



Touchstones Project

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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Love

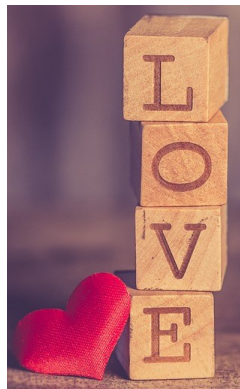
Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

Love is at the center of our faith. That was emphasized by the UUA Board of Trustees when it issued its charge to the *Article II Study Commission* in June 2020, writing, "We, therefore, charge this commission to root its work in Love as a principal guide...; attending particularly to the ways that we (and our root traditions) have understood and articulated Love, and how we have acted out of Love."

Of course, this focus is not new. In capturing the essence of our religious tradition, someone (though not Ferenc Dávid, 16th-century founder of Unitarianism) said, "We



do not need to think alike, to love alike." A 21st-century Unitarian Universalist layperson added: Our calling is not to be like-minded. Our calling is to become like-hearted.

Nineteenth-century Universalists stressed a *Gospel of Love*. As Universalist minister Hosea Ballou (1771-1852) said, "If we agree in love, there is no disagreement that can do us any injury, but if we do not, no other agreement can do us any good."

In 1894, in his explanation of covenant, Unitarian minister James Vila Blake wrote, "Love is the spirit of this church...." Then, Universalist minister L. Griswold Williams wrote a covenant in 1933 that began, "Love is the doctrine of this church...." Spirit and Letter.

In 1985, when Unitarian Universalists adopted the current *Article II Principles and Sources*, our grounding in love was articulated in two sources: (2nd) "Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us

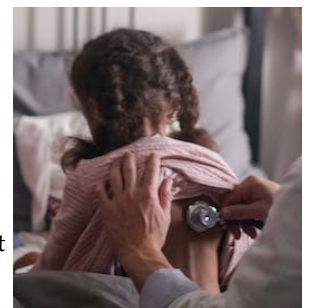
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The Cure

Rev. Christopher Buice

Once upon a time there was a young girl named Maggie, who found out she had a very terrible disease and probably would never be well again.

She was very, very sad, and although she had many friends, all of them were afraid to visit her because they feared they might catch the disease.



So the little girl sat in her bed all by herself and was very lonely.

One day she heard a knock on her door. "Come in," she said and in walked three of her friends. One was a doctor, one was a minister, and one was a magician. Maggie was very glad to see them for no one else had been brave enough to visit her.

"Hello, Maggie," said her friends as they sat down around her bed. "We came to tell you something. Each one of us is going to try to find a cure for your disease."

"Yes," said the doctor, "I'm going to go into my laboratory and do experiments until I discover a medicine that will cure your disease."

"And I," said the minister, "am going to pray every day that you will be healed of this terrible disease."

"And I," said the magician, "am going to look through my books of magic until I discover a potion or spell that will rid you of your disease."

Maggie smiled and was happy because

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Love & the Common Good

The relationship between love and the common good is complex. It depends, in part, on how we answer the question, "Who is my neighbor?" Jesus answered the lawyers' question with the *Parable of the Good Samaritan*. When we reach across differences, embrace the stranger, and balance our needs with others, even those unknown to us, we can "go and do likewise" as Jesus instructed. We need an uncommon love to advance the common good. Such a love invites compassion, empathy, and altruism. It seeks to put right injustices and inequalities that prevent some from partaking in the common good. If, as is often the case, we must choose, may we choose love and act accordingly.

A Theme-Based Ministry Project

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Reimagining the Common Good

(Continued from page 1) The Cure

she saw how much her friends cared for her. "Thanks," she said.

"We're sorry that we can't stay long to visit," said her friends, "but we must rush off and begin our search for a cure. We'll return in three days and surely by then one of us will have found a way to cure your disease."

And so, her friends went away in search of a cure, and once again Maggie was very lonely.

For three days Maggie's friends did everything they could to find a cure for the disease. The doctor



worked hard in the laboratory but couldn't discover any medicine that could help the little girl. The minister prayed every day and every night that Maggie would be healed of her disease, but the little girl was still sick. The magician looked through all the magic books, but there were no spells or potions that could cure Maggie's disease. All three of Maggie's friends were very sad for they felt that they had failed.

