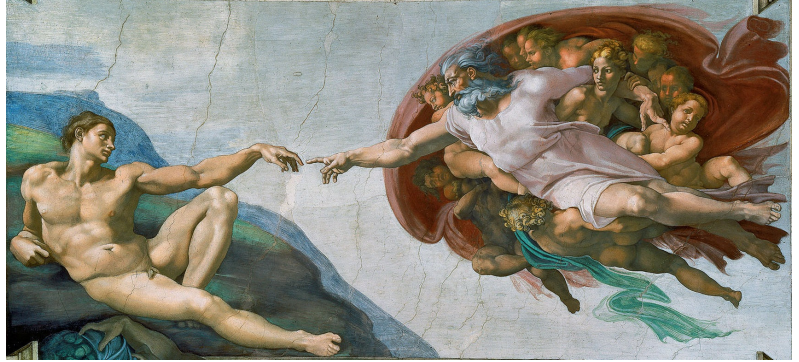


On Being Divine.

Someone says to a Unitarian Universalist, “I hear you deny the divinity of Jesus.” The UU says, “That’s not true! We don’t deny the divinity of anyone.” That barely merits a smile, but there’s more than a little truth in that answer.



What does it mean to be divine? To embody the holy? To be a “child of God”? These answers must come from you. (What? You thought we were going to answer those questions for you?) Here are some things (*included in this PDF if there is no link*) that may provide light for you to find your own way.

In Song:

“God Help the Outcasts” by Alan Menken (music) and Stephen Schwartz (lyrics; attached)
Dan’yelle Williamson: <https://youtu.be/c2rdcwm1gQo>

In Story:

Excerpts from Jennifer Brower’s sermon, “Who Knew?,” from December 2, 2007

“The Messiah Is One Of Us,” (aka “The Rabbi’s Story”)

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

“Now is the time to know that all that you do is sacred.”

—Hafiz, “Now is the Time”

“It may seem as if the mysteries of divine-human reunion erupt in our lives when, in fact, the otherness of spiritual abiding is integral to human interiority. On occasion, we turn our attention to this abiding presence and are startled. But it was always there.”

—Barbara A. Holmes, *Joy Unspeakable*

“True belonging is the spiritual practice of believing and belonging to yourself so deeply that you can share your most authentic self with the world and find sacredness in both being a part of something and standing alone in the wilderness. True belonging doesn’t require you to change who you are; it requires you to be who you are.”

—Brené Brown, *Braving the Wilderness*

“A world of subjects—divine beings honoring the divinity in the other—is surely heaven.”
—Josh Radnor, “Saluting the Divinity in You”

“The second half of life is devoted to restoring the wholeness (making holy) of life. The wholeness at the end is conscious while it was unconscious and childlike at the beginning.”
—Robert A. Johnson, *Owning Your Own Shadow*

“Divinity is fully realized humanity. It means giving up pretending to be good and instead becoming real.”
—Walter Wink, *The Human Being*

On Being Naked.

Most of us don’t want to be seen naked by anyone other than someone we’re intimate with. Call it modesty, social convention, body shame, or body dysmorphic disorder. But we cover our nakedness with more than clothes: we hide behind roles, titles, personas, words—even lies.



In Song:

“See Me, Touch Me, Feel Me” from the rock opera, *Tommy*, by *The Who*
<https://youtu.be/FFKMsz2obxI>

In Story:

“My Vacation at a Nudist Camp,” Emily Yoffe, *Slate*, Sep 8, 2010
<https://slate.com/human-interest/2010/09/my-vacation-at-a-nudist-camp.html>

“For many parents, allowing a child to run around naked at home is perfectly natural, an expression of physical freedom that represents the essence of childhood, especially in the summer. But for others, unclad bodies are an affront to civility, a source of discomfort.”
<https://www.nytimes.com/2009/07/16/garden/16nudity.html>

“But if in your fear you would seek only love’s peace and love’s pleasure, then it is better for you that you cover your nakedness and pass out of love’s threshing-floor, into the seasonless world where you shall laugh, but not all of your laughter, and weep, but not all of your tears.”
—Khalil Gibran, “On Love,” *The Prophet*

“The strongest warrior is not the one who wears layers of armor, but the one who puts down her sword and shield, takes off her armor, and opens her heart—she is the brave one.”
— Chögyam Trungpa, Naropa University

“But if in every breath / you strip naked / just like a winter / the joy of spring / will grow from within.” —Rumi

“I’m lazy and unwilling to test myself. If I concentrate on my music I’d be vulnerable and naked and expose more of my soul. I’m weak and I don’t want anyone to see it. It’s easier to be flippant than to bare your soul.”

—Paul McDermott

“It’s easier to bare your ass than it is to bare your soul.”

