



## What Does It Mean To Be a People of Paradise?



**February 2019**

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In the cold winds of winter, images of a tropical paradise might arise in our minds. We see the ocean, and sand, and sun. We hear the warm breeze rustling over our shoulders on a night beach stroll and the sounds of the waves. We might imagine distant music of birds singing out that a meal has washed up on shore. But, if we aim to imagine “paradise” as it’s own concept, each one of us will think of something different.

“Paradise,” for many, does have a connotation of bliss-- of ultimate joy. A worry-free existence that serves perhaps as an escape from our lives or as a heightened awareness of each passing moment. For others, “paradise” is just one, rare, fleeting moment woven within the fabric of what is familiar, like the delight in the presence of a loved one who makes us belly-laugh.

How we individually think of or experience paradise influences how we each show up to our sixth principle. As Unitarian Universalists, we uphold the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. World community. Peace. Justice. These sound a lot like a potential paradise. In fact, Is this principle us, collectively, aiming for a big, expansive, earthly paradise?

Or, is paradise something given? Is it something we must not earn and cannot create but instead just receive? Is it a sense of ultimate belonging? A sustained experience of the holy? Is it an afterlife? Some far away realm in the future? The earth beneath our feet? Is it inevitable? Absolute? Subjective? Internal? External? Fleeting? Equal?

“Paradise” may be one of the most abstract of our themes. The idea causes a lot of questions and makes us become aware of our already experienced luxuries. As we contemplate paradise this month, let us strive to explore what is delightful in our lives already. That way, whether or not we have a retreat from this cold winter planned, we can gravitate toward the things in our lives that already feel like paradise to us.

In faith,

Andrea Johnson  
Chalice Circle Coordinator

# Our Spiritual Exercises

## Option A:

**Reflect on this Parable credited to Henry Nouwen: *Two Babies Talking in the Womb*:**

<https://thebacajourney.com/two-babies-talking-in-the-womb/>

**In a mother's womb were two babies.** The first baby asked the other: *"Do you believe in life after delivery?"*

The second baby replied, *"Why, of course. There has to be something after delivery.*

*Maybe we are here to prepare ourselves for what we will be later."*

*"Nonsense,"* said the first. *"There is no life after delivery. What would that life be?"*

*"I don't know, but there will be more light than here. Maybe we will walk with our legs and eat from our mouths."*

The doubting baby laughed. *"This is absurd! Walking is impossible. And eat with our mouths? Ridiculous. The umbilical cord supplies nutrition. Life after delivery is to be excluded. The umbilical cord is too short."*

The second baby held his ground. *"I think there is something and maybe it's different than it is here."*

The first baby replied, *"No one has ever come back from there. Delivery is the end of life, and in the after-delivery it is nothing but darkness and anxiety and it takes us nowhere."*

*"Well, I don't know,"* said the twin, *"but certainly we will see mother and she will take care of us."*

*"Mother?"* The first baby guffawed. *"You believe in mother? Where is she now?"*

The second baby calmly and patiently tried to explain. *"She is all around us. It is in her that we live. Without her there would not be this world."*

*"Ha. I don't see her, so it's only logical that she doesn't exist."*

To which the other replied, *"Sometimes when you're in silence you can hear her, you can perceive her. I believe there is a reality after delivery and we are here to prepare ourselves for that reality when it comes...."*

**Come to your group prepared to talk about what in this parable brings you comfort, or what breeds disconnect from your own beliefs.**

## ***Option B:***

### ***Practice Visualization***

Visualization is a powerful Law of Attraction technique. Our brains do it naturally when we envision something we want to do or accomplish, or something we want to happen to us. Professionals, athletes, celebrities, and politicians are versed in visualizing success, but have you ever tried visualizing your own *paradise*? Take a minute to brainstorm a moment of bliss you would like to experience, and follow these steps to visualize this paradise.

