

What does it mean to be people of **Simplicity?**

When I Am Among the Trees

When I am among the trees,
especially the willows and the honey locust,
equally the beech, the oaks and the pines,
they give off such hints of gladness.
I would almost say that they save me, and daily.
I am so distant from the hope of myself,
in which I have goodness, and discernment,
and never hurry through the world
 but walk slowly, and bow often.
Around me the trees stir in their leaves
and call out, "Stay awhile."
The light flows from their branches.
And they call again, "It's simple," they say,
"and you too have come
into the world to do this, to go easy, to be filled
with light, and to shine."

~ Mary Oliver

JOURNEYS

Theme Packet for June 2016

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

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WONDERINGS *about* SIMPLICITY

Many of us long for simplicity. But why? Why value simplicity? Perhaps we imagine more idyllic lifestyles, desks without clutter, and making the lowest possible impact on the environment. But why? I had two experiences during my recent time in Vancouver that help me to unpack this question.

First, the gathered delegates at the Canadian Unitarian Council's Annual Meeting approved a new vision for Canadian Unitarian Universalism. In its simplest version, it reads, "Our interdependence calls us to love and justice." This may not seem a big shift, but the statement's focus on interdependence as a central vision is actually something quite new.

Living a life of interdependence may go hand in hand with simplicity. If we recognize and make choices in terms of our impact on others and on the planet, we may will probably choose not to have so much, not to do so much, not to expect or demand so much.

Second, the Canadian UU ministers spent a day in a workshop focused on bi-cultural competency. The two women who brought Indigenous knowledge to us talked about a relationship with the land...which includes gratitude offered for anything taken, where only a small portion of the available resources are used, where regrowth/sustainability for the future is a highly held value. One takes only what one needs, leaving some for others and some for the earth itself, and even that with an awareness of the effect that it might have.

In a culture of excess and in an economy built on materialism, our decisions are often several levels removed from the source. It's not so obvious how much there is, where it's coming from, or who needs it. We are encouraged to buy storage systems and bins in which to keep all the 'stuff' we own, only to end up looking for additional garages and bigger closets. Buying more widgets rarely appears to affect the availability of widgets. Gas pumps are assumed to be connected to a bottomless cache of gasoline, so that one more litre or two doesn't really make a difference. We are shielded from seeing the bigger picture.

So, is there a better way? In order to choose simplicity, I believe we have to make a commitment to examining each of our choices more deeply. Perhaps we can use a 'simplicity lens' to discern how much we buy, use, and hold onto. Ask yourself: What is enough? What brings me joy? What can I let go of in order to open up space for connections and reflection? How might all life benefit if I live more simply?

I invite you to enter into these questions and reflections. Go gently and simply into summer. As Mary Oliver so eloquently says, you have come into the world to go easy, to be filled with light, and to shine.

~ Rev. Julie

sim · plic · i · ty
sim ' plisədē/
n.

1. Free of complexity: "for the sake of simplicity, this chapter will concentrate on one theory"
2. The quality or condition of being plain or natural: "the grandeur and simplicity of Roman architecture"
3. Being plain, uncomplicated, or easy to understand: "the simplicities of pastoral living" or "the simplicity of the language"

synonyms: clarity, clearness, plainness, intelligibility, comprehensible, modesty, understandable, accessibility, unadorned, sparseness, straightforward, effortless, restraint

A STORY *about* SIMPLICITY

Excess Baggage ~ Barbara Merritt <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/excess-baggage>

On our way to Maine one summer, my older son and I found ourselves following one of the most ridiculous looking cars I have ever seen. It was a sports utility vehicle, laden with all the evidence of American consumerism and conspicuous consumption. Lashed onto the top were a canoe and a kayak. Strapped onto the back bumper were four bicycles. Golf clubs, tennis rackets, and camping equipment were visible through the Jeep's back window. Every car that passed by stared in astonishment at this visible study in recreational excess.



The thing I found most remarkable about the vehicle in front of us was that we owned it. My husband and younger son were driving our Jeep up to Maine, and we followed. After staring at our car for some miles, and noticing the attention it was attracting from drivers-by, I decided that this was an auspicious moment to have a discussion with my older child about "nonmaterialism." I explained, trying to keep a straight face, that his father and I were dedicated to an ethic of simplicity, diminishing consumption, and intentional reduction in material accumulation.

