



TOUCHSTONES

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Respect



Introduction to the Theme

Our religious journey to respect has, in some ways, been slow. Tolerance has been a core religious value for us since 1557. Yet, Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church wrote in a sermon in 1998, "Acceptance trumps tolerance." In another sermon a decade later in 2008, he proposed that Unitarian Universalists "upgrade the condescending virtue of tolerance to a 'true respect.'" And we are.

Tolerance

Unitarian historian Earl Morse Wilbur wrote, while Unitarianism has often been understood "as a movement or a sect characterized primarily by certain beliefs about the being of God and the

person of Christ," it was not fundamentally a movement that was doctrinally driven since its adherents varied widely in their opinion on a wide range of doctrines. Wilbur concluded that Unitarianism was characterized by three leading principles: "first, complete mental freedom in religion rather than bondage to creeds or confessions; second, the unrestricted use of reason in religion, rather than reliance upon external authority of past tradition; third, generous tolerance of differing religious views and usages rather than insistence upon uniformity in doctrine, worship, or polity. Freedom, reason, and tolerance...."

It is an understatement to suggest that the Reformation was not known for these three characteristics. A commitment to tolerance was especially rare. Given this, the actions of John II Sigismund Zápolya (Szapolyai János Zsigmond) (1540-1571) and his mother, Queen Isabella Jagiellon (1519-1559)

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Wisdom Story

Building Respect

Janeen Grohsmeyer



When Joseph Jordan (pronounced *Jerden*) was born in Virginia in 1842, slavery was still legal. Most people of African descent were treated as property, like horses or dogs. They were bought and sold; they had no rights. Whether enslaved or free, people of color were not treated with respect.

Joseph had been born free, in a small community on the Elizabeth River. He learned to read and write. At a young age, he began to work on the river harvesting oysters, alongside the men. When he was twenty-one, he moved to the city of Norfolk. Joseph found work, first as a laborer, then as a grocer, and finally as a carpenter, building furniture and houses with his hands.

He married Indianna Brown, and they had three children and built a new life together. The Civil War had ended by now. Slavery was gone, and many other people also needed to build new lives. Joseph worked hard. He bought land and built more houses, which he rented to other families.

But even though people could no longer be bought and sold, true freedom had not yet arrived for African Americans. The laws were unfair, and it was hard for African Americans to find places to live, or good jobs, or schools of any kind. Joseph had become a Baptist minister, and when he preached on Sundays, he sometimes spoke of the sins of the white oppressors, and how God would surely punish them by sending them to burn in hell for all eternity.

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Respect & Deepening Connections

As the Introduction makes clear, it has been a long road to respect, embracing tolerance first and then acceptance: both worthy, but insufficient. Some suggest that respect is more important than love. Respect is fundamental for deepening connections and it can be expressed and reciprocated in many different ways. By contrast, disrespect severs connection and evokes negative interactions. Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker writes, "Reverence and respect for human nature is at the core of Unitarian Universalist faith. ... 'Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy,' the great 20th century Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote. Unitarian Universalists affirm the inherent worth and dignity of each person as a given of faith—an unshakeable conviction calling us to self-respect and respect for others."

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Deepening Connections

Treated with Respect

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

Then a friend gave Joseph a book, *The Plain Guide to Universalism*, and he read of God's promise of salvation to all: the powerless and the powerful, the oppressed and their oppressors alike. Universalism said that everyone, no matter who they were or what they had done, was a child of God. Joseph also knew that Jesus had said: "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you." So Joseph stopped preaching a message of vengeance, and he began preaching a message of respect and love.

Joseph wanted to learn more about the Universalist faith, so he went to Philadelphia to study with a Universalist minister at a Universalist church. The people there treated him as a person instead of a thing, as a fellow child of God, as someone worthy of respect. The seven members of the Universalist Ordaining Council found him to have a "clear and bright mind" and gave him a unanimous recommendation. On the thirty-first of March 1889, Joseph Jordan officially became a Universalist minister, the first African American to be ordained by the Universalist denomination.

