

READING - DAYS BY RALPH WALDO

Daughters of Time, the many-faced Days,
Muffled and dumb like barefoot dervishes,
And marching single in an endless file,
Bring crowns and riches in their hands.
To each of us they offer gifts, after our will,
Bread, kingdoms, stars, and sky-that-holds-them-all.

I, in my vine-filled garden, watched this pomp,
I forgot my morning wishes, and hastily
Took but a few herbs and apples, and this Day
Turned and departed - silent. I, too late,
Under her solemn headband saw her scorn.

(Musical Interlude)

Scarcity vs. Abundance by Kip Barkley

We, in these United States, consume 25% of the World's resources. And we make up 5% of the world population. We have it pretty nice. Well, I do. But I know that the goodies around here are not distributed evenly. Some folks have a lot more goodies than others.

And here River of Grass is in the midst of our annual canvass fundraiser. Mere coincidence! Today is not a fund raising presentation. Ken Bresnehan has no idea what I am going to say. I am looking at thoughts about scarcity vs. abundance. Abundance and scarcity.

Can I convince you that either option is true? Probably not. I will just share some stories and observations. Some observations will even be my own. Some see themselves living in a world of scarcity. Some see themselves living in a world of abundance.

What I see is that this is not an either/or situation. It is more as though we draw a line and find our place along it. I see a continuum of points between scarcity and abundance. And where is Kip on this line? Somewhere in the middle. I received a college education years ago. I put myself through graduate school. I live debt-free, doing work I enjoy. I am happily married to Kristine and have a large, diverse support group.

What does all this have to do with Unitarian Universalist values? I see it aligning most closely with the fourth of our Seven Principles: The free and responsible search for truth.

Kip is fascinated with this thinking: Abundance Thinking vs. Scarcity Thinking. Did you ever notice that the Christian Devil practices Scarcity Thinking?

He offers each of us an abundance of stuff, stuff that he himself cares nothing about. It's just stuff that we don't have. This Devil doesn't even want it. All he wants is our - immortal souls.

Scary thought. That is why I am Unitarian Universalist. We don't allow any Devils around here. But we do watch movies like Lord of the Rings.

We see Gollum destroy himself pursuing the One Ring that Rules Them All. Gollum calls it, the Precious. Here we can get Biblical again. Now, I am talking about the difference between Wanting and Coveting. Wanting is OK. But when I covet, I let the wanting possess me. I want - the Precious! That's not healthy.

Yet, I see abundance thinking to be not about what I have. I see abundance thinking to be about choices. How can I not have the Precious? Precious! No Precious! If I do not see at least a third option, I figure I have missed a choice somewhere.

Two options are not enough, say deciding between a bad job or unemployment. Or a bad marriage or being alone. There has got to be something more, and that I am not seeing.

My third solution might not appear right away, but it is out there somewhere. A belief in scarcity will keep me in a bad situation and keep me from looking for alternatives.

Scarcity thinking can pop up in many places. On the TV shopping channel when the pitchwoman tells me that, "This potato slicer will be available at this price only for the next 10 minutes. Call now!" Here is an appeal to scarcity thinking. Might I live my whole life unhappy without this potato slicer, if I don't act right now?

I go shopping for a blue Toyota Corolla. I see one on the car lot, all shiny and new. I hesitate. The salesman points out that, "This car will be gone in the next few days. Act now!" Do I really believe that this is the last shiny blue Toyota Corolla on the planet?

Have you ever attempted to offer additional choices to someone who was clinging to a bad situation? Good luck! It's like trying to save someone who is drowning. They will want to pull you down with them.

OK, some people have more privileges than others. That translates into more choices. And some choices, once made, cannot be undone. But in a world of abundance, additional choices are still lurking.

This choice mindset can be subtle. "Steal past watchful dragons that guard the ideas that hold you in your place." How will I find additional choices?

I ask the age-old question, is the glass half full or half empty? A third choice is to ask, where's the pitcher? The pitcher that filled both these glasses.

I have a day job, when I am not telling stories here in this pulpit. As a computer consultant, I offer to sell my time and my talent to others.

I do this for both love and money. I do it for money because I am not independently wealthy. I do it for love because I love solving problems and to be of service. What I do is really a blend for both love and money.

I could have just a job where it's just for money and I like nothing else about it.

