



# TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

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## Reverence

## Wisdom Story



lished just before his death in 1965. A pivotal event, which he recounted in many of his writings over the years, occurred in 1915 when he was 40 years old. This was when he encountered the idea of *Reverence for Life*. (See page two.)

The idea of *Reverence for Life* can be grounded in a theology based upon a notion of God or one in which the idea of God is absent. The notion of *Reverence for Life* does invite us, regardless of our theology, to respond to the question, "What for you in life is holy or precious or sacred?" The search for answers to this question brings many people to a Unitarian Universalist church. We come to flee a sterile secularism in search of deeper meaning. We also come because the answers offered by traditional religion do not respond adequately to our particular questions. We

### Introduction to the Theme

The Rev. William Sinkford preached a sermon called *The Language of Faith* at the First Jefferson Church in Fort Worth, Texas, on January 12, 2003 about the importance of a vocabulary of reverence, which is important for Unitarian Universalists to be able to enter into meaningful religious dialogue with others, but it is even more important as a way of naming our values, informing our search for meaning, and giving us a language to use in speaking of the depth dimension of our experiences. A vocabulary and a theology of reverence bring to mind the life of Albert Schweitzer.

Schweitzer wrote about his struggle to find life's meaning in an article pub-



(Continued on page 6)

**Amrita's Tree** *an ancient tale retold by Rev. Beth Chronister*

Amrita sat and leaned against her tree. She loved her tree and had from the first day she claimed it as her own. Amrita often talked to her tree, sharing her dreams and secrets, but today was so peaceful she just sat in silence with eyes closed.

*HAY-ELPHHH!* Amrita was startled by the shrill warning call of the peacock. It echoed through the forest. As animals fled in response, Amrita heard men marching toward her. She looked in the direction of the sound and saw flashes of sunlight off of metal.

The men carried axes. "Cut down every tree you can," the chief woodcutter said. "The Maharajah needs wood for his new palace."

Amrita could not believe it. They were going to cut down the

forest! She ran as fast as she could back to her village. "Amma, Amma," she called to her mother, "There are men in the forest with axes, and they are going to cut down the trees!" Amrita's mother rushed around the village, calling women away from their work. "We must save the trees!" she urged. The women and children ran into the forest.

Amrita's mother greeted the woodcutters politely, "Namaste. We do not want trouble, but we cannot let you cut down these trees."

The chief woodcutter laughed at her. "You do not own these trees. We have orders from the Maharajah."

(Continued on page 2)

### Reverence & Repairing the World

It is impossible to repair the world if we do not have reverence for the Earth, this amazing planet that gave birth to us, and to the ten-thousand-thousand things with whom we share life. The chance of the existence of Earth and of our species on Earth are considered to be less than 1 in 60 billion. Not great odds, but here it is and here we are. As Wendell Berry writes, "it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it." Respect is not enough. Love is not enough. Humility and reverence can create right relationship so that care and repair can matter.

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## Repairing the World

## The Forest Queen

(Continued from page 1) **Amrita's Tree**

"Sir, these trees are our life," Amrita's mother explained. "Their roots hold the soil together during the monsoons and soak up the rain, so the earth can give us fresh water. Don't you understand? We need these trees to survive."

"Quiet!" yelled the chief woodcutter and he ordered his men to start cutting down the trees. One woodcutter went to an ancient *Khejri* tree and began chopping with his axe. The mighty tree came crashing to the ground. Amrita and the others cried out in disbelief. They were going to kill all the trees.

The woodcutters spread out and began cutting down other trees. Then a woodcutter walked past Amrita in the direction of her special tree. Amrita ran ahead of him and yelled, "No!" She flung her arms around her tree. "If you want to cut the tree, you will have to cut me first!"

"Swing your axe!" commanded the chief woodcutter. "I..." the woodcutter faltered. He looked down at the girl—this mere sapling of a girl—her eyes squeezed shut, her thin arms hugging so tight, her tearstained cheeks pale with fright. "I... I cannot." Amrita opened one eye, then another. All around her women and children began hugging trees.

Without a word, the laborers picked up their axes and left. Amrita and the others returned to the village, grateful that the men had stopped, but they worried that the Maharajah would now come. The next afternoon he did arrive in a thunder of hooves and a cloud of dust, riding on his majestic horse.