My son greeted this pronouncement with hysterical laughter. Even I had to chuckle. But I was persistent, and after his raucous laughter subsided, I explained how, throughout our married life we had, both of us, consistently chosen jobs that paid less, even when we were offered positions that paid more; how we had invested our modest resources into education and travel rather than in real estate and furniture; and how we tried constantly to decrease our dependence and reliance on material wealth. Notwithstanding the visual evidence to the contrary, we were working to simplify our lifestyle.

Robert listened to everything I said, and then he replied, "I understand Mom. You and Dad are nonmaterialistic. You just aren't very good at it."

QUESTIONS *for reflection on* SIMPLICITY

- What are the simple pleasures in your life?
- Assume that busyness and complexity are results of systems and expectations that make simplicity at task too big for one person to solve. What support do you need? Who might be your teammates?
- In what ways might you be complicating your life? For example, do you read too much into things? Are you doing things that aren't necessary?
- We all relate to simplicity in a different way. What does simplicity mean for you? Against what standard are you holding simplicity?
- All of our lives include existing simplicity strategies. What 'simplicity' already exists in your life? How can you build on it?
- What do wish you could say "no" to in your life? Why haven't you? What would happen if you did?
- Has one of your treasures become a burden? Is it time to let go?
- What are the simple truths that you live by?

INSPIRATIONS *on the theme of* SIMPLICITY

Any intelligent fool can make things bigger, more complex, and more violent. It takes a touch of genius — and a lot of courage — to move in the opposite direction. ~ *E. F. Schumacher*

Simple things are always the most difficult. In actual life it requires the greatest art to be simple, and so acceptance of one's self is the essence of the moral problem and the acid test on one's whole outlook on life. ~ *Carl Jung*

Our lives are often filled with a million things to do and consume that distract us from simple living. When I pay attention and become mindful, I marvel... Consuming less and living simply are the true conditions of happiness. ~ *Barbara Ann Kipfer*

I do believe in simplicity. It is astonishing as well as sad, how many trivial affairs even the wisest thinks he must attend to in a day; how singular an affair he thinks he must omit. When the mathematician would solve a difficult problem, he first frees the equation of all encumbrances, and reduces it to its simplest terms. So simplify the problem of life, distinguish the necessary and the real. Probe the earth to see where your main roots run. ~ *Henry David Thoreau*

Simplicity means not only letting go of attachments to material goods, but also to beliefs and judgments about others, and of how I think the world should be. ~ [Brad Ogilie](#)

The art of art, the glory of expression and the sunshine of the light of letters, is simplicity. ~ *Walt Whitman*

It is easy to be heavy; hard to be light. ~ *G. K. Chesterton*

The art of simplicity is a puzzle of complexity. ~ *Douglas Horton*

The guiding motto in the life of every natural philosopher should be, seek simplicity and distrust it. ~ *Alfred North Whitehead*

"You only lose what you cling to." —
Gautama Buddha



Simplicity is not the absence of clutter, that's a consequence of simplicity. Simplicity is somehow essentially describing the purpose and place of an object and product. The absence of clutter is just a clutter-free product. That's not simple. ~ *Jonathan Ive*

A door opens in the center of our being and we seem to fall through it into immense depths

which, although they are infinite, are all accessible to us; all eternity seems to have become ours in this one placid and breathless contact. God touches us with a touch that is emptiness and empties us. God moves us with a simplicity that simplifies us. ~ *Thomas Merton*

Simplicity is making the journey of this life with just baggage enough. ~ *Charles Dudley Warner*

Simplicity is about subtracting the obvious, and adding the meaningful. ~ *John Maeda*

Sometimes in life, we have to become less to be more. We become whole people, not on the basis of what we accumulate, but by getting rid of everything that is not really us, everything false and inauthentic. Sometime to become whole, we have to give up the dream. ~ *Harold Kushner, in When All You've Ever Wanted Isn't Enough*

I find my thoughts, increasingly, not on the supernatural or spiritual, but on what is meant by living a good and worthwhile life — achieving a sense of peace within oneself, I find my thoughts drifting to the Sabbath, the day of rest, the seventh day of the week, the seventh day of one's life as well, when one can feel that one's work is done, and one may, in good conscience, rest. ~ *Oliver Sacks*



Practicing SIMPLICITY

Option A: When Life Was Simple

Challenge your present with memories of your past. Was there a time when “life was simpler?”

