

Reverence

The problem to be faced is: how to combine loyalty to one's own tradition with reverence for different traditions.

— Abraham Joshua Heschel

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Abraham Joshua Heschel issues a challenge to people of all faith traditions: "The problem to be faced is how to combine loyalty to one's own tradition with reverence for different traditions." Heschel was speaking from the place of a faith leader, loyal to his own Judaism, but deeply committed to the Interfaith experiment. He came of age during the Civil Rights era and caught a glimpse of globalization. He recognized the evil born of the insularity of the holocaust, yet he felt blessed when he marched with Martin Luther King, Jr., a man who professed a baptist theology. Heschel didn't need to leave his own tradition to feel the blessing of another—reverence allowed him this privilege.

As I see it, Heschel's challenge rings particularly true for Unitarian Universalists—and we don't even need to leave our own sanctuary to test our resolve. There are essentially three different kinds of UUs. There are those who claim UUism first, and only, without any qualifiers. These are the rarest birds in our forest. There are also those who claim UUism first and their own expression of theology or faith second. I fit in this camp: I'll tell you that I am a UU, and if you ask for more, I'll share that I am a theist who finds God in the natural force of creativity. There are also those who claim their particular expression of theology or faith first and their commitment to UUism second. For example, I know a number of Christian UUs, Buddhist UUs, Jewish UUs, Atheist UUs, Pagan UUs, etc.

Regardless of the camp you claim, Heschel's quote offers a valid challenge. I've heard UUs

say that we do interfaith work every time we gather. This is partially true. We certainly prepare ourselves well to engage with theological diversity, and we might even learn to develop that reverence for other traditions that Heschel intones... or we might fight against it with every ounce of our chalice cup!

There's a terrible old joke about us that asks, "Why are UUs such terrible singers? Because we're always reading ahead to see if we are willing to sing the words in the next line." When Heschel marched with King, he nodded and shared in prayers lifted to Jesus, and he sang along when the chorus offered, "Nearer, my God, to thee, e'en though it be a cross that raises me..." Heschel could do this because he revered not the words themselves, but the way they were lifting a people a bit closer to the God of their understanding, as well as a bit closer to the holy that might embrace us all.

Rather than read ahead in a hymn, regardless of its origin, I live by this maxim proposed by the UU minister Rev. Dr. Mark Morrison Reed: "...that word that you are unwilling to say, that word might be the very word that the person standing next to you needs, desperately, needs to hear."

We come together in community as UUs to grow and deepen in our own faith, but also to learn to revere the traditions that hold others as they grow and deepen. If all the world were vanilla, it would be a very boring place. If all the world were chocolate... well, maybe that I could live with. But luckily it's not my place to flavor the world, and neither is it yours—and let that be a blessing!

MINISTER'S MESSAGE

Reverence and Integrity



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PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

The Days of Miracle and Wonder



*Bob Brown,
Board President*

A religion, old or new, that stressed the magnificence of the Universe as revealed by modern science might be able to draw forth reserves of reverence and awe hardly tapped by the conventional faiths. Sooner or later, such a religion will emerge.

—Carl Sagan

One of the most wonderful sounds I heard early in my visits to a Unitarian Universalist congregation were the

combination of the words science and awe living side by side as one and not set against each other. In awe, I refer to the recognition of God, the supernatural, people, and senses that one cannot describe in words—in other words, it's reverence.

Awe has moved mountains; science is describing how. I think it's a beautiful check and balance for open thinking, conversation, and growth to our spirit and life. I love this combination, but my heart tells me it's a work in progress and does not see an end as science grows in knowledge, our celestial surrounding grows and shrinks, and our prejudices continue to hide behind our egos.

As long as we can commit to accepting both science and awe, and more importantly respecting the other opinion in spite of our personal differences, we will grow and be revered if we act accordingly.

A long, 25-year gap existed before I came back to a religion and became a UU. My "church" during my absence of a religion was being in the mountains hiking, doing trail work, and observing what I believe are some of the most beautiful sights, sounds, and energy in my life. I still go the mountains and its very spiritual to me, but not a religion, as I believe the latter needs community. We can act with reverence in our community by producing miracles and wonder. We shall emerge.

RELIGIOUS EDUCATION

Experiencing Reverence in Nature



*Linda Weaver,
Director of Religious
Education*

If a child is to keep alive his inborn sense of wonder... he needs the companionship of at least one adult who can share it, rediscovering with him the joy, excitement and mystery of the world we live in.