After the three days were over, the doctor, the minister, and the magician returned to Maggie's house and told her the bad news. "We're sorry," they said, "but we couldn't find a cure. We did our best." And the three friends began to cry.

"Don't cry," said Maggie. "Before I was sick, I had many friends, but now they're all afraid to visit me. This disease I have is a terrible one, but it's nothing compared to the loneliness I've felt these last few days. I now know loneliness is the worse disease of all.

"Right now, the medicine I need most is your friendship.

"The prayer I need most is for you to simply be with me.

"And the magic I need most is your love."

And so, the doctor, the minister, and the magician gathered around the little girl and laid their hands upon her. In the silence that followed, it is said that they found the cure.

2 Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/cure>

The Language of Love

As our experience increases, we understand that love is exceedingly complex. We are challenged to describe this complexity because of the limitations of English. Turning to the language of love used by the ancient Greeks, we can better appreciate the intricacies involved.

For the Greeks, an incredibly intense love was *érōs* (ἔρως), which we know as erotic or romantic love. This is the love, often characterized by physical attraction, by which we long for others to overcome our existential loneliness and alienation. This longing for union is the first realm of love, the imperative for the propagation of the species. In his Dialogue *Symposium*, Plato discussed several types of love. He thought that *érōs* went further. It helped the soul recall the knowledge of beauty and contributed to understanding spiritual truth.

Érōs could evolve into *prágma* (πραγμα), a mature, practical love that developed over the years. It was a love characterized by patience and tolerance needed to sustain and deepen long-term relationships.

Another realm of love was *philía* (φιλία), which meant deep friendship. Plato believed true friendship went beyond mere affection and involved a deep bond based on shared values, interests, and intellectual pursuits. *Philía* was platonic love.

Storgē (στοργή) was familial love between parents and children or among siblings based on natural affection and familiarity. Aristotle recognized storge as an essential type of love, emphasizing its role in family bonds and developing virtuous character.

Erotopia, commonly known as *lūdus* (Latin), was a playful or flirtatious love, the kind experienced in the early stages of a romantic relationship.

Agápē (ἀγάπη) was a selfless, unconditional love that went beyond romantic or familial relationships. It embodied love for humanity, compassion, and altruism. In Latin, *agápē* was rendered as *caritas*, meaning charity or acts of kindness. While *agápē* is commonly associated with Christian theology, Plato considered it a selfless, transcendent love that



went beyond personal desires.

Philautía, or "love of the self," was another type of love among the ancient Greeks. There were two varieties. The self-serving kind was narcissism, while a healthy *philautía* meant that by loving ourselves, we enhanced our ability to love others well.

Xenía (ξενία) was love or friendship extended to the stranger in the form of hospitality. In ancient Greece, it was considered a moral obligation. The opposite response was xenophobia.

Mania (μανία) was the final type, one not often associated with love. It was an obsessive love characterized by possessiveness and intense emotional highs and lows. Mania, jealous and extreme, was an unhealthy and destructive love.

Expanding our language of love can help us in exploring the nature of love more deeply.

The photo above is of The Shaftesbury Memorial Fountain in London's Piccadilly Circus, which features the statue of Anteros, the god of requited love, literally love-returned. He was the brother of Eros. Anteros punished those who scorned love.

Source: Touchstones

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "There is no progress in love, no perfection that one might someday attain. No love is adult, mature, and reasonable. In relation to love there are only children—there is only a spirit of childhood that is abandon, carefreeness, a spirit of letting go" Christian Bobin

Day 2: "When I am commanded to love, I am commanded to restore community, to resist injustice, and to meet the needs of my brothers and sisters." Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 3: "They say a person needs just three things to be truly happy in this world: someone to love, something to do, and something to hope for." Tom Bodett

Day 4: "I don't trust people who don't love themselves and tell me, 'I love you.' ... There is an African saying which is: Be careful when a naked person offers you a shirt." Maya Angelou

Day 5: "You know, when it works, love is pretty amazing. It's not overrated. There's a reason for all those songs." Sarah Dessen