Joseph returned to Norfolk, Virginia and opened the First Universalist Church of Norfolk in a rented room. He built the pulpit with his own hands. ...The congregation grew quickly, and with the help of donations from other Universalist churches, the Universalists in Virginia soon built new meetinghouses and schools.

Dozens of African American children came to learn, for there were few other schools available to them. Joseph knew that education was vital.... Joseph worked every day, teaching during the week and preaching on Sundays, sharing the Universalist message of God's love for everyone.

Joseph Jordan died in 1901, when he was fifty-nine years old. Over many decades, the churches and schools Joseph Jordan helped build gave thousands of families in Virginia a chance to learn and a place to be treated with respect.

Source: <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/youth/virtueethics/workshop4/building-respect>

Seek Mutual Respect

Is Tolerance a Virtue?

Rev. Forrest Church

Lord Acton once said that every institution perishes by an excess of its own first principle. The three first principles of liberal religion are freedom, reason, and tolerance. So ...consider the dangers of an excess of tolerance.

Literally speaking, to tolerate means to abide with repugnance. This can be a virtue when we are talking about our great aunt's politics or an occasional and therefore not particularly important lapse in our children's table manners. It can also be a virtue when we choose not to condemn, only to disapprove of one another's private foibles. Without a degree of tolerance, we would all become intolerable, rife with judgment, incapable of forgiveness, driven by a dangerous and often self-delusional sense of superiority.

So defined, even at its best, tolerance remains a relatively weak virtue. And at its worst, tolerance is not a virtue but a vice. This can happen in two ways. First, tolerance can become a self-congratulatory cover for condescension. For instance, if we merely tolerate another's religion or sexual preference, we tend to fall short of the higher call to mutual respect. If I tolerate you often, I am putting up with you. I am looking down at you while acting in a high-minded manner. This is an invitation less to righteousness than to self-righteousness. Colonialists tolerated their subjects. By like measure, we must check ourselves when we are tempted only to tolerate those who are different from us rather than working better to understand and respect them.

Second ...if to tolerate means, in certain instances at least, to abide with repugnance, there are some things too repugnant to abide. [In this regard, there are some things and some people's actions that we should never tolerate.]

Source: <http://www.allsoulsnyc2.org/publications/sermons/fcsermons/is-tolerance-a-virtue.html>

Look with New Eyes

Practice Respect

Rev. Tom Owen-Towle

How can Unitarian Universalist ... [congregations] foster right relationships? First, they need to learn how to embrace conflict as inevitable, even desirable. Every viable organization ...both yearns for stability and pushes for achievement. ...Progress is both expansive and disruptive: progress spells change, change causes anxiety, and anxiety precipitates conflict. But conflict is not only unavoidable, it's beneficial. Hearty turmoil elicits new ideas and understandings.

...Ironically, genuine conflict frequently emerges in eras of strength, when a community is swelling in size or morale and is strong enough to tackle the problem. A healthy church learns to integrate the forces of stability with the forces of change. It can bicker gainfully. Opposing opinions can actually create a golden opportunity—that is, for a church equipped with goodwill ...[in order to turn] conflict into growth.

...Healthy churches heed what Native American activist Catherine Attla calls "the big law of respect." A respectful church is one where boundaries are kept, saboteurs are confronted, and crises are faced. Good behavior is expected and rewarded. Parishioners are urged ...to engage one another with an active gaze and a level glance.

...Respect must be evident in the details of church organization and programming from the moment a newcomer crosses the threshold. ...Members are always asking, "What does it mean to practice a kinder regard...?"

...To be respectful literally means "to look at something or someone again." The Buddhists call this process "seeing with unfurnished eyes"—that is, eyes empty of mental clutter and inherited furniture. Respectful persons are those who look again at what is readily ignored or missed.

Source: from *Growing a Beloved Community: twelve hallmarks of a healthy congregation* by Tom Owen-Towle, 2004, Skinner House Books, Boston, MA.

