

"On Being Woven" by Rumi - from *The Essential Rumi*

The way is full of genuine sacrifice.

The thickets blocking the path are anything that keeps you from that, any fear that you may be broken to bits like a glass bottle. This road demands courage and stamina, yet it's full of footprints! Who are these companions? They are rungs in your ladder. Use them! With company you quicken your ascent.

You may be happy enough going along, but with others you'll get farther, and faster.

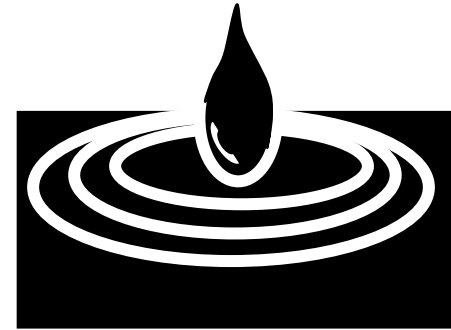
Someone who goes cheerfully by himself to the customs house to pay his traveler's tax will go even more lightheartedly when friends are with him.

Every prophet sought out companions. A wall standing alone is useless, but put three or four walls together, and they'll support a roof and keep the grain dry and safe.

When ink joins with a pen, then the blank paper can say something. Rushes and reeds must be woven to be useful as a mat. If they weren't interlaced, the wind would blow them away. Like that, God paired up creatures, and gave them friendship.

Polly Horvath
My One Hundred Adventures

"We all belong here equally...Just by being born onto the earth we are accepted and the earth supports us. We don't have to be especially good. We don't have to accomplish anything. We don't even have to be healthy."



SMALL GROUP MINISTRY

Unitarian Society of
Germantown

October, 2012 ~ Belonging

In the rush from day to day activities sometimes it is easy to think that we do not belong to a community and feel isolated in this world. This month let us make an effort to reach out to others to show them that we notice them and want them to feel that they belong to our community, our lives.

Spiritual Exercise 1:

This month let's send messages of positive reinforcement to the people who make us feel like we belong: at church, at home, at work, etc. Take a moment to write small notes to people about how they make you feel included, special, and what they do to make you feel this way.

Spiritual Exercise 2:

Invite someone to an activity that month, whether it's coming along to worship service, going to the Diwali celebration, participating in a book group, or going on a hike. Offer a personal invitation to someone to draw them in, and reflect on or share with your small group how it felt to specifically include someone in the activity.

Chalice Lighting
~David Whyte

It doesn't interest me if there is one god or many gods,
I want to know if you belong or feel abandoned.

Check-in

Share briefly what's been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met.

Reading

*(on back cover)
Go around the circle and have each person read one stanza.*

Sitting in Silence

Sitting in Silence

Questions for Contemplation

From the time we are born, we begin reaching out to connect with the world, to discover our place and purpose. We might belong to many things: family, neighborhood, school, a community of faith, country, the world, nature, the universe. We might. Do we?

- Where or with whom do you feel like you have a sense of belonging? What messages do these people and/or communities send to make you feel like you belong?
- One of our founding principles in Unitarian Universalism is the acceptance of one another & encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations. How do you feel this church, this community promotes spiritual growth and your sense that you belong with this spiritual group? What activities through out the year encourage your sense of worth in our spiritual community?
- What actions do you initiate to connect to others, to feel you belong?

Sitting in Silence

Let us pause for a moment to gather our thoughts about the topic of Belonging.

Sharing/Deep Listening

Please share your thoughts on Belonging.

Reflection

This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

Singing

Louis Armstrong
What A Wonderful World

I see trees of green... red roses too
I see 'em bloom... for me and for you
And I think to myself... what a wonderful world.

I see skies of blue... clouds of white
Bright blessed days... dark sacred nights
And I think to myself ... what a wonderful world.

The colors of a rainbow... so pretty in the sky
Are also on the faces... of people going by
I see friends shaking hands... sayin how do you do
They're really sayin... i love you.