1. Bring the memory back to life: Return to that time in your life when life was simpler and more nourishing. Journal about it, share the story with a friend, make it a part of your meditative practice.
2. Work with the memory: Spend time focusing on what was most nourishing or precious about it. Note what gift it gave you at the time and what it means for that gift to be absent from your present. Again, use the form you are most comfortable with: journaling, conversation, meditation, etc.
3. Let it challenge you: Ask yourself “Why can’t it be this way again?” Play devil’s advocate with yourself. Ask yourself if the barriers really exist...might they be self-imposed? or more in your control than you want to admit? How might you reclaim the feeling and the freedom this memory offers you?

Option B: De-Clutter Your Decision Life

Simplicity is not just about materialism. For many, the most oppressive clutter is not the stuff packed into our physical space but the millions of decisions we have to make each day. Psychologists have even given this struggle a name: “Decision Fatigue”:

<http://www.nytimes.com/2011/08/21/magazine/do-you-suffer-from-decision-fatigue.html>

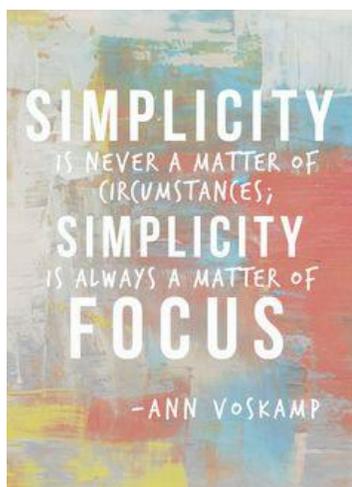
<http://www.businessinsider.com/decision-fatigue-and-productive-mornings-2015-4>

The implication our willpower “muscles” can get exhausted. Too many decisions weaken our ability to think clearly, and even to be kind. Spending too much energy on the inconsequential stuff damages our ability to focus on the important decisions of our lives.

Check out how President Obama and Mark Zuckerberg are simplifying their “decision life.”

<http://www.businessinsider.com/barack-obama-mark-zuckerberg-wear-the-same-outfit-2015-4>

<http://www.becomingminimalist.com/wear-one/>



Your Assignment: Pick a daily routine and take the decision out of it. For one week at least, wear the same basic outfit or part of the same outfit, eat the same breakfast or pack the same lunch. Find your own way to de-clutter your decision life!

Option C: Room for What’s Inside of You

Simplicity is not just about pruning the world outside of us, but also about making space for the world inside us. One tragedy of busy lives is that of being cut off from our inner voice. Simplicity in this sense is less about clearing away the trivial and more about making room for the divine, your still small voice within, to speak.

So here’s your assignment: Make time to listen. It is as simple as that.

Meditate, walk in the woods, turn off the car radio. Notice, and share, how you made that listening space, and what you heard.

Option D: The List

“Simplicity boils down to two steps: Identify the essential. Eliminate the rest.” ~ Leo Babauta

Ever done that ‘life raft’ values exercise in which you write all your values on individual cards, and then are asked, one at a time, to ‘throw one overboard?’

Try doing that with the stuff in your life. First, make a list of major things that you own and services you use. Then circle the things on the list that you need – that you absolutely couldn’t do without. Put a box around items that aren’t necessary but that make your life easier. Put a star by those that are luxuries. Preview the list. What do you notice? Are there any changes you’d like to make?

Option E: Before I Die....

The exercise of reflecting on what you want to do before your die, or what you might do if you had only one to two years to live, is a core spiritual practice for many religious traditions. It is the ultimate simplifying and clarify exercise. In fact, recently, it has caught the imagination of people from around the world in the form of giant chalkboards where people are invited to complete the sentence, "Before I die I want to..."

<http://beforeidie.cc/site/blog/category/walls/>

<http://beforeidie.cc/site/about/>

https://www.ted.com/talks/candy_chang_before_i_die_i_want_to?language=en

Your Assignment: Complete the sentence for yourself. Spend time thinking about it. Talk with friends. Make it the core question of your meditative practice for the month. The challenge is to pick just one thing. The gift will come later if you actually commit to doing it!

