

Soul Matters, March 2014

What Does It Mean To Be a Person of Anticipation?

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We all have periods of anticipation in our lives. Anticipating what a new school or job will be like... Anticipating a raise, a wedding, the coming of spring... Anticipating a test, a job interview, an operation... Anticipation can be a delight or an agony. It depends on your attachment to the outcome.

Anticipation is a skill used in sports, music, theatre, and any number of other outlets. In baseball, a batter must be able to anticipate the ball coming at him/her, without expecting that it will be any particular type of pitch. There is very little time to react to a fast-pitched baseball, and anticipation helps the batter to be ready. In music, a vocalist or wind instrumentalist might anticipate a long note by taking a big breath before it. In live theatre, an actor must anticipate his/her next lines, while being open to whatever actually happens before them. It doesn't play well to deliver the "right" lines after another actor stumbles or delivers the wrong lines.

Anticipation is not the same as expectation. Expectations are things you believe are likely to happen. Anticipation is about looking forward, preparing for something, "a feeling of excitement about something that is going to happen."

Remember what it felt like as a child, waking up on the first morning of summer vacation? Or anticipating Christmas, or your birthday? At any age, did you ever plant a seed and anticipate what would grow from it?

As a church, you have just come through a year and a half of interim ministry. You have a new mission statement, a commitment to developmental ministry, you've completed a successful stewardship campaign, and celebrated your 20th anniversary as a church. Now is the time of anticipation. This month, your Ministerial Search Team is interviewing potential developmental ministers. By some time in April, the Team and Board will have selected that person.

There are many unknowns before you. You don't yet know who your next minister will be. You don't know what will be asked of you starting when developmental ministry begins in August. But here's what I know. All of your candidates for ministry are well-qualified to lead you. Any of them will be devoted to the success of your church. You have an exciting time before you, imagining and re-imagining how to have a vibrant, healthy, growing church.

So relax and enjoy it. This is a time to be open to what is, and what is yet to come.

I hope this time of anticipation is a delight; you deserve delight. With gratitude for all the work you have done to reach this point,

Love, Rev. Beatrice

Our Spiritual Exercises:

*You may choose one or all of these exercises.
If you want to do both 2 and 3, try the second exercise first.*

1) Write a story, or make notes on the following, so you can share it with your group. Remember a time when you anticipated something, good or bad. How did you prepare for it? What did you think was going to happen? How did you feel as you were waiting? What really happened? And what changed when it did?

2) Anticipate having a good day, on a particular day before your Soul Matters group meets. This can be a day off from work, a working day, a special day... any one you choose. Notice how you feel as you anticipate this good day. What are your expectations? Can you release them so that whatever happens will be OK? Are there any preparations you need to make in anticipation of this day?

Notice how you feel when this day begins. Hold your anticipation of a good day throughout the day, or keep on reminding yourself as needed. Notice how that feels. At the end of the day, make some notes on how your day went. Did your anticipation of a good day make any difference?

3) Begin each morning with the expectation of a good day. Keep the following on your bedside table or bathroom mirror, and read it every morning, preferably aloud. Feel free to create a mantra of your own, if you prefer.

Each new day is a gift.
I am alive, and grateful for my life.
I anticipate this day with delight.
Today is a new day, a fresh start, a clean slate.
This day holds its own opportunities for love,
acceptance, forgiveness, and salvation.
I anticipate with pleasure this great new day.

Questions To Wrestle With:

Be sure to engage these questions in advance of your group and treat them like a spiritual discipline throughout the month. Read over the questions and find the one that “hooks” you most. Then let it take you on a ride. Don’t wait until the last minute. Look them over early and live with them during the entire month. Tape the one that hooks you to your bathroom mirror. Or carry it in your wallet or purse. Maybe even post it on your refrigerator door. One way or another, allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share that journey with your group.

1. Were your early teachers right about what to anticipate about life and others?

As children and young adults, all of us were taught to anticipate certain things about life and others. Some of us were taught that people are fragile and trustworthy. Others of us were taught to trust and expect the best. Some of us were told to expect and anticipate that life had a very specific plan for us. Others of us were taught to anticipate that we would have to make it on our own and make life into what we wanted it to be. Did these early lessons about anticipation prove true for you? And if not, what were the one or two key experiences that changed your perspective?

2. Has anticipation ever let you down?

We’ve all had high hopes that have been crushed. Sometimes we anticipate with all our heart. And when what we anticipated doesn’t happen, those hearts can be bruised badly. What did these broken heart experiences teach you? And who or what helped those bruises heal?

3. Has anticipation ever surprised you?

Have you ever experienced some event or situation that was easier than you anticipated? What did that teach you? How did it shape their attitude towards others and life?