—François Truffaut

“I’ve seen vocalist René Marie naked three times. So have tens of thousands of others—just about anyone, I’d bet, who’s seen her perform in person. No, she doesn’t strip off her clothes. She peels away emotional defenses, social niceties, and the veneer of celebrity to expose and open her heart. Why does she do that? So she can open yours. What’s more, she has three accomplices, collectively known as *Experiment in Truth*, who are expert at picking the internal locks—John Chin (piano), Elias Bailey (bass), and Quentin Baxter (drums). So be warned: you will be moved if you attend her New Mexico Jazz Festival concert at the African American Performing Arts Center on August 5.”

—Mel Minter, *Musically Speaking*, Jul 30, 2017

<https://www.melminter.com/2017/07/30/rene-marie-gets-even-more-personal>

“Opening up, being available, and taking in makes you vulnerable, even more so than prancing around in the buff precariously balanced on seven inch spikes in a room full of horny, drunken men.”

—Summer Patton, “The Naked Truth: Stripping for Fun and Profit,” *City Paper*, May 4, 2005

“If you have never established your true identity, it is much easier to bare your bottom in bed than to bare your soul to another human being and take that person into the depths of your spirit.”

—www.grace.nb.ca/library/990530am.html (dead link)

We choose owning our stories of struggle, over hiding, over hustling, over pretending. Showing up is our power. Story is our way home. Truth is our song. We are the brave and brokenhearted. We are rising strong.

—Brene Brown, “Manifesto of the Brave and Brokenhearted,” *Rising Strong*, 2015

We can affirm that each of us is endowed with a dignity, beauty, and character whose natural expression is infinitely more interesting and engaging than any identity we might construct with clothes and cosmetics.

—Duane Elgin, *Saying Yes!*

Thinking of you music:

“Until the next Time”: We’ll meet again, don’t know where, don’t know when.

Fun version: Dropkick Murphys: https://youtu.be/-O_cOnGrpY8?t=9

Soft and serious: Johnny Cash: <https://youtu.be/KodNFsP6r88>

Music for community:

Virtual Choir: “You Will Be Found” from *Dear Evan Hansen*

<https://youtu.be/WFZmT-LRMBM>

Deep thinking music:

Natalie Gamsu: “Hot Gates”: <https://youtu.be/BqSJVYco2fo>

An incredibly compelling and important anthem written by Christopher Torr. The lyrics (at YouTube) are simple, powerful, fraught with urgency, haunting, and beautifully sung.

Music for comfort and relaxation:

Abdullah Ibrahim: “Water From An Ancient Well” <https://youtu.be/aBf7yGbxtHw>

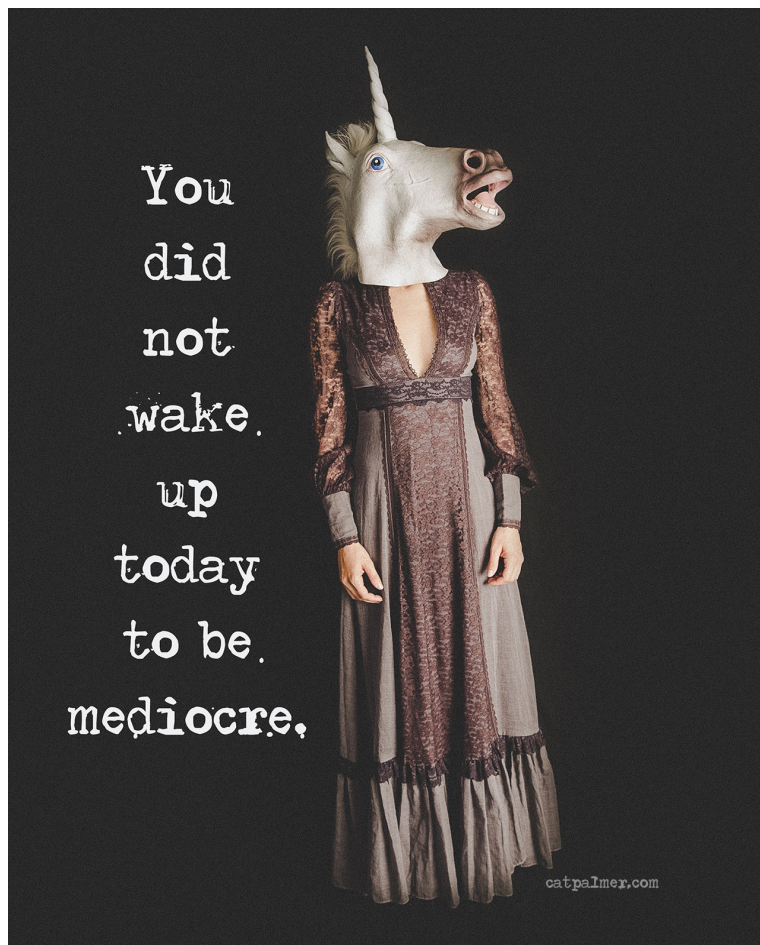
Brian Eno: “An Ending (Ascent)” <https://youtu.be/OlaTeXX3uH8>