Day 6: "Love is friendship that has caught fire. It is quiet understanding, mutual confidence, sharing and forgiving. It is loyalty through good and bad times. It settles for less than perfection and makes allowances for human weaknesses." Ann Landers

Day 7: "Love is an untamed force. When we try to control it, it destroys us. When we try to imprison it, it enslaves us. When we try to understand it, it leaves us feeling lost and confused." Paulo Coelho

Day 8: "How many slams in an old screen door? Depends how loud you shut it. How many slices in a bread? Depends how thin you cut it. How much good inside a day? Depends how good you live 'em. How much love inside a friend? Depends how much you give 'em." Shel Silverstein

Day 9: "We talk too much, love too seldom, and hate too often." Bob Moorehead

Day 10: "Love is a force more formidable than any other. It is invisible, it cannot be seen or measured, yet it is powerful enough to transform you in a moment, and

offer you more joy than any material possession could." Barbara De Angelis

Day 11: "When the power of love overcomes the love of power, the world will know peace." Jimi Hendrix

Day 12: "What Is Love? I have met in the streets a very poor young man who was in love. His hat was old, his coat worn, the water passed through his shoes and the stars through his soul." Victor Hugo

Day 13: "Respect was invented to cover the empty place where love should be." Leo Tolstoy

Day 14: "So, the America I loved still exists, if not in the White House or the Supreme Court or the Senate or the House of Representatives or the media. The America I love still exists at the front desks of our public libraries." Kurt Vonnegut

Day 15: "Have enough courage to trust love one more time and always one more time." Maya Angelou

Day 16: "Love never dies a natural death. It dies because we don't know how to replenish its source. It dies of blindness and errors and betrayals. It dies of illness and wounds; it dies of weariness, of witherings, of tarnishings." Anaïs Nin

Day 17: "All your life, you will be faced with a choice. You can choose love or hate.... I choose love." Johnny Cash

Day 18: "Someone I loved once gave me a box full of darkness. It took me years to understand that this too, was a gift." Mary Oliver

Day 19: "Sometimes it's a form of love just to talk to somebody that you have nothing in common with and still be fascinated by their presence." David Byrne

Day 20: "The beginning of love is the will to let those we love be perfectly themselves, the resolution not to twist them to fit our own image." Thomas Merton

Day 21: "The one thing we can never get enough of is love. And the one thing we never give enough of is love." Henry Miller

Day 22: "A purpose of human life, no matter who is controlling it, is to love whoever is around to be loved." Kurt Vonnegut

Day 23: "People have to love the Earth before they save it, so love is the key." Bill Jacobs

Day 24: "The best portion of a good ...life: ...little, nameless unremembered acts of kindness and love." William Wordsworth

Day 25: "You yourself, as much as anybody in the entire universe, deserve your love and affection." Sharon Salzberg

Day 26: "[Eros] is the love of healing, the love that reconciles the alienated and separated. It is the love of forgiveness that reaches to the depths of the finite experience of fragility, worthlessness, willful rebellion, or oppressed, silent passivity." Diarmuid O'Murchu

Day 27: "The best love is the kind that awakens the soul and makes us reach for more, that plants a fire in our hearts and brings peace to our minds." Nicholas Sparks



Day 28: "We need, in love, to practice only this: letting each other go. For holding on comes easily; we do not need to learn it." Rainer Maria Rilke

Day 29: "There is only one page left to write on. I will fill it with words of only one syllable. I love. I have loved. I will love." Dodie Smith

Day 30: "It is easy to love people in memory; the hard thing is to love them when they are there in front of you." John Updike

Day 31: "Friendship marks a life even more deeply than love. Love risks degenerating into obsession, friendship is never anything but sharing." Elie Wiesel



Faith and Theology

A Theology of Love

A liberal theology of love falls within the framework of theological anthropology, which seeks to understand the nature of humanity. In *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-first Century*, Rev. Rebecca Ann Parker suggests that topics relevant to theological anthropology include “what it means to be human, what it means to live in right relationship with the divine, and what it means to love and be loved.” At a minimum, it also includes how to live in right relationship with “the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part” and how to use love effectively in the work for justice.