4. Are you sick and tired of people not appreciating your pessimistic anticipation?

Unitarian Universalism talks a lot about hope. About people being good at heart and life being woven fine with the love that will not let you go. Preachers constantly tell us that hope and life’s gifts are mostly a matter of looking at the world with optimistic eyes. But what about the glass-half-empty folk? Is pessimism all about doom and gloom? How do the Eeyores among us convince their rose-colored-glasses friends that our pessimism is a smart, reality-based strategy to ensure that we are prepared?

5. Has the anticipation strategy of “fake it until you make it” ever worked for you?

There’s not much to add to this question. If you are a believer in the strategy, this is your chance to testify!

6. Do you anticipate a brighter future for your children?

Scientists tell us we missed the window to do much about climate change. Political analysts talk about how politics is more polarized than ever and thus there is little chance of us tackling the social challenges of our time. Globalization and the income divide do not bode well for the survival of a strong middle class. College costs are rising yearly. In the midst of all these dire predictions, what are you telling your children? Or more importantly, how are you preparing them? Maybe even most important of all, what are you doing to change what they have to anticipate?

7. Do you know what you anticipate?

Are you rushing into what is next or going along with whatever comes? It is all too easy to let life live us rather than us live it with intentionality. Busyness and day-to-day to-do lists can become the drivers of our days rather than our life goals and dreams. Are you becoming who you want to be or just responding to what comes next? As cheesy as it sounds, when was the last time you asked, “What do I want out of life?”

8. Are you anxiously & clingingly expecting or openly & calmly anticipating?

Many religious traditions teach that periods of “waiting” or spiritual anticipation are good for the soul. In fact they prescribe these periods of waiting without expectation and anticipation as spiritual disciplines. In what way does your life have a “season of open anticipation” or “season of unknowing” in it right now? Or in what way does your life need one? How good are you at sitting with the unknown?

9. Is grace part of it?

Our Christian heritage talks a lot about grace. For most UUs, grace is simply an unanticipated gift-- an experience of healing, hope or sheer joy that you didn't earn, expect, or deserve. What roles do these unanticipated gifts of grace play in your spiritual life? What incredible surprises woke you up recently or made you open to life more fully? How has an unexpected gift asked you to live differently? In what ways can you expand this gift so it is unanticipated grace for someone else to enjoy?

10. Where do you draw the line between anticipation and anxiety?

Can't wait to hear your answers of this!

11. What anticipated future drives our church?

At the heart of every thriving congregation is a compelling vision of the future. What do you see our congregation looking like 5 years from now? More importantly, how will our congregation have shaped the future 5 years from now? What does a uniquely UU future look like?

12. What is your greatest anticipation?

What is your greatest want or hope? And what are you doing to make it happen? Are you doing anything to make it happen? Or are you just anticipating it passively? Do you still anticipate it? Or have you let it become a pipe dream?

Recommended Resources:

As always, this is not “required reading.” We will not analyze or dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started--and maybe to open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to “live a life of awakening.”

Wise Words:

Plan plans, not results!!!

- anonymous

Expecting is the greatest impediment to living.
In anticipation of tomorrow, it loses today.

-- Lucius Annaeus Seneca,

(a Roman Stoic philosopher and statesman who advised Emperor Nero.)

Our thinking and our behavior are always in anticipation of a response. It is therefore fear-based.

--Deepak Chopra

Calling on the flying things of the universe & hoping not too many of them are pigeons

- Brian Andreas

Conscience in most men, is but the anticipation of the opinions of others.

- Jeremy Taylor

My Mother taught me about ANTICIPATION..."Just wait until your father gets home."

- anonymous

"Being a pessimist probably won't work anyway."

- seen on a church sign board

"I keep pondering that very thin line between anticipation and expectation, and how much better my life is when I don't let myself cross that line.

My spiritual discipline regarding anticipation, it seems to me, is to maintain a feeling of anticipation -- excitement and eagerness -- about

the POTENTIAL for something to happen, yet not become attached to an EXPECTATION that it will happen, let alone happen in a specific way, if it does come to pass.

Anticipation can so easily morph into grasping and being attached to outcomes. And when that happens, I'm no longer present in the here and now of my own life. I'm living with thoughts and emotions based on "should have been" (past) and "should be" (future) versus experiencing what actually is (Now). I've got to remember the OPEN part of our UU call to Listen-Open-Serve.

When we're harboring expectations, we basically become too full of ourselves to receive the gifts that are being offered us by others, or to recognize opportunities for us to gift others (whom we understand may not be able to recognize as gifts, if they themselves are harboring expectations).

I can think of loads of times when having set expectations instead of a wide open sense of anticipation led me to miss out on opportunities to truly enjoy being fully alive, and conversely, when going with the flow led to unanticipated joys, such as when I was a kid, putting on our bathing suits to dance in the downpour and play in the puddles, instead of getting our undies all in a bunch and pouting on the front porch because the plans we had for a picnic and swimming at our Aunt Jean's were rained out.

