



Living a Life of Balance

Small Groups: July & August 2015

In the contemporary story “The Parable of the Trapeze” by Dannan Parry, the author describes the experience of swinging along on your own trapeze bar, enjoying the breeze, when suddenly you see another bar coming towards you. In the moment, in that place of deep knowing, you understand that the approaching bar has your name on it. You intuit that your path, your growth, your next step is there just ahead of you. The problem, of course, is that to grab that next bar, you have to let go of the current bar you are holding and there is the unavoidable moment when you will for a period be without any bar flying through the space in-between. This space is called “transition.”

During July and August we will be exploring what it means to live a life of Balance. Sometimes, we try to create balance by controlling everything, feeling like it is the world or circumstances that throw us out of balance. Maybe the universe does have a sense of humor, for just at the moment when we are spending time looking at living with balance, we, as a congregation, will actually be in a great deal of transition. We have fantastic staff like Anne Byrne and Jill Story (and just a few months ago, Rev. Linda Lawrence) letting go and flying on to that next bar of opportunity and growth in their lives. Over the next couple of months, we will be adding new staff to the congregation, some who will likely be interim, here only for a year, as we move through this transition period and think about what next bar is ahead in the life and growth of UUCP.

Transition times are not always easy. Dannan Parry says that we sometimes regard the in-between time as a no-place between places, but that in truth the transition time is the most significant. He writes:

“I have come to believe that transition is the only place that real change occurs. I have a sneaking suspicion that the transition zone is the only real thing and the bars are illusions we dream up to avoid the void where the real change, the real growth, occurs for us. Whether or not my hunch is true, it remains that the transition zones in our lives are incredibly rich places. They should be honored, even savored. Yes, with all the pain and fear and feelings of being out of control that can (but not necessarily) accompany transitions, they are still the most alive, most growth-filled, passionate, expansive moments in our lives.”

As we contemplate how to cultivate balance in our lives, to create a balance between our heads and our hearts, our work and our family, our doing and our being, it just may be that there is no better place to really practice balance than in times of transition. And in this way, we might discover that a part of finding balance in the midst of transition is to look around during the “in-between” times, honor these times, and remember that sometimes it is when we feel most lost, when we are most uncertain which way is forward, when we feel confounded, that these are the times when we are growing the most. That transition is the only place where real change occurs.

In the end, transition times do pass. We do find that new bar. And once we do, we may discover, we only got there by letting go of the old and growing through the transition.

May this summer, and the long, hot days, afford you chances to slow down in body and in spirit, to have time to rest and to appreciate moments of love, joy, beauty and hope.

Rev. Susan



Living the Theme: Balance

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience balance and what you learned from the practice.

1. Learn to balance your body and mind through yoga.

Try making a regular time each day to strengthen your balance with some simple yoga poses. Perhaps begin each day with a pose, or take a break in the middle of the day to remember the art of balance. The following yoga poses are designed for people of all ages.

a. Tree pose

Stand with your legs together and your arms straight over your head, palms together. Raise your right leg slightly off the ground so that the toes are still on the ground and your heel is touching the inside part of your ankle. Balance for 20 to 30 seconds if possible. Repeat with the other leg. Hold onto something if necessary. As you gain balance, draw your raised foot upward, resting the sole of your foot on the inside of the lower leg. Eventually, work toward having your raised leg bent, with the foot resting on the inside of the opposite leg above your knee.

b. Warrior pose

Begin with your feet hip-distance apart and your arms straight at your side. Turn to the right, and step your right foot out wide about 3 to 4 feet while keeping your heels in line. Turn your right foot out to a 90-degree angle. Inhale and raise your arms straight to the sides to shoulder height.

As you exhale, bend the right leg until your thigh is parallel with the floor. Your left leg should be straight. Hold pose for up to 30 seconds while concentrating on your breath. Repeat pose with other leg.

2. Make time for the Important Things in Life

The poet Brian Andreas writes:

“Everything
changed the
day she figured
out there was exactly
enough time
for the
important
things
in her
life.”

His poem is called “Enough Time.” If you live your life constantly wishing you had more time, thinking you never had enough, try to change your perspective a bit to reflect on and name the important things to you. Are those things (or people, relationships, qualities of life) getting your attention?

Invite yourself to think differently when you feel there is not enough time. Ask yourself, what are the important things, and then make sure to make time for those things.