Or I could turn a crank on an assembly line, until the lunch whistle blows. How dreary. But I get to coach clients on how their gadgets work. I figure out their puzzles and show them more ways to take control of their work environment. I

could forget to send out invoices but then my work would be all for love. I do need a job for money somewhere.

I could be a Merchant of Doubt. Have you heard about these people? They are paid big money to produce phony research to confuse the public about the dangers of tobacco, the impact of climate change, or the need to keep our prisons full. If they cannot stop change, they can at least delay it. And they are paid very well.

So in my own work world, I look for balance. I do some for the money and some for love. If it were nothing for love, I'd look for a way to get out. There must be another option. Disappointment is inevitable; misery is optional.

There are many forms of scarcity.

There was a Roman philosopher who observed that in ancient Rome there were two most degraded social classes. One was the slaves at the bottom who cleaned sewers or worked in the mines. The other was the second level of the aristocracy. These were the ones dependent upon the first level for all of their existence.

Their place in the upper class was theirs as long as they pleased those above them. Here was the only world they knew, so no other world looked open to them. They were imprisoned by a wealth that was not their own.

How many of you saw the movie Foxcatcher starring Steve Carell? It is the story of wealthy heir John DuPont and the 1988 Olympic Games. John grew up in a very privileged, but cold, branch of the famous Du Pont family, as an unloved and neglected child.

As an adult, he wanted to be wrestling coach of a winning US Olympic team. With so much money under his control, he could buy people to be near him. Yet, he received ongoing disapproval from his mother.

John lived in a world of scarcity in spite of his wealth, and he lacked the social skills, or vision, to expand his way out of it. The story does not end well, but go see the movie. It won an Academy Award.

And then there are gifts. It's nifty to receive something, especially something for nothing. But there is more to gifts than that. Yes, you receive a goodie, but it is also the GIFT that you are receiving. How do I go about receiving a GIFT?

Once upon a time, I knew a lady named Pat Mantis. She was a "church lady", a Methodist, I think. Her thing was managing the downtown cooperative feeding program here in Fort Lauderdale. Pat would help others remember her name by saying, "Think of Praying Mantis." She is very clever with words. One of Pat's many roles was fund raising. Fund raising has a lot to do with giving and receiving.

So I think of what might be the response to giving Pat Mantis a busted can opener. "Thank you, thank you, thank you. You might see this gadget as broken. True, the handle is bent and there is a little rust on it. It is stiff to move, but the gears still turn. Yes, and with a little oil, there is still value here.

Our clients need can openers for some of the food we give them. This opener is, in a way, like our clients, perhaps a little bent and rusted, but there is still value present. With a bit of our help, they can be of value to others. Thank you for your gift, and know that you have made a difference."

This all makes me want to write Pat a large check.

A Sufi Master once observed, "The best way to express gratitude for a gift, is to use it well." A person clinging to their scarcity will trash the gift just to remain where they are. And if I hoard the goodie I receive, I have missed the GIFT that came along with it. I feel good when I get a GIFT. Someone cares! When I don't recognize such a GIFT, I miss the good feeling.

So amidst all these options of seeing scarcity and abundance, I am looking towards an attitude of gratitude. Gratitude is the open door to abundance.

I suggest that abundance is not something we acquire. It is something I tune into. Acknowledging the good that I already have in my life is the foundation for all abundance. I suggest to you that gratitude is the opposite of feeling entitled. Gratitude is the opposite of feeling entitled.

Abundance Mentality is a term that means I believe that there are enough resources and success to share with others. The term was coined in a 1989 self-help book entitled The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen R. Covey.

This abundance mentality is counter to what I might commonly default to, which is the theory that there is a lack of everything. This scarcity mentality can produce a lot of fear, anxiety and desperation

If I can reprogram my way of thinking into an abundance mentality (that there is plenty of what I want, I just simply have to reach for it), then I can rid myself of much unwanted angst.

So how do I create an abundance mentality? I start by being grateful for three new things each day. Just three. I don't cheat by recycling yesterday's new things. I pick a fresh ones. I am grateful for three new things each day.

Have I brought you an answer today? Maybe not. Have I brought you more choices today? Maybe so. Have I given you something to think about? That is my wish. Thank you. Thank you. Thank you.