Secret Tips for Successful Visualization

<https://www.applythelawofattraction.com/successful-visualization/>

Guided Visualization Exercise:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=r-zXv7aYYqY>

## ***Option C:***

### **Find Paradise in Our Recommended Resources**

Our recommended resources are full of wisdom about what it means to be a people of paradise. Engaging these resources and finding the one that especially speaks to you is a spiritual practice in and of itself.

So, if none of the above exercises call to you, engage the recommended resources section of this packet as your spiritual exercise for the month.

Set aside some regular time throughout a week to go through them and meditate on them until you find the one that most expands or deepens your understanding of trust. After you've found it, consider printing it out and carrying it with you or pinning it up so you can continue to reflect on it throughout the weeks leading up to your group meeting. Come to your group ready to share where the journey led you.

# Your Question

*As always, don't treat these questions like "homework" or try to answer every single one. Instead, make time to meditate and reflect on the list and then pick the one question that speaks to you most. The goal is to figure out which question is "yours." Which question captures the call of your inner voice? Which one contains "your work"? What is it trying to get you to notice? Where is it trying to lead you?*

1. For some, "paradise" is synonymous with "bliss." Looking backward, what bliss did you experience as a child? Can it only be known to children? What bliss have you sustained from childhood throughout your life? Or, what bliss would you like to reawaken? What is truly blissful in your life right now?
2. If "paradise" were an emotion, how would it manifest for you? If it were (or is) a sense, how would it be perceived by the body?
3. How does your identity influence your definition of paradise?
4. Frida Kahlo writes about the kind of lover you deserve, but is "love" paradise?
5. What was the first mystery to capture your imagination? How does that still shape you today? Is there a relationship between mystery and paradise?
6. What would happen if you decided that paradise was lying around waiting for you to notice it, rather than a destination?
7. What might it mean to allow yourself to be healed by the paradise all around you?
8. Is clinging to the pursuit of what you want cutting you off from noticing what you have?
9. So life's led you into a puddle. Are you still staring at your mud-covered feet? Or are you ready to look up and notice that the wide open sky never went away?

**What's your question?** Your question may not be listed above. As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month listening to your days to hear it.

# Companion Pieces

## Recommended Resources for Personal Exploration & Reflection

*The following resources are not required reading. We will not analyze these pieces in our group. Instead they are here to companion you on your journey this month, get your thinking started and open you to new ways of thinking about what it means to be part of a people of Wonder.*

### Word Roots

**Paradise:** a place of exceptional happiness and delight; a walled garden or a place covered in paintings of flowers and trees; a place where you can wonder without worry.

### Wise Words

Those who are blind may feel that if they could recover their sight they would be dwelling in paradise, but we who have good eyes rarely take the time to appreciate that we are already in paradise. If we just take a moment to touch our eyes deeply, we will feel real peace and joy.

*~Thich Nhat Hanh*

A thankful person is thankful under all circumstances.  
A complaining soul complains even if he lives in paradise.

*~Baha'u'llah*

**The mind is its own place, and in itself can make a heaven of hell, a hell of heaven.**

*~ John Milton, Paradise Lost*

But love is always new. Regardless of whether we love once, twice, or a dozen times in our life, we always face a brand-new situation. Love can consign us to hell or to paradise, but it always takes us somewhere. We simply have to accept it, because it is what nourishes our existence. If we reject it, we die of hunger, because we lack the courage to stretch out a hand and pluck the fruit from the branches of the tree of life. We have to take love where we find it, even if

that means hours, days, weeks of disappointment and sadness.

The moment we begin to seek love, love begins to seek us. And to save us."

*~ Paulo Coelho, By the River Piedra I Sat Down and Wept*

"It is better to have your head in the clouds, and know where you are... than to breathe the clearer atmosphere below them, and think that you are in paradise"

*~Henry David Thoreau*

"...But we can perhaps remember, if only for a time, that those who live with us are our brothers, that they share with us the same short moment of life; that they seek, as do we, nothing but the chance to live out their lives in purpose and in happiness, winning what satisfaction and fulfillment they can.