Amrita, though afraid, greeted him like a forest queen. He climbed down from his horse.

"I present this royal decree to you, Amrita," said the Maharajah, "and to the women and children of your village, in honor of your courage and your wisdom. I promise that, from this day forward, no tree in this forest will be cut down."

This is the power and blessing of reverence for life. Amrita's tree still stands in that forest.

Source: Touchstones

## The Iron Door

**Reverence for Life**

Albert Schweitzer

"It was the dry season in usually wet equatorial Africa and slowly we crept upstream, laboriously feeling for the channels between the sandbanks of the Ogoone River. Lost in thought, I sat on the deck of the barge, struggling to find the elementary and universal conception of the ethical, which I had not discovered in any philosophy. Sheet after sheet I covered with disconnected sentences, merely to keep myself concentrated on the problem. Late on the third day, at the very moment when at sunset we were making our way through a herd of hippopotamuses, there flashed upon my mind, unforeseen and unsought: *Reverence for Life*. The iron door had yielded: The path in the thicket had become visible. Now I had found my way to the idea in which life-affirmation and ethics are contained side by side! Thus, to me, ethics is nothing else than reverence for life. Reverence for life affords me my fundamental principal of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life...."

George Marshall, minister of the *Church of the Larger Fellowship*, began corresponding with Albert Schweitzer in the 1950s. He raised \$50 for Schweitzer's hospital, and visited him in Africa. He co-authored a book about his friend, *Schweitzer: A Biography*. Marshall invited Schweitzer to join the Church of the Larger Fellowship. Schweitzer responded, "I thank you cordially for your offer to make me an honored member of the Unitarian Church. I accept with pleasure. Even as a student I worked on the problem and history of the Unitarian Church and developed sympathy for your affirmation of Christian freedom at a time when it resulted in persecution. Gradually, I established closer contact with Unitarian communities and became familiar with their faith-in-action. Therefore, I thank you that through you I have been made an honored member of this church."

Source: Touchstones

## Seeds of Reverence

**Reverence**

Paul Woodruff

Reverence is an ancient virtue that survives among us in half forgotten patterns of civility, in moments of inarticulate awe, and in nostalgia for the lost ways of traditional cultures.

...To forget that you are only human, to think you can act like a god—this is the opposite of reverence. ...An irreverent soul is arrogant and shameless, unable to feel awe in the face of things higher than itself. As a result, an irreverent soul is unable to feel respect for people it sees as lower than itself—ordinary people, prisoners, children. ...

...This virtue, so important to the ancients, has fallen beneath the horizons of our intellectual vision. And yet reverence is all around us....



Why reverence? ...Because we have forgotten what it means. Because reverence fosters leadership and education. Most important, because reverence kindles warmth in friendship and family life. And because without reverence, things fall apart. People do not know how to respect each other and themselves. ...Without reverence, we cannot explain why we should treat the natural world with respect. Without reverence, a house is not a home, a boss is not a leader, an instructor is not a teacher. Without reverence, we would not even know how to learn reverence. To teach reverence, you must find the seeds of reverence in each person and help them grow.

Source: *Reverence: Renewing a Forgotten Virtue*, by Paul Woodruff, Oxford University Press, New York, 2001

# Readings from the Common Bowl

**Day 1:** "Reverence is an organic human experience that requires no supernatural explanations." Rev. Kendyl Gibbons



**Day 2:** "Pursue some path, however narrow and crooked, in which you can walk with love and reverence." Henry David Thoreau

**Day 3:** "Spring passes and one remembers one's innocence. Summer passes and one remembers one's exuberance. Autumn passes and one remembers one's reverence. Winter passes and one remembers one's perseverance." Yoko Ono

**Day 4:** "In reverent pauses, when we slow down and think about the gift of life, we may briefly touch humility." Bryant McGill

**Day 5:** "Ethics is nothing else than reverence for life." Albert Schweitzer

**Day 6:** "That sense of sacredness, that thinking in generations, must begin with reverence for this earth." Paul Tsongas

**Day 7:** "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

**Day 8:** "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." John O'Donohue

**Day 9:** "Love, Hope, and Reverence are realities of a different order from the senses, but they are positive and constant facts, always active, always working out mighty changes in human life." Elizabeth Blackwell

**Day 10:** "There is only one valid way to partake of the universe.... That way is characterized by reverence—a reverence born of a felt sense of participation in the universe, a kinship with all and with all matter." Larry Dossey

