore that new nature we now enjoy means that we too must bear the sins and sorrows of others. The incarnate Lord makes his followers the brothers [and sisters] of all humankind.”

Dietrich Bonhoeffer

"The word became flesh, " wrote John, "and dwelt among us, full of grace and truth" (John 1:14). That is what incarnation means. It is untheological. It is unsophisticated. It is undignified. But according to Christianity, it is the way things are.

All religions and philosophies that deny the reality or the significance of the material, the fleshly, the earthbound, are themselves denied. Moses at the burning bush was told to take off his shoes because the ground on which he stood was holy ground (Exodus 3:5), and incarnation means that all ground is holy ground because God not only made it but walked on it, ate and slept and worked and died on it. If we are saved anywhere, we are saved here. And what is saved is not some diaphanous distillation of our bodies and our earth, but our bodies and our earth themselves. Jerusalem becomes the New Jerusalem coming down out of heaven like a bride adorned for her husband (Revelation 21:2). Our bodies are sown perishable and raised imperishable (1 Corinthians 15:42).

One of the blunders religious people are particularly fond of making is the attempt to be more spiritual than God.

Frederick Buechner, from Wishful Thinking

UU Connections: Mystery, UU History & UU Theology:

Reading: Selection from “The Oversoul”

Ralph Waldo Emerson from

<http://uusanmateo.org/phocadownload/mystery%20and%20wonder.2018.pdf>

Let us learn the revelation of all nature and thought:

that the Highest dwells within us,

that the sources of nature are in our own minds.

As there is no screen or ceiling between our heads and the infinite heavens, so there is no bar or wall in the soul where we, the effect, cease, and God, the cause begins.

I am constrained every moment to acknowledge a higher origin for events than the will I call mine.

There is deep power in which we exist and

whose beatitude is accessible to us.

Every moment when the individual feels invaded by it is memorable.

It comes to the lowly and simple;

it comes to whosoever will put off what is foreign and proud;

it comes as insight;

it comes as serenity and grandeur.

The soul’s health consists in the fullness of its reception.

For ever and ever the influx of this better and more universal self is new and unsearchable.

Within us is the soul of the whole,

the wise silence, the universal beauty,

to which every part and article is equally related;

the eternal One.

When it breaks through our intellect, it is genius;

when it breathes through our will, it is virtue;

when it flows through our affections, it is love.

Sermon: Transcending Mystery and Wonder

Rev. Dr. Gretchen Woods

<http://www.allsoulsindy.org/sermons/transcending-mystery-and-wonder-feb-4-2013/>

Excerpt from sermon where she explicates Emerson and religious naturalism:

“Emerson is a great leader of those who believe in the possibility of apprehending mystery and wonder through the human mind and of being part of that mystery and wonder at the same time. The recognition of divinity being both immanent (within us – though Emerson never used that terminology which we hear most often from Marcus Borg) and transcendent (beyond us) is at the heart of mystical experience. This perspective has been re-welcomed in to the arena of Unitarian Universalist thought over the past two decades, though it has always been part of our heritage. Those of us who experience wonder through nature are especially comfortable with Emerson, given his enthusiastic sense of connection with nature. Our earth-based approach to religion draws many parallels.

Emerson – and most of those who have had mystical experience – do not see a need to separate immanent from transcendent. Emerson said, “When I look at the rainbow I find myself the center of its arch. But so are you; and so is the man who sees it a mile from both of us.” (Robertson, pp. 94-95.)

I found it fascinating that Emerson was among the first to translate the Sufi poets, notably Hafez, into English. In April of 1846, he discovered Hafez through a copy of Joseph von Hammer’s *Der Diwan von Mohammed Schemsed-din Hafis*. “He soon became enthralled with the work of Hafez, the fourteenth-century Sufi master and greatest of Persian lyric poets.” (Robertson, p. 423.) “Emerson eventually filled a 250-page notebook with translations from Persian poets, mostly Hafez.” (Ibid.) p. 424.) “. . . every line of every poem

testified that the spiritual appears to us only through the senses.” (Ibid.) For Hafez and Emerson, religion is ecstatic, sensual, and filled with joy, rather than what he called the “corpse-cold Christianity” of his native New England at that time. The Sufis came to the perspective of human being as potentially immanent and transcendent long before Emerson and deeply affected his thinking about mystery and wonder...”

Book: Sources of our Faith

Kathleen Rolenz

<https://www.uuabookstore.org/Sources-of-Our-Faith-P17835.aspx>

The living tradition we share draws from many sources. This collection of inspirational readings from many cultures and times provides a felt sense of the six Sources of Unitarian Universalism. Organized by Source, and introduced with thoughtful essays from the editor, these readings are ideal for use in worship or for personal reflection. From the Qur'an to Margaret Fuller, from Rumi to Rebecca Parker, this broad range of poetry and prose will help deepen our understanding and connection to our faith.

Article: The spiritual practice of hospitality: Welcoming people to our congregations isn't a duty; it's a way to encounter the mystery and wonder of life.

David Rynick

Full article at <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/the-spiritual-practice-hospitality>

Excerpt: “we can use our practice of hospitality to encounter ourselves and our world in all their vividness and particularity: right here, right now, with this person in front of me. In a true encounter with another human being, we come face to face with the mystery of life. In some way, every other person, no matter how well we know them, will remain as mysterious to us as a country across the ocean we only read about in books... whenever we encounter another human being with respect for this essential unknown, we create the possibility for something genuinely new to emerge. In every interaction, whether it is with a stranger or our longtime partner, we can be surprised by what we have not yet seen or even imagined...”

Article: How To Know God: An Atheist Mystic Meets the Goddess of Love.