Surely, this bond of common faith, this bond of common goal, can begin to teach us something. Surely, we can learn, at least, to look at those around us as fellow men, and surely we can begin to work a little harder to bind up the wounds among us and to become in our own hearts brothers and countrymen once again."

*~ Robert F. Kennedy in "The Mindless Menace of Violence"*

### Poetry

**in time of daffodils**

*e. e. cummings*

<https://wordsoftheyear.com/2014/12/03/in-time-of-daffodils-who-know-by-e-e-cummings/>

in time of daffodils(who know  
the goal of living is to grow)  
forgetting why, remember how  
in time of lilacs who proclaim  
the aim of waking is to dream,  
remember so(forgetting seem  
in time of roses(who amaze  
our now and here with paradise)  
forgetting if, remember yes  
in time of all sweet things beyond  
whatever mind may comprehend,  
remember seek(forgetting find)  
and in a mystery to be  
(when time from time shall set us free)  
forgetting me, remember me

**You deserve a lover...**

*Frida Kahlo*

<https://wordsfortheyear.com/2017/11/13/you-deserve-a-lover-by-frida-kahlo/>

You deserve a lover who wants you  
disheveled, with everything and all the  
reasons that wake you up in a haste and the  
demons that won't let you sleep.

You deserve a lover who makes you feel safe,  
who can consume this world whole if he  
walks hand in hand with you; someone who  
believes that his embraces are a perfect  
match with your skin.

You deserve a lover who wants to dance with  
you, who goes to paradise every time he  
looks into your eyes and never gets tired of  
studying your expressions.

You deserve a lover who listens when you  
sing, who supports you when you feel shame  
and respects your freedom; who flies with  
you and isn't afraid to fall.

You deserve a lover who takes away the lies  
and brings you hope, coffee, and poetry.

**There may be chaos still around the world**

*George Santayana*

<https://wordsfortheyear.com/2015/02/10/there-may-be-chaos-still-around-the-world-by-george-santayana/>

There may be chaos still around the world,  
This little world that in my thinking lies;  
For mine own bosom is the paradise  
Where all my life's fair visions are unfurled.  
Within my nature's shell I slumber curled,  
Unmindful of the changing outer skies,  
Where now, perchance, some new-born Eros  
flies,  
Or some old Cronos from his throne is hurled.  
I heed them not; or if the subtle night  
Haunt me with deities I never saw,  
I soon mine eyelid's drowsy curtain draw  
To hide their myriad faces from my sight.  
They threat in vain; the whirlwind cannot  
awe  
A happy snow-flake dancing in the flaw.

**I Have Lived My Whole Life in a Painting  
Called Paradise**

*Diane Seuss*

**Full poem:**

<https://www.poets.org/poetsorg/poem/i-have-lived-my-whole-life-painting-called-paradise>

with the milkweeds splitting at the seams  
emancipating their seeds  
that were once packed in their pods like  
the wings and hollow bones  
of a damp bird held too tightly in a green  
hand. And the giant jade  
moths stuck to the screen door as if glued  
there. And the gold fields  
and stone silos and the fugitive cows  
known for escaping their borders.  
I have lived in a painting called *Paradise*,  
and even the bad parts  
were beautiful. There are fields of needles  
arranged into flowers,  
their sharp ends meeting at the center, and  
from a distance the fields  
full of needle flowers look blue from their  
silver reflecting the sky,

or white lilies if the day is overcast, and there in the distance is a meadow filled with the fluttering skirts of opium poppies.

