

Allen Avenue Unitarian Universalist Church  
Lay-led service, November 28, 2010  
Abundance

Opening Words

In this time of Thanksgiving and the holidays we think of abundance with the abundant harvest; abundant family and abundant friends.

If we have this we are lucky for there are many other abundances

Abundance of thirst

Abundance of hunger

Abundance of sadness  
of loneliness

Abundance of tears  
of apathy  
of madness

Abundance of money  
of food  
of friends  
of respect

It's the positive part of abundance that we tend to think of. That we are a rich nation with rich resources.

But don't forget how hard this time of year can be for those with scarcity, with depression, with broken hearts.

Use your abundant spirit to help their broken spirits.

And make the gladness in your heart even more abundant.

Thank you.

by Edmund Davis-Quinn

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William Irvine, "[A Guide to the Good Life](#)

We normally characterize an optimist as someone who sees his glass as being half full rather than half empty. For a Stoic, though, this degree of optimism would only be a starting point. After expressing his appreciation that his glass is half full rather than being completely empty, he will go on to express his delight in even having a glass: It could, after all, have been broken or stolen. And if he is atop his Stoic game, he might go on to comment about what an astonishing thing glass vessels are: They are cheap and fairly durable, impart no taste to what we put in them, and – miracle of miracles! – allow us to see what they contain. This might sound a bit silly, but to someone who has not lost his capacity for joy, the world is a wonderful place. To such a person, glasses are amazing; to everyone else, a glass is just a glass, and it is half empty to boot.

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Adam and Eve and All That

Reflecting on abundance recently, I decided to find a four-letter synonym for the term. The answer popped quickly into mind. The word is "life." Life itself is abundance. The chance to breathe and to eat and to think and to drink and to kiss is abundance.

Not exactly an original thought, I soon realized. Actually thinking an original thought would be super-abundance, but I missed the mark this time around. I missed it by a long shot. The Bible beat me to it in its very first book. God placed Adam and Eve in paradise and gave them life in the midst of everything they could possibly want, gave them everything except for one tree. There was life, there was abundance. Except for the one tree. And that was before Black Friday had even been conceived.

In a contemporary version of the story, a suburban Sam and Samantha might have everything they could possibly want – abundance again – until the newest iPod appears at a price they cannot afford without bringing down their entire house of cards. Down come the cards, joker landing on the top. The abundant life – except for one iPod, one tree.

And here lies truth. Life itself as abundance – except. We have enough food, enough water on this earth for all. Except. Some of us want our iPods, our prime rib, our lobster and our shiny cars and we get them, while others do not. We reject the abundance of life as not quite enough, and we go after the one more tree, then the one beyond that.

Knowledge of life as abundance did not stop with the authors of Genesis. Poets for ages have sung of the glories of nature, and theologians for centuries have proclaimed the wonders of life. “I exist as myself, and that is enough,” sang Walt Whitman.

Through the centuries, a religious sect of Adamites has occasionally sprung up, a sect professing to have reclaimed the innocence of Eden. Celebrating a practice they call “holy nudism,” Adamites have sometimes stripped themselves naked for worship. Back to the basics of abundance. But Adamites have not always fared very well. Wikipedia has a wonderful drawing of practitioners being rounded up by men with guns, rounded up and apparently led off to jail instead of paradise. The poets have not always done well, either. Whitman sang not just of himself but of other men, and women, too, and not all of them were pleased by his song. One contemporary reviewer called Whitman an Adamite, and said his *Leaves of Grass* might better have been called *Stenches from the Sewer, Garbage from the Gutter, or Squeals from the Sty*.

As UUs we reject such hostility. We respect other religions, so do not condemn the Adamites or the believers of Genesis. After all, what Adam and Eve did by dressing us was at least a little useful, not just for the clothiers at L. L. Bean but for the rest of us as well. I hope I will not offend by confessing that the idea of worshipping here in the nude with all of you does not appeal – especially when I think of traveling to and from this building through a Maine winter – or even a mosquito-filled summer day. And the message of Genesis is strong – life does offer much even without every new electronic gizmo we can get our hands on.