**Day 11:** "We may be divided from one another by our beliefs, but never by reverence." Paul Woodruff

**Day 12:** "Reverence is a deep sense of respect for marvels that surround us and that brought us into existence. It is an awareness of ourselves ...in an order beyond the grasp of any single human mind." Wisdom Commons

**Day 13:** "Without reverence, there is no sense of presence or wonder." John O'Donohue

**Day 14:** "The problem to be faced is: how to combine loyalty to one's own tradition with reverence for different traditions." Abraham Joshua Heschel

**Day 15:** "Let's think of reverence as awe, as presence in and openness to the world.



The alternative is that we stultify, we shut down. ...This is our goal ...to help others have this sense of ...wonder, of seeing things anew, things that can catch us off guard, that break in on our small, bordered

worlds." Anne Lamott

**Day 16:** "Gratitude bestows reverence, allowing us to encounter everyday epiphanies, those transcendent moments of awe that change forever how we experience life and the world." John Milton

**Day 17:** "Science is ...about reverence, not mastery." Richard Powers

**Day 18:** "While arrogant intellect seeks to control and manipulate the world, the poetic spirit bows with reverence before its mysteries." Daisaku Ikeda

**Day 19:** "Reverence calls us to service. When we have a mindset of reverence, it seems natural to use our life energy to preserve, honor and elevate something greater than ourselves." Wisdom Commons

**Day 20:** "Bring nothing but silence / Show nothing but grace / Seek nothing but shelter / From the great human race. Take nothing but pictures / Kill nothing but time / Leave nothing but footprints / To show you came by." John Kay

**Day 21:** "The real voyage of discovery consists not in seeking new landscapes, but in having new eyes." Marcel Proust

**Day 22:** "Science enhances the moral value of life, because it furthers a love of truth and reverence—love of truth displaying itself in the constant endeavor to arrive at a more exact knowledge of the world of mind and matter around us, and reverence, because every advance in knowledge brings us face to face with the mystery of our own being." Max Planck

**Day 23:** "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." Carl Sagan

**Day 24:** "True spirituality makes you loving and grateful, and forgiving, and patient, and gentle, and long-suffering. True spirituality breathes reverence into every act and deed." Marjorie Pay Hinckley

**Day 25:** "It is as impossible to live without reverence as it is without joy." Henry Beston

**Day 26:** "By having a reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practicing reverence for life, we become good, deep, and alive." Albert Schweitzer

**Day 27:** "Authentic faith leads us to treat others with unconditional seriousness and to a loving reverence for the mystery of the human personality." Brennan Manning

**Day 28:** "If you desire peace in the world, do not pray that everyone share your beliefs. Pray instead that all may be reverent." Paul Woodruff

**Day 29:** "Religion, according to Alfred North Whitehead, is a phenomenon that begins in wonder and ends in wonder. Feelings of awe, reverence, and gratitude are primary, and these can never be learned from books." Rev. Gary Kowalski

**Day 30:** "The cause of violence is not ignorance. It is self-interest. Only reverence can restrain violence—reverence for human life and the environment." William Sloane Coffin

**Day 31:** "Reverence is profound respect mingled with love." David O. McKay



## Toward a Humanist Vocabulary of Reverence

Rev. David E. Bumbaugh

The key ...a humanist vocabulary of reverence is to be found, I believe, in the second affirmation of the original [Humanist] Manifesto [1933]. After affirming that the universe is "self-existing and not created," the manifesto went on to insist (in the language of the time), "Humanism believes that man is a part of nature and he has emerged as the result of a continuous process." If we take that assertion seriously, then it becomes clear that our growing understanding of the nature of the universe is, in some sense, also a deep anthropology—a source of continuing revelation concerning our own nature.

I would suggest to you that the history of science in the twentieth century was the history of an enlarging understanding of the universe, its evolution, its history, and its structure. We have engaged the universe at the very limits of our capacity. We have explored the world of the microcosm and the world of the macrocosm. We have found at both extremes incredible complexity.

In high energy, subatomic physics we have encountered a reality that can only be fully explicated in the language of mathematics and that, when translated into our common discourse, confounds all our settled conventions.

...At the other extreme, the macrocosmic world, we discover a universe that is larger than we can encompass in our imaginations.

