

JOURNEYS

Theme Packet for February 2015

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

Vulnerability



*In the cause of silence, each of us draws the face of her own fear -
fear of contempt, of censure, or some judgment, or recognition,
of challenge or annihilation.*

*But most of all, I think, we fear the visibility without which we cannot truly live...
And that visibility which makes us most vulnerable is that which also is
the source of our greatest strength. ~ Audre Lorde*

*Excerpted from "The Transformation of Silence into Action," a speech originally delivered at the Lesbian and Literature panel
of the Modern Language Association's December 28, 1977 meeting.*

Republished by Crossing Press in 1984 in her book Sister Outsider: Essays and Speeches.

If you've picked this up in a hard copy, and would like to receive these monthly packets by email, sign up to be on UFP's email list, by sending a request to unitarianchurch@cogeco.net.

WONDERINGS *on the theme of* VULNERABILITY

Imagine that you are standing in front of a group of colleagues, or your entire class, about to give a presentation. There are... a whole bunch of folks watching who will decide in their own minds whether you are smart, whether you are entertaining, whether you are the sort of person they admire. How do you feel?

Imagine that there is someone you really like, someone you think is cute [and funny.] ... You're about to ask them if they would like to go out to dinner, or if they want to go to the upcoming school dance. You're about to put your heart on the line, about to risk rejection, maybe even look like an idiot. How do you feel?

Imagine that you have just walked into a church that you are hoping could possibly be your spiritual home. But ..., you don't know how people usually dress for services, whether you will know how to sing the songs, whether the minister will say something hurtful about your beliefs or identity...or whether anyone will even speak to you after the service. How do you feel?

How you feel, I imagine, is vulnerable. Partly scared, partly hopeful, on the edge of something that might change your life through triumph or humiliation, connection or rejection, being welcomed in or being pushed out.



Vulnerability can be a terrifying experience, like walking a tightrope across an enormous canyon. Your heart beats faster, and your mouth gets dry while your palms get wet. It's the sort of experience that you probably want to avoid like the plague. *Except* that those moments of vulnerability are absolutely the most important bits of your life. Without walking into those vulnerable moments there's little chance for your life to change, because every change comes wrapped in loss or the possibility of defeat as well as the possibility of something amazing.

And we are vulnerable so often: every time we raise our hand to speak in class; every time we voice an opinion in a meeting; every time we speak to a stranger; every time we tell a loved one that we were hurt by something they said or did. We're vulnerable when we admit that we don't understand and whenever we ask for help. We're vulnerable any time we walk into a group of people whose race or age or religion or ethnicity is different from our own. We're vulnerable any time we create, and allow someone else to see our creation.

Basically, we're vulnerable any time we put ourselves out there in the world, hoping for some real connection with another person. If we're never vulnerable, the important parts of who we are and what we can do never see the light of day.

We need [to practice being vulnerable] in all the moments when we choose to talk to a stranger at a bus stop, or share a drawing or a poem we created, or express an opinion that's different from what the teacher or the boss said. [And we need] to remember that each person who walks up to our church or our office or our group at lunchtime is doing something just a little bit vulnerable and brave, and that it matters that we offer them a smile of welcome.

~ Rev. Dr. Lynn Ungar

Minister for Lifespan Learning at the Church of the Larger Fellowship

<http://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/resources-for-living-october-2013/>

STORIES *about* VULNERABILITY

Androcles and the Lion

~ Aesop

vul ner a bil i ty

noun \ vəl-n(ə-) rə-'bi-lə-tē

1. easily hurt or harmed physically, mentally, or emotionally
2. openness to attack, harm, or damage
3. degree to which people, property, resources, systems, and cultural, economic, environmental, and social activity is susceptible to harm, degradation, or destruction on being exposed to a hostile agent or factor.
4. the inability to withstand the effects of a hostile environment

Origin of VULNERABILITY: from Latin *vulnerare* 'to wound', and *-ble*, meaning "the ability to be wounded."

