

JOURNEYS

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
Theme "Un-Pack-it" for December 2016

A Community of Incarnation

Poem

~ *Mary Oliver*

The spirit
likes to dress up like this:
ten fingers,
ten toes,
shoulders, and all the rest
at night
in the black branches
in the morning
in the blue branches
of the world.
It could float, of course,
but would rather
plumb rough matter.
Airy and shapeless thing,
it needs
the metaphor of the body,

lime and appetite,
the oceanic fluids;
it needs the body's world,
instinct

and imagination
and the dark hug of time
sweetness
and tangibility
to be understood,
to be more than pure light
that burns
where no one is --

so it enters us --
in the morning
shines from brute comfort
like a stitch of lightning;

and at night
lights up the deep and wondrous
drownings of the body
like a star.

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by sending a request to office@peterboroughunitarian.ca.

WONDERINGS *on the theme of* INCARNATION

Incarnation is especially significant for Christians at this time of year, because Jesus' birth is seen as God becoming human. But, as suggested in its definition, and as is evident in the internet resources found later in this packet, 'incarnation' is an important concept in many religions and cultures. Myths abound about gods taking human form and then playing out some important drama here on earth. Hindus greet one another by saying "Namaste", which translated means, "The divinity in me bows to the divinity in you." In Kabbalism, a story tells of a cosmic accident in which the vessels that held God's light were shattered, and all of those divine shards and sparks were scattered upon the world. For Jews, our work (tikkun olam) is to collect those divine sparks and use them to repair the world.¹

In my personal story, I was caught in the crosshairs of two messages...first that my body is the temple of God, and second, that the body is part and parcel of a sinful world. The upshot is that I have a pretty complicated (not positive) relationship with my body. And so for me, just the idea that there exists a divine spark inside of me, if even just a broken piece of light, opens a window. It gifts me with the possibility of knowing my own wholeness, or inner light, or intrinsic goodness.

And when I let myself see the faintest glimmer of a divine spark inside, I begin to see that this is not just possibility, but reality. And it's not a just a spark that comes from somewhere else, but rather, is something that is embedded in my very being. There is no separation; each of us is both body and spirit, divine and human, broken and whole.



In the story of this faith, while early Christians debated and then decided that Jesus was God, Unitarians came to affirm "the spiritual leadership of Jesus" while refuting that he was actually part of a trinity. Later, the Transcendentalists helped us to recognize that we each contain the divine within us. And today, our first principle affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

What if our principles claimed 'the inherent divinity and dignity of each person?' This is not to suggest that we are perfect, but rather that we are each part of a spirit-infused Universe. For when we can recognize this, boundaries dissolve... between the individual and the community, between the animate and inanimate, between present and future, between worthless and sacred. All that is, including you and me, is precious and holy.

You, each and every one, are a beautiful incarnation! With gratitude for your spirit,

~ Rev. Julie

in car na tion **inkär' nāSHən**

noun

1. a person who, in the flesh, embodies a deity, spirit, or abstract quality: "Rama was Vishnu's incarnation on earth." In Christian theology, the embodiment of God in human flesh as Jesus.

2. divine condescension...an in-body merger between the divine and the human (the divine side must necessarily limit itself in order to be truly and fully human)*

3. made comprehensible, concrete or real

Etymology: to be made flesh - "in" + "caro" (flesh)

¹ * As found at: <http://www.patheos.com/blogs/bibleandculture/2012/12/23/the-meaning-of-incarnation/>

a STORY about INCARNATION

The Rabbi's Gift²

There was a monastery, which had fallen on hard times. Its many buildings had been filled with young monks and its big church had resounded with the singing of prayers, but it was now nearly deserted. People no longer came to be nourished by the prayers and presence of the monks. Only a handful of old, old monks shuffled through the cloisters and praised God with heavy hearts.

Nearby, on the edge of the monastery woods, an old rabbi built a little hut and came occasionally to walk in the woods. One day, his heart heavy with the burden of the monastery and the failing of the faith, the abbot decided to visit the rabbi. After morning Eucharist, he set out through the woods.

As he approached the hut, the rabbi greeted the abbot warmly. Across their differences, there were similarities. Both knew God; both knew the difficulties of keeping alive the faith in their communities; both were concerned for the welfare of those they served.