...The history of the universe is our history; we are all of us recycled stardust. In the words of Robert Terry Weston, "out of the stars have we come." Our very existence is rooted in the fundamental processes of the universe itself. How can we not stand in awe before the fact of our emergence as a consequence of those same vast processes that created galaxies and suns and stars and planets?

...When the Humanist Manifesto

4 declared that we are part of nature

and we have emerged as the result of a continuous process, it not only denied the creation stories of the western

religious traditions, it gave us an immensely richer, longer, more complex history, one rooted in a system which invites not blind faith but challenge and correction and amendment, one which embraces "truth, known or to be known." It also gave us a language of reverence because it provides a story rooted not in the history of a single tribe or a particular people, but a history rooted in the sum of our knowledge of the universe itself. It gave us a doctrine of incarnation which suggests not that the holy became human

in one place at one time to convey a special message to a single chosen people, but that the universe itself is continually incarnating itself in microbes and maples, in humming birds and human beings, constantly inviting us to tease out the revelation contained in stars and atoms and every living thing. A language of reverence for Humanists begins with our understanding of this story as a religious story—a vision of reality that contains within it the sources of a moral, ethical, transcendent self-understanding.

It is a religious story in that it calls us out of our little local universes and invites us to see ourselves in terms of the largest self we can imagine—a self which was present, in some sense, in the singularity which produced the emergent universe, a self which was present, in some sense, at the birth of the stars, a self which, in some sense, is related through time to every living thing on this planet, a self which contains within itself the seeds of a future we cannot imagine in our wildest flights of fancy.

It is a religious story in that it whispers of a larger meaning to our existence—a suggestion that in us the universe is grasping for self-knowledge, for self-understanding, for insight. How we participate in this process, or what the ultimate consequence of this process may

be, we cannot know.

...Brian Swimme has suggested that the religious story for our time is the "Universe Story." I would add that the human story and the universe story are the same tale.

...The reality inside of us and the reality outside of us are ultimately one reality. In us the universe dreams its dreams. In us the universe struggles for a moral vision. In us the universe hopes for new possibilities. In us the universe strives for self-understanding. In us the universe seeks the meaning of existence. ...[O]ur existence, our struggles and our failures are lent moral significance by the fact that they occur within a larger context—within the largest context our reason and our imagination can conceive—within a context grounded in a unified view of existence.

This is a religious story; it invites us to awe; it demands a vocabulary of reverence. It is a story that is uniquely appropriate to the Humanist tradition. It emerges from the scientific enterprise. It seeks to overcome the ancient dualisms that, over the ages, have diminished the human spirit.

...We are called, at this moment in time, to renew that undertaking—to find or build a vocabulary of reverence adequate to the vision which is emerging around us—a vision which is the result of the drive by the universe to know itself and understand itself—a vocabulary adequate to describe a universe which regularly confounds our expectations, even as it rewards our attempts to know.... We are children of, expressions of a universe that is not only "stranger than we know, but stranger than we can know." It is incumbent upon us to challenge the parochial and limited claims of traditional religions with the enlarging and enriching and reverent story that is our story and their story: the Universe Story.

*Excerpt, Delivered at the Fourth Annual Symposium of the Boulder International Humanist Institute, Boulder, CO, February 22, 2003, Source: [http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/bumbaughdavid/humanist\\_reverence.pdf](http://www.uua.org/sites/live-new.uua.org/files/documents/bumbaughdavid/humanist_reverence.pdf)*



## Fluent in Faith

Rev. Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar

Two generations ago, Edith Hunter, one of the great religious educators of that era, wrote the much-needed book *Conversations with Children*, calling on parents, and those who worked with children in their congregations, to embrace opportunities to talk with children about the deep religious questions and ethical struggles that are a part of every child's life. ...

...Engaging in conversation is an act of love. It is listening, hearing the cries of the other's heart, and offering the cries of our own heart in return. This is what we must do. We must find ways to have our conversations and to convey our faith, as parents and as a religious body, without framing them as ultimates, as orthodoxies. We must learn to talk comfortably, confidently, joyfully about our shared religious meanings. ...