Synonyms: exposure, liability, openness, susceptibility, gullibility, insecurity, uncertainty

It happened in ancient times that a slave named Androcles escaped from his master and fled into the forest, and he wandered there for a long time until he was weary and spent with hunger and despair.

Just then he heard a lion near him moaning and groaning and at times roaring terribly. Tired as he was, Androcles rose up and rushed away from the lion; but as he made his way through the bushes he stumbled over the root of a tree and fell down twisting his ankle. When he tried to get up, there he saw the lion coming towards him, limping on three feet and holding his fore-paw in front of him.

Androcles had not strength to rise and run away, but when the great beast came up to him, it kept on moaning and groaning. Androcles saw that the lion was holding out his right paw, which was covered with blood and very much swollen. Looking more closely, Androcles saw a great big thorn pressed into the paw, which was the cause of all the lion's trouble. Plucking up courage, he seized hold of the thorn and

pulled it out of the lion's paw, who roared with pain when the thorn came out, but soon after found such relief from it that he rubbed up against Androcles, and showed in every way that he knew, that he was truly thankful for being relieved from such pain.

One day a number of soldiers came marching through the forest and found Androcles. They took him prisoner and brought him back to the town from which he had fled. There he was condemned to be thrown to the lions because he had fled from his master.

On the appointed day he was led forth into the arena and left there alone. The signal was given for the lion to come out and attack Androcles. But when it came out of its cage and got near Androcles, what do you think it did? Instead of jumping upon him, it rubbed up against him and stroked him with its paw and made no attempt to do him any harm.

The Emperor, surprised at seeing such a strange event, ordered his master to set him free, and the lion was taken back into the forest and let loose to enjoy freedom once more.





This second story was told by Rev. Ana Levy-Lyons, in Quest Magazine, October 2103

<http://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/sustainable-empathy/>

Traveling home at the end of a really hot day, I got to Grand Central Terminal and made my way down to the 7 train like I always do. There was obviously a problem with the train because the platform was packed solid with commuters waiting, tight like sardines, sweating in the intense heat.

I could barely get onto the platform there were so many people. I asked around and nobody knew what was going on and there were no announcements forthcoming and no station agents in sight. So we all just waited uncomfortably, absorbed in our smartphones.

For some reason I looked up and noticed this guy slowly trying to make his way through the crowd. He touched someone on the shoulder and I thought he had met up with a friend, but then he moved past her and kept going. And as he threaded his way through, he lightly touched each person on the elbow or arm as if he knew them and had now arrived at his destination. There was something intimate about the way he moved through the crowd. As if he knew all of us. I found it so interesting to watch and I developed all kinds of theories about what his deal was. Maybe he wasn't a New Yorker; maybe he was from another country with a different sense of personal space. Or maybe he was a politician, skilled in the art of connecting, just for a split second, with each of hundreds of strangers. Maybe I was witnessing the secret of great leadership.

I turned back to my Blackberry and then looked up again as I heard a gasp. Somebody was falling in the midst of the crowd. People were catching him and lowering him to the floor. It was that same guy! People were shouting, "Get help! Get help!" and so I started to make my way toward the stairs to try to find an MTA person. But before I got there, it seemed that the guy was already coming to. He was getting back up, helped by those around him, saying, "That was the strangest feeling." He had simply passed out from standing for so long in the heat.

All of my theories about this guy had been wrong. As I had been watching him make his way through the crowd, he had probably been feeling his grip on consciousness slipping away and he had been trying to almost hold on to people as he passed by. The intimacy I had noticed was actually borne of vulnerability. And the people around him responded to his vulnerability with intimacy: somebody offered him a bottle of water, while somebody with a stethoscope offered to listen to his heart. He had been vulnerable and so his boundaries were down, his edges were soft and his heart was open.