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "How would your life be different if you stopped making negative judgmental assumptions about people you encounter? Let today be the day you look for the good in everyone you meet and respect their journey."
Steve Maraboli



Day 2: "Attitude is a choice. Happiness is a choice. Optimism is a choice. Kindness is a choice. Giving is a choice. Respect is a choice. Whatever choice you make makes you. Choose wisely." Roy Bennett

Day 3: "Respect for ourselves guides our morals; respect for others guides our manners." Laurence Sterne

Day 4: "I don't have to agree with you to like you or respect you." Anthony Bourdain

Day 5: "Once we give up searching for approval, we often find it easier to earn respect." Gloria Steinem

Day 6: "You can't help respecting anybody who can spell TUESDAY, even if he doesn't spell it right; but spelling isn't everything. There are days when spelling Tuesday simply doesn't count." A.A. Milne

Day 7: "I don't believe in charity. I believe in solidarity. Charity is so vertical. It goes from the top to the bottom. Solidarity is horizontal. It respects the other person."
Eduardo Galeano

Day 8: "Tragedy in life normally comes with betrayal and compromise—by trading in our integrity and failing to treat life and others in our life, with respect and dignity. That's really where the truest and the most tragic failures comes from..., they come making the choice to betray another soul, and in turn, giving up a piece of our own." José Harris

Day 9: "If you spend your life sparing people's feelings and feeding their vanity, you get so you can't distinguish what should be respected in them."
F. Scott Fitzgerald

Day 10: "It is better to be respected than it is to be popular. Popularity ends on yearbook day, but respect lasts forever."
John Bytheway

Day 11: "One of the sincerest forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say." Bryant McGill

Day 12: "Defensiveness is usually someone silently screaming that they need you to value and respect them in disguise. When you look for deeper meanings behind someone's pain you can then begin to heal not only yourself, but others."
Shannon Alder

Day 13: "Tolerance isn't about not having beliefs. It's about how your beliefs lead you to treat people who disagree with you." Timothy J. Keller

Day 14: "Respect other people's feelings. It might mean nothing to you, but it could mean everything to them." Roy Bennett



Day 15: "Respect is how to treat everyone, not just those you want to impress."
Richard Branson

Day 16: "I can win an argument on any topic, against any opponent. People know this, and steer clear of me at parties. Often, as a sign of their great respect, they don't even invite me." Dave Barry

Day 17: "Respect is not a one way street."
Henry Rollins

Day 18: "Trust is earned, respect is given, and loyalty is demonstrated. Betrayal of any one of those is to lose all three."
Ziad Abdelnour

Day 19: "It's very dramatic when two people come together to work something out. It's easy to take a gun and annihilate your opposition, but what is really exciting to me is to see people with differing views come together and finally respect each other." Fred Rogers

Day 20: "Tolerance only for those who

agree with you is no tolerance at all."
Ray Davis

Day 21: "Be respectful to your superiors, if you have any." Mark Twain

Day 22: "The grandiose person is never really free; first because he is excessively dependent on admiration from others, and second, because his self-respect is dependent on qualities, functions, and achievements that can suddenly fail." Alice Miller

Day 23: "We abuse land because we see it as a commodity belonging to us. When we see land as a community to which we belong, we may begin to use it with love and respect." Aldo Leopold

Day 24: "I would rather be alone with dignity than in a relationship that requires me to sacrifice my self-respect." Mandy Hale

Day 25: "Nothing living should ever be treated with contempt. Whatever it is that lives, a ...[person], a tree, or a bird, should be touched gently, because the time is short. Civilization is another word for respect for life...." Elizabeth Goudge

Day 26: "If they respect you, respect them. If they disrespect you, still respect them. Do not allow the actions of others to decrease your good manners, because you represent yourself, not others."
Mohammad Zeyara

Day 27: "Your suffering needs to be respected. Don't try to ignore the hurt, because it is real. Just let the hurt soften you instead of hardening you. Let the hurt open you instead of closing you. Let the hurt send you looking for those who will accept you instead of hiding from those who reject you." Bryant McGill

Day 28: "You should never be surprised when someone treats you with respect, you should expect it." Sarah Dessen

Day 29: "Respect for the fragility and importance of the individual is still the first mark of the educated person."
Norman Cousins

Day 30: "Listening to each other and respecting each other aren't just nice ideas. They are matters of life and death."
Alan Jones