Resources on SIMPLICITY

On the Web

George Carlin Talks About "Stuff"

<http://tinyurl.com/d5ebg95>

A story about a congregation who chose simplicity of space.

<http://tinyurl.com/hcqtju>

10-part sermon series on *Voluntary Simplicity*, Rev. Sharon Wylie

<http://tinyurl.com/z3kw9ls>

Less Stuff, More Happiness (TED Talk) Writer and designer Graham Hill asks: Can having less stuff, in less room, lead to more happiness?

<http://tinyurl.com/nqz3vys>

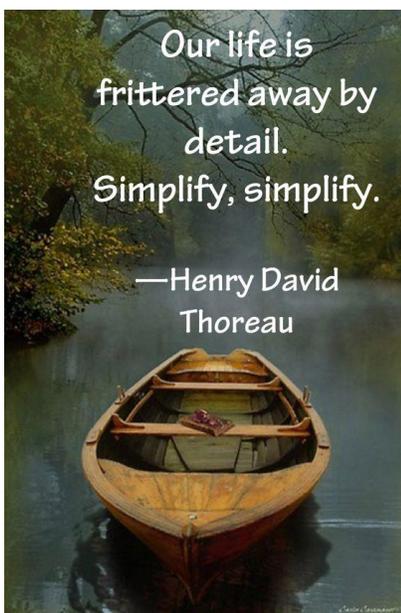
Towards a Science of Simplicity (TED Talk)

We know it when we see it — but what is simplicity, exactly? In this funny, philosophical talk, George Whitesides chisels out an answer.

<http://tinyurl.com/m2e2d6v>

The Art of Stillness (TED Talk) The place that travel writer Pico Iyer would most like to go? Nowhere. In a counterintuitive and lyrical meditation, Iyer takes a look at the incredible insight that comes with taking time for stillness. <http://tinyurl.com/lonrc5m>

Repossessing Virtue: Marie Howe on Greater Simplicity and Laura Ingalls Wilder by Trent Gilliss for On Being <http://tinyurl.com/zzavh5w>



Living the Questions: What is Enough? podcast with Caroline Howe, environmentalist and entrepreneur <http://tinyurl.com/hru5qag>

Living the Questions: How Can I Live More Simply? podcast with Zach Kerzee, a Methodist minister, bread-baker and part-time farmer.

<http://tinyurl.com/j9o7hsr>

Simplicity on the Other Side of Complexity by Parker Palmer, including a poem by Mary Oliver

<http://tinyurl.com/pvrck2t>

Wait, I have to do something important, don't go... Something to make you smile

<http://tinyurl.com/js6jvf7>

Websites with reflections and resources on simple living

www.simpleliving.org

<http://simplicitycollective.com/what-does-the-simple-life-mean-to-you>

<http://bemorewithless.com/simpletruth/>

The Spirit of Sauntering: Thoreau on the Art of Walking

"What business have I in the woods, if I am thinking of something out of the woods?"

<http://tinyurl.com/zar5b4o>

Books

Blush: A Mennonite Girl Meets a Glittering World by Shirley Showalter

This memoir evokes a lost time, in Lancaster County, Pennsylvania, when a sheltered little girl first encounters the glittering world and her desire for fancy forbidden things she could see but not touch.

The Art of Racing in the Rain by Garth Stein

A story of family, love, loyalty, and hope which looks at the wonders and absurdities of human life...as only a dog could tell it.

Everyday Simplicity: A Practical Guide to Spiritual Growth by Robert J. Wicks

Wicks says we all have the path to spirituality within us, if only we would follow it.



The Life-

Changing Magic of Tidying Up: The Japanese Art of Decluttering and Organizing by Marie Kondo

By determining which items in your house “spark joy” (and which don’t), this lifestyle phenomenon will help you clear your clutter and enjoy the unique magic of a tidy home – and the calm, motivated mindset it can inspire.

Simple Pleasures by Susannah Seton

A celebration of the art of living well, all arranged by season, in a compendium of ideas to bring moments of pleasure to everyday life.