Extinguishing the Chalice

~Michael Sallwasser
Litany of Diversity

Please hold hands and read aloud:

If the colors of our skin or the lands of our ancestors are different,
It need not divide us.
If the genders we claim are different,
It need not divide us.
If the stages in our lives are different,
It need not divide us.
If our means of achieving the common good are different,
It need not divide us.
If who we love and how we love are different,
It need not divide us.
If the spiritual paths we follow are different,
It need not divide us.
If our abilities to think and do are different,
It need not divide us.
If our resources are different,
It need not divide us.
If we join spirits and hearts,
Our differences will not divide us, but deeply bind us together.

Additional Resources & Readings

Belonging, A sermon by Rev. Meghan Conrad Cefalu, Given at UUCM – March 22, 2009

My husband and I have a ritual of watching one episode of some old TV show on DVD each night. These days we are working our way through season two of Cheers. I'm now starting to wonder if the idea for this sermon came to me because I have had the opening theme song in my head for a number of weeks. I won't sing it for you, but the words are, "Making your way in the world today takes every thing you've got. Taking a break from all your worries sure would help a lot. Wouldn't you like to get away? Sometimes you want to go where everybody knows your name. And they're always glad you came. You want to go where people know troubles are all the same. You want to go where everybody knows your name."

Of course, the song is referring to a neighborhood bar as the place where "everybody knows your name" but I think the idea translates just as well to a religious community like ours. There is something very appealing about being in a place where you are known and appreciated, where people are glad to see you and you are reminded of the commonality of the human condition.

I chose to explore the concept of belonging with you today because it *is* a new member Sunday. We have had a formal ritual welcoming eight people into membership with us. Now these men and women can tell their friends and family that they *belong* to the Unitarian Universalist Community of the Mountains.

But what does that really mean? What is different now? I've been pondering the question, "What does it mean to belong?"

Dictionary dot com offers three variations to define the word. The first listing says, "to be in the relation of a member". That is pretty straightforward.

The second one says, "to have the proper qualifications, especially social qualification to be a member of a group." Ah, now we are getting down to the nitty-gritty. The notion of belonging can carry an intimation of exclusion. A person either belongs to a particular group or they don't.

Suddenly I have flashbacks to my college years. I remember the way some of the sororities and fraternities would scout out the freshman in search of the right people, the ones they deemed worthy to wear their particular set of Greek letters.

Remember that great Groucho Marx quip about membership? He says, "I sent the club a wire stating, PLEASE ACCEPT MY RESIGNATION. I DON'T WANT TO BELONG TO ANY CLUB THAT WILL ACCEPT ME AS A MEMBER."

Thankfully, our UU congregations do not operate this way. On the contrary, we are welcoming to all who find themselves aligned with our values of freedom, reason and tolerance.

Which brings us to the third variation on Dictionary dot com which says that to belong is to "be properly or appropriately placed." As in *the books belong on the shelf*.¹ This third definition is the one that most resonates with me. That sense of belonging is like finding yourself at home. I have known many people who described the feeling they had discovering Unitarian Universalism for the first time in this way. They say, "I have been a UU for years, I just didn't know it!"

I had that kind of experience the first day I walked into what would later become my seminary, Starr King School for the Ministry. I just knew I belonged in that place, with those people. I didn't know much about Unitarian Universalism. But based on what I learned in the span of an afternoon I was certain, I mean I knew down in the center of my bones, that I had not only found a religious denomination I could belong to with my

whole heart, but I had also found the new direction for my life's work that I had been searching for.

¹ belong. Dictionary.com. Dictionary.com Unabridged (v 1.1). Random House, Inc.
<http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/belong> (accessed: March 20, 2009).

But actually becoming a UU wasn't as simple as that, not really. I was thrilled by the seven purposes and principles, I was delighted by the lack of creed or dogma and I was delirious with joy by the sincere welcome extended to the gay community.

On paper this was as close to perfection as any religious organization could be. But that feeling like I really belonged, like I was "properly or appropriately placed" among the people I met in the local UU church took a little bit longer to develop.

