

“It Would Have Been Enough”
Rev. Bob Janis-Dillon
The First Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Hunterdon County
April 5, 2009

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,

if you had only given us the Big Bang,
and not given us life,
it would have been enough.

If all that ever happened was that matter exploded into existence,
with all the energy that would ever exist
flaring out from a single dot,
as time unfolded from nothing,
as the laws of physics – themselves an item of great beauty –
were made manifest,
if all that happened was the great beginning,
the mere birth of all that was yet to be,
the supernovas and the rainforests,
the black holes and the ice cream trucks,

I would have abundant cause for a grateful heart.

Even though there wasn't an individual *me* there to see the big bang,
and there wouldn't be for another fourteen billion years,
even though I'm not convinced
there was even a *you* there to perform it,
I feel overwhelmed with gratitude
for this cosmic stardust process
that I get to be a part of,
this beautiful burst of being.

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,

If you had only given us life,
and not given us consciousness,
it would have been enough.

If all that happened was the earth
evolved into a beautiful blue-green living rock,
a place where the air

passes through a multitude of forms,
and the forms move and grow and change
in concert and conflict,
a place where life leads to more life,

I would have abundant cause for a grateful heart

From the honeydew melon to the bullfrog,
from the eukaryotic cell to the Great Barrier Reef,
the life of this world is so incredibly amazing,
I would say that it takes my breath away,
only I know it is exactly the opposite.

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
if you had only given us consciousness,
and not freed us from slavery,
it would have been enough.

If all that happened was I was able to notice
the wiggling my little finger,
or if I looked out the window right now and, instead of the
lustrous beauty of the surrounding fields all I could see was a brick wall,
still,

I would have abundant cause for a grateful heart.

To notice some small piece of the world,
the world without and the world within,
to be aware of what's out there,
to be aware of what's in here,
what an amazing gift to be a part of the
universe's noticing of itself.

To think, to reflect, to be aware of the soulfulness of things –
I'd be abundantly satisfied with US weekly and elevator music,
and yet we have been given Shakespeare and Janis Joplin.

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
If you had only freed us from slavery, and not given us the supermarket,
it would have been enough

If all that happened was that we live at a time and
in a place where no other human being
is able to force us to build pyramids we
don't agree to, if we were instead free
to live where we want and marry who we wish and
befriend whom we love and do what we feel called to do,

We would have abundant cause for grateful hearts.

To go to sleep at night knowing that even our challenges are
our own, that we can embrace life,
or wrestle with life,
on our own terms,
is a power pharaoh and kings have sought, and thankfully,
we possess.

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
If you had only given us the supermarket, and not given us our morning cup of coffee,
It would have been enough.

If all that happened was we were able to walk along aisles
of pomegranates and frozen pizzas,
surrounded by sights and smells from the entire
majesty of the world,
if we could but witness a stack
of locally grown tomatoes,
and remember that summer is here at last,
that winter has passed again and the cycle goes on,

We would have abundant cause for grateful hearts.

Just to be there is happiness,
what ecstasy to be able to take a little of that home with me,
and make it a part of my own being
through the miracle of digestion.

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
if you had only given us a morning cup of coffee,
and not given us the congregation,
it would have been enough.

If all that happened was I woke up

and tasted its liquid to my lips,
that I began the day receiving something
that had grown in the fields through no help from me,
to live in necessary communion with the earth,
receiving its permission to remain alive and awake,

I would have abundant cause for a grateful heart

Not only do I get to live,
I get to live with flavor,
and the rising of my body is accompanied
by a swelling of gratitude in my soul.

To whom it may concern:
God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
If you had only given us the congregation,
and not given us purpose in our lives,
it would have been enough.

If all that happened was that we could find a community to
remind us that life is worthy of our respect,
that to be alive is a precious and wonderful experience,
if there were a place that affirmed us as individuals
while reminding us that we are not alone,

We would have abundant cause for grateful hearts.

Here we have known a place we can be accepted,
a place with a diversity of people and beliefs
can come together to create something beautiful.

I want to pause here in this litany and consider
the nature of gratitude.