Parker writes, “Apparently, love, as I and many religious progressives understand it, is dangerous. We advocate for love that surprises, disrupts, and alters the status quo; that expresses itself in diverse ways; that comes in rainbow colors. Those who want to preserve the existing social and economic order invest in prohibiting such love.”

The principle of every person’s inherent worth and dignity means that we are each worthy of love. We are also each capable of loving. At issue is the circumference, depth, and courage of our love.



Love’s Circumference

In his poem, *Outwitted*, poet Edwin Markham (1852-1940) wrote, “He drew a circle that shut me out — / Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout. / But love and I had the wit to win: / We drew a circle and took him In!” Notably, Markham was a lifelong Universalist. He knew that love can

be exclusive or inclusive. The circumference of love can be small if it is limited to self, kin, and tribe, or it can be quite large if

we choose to love our “neighbor.” The *Parable of the Good Samaritan* makes clear that our neighbor can be a stranger or an enemy, any man or every woman. In this sense, Jesus did not define neighbor by proximity but by otherness. Love is the willingness to overcome otherness. Love can break down barriers, transcend differences, and embrace diversity.

The Depth of Love

The depth of our love concerns the reservoir of love we can draw upon. If it is shallow, then conflict, betrayal, injustice, and other slings and arrows will instill fear and undo our love. If it is deep, we can withstand such indignities and continue to live and lead with love.

The depth of our love also determines who we are willing to love. We are encouraged to love and accept others regardless of whom they love or hate while not condoning hate. Religious liberals tend to love across race, gender, and sexual orientation, and those who are marginalized, but are often challenged to love and accept people with certain religious or political beliefs. We cannot overcome this tendency without practicing a rigorous spiritual discipline of love. (See *Practice Love* on page 6)

Love & Courage

Love, especially love in service of justice, requires courage. Martin Luther King, Jr., among countless others, knew this. He demonstrated immense courage throughout his life, which allowed him to continue to work nonviolently and engage friend and foe with love. The Old French root of courage was *corage*, which meant heart. The enemy of love is fear. L.J. Vanier reminds us, “If light is love, then fear is its shadow.” Her words echo King’s: “Darkness cannot drive out darkness; only light can do that. Hate cannot drive out hate; only love can do that.” When fear is close at hand, we must acknowledge it if we are to overcome it. To do so, consider asking, “What would I

do in this situation if I wasn’t afraid?” The answer frees us to engage and overcome our fear, which is often real and paralyzing.

Divine Love or Collective Love

Our love can be expansive, deep, and courageous to the extent that it partakes in a greater love. For many, the connection is to God’s love. Rebecca Parker writes, “Those who imitate Christ ... incarnate divinity through acts of compassionate love. As with Jesus, their love disrupts established social norms regarding who is welcome at the table of human fellowship. Radical inclusiveness is the mark of Christian love, for all bear the image of God.” For others, the source of a greater love is a collective love that consists of those they love, those who love them, and the cloud of witnesses who preceded them, those prophetic women and men who wielded the transforming power of love to confront powers and structures of evil. This commanding, collective love encourages us to act. The word “encourage” literally means “to put heart into.” Divine love and collective love can kindle in us a holy boldness that is powerful and transforming.

Human Flourishing

French mathematician and philosopher René Descartes coined the dictum, *cogito ergo sum*, Latin for “I think, therefore I am.” How would the world be different if he said, *amo ergo sum*: “I love, therefore I am?” Love is crucial to human flourishing: to be loved and then to love. Love helps us grow and develop spiritually, emotionally, and socially. Abraham Maslow placed it in the center of his hierarchy of needs: (1.) physiological (food and clothing), (2.) safety (physical and emotional), (3.) *love and belonging*, (4.) esteem, and (5.) self-actualization (including peak experiences). Love makes esteem and self-actualization possible. Max Scheler writes that love is foundational: “Love is always what awakens both knowledge and volition. Indeed, it is the mother of spirit and reason itself.” Love weaves connection with commitment and helps communities thrive.