James Ishmael Ford

Full article at <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/how-know-god>

Excerpt: “Now, many years have passed, and by most understandings of the word I’m an atheist. I do not believe in a human-like consciousness that directs things. While I hear people when they say they see the divine in the beauty and mystery of the world, for me it is just beauty and mystery. Doesn’t need any projection of a human into the sky. I’m confident there is no deity that acts within history.

And. Within my experience there is something in the beauty and mystery, an experience that seems to rise naturally within our human minds, our human hearts. The best word I can find for it is love. Yes, a difficult word, with too many meanings, and not the only word possible. Buddhists tend to like the word compassion for what appears to be the same complex of human reactions to that beauty and mystery we encounter. But still, the word love is the one that seems to work best to me...”

Quote: Rev. David Bumbaugh (quoted in Essex Conversations by Tom Owen-Towle p. 204)

My faith is not rooted in knowledge, though I lust to know all that I can know; my faith is rooted in awe and wonder, in a world so mysterious that it forever escapes the net of words with which I attempt to ensnare it.

Recommended Sermons

Mysticism for the Rest of Us

Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

Text: https://docs.google.com/document/d/1MTn8fHMIpa_mMsUEK6etVwdu-ZA7mzn-6HXOSXDbJy0/edit?usp=sharing

Audio: <https://ucmvt.org/app/uploads/2016/03/mar-13-2016.mp3>

“Mystical moments, although we cannot will them to happen, are available to us all. The mystical moments I have experienced have not involved visions or voices of the divine. These instead have been moments of feeling profound spiritual wholeness, of having a felt sense of some greater truth of our union, our goodness, our connection and interdependence...”

Awestruck

Rev. Diane Rollert

<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/53a702d8e4b007c6678dc914/t/543c261ae4b0dedc21931419/1413228058208/Awestruck.pdf>

Touch Wonder

First Parish Groton, MA

<https://uugroton.org/nbu/public/sermons/2011-10-23.mp3>

Using the legacy of the UU mystical transcendentalist movement as it's guide, this sermon helps us navigate the journey of losing your sense of mystery and wonder and finding again in the miracle of here and now

Wonderfully Dark

Victoria Safford

<https://whitebearunitarian.org/wonderfully-dark-12-06-15-sermon/>

And yet and still, in summer in a grassy field, in winter in the snow, he goes outside at night lies face upward on the ground, drenched in starlight and awash in wonder, bobbing on his back in the sea of mystery, and the tiny islands of his knowledge are like pinpricks of light in the vast velvet above. They don't weigh very much, the islands of knowledge. He's like a little kid. He's like a shaman or an ancient priest. He's like any of us, if we're mindful and open and available.

Loving the Unknown

Rev. David H. Messner

https://drive.google.com/open?id=1_22mO6oMloAjiDcKqGtvOmkXf5ezKD3Y

On the mysterious power of Christmas to open us up, to... convince us that what we long for is actually possible, enable us to forget what we want and open to what we get, and embrace life as a wrapped present full of loving surprise.

When God Had a Body

Rev. Gretchen Haley

<https://revgretchenhaley.wordpress.com/2016/12/12/when-god-had-a-body/>

On the mystery of the incarnation and how it leads to the miracle of recognizing each other as divine

UU Mysticism: Experience of the Ultimate

Rev. Barbara F. Meyers

<https://mpuuc.org/mental-health-resources/mental-health-sermons/mysticism/>

Closing Words

Our unity even amidst life's discord - Rev. Joan Javier-Duval

May we embrace the mystery that surrounds us.

May we sink deep into the truth of our unity even amidst life's discord.

May we keep our hearts open to those moments of more than mortal splendor,
when there is indeed a touch of glory in just being alive.

Remembering that the universe is larger - Marjorie Newlin Leaming

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/closing/6035.shtml>

Remembering that the universe is so much larger than our ability to comprehend, let us go forth from this time together with the resolve to stop trying to reduce the incomprehensible to our own petty expectations, so that wonder—that sense of what is sacred—can find space to open up our minds and illumine our lives.

We All Emerge - Eric Williams

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/benediction/we-all-emerge>

We all emerge from

Dwell within

Are transformed by

And called back to Love.

May your mind be humbled before this Mystery.

May your heart grow hopeful by it.

May you be sustained by this Love always.

Fragments of Holiness (UU hymnal #701) - Rev. Sara York

We receive fragments of holiness, glimpses of eternity, brief moments of insight. Let us gather them up for the precious gifts that they are and, renewed by their grace, move boldly into the unknown.

Eternal Mystery - Carol Meyer

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/meditation/5858.shtml>

May we open ourselves ever more fully to that Eternal Mystery which lures us onward toward life and creativity.

May we find the courage to live our faith, to speak our truth, and to strive together for a world where freedom abounds, and justice truly does roll down like water.

May we know the fullness of love without fear, and the serenity of peace without turmoil.

May we hold one another in the deep and tender places with compassion, and may we grace one another by sharing our own vulnerabilities, being ever mindful of the divinity within that makes soulmates of us all.

The Door to God - Hafiz:

Where is the Door to God?

In the sound of a barking dog,

In the ring of a hammer,

In the drop of rain,

In the face of

Everyone I see.

[As we go today, may we all open ourselves to the many doors inviting us in. Amen.]

Opportunities For Support & Inspiration

Join the Soul Matters Worship Leader Support Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Join the Soul Matters Ministers' Support Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/719788338192570/>

Attend one of our two monthly online ministers' brainstorming groups:

First Tuesdays and First Thursdays of each month at 1pm eastern

Attend our monthly online musicians' brainstorming group:

Second Thursdays of each month at 1pm eastern

Join the Soul Matters Inspiration Facebook Page:

<https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/>

Find musical inspiration on our Soul Matters Spotify music playlists:

<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/spotify-lists.html>

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