



TOUCHSTONES

Power

February 2022

This month's theme is "power," a concept I've been thinking a lot about since I dived into the Enneagram a while ago. The Enneagram is a system of identifying the core needs, concerns, and approaches of people. In the system, there are 9 main types of drives. Each type is organized about what that type believes that it needs to feel whole, loved, safe, and purposeful. A type 1 needs to be right, a type 2 needs to be helpful, a type 5 needs to be wise, type 9 needs peace, and so on.

I am a type 8, and type 8 needs power. At first, I thought "this is horrible! Power is bad!" But it is not that simple. Some type 8's want power over themselves, so they can make their own choices. Other type 8's want power so they help others, fight injustice, protect the vulnerable, and so forth. And some 8's want power for the sake of power because it makes them feel invulnerable to the whims of fate.

I'm the second type. Many "social reformers" are – we want to use our power to make the world better. But there is a healthy and an unhealthy version of this trait. A healthy "social 8" is aware of how they use their power, they are cognizant of their social location, and in accountable relationships with others, they give away the power they've earned to support others. And unhealthy version lashes out, they make it personal, they engage in organizational in-fighting.

The point I want to draw from here is that for all of us, whatever our personality or drive, there is a healthy way to approach power. Power – the ability to affect an outcome – is something that every person has. Some have more than others, but we all have some. And if people of goodwill give up their access or use of power, then only those who wish to dominate others will be on the stage. Instead, we must relentlessly consider how to use power in ethical and loving ways.

I am here reminded of the well-known words of the Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr., who wrote that "Power without love is reckless and abusive, and love without power is sentimental and anemic." A studied disdain for how power works is a position of indulgent privilege. If we want to make the world more just and more fair, we must understand power and be prepared to use it.

Yet we cannot be captured by it. Power is seductive, and the idea that the people with power are special, endowed by God with said power, runs deep in the world. The divine right of kings is alive and well in the prosperity gospel.

As you consider the meaning of "Power" this month, I invite you to think about your relationship with power. Are you able to claim yours? What do you want to use it for? Does it frighten you, seduce you, or both? How can you use what you do have to make the world we dream of?

In faith,
Matthew

Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "Power does not corrupt. Fear corrupts... perhaps the fear of a loss of power."
John Steinbeck

Day 2: "I tell my students, ...if you have some power, then your job is to empower somebody else. This is not just a grab-bag candy game." Toni Morrison

Day 3: "We still think of a powerful man as a born leader and a powerful woman as an anomaly." Margaret Atwood

Day 4: "Without a humble but reasonable confidence in your own powers you cannot be successful or happy."
Norman Vincent Peale

Day 5: "Our deepest fear is not that we are inadequate. Our deepest fear is that we are powerful beyond measure. It is our light, not our darkness that most frightens us."
Marianne Williamson

Day 6: "With great power... comes great need to take a nap. Wake me up later."
Rick Riordan

Day 7: "...Even if we don't have the power to choose where we come from, we can still choose where we go from there." Stephen Chbosky

Day 8: "We do not need magic to transform our world. We carry all the power we need inside ourselves already." J.K. Rowling

Day 9: "Knowing others is intelligence; knowing yourself is true wisdom. Mastering others is strength; mastering yourself is true power."
Lao Tzu

Day 10: "The most common way people give up their power is by thinking they don't have any." Alice Walker

Day 11: "...Perhaps those who are best suited to power are those who have never sought it." J.K. Rowling

Day 12: "You have power over your mind—not outside events. Realize this, and you will find strength."
Marcus Aurelius

Day 13: "Whatever you can do or dream you can, begin it. Boldness has genius, power, and magic in it!"
William Hutchinson Murray

Day 14: "The salvation of this human world lies nowhere else than in the human heart, in the human power to reflect, in human meekness, and human responsibility." Václav Havel

Day 15: "Too often we underestimate the power of a touch, a smile, a kind word, a listening ear, an honest compliment, or the smallest act of caring, all of which have the potential to turn a life around."
Leo Buscaglia

Day 16: "But remember ...that a kind act can sometimes be as powerful as a sword." Rick Riordan

Day 17: "Recognizing power in another does not diminish your own." Joss Whedon

Day 18: "If you could only love enough, you could be the most powerful person in the world." Emmet Fox

Day 19: "There is a sacredness in tears. They are not a mark of weakness, but of power." Unknown



Day 20: "Sometimes letting things go is an act of far greater power than defending or hanging on." Eckhart Tolle

Day 21: "When you blame others, you give up your power...." Robert Anthony

Day 22: "Never allow a person to tell you no who doesn't have the power to say yes." Eleanor Roosevelt

Day 23: "When I dare to be powerful, to use my strength in the service of my vision, then it becomes less and less important whether I am afraid."
Audre Lorde

Day 24: "Showing gratitude is one of the simplest yet most powerful things humans can do for each other." Randy Pausch

Day 25: "Between stimulus and response, there is a space. In that space is our power to choose our response. In our response lies our growth and our freedom."
Viktor Frankl

Day 26: "Power isn't control at all, power is strength, and giving that strength to others. A leader isn't someone who forces others to make him stronger; a leader is someone willing to give his strength to others that they may have the strength to stand on their own." Beth Revis

Day 27: "The most regretful people on earth are those who felt the call to creative work, who felt their own creative power restive and uprising, and gave to it neither power nor time." Mary Oliver