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Love is at the Center of our Shared Values

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction to Theme** to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love” and (4th) “Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.” In June 2009, the UUA deepened the emphasis on love when it launched its interfaith, public advocacy campaign, *Side with Love* (formerly *Standing on the Side of Love*, a phrase coined by UUA President Rev. Bill Sinkford in 2004 in support of marriage equality).

The relevant Article II Principles numbered five in 1961. By the 1970s, many considered them inadequate due to language reflecting patriarchal and hierarchical assumptions and their theological grounding. Various attempts at revision were pursued without success. At the 1981 GA, delegates voted to refer the bylaw revision to a committee. That committee developed a congregationally-based process that led to the 1985 principles and sources, which have served us well for over 35 years.

The UUA Bylaws require a review of Article II every 15 years. The UUA asked the Commission on Appraisal (CoA) to review Article II in 2006 because the deadline had been missed by six years. The 2010 GA rejected the extensive revisions proposed by the CoA. The current review, which began in 2020 after just ten years, was in response, in part, to the *8th Principle Movement*.

Paula Cole Jones and Bruce Pollack-Johnson began working in 2013 on the 8th principle. Jones was concerned that the anti-racism, anti-oppressive, multicultural work begun in 1992 within the UUA had faltered, as evidenced by decreased funding and emphasis. Pollack-Johnson’s initial draft went through a process of input and revision, finally asking that we covenant “to affirm and promote: journeying toward spiritual wholeness by working to build a diverse, multicultural Beloved Community by our actions that accountably dismantle racism and other oppressions in ourselves and our institutions.” While not

included here, love is the foundation and goal of the Beloved Community.

Pollack-Johnson’s congregation incorporated elements of the 8th principle into their covenant. In 2017, at the urging of Jones and Pollack-Johnson, the General Assembly called for the UUA Board to appoint a study commission to discuss adding an 8th Principle. Since then, close to 250 UU congregations and organizations have adopted it. The *Article II*

Study Commission, which convened in the fall of 2020 and included Paula Cole Jones as a member, was to consider an 8th principle in its overall review. The Canadian Unitarian Council adopted an 8th principle in November 2021.

To further clarify their charge, the UUA Board included the following: “Dr. Cornel West says that ‘justice is what love looks like in public.’ Our commitment to personal, institutional, and cultural change rooted in anti-oppression, anti-racism, and multiculturalism values and practices is love in action and should be centered in any revision of Article II.”

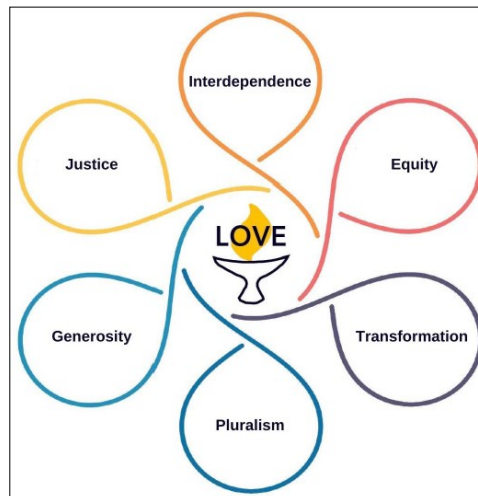
In their revision to Article II, the Study Commission proposed in *Section C-2.1. Purposes*, “The purpose of the Unitarian Universalist Association is to actively engage its members in the transformation of the world through liberating Love.” In this, love moved from inclusion in two of the 1985 sources to the *purpose* and *center* of our faith.

While the charge to the Study Commission requested that they revisit the sources and, perhaps, expand them, they eliminated the sources, replacing them with *Section C-2.3. Inspirations* which, unfortunately, are uninspiring. The absence of sources is a serious flaw.

In *Section C-2.2. Values and Covenant*, the Study Commission noted that our covenant draws “from our heritages of

freedom, reason, hope, and courage, building on the foundation of love.”

They continued, “Love is the power that holds us together and is at the center of



our shared values. We are accountable to one another for doing the work of living our shared values through the spiritual discipline of Love.” Thus, love is our purpose, a shared value, a covenant, and a spiritual discipline. Relative to this new articulation of values/covenants, 7

values replace 7 principles. They are love, interdependence, equity, transformation, pluralism, generosity, and justice. As noted in *I Corinthians 13*, “And the greatest of these is love.”

