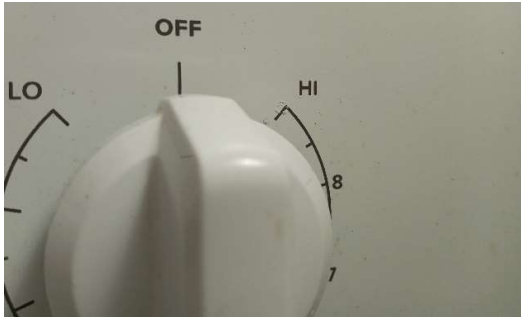


Down a Notch

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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"Notches" © 2023 Rod E.S.Q.

The 1984 mockumentary (or rather “rockumentary”) *This is Spinal Tap*, features a fictional metal rocker proudly displaying the equipment for his band’s amps, confidently explaining that the notches in regular amps go to 10, but *his band’s* dials “go to 11”. The phrase “turning it up to 11” has since entered the popular imagination as a catchy phrase to illustrate taking things to the extreme, going the extra mile, or heading just a bit *more* beyond the limit – literally giving it 110%.

And pushing our limits is, indeed, one of the ways that we often think of growth. In fact, we often encourage it in our spiritual communities, as going a bit out of our comfort zones can often offer novel experiences, new points of view and perspectives, and a wider sense of who we are and who we can become individually and as part of a community.

This can mean taking on new tasks or seeking ways to improve what we are already doing. At our church, that can take the shape of stepping into a volunteer position, like joining a committee (or maybe chairing one), leading a service, offering to host a social gathering (at home or in our building), or helping out with the practical and logistical needs of making a place homey and welcoming.

For many of you this may be an expansion of what you already do. Or, it could be an entirely new thing altogether, which can be exciting and scary at the same time. Speaking in front of people can do that for some of us, even more so when there are a lot of moving parts.

At the same time, self-improvement can take a seemingly opposite – but complementary – shape. Instead of turning it up to 11, it is also a perfectly legitimate option to take it down a notch from time to time.

Setting boundaries, or finding where our limitations are, can also be a practice of personal growth. Sometimes, the need to take it down a notch may be the result of recognizing that pushing some limits may simply not do us – or others – much good.

Other times, it may be that we find newer limits, which can come from changing life circumstances, health issues, emerging personal needs, or the transforming needs of a community.

There is also the possibility that allowing space for *less* may open up space for *more* in *other* dimensions of our lives, which might have been neglected, or could otherwise use more attention – turning it down a notch so that we may devote 11 where it's needed more. As we head into the Lenten season in February, we sometimes explore how having less, or doing less, of something can make space for more of what we might be missing.

Or... in turning it down a notch, we may open up space for someone *else* to expand *their* limits – going down to 9 so that someone else may have some room to move into 11.

Perhaps it isn't so much one's actions that need turning down, but it's *expectations* that could use coming down a notch. Be these some expectations of oneself, or the expectations we have of others. Maybe it's OK if all we can offer is an 8 – or a 7 – and it's worth remembering this when others aren't in a position to go to 11... or, maybe they *are* at 11 but we may be using different scales with different units, an altogether different standard.

The author and vlogger John Green has made it *his* goal in 2023 to “take it down a notch”. With many projects on the go, he's come to recognize

that a lot of his life involves turning it up to 11, but he's seeing that this is not sustainable. Green is not much older than me, and he may look quite young to many of you, but the truth is that all ages have spots when it might make sense to take it down a notch, even if those spots might come up more often later in life.

Now that I'm in middle age (as I've recently been reminded), I too find that there are some areas where I could use turning it down a notch. It's become abundantly clear to me that I cannot keep the same lifestyle that I had in my school days (and often that's probably a good thing). And many things may be true at the same time – I still find spots where I might do well in turning it up to 11... or at least keeping it at 10.

I mentioned a couple weeks ago that one of my personal themes for this year is deeper connection – or reconnection – with friends and family, so I'm turning my efforts to reach out to them up to 11. I've also found it helpful to be more mindful about some of my expectations, and turning some of these down a notch helps make it easier to be satisfied with others' efforts, as well as with my own sense of accomplishment. A little anticppointment can go a long way.

Here at our church, you may have seen that some folks take on a number of roles, and there are good reasons why many of you do. You may well enjoy these roles, or find them otherwise fulfilling in what you accomplish through them. You may be well-suited to the task. And you may also do them with a sense that no one else might take them on if you don't.

Maybe you've been wondering if you can assist on these tasks, or even filling in when someone else is ready for a break. And perhaps some time and space has opened up for you and you're ready to take on something that wasn't as feasible before. Some of you are already being part of making these kinds of transition happen.

Because that is how a community like ours can run – not just through the efforts of devoted folks who take leadership, but also owing to the spaces made possible by sharing our ministry. And by recognizing that not all of our expectations from ourselves and the community may be fulfilled at a given time – some may take longer, some may not be realistic at all, or anymore. Alongside our shared efforts, a measure of grace goes a long way.

My friends, now that January is nearly over, we've had a chance to test out our emerging goals and outlooks for the year. Perhaps you've identified a theme that resonates with you as you've found something that you want more of in your life... or something you want less of.

Taking it down a notch, my friends, is a legitimate way to take care of oneself, and of others. And it is also an invitation for those who are thinking of taking 11 out for a spin – or even trying out 9, or 8.

My friends, there are times and there are spaces for pushing the limits, and there are times and spaces for acknowledging limitations. There also times and spaces to offer ourselves and others a measure of grace.

May we allow ourselves these times and these spaces.

So may it be,
In the spirit of balance,
Amen

*Suggested Hymns:***Opening Hymn #16 'Tis a Gift to Be Simple**

Words: Joseph Bracket, 18th cent.

Music: American Shaker tune

SIMPLE GIFTS

Hymn #90 From All the Fret and Fever of the Day

~)-| Words: Monroe Beardsley, b. 1915

Music: Cyril V. Taylor, b. 1907, © Hope Publishing Co.

COOLINGE

Closing #94 What Is This Life

Words: William Henry Davies, 1869-1941

Music: A. D. Carden's *Missouri Harmony*, 1820

DEVOTION