Day 31: "Respect is love in plain clothes."
Frank Byrnes



Self-Respect: Its Source, Its Power by Joan Didion

(Joan Didion, an American author, born in 1934, is best known for her novels and her literary journalism. This piece is an excerpt from a June 1961 issue of *Vogue*. Didion wrote the essay as the magazine was going to press because another writer had failed to provide a piece on the same subject. Only her second column for *Vogue*, it was written in just two days. Given the fact that they were

out of time, Didion wrote it to perfectly fit the designated two-page spread. She did this, not by writing to a word count or a line count, but to an exact character count. The article is a meditation on what it means to live well in one's soul, noting that external realities like prestige, approval, and conventions of success are in the end inadequate. Cultivating self-respect requires that we "know the price of things" by weighing the value of immediate pleasures with long term comforts, many of which may be largely intangible. Didion was concerned that we were slowly losing this virtue. Fortunately, it can always be re-learned.)

...The dismal fact is that self-respect has nothing to do with the approval of others—who are, after all, deceived easily enough; has nothing to do with reputation....

To do without self-respect ...is to be an unwilling audience of one to an interminable documentary that details

one's failings, both real and imagined, with fresh footage spliced in for every screening.

...People with self-respect have the courage of their mistakes. They know the price of things. ... In brief, people with self-respect exhibit a certain toughness, a kind of moral nerve; they display what was once called char-



acter, a quality which, although approved in the abstract, sometimes loses ground to other, more instantly negotiable virtues. ... Nonetheless, character—the willingness to accept responsibility for one's own life is the source from which self-respect springs.

...It is a question of recognizing that anything worth having has its price. People who respect themselves are willing to accept the risk.... They are willing to invest something of themselves; they may not play at all, but when they do play, they know the odds.

That kind of self-respect is a discipline, a habit of mind that can never be faked, but can be developed, trained, coaxed forth.

...To have that sense of one's intrinsic worth which constitutes self-respect is potentially to have everything: the ability to discriminate, to love and to remain indifferent. To lack it is to be locked within oneself, paradoxically incapable of either love or indifference.

Source: Excerpt from <http://www.vogue.com/3241115/joan-didion-self-respect-essay-1961/>

Righteous Incivility

Respectful or Rude?

Amy Olberding

The desire to be civil, in its cleanest and most robust form, is a desire to be moral, to treat others humanely, with respect, toleration, and consideration. But if one wants to be moral, one must also know that, in order to be good, sometimes one cannot be nice. The imperative to treat others civilly is never ...total because sometimes a moral good is won in rudeness. To display disrespect or enmity, to mock or shun, to insult or shame—these can be moral gestures. For even as we need to respect humanity, valuing human beings can sometimes require disrespecting some of them, precisely the ones who deny or damage our shared humanity. To show such people respect and consideration might let them have their way..., let them continue in their destructive ways.

...Truly righteous incivility would issue from a deeply moral wish against its own necessity. It would come about as forced, a sorry step one feels reluctantly obliged to take. Morally good people *want* to respect others—they want a world in which we can, in all good conscience and effect, treat each other humanely and kindly. They do not want to signal disrespect even when they see they must.



They are people who perceive a moral need to be rough and inconsiderate as distressing or at least a disappointment. Perhaps my disappointment in myself, in my too-eager impulse for the punch, can be used to turn me toward this better form of disappointment.

Source: <https://aeon.co/essays/whats-the-difference-between-being-righteous-and-being-rude>

The Language of Respect

Marilyn Price-Mitchell, Ph.D.

...Hal Holloman and Peggy Yates have studied the topic of respect and how it gets translated through the words we use.

...What they learned is not surprising. When we give respect, we get it back in return. When we respect children and teens, they learn to believe in themselves and us. They feel valued and loved.

...Respect is a two-way street, where adults are the pace-setter cars.

... Holloman and Yates discovered eleven categories of words that foster respect. ...Rephrasing words from a negative to a positive context helps develop a culture of respect. ...

1. **Words of Encouragement:** Instead of complaining..., let them know how much you admire their ability to overcome tough challenges and recover from apathy or failure.