While the Special Commission briefly outlined the meanings of the other six values in their proposed *Article II* using covenantal language, love is not defined, per se. What love means and how we love is critical because our faith’s future may well depend upon it. As we consider love, the Special Commission affirmed that,

- ◆ Love is a power and our purpose
- ◆ Love binds us together,
- ◆ Love is at the center of the other six values and thus informs their meanings and applications,
- ◆ Love demands accountability,
- ◆ Love involves the work of living our shared values into being (i.e., making them real in ourselves, making our congregations into multicultural Beloved Communities, and transforming the world through Liberating Love) and,
- ◆ Love is a spiritual discipline.

Given this centering of love, the sources (i.e., root traditions) of our faith matter a great deal as we look forward. Love was a central and defining element in Universalism as it contended for influ-

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Doing Love

Children begin learning about love in infancy. When they enjoy secure attachment to parents and primary caregivers, the resulting sense of safety lets them form intimate relationships from infancy onward. While attachment is biologically hardwired, it leads to feeling love. For psychotherapist Liza Finlay, feeling love is fabulous, “But,” she writes, “doing love (think, ‘love, the verb’) is even better. And it turns out that the ability to ‘do’ love is an essential skill you can pass on to children for their long-term well-being.” Finlay continues, “Despite the fact that we are wired for empathy—mirror neurons in our brains mimic, or mirror, the emotional experience of others—we still need practice. Kids need to flex those empathy muscles. They need to learn to “do” love.”

Empathy grows in the fertile ground of unconditional love and trust. As it develops, children begin to identify and understand the feelings of others. It allows a child to respond as they would want someone else to respond to them. But, as they learn to intuit how the other person is unique, their response is increasingly tailored to that person’s feelings and needs.

Children doing love can be expressed in different ways. Empathy often leads to kindness, those acts that help or support another person, or that simply convey care. As love matures, the child is occasionally able to put the needs of others ahead of their own. Encouraging children to perform acts of kindness like helping a friend in need, participating in community service projects, or committing random acts of kindness reinforces their doing love. Importantly, children also need to express gratitude to others for kindness received.

M. Scott Peck said that, at a minimum, love means paying attention. We help our children pay attention by teaching them to listen when others speak, having them asking questions to deepen their understanding, and expressing their appreciation to convey that they value others. Listening also supports noticing and understanding different

viewpoints. This perspective-taking helps children understand that two people can have a similar experience but feel quite different about it.

Doing love across differences is not easy. This is why teaching children to treat others with respect is essential. Unitarian Universalist minister Tom Owen-Towle has suggested that respect is more important than love. We do know that respect is an integral part of love. It is the way we affirm another person’s worth and dignity. When differences divide, respect is the bridge that love can cross.

While some aspects of love are innate, children need to learn about love and how to do love. This learning will enrich their lives beyond measure. A wise person said, “Love is the most important lesson we can teach our children, for it is the lesson that will shape their character and guide their lives.”

Source: Touchstones



Family Activity: Dandelion Wishes

Folklore has it that if you blow all of the seeds off the tuft of a dandelion in one breath your wish will come true. As a family, make a list of the things that you wish for in the lives of people you love and your wishes for those in the wider circles rippling out to include the entire world. Write each wish on a small strip of paper, fold each one, and put them all in a bowl. Each evening, take one of the dandelion wishes from the bowl and read the wish aloud. Then discuss what would need to happen for that wish to come true. What role would love play?

Practice Love

Becoming more loving requires effort. While most are inclined to “do (some) love,” the world would benefit by more love. But love must be more than a feeling or an act; it must be a discipline that continually encourages us to choose love.

Practicing a spiritual discipline of love can draw on many elements. There is no single formula. Include the most meaningful ones to make love a habit.

Intend Love. In the morning, take a few moments to set your intention to respond with love throughout the day, regardless of what happens.