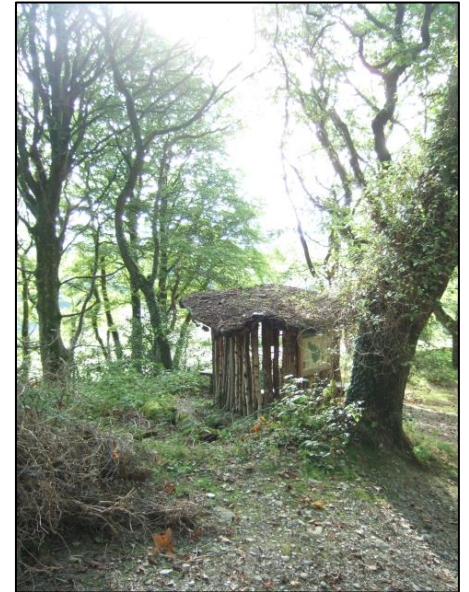
The only words spoken were the mysterious words of the rabbi, 'The Messiah is among you' and an instruction, 'you must only repeat this once. After that no one must ever say it aloud again'.

Finally, the abbot and the rabbi exchanged an embrace and the abbot returned to the monastery, pondering the words of the rabbi, 'The Messiah is among you'. Whatever could the rabbi mean? Could Christ be cantankerous Brother William? Could Christ be mean and spiteful Brother Stephen? Could Christ be the one young novice, petulant and withdrawn, and still to be named? Who could Christ be? The abbot pondered this all afternoon and all night.

The next morning, the abbot called the few monks together and shared the teaching from the rabbi. 'You can never repeat this', he said. 'The rabbi who walks in the woods says, "The Messiah is amongst us"'.²

The monks were startled by this revelation. 'What could it mean?' each asked himself. 'Is dirty and sloppy Brother John the Messiah?' 'Is moody Father Matthew or crothy Brother Thomas the Messiah?' 'What could this mean?' 'The Messiah is among us?' They were deeply puzzled by the rabbi's teaching. But according to the instruction, no one ever mentioned it again.

Days and weeks went by. The monks began to treat one another with special reverence and respect. There was a gentle, wholehearted, human, yet divine, quality about them which was hard to describe but easy to see. They lived with one another as men who had found something special. They prayed and read Scripture as men who were always looking for something. The occasional visitors found themselves deeply moved by the life of these monks. Before long, people were coming from far and wide to be nourished by the prayer life of the monks and young men began asking to become part of the community.



² <http://www.community4me.com/rabbisgift3.html>

INSPIRATIONS *on* INCARNATION

The first step on a spiritual path today is a return to a sense of one's own body.

~ *Martha Heyneman*

Our body is precious. It is a vehicle for awakening. Treat it with care. ~ *Buddha*

You don't have a soul. You are a Soul. You have a body. ~ *C.S. Lewis*

We are not human beings on a spiritual journey. We are spiritual beings on a human journey. ~ *Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

Be sure that it is not you that is mortal, but only your body. For that [person] whom your outward form reveals is not yourself; the spirit is the true self, not that physical figure.

~ *Cicero*

There is but one temple in the universe and that is the body of [humans]. ~ *Novalis*

No degree of worldly
darkness can extinguish
the glow of a soul's
inner light

Wes Fesler

PICTUREQUOTES.COM

I stand in awe of my body.

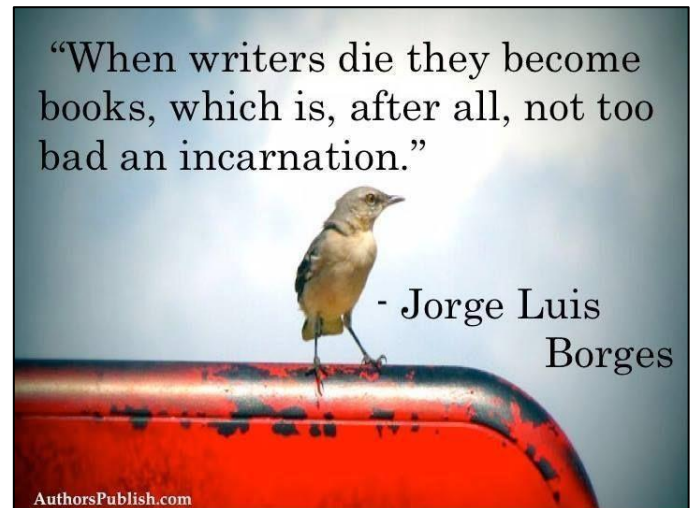
~ *Henry David Thoreau*

Pass again from the heavenly realm
and plunge into the vast ocean of
Consciousness.