QUESTIONS *for reflection on* VULNERABILITY

- How are you trying to be invulnerable and unbreakable? What would happen if you just stopped trying?
 - Has age left you feeling more vulnerable, or less? In what ways?
 - Are you good at noticing the difference between feeling vulnerable and being vulnerable?
 - To what, or to whom, are you vulnerable? To whom, with whom, are you willing to be vulnerable?
 - Are there times when you've risked vulnerability that have paid off? Or not paid off?
 - Are you, or how can you be, grateful for your wounds?
 - What have you learned about the relationship between vulnerability and grace?
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INSPIRATIONS *on* VULNERABILITY

Security is mostly superstition. It does not exist in nature, nor do the children of men as a whole experience it. Avoiding danger is no safer in the long run than outright exposure. Life is a daring adventure, or nothing.
~ Helen Keller

Courage is vulnerability. Vulnerability is courage. Like shadow and light, neither one can exist without the other.
~ Wai Lan Yuen

The holy waits in your world, too. Maybe today it will find you in a listening posture, and will whisper to you. "You tumble like a leaf," it will say. "And yet by some miracle you are still here. Now what is the purpose of that?"
~ Angela Herrera

If we are live a life we can endure and make love that is loving... if we are to weave real connections, create real nodes, and build real houses we need to reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.
~ Marge Piercy

Now if you listen closely
I'll tell you what I know
Storm clouds are gathering
The wind is gonna blow
The human race is suffering
And I can hear the moan,
'Cause nobody, But nobody
Can make it out here alone.
~ Maya Angelou

Sometimes we must yield control
to others and accept our
vulnerability so we can be healed.
~ Kathy Magliato

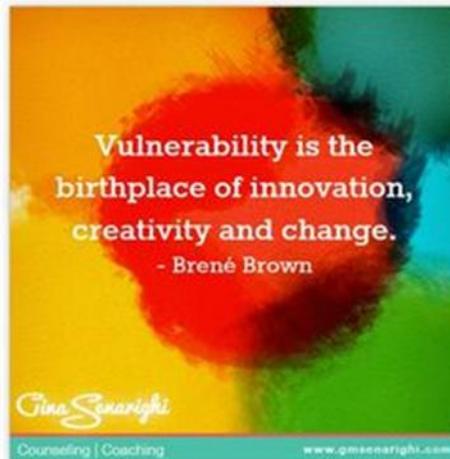
Life is not intended to be safe. A safe life has two small a name for a creature of eternity. Life at its noblest and highest has a hazard about it; it ponders tomorrow but does not know it; it sounds the depths of the ocean, but knows not the hazards of the bottom. Life at its best takes a chance on righteousness no matter the hazard, no matter the cost. Life, when answering to its true name, lifts on wings, feeling no invisible hands supporting it.
~ Ethel Waters

When we were children, we used to think that when we were grown-up we would no longer be vulnerable. But to grow up is to accept vulnerability... To be alive is to be vulnerable. ~ Madeleine L'Engle

Perfectionism is the voice of the oppressor, the enemy of the people. It will keep you cramped and insane your whole life. Perfectionism is based on the obsessive belief that if you run carefully enough, hitting each stepping-stone just right, you won't have to die.
~ Anne Lammott

To love at all is to be vulnerable. Love anything and your heart will be wrung and possibly broken. If you want to make sure of keeping it intact you must give it to no one, not even an animal. Wrap it carefully round with hobbies and little luxuries; avoid all entanglements. Lock it up safe in the casket or coffin of your selfishness. But in that casket, safe, dark, motionless, airless, it will change. It will not be broken; it will become unbreakable, impenetrable, irredeemable. To love is to be vulnerable. ~ C.S. Lewis

Anything that can happen to a human being may also happen to me.
~Bo Lozoff



The way of love is not a subtle argument.
The door there is devastation.
Birds make great sky-circles of their freedom.
How do they learn it?
They fall, and falling, they are given wings.
~ Rumi (translated by Coleman Barks)

We know, with varying degrees of acceptance into awareness, our own weaknesses, and there is a tendency to think that others - who seem, on the surface, to be very sure and confident - do not struggle in the way we do. But many of those who appear to cope and be strong and tireless are indeed very different behind their masks. We are all wounded; we all feel inadequate and ashamed; we all struggle. But this is part of the human condition; it draws us together, helps us to find our connectedness.
~ June Ellis

Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen. Don't be afraid.
~ Frederick Buechner

Vulnerability is the gift life has given us to open us to the find connection with one another. ~ Tim House

When things are shaky and nothing is working, we might realize that we are on the verge of something.
~ Pema Chödrön

PRACTICING VULNERABILITY

1. Make Something Beautiful from What's Been Broken

The spiritual challenge of living a life of vulnerability involves more than just accepting our vulnerability. Often the human spirit calls us to take the unexpected or painful events of our lives and make something beautiful out of it. This doesn't mean that "everything happens for a reason." Rather it is a faith stance which trusts that grace is woven into even the darkest of events.

This exercise asks you to find your own way of making something beautiful from what's been broken. As inspiration, visit the following site: <http://tiny.cc/o7u4ax>

After letting the pictures from this man's spiritual work sink in, spend some time figuring out what your own version of this might be. Think about something that was "broken," lost or painful in your own experience and then do something to pull the grace from it. Consider bringing an object to our Journeys group that helps tell the story of your efforts.

2. 99 Problems http://www.ted.com/talks/maysoon_zayid_i_got_99_problems_palsy_is_just_one

Laughter is often one of our most powerful spiritual tools. This exercise invites you to think about how you might use humor to step back and see your vulnerability in a new light. Watch the TED talk in the link above.

Then ask yourself how humor can or has helped you face your vulnerability.

Keep things simple: just watch the video then ask yourself, "What's the message or lesson in this for me?" During this month, see how you might use laughter and humour in response to feeling vulnerable.

3. Make a postcard that shares (the secrets you keep about) your vulnerability

Visit <http://postsecret.blogspot.com/> and read through the postcards cataloged there.

(Feel free to visit

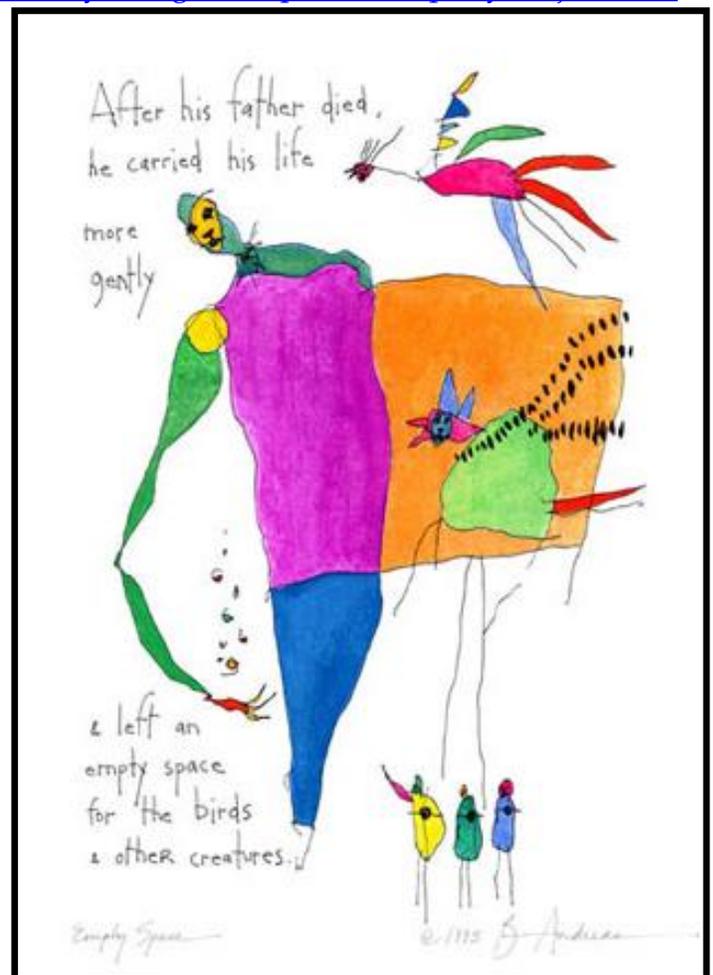
<http://www.postsecretcommunity.com/news-faq/postsecret-story> to learn even more about the postsecret postcard project.)