Lovingkindness Meditation: This Buddhist practice, known as *Metta* meditation, is powerful. Use it to cultivate feelings of love and compassion toward oneself (I), others (you), and all beings (we). The middle focus on others (you) is often repeated several times and directed at various individuals or groups, including at least one person with whom you struggle. There are different variations of the meditation. Use it at least once a day, if not more often.

Right Speech. Despite the riff on sticks and stones, words have the power for good and ill. Thích Nhất Hạnh wrote, “May my words create mutual understanding and love. May they be as beautiful as gems, as lovely as flowers.” Repeat this mantra often to cultivate and express loving words.

Gratitude Practice. Start or end your day by reflecting on the things and people you’re grateful for. Gratitude opens us to life by creating a positive and trusting environment that encourages responding to life with love.

Engaged Love. To make love more than a feeling, pursue justice, not randomly but intentionally. Act each day to bend the moral arc toward justice.

Self-Examination. Daily self-examination involves reflecting on your thoughts, words, and actions to identify where you can improve and align more closely with your desire to manifest love.

The above are a few of the elements you can consider. Since it is a life-long journey, add one element at a time and establish it before adding another.

Source: Touchstones

(Continued from page 4) **Faith and Theology**

Love as Activist

A liberal theology regards love as a moral imperative that calls us to act on behalf of others to bend the moral arc of the universe toward justice. In this regard, love is not just a feeling; it is a call to action to create a more equitable and compassionate society, to promote the well-being and flourishing of all people and creation itself. It requires actively working to address systemic inequalities, oppression, and suffering in the world.

Self-Love

Theologically, loving ourselves is a necessary foundation for loving others and engaging in acts of service and justice. Self-love is not self-ish. It is a prerequisite for loving our "neighbor." Self-love requires exquisite honesty. It is a call to love ourselves: warts, shortcomings, brilliance, beauty, and all. If we cannot love the least of ourselves, we will condition our love to such a degree that few will be able to enter the kingdom of our love. If we cannot love the least of ourselves, how can we love the "least of these" whom Jesus loved: the poor, oppressed, marginalized, despised, humiliated, imprisoned, etc.? If we cannot love ourselves fully, what does that mean for every person's inherent worth and dignity? Loving ourselves sustains our love for others and the world as we do love.

Love's Fire

Pierre Teilhard de Chardin wrote, "Love is the most universal, formidable, and mysterious of cosmic energies." He believed that after we have harnessed the winds, waves, tides, and gravity, we will finally harness love, and then, for a second time in the history of the world, we will have discovered fire. If this were easy, we would have already done it. We have not, yet as Wendell Berry writes, "This is no paradisaal dream. Its hardship is its possibility." The truth is, there is nothing easy about love and nothing more important.

Source: Touchstones

Let It Be Love

Omid Safi

...As so many of our teachers have reminded us, it is when love moves into the public square that we call it justice. It is this same love that pours out of God's own being and brings us here, that sustains us here, that will take us back home. It is this same love that we recognize in other people, who love their babies and their community as we love our babies and our community. When we recognize this same love in one another, we will not stand for having something happen to other people's babies and community that we wouldn't want to have happen to ours. That is simply what we call justice—and this work of justice is a task of love.

...Somewhere I read that Aristotle talked about habit as a virtue.

...Stick with love.

...Go, be your best self. Be your most beautiful self. Be your luminous self. Be your most generous self. Be your most radically loving self. And when you fall short of that—as we all do, as we all have—bounce back and return. And return again. There is a grace in this returning to your luminous self.



...Focus on the journey, and the company we keep on this journey of life, and beyond. It is the journey itself that is lovely and worth taking.

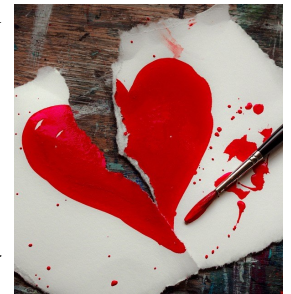
So let us keep journeying together, to a way of being together that makes beauty real and love present. Hand in hand, with this commitment to love guiding our steps; right can be actualized; justice can be mobilized; meanness can be neutralized; love can be organized; and the beloved community can be realized. Let it be love.

