

April Theme 2020
Unitarian Universalism: The Practice of Love

Faith is love, taking the form of aspiration. - Rev. William Ellery Channing, Unitarian

Our Unitarian Universalist forebears are speaking to us directly, as we collectively and individually meet this moment. Their words can act as salve for our fears and for the far too many iterations of strife. No matter what your days are holding, we all could use a little comforting and a fresh dose of *inspiration*. Their voices remind us of the resiliency of the human spirit. Throughout history, our ancestors have lived through wars and lack and perennial struggles of social justice with courage, compassion and grace. They are calling to us now, 'taking the form of aspiration' to Love.

It may be helpful to articulate the difference between inspiration and aspiration. Both make you want to do something. Inspiration comes from the Latin word *inspirare*, which means to breathe or blow into. Inspiration arrives from the outside, in the forms of people, ideas, words or the divine that influence us in some way. Aspiration, on the other hand, starts from within and moves out. *Aspirare* is Latin for 'breathing at' or 'blowing upon.' Aspiration is an inner hope or striving that sends us out into the world to do that thing. Inspiration and aspiration work together in a continual cycle in our quest to be, as Nathan often reminds, "the kind of person we say we want to be." Love is the central practice to becoming and living our faith, to make a reality of our UU commitment to love each other, to love the stranger who is us and those who think and act differently, who are also us.

This takes time. When we take time (which we have) to notice, we can experience love in all its simple and complex expressions every day- a friend who calls and makes us laugh, checking in on a neighbor or gently practicing self-love by guarding the first moments of the day with quiet and peace. It takes our full presence to love in all the various ways it's embodied - love between partners, children, family, friends, pets and community. These are all necessary.

When we recite "Love is the spirit of this church", we are talking about these manifestations of love. AND, the kind of love our faith is pointing to is the highest form of love. The kind of love the Greeks called **Agape**. In rough translation, this means love, charity, affection. **The concept of agape embraces a universal, unconditional love that transcends and persists regardless of circumstance. It goes beyond just the emotions to the extent of seeking the best for others.** Each principle and value of Unitarian Universalism is for this cultivation of love. Each day, we can begin by setting an intention on how we want to be in the day given us (planting seeds), and by our actions (watering and tending to our values) and by our willingness to be available for each other (virtually or otherwise) so that love's full harvest can be made possible by grace.

We bear witness as our health care workers, first responders and those who remain out in the world so that we can have food and medicine. They are displaying the best of what humans can be. They call us to bravery and sacrifice and we honor them. They also inspire us- with courage, compassion and kindness. This is what love looks like.

As UUs, we have a wealth of resources to move through *whatever* is happening AND to be made strong by it. This includes our UUAC congregation, our wider UU community of faith, expanding to all the wisdom traditions and those who have informed our own particular and evolving theologies. Please see www.uuac.org and www.uua.org/wiserbraver which posts stories on FB and other platforms. Braver/Wiser is a weekly message of courage and compassion for life as it is. Every Wednesday, you'll receive a written reflection and brief prayer, grounded in Unitarian Universalism.

Remember: We need each other. You are needed. The world needs us. We are all trying our best. You are needed at this time. May we love without judgement and with an open heart.

Questions to explore:

1. What are some of the barriers that stop you from loving the way you'd like to be able to?
2. Which sources do you go to, time and again, to find inspiration and solace?
3. What do you consider to be the opposite of Love? (Fear, ignorance, complacency, or...)
4. How does your faith inform your daily decisions, large and small?
5. In what ways does your faith support you during this time?
6. Who are the people that you support? Who are the people that support you? If you can, name the qualities and characteristics that you enjoy and are grateful for.
7. List practices that help you to stay grounded and allow you to find moments of joy. (Prayer, meditation, exercise, cooking, other rituals).
8. When do you find it easier to love? (when could mean time of day, the kind of person, home vs. work, in a crisis or when all is well, etc.)
9. How does standing on the side of love inform your decisions in your life? For today?

Quotes:

Difficulties are meant to rouse, not discourage. The human spirit is to grow strong by conflict.
~ William Ellery Channing, Unitarian minister

I am only one, but I am one. I cannot do everything, but I can do something. And I will not let what I cannot do interfere with what I can do.
~Edward Everett Hale, Unitarian Minister

To be in charge is certainly not only to carry out the proper measures yourself but to see that everyone else does so too.
~Florence Nightingale, Unitarian, Founder of modern nursing

I may be compelled to face danger, but never fear it, and while our soldiers can stand and fight, I can stand and feed and nurse them.” ~Clara Barton, Universalist, Founder of the American Red Cross

Straight and swift to my wounded I go...to the rows of the hospital tent, Or under the roof'd hospital,
To the long rows of cots up and down each side I return, To each and all one after another I draw
near, not one do I miss, I onward go, I stop, With hinged knees and steady hand to dress wounds.
~ Walt Whitman, *The Wounded Dresser*, Unitarian nurse during the Civil War, poet

Hope is all brightness as we gaze upon the precipice. Not casting our eyes downward, but filling our
lungs eagerly with the fresh air of a new day, our souls in winged orbit outdistance the moon.
~Sally Borden, psychiatric social worker, UU church Detroit

Love is a perfume you can't pour out onto others without getting a few drops on yourself.
~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, Unitarian Writer and Transcendentalist

The religious way is the deep way, the way that sees what physical eyes alone fail to see, the
intangibles of the heart of every phenomenon. The religious way is the way that touches universal
relationships; that goes high, wide and deep, that expands the feelings of kinship.
~ Sophia Lyon Fahs, educator, author, Unitarian

The Eskimos (Inuits) had 52 names for snow because it was important to them; they're ought to be
as many for love.
~Margaret Atwood, Writer, Unitarian Universalist

Little more than one thing seems certain, and that is, we are, here, enveloped in a world of mystery, and can do no better perhaps, than gradually to accept what little light we can gather, and wait patiently the promised period when we shall see as we are seen, and know as we are known.

~Rev. Moses Ballou, Universalist Minister

Kindness is another name for love. And when we put love into the world we have brought heaven nearby, for wherever there is kindness there is heaven. ~ Rev. Martha Bortle, Universalist minister

Unless you love something, nothing else makes sense. ~e.e. cummings, Unitarian poet