2. **Words of Grace:** Instead of blaming, ...forgive them for mistakes or misjudgments. Give them a chance to get it right.

3. **Words of Guidance:** Encourage ... [teens] to ask questions and give them words of guidance.

4. **Words of Respect:** ...Build a climate of respect in ...classroom and family.

5. **Words of High Expectations:** ... Encourage ...[teens] to envision and pursue goals that fuel their passion.

6. **Words of Hope:** Instead of ... another difficult day, help them envision a better tomorrow.

7. **Words of Love:** ...Speak to their hearts. Demonstrate how much you love and care for them every day.

8. **Words of Relationship:** Use words that build connection.... Help teens "feel felt" by you.

9. **Words of Understanding:** ... Discover a young person's perspective through empathy.

10. **Words of Unity:** ...Foster a culture of collaboration and cooperation.

11. **Words of Accountability:** Being respectful means holding everyone

accountable. Instead of allowing disrespectful behavior, help young people stay on track.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/the-moment-youth/201402/the-language-respect>

Family Activity:

Warm Fuzzies & Cold Pricklies

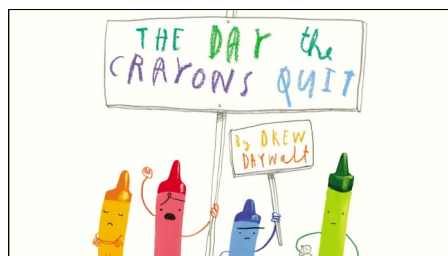
Find the story *Warm Fuzzies and Cold Pricklies* by Claude Steiner (one version is at <http://www.houstonisd.org/cms/lib2/TX01001591/Centricity/Domain/3465/Awesomeness%20-%20Warm%20Fuzzy%20Story.pdf>). Read the story with your children and then create two lists of words—those that are warm fuzzies and those that are cold pricklies. Once the list is completed discuss the words and why each is a warm fuzzy or a cold prickly. Invite everyone to begin using warm fuzzy words when talking with each other.

Family Activity:

Empathy & Respect

Ask each person what his or her favorite color is, as well as other colors they really like. Then read the following two by books or watch the videos of them being read. They are written by Drew Daywalt and illustrated by Oliver Jeffers. *The Day the Crayons Quit* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=489micE6eHU> (7:22) and *The Day the Crayons Came Home* at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iOtTTAbIGfQ> (8:19)

How do each of you identify with the crayons in each of these books? A gateway to understanding is empathy. And often, respect flows from empathy.



Six Windows on Respect

Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

...A beautiful little East African girl ...I met in 1976 while traveling in Kenya [is present to me]. She is four years old and speaks four languages with astounding fluency. I ...ask her name, and she tells me, "I'm *Tolani*." ...It is a West African name, used by *both* boys and girls; and it means "one who gives respect *and* one who is respected." How I love its meaning, its promise of symmetry.... You get respect when you give it.

When we worry about the deterioration of civility..., we often cite lack of respect as the reason that our social fabric is tearing. Likewise, when we suffer ...emotional and physical abuse, even misunderstanding and isolation, we often see the roots of the pain ... in disrespectful attitudes and behavior.

...Most of these references to respect ... are warnings about the catastrophic consequences that result when it is *absent*.

...Respect is commonly seen as deference to status and hierarchy.... The remnants of this view survive ...and shape our expectations, our apprehensions, and our disappointments.

...I focus on the way respect creates symmetry, empathy, and connection in all kinds of relationships, even those ... commonly seen as unequal.

...Respectful relationships ...have a way of sustaining and replicating themselves. ... Respect generates respect; a modest loaf becomes many. ...

Six windows on respect—empowerment, healing, dialogue, curiosity, self-respect, and attention—...reveals a different angle of vision.... In order for us to explore the rich phenomenon of respect, we must ourselves engage in respectful dialogue, one built on relationships that move toward symmetry and intimacy. Our dialogue captures our full attention, allows us to take risks, explore silences, and challenge our inhibitions. The attentive, healing power of such a relationship, the life-enhancing glow of respect given and gained ...[is profound].