Let the drop of water that is you
become a hundred mighty seas.
But do not think that the drop alone
Becomes the Ocean —

the Ocean, too, becomes the drop! ~ *Rumi*

You are a little soul carrying about a corpse, as Epictetus used to say. ~ *Marcus Aurelius*



There is nothing so secular that it cannot be sacred, and that is one of the deepest messages of the Incarnation. ~ *Madeleine L'Engle*

Prayer is a moment of incarnation - God with us. God involved in the details of my life.

~ *Paul E. Miller*

Action is always superior to speech in the Gospels, which is why the Word became flesh and not newsprint. ~ *Colin M. Morris*

Like flowers we grow, bloom, and wither - each day and each life. In our next life we'll grow, bloom, and wither even more beautifully. But although we blossom more grandiose in each new life, all our lives are perfect in their own way. ~ *Stefan Emunds*

All true friendliness begins with fire and food and drink and the recognition of rain or frost. ...Each human soul has in a sense to enact for itself the gigantic humility of the Incarnation. Every man must descend into the flesh to meet mankind. ~ *G.K. Chesterton*

The Son of God became man to enable men to become the sons of God. ~ *C. S. Lewis*

Every man is a divinity in disguise, a god playing the fool. ~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

PRACTICING INCARNATION

Option A: Be a 'Divine Spark'³

Unitarian Universalists who are uncomfortable with such terms as 'the divine' and 'the holy' may still believe that with intention, we can incarnate the qualities that the world most needs. So, imagine that a spark resides in you that allows you as 'enlightened' as possible; how is it expressed? Through your mind? Your body? Your heart? Your spirit? Spend some time contemplating how you can more fully express, or incarnate, what matters to you, and then take time to practice doing that!

Option B: Grow a 'Divine Spark'

Envision the seed of 'sacred possibility' that dwells within each person and being. Do an art project to create it and to express what does it contains, or what it looks like. What grows from that divine seed? What special powers does it have to come alive in each being it inhabits?



Option C: Consume some Light (a great activity to do with kids!)

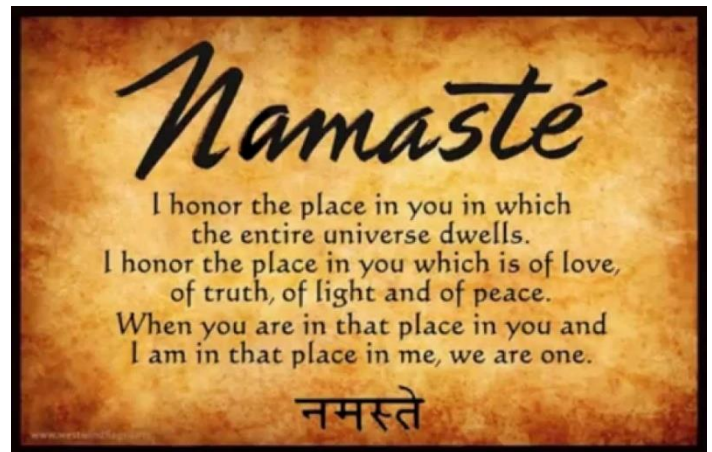
Make roll-out cookies and shape them into 'divine sparks,' whatever they might look like to you. Then eat them!

Option D: 'Divine Sparks' at the Table

When gathered for a meal with family or friends, give everyone a candle. Light them, hold them up, and sing together "This Little Light of Mine." Talk together about the special light each of us has, and tell one another about the light that you see in them.

Option E: Seeing Other 'Divine Sparks'

Put on your special glasses...the ones that allow you to see the divine in everything...and go out into the world looking carefully at each person, being, or thing that you see. Greet them by saying Namaste. What do you see that you didn't see before? Does wearing these glasses change your interactions with the world? Journal about that experience.



QUESTIONS for reflection on INCARNATION

- There are many words used to describe that which animates a body...Life-energy, Spirit, Soul, Holy, Divine. Which of these words work for you? Reflect on what it is in your life that has informed your perspectives.
- What is the relationship between the divine (qualities such as wholeness, Buddha nature, intrinsic goodness) and the world and its beings? Are they separate? Infused in each other? Attainable but not inherent?
- When in your life have you experienced feeling that you are part of, or in harmony with, what is divine or holy? Can you name what contributed to that feeling or how you were able to recognize it? (Where you were, what you were doing, etc.) When have you experienced it in others? Consider how this ability or awareness affects or has affected your relationship(s) with all that is.

³ See "Wonderings" on page 2 for a bit of an exegesis on the term 'divine spark.' If this term doesn't work for you, please translate into your own words.