Some Questions to Live With

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

- 1. What does it mean to you to live a balanced life?** What would a balanced day look like?
- 2. What values or qualities of being** must be present for you to have a balanced life?
- 3. How would honoring your values** impact your experience of a work-life balance?
- 4. Where do you feel out of balance? Where do you struggle to balance competing priorities or concerns?**
- 5. Balance can touch so many aspects of our lives. There is a balance between doing and being, between giving and receiving, between talking and listening, between providing support and challenge. What relationships in your life (with yourself or with others) do you struggle with finding the right balance?**
- 6. How do you know when you are out of balance?** What does it feel like emotionally and physically?
- 7. What are you willing to give up in order to feel more balanced?**
- 8. Do you have a ritual or practice** to bring yourself back to a balanced state of living/being?
- 9. How do you balance your children's activities?** Do you or they feel overwhelmed, under stimulated, or just right?
- 10. How do you balance the care of others with your own self-care?**
- 11. Is there anything in your life that you avoid dealing with?** Does that lack of attention to the issue throw you off balance?
- 12. What is "too much" in your life?** Overeating? Overspending? Overworking? What do you gain from this imbalance, and what do you lose?
- 13. Who in your life models for you a healthy balance?** What do you see that indicates balance? What can you learn from this person?
- 14. Are there "shoulds" in your life that keep you out of balance?** Are they true obligations or are they self-imposed?
- 15. In what ways could you ask for help** from others in order to maintain balance?
- 16. In what ways are you already doing a great job of balancing?**



Recommended Resources

These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.

First Thoughts and Wise Words

Balance: a state in which different things occur in equal or proper amounts or have an equal or proper amount of importance

One should so master one's nature that both the positive and the negative aspects in every character trait are integrated. For example, be both conservative and progressive; be fearless and peaceable; have a strong personality and a meek one.

From the Hassidic Tradition

Live a balanced life - learn some and think some and draw some and paint some and sing and dance and play and work every day some.

Robert Fulghum, UU

Happiness is not a matter of intensity but of balance and order and rhythm and harmony.

Thomas Merton

A harmonized mind produces harmony in this world of seeming discord.

Paramahansa Yogananda

When we have a good balance between thinking and feeling... our actions and lives are always the richer for it.

Yo-Yo Ma

Our lives are a mixture of different roles. Most of us are doing the best we can to find whatever the right balance is . . . For me, that balance is family, work, and service.

Hillary Rodham Clinton

Balance is the perfect state of still water. Let that be our model. It remains quiet within and is not disturbed on the surface.

Confucius

Be moderate in order to taste the joys of life in abundance.

Epicurus

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.

Albert Einstein

Life is a balanced system of learning and evolution. Whether pleasure or pain; every situation in your life serves a purpose. It is up to us to recognize what that purpose could be.

Steve Maraboli

If it is language that makes us human, one half of language is to listen.

Silence can exist without speech, but speech cannot live without silence.

Listen to the speech of others. Listen even more to their silence.

To pray is to listen to the revelations of nature, to the meaning of events.

To listen to music is to listen also to silence, and to find the stillness deepened and enriched.

Jacob Trapp, Singing the Living Tradition #482

*In Chinese philosophy, **yin** and **yang** are generalized descriptions of the antithesis or mutual correlations in human perceptions of phenomena in the material world, combining to create a unity of opposites in the theory of Taiji. The term **liang yi**, also known as **yin** and **yang** or **earth and heaven** has a similar meaning.*

Unknown

You can only lean against that which resists.

Indian Proverb

Maintain a state of balance between physical acts and inner serenity, like a lute whose strings are finely tuned.

Buddha



Moderation, the Golden Mean, the Aristonmetron, is the secret of wisdom and of happiness. But it does not mean embracing an unadventurous mediocrity; rather it is an elaborate balancing act, a feat of intellectual skill demanding constant vigilance. Its aim is a reconciliation of opposites.

Robertson Davies

Zen is not a particular state but the normal state: silent, peaceful, unagitated. In Zazen, neither intention, analysis, specific effort nor imagination take place. It's enough just to be without hypocrisy, dogmatism, arrogance—embracing all opposites.

Taisin Deshumaru, Zen teacher

To allow oneself to be carried away by a multitude of conflicting concerns, to surrender to too many demands, to commit to too many projects, to want to help everyone in everything is itself to succumb to the violence of our times. Frenzy destroys our inner capacity for peace. It destroys the fruitfulness of our work, because it kills the root of inner wisdom which makes work fruitful.