...Let our conversations with children open them—and us—to ever-wider circles of awareness. Let them open up wider circles of spiritual life, spiritual joy, wider circles of faithful living. Let them also give our children strength and hope and meaning for those times when they feel lonely and we cannot be there for them; when they feel pain because of the cruelties of the world; when they feel guilt and shame and struggle for direction; when they face dangers from which they need more than human protection; when they feel grief and rage as well as awe and reverence. Let us have conversations that will ground them in faith, giving them songs and stories and images that make that faith accessible.

Source: *Fluent in Faith: A Unitarian Universalist Embrace of Religious Language*, Jeanne Harrison Nieuwejaar

## A Classroom is a Place for Life

Kimberly Franklin

[In] the film *Monsieur Lazhar*, Monsieur Lazhar's clear assertion [is] that a classroom or school is a place of "friendship, work, courtesy and life, a place to offer life." He says these words to his students on the day he is forced to leave them and in response to the actions of other adults in the school who

have "infected the school with their personal despair." Monsieur Lazhar, himself, is dealing with significant personal tragedy, as well as, the challenge of being a political refugee in an unfamiliar culture. However, he shows reverence for the needs of his students and recognizes that he is there for them, that their healing is more important than his. Monsieur Lazhar is not a perfect teacher, but what comes through to the students are actions and words qualified by a spirit of love, attentiveness, and care. There is something self-emptying about the role of the teacher that he embraces and a recognition that there is something very dangerous about becoming needy as a teacher. What was especially remarkable was that Monsieur Lazhar did not fall into the trap of becoming a divided person, who leaves part of himself "at the door" of the classroom in order to fulfill the expected role of teacher. It was clear that his personal experiences stayed with him, but he didn't allow those experiences to "infect." Instead, he used his own suffering to understand the suffering of his students, and to pay attention to them in a way that allowed wisdom to arise. He found life in his suffering and offered that life to his students.

(The 2011 movie is based on the play, *Bashir Lazhar*, by Évelyne de la Chenelière that tells the story of an Algerian refugee in Montreal who steps in to teach at an elementary school after the former full-time teacher commits suicide. ... It was filmed in Montreal.)

Source: <https://educatingwithreverence.com/2012/02/>

## Family Activity:

### Petting Zoo

Nature and animals can evoke wonder and awe in children and cultivate reverence. Go to a petting zoo and allow your children to interact with the animals. Learn what different animals need to flourish. What do they eat? How long and when do they sleep? What other things are necessary for them to grow and be healthy?

## Love First

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker

Loving our neighbor implicates us in loving the whole network of life. ... We cannot turn from our bonds and obligations for and with one another and expect everyone to be okay. We cannot love after the fact and expect love to be able to save life. ...

We must learn again to live with reverence. Reverence is a form of love. ... Reverence greets all humanity as sacred. It genuflects before the splendor of the grass and the magnificence of the trees. It respects the complexity, beauty, and magnitude of creation and does not presume to undo its intricate miracles. ...

Reverence for life has to be learned. It is not just a feeling; it is a way of life. ... Reverence involves full-fledged devotion enacted in deeds of care and responsibility. It involves knowledge, study, and attention. ...

Our task now is to do what we can to advance reverence for life and deepen the promise of love. Let us dedicate ourselves to the thinking, researching, practice, and learning that will bring more love into the world. Let us be a witness for the new science that tells us how connected all life is and let us work for social policies that embody our responsibility for one another and for the earth. Let us give reverent attention in our worship life and our educational work to knowing and serving the beauty and goodness of life.

...Let us make love the first, not the last, resort.



Source: adapted from *Blessing the World: What Can Save Us Now* by Rebecca Ann Parker, edited by Robert Hardies, Skinner House Books, Boston, 2006.

*(Continued from page 1)* **Introduction**

come hoping that a community of seekers will help us with our own religious quest. We come because we need the same freedom that allowed Albert Schweitzer to find his life's meaning.

Without a vocabulary of reverence, how can we talk about what inspires and moves us? How can we speak the truth of our experiences, of suffering and joy? What words do we have to describe the deepest dimensions of our lives? Which words can guide us when we are lost or comfort us when we are hurt?

The truth is that we each must develop a vocabulary of reverence for ourselves that is congruent with our own beliefs. For some, God will be an important part of that language. Others will choose other words that speak of their highest aspirations and ultimate commitments. That is the logical conclusion of our commitment to one of the seven principles of Unitarian Universalism in which we affirm and promote "a free and responsible search for truth and meaning."