I have since learned to understand and articulate the slow progress of religious identity formation. There is a progression of steps that we all go through as our sense of being Unitarian Universalists develops. First we come to the local congregation for personal reasons: maybe we are lonely, or in crisis or just looking to make some like-minded friends. People do not join churches because they are just dying to serve on a committee or head a task force!

Once we have been coming to services for a few months we might feel like we'd like to get a little more involved in the life of the congregation. At first our participation is somewhat self-serving. We want to do things we find really fun, like singing with the choir or planting flowers in the garden, or joining a circle supper to meet some other members.

Over time our involvement might begin to reflect our growing understanding of the bigger picture. Maybe we've been inspired to go to a district event or training and or we've read some UU history. We start to see how our local congregation fits in with the other congregations in the district. We begin to care about the liberal religious message that UUs bring to the wider world beyond the city or town we live in.

At some point our awareness might have expanded to include the national and international UU movement. Maybe we've been to General Assembly and gotten the chills when we stood in an auditorium with 4000 other UUs from around the country to sing "Spirit of Life" like we meant it.

(I've heard it said that a tribe is a group of people who know the same songs.)

Now suddenly we have become interested in what is happening in the broader association – what each of the current candidates for the UUA presidency bring to the table, and the other issues to be voted on at General Assembly this year.

When our sense of connection to the UU movement expands beyond our home congregation so does our feeling of belonging within our denomination so that when we visit any UU congregation we feel at home.

I want to also acknowledge that many people have resistance to joining groups. There are several people who are regular participants in our community who pledge generously to our budget and serve on committees but, for a variety of reasons, have decided not to officially join our congregation. One person explained, "I'm just not much of a joiner."

Growing up there were plenty of groups that we belonged to that we never had any say about. We were born into our families, into a nation, and a neighborhood and our parents made choices for us about which school we went to and whether or not to belong to a particular church or synagogue. Once we grow up we come to realize that there is power in membership that you choose for yourself.

It is also true that when questioned in polls there are thousands of people in our country who report that they are Unitarian Universalists yet are not associated with any congregation.

I suspect that some of these people might define themselves as “fiercely independent”. Perhaps they feel like they would have to sacrifice too much of themselves, give up too much of their individuality, to belong to a congregation. I can understand that. Belonging to a group says something about a person’s identity. So if I don’t believe 100% of what a particular group espouses I would be reticent to align myself with it.

The way I understand it, religious identity and personal growth are developed and lived out through engagement with one another in the local congregation. I suppose a person can hold UU beliefs in total isolation. But I have to think that we have a richer experience when we are in a covenantal relationship within a community and can learn and grow from our encounters with one another.

Besides, so much of our faith is about peace and justice making in the world. It is so much easier to do this work when we have a place to come together on Sundays to rest, reflect and reenergize ourselves.

Psychologists who study the theory of love and attachment tell us how much human beings need to belong with someone, to someone. We come into the world physically and emotionally dependent upon others for our very survival. As we grow up we tend accept the delusion that to be a mature adult means we shed this dependency, we become *independent*. It is true that it is important to learn how to move through the world on our own, but it would be a mistake to think that we stop relying on other people, especially for emotional support. And yet it is seen as a sign of weakness to need help.

I have a friend in town who is raising two teenage daughters by herself. She is the sole provider for her family and has to make all those tough decisions that childrearing demands all by herself. At the end of her day she does not have someone with whom to discuss the best way to handle discipline issues, or worry along with her about the relationship choices her 17-year-old is making. She was embarrassed to admit to me that she crawls in bed at night exhausted and depleted and sometimes feels helplessly alone.

I just keep thinking that it is not supposed to be this way. I don’t think that people are equipped to raise children in isolation from the support of a community of some kind. It is just too much.

