

Mystery and Wonder

1 Every time I am willing to stand calmly in the face of mystery, knowing that I finally can neither control nor manage it, I know I have realized a small measure of spiritual growth. **Caroline A. Westerhoff**, *Good Fences*

2 Wisdom is a stream put forth from the Great Mystery, beyond concepts, words, or form. **Dhyani Ywahoo**, in *Teach Us to Number Our Days* by Steven McFadden

3 The only time I see the truth is when I cross my eyes. **Louise Erdrich**

4 The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science. He to whom the emotion is a stranger, who can no longer pause to wonder and stand wrapped in awe, is as good as dead—his eyes are closed. The insight into the mystery of life, coupled though it be with fear, has also given rise to religion. To know what is impenetrable to us really exists, manifesting itself as the highest wisdom and the most radiant beauty, which our dull faculties can comprehend only in their most primitive forms—this knowledge, this feeling is at the center of true religiousness. **Albert Einstein**

6 Just as a world without poetry has squandered the mystery of the snowflake, so does a world without religion suffocate from its merciless functionalism. **Dorothee Soelle** in *The Silent Cry*

7 The knowing that characterizes the second half of life is open to mystery, drawn to the depths, and ready to risk. It is not easily distracted by minutiae. The questions it raises are rarely multiple choice or true-false. Embracing ambiguity leads to a kind of holy agnosticism, a comfortableness with mystery and open-endedness. **Margaret Guenther**

8 When we deliberately leave the safety of the shore of our lives, we surrender to a mystery beyond our intent. **Ann Linnea**, *Deep Water Passage*

9 Where there is a woman there is magic. If there is a moon falling from her mouth, she is a woman who knows her magic, who can share or not share her powers. A woman with a moon falling from her mouth, roses between her legs and tiaras of Spanish moss, this woman is a consort of the spirits. **Ntozake Shange**, *Sassafras, Cypress and Indigo*

10 In some fairy tales there is a magic word which has the power to undo the spell that has imprisoned someone and free them. When I was small, I would wait anxiously until the prince or

the princess would stumble on the formula, said the healing words that would release them into life. Usually the words were some sort of nonsense like "Shazam." My magic words have turned out to be "I don't know." **Rachel Naomi Remen**, in *Kitchen Table Wisdom*

11 At a time when we have become accustomed to having technological miracles served up with our morning coffee, it is hard to be amazed by anything.

. . .We are going to have to look beyond Silicon Valley for our miracles, for the wonderful, amazing things that are just beneath the surface of our hour by hour world. We are going to have to look beyond and beneath the sign that says 'genius at work' for the one that reads 'mystery at work.'

--**John Kirvan**, An Excerpt from *Silent Hope: Living with the Mystery of God*

12 You are not God's mouthpiece. Try to be an ear,
And if you do speak, ask for explanations. **Rumi**, trans. **Coleman Barks**

13 "To behold with awe is to see things filled with their own light. This light and this bit of being are gifts of creation. As gifts they fill us with awe. This awe is accompanied by delight. It is the original blessing." **M.C. Richards**

14 My God what a world. There is no accounting for one second of it. **Annie Dillard**, in *Super, Natural Christians* by Sallie McFague

15 a poem by Billy Collins. . .

Introduction to Poetry

I ask them to take a poem
and hold it up to the light
like a color slide

or press an ear against its hive.

I say drop a mouse into a poem
and watch him probe his way out,

or walk inside the poem's room
and feel the walls for a light switch.

I want them to waterski
across the surface of a poem
waving at the author's name on the shore.

But all they want to do
is tie the poem to a chair with rope
and torture a confession out of it.

They begin beating it with a hose
to find out what it really means.

16 a poem by Mary Oliver. . .

When Death Comes

When death comes
like the hungry bear in autumn;
when death comes and takes all the bright coins from his purse

to buy me, and snaps the purse shut;
when death comes
like the measles-pox;

when death comes
like an iceberg between the shoulder blades,

I want to step through the door full of curiosity, wondering:
what is it going to be like, that cottage of darkness?

And therefore I look upon everything
as a brotherhood and a sisterhood,
and I look upon time as no more than an idea,
and I consider eternity as another possibility,

and I think of each life as a flower, as common
as a field daisy, and as singular,

and each name a comfortable music in the mouth,
tending, as all music does, toward silence,

and each body a lion of courage, and something
precious to the earth.

When it's over, I want to say: all my life
I was a bride married to amazement.
I was the bridegroom, taking the world into my arms.

When it's over, I don't want to wonder
if I have made of my life something particular, and real.
I don't want to find myself sighing and frightened,
or full of argument.

I don't want to end up simply having visited this world.

17 Our minds are finite, and yet even in these circumstances of finitude we are surrounded by possibilities that are infinite, and the purpose of human life is to grasp as much as we can out of the infinitude. **Alfred North Whitehead**

For Reflection and Discussion

A What do mystery and wonder have to do with your spirituality, your religion?

B In what context do you experience mystery and wonder. . .in nature, in the arts, in personal relationships, in your experience of yourself? Are you able to describe the feeling/the apprehension/the recognition of mystery or wonder using your own language?

C Do you find--or have you ever found --"I don't know" to be magic words for you? How so?

D Do you sometimes suffer from a need to know or understand? Or, in the language of the Billy Collins poem, are there "poems" that you are beating up in order to find "what it really means"? Does an example come to mind?

E "Mystery and Wonder" and All Souls: How do the two relate in your experience? Is there a specific moment that stands out? Consider every aspect of your experience of All Souls as you think about mystery and wonder as it shows up in your own life.

--Mary Beth Hatem, for Covenant Groups at All Souls Church, Unitarian