It is true that our Principles and Purposes do not contain "traditionally religious language," but they clearly articulate a radical theology of reverence. The word radical is intentional. If we practiced these principles on a daily basis, if we lived by them, our lives would be radically altered, as would the lives of every person with



whom we came in contact. As an example, our first principle asks us to affirm and promote "the inherent worth and dignity of every person." This does not refer to the external and often superficial worth and dignity that may accrue to a person because of their position, wealth, influence, or good fortune. It refers to the

inherent worth and dignity that is present by the very fact of a person's existence. In the Hindu tradition, this kind of profound reference for another is conveyed by the word *Namaste*, which is used to greet another person. The word is translated in different ways, including "the divine in me greets the divine in you."

Now is this inherent worth and dignity always obvious? No. Do people act in endless ways that betray their inherent worth and dignity? Of course. Is it likely that in some people such inherent worth and dignity does not exist? Perhaps. However, what would it mean if you interacted with others fully and intentionally conscious of their inherent worth and dignity? Would it help elicit in those you encountered a basic goodness? More importantly, what would it elicit in you if you made this a daily practice?

Each of our seven principles articulates a theology of reverence including the seventh, which invites us to affirm and promote "Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." In essence, this seventh principle is just a different way of stating Schweitzer's principle of reverence for life.

In contemporary society, reverence is a forgotten virtue. Without it we are impoverished.

The hierarchy of values that informs our actions becomes flattened, as does our experience of the world. This is what happens when we lose a sense of awe and wonder, when we take for granted all that we should cherish. And there is so much that is worthy of our respect and admiration. What do you prize? What do you revere? What do you consider to be sacred or holy? Your answers matter.

**The Cup of Our Life**

Joyce Rupp

...A ...step to practicing openness is suggested by an old Zen story. A university professor goes to have tea with a teacher. The teacher pours the visitor's cup full and then keeps on pouring. The professor watches the overflow until he can no longer restrain himself. "It is overfull. No more will go in!"

The teacher responds: "Like this cup, you are full of your own opinions and speculations. How can I show you Zen unless you first empty your cup?"



All of us have filled our cups with preconceptions, expectations, prejudices, assumptions, and opinions. We think we already know what we need or where to find out what we need. But the spiritual life requires that we be open to ...messages coming from all directions and that we also be willing to change our minds.

...Humans differ from each other mentally, physically, emotionally, and spiritually. The challenge every day is to be open to the gifts packed within these differences and not to view them as threats.

In these times, when the world is so fragile and tense with the dark clouds of terrorism, when politicians are playing on divisions ...to build up their support, and when economic and geographic factors separate us even more from others, it is good to remind ourselves of ...keeping a heart open to others in love, kindness, compassion, and reverence.

You can see how you do with such an open-hearted approach by keeping a diary of your experiences. ...As contemporary writer Doris Grumbach says: "Keeping a journal thins my skin. I feel open to everything, aware, charged by the acquisition of intensity." Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/practices/features/view/16915/on-the-value-of-emptying-your-cup>

## L

**Reverence: A Tangerine***Thích Nhất Hạnh*

Many years ago, a young man named Jim Forest asked me to teach him.... I offered him some tangerines, he continued telling me about the many projects he was involved in—his work for peace, social justice, and so on. He was eating, but, at the same time, he was thinking and talking. I was really there, and that is why I was aware of what was going on. He peeled a tangerine, tossed the sections of it into his mouth, and quickly chewed and swallowed.

I said, "Jim, stop! Eat your tangerine." He looked at me and understood. So, he stopped talking and began to eat much more slowly and mindfully. He separated each of the remaining sections, smelled their beautiful fragrance, put one section at a time into his mouth, and felt all the juices surrounding his tongue. Tasting and eating his tangerines in this way took a few minutes, but he knew we had the time for that. When he finished, I said, "Good." I knew that the tangerine had become real, the eater of the tangerines had become real, and life had become real at that moment. What is the purpose of eating a tangerine? It is to eat the tangerine. During the time you eat a tangerine, eating that tangerine is the most important thing in your life.

The next time you have a tangerine, please put it in ...your hand and look at it in a way that makes the tangerine real.



You do not need a lot of time, just two or three seconds is enough. Looking at it, you will see the beautiful tangerine blossom with sunshine and

rain, and the tiny tangerine fruit forming. You can see the baby fruit transform into a fully developed tangerine and watch the color change from green to orange. Looking at a tangerine this way, you see everything in the cosmos in it—sunshine, rain, clouds, trees, leaves, everything.