Resources on INCARNATION

On the Web

A Wiccan View of the Divine Within, Phyllis Currott

<http://tinyurl.com/zhusylk>

A Christian Reflection on the Incarnation, Jim Friedrich

<http://tinyurl.com/jen6xx9>

A Vedic View of the Divine Within, Yogini Shambhavi

<http://tinyurl.com/zeqzm8t>

An Cosmological View on the Divine Child Within

<http://tinyurl.com/dl6nlg>

A Unity Perspective on the Divine Potential Within

<http://tinyurl.com/hzzy3kq>

A Review of the Divine Spark in Jewish Sources

<http://tinyurl.com/jgnlrhc>

A bit about Quakers and the Inner Light

http://quaker.wikia.com/wiki/Inner_light

The War on Consciousness, a Ted Talk by Graham Hancock

<http://tinyurl.com/m8dxr7j>

The Ted Talk Debate on Graham Hancock's talk about DMT

<http://tinyurl.com/jlu6d68>



Movies

A Dog's Purpose (2017/PG) - A dog looks to discover his purpose in life over the course of several lifetimes and owners.

Amadeus (1984/PG) - The incredible story of Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart, told by his peer and secret rival Antonio Salieri - now confined to an insane asylum.

Bruce Almighty (2003/12A) - A guy who complains about God too often is given almighty powers to teach him how difficult it is to run the world.

Clone/Womb (2010) - A woman's consuming love forces her to bear the clone of her dead beloved. From his infancy to manhood, she faces the unavoidable complexities of her controversial decision.

DMT: The Spirit Molecule (2015/Doc) - An investigation into the long-obscured mystery of dimethyltryptamine (DMT), a molecule found in nearly every living organism and considered the most potent psychedelic on Earth.

Face/Off (1997/18A) - An FBI agent undergoes a face-transplant surgery and assumes the identity and physical appearance of a ruthless terrorist, but the plan goes wrong when the same criminal impersonates the cop.

Jesus of Montreal (1989/18) - A group of actors put on an unorthodox, but acclaimed Passion Play which incites the opposition of the Catholic Church while the actors' lives themselves begin to mirror the Passion itself.

The Lego Movie (2014/U) - An ordinary Lego construction worker, thought to be the prophesied 'Special', is recruited to join a quest to stop an evil tyrant from gluing the Lego universe into eternal stasis.

The Matrix (1999/15) - A computer hacker learns from mysterious rebels about the true nature of his reality and his role in the war against its controllers.

Time is Art: Synchronicity and the Collective Dream (2015/Doc) - the story of an artist's search for inspiration in a money-driven society, and of the human search for meaning in a seemingly meaningless world.

What the Bleep: Down the Rabbit Hole!?: (2006, Doc) - Docudrama making links between quantum mechanics, neurobiology, human consciousness and day-to-day reality.

Books

Being Bodies by Lenore Friedman

The relationship between body and mind has always been a topic of speculation and spirited discussion. This anthology comes from the unique perspective of women who are students of Buddhism.

Divining the Body: Reclaim the Holiness of Your Physical Self by Jan Phillips

This book attempts to undo the damage sustained living in a culture that teaches self-hatred. It is a journey through the sacred terrain of the body...guiding you to take brave, gentle steps toward the Divine within.

Lifecraft: The Art of Meaning in the Everyday by Forrest Church

A joyous book on the art of finding meaning in daily life. Church challenges much of the modern search for meaning-indeed, the entire thrust of modern theology.

Roots and Wings: The Human Journey from a Speck of Stardust to a Spark of God by Margaret Silf

This book invites us to participate in an age-old conversation about our origins and destiny. What might it mean to become fully human? Silf brings science and spirituality together, allowing a bold new synthesis between them.

Dance - The Sacred Art: The Joy of Movement as a Spiritual Practice by Cynthia Winton-Henry