I hope and trust that some were wise enough to carve out time on Thanksgiving Day to be grateful for all that we already have – even while others made plans to head for the mall and get more at midnight or dawn. Recognizing what we have is a great first step toward overcoming the temptation to demand more.

Maybe the best synonym for abundance is not *life*. Maybe the best equivalent is another three-syllable word. And maybe that word is *acceptance* – acceptance of all that we already have, acceptance of our remarkable and unlikely chance to eat and to think and to drink and to kiss.

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Enough  
10-26-10

“That’s enough,” they tell me  
and take it away,  
never asking if I thought it was  
enough.  
Enough for how long?  
I wonder.  
For today, this month, this year,  
this life?  
Suddenly distrustful  
that I will ever get more,  
I panic,  
horde what I have left,  
terrified it will not be  
enough.  
I snatch at more  
when the opportunity arises –  
more food, love, beauty, prestige –  
uncaring that others,  
too, wanted some.  
They have enough  
but I may not.  
Covetous and grasping,  
I find the chances  
to take more  
grow fewer,  
and I become more  
fearful,  
until one day  
I am all alone,  
sitting silent and despairing.  
A little girl sees me,  
gives me a flower.

“Because you look sad,”  
she says.  
It is the first gift  
in longer than I can  
remember.  
Suddenly I am not  
afraid.  
I give her some  
of what I have,  
knowing that what remains  
is more  
than enough,  
and her eyes spark  
like fireflies,  
igniting echoing warmth  
in me.  
I give to others,  
cautious at first,  
but finding each time  
deep joy.  
I am no longer  
alone,  
and I receive so much  
for what I give.  
What I feared  
seems shadowy,  
smoke and mirrors,  
and I turn my back  
on those doubts.  
I live freely, now,  
trusting that I truly have  
enough.

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Abundance & Prosperity Meret Bainbridge Abundance service 11-28-2010

When I think of “Abundance” I find myself caught between two conflicting paradigms. On the one hand is the belief in the power of positive thinking and our control over our reality, culminating in the New Age belief that if we only replace a scarcity model of thinking with a model of abundance, we can attract money our way from a limitless universe regardless of economic realities. On the other hand is our direct experience of scarcity during the recent economic downturn and our growing awareness of limited ecological resources and the excess of our consumption and waste, leading to a return to simplicity and frugality.

So, what really is abundance? I would like to share with you some insights I gained from a rather unusual source – acupuncture – which is what I do for a living.

“Abundance and Prosperity” is the name of an acupuncture point on the leg, also known as Stomach 40. It is located on the stomach channel which is related to nourishment.

I have always been fascinated by the ancient Chinese names for acupuncture points which are so full of imagery, sometimes paradoxical, and quite often illustrate a teaching rooted in Taoist philosophy.

When I tell my patients that there is a point by the name “Abundance and Prosperity”, the response without fail is: “Do that one on me! Do it in every single treatment. I could use some more of that!” - That is, until I tell them that this is not at all what the point does, at least not right away. To the contrary, the effect of this point is to help you get rid of things. It clears accumulations, in particular accumulations of phlegm. Now, what we call “phlegm” in Chinese Medicine is more than nasal discharge – it includes such diverse phenomena as excess body fat, inflammation or brain fog – which we call “phlegm misting the heart”. Phlegm is water that has stopped flowing, and has congealed into a stagnant bog.

Acupuncture theory tells us that we need to first clear this accumulation and get the water flowing again, so nourishment can reach all areas – and then we can gain true abundance.

The same lesson is found in Feng Shui – which is sort of acupuncture for our surroundings. Feng Shui teaches us that in order to attract prosperity to our homes, we must first clear out clutter, unearth the treasures from under the pile of junk, discern what is useful to us from what has turned into old baggage.

Clearing away the accumulations of useless things from our homes, the accumulations of toxins from our bodies and outdated thought patterns that no longer serve us from our minds – all this helps break up the congealed energy and gets the water flowing again.

Isn't it interesting? In the West, we tend to think of abundance as accumulation, as having more, plenty, extra - accumulated wealth, bank accounts, property, stuff.