Day 28: "Power concedes nothing without a demand. It never did and it never will."
Frederick Douglass

Day 29: "This life is yours. Take the power to choose what you want to do and do it well. Take the power to love what you want in life and love it honestly. Take the power to walk in the forest and be a part of nature. Take the power to control your own life. No one else can do it for you."
Susan Polis Schutz

Day 30: "We cultivate love when we allow our most vulnerable and powerful selves to be deeply seen and known, and when we honor the spiritual connection that grows from that offering with trust, respect, kindness, and affection."
Brené Brown

Day 31: "I believe in the power of the imagination to remake the world, to release the truth within us, to hold back the night,...." J.G. Ballard

Family Matters

Sing to the Power

Rev. Lynn Ungar

Our Unitarian Universalist tradition has long placed an emphasis both on our human capacity to change the world and our moral obligation to exercise our powers for the common good. We believe each individual, as part of our inherent worth and dignity, has power, and there are many kinds of power as well as many ways to express one's power in the world. (from the preface)

...The Rev. Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. wrote, "I am not interested in power for power's sake, but I'm interested in power that is moral, that is right and that is good."

...The word "power" often has a negative connotation. It may remind us of the corruption that seems inevitable when people pursue power for its own sake. We may feel overwhelmed by the power of giant institutions. But everyone has power, and the capacity to choose how and when to use it.

Sing to the Power, affirms our UU heritage of confronting "powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love."

Sing to the Power uses metaphor ...as a framework to explore ...power.

- ◆ Earth: Connection, Roots, Growth & Place.
- ◆ Air: Stillness, Presence, Silence & Listening.
- ◆ Fire: Shine, Passion, Action, & Reaching Out.
- ◆ Water: Flexibility, Persistence, & Gathering.

The final session honors all of the elements' power to transform.

The following activities are from *Sing to the Power*.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/sing>



Family Activity:

The Power of Silence

Download the story, *One Square Inch*, by Rev. Lynn Ungar at <http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/sing/session7/229956.shtml>

Read the story, *One Square Inch*, to your children, then take a walk or a hike in silence.

When everyone is ready, stop and have a discussion about what everyone heard while being silent.



Family Activity:

The Power of Growth

Download the story, *Putting Dreams into Action*, by Rev. Lynn Ungar at <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/sing/session3/220350.shtml>

Read the story, *Putting Dreams into Action*. Discuss with your children the story and the power in things that grow in the garden, whether vegetables, or flowers, or fruit on trees, as well as the power of ideas.

Discuss with your children, what they would like to grow and buy and plant those seeds. Watch each day to see what happens. Growth

is slow at first, but if you watch closely there are many changes. Imagine the power required just for the seed to break open and for the seedling to push upward.



Speaking For Whom?

Reclaiming Prophetic Witness

Rev. Dr. Paul Rasor

From its beginnings, American religious liberalism has included a prophetic dimension oriented toward social justice. ...James Luther Adams claimed that this religious imperative "makes the role of the prophet central and indispensable in liberalism."

...A... factor that weakens the liberal prophetic voice is the tension between religious liberalism's prophetic impulse and the realities of its social location. Biblical ...prophets could come from ...the socially empowered establishment or the marginalized and socially devalued groups. Today's social prophets may also appear from a variety of social locations. But it is difficult for someone from the social and economically privileged classes to speak effectively on behalf of the poor and powerless—an issue the biblical prophets confronted as well. ...In ancient Israel, the establishment prophets were more conservative than those on the periphery, and they tended to prefer gradual social change over radical social restructuring.

H. R. Niebuhr's [1894-1962] early insights into the link between denominationalism and social class are still worth noting.... In Niebuhr's view, middle-class churches tend to emphasize personal self-fulfillment and an ethic of individual responsibility, an orientation aimed more at satisfying the needs of the comfortable than the needs of the poor. His analysis of these class issues led him later to conclude that religious liberals "are missionaries to the aristocracy and the middle-class." ...Contemporary commentators have charged in similar terms that liberal theology serves as "an ideology for the bourgeois" and that it often "ends up sanctioning the power structures of modern society."

...We must realize that we always speak from our own social location, whatever our intentions about speaking on behalf of others.

Source: Rasor, Paul. *Reclaiming Prophetic Witness: Liberal Religion in the Public Square*.



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- Members and friends of the church who live at Wesley Willows are invited to join others and Rev. Matthew on the 4th Tuesday of most months at 9am. We will meet in the fellowship hall at Aldersgate United Methodist Church.

Want to have a group – a book group, a parent group, a “circle supper”, or whatever you like?

– just email Autumn at office@uurockford.org and she can give you the Zoom login and password

Power & Repairing the World

Democracy is a form of power, and, though imperfect, it has been influential in the work of repairing the world. We, however, see around us a weakening and decline of democracy, and a rise of authoritarianism that's been underway across the globe for the last 30 years. It is difficult to see or imagine how authoritarianism can repair the world. In place of the common good, it allocates power to the few, and becomes increasingly abusive. It is motivated by greed and a lust for “power over.” Our own power emerges as we speak truth to power. It takes root as people slowly realize that in the “power over” dynamic of authoritarianism they will lose their freedom. It begins to blossom when more and more people say “No!” It bears fruit in a revolution for freedom however that comes to be as people claim their power.