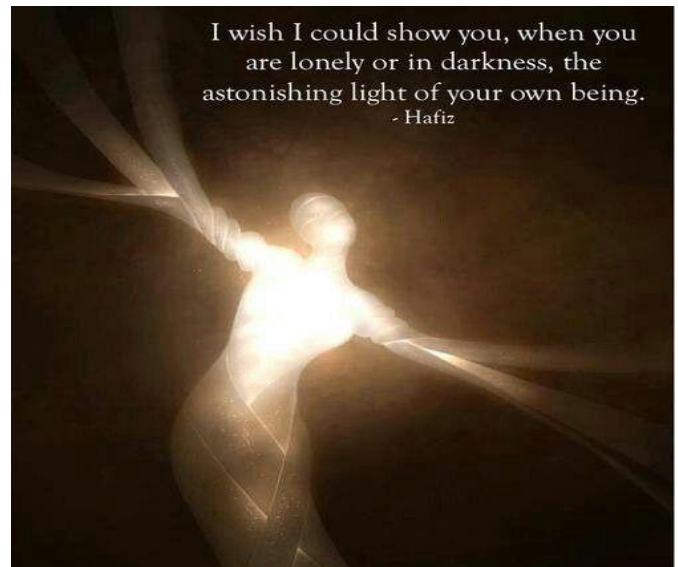
Dance is a spiritual tool to: celebrate your unique spirituality, unify your body and mind, push your personal boundaries, work through trauma or crisis, deepen your relationships and strengthen your community.

The Soul of the Child: Nurturing the Divine Identity of Our Children by Michael Gurian

A blend of inspiring stories, common sense, and scientific observations, urging us to become aware of our children's divine inheritance, and learn how to nurture that divinity.

The Spirit Leads: Margaret Fuller in Her Own Words, Barry M. Andrews, editor

A dynamic collection of excerpts from Fuller's writings, whose impact on the leading Transcendentalists of the day as a religious radical, political revolutionary, social reformer and forceful advocate of women's rights remains significant, even today.



Music

Can't Take That Away by Mariah Carey

<http://tinyurl.com/jq4bacl>

The Chanukah Song (We Are Lights) from Wicked

<http://tinyurl.com/jy2sxj2>

"GARBO" *The Divinity Within Humanity*, Navratri Song by Parthiv Gohil

http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=I5U_y-lvvas

Incarnation Song by Chris and Thomas

<http://tinyurl.com/hslyb6j>

Stand In The Light by Jordan Smith

<http://tinyurl.com/z6ka9ak>

That's About the Size, Sesame Street

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2ABxl46Ovv8>

There's a Light in You, a soft, relaxing song for kids by Bryant Oden

<http://tinyurl.com/zbfjl3g>

What If God Was One of Us by Joan Osborne

<http://tinyurl.com/pwpbvc4>

Table Grace on INCARNATION

All life is one, and everything that lives is holy:
plants, animals and Man.

All must eat to live and nourish one another.

We bless the lives that have died to give us food.

Let us eat consciously, resolving
[to honour what is holy in all that is.]

~ Attributed to JG Bennett

You live on earth only for a few short years which you call an incarnation, and then you leave your body as an outworn dress and go for refreshment to your true home in the spirit.

- White Eagle

WOMENFORONE.COM

Chalice Lighting *on* INCARNATION

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 with us.

- Albert Schweitzer
(#447 in SLT)

Sunset

Slowly the west reaches for clothes of new colors which it passes to a row of ancient trees. You look, and soon these two worlds both leave you one part climbs toward heaven, one sinks to earth. leaving you, not really belonging to either, not so hopelessly dark as that house that is silent, not so unswervingly given to the eternal as that thing that turns to a star each night and climbs- leaving you (it is impossible to untangle the threads) your own life, timid and standing high and growing, so that, sometimes blocked in, sometimes reaching out, one moment your life is a stone in you, and the next, a star.

~ Rainer Maria Rilke

Sabbatical's theme: **IDENTITY**

During the three months Rev. Julie is on sabbatical (January to March, 2017) we will consider the theme of "Identity." Who are we as a congregation? What is ours to do?

Do you have ideas for resources? A favourite novel, blog, poem, or movie? Maybe you've taken a photo or done some artwork for the front page? Email your suggestions to office@peterboroughunitarian.ca

Children's Books *on* INCARNATION

All I See Is Part of Me by Chara M. Curtis
The Everything Seed by Carole Martignacco
The Girl God by Trista Hendren
Good Night Yoga: A Pose-by-Pose Bedtime Story by Mariam Gates
I Can Make a Difference: A Treasury to Inspire Our Children by Marian Wright Edelman
Inside All by Margaret H. Mason
On My Way To A Happy Life by Deepak Chopra
On the Day You Were Born by Debra Frasier

Thanks to all who helped create this packet by writing text, suggesting resources, offering artwork and providing feedback!

We subscribe to "Soul Matters" a curriculum from Rev. Scott Taylor. Service Leaders and Covenant Group Facilitators work with Rev. Julie Stoneberg to incorporate the theme into our programming & Sunday Services. Would you like to share your talents?

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