So, how do we live a life of anticipation, in which we're consistently open to and hungry for WHATEVER deliciousness Life may have to offer us?"

- A Soul Matters Member

A Religious Man and Anticipation

A religious man is on top of a roof during a great flood. A man comes by in a boat and says "get in, get in!" The religious man replies, "no I have faith in God, he will grant me a miracle."

Later the water is up to his waist and another boat comes by and the guy tells him to get in again. He responds that he has faith in god and god will give him a miracle. With the water at about chest high, another boat comes to rescue him, but he turns down the offer again cause "God will grant him a miracle."

With the water at chin high, a helicopter throws down a ladder and they tell him to get in, mumbling with the water in his mouth, he again turns down the request for help for the faith of God. He arrives at the gates of heaven with broken faith and says to Peter, I thought God would grand me a miracle and I have been let down." St. Peter chuckles and responds, "I don't know what you're complaining about, we sent you three boats and a helicopter."

On the Practice of Quaker Worship By Douglas Steere

The practice of sitting together in silence is often called "expectant waiting." It is a time when Friends become inwardly still and clear aside the activities of mind and body that usually fill our attention in order to create an opportunity to experience the presence of the Holy Spirit. It is not a time for "thinking," for deliberate, intellectual exercise. It is a time for spiritual receptivity, so it is important not to clog one's mind with its own busy activities. Nonetheless, thoughts will occur in the silence. Some thoughts will be distractions and should be set aside. (Make that shopping list later.) But some thoughts or images or feelings may arise that seem to come from a deeper source and merit attention. If you are visited by a spiritual presence, if you seem to experience perceptions that are drawn from a deeper well or are illuminated with a brighter light, then let those impressions dwell in you and be receptive to the Inward Teacher. Each person finds his or her

own ways of "centering down," or entering deep stillness during meeting.

There are two common guidelines about entering worship:

- "Come with heart and mind prepared." Worship will be more meaningful if you arrange to enter meeting in a relaxed and calm frame of mind, rather than in a rushed frenzy, and if you ready yourself during the week through prayer, contemplation, reading, or other practices; and
- Bring "neither a determination to speak nor a determination to remain silent." In other words, if you offer a spoken message during worship, it should arise from a spiritual prompting that happens during worship--one that you are ready for but have not planned.

- Douglas Steere

"I think of trying to get pregnant as one of the biggest anticipations in life. When it fails to happen, the couple faces great anticipation and huge disappointment, possibly again and again and again. If pregnancy does result, a nine-month anticipation begins. Excitement. Anxiety. Wonder. Fear. Impatience. So many emotions can be wrapped up in anticipation."

- A Soul Matters Member

Podcasts & Websites:

Apocalypse

This American Life Podcast

APR 2, 1999

Stories of the end of the world. More people believe it's more imminent than you probably realize...

Facing, and Planning For, How You Will Die (and why we don't.)

Big Think Blog

David Ropeik

http://bigthink.com/risk-reason-and-reality/facing-and-planning-for-how-you-will-die?utm_source=Big+Think+Weekly+Newsletter+Subscribers&utm_campaign=80b7625ea2-Machine_Translation8_17_2012&utm_medium=email

Online Videos & Podcasts:

Anticipation - Carley Simon

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4NwP3wes4M8>

Worth listening to again.

Tali Sharot: **The optimism bias**

TED TALK

Are we born to be optimistic, rather than realistic? Tali Sharot shares new research that suggests our brains are wired to look on and anticipate the bright side -- and how that can be both dangerous and beneficial.

http://www.ted.com/talks/lang/en/tali_sharot_the_optimism_bias.html

Anticipating that we are in the Anthropocene (the human dominated period of history), how shall we proceed?

TED TALKS

http://www.ted.com/conversations/10314/anticipating_that_we_are_in_th.html

Elizabeth Gilbert: **Your elusive creative genius**

TED TALK

On anticipating the elusive Muse.

http://www.ted.com/talks/elizabeth_gilbert_on_genius.html

Books:

1984

By George Orwell

Brave New World

By Aldous Huxley

Beyond Calculation

By Peter J. Denning (Editor), Robert M. Metcalfe

As the 16 contributors to this volume make clear, the scientific, economic, and social impacts of computers are only beginning to be felt. This brilliantly eclectic collection will fascinate anybody with an interest in computers and where they are taking us. The book "offers a collection of 24 essays of astonishing intellectual reach" (Steven Manes, "The New York Times").

Movies

Meet Joe Black

about anticipating your own death and the expectations for love and career we hold..

http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Meet_Joe_Black