Let's look around us at this moment.
Outside, it's a beautiful day.
We can see the sunlight settling on the fields,
a little beyond the Delaware River is glistening,
the towns of Flemington and Frenchtown and Milford
are bustling in this early spring week-end
the world is waking up to the morning,
and waking up to spring.

In here, we are in this amazing building,
sharing this space, and this time.

Around us are many wonderful people, some we may have come to know, some we may have shared incredible moments with, many of whom we have not yet met. All these wonderful individuals are here together this hour focused on what it means to be alive, and what it means to be human together.

Aware of the beauty around us, what rational response could we possibly muster but to be grateful?

Every year in a great many Unitarian Universalist congregations, the minister gives a sermon during the pledge season. Sometimes this sermon is nicknamed “the sermon on the amount.” Well, for this sermon, this year, I’m not going to go into detail about the many worthy programs this congregation sustains – though there are many. I’m not going to tell you about the way that this congregation has changed lives, although this is deeply important. Just so we know that it has, if you can honestly say that being a part of this congregation, that coming here on Sundays or on other days has changed your life in some way, please raise your hand.

There you go. If you want to know how this congregation changes lives, ask them. I want to invite everyone here, after the service, to ask one person who raised their hands, “how has this congregation changed your life?” I think the answers will be worth hearing.

But what I’ve been talking about is gratitude. And I think there’s no finer topic around pledge time, because awareness brings gratitude, and gratitude brings generosity. The Buddha wrote, “The lucky man has three gifts: gratitude, reverence, and the Dhamma (a sense of the law, a sense of the way the world is)” Notice he’s saying gratitude *itself* is a gift, not merely something to be grateful for. Just to be grateful is a gift in itself. I hope you are fortunate enough to have this gift. And I know if you have it, and if you care for this place, it will be easy for you to be generous.

I can say I’m truly grateful for this life. You know, as a minister I think a lot about life and death – part of the job, I guess – and lately I’ve been thinking a thought that might strike some as morbid but for me is greatly liberating. I think to myself, what if this is it? What if these are the days I have been given? I mean, I love living and my hope is to live to a hundred and twenty. But what crosses my mind in that moment, is that if all there was were the days I had lived so far, I’m so grateful for them. “Dayenu” – it would be enough. And because of that, I’m inclined to a generous heart. My mantra these days is “today’s a bonus.” You know? I’ve lived long enough, the universe has done enough for me, more than enough – today’s a bonus. And if you live like today’s a bonus, you’re likely to be

a generous person. Gratitude is the realization that life has been totally unfair to us – unfair in the sense that we have more, much more than we ever did to deserve.

To whom it may concern:

God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
If you had only given us purpose in our lives,
and not given us everything that has happened up until yesterday,
it would have been enough.

If all that we had was the opportunity to make a difference,
If all we had been given was a tough old world that needed our healing touch,

We would have abundant cause for grateful hearts.

Today is the day to tell the world that love is possible,
today is the day to reach one person and let a connection
of compassion triumph over separation and hatred.
Today we may add a few drops of justice to
what might one day become a mighty stream.

To whom it may concern:

God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
If you had given us everything that has happened up until yesterday,
and not given us the hope of tomorrow,
it would have been enough,

If all that happened was the life I've lived until this present moment,
The people I've met, the chance I've had to make a difference,

I would have abundant cause for a grateful heart

When I think back on my life,
I am grateful for it all,
and though I never would have guessed everything that happened,
and much of it I certainly would not have chosen,
but taken as a whole, for all its faults
to be alive is a glorious jewel,
one which I know I won't keep forever
but am so grateful to have been given.

To whom it may concern:

God, universe, spirit, soul, nothing and everything,
we have been given the Big Bang, life, consciousness,

freedom from slavery, the supermarket,
the morning cup of coffee, the congregation,
purpose in our lives, everything that has happened until today,
and we may yet receive the hope of tomorrow, too.

If we are blessed enough to receive tomorrow, too,
let us use it to reach out to others with love,
to give of our gifts with abandon,
and to recognize *this* world,
as the precious gift that it is.

Blessed be,
AMEN