### **Raspberry**

*Rev. Dr. Lynn Ungar*

<https://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/raspberry/>

Almost October, and there it was,  
draped over the fence,  
ripe as July, and as seductive—  
a stranger’s bit of paradise.  
It wasn’t mine. Perhaps  
I should have left it there,  
flashing like a cardinal  
in the autumn light.  
But, still, the world offers itself so lavishly, as if  
it will not be refused.  
Sometimes I call this “grace.”  
Sometimes I simply taste it  
as a perfect raspberry, out of season,  
savored seed by seed,  
Persephone’s fruit.

### **Gone to the Unseen**

Rumi

Full Poem:

<https://wordsoftheyear.com/2015/12/21/gone-to-the-unseen-by-rumi/>

At last you have departed and gone to the Unseen.  
What marvelous route did you take from this world?

Beating your wings and feathers,  
you broke free from this cage.  
Rising up to the sky  
you attained the world of the soul.  
You were a prized falcon trapped by an Old Woman.  
Then you heard the drummer’s call  
and flew beyond space and time.

you fell upon the rooftop of this world.  
Then you ran in every direction  
and escaped through the drain spout...

## **Articles, Podcasts and Videos**

### **Forgiving the Broken**

Rev. Myke Johnson

<https://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/forgiving-the-broken/>

...“There is no utopia in which we can leave behind our brokenness. In the very midst of our vision and our ideals we bring our full and wounded selves to the table. I have seen this in every community to which I have given my energy, from the Catholic Workers to the Seneca Women’s Peace Camp, from organizations working for ecological sustainability to church congregations. Our friends can sometimes break our hearts more deeply than our enemies.”

### **“The Ritual of Sabbath”**

*Rev. Sue Magidson*

<https://www.questformeaning.org/quest-article/the-ritual-of-sabbath/>

“...The Jewish Sabbaths I’ve experienced weren’t only about rest; they were also about pleasure. I know this may sound counter to those of you whose image of the Sabbath includes strict rules and *discomfort*—scratchy restrictive clothing, enforced quiet, prohibitions against dancing or singing or playing, and long hours in church or synagogue.”

### **The Habits of Happiness – TED Talk**

*Matthieu Ricard*

[https://www.ted.com/talks/matthieu\\_ricard\\_on\\_the\\_habits\\_of\\_happiness](https://www.ted.com/talks/matthieu_ricard_on_the_habits_of_happiness)

What is happiness, and how can we all get some? Biochemist turned Buddhist monk Matthieu Ricard says we can train our minds in habits of well-being, to generate a true sense of serenity and fulfillment.

### **Eight Places to your Sacred Space**

Thomas W. Shepherd

<http://www.unity.org/resources/articles/eight-places-find-your-sacred-space>

“A series of scenarios. You can create

whatever sacred space you want—pagoda temple or Grange Hall, towering basilica or tent in the wilderness. Images of potential meditation spaces begin below. Do not be confined to these examples, but think of the list as a starter kit for lifelong adventures in silent communion with your God.”

### **Aesthetic Rapture Between Heaven and Hell: William Blake Illustrates John Milton’s “Paradise Lost”**

<https://www.brainpickings.org/?s=paradise>

And how beautifully Blake reciprocated that love — however one may [feel about religion](#), there is something undeniably and immeasurably powerful about Blake’s paintings, an ineffable magic that sparks its very own source of divinity:

### **Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, Part I: Everything Is Sacred**

<https://cac.org/pierre-teilhard-de-chardin-part-everything-sacred-2015-08-10/>

Nor was there a split between human work and spirituality. To explain what he called “the divinization of our activities,” Teilhard wrote, “By virtue of the Creation and, still more, of the Incarnation, *nothing* here below *is profane* for those who know how to see. On the contrary, everything is sacred. . . . Try, with God’s help, to perceive the connection—even physical and natural—which binds your labour with the building of the kingdom of heaven; try to realize that heaven itself smiles upon you and, through your works, draws you to itself.”

### **Listening In With Eckhart Tolle**

Katy Koontz

<http://www.unity.org/publications/unity-magazine/articles/listening-%E2%80%A6-eckhart-tolle>

“Learn to be truly present, Tolle urges, and doors you never before noticed will open wide to reveal exquisite treasures that exist

only in each moment.”