Source: *Respect: an exploration* (2000) by Sara Lawrence-Lightfoot

From Tolerance to Acceptance

(Continued from page 1) **Introduction**

were remarkable. Jagiellon was married to King John Zápolya (1497-1549) who died two weeks after the birth of their son. She



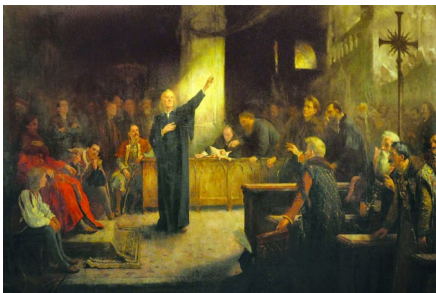
ruled the kingdom on behalf of her son until her death in 1559, except for five years (1551-1556) when she and her son were in exile. In 1557, Jagiellon issued the *Decree of Religious Tolerance*, which called for “each person to maintain whatever religious faith he wishes, with old or new rituals, while We at the same time leave it to their judgment to do as they please in the matter of faith, just so long as they bring no harm to bear on anyone at all.” The decree was reaffirmed in 1563 by Sigismund, who ruled as the King of Hungary from 1557 to 1570 when he abandoned the title of King in the Treaty of Speyer between the two Hungarian



kingdoms and became the first Prince of Transylvania from 1570 to 1571.

In March 1568, Sigismund convened the Diet (i.e., religious assembly) of Torda to facilitate a debate between believers

in the “Unity of God” and Trinitarians. The debate, which was actually held at Gyulafehérvár, lasted ten days, beginning at 5 am each day. Francis Dávid (Dávid Ferenc) represented the Unitarian position and relied on scripture to buttress his arguments. At the conclusion of the debate, Dávid’s arguments were seen as stronger, and many in Transylvania would embrace Unitarianism.



In response to the debate, Sigismund issued the *Edict of Torda* on March 18, 1568. (It is also known as the *Patent of Toleration* and as the *Act of Religious Tolerance and Freedom of Conscience*.) Reaffirming the

1557 decree, this stated that “preachers shall preach and explain the Gospel each according to his understanding of it,” that a congregation “shall be permitted to keep a preacher whose teaching they approve,” and that “no one shall be reviled for his religion by anyone....”

In 1569, Sigismund declared himself and his court to be Unitarian. In January 1571, the Diet and Sigismund gave legal recognition to the Unitarian Church, designating it as a received religion” so that it would have the same constitutional protection as Roman Catholicism, Calvinism, and Lutheranism in Transylvania. Sigismund, the only Unitarian king in history, died on March 14, 1571 from injuries suffered in a carriage accident.

This remarkable period of religious toleration was short-lived, coming to an end in 1594, when religious tolerance and freedom of conscience were replaced by another two centuries of often brutal religious persecution by the state.

The next flowering of tolerance blossomed in England with the passage of the *Act of Toleration* in 1689, a statute granting freedom of religious worship (with conditions) to dissenting Protestants in England. It offered “recognition of the right of private judgment in matters of faith and worship; liberty granted by the government to preach and worship as one pleases; equality under the law without regard to religion” as long as oaths of allegiance were pledged to the monarch. Dissenters were required to register their meeting locations and were forbidden from meeting in private homes. Any preachers who dissented had to be licensed. Certain religions and groups were not protected including Roman Catholics and Unitarians, as well as atheists. Penalties against Unitarians were finally removed in the *Doctrine of the Trinity Act* in 1813.

One impetus for this law was John Locke’s four *Letters Concerning Toleration* (1685-92). Locke suggested that governments should respect freedom of religion except when the dissenting belief was a threat to public order. The first letter was written while Locke was in exile in

Holland (1683-1689) in 1685 and published anonymously in England in Latin in 1689.