Then consider what vulnerability you're most afraid of revealing or letting go of. Make a (secret) postcard that exposes this vulnerability.

Is there anyone with whom you can share this postcard? Who would you send it to if you could?

4. Thank Someone for Being Vulnerable

Reach out to someone whose vulnerability has enriched your life and let them know it was meaningful. Did someone come out to you when you knew little about LGBTQI issues, making it easier for you to be an ally when a family member came out to you more recently? Did someone in your community step forward to help make it a beautiful place for you to build a life? Find them on Facebook, or mail them a note, sharing that you appreciate what you learned from them. Look around you. Who is risking their vulnerability now who may not be getting credit and encouragement? Tell them you see them and appreciate it.



Resources on VULNERABILITY

On the Web

TED: Meet the Robots for Humanity

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aCIukWXmIV4>

Paralyzed by a stroke, Henry Evans uses a telepresence robot to help him live his life.

TED: The Power of Vulnerability

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iCvmsMzIF7o>

In a poignant, funny talk, Brené Brown shares a deep insight from her research, one that sent her on a personal quest to know herself as well as to understand humanity.

Antibiotic Resistance. Be Afraid. REALLY! Be VERY Afraid!

<http://bigthink.com/risk-reason-and-reality/antibiotic-resistance-be-afraid-really-be-very-afraid> How vulnerable are we, really? Perhaps more than we thought.

Becoming Powerfully Vulnerable-The Key to True Connection and Intimacy by Julie-Anne Shapiro

<http://www.selfgrowth.com/articles/become-powerfully-vulnerable-the-key-to-true-connection-intimacy>

3 Myths about Vulnerability by Margarita Tartakovsky

http://www.huffingtonpost.com/2012/09/04/myth-s-about-vulnerability_n_1853117.html

Vulnerability as a Spiritual Path by Miki Kashtan

http://www.baynvc.org/articles/vulnerability_as_a_spiritual_path.php

Ready for a vulnerability hangover? Five ideas from Brené Brown by Roman Krznaric

<http://www.romankrznaric.com/outrospection/2012/10/16/1729>

Music

One is the Loneliest Number - *Three Dog Night*

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=22QYriWAF-U>

One - U2

http://www.dailymotion.com/video/xrtl8f_u2-one-92-directed-by-anton-corbijn_music

One - Bob Marley

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=FTY8H7zjdtc>

Landslide - Stevie Nicks

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ov1SOhwfbys>

Landslide - Dixie Chicks

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=J4_wXPZ1Bnk

Let it Go - Idina Menzel (*Frozen*)

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

Let it Be - The Beatles

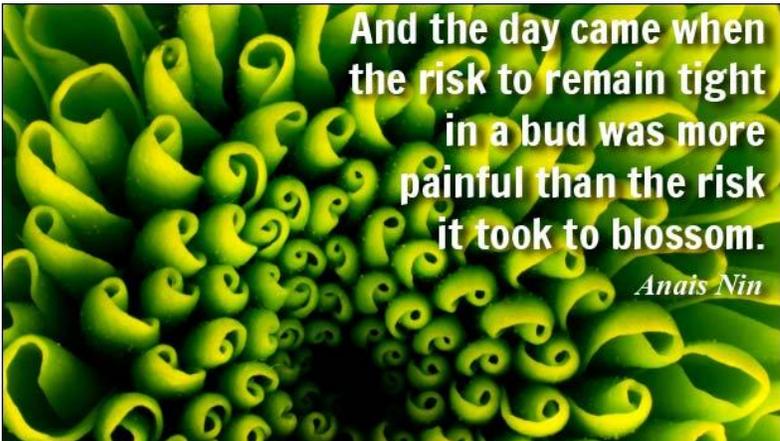
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WcBnJw-H2wQ>