### **We are already in paradise**

Rebecca Parker

<https://www.uuworld.org/articles/already-in-paradise>

“If we can recognize this, our religious framework can shift from hope for what could be—for a “better world” to come—to hope that what is good will be treated with justice and love and that what has been harmed will be repaired. This is a different kind of hope. It could be called *responsive* hope, hope grounded in respect for what is here, now. “There are a thousand ways to kneel and kiss the ground,” Rumi wrote. Our framework of meaning can begin with appreciative and compassionate attention to *this* world, rather than imagining an ideal *other* world.”

## **Movies**

### **Enchanted April**

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/enchanted\\_april/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/enchanted_april/)

Two cloistered, married English women impulsively rent an Italian villa and embark upon a vacation without their spouses.

### **It’s A Wonderful Life**

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/its\\_a\\_wonderful\\_life/](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/its_a_wonderful_life/)

George Bailey, who has long considered himself to be a failure, is made to realize how many lives he has touched, and helped, through his existence.

### **Pleasantville**

<https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/pleasantville/>

“Addicted to a utopian world, David immerses himself in “Pleasantville” as an innocent escape from the trouble-plagued real world...”

## **The Truman Show**

[https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/truman\\_show](https://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/truman_show)

“Jim Carrey gives a remarkable performance as a man learning that his entire life in a storybook coastal village has been the subject of a live, 24-hour-a-day womb-to-tomb television drama.”

joy reveal about ordinarily unmet social desires and possibilities?”



<https://www.soulmatterssharingcircle.com/>

## **Books**

### **The Five Invitations: Discovering What Death Can Teach Us About Living Fully**

*Frank Otaseski*

<https://www.amazon.com/exec/obidos/ASIN/1250074657/b-raipick-20>

An exhilarating meditation on the meaning of life and how maintaining an ever-present consciousness of death can bring us closer to our truest selves

### **Proof of Heaven**

*Eben Alexander*

[https://www.amazon.com/Proof-Heaven-Deluxe-DVD-Neurosurgeons/dp/1476753024/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?keywords=Proof+of+Heaven&qid=1548006967&s=Books&sr=1-1](https://www.amazon.com/Proof-Heaven-Deluxe-DVD-Neurosurgeons/dp/1476753024/ref=sr_1_1?keywords=Proof+of+Heaven&qid=1548006967&s=Books&sr=1-1)

"Proof of Heaven" is more than just an awe-inspiring account of a profound encounter with spiritual reality. Dr. Alexander's neuroscience career taught him that near-death experiences are brain-based illusions, and yet his personal experience left him dumbstruck." --Bruce Greyson, MD, co-editor of "The Handbook of Near-Death Experiences: Thirty Years of Investigation"

### **A Paradise Built in Hell**

*Rebecca Solnit*

[https://www.amazon.com/Paradise-Built-Hell-Extraordinary-Communities/dp/0670021075/ref=sr\\_1\\_1?crd=30TDTQL68ZPQS&keywords=a+paradise+built+in+hell+rebecca+solnit&qid=1548007146&s=Books&sprefix=a+paradise+buil%2Cstripbooks%2C171&sr=1-1-catcorr](https://www.amazon.com/Paradise-Built-Hell-Extraordinary-Communities/dp/0670021075/ref=sr_1_1?crd=30TDTQL68ZPQS&keywords=a+paradise+built+in+hell+rebecca+solnit&qid=1548007146&s=Books&sprefix=a+paradise+buil%2Cstripbooks%2C171&sr=1-1-catcorr)

“A startling investigation of what people do in disasters and why it matters. Why is it that in the aftermath of a disaster? whether manmade or natural? people suddenly become altruistic, resourceful, and brave? What makes the newfound communities and purpose many find in the ruins and crises after disaster so joyous? And what does this