**^[]_[SEP]We belong to each other.

In this scary economic climate, where I am seeing people all around me lose their jobs, their homes, and their financial security that they worked their whole lives to build,

In a time when men and women feel crushed beneath the burden of raising their children alone, In a time when there is war and brutality in the world,^[]_[SEP]And we all know someone who is in pain, either in body or soul,

These are the times when, as *our* poet (and she is *our* poet now) so eloquently put it, “the world is getting narrower and it is harder to squeeze through without touching”

This is my hope for our new members: that you let UUCM become the place where everybody knows your name. Because here we belong to each other. Here we practice knowing that. And in time I hope you allow your identification with Unitarian Universalism to grow so that your sense of belonging within this denomination flourishes.

“We need each other, and I need you. There isn't room not to touch anymore.” Amen

Feeling Like You Belong

We all want to have the sense that we belong among people we know.
Where do we really belong? What makes us feel less like we belong?
What makes us feel more like we belong?

WHERE DO YOU BELONG?

You belong where you say you belong! The decision about whether you belong with others is your decision, not theirs.

In the adult world, we are seldom "kicked out" or excluded from any groups. People from a certain group might mistreat us, and this might help us decide to leave. But, even then, it is our decision, not theirs.

The question of whether we feel like we belong should be based on how we are treated while we are actually with the group.

But people who fear that they don't belong usually feel excluded before they've spent any time at all with that group!

"I'd never be good enough for them." "They'd never let anyone like me in." "People like them don't care what people like us have to say." "I'm just too [dumb, wise, fat, skinny, sick, healthy, young, old, etc.] for those people." "They're just too [dumb, wise, fat, skinny, sick, healthy, young, old, etc.] for me."

Look back on your life and ask yourself: "Who have I decided that I belong with?" "Who have I accepted into my world?"

Then look back again and ask: "Who have I decided I don't belong with?" "Who have I excluded from my world?"

WHAT MAKES YOU FEEL LESS LIKE YOU BELONG?

We decide whether we belong based on our experience or on our beliefs.

FROM OUR EXPERIENCES If some people in a group mistreat you, deciding to leave them can be a good decision. This is especially true if you objected to the mistreatment but nothing changed afterwards.

FROM OUR BELIEFS But if you haven't been mistreated by people in a certain group and you only think you will be mistreated, it is your beliefs that are keeping you from the feeling of belonging.

Such beliefs are both bigoted against them and terribly restrictive for you!

It's bad enough to restrict yourself because of your own beliefs. It's even worse to exclude yourself because of someone else's beliefs.

When it comes to a decision as important as whether to cut a whole group of human beings out of your life, I don't care at all what your parents, or your culture, or even your priests/rabbis/ministers think. I care what YOU have experienced. And whether you have spoken up for yourself about being treated well. And what you have decided, and whether these decisions are working for you or not.

WHAT CAN YOU DO TO FEEL MORE LIKE YOU BELONG?

If you are actually mistreated by some people in a certain group: Don't judge the group. Judge the individuals.

- Tell the people who are mistreating you that it has to stop. If they stop for a long while, stay with them. If they only stop for a short while, consider leaving.
 - If they don't stop, leave. Join a better group. And congratulate yourself for trying! Whether you stay or leave, remember that some of these people did treat you well.

If you are only thinking that you will be mistreated, ask yourself where your opinion came from:

- Is it only based on what you heard from someone else? Is it based on your experience with a few people you think are similar? Is it based on your experience with many people you think are similar? Admit that you fear being mistreated by the people in this group. Then ask yourself: What kind of mistreatment do I fear? If it did happen, how bad would it actually be? Am I so afraid that it's not even worth trying to accept the new group? Most importantly: How would you treat yourself after you got home from being mistreated? Would you treat yourself even worse than the people in the group treated you? Is the biggest problem what they think of you, or what you think of you?

ASK YOURSELF:

If I exclude another group, where will I get the feeling of belonging that I need? If I just need to find a better group, which group will I try next? Can I allow myself to think in terms of individuals instead of whole groups? Is there some way I stir up the very mistreatment I try to avoid? If so, how can I change this?

YOU BELONG WHERE YOU SAY YOU BELONG!

Give people a chance to treat you well. Accept them and spend your time with them.

You belong with good people.

You belong wherever you say you belong!

Borrowed from <http://helpyourselftherapy.com/topics/belong.html>