—Rachel Carson, *A Sense of Wonder*

As I write this article, the cherry blossoms are at their peak. Daffodils, magnolias, redbuds, and forsythia are all in bloom, and I woke up to find a pair of mallard ducks in my front yard, out of sight of any creek or pond. At this time of year, I feel reverence every time I step outside or look out a window. It's not hard to feel respect and awe in nature when there is so much life, color, and warm sunlight everywhere we look.

This summer, the children and the adults who join them will have many opportunities to experience the wonder and mystery of nature. They will deeply explore our Unitarian Universalist seventh principle, which asks us to respect the web of life on which we all depend. They will observe, touch, and engage with parts of nature in ways that spark curiosity. The leaders will share their own excitement and wonder, helping nurture an appreciation for the beauty and the mystery of the world.

We invite adults and teens who have been active in the congregation for at least six months to accompany the children as leaders or assistants on one or two Sundays this summer. In this way, you can join in rediscovering, in the words of Rachel Carson, the joy, excitement, and mystery of the world alongside our children. The summer program, which we are calling "Our Wonderful World," combines sessions from "World of Wonder," a Tapestry of Faith curriculum from the Unitarian Universalist Association, and sessions and activities created by Connie Barlow. To find out more, contact me at re-director@uusterling.org. Whether you have attended frequently or you have not attended at all, we encourage you to join us as we prepare to explore the reverence and joy that can be experienced in nature.

The Children's Religious Exploration Calendar and a list of programs and events for children and families is at the end of the RE column on the UUCS website, www.uusterling.org.

A MONTH OF SPIRITUAL PRACTICE

May: Reverence

You are invited to engage the practice of *Lectio Divina*. *Lectio Divina* is Latin for divine reading, spiritual reading, or holy reading, and represents a traditional practice of scriptural reading intended to promote communion with that which is ultimately meaningful. It is a way of praying or meditating with sacred words that calls one to study, ponder, listen and, finally, rejoice within the soul. Unitarian Universalists embrace a wide-reaching definition of scripture, finding words of profound meaning in the works of the world religions, scientists, poets, and the experiences of our own lives.

Find the time in your day to read each piece every day. Read, pause, read again, pause, and then reflect. You may choose to write each quote in a journal and add notes from your reflections. You may choose to read each piece to your family at the dinner table. You may choose to read in the morning or before sleep. You may choose to use the piece to gather your spirit for prayer or meditation.

May 1–7

*My day is done, and I am like a boat drawn on the beach,
listening to the dance-music of the tide in the evening.*

—Rabindranath Tagore, *Stray Birds*

May 8–14

*Democracy is not merely a form of Government. It is primarily
a mode of associated living, of conjoint communicated expe-
rience. It is essentially an attitude of respect and reverence
towards our fellow men.*

—B.R. Ambedkar, *Writings And Speeches*

May 15– 21

*Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked, in which you
can walk with love and reverence.*

—Henry David Thoreau

May 22–28

*My best Acquaintances are those
With Whom I spoke no Word—
The Stars that stated come to Town
Esteemed Me never rude
Although to their Celestial Call
I failed to make reply—
My constant-reverential Face
Sufficient Courtesy.*

—Emily Dickinson

May 29–June 4

*Life must have its sacred moments and its holy places. We need
the infinite, the limitless, the uttermost—all that can give the
heart a deep and strengthening peace.*

—A. Powell Davies, *Without Apology: Collected
Meditations on Liberal Religion*

Want to share something in the Summer newsletter?

- ✓ Reflections or articles related to the Summer liturgical theme, *beauty*
- ✓ Announcements (including those related to events that will take place in June, July, August and the first two weeks of September)
- ✓ Group or committee updates (what you accomplished, what's planned for next month, etc.)
- ✓ Recent photos taken at UUCS or during UUCS events.

Please send anything you'd like to include to newsletter@uusterling.org by May 15th.

SACRED STORY FOR ALL AGES

The Observable Universe (A video story on YouTube)

Take an amazing journey from the surface of the earth to the edge of the observable universe, and then return back to earth and into an atom within our DNA at www.youtube.com/watch?v=HiN6Ag5-DrU.

Questions for Discussion:

How did you feel while watching the video? What did you think as you watched?

How would you describe reverence?

What do you admire or respect?

What fills you with wonder or awe?

UPCOMING BOOK CLUB MEETINGS

The UUCS Book Club will meet on Sunday, June 22, at noon in the upstairs mezzanine. The book to be discussed is *Stewing in the Melting Pot* by Robert Sanabria, a retired Army lieutenant colonel and a decorated veteran of the Korean and Vietnam wars. The book is available on Amazon for \$4.50 and for free at the public libraries.

The book selection for July 27 is an historic novel called *Mrs. Poe* by Lynn Cullen. In August, we plan to read *The Goldfinch* by Donna Tartt. Even if you haven't read the books, come listen to the discussions and offer suggestions of your own for future discussions. Bring finger food to share.