Religious tolerance emerged in the American colonies sporadically. Roger Williams of Rhode Island and William Penn of Pennsylvania embraced freedom of conscience and worship for all. Maryland’s *Toleration Act* of 1649 extended rights to both Catholics and Protestants. The Virginia *Statute for Religious Freedom* was passed in 1786 to disestablish the Church of England. It became a model for the First Amendment, passed in 1791, which states, in part, “Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion or prohibiting the free exercise thereof....” The loophole in this right was the fact that individual states could still have an official state religion. Massachusetts was the last state to completely disestablish church-state commitments in 1833. (The first amendment protection was later expanded to include state and local governments through the Fourteenth Amendment in 1868.)

It is notable that Unitarian minister William Ellery Channing attacked intolerance in his historic sermon, *Unitarian Christianity*, which was delivered at the ordination of the Rev. Jared Sparks at The First Independent Church of Baltimore on May 5, 1819. Channing wrote, “An enemy to every religion, if asked to describe a Christian, would, with some show of reason, depict him as an idolater of his own distinguishing opinions, covered with badges of party, shutting his eyes on the virtues, and his ears on the arguments, of his opponents, arrogating all excellence to his own sect and all saving power to his own creed, sheltering under the name of pious zeal the love of domination, the conceit of infallibility, and the spirit of intolerance, and trampling on men’s rights under the pretense of saving their souls.”

While tolerance has its limits, we only have to look at the world to realize that it continues to be in short supply in too many places with devastating consequences.

Acceptance

The shift from tolerance to acceptance was marked by the adoption of new Prin-

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Finally! Respect!

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ciples in 1985. The third principle affirmed and promoted “Acceptance of one another....” In a 1987 course on the principles, Rev. Tom Owen-Towle wrote, “As a faith we have evolved, and wisely so, from the concept of tolerance to one of acceptance—a broader, more magnanimous spiritual sentiment. The liberal spirit is a spirit which welcomes us to community as we really are and invites us to create tomorrows of our own choosing. Authentic acceptance means that we try to live affirmations which liberate rather than imprison others. ...The spirit of acceptance means that we promote unfettered yet responsive religion.” Commenting on both parts of this principle, Owen-Towle concludes, “Acceptance affirms us as we are, and encouragement pushes us toward whom we might become.” A question mark emerges if this principle is limited to our congregations.

Respect

Our principles, however, move from “acceptance” in the third principle to “respect” in the seventh principle: “Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.” In reflecting on the seventh principle, the Rev. Barbara Merritt wrote, “To have respect for all life does not mean that we understand all that goes on in this creation. It certainly does not mean that we approve of all behavior. Surely the interdependent web will break our hearts, as well as restore our souls. To have respect for life itself, for *all* existence is to recognize a relationship, a covenant, a connection. To ...be respectful is fundamentally a faith stance. The word respect comes from the root ‘to look back,’ to regard. In this faithful commitment we promise to pay attention.”

She continues, “Jose Ortega y Gasset stated the connection clearly...: Tell me what you pay attention to and I will tell you who you are. What we choose to pay attention to determines to a large extent what we become.”

Let us practice respect for this aligns perfectly with our inherent worth and dignity as well as the worth and dignity of all existence. This completes the circle as we move from the seventh principle back to the beginning with the first principle.

A Politics of Hope

Self-respect as a Social Good

Titus Stahl

Political hope is distinguished by two features. Its object is political: it is hope for social justice. And its character is political: it is a collective attitude. ...The promise of a “politics of hope” is thus the promise that hope for social justice will become part of the sphere of collective action, of politics itself.

...The sphere of politics has particular features ...that impose limitations on what we can rationally expect. ...John Rawls in 1993 described ...the insurmountable pluralism of “comprehensive doctrines.” ...Such pluralism makes it unreasonable to expect that we will ever arrive at a final consensus on these matters. ...The most we can rationally expect from politics is the pursuit of those principles of justice on which all reasonable people can agree, such as basic human rights, non-discrimination, and democratic decision-making.

...This limitation stands in tension with another of Rawls’s claims. He also argued, in 1971, that the most important social good is self-respect. In a liberal society, the citizens’ self-respect is based on the knowledge that there is a public commitment to justice—on the understanding that other citizens view them as deserving fair treatment. However, ... that ...will make a relatively small contribution to our self-respect.