Source: <http://www.mindfulnessbell.org/wp/2013/08/dharma-talk-the-art-of-living/>

## F

**Because Our Future Depends on It***Wendell Berry*

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world—to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity—our own capacity for life—that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled. We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the



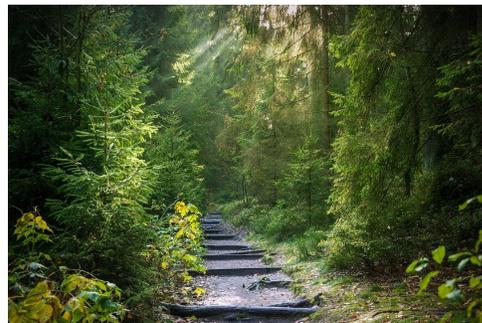
world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.

Source: <https://www.dailygood.org/story/1264/8-great-writers-on-why-reverence->

## F

**My Hunger for Awe***Scott Russell Sanders*

From the few years of my life before our move to Ohio, I can bring back only a handful of moments...; yet I was shaped ...by every hour of every day. It's often said a young child is like a sponge, but that seems to me the wrong metaphor, because a sponge can be wrung dry, while everything that goes into a child stays there. A child is more like a forest, gathering every drop of rain or



flake of snow, every fallen leaf, the slant of sunlight and glint of moonlight, the fluster and song of birds, the paths worn by deer, the litter of bones and nuts and seeds, and whatever the wind delivers, taking it all in, turning everything into new growth.

The moment we begin taking this skein of miracles for granted, we cease to live, no matter if our hearts still beat.

...I still sleepwalk through much of my life. But ...I keep struggling to wake, and when I do occasionally wake, a rush of awe dissolves the boundaries of this, disclosing the borderless, luminous, abiding ground. ...My hunger for awe ... derives [some] from genetic inheritance, ...[but] most of it was determined by what poured into me during those years in Tennessee. How my parents held me...; how my sister played with me or fussed over me; ...the company of animals and plants; the skies, the weather, and the lay of the land; ...; the very air I breathed, spiced with cotton poison and gravel dust and manure—all of these influences, and more, rode along inside of me to Ohio.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/16107>

## Theme for Discussion Reverence

**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:** “We must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery.... We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation.... For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it.” ...  
*Wendell Berry*

**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:** “If you ask the poets of reverence, ‘What must I believe in order to be reverent?’ they will fall silent. But ask them, ‘What must I not believe?’ Then they have an answer: any belief that trespasses on divine ground is the enemy of reverence.

Do not believe that you are supreme in any way; do not believe that you alone know the mind of God. These would be troubling violations of the boundary between human beings and the object of reverence.”

*Paul Woodruff*

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

1. As a child, what experiences evoked awe and wonder in you? And as an adult? How have these cultivated reverence in you?
2. What for you in life is holy or precious or sacred?
3. What do you revere? Why?
4. What do you love? What touches your heart?
5. What brings you joy and delight?
6. Someone said that reverence requires giving things their proper due. How do you treat people with reverence? Animals? The earth?
7. Albert Schweitzer based his ethics on reverence for life. What role might reverence for life play in your ethical stance?
8. If you were creating a language of reverence what words would be most important to you? Why?

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 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.*



## When We Approach with Reverence

*John O'Donohue*

At the heart of things is a secret law of balance and when our approach is respectful, sensitive and worthy, gifts of healing, challenge and creativity open to us.

A gracious approach is the key that unlocks the treasure of encounter.

The way we are present to each other is frequently superficial. We become more interested in “connection” rather than communion.

In many areas of our lives the rich potential of friendship and love remains out of our reach because we push towards “connection.”

When we deaden our own depths, we cannot strike a resonance in those we meet or in the work we do.

A reverence of approach awakens depth and enables us to be truly present where we are.

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 of things.

When we walk on the earth with reverence, beauty will decide to trust us.

The rushed heart and the arrogant mind lack the gentleness and patience to enter that embrace.

Beauty is mysterious, a slow presence who waits for the ready, expectant heart.

Source: <http://newstoryhub.com/2019/07/when-we-approach-with-reverence-john-odonohue/>

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