In Eastern thought, accumulation gets in the way of abundance. Abundance is not so much about how much we have, but more about energy circulating, flowing without restriction, following the cycle of life. Then the energy will find its way and nourishment will get to where it is needed. Maybe abundance is not so much about having, but about moving, circulating, being.

The same is true for money. Money is just a means of exchange, of coming and going. Money wants to flow, to circulate. That's why we call it “currency”. Money that is hoarded is stagnant like “phlegm”. Money that is free-flowing will bring nourishment to many.

With that thought I now invite you to pull out your checkbooks and wallets for our offertory. Each week, we at Allen Avenue UU share one half of our collection with a nonprofit organization that has a local connection to our community.

For the month of November the recipient of our Share-the-Plate is Grace-Street Ministry.

Grace-Street Ministry offers a consistent, compassionate, pastoral presence to the homeless and marginalized in downtown Portland.

Pastor Mair Honan co-founded the Ministry four years ago as a way to give the homeless the respect and an authentic personal interaction that they do not usually receive. Honan connects with people directly on the street and through shelters and soup kitchens, conducting prayer services and helping solve practical problems.

Your donations may go toward the purchase of things like clothing, boots, rain ponchos, water bottles, backpacks, or phone cards. A few dollars can go a long way in buying warmth for a day or a little more safety.

Please let the money flow and give generously. The offering will now be given and received.

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## **AN ABUNDANCE OF TEARS**

Thinking about the abundance of life, I found myself focusing on the abundance of tears. That seemed inappropriate, so I thought about the other plentiful quantities in my life. Some, like tears, seem to have both positive and negative sides. I certainly have many friends, siblings, excessive cellulites, lots of medications, accumulated junk, impatience, wonderful memories, illnesses, and much more.

As I continued exploring the topic, the abundance of tears kept returning to mind. “How can anyone speak of tears as an abundance?” you might ask, especially, if you identify tears as negative and suppress them. My answer – “Because living with an abundance of tears makes me feel more alive”. Tears manifest in an overflowing fullness when thanking my grandchildren for helping out and they respond, “But Grandma, that’s what grandchildren are for!”. Receiving the loving care of my partner strengthens me, the protectiveness of my sons gives me courage, and I feel worthy by the encouragement of friends. I could name more ingredients for the fullness of my heart, but I’d rather share some experiences that have filled me with an abundance of tears.

How did I get to be like this, you may wonder – as I certainly have. The answers lie in some of the other abundant areas in my life such as the wisdom my father shared.

When one of us eight children complained about not having something, he’d remind us that we had a roof over our heads, clothing on our backs, food in our bellies, and each other and that was enough. I didn’t always agree, but as I matured and bore children of my own I began to understand his advice. We may not have had material things, we always had an extra place at our table for anyone who needed a meal and companionship. I carried that tradition into my married life where the door was always open for anyone in need. What more could anyone want?

I really do see tears as an abundance in my life, but sometimes they and I have spent too much time together. I discovered that during the first year of teaching – another abundance that I wish I were well enough to experience again. During the first four months of teaching, an overwhelming supply of concerns, sleepless nights, and tears for the students and their challenges enabled me to lose 36 pounds! I could benefit from that now!

However, if needed, I would counsel anyone to abandon that approach and try the method that helped me cope. I knew that I’d be more effective if I learned to detach and still feel compassion. What helped me most was to visualize an imaginary screen between others and me. Only then was I able to reach out, take the hand of another and walk beside him or her without attempting to carry and/or “bleed” from another’s woundedness. It was not easy to give up my unconscious need to “slosh buckets of God” over others to ease their pain.

There is not enough time to share more ingredients for an abundance of tears, and I don't advocate that everyone experience life as I do, but I would love see peoples of the world shedding more tears of compassion. "If only all the hands that reach could touch" is one of my favorite quotes.

My wish for each of us is that we have enough and for me that includes plenty of tears.

Marcia Rogers Payson

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Closing Words

At the deepest level, there is no giver, no gift, and no recipient...only the universe rearranging itself.

Jon Kabat-Zinn