For extended relaxing music:

WFUV’s Stress-Free Soundtrack

<https://wfuv.org/content/wfuvs-stress-free-soundtrack>

free Spotify account required (60 songs, 4:25:00)



God Help the Outcasts

from *The Hunchback of Notre Dame*

Music: Alan Menken

Lyrics: Stephen Schwartz

I don't know if You can hear me, or if You're even there
I don't know if you would listen to a gypsy's prayer
They tell me I am just an outcast, I shouldn't speak to You
Still, I see Your face and wonder: Were You once an outcast, too?

God help the outcasts, hungry from birth
Show them the mercy they don't find on Earth
The lost and forgotten, they look to You still
God help the outcasts, or nobody will

I ask for nothing, I can get by
But I know so many less lucky than I
God help the outcasts, the poor and downtrod
I thought we all were the children of God

I don't know if there's a reason
Why some are blessed, some not
Why the few You seem to favor
They fear us, flee us, try not to see us

God help the outcasts, the tattered, the torn
Seeking an answer to why they were born
Winds of misfortune have blown them about
You made the outcasts don't cast them out

The poor and unlucky, the weak and the odd
I thought we all were the children of God



Dan'yelle Williamson singing "Outcasts"

Faith

Rev. Jennifer L. Brower

Defining faith is no easy task—it is almost as tricky as defining God! And I know that some of you have found wrestling with faith to be so difficult that you have jettisoned it. Many of us have rejected faith altogether, because what we were taught doesn't make sense anymore. And so, if you count yourself among that group, today, I ask you to raise the questions again, and to consider faith anew.

One of the problems with talking about faith is that we commonly associate it with religious belief or adherence to a particular set of theological doctrines. Though faith and belief are related and do intersect, they are not synonymous.

The late Wilfred Cantwell Smith, professor of comparative religion at Harvard, makes this distinction:

*Belief arises out of the effort to translate experiences of transcendence into concepts. But one does not have faith in a concept. Faith, rather, is the relation of trust in the transcendent [or the higher commitment] about which concepts or beliefs are fashioned. Faith is a quality of human living. It is an orientation of the personality, to oneself, to one's neighbor, and to the universe; it is a total response, a way of seeing whatever one sees and handling whatever one handles; a capacity to live at more than a mundane level. It is a quiet confidence and joy which enable one to feel at home in the universe, and to find meaning in the world and in one's own life, a meaning that is profound and ultimate, and is stable no matter what may happen.**

So, from Smith's view, faith can be understood, not as an unwavering belief in a certain supernatural something, but as trust in what one has

found transcendent expressed in an attitude toward life that promotes growth and provides us with a sense of grounding.

Along these lines, Sharon Salzberg, a renowned instructor of Buddhist meditation and founder of the Insight Meditation Society of Massachusetts writes in her book, *Faith: Trusting Your Own Deepest Experience*:

Faith does not require a deity or a God, it is not a commodity we either have or don't have. Faith is an inner quality that unfolds as we learn to trust our own deepest experiences.

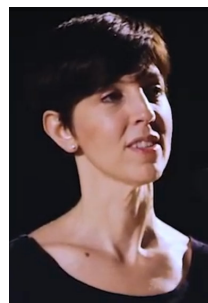
The role of "trust" in both Smith and Salzberg's definitions of faith leapt out at me.

For years, I have found encouragement in the succinct words of the late William Sloan Coffin who wrote that "faith is not belief without proof, it is trust without reservation."

For Smith, Salzberg, and Coffin, faith is an extension of trust. Faith is dependent upon our capacity to trust—to trust our own experience, the universe around us, and our understanding of the transcendent or our highest commitments.

To blend the ideas expressed by these three religious thinkers, faith is an unfolding capacity to "trust without reservation" that allows us to "feel at home in the universe, to find meaning in the world and in our own life, a meaning that is stable no matter what may happen."

* *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning*, 1981, James W. Fowler



—Rev. Jennifer L. Brower is Minister for Pastoral Care at the Unitarian Universalist Congregation at Shelter Rock. Excerpted from her sermon, "Who Knew?," delivered December 2, 2007. (Not available online. The congregation's website is www.uucsr.org.)

At some point

I believe one has to stop holding back for fear of alienating some imaginary reader or real relative or friend, and come out with personal truth. If we are to understand the human condition, and if we are to accept ourselves in all the complexity, self-doubt, extravagance of feeling, guilt, joy, the slow freeing of the self to its full capacity for action and creation, both as human being and as artist, we have to know all we can about each other, and we have to be willing to go naked.

*— May Sarton,
Journal of Solitude*