Source: <https://onbeing.org/blog/omid-safi-let-it-be-love/>

Learning to Love

In several novels including *On Love: A Novel* (1993) and *The Course of Love: A Novel* (2016), as well as his *New York Times* essay, *Why You Will Marry the Wrong Person* (2016) (see <https://www.nytimes.com/2016/05/29/opinion/sunday/why-you-will-marry-the-wrong-person.html>), Alain de Botton has thoughtfully explored love and relationships.

Many of his insights are captured in Krista Tippet's interview of him at *The True Hard Work of Love and Relationships* (2017), see <https://onbeing.org/programs/alain-de-botton-the-true-hard-work-of-love-and-relationships/>. In the interview he states, "We have this ideal of what love is and ...these very, very unhelpful narratives of love. And they're everywhere. They're in movies and songs.... But if you say to people, 'Look, love is a painful, poignant, touching attempt by two flawed individuals to try and meet each other's needs in situations of gross uncertainty and ignorance about who they are and who the other person is, but we're going to do our best, that's a much more generous starting point.'"



de Botton continues, "The Ancient Greeks had a view of love which was essentially based around education; that ... love is a benevolent process whereby two people try to teach each other how to become the best versions of themselves." He continues, "the only conditions under which anyone learns are conditions of incredible sweetness, tenderness, patience.... But the problem is that the failures of our relationships have made us so anxious that we can't be the teachers we should be. And therefore, some ...genuine, legitimate things that we want to get across ...come across as insults, as attempts to wound, and are therefore rejected, and the arteries of the relationship start to fray."

We should read the article and listen to the interview to learn how, through love, to "become the best versions of ourselves."

Source: Touchstones

Small Group Discussion Guide

A Liberating Love

(Continued from page 5) **Introduction to Theme**

ence in the 19th century, offering “hope, not hell.” Our forebearers believed that God’s boundless love for all humanity was so powerful that it would ultimately lead to the redemption and salvation of every soul, regardless of their past actions or beliefs. Their advocacy for social justice was an expression of God’s love and a way to make the world a better place. They moved from affirming God’s Love to “God is Love.” As Rev. Forrest Church wrote in *The Cathedral of the World: A Universalist Theology*, “Universalism is an exacting gospel. Taken seriously, no theology is more challenging—morally, spiritually, or intellectually: to love your enemy as yourself; to view your tears in another’s eyes; to respect and even embrace otherness, rather than merely to tolerate (literally, to ‘put up with’) or, even worse, dismiss it.”



As above, we are called to place love at the center of all that we do. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, “Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic.” But a powerful, Liberating Love, that is a new world waiting to be born.

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Theme for Discussion: Love

Preparation: (Read *Explorations* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “Now there is a final reason I think that Jesus says, “Love your enemies.” It is this: that love has within it a redemptive power. And there is a power there that eventually transforms individuals. Just keep being friendly to that person. Just keep loving them.... And by the power of your love they will break down under the load. That’s love, you see. It is redemptive, and this is why Jesus says love. There’s something about love that builds up and is creative. There is something about hate that tears down and is destructive. So love your enemies.” *Martin Luther King, Jr.*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake)

(In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “The principal form that the work of love takes is attention. When we love another we give him or her our attention; we attend to that person’s growth. When we love ourselves we attend to our own growth. When we attend to someone, we are caring for that person. The act of attend-

ing requires that we make the effort to set aside our existing preoccupations and actively shift our consciousness. Attention is an act of will.” *M. Scott Peck*

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. Is there a connection between love and happiness, and if so, how does it work?
2. Can love be unconditional, or are there always conditions that will limit it?
3. What gets in the way of self-love? What role does self-love play in our ability to love others?
4. How does society influence our understanding & expression of love, generally and for the LGBTQIA+ community?
5. How does our concept of love relate to ethics and morality in our decision-making?
6. How can love promote a willingness to build the common good?
7. Can love motivate people to seek justice? How?
8. What might a spiritual practice of love involve?
9. What are the benefits and challenges of UUs asserting that love is at the center of our faith?
10. What role does love play in your congregation?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person for the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones)
We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words by Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*