

**Life Is a Wonder**  
Rev. Debra Faulk  
read by Alexa Yaphe & Terri Marks  
First Unitarian Congregation, Toronto  
Sunday, January 25 2026

*Today, Alexa and I, your co-worship leaders, will share with you Rev. Debra Faulk's reflection entitled "Life Is a Wonder," prepared for the Meaning Making Project this January. In it, she invites us to reclaim childlike curiosity, embrace life's mysteries, and practice awe as a path to renewal and connection. I invite you to listen with an open heart.*

Is it a mystery, miracle, ... a wonder? Is it to ponder, to doubt, ... to wonder? Can the cultivation of wonder rejuvenate, inspire and motivate? Is it a spiritual practice? A few of the questions that inform the reflection, the wonderings.

Why, why, why – most of us can recall or know a young person whose favorite word is why. I must confess that little one still lives in me. I want to learn something new every day. There is not a single day that I can recall when that “why” question was not with me. This is both engaged curiosity and a way to open the conversation about the big questions in life, which is, from my perspective, a significant part of the purpose of a religious or spiritual community.

Unitarian Universalists have never required a single answer to life's biggest questions. We love mystery. We honour science. We respect doubt. We embrace metaphor. And we leave room for the miraculous—even if we may not all agree on what that word means.

Our faith tradition does not have the absolute answers to those big questions, we do offer responses – ideas about the big questions that help us understand life and its meaning. UU responses help us all to think about the mysteries of life and death, the mysteries of everything. ... Mystery is what makes life, life. There will always be big questions and there will always be mystery. Mystery, mystery, life is a riddle and a mystery.

Poet Mary Oliver titles one of her poems *Mysteries, Yes*

In it she states:

*Truly, we live with mysteries too marvelous  
to be understood.*

*How grass can be nourishing in the  
mouths of the lambs.*

*How rivers and stones are forever*

*in allegiance with gravity  
while we ourselves dream of rising.  
How two hands touch and the bonds  
will never be broken.  
How people come, from delight or the  
scars of damage,  
to the comfort of a poem.  
Let me keep my distance, always, from those  
who think they have the answers.  
Let me keep company always with those who say  
"Look!" and laugh in astonishment,  
and bow their heads.*

There is and always will be that questioning, the whys that are daily with us. Those of us who find ourselves in a community of seekers and searchers, recognize and for the most part, accept that there is that which is unknowable – though we also will diligently attempt to know.

In *The Four M's of Religion*, Rev Joyce Smith, clarifies this saying that:

*Our scientists are not solving mysteries, they are making discoveries. Nor is mystery the same as magic ... Mystery is an awareness. It is the wonder at the simple holiness of life itself. Mystery leads us to stand in awe of the fact that we do exist, that the world in all its beauty is.<sup>1</sup>*

I like that mystery is an awareness, the wonder at the simple holiness of life. We so need to be called back to this sense of the simple holiness of life, back to the wonder of it all. Sometimes wonder is a gentle ache in the heart, a sense that the world is bigger, more intricate, more sacred than our minds can hold. I have had a few moments in my life when I have been taken by or fallen into the mystery, into the wonder of it all. In those moments there is a sense of profound connection with all that is. The mere mention of this brings one of those moments vividly to mind, it calms my soul and provides a momentary sense of connection - perhaps you have such an experience that comes to mind.

I know I am not alone in these experiences for many have shared theirs with me, after all books are written about such moments – indeed, our 1<sup>st</sup> source of inspiration from the Sources of the living Unitarian Universalist tradition articulates this as the **Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life.**

In her play *The Search for Intelligent Life in the Universe*, I love how Lily Tomlin, as “Trudy the Bag Lady” puts it:

*“On the way to the play we stopped to look at the stars. And as usual I felt in awe. And then I felt even deeper in awe at this capacity we have to be in awe about something. Then I became even more awestruck at the thought that I was, in some small way, a part of that which I was in awe about. And this feeling went on and on. My space chums got a word for it: ‘awe infinitum.’ ‘Cause at the moment you are most in awe of all you don’t understand, you’re closer to understanding it all than at any other time. And I felt so good inside, my heart felt so full, I decided to set time aside each day to do ‘awe-robics’.”*

Let this be an invitation to add this to your daily well-being routine, exercise the body with physical activity, exercise the mind with reading, researching, learning something new, exercise the emotions by engaging in deepening relationships, exercise the soul with awe-robics. Awe-robics, now that would be a way to maintain a child-like sense of wonder.

When do we start to experience wonder, is it in the infant noticing their toes, or the ‘wow’ at the first sight of snowflakes or looking in a tidal pool. Wondering...that ongoing source of curiosity that fuels our development as human beings and has fueled most, if not all, discovery.

Somewhere along the way, many of us lose the sense of wonder we had as children. You see, children do not ask questions to prove anything. They ask because the world is an invitation.

Adulthood can shrink that invitation.

Responsibilities pile up.

We get better at predicting, explaining, categorizing.

We learn to *manage* life instead of marveling at it.

And sometimes wonder feels almost dangerous—because if we allow ourselves to feel awe, we may also have to feel grief, vulnerability, humility, even gratitude.

Wonder opens us up, and being open can feel a bit risky.

There is a cost to a life without wonder.

Without wonder, life becomes flat.

Without wonder, we lose touch with what makes our days sacred.

In these current times there is another aspect of wonder that has been very present. Bewilderment. As I try to take this sense of wonder into my ponderings about the challenges both personal and in the big wide world, I feel bewildered at so many things that have me question how on earth did we get here, how did it come to this? Wonder can be curiosity. Or confusion. Or longing.