You've Got a Friend - James Taylor

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3WJ1cf3nrLE>

Movies

- *Good Will Hunting* (1997)
Will Hunting, a janitor at MIT, has a gift for mathematics, but needs help to find direction. He must risk being vulnerable to succeed in life and love.
- *The Pursuit of Happyness* (2006)
A struggling salesman takes custody of his son as he's poised to begin a life-changing professional endeavor.
- *Flashdance* (1983)
A tough construction worker has a dream of entering ballet school. She auditions in a wood-paneled room before six long-faced judges.
- *Shrek* (2001)
When a green ogre discovers his swamp has been invaded, he sets out on a journey that requires him to reveal his true self.
- *A Home of Our Own* (1993)
An energetic widow and her six children head for the countryside to make a home of their own, while facing all kinds of difficulties during their journey.
- *Freedom Writers* (2007)
A young teacher inspires her class of at-risk students to learn tolerance, apply themselves, and pursue education beyond high school.



And the day came when
the risk to remain tight
in a bud was more
painful than the risk
it took to blossom.

Anais Nin

Books

Becoming Human by Jean Vanier
(1998 Massey Lectures) A powerful and gripping meditation on what makes for a truly humane and compassionate humanity. Vanier traces a possible path of spiritual evolution from loneliness and alienation towards joy and fulfillment.

Daring Greatly: How the Courage to Be Vulnerable Transforms the Way We Live, Love, Parent, and Lead by Brené Brown

Brown argues that vulnerability is not weakness, but rather our clearest path to courage, engagement, and meaningful connection.

Stitches: A Handbook on Meaning, Hope, and Repair by Anne Lamott

We start again after personal and public devastation, we recapture wholeness after loss, Lamott says, by collecting the ripped shreds of our emotional and spiritual fabric and sewing them back together, one stitch at a time.

The Gift of Adversity: The Unexpected Benefits of Life's Difficulties, Setbacks, and Imperfections by Norman E Rosenthal, M.D. and Rameck Hunt

Running counter to society's current prevailing message that 'excellence' must always be aspired to, Rosenthal shows that engaging with our own failures and defeats is one of the only ways we are able to live authentic and meaningful lives.

The Highly Sensitive Person by Elaine Aron
"Highly sensitive person" describes 15 to 20 percent of the population. Being sensitive is a normal trait--nothing defective about it. Yet society rewards the outgoing personality and treats shyness and sensitivity as something to be overcome.

The Places that Scare You by Pema Chodron
We can let the circumstances of our lives harden us and make us increasingly resentful and afraid, or we can let them soften us and make us kinder.

The Wisdom of Insecurity by Alan Watts
It is only by acknowledging what we do not and cannot know, that we can find something truly worth knowing. In order to lead a fulfilling life, one must embrace the present—live fully in the now.

The whole gamut of human experience is yours to enjoy once you decide to venture into territory where you don't have guarantees. ~ Wayne Dyer

Children's Books on VULNERABILITY

One by Kathryn Otoshi
Shrek! by William Steig
Gleam and Glow by Eve Bunting
Horton Hears a Who by Dr. Seuss
The Cherry Tree by Daisaku Ikeda
A Chair for My Mother by Vera B. Williams
Pippi Longstocking by Astrid Lindgren

Table Grace on VULNERABILITY

For what we are about to receive,
let us be truly thankful to those who prepared
and served it. In this festivity let us remember
too those who have none,
those who cannot share this plenty,
those whose lives are more affected than our
own by war, oppression and exploitation,
those who are hungry, sick and cold.
In sharing in this meal, let us be truly thankful
for the good in our lives, and may we commit
once again to bringing more good to the world.

~Anonymous

The content for these packets is a group effort. Thanks to all who helped create this packet by suggesting resources and providing feedback. Your artwork, and original writing is also most welcome! We subscribe to "Soul Matters" a curriculum from Rev. Scott Taylor. Service Leaders and Covenant Group Facilitators work with Rev. Julie to incorporate the theme into our programming & Sunday Services. Would you like to share your talents?

Next month's theme: **PRACTICE**
Email your suggestions for resources to share in this packet to unitarianchurch@cogeco.net

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