Simplicity Parenting: Using the Extraordinary Power of Less to Raise Calmer, Happier, and More Secure Kids by Kim John Payne and Lisa M. Ross

Payne helps parents reclaim for their children the space and freedom that all kids need for their attention to deepen and their individuality to flourish.

Voluntary Simplicity: Toward a Way of Life That Is Outwardly Simple, Inwardly Rich by Duane Elgin

A book about “living with balance, embracing the tenets of voluntary simplicity -- frugal consumption, ecological awareness, and personal growth.



The Art of Stillness by Pico Iyer

Iyer paints a picture of why so many have found richness in stillness. In this age of constant movement and connectedness, perhaps staying in one place is a more exciting prospect, and a greater necessity than ever before.

Walden, by Henry David Thoreau

In communing with the natural world, Thoreau wished to “live deliberately, to front only the essential facts of life...” Interwoven with accounts of Thoreau's ‘life in the woods’ are mediations on human existence, society, and government expressed with wisdom and beauty of style.

Children’s Books on SIMPLICITY

A Handful of Quiet: Happiness in Four Pebbles

by Thich Nhat Hanh

Float by Daniel Miyares

Ideas Are All Around by Philip C. Stead

The Listening Walk by Paul Showers

The Little House by Virginia Lee Burton

Mindful Movements: Ten Exercises for Well-Being

by Thich Nhat Hanh

On Meadowview Street by Henry Cole

Pool by Jihyeon Lee

Silence by Lemniscates

Stuff by Margie Palatini

What Does It Mean To Be Present? by Rana DiOrio

Next Year’s Themes have been chosen and will be posted on our website soon!

Table Grace *on* SIMPLICITY

For simple things that are not simple at all
For miracles of the common way...

Sunrise...sunset,
Seedtime...harvest,
Hope...joy...ecstasy

For grace that turns
our intentions into deeds,
our compassion into helpfulness
our pain into mercy

For Providence that
sustains and supports our needs

We lift our hearts in thankfulness,
and pray only to be more aware
and, thus more alive.

~ Gordon B. McKeeman

Movies

A Simple Curve (2005 - 14A)

A father and son run their own two-man furniture business but have opposing ideologies on what should guide their craftsmanship, quality or commerce.

Blackish (short clip from the television show)

The devastating simplicity and complexity when it comes to hope and racial justice.

Into the Wild (2007 - 15)

After graduating from Emory University, a young man abandons his possessions, gives his entire savings to charity and hitchhikes to Alaska to live in the wilderness. Along the way, he encounters a series of characters that shape his life.

No Impact Man (2009 - Doc)

Follow the Manhattan-based Beavan family as they abandon their high consumption 5th Avenue lifestyle and try to live a year while making no net environmental impact.

The Pursuit of Happyness (2006 - 12A)

A struggling salesman takes custody of his son as he's poised to begin a life-changing professional endeavor.

Seeking God: The Way of the Monk (2007 - Doc)

Participate in the monastic way of life through the words and activities of the Benedictine monks at this tranquil monastery in northern New Mexico.

The Station Agent (2003 -15)

When his only friend dies, a man born with dwarfism moves to rural New Jersey to live a life of solitude, only to meet a chatty hot dog vendor and a woman dealing with her own personal loss.

Music

Rev. Lynn Harrison's album: *Simplicity*

Tis a Gift to Be Simple ("Simple Gifts")

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kWTDgc96bg8>

Give Me the Simple Life by Ella Fitzgerald

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ub7A9mK_yX4

Easy to be Hard by Three Dog Night

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=SrD14jqTtAE>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCs1rkAXZ9o>

(Cheryl Barnes)

Simple by k. d. lang

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yps8XYldq7U>

Simple Things by Carole King

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7RbeIT0gC8U>

Somewhere Only We Know by Keane

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Oextk-If8HQ>

The Simple Things by Joe Cocker

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5GNvHGhdBuQ>

Chalice Lighting *on* SIMPLICITY

May this light surround us, guide our footsteps, and hold us fast to the best and most righteous that we seek.

May its light sharpen the darkness around us, in order to nurture our dreams and give us rest so that we may give ourselves to the work of our world.

Let us seek to remember the wholeness of our lives, the weaving of light and shadow in this great astonishing dance in which we move.

~ Kathleen McTigue (adapted)

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