...Even though we are not justified in *expecting* more than limited agreement on justice, we can still collectively *hope* that, in the future, consensus on more demanding ideals of justice will emerge. When citizens collectively entertain this hope, ...this ...can contribute to self-respect and is thus a desirable social good in its own right. In the absence of consensus, political hope is a necessary part of social justice itself.

So, it is rational, perhaps even necessary, to recruit the notion of hope for the purposes of justice.

Source: <https://aeon.co/ideas/why-politics-needs-hope-but-no-longer-inspires-it>

Engaging the Stranger

Pluralism: a matter of respect

Diana L. Eck

The plurality of religious traditions and cultures has come to characterize every part of the world today. But what is pluralism?

1. Pluralism is not diversity alone, but *the energetic engagement with diversity*.

...Religious diversity is a given, but pluralism is not a given; it is an achievement. Mere diversity without real encounter and relationship will yield increasing tensions in our societies.

2. Pluralism is not just tolerance, but *the active seeking of understanding across lines of difference*. Tolerance is a necessary ...virtue, but ...tolerance is too thin a foundation for a world of religious difference and proximity. It does nothing to remove our ignorance of one another, and leaves in place the stereotype, the half-truth, the fears that underlie old patterns of division and violence. ...

3. Pluralism is not relativism, but *the encounter of commitments*. This does not require us to leave our identities and our commitments behind, for pluralism is the encounter of commitments. It means holding our deepest differences, not in isolation, but in relationship to one another.

4. Pluralism is *based on dialogue*. The language of pluralism is that of dialogue and encounter, give and take, criticism and self-criticism. Dialogue means both speaking and listening, and that process reveals both common understandings and real differences. Dialogue does not mean everyone at the “table” will agree with one another, [but it does mean that everyone can practice respectful engagement.] Pluralism involves the commitment to being at the table—with one’s commitments.

Source: <http://pluralism.org/what-is-pluralism/> The Pluralism Project at Harvard University

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Respect

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

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

Opening Words: “There are things you can’t back down on, things you gotta take a stand on. But it’s up to you to decide what them things are. You have to demand respect in this world, ain’t nobody just gonna hand it to you. How you carry yourself, what you stand for—that’s how you gain respect. But, little one, ain’t nobody’s respect worth more than your own.”

Mildred Taylor

Chalice Lighting: (James Vila Blake) adapted

(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 one.

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: “Self-respect is not the same as self-confidence or self-esteem. Self-respect is not based on IQ or any of the mental or physical gifts.... It is not earned by being better than other people at something. It is earned by being better than you used to be, by being dependable in times of testing [and] ... in times of temptation. It emerges in one who is morally dependable. Self-respect is produced by inner triumphs, not external ones.” David Brooks

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

1. Who taught you about respect? How?
2. What does it feel like to be respected? Disrespected?
3. How do we cultivate self-respect?
4. Does a person have to earn respect, or do all people deserve it?
5. How would you relate respect to our first principle: the inherent worth and dignity of every person?
6. How important is respect? Why?
7. Does everyone deserve respect? Why or why not?
8. What are the signs of respect?
9. Does our society put an emphasis on respect or disrespect? How? Why?
10. What are the differences between tolerance, acceptance, and respect? Are all three necessary? In which situations would you use each?

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

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

Extinguishing Chalice: (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *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: Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Respect for Things

The Patience of Ordinary Things

Pat Schneider

(This poem is a poignant reminder that “respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are apart” includes everything including the inanimate objects that shape our world and enhance our life. How will you show your respect and gratitude?)



It is a kind of love, is it not?

How the cup holds the tea,
How the chair stands sturdy and foursquare,
How the floor receives the bottoms of shoes
Or toes. How sales of feet know
Where they’re supposed to be.
I’ve been thinking about the patience
Of ordinary things, how clothes
Wait respectfully in closets
And soap dries quietly in the dish,
And towels drink the wet
From the skin of the back.
And the lovely repetition of stairs.

And what is more generous than a window?

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/24904> from *How The Light Gets In: writing as a spiritual practice* (2013) by Pat Schneider.

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