UUCS PICNIC

Bring your dads and your grads to the annual UUCS Picnic at Claude Moore Park in Sterling. This year it's on Father's Day, June 15, from noon until the last person leaves. Look for the order form on the wall outside Rev Anya's office to let us know how many burgers, hot dogs, and veggie burgers we need to buy. All are asked to bring a side dish or a salad. All plates, utensils, and cold drinks will be provided. We'll meet at Pavilion #2, where there are plenty of tables sheltered from the sun and where the kids have plenty of room for games.

COVENANT GROUP TOPIC EXCERPT

Covenant groups at UUCS engage the monthly themes in deep and meaningful ways. They read passages together, then respond to a set of questions, offering one another the opportunity to reflect unchallenged. New groups begin every October, and all UUCS members, friends, and visitors are encouraged to join a covenant group by contacting our covenant group coordinator, Deb Rose, at drosept@gmail.com.

Opening Reading:

In this time of anticipated spring let us allow ourselves to extend the anticipation—to value the time of budding before blooming, of seeding before sprouting. This is a time of revelation: the revealing of that which is eternal, which we see every year, but still need to be reminded to see it in a new way.

—Teresa Cooley

Reading:

What you encounter, recognize or discover depends to a large degree on the quality of your approach. Many of the ancient cultures practiced careful rituals of approach. An encounter of depth and spirit was preceded by careful preparation.

When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us. Our real life comes to the surface and its light awakens the concealed beauty in things. When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us. The rushed heart and arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace.

—John O'Donohue, *Beauty: The Invisible Embrace*

Questions:

How do you experience reverence? Tell a personal story of reverence.

John O'Donohue shared, "When we approach with reverence, great things decide to approach us." Does this resonate with your understanding? Tell a story.

How does reverence save, liberate, or transform you?

CALENDAR

Stay Up to Date With UUCS Events

M A Y	////////////////////////////////////
<p>Sunday, 5/4</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Dependence and Reverence” Independence makes it possible for us to follow the dictates of our conscience to live freely, with dignity. Dependence on other beings and on the basic building blocks of life makes it possible for us to understand a shared life—a life that calls us to reverence. Our choir will sing.</p> <p>Noon — Inquirer’s Class in Rev. Anya’s office All newcomers are welcome.</p> <p>Noon — Two Services Task Force presentation in the sanctuary The Two Services Task Force will present on the status of their work and the vote that will be taken at the annual meeting. Please join us for this important conversation.</p>
<p>Friday, 5/9</p>	<p>6:30 pm — Concert by the Gay Men’s Chorus A benefit for People of Faith for Equality, VA. Tapas, wine, and sangria will be served when the doors open at 6:30; the concert will begin at 7:30. Childcare will be provided. Tickets are on sale at UUCS or online at http://pofev.org/index.php/events/gay-mens-chorus-benefit/</p>
<p>Sunday, 5/11</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service: “A Rose by Any Other Name” The Annual Flower Communion Service on Mother’s Day. Please bring a flower for each person in your family.</p>
<p>Thursday, 5/15</p>	<p>6:30 pm — Poetry Reading Poetry reading at UUCS by Chuck Harper (Kristen Harper’s father). Light refreshments will be provided and all ages are welcome.</p>
<p>Sunday, 5/18</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service: “Reverence Is Not Blind” A reflection on the state of our congregation and the call to balance appreciation with challenge and dreams with humility. Lisa Fiorilli will fill our sanctuary with the joyous and woeful sounds of her solo saxophone.</p> <p>11:45 — Annual Meeting Members, Friends, and Visitors are welcome to come and hear the annual report and consider options for our congregation. Members will be invited to vote on the budget, the slate of nominees to the Board, the Leadership Development Committee, a plan from our Two Services Task Force, and a proposal from our Partner Church Council. We will also elect delegates to the UUA General Assembly.</p>
<p>Sunday, 5/25</p>	<p>10:30 am — Worship Service: “If I Only Had One Sermon to Preach” Rev. Anya weaves her favorite poem (as if it’s possible to choose just one) through this contemplative service. Harry Harris blends notes to the theme on his dulcimer.</p>

J U N E	////////////////////////////////////
Sunday, 6/1	10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i> Noon — <i>Inquirer's Class in Rev. Anya's office</i> All newcomers are welcome.
Sunday, 6/8	10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i>
Sunday, 6/15	10:30 am — <i>Worship Service</i> Noon — <i>UUCS Picnic</i>

Snapshots from last month's First Friday Folk Dancing event.

