

## 6-4-23 Finding Delight in the Everyday Ordinary

By Shannon Anderson

June days feel like they go on forever. The mornings stretch from the early dawn, allowing ample time for musings, breakfasts on the patio, and walks among the dew and birdsong. The days bring sunshine into my office window, warmth onto my shoulders, and help the day go by faster and yet slower at the same time. The evenings languish in a lovely light, filling the sky with pastel clouds amongst a vibrant blue. Color surrounds me, flowers are everywhere. There is a symphony of sounds. Children play, the river runs high over rock, birds dart between tree branches. The newly grown leaves rustle in the breeze. Occasionally, thunder rumbles and brings rain. The dog smells everything in the fresh green grass. Baby ducks float by. Butterflies dance in the sky. The world feels anew with life. There is much delight in these long June days. Delight comes not perhaps in big events, but rather in the little. The ordinary. The ordinary that becomes extraordinary merely because you let it be so.

I was delighted to pick this month's theme of delight. And there is no better month to think about delight than June. June brings a world of inspiration to the senses and the mind. It balances the dark wonder of December with the axial tilt of our planet. Balance, life, growth, and birth. Those are the feelings of June.

As UUs we are connected to and connected with the natural world. After all, the planet we call home and the landscapes in which we live are the commonality that bring us together rather than highlight our differences. There is universal truth in the stars of a summer sky, the sun bright above us, or the green of a hillside full of flowers. Nature's delight is worthy of worship, of veneration, of ultimate respect.

Indeed, some cultures and religions have found extraordinary powers in this ordinary world. The Polynesian mana, the orenda of the Iroquois, the wakan of the Dakotas, and the manitou of the Algonquin all are symbols that there is supernatural in the natural, that the delight we find in nature is superhuman, omnipotent, and omnipresent. Nature's superpowers reside among us, and in us. Whether by myth, legend, or spirit, the ordinary delights of the daily environment of our lives can become extraordinary if we let them.

But even if you don't believe in some higher power, one can find a spiritual presence in the delight of the every day. This is because our mind and body find connection in joy. When we feel delight, our brain releases neurotransmitters, creating benefits for our bodies and yes even for our hearts. Delight helps us boost our immune system, fight off stress and pain, and support a longer, healthier lifestyle. Laughter is in fact the best medicine.

Smiling more, embracing joy, and finding simple pleasures in everyday life are healthy traits for both our bodies and minds.

And while June and all of its beauty and light makes it easier for us to find this extraordinary delight, we all have hard times within days or even entire days that are hard. And for some, chronic depression, deep sadness, or significant grief or pain places delight out of reach. So, while we try to find more delight, we must be mindful that some of those around us might not be in a position to do so.

Delight also is difficult because of external factors seemingly outside of our control. Extreme weather, wildfire smoke, elected officials that should not be elected, humanitarian crises, mass shootings, and other events occur daily and flood into our brain counteracting all of the delight we're trying to find.

Living in this world as a sensitive, caring, human can be very trying if not downright disappointing and sad.

Many of us practice self-care and self-awareness techniques to center ourselves in a world that often feels out of balance. Mindfulness and meditation are important ways to help us filter out the rest of the world and stay focused on the everyday now, what you can impact rather than what impacts you.

So too do trips out in nature help us to bring back those endorphins of joy and delight. We are blessed here in Sheridan with beautiful parks and walking paths, easily accessible from all areas of town. Our rivers, gardens, trees, and wildlife create an environment of peace and joy. And we are further blessed by having a beautiful mountain range in our collective backyard, full of evergreen lined trails, adorable baby moose, and crisp clear lakes. Being outside in this glorious nature easily fills you with delight. For those that are mobility limited, you can find natural beauty right from the car or park bench. My mom doesn't get out much anymore, but she enjoys a slow drive down a country road to hear meadowlark and see the mountains from a distance. Even small outings can reset your mind and body and soul through the delight we experience.

But even if you don't have time for a walk in the park or a drive to the mountains when you're faced with external strife or pressure, just take a moment to look out a window and focus on a tree or some other element of the natural world that you can connect with in that very simple ordinary moment.

Keeping humor close and accessible also helps. Post a cartoon on your bulletin board ready to cheer you up when you need it. Or maybe look for that funny cat video or whatever internet inspiration for joy you can find. For me, it is something called pudgy penguins shared over text with my friend Lynne. I cannot overstate how much joy these animated blinking penguins wearing silly hats bring me. And you might be familiar with the gnome that knits hearts and releases them into the sky? Pure joy. There's a twitter account I follow called the Tao of Gardening, which if you didn't already guess it is all flowers all the time. I also check out Grover's Twitter account – nothing like a funny little blue monster to lighten up your day. Unlike Elon Musk, Grover doesn't tweet very often, but even looking back at old posts always brings a smile to my face. So, yes there is good stuff on the internet still – you just have to seek it out.

Little moments of delight bring us back to ourselves, again focusing on the here and now and your ability to act, as opposed to your struggle to react to the world around you.

This is not say that other emotions should be ignored or pushed aside. Those feelings are valid and a part of who we are. Frustration, fear, anger, pain – these feelings are a normal reaction to what is often not a normal world. Again, it is part of what makes us human.

But we must find a way back to joy. I choose to be delighted in this crazy, wonderful world we share, and I hope you will join me to find the extraordinary in the ordinary everyday moments that encompass our lives.