Thomas Merton

In a modern society people can live without hope only when kept dazed and out of breath by incessant hustling.

Eric Hoffer

Karma Repair Kit Items 1-4

1. *Get enough food to eat, and eat it.*
2. *Find a place to sleep where it is quiet, and sleep there.*
3. *Reduce intellectual and emotional noise until you arrive at the silence of yourself, and listen to it.*
- 4.

Richard Brautigan

My point is, life is about balance. The good and the bad. The highs and the lows. The pina and the colada.

Ellen DeGeneres

The ingredients of both darkness and light are equally present in all of us...The madness of this planet is largely a result of the human being's difficulty in coming to virtuous balance with himself.

Elizabeth Gilbert, Eat, Pray, Love

I think that our lives balance without our help, like water seeking a level. If I try to stay awake forever, I eventually get tired and fall asleep. And if I try to sleep forever, after enough time in bed, I wake up.

Worship Associate

Just as your car runs more smoothly and requires less energy to go faster and farther when the wheels are in perfect alignment, you perform better when your thoughts, feelings, emotions, goals, and values are in balance.

Brian Tracy

The Uses of Not

*Thirty spokes
meet in the hub.
Where the wheel isn't
is where it's useful.*

*Hollowed out,
clay makes a pot.
Where the pot's not
is where it's useful.*

*Cut doors and windows
to make a room.
Where the room isn't,
there's room for you.*

*So the profit in what is
is in the use of what isn't.*

Lao Tzu

Your hand opens and closes, opens and closes. If it were always a fist or always stretched open, you would be paralyzed. Your deepest presence is in every small contracting and expanding, the two as beautifully balanced and coordinated as birds' wings."

Rumi



In thinking about "balance", it struck me, on a big picture level, how the cycles of nature- day/night, winter/summer/ young/old, birth/death- are constantly re-balancing. Maybe part of feeling balanced would be to tune-in and feel more a part of these natural cycles. On a personal level, it's easier to talk about "balance" than to achieve it. There's the "inner life": body, mind and spirit, that often gets out of whack. Then there's the "outer life": family, friends, work and everything else. What help is there for this juggling act that is our modern world?! Keeping better balance in the "inner life" seems to allow for better results in the "outer life." And this frequent reminder to self: "There is no such thing as a perfectly balanced day, week, or life; maybe over time, reasonable balance can be enjoyed now and then." (That sounds more realistic!) And when things get totally unbalanced, that's the time to lighten up and laugh.

Small Group Facilitator

Everything changed the day she figured out there was exactly enough time for the important things in her life.

Brian Andreas "Enough Time"

Imagine life as a game in which you are juggling some five balls in the air. You name them - work, family, health, friends and spirit - and you're keeping all of these in the air. You will soon understand that work is a rubber ball. If you drop it, it will bounce back. But the other four balls - family, health, friends and spirit - are made of glass. If you drop one of these, they will be irrevocably scuffed, marked, nicked, damaged or even shattered. They will never be the same. You must understand that and strive for balance in your life.

Bryan Dyson, former CEO of Coca-Cola

I have consistently practiced yoga for the past 12 years, and it has helped me immeasurably to bring my body literally into balance, and it is my "go-to" activity to bring equilibrium to my soul and spirit as well. I wrote this poem, "Dancer Pose," to capture the grace my yoga practice provides me.

Kim St. Clair

"Dancer Pose"
by Kim St. Clair

*Knee bent
Foot rooted
Kicked
Into
Hand
Lean forward arm above head
Hinged hips
Soft
Arched
Steady
Then wobble, balance thrown
Tight core
Knees supple, thighs engaged
Breath synched to the
Dance
Posed
And closed*

Additional Resources

Articles:

Finding Balance in Goldilocks Communication:
<http://vividmethod.com/goldilocks-communication-just-the-right-amount-of-information/>

On Being Too Much for Ourselves:
Psychoanalyst Adam Phillips on Balance and the Necessary Excesses of Life:
<http://www.brainpickings.org/2015/06/08/adam-phillips-on-balance/>

Videos and Films:

Work-Life Balance - "Everything worth fighting for unbalances your life":
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MPR3o6Hnf2g>

What can we learn from this artist's practice of balancing natural elements?
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vswc7xB0V6c>