Even the most advanced neuroscientist cannot fully explain consciousness, or our capacity to wonder. The odds of our existence—your existence, my existence—are astronomically improbable. Is it a wonder?

Always. Because no matter how much we know about evolution, physics, chemistry, ecosystems—life retains its ability to astonish us.

In the language of science, wonder is not anti-rational.  
Wonder is the beginning of inquiry.

In the language of spirit, wonder is not naïve.  
Wonder is the doorway to reverence.

In the language of poetry, wonder is not childish.  
Wonder is what allows us to live fully, deeply, joyfully.

Yet wonder is not merely a feeling that happens to us.  
It can be a practice—a discipline, even a spiritual path.  
Think of how many religious traditions cultivate wonder:  
Jewish mysticism teaches that the whole world is filled with divine sparks waiting to be seen. Buddhism speaks of “beginner’s mind”—approaching each moment freshly. Christianity marvels at incarnation—the holy made flesh. Pagan traditions honor the seasons, the moon, the cycles of nature. And Unitarian Universalism— we have put wonder right at the center of our theology, as our primary source of inspiration. I would suggest that it is also a bridge between our first principle, the affirmation of *the inherent worth and dignity of every person* and our seventh principle, the valuing of *the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part*.

Wonder is the bridge between these two principles: The more we wonder at the inherent worth of life, the more reverently we treat it.  
In this way, wonder becomes a moral stance—a way of living ethically in a world that desperately needs our care.  
Wonder does not require certainty.

In fact, wonder and doubt often walk hand in hand.

The philosopher Socrates said, “Wonder is the beginning of wisdom.”

Notice he did not say certainty.

Wisdom begins when we admit that we do not know everything, when we resist the temptation to be right all the time.

Doubt—healthy, curious doubt—is the partner of wonder.

Where wonder asks, “What is possible here?”

Doubt asks, “What might I be missing?”

Both are necessary.

Both keep us humble and open.

And humility is a kind of spiritual spaciousness—space enough for new learning, new understanding, new connection, even new transformation.

We live in a culture of overwhelm—of news cycles, productivity pressures, and unrelenting speed. Wonder is a kind of antidote.

Think of the last time you felt wonder—maybe while watching a sunset, or holding a newborn, or hearing a piece of music that reached something deep in you.

In those moments, time stretches.

The racing mind slows.

The heart opens.

Even a few seconds of wonder can feel like a breath of fresh air.

Wonder nudges our creativity.

It sparks inventions, artwork, poetry.

It helps us imagine possibilities we have not yet tried.

Every new idea begins with wonder.

“What if...?” is a wondering question.

Psychologists tell us that people who cultivate awe—noticing wonder regularly—tend to act more compassionately, volunteer more, and feel more connected to others.

Wonder makes us aware that we are part of something larger than ourselves.

And that awareness often leads to action—action for justice, for the environment, for the vulnerable, for peace. Wonder motivates us because wonder awakens love.

How might we practice wonder intentionally? A few thoughts.

### **Slow Looking**

Choose one ordinary thing each day—a leaf, a cup of coffee, a street corner—and look at it more slowly than usual.

Notice its textures, colors, sounds, or even its history.

Slow looking turns the ordinary into the extraordinary.

### **Ask Questions Without Needing Answers**

“What is this trying to teach me?”

“How did it come to be?”

“What else might be true?”

Questions open the mind like windows.

### **Step Outside**

Nature is a master teacher of wonder.

Touch bark.

Watch clouds.

Listen to birds.

Feel wind.

Let yourself be small in the best possible way.

**Note a daily wonder** - Each evening, reflect or write down one moment—just one—that surprised you, moved you, or made you pause.

Over time, this trains the mind to notice beauty.

### **Cultivate Wonder with Others**

Share moments of wonder aloud with family, friends, or within your communities.

When wonder is spoken, it grows.

Here’s something we rarely acknowledge:

Every person listening today is a phenomenon—an unrepeatably event in the universe.

You are the result of stardust, oceans, continents, ancestors, choices, accidents, dreams, struggles, heartbreaks, joys, and countless acts of love or care that allowed you to survive to this very moment.

If that is not wonder, what is?

So how might our lives change if we intentionally lived with more wonder?

We might slow down.

... become more patient—with ourselves and with others.

We might be less cynical.

... become more curious.

We might listen more deeply.

...give thanks more often.

We might act more courageously.

... love more freely.

Wonder does not solve every problem.

It can change the way we meet the world.

It opens our eyes, softens our hearts, strengthens our spirits, and reminds us of what truly matters.

Life is not perfect.

Life is not always fair.

Life can be harsh, heartbreaking, confusing.

And yet—

even in the hardest times, wonder is possible.

And wonder is not something we outgrow.

It is something we grow into.

Let us cultivate wonder like a garden—

with patience, with curiosity, with reverence.

Let us practice wonder as a form of spiritual resilience—

a way to stay awake to the beauty, the fragility, the astonishment of being alive.

I close this reflection and the invitation to awe-robics, to cultivating wonder full lives and with these words from Ojibway writer, poet, Richard Wagamese:

“I've been referred to as odd before.

Nowadays, I prefer to refer to myself as “awed.” I want awe to be the greatest ongoing relationship in my life. I want to move through my days floored by the magnificence and generosity of my Creator. The breaking of a day, the silence between words, the light emanating from a real conversation and kindness, truth, love and the apparently random hand of grace: I want to remain gobsmacked by

all of it. Rendered speechless by wonder, I await the next unfolding. Peace,  
friends. Be awed today.”<sup>2</sup>

Let us take a few deep breaths in silent reflection.