

## Heroes

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, December 2012

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### **Opening Words** The Hero with One Face (David Wagoner) (excerpt)

*[Editor's note: for many of us, our earliest quests on our own heroic life journeys were assigned to us by others.]*

They chose me, not that I might learn,  
But only because I was born,  
And gave me amulets of clay,  
Some armor, and a brief goodbye.

And at the threshold of the pool,  
The looking glass, the spoiled well,  
The hole beneath the swirling tree,  
I waited meekly. They called me.

I turned a corner, and was there,  
Where all the other places are:  
The other side of the cupped moon,  
Oz, Heaven-Hell, and the Unknown.

I had too many purposes:  
Although they hadn't said, "Find keys,  
Find maidens, answers, and lost loves,"  
I knew they wanted these themselves,

And I was bound to seek them all  
Or be transformed, or die, or fall.

### **Chalice Lighting and Silence**

#### **[Covenant Review]**

#### **Check-in**

When you are unsure of your ability to get through a challenging time, what do you tell yourself (or what image do you bring to mind) that usually comforts and encourages you?

#### **Topic Introduction**

When we talk about heroes, we are talking about an idea that takes a lot of forms. You, for instance, are a hero. Your very birth was heroic, that bloody chute you negotiated, that violent separation, that searing first breath. And your mother was surely heroic too; her body and her labor changed both her and the world forever.

We are talking about heroes of world mythology and pop culture, the archetypal hero, whose story is told over and over again in every life in every generation. You or someone you know has engaged in a heroic quest: slain a dragon, rescued a damsel or her male

counterpart, spun straw into gold, fooled a villain, drawn the sword from the stone, found the magic key.

We are also talking about heroes in the news: people who stand between the bullet and their loved ones, soldiers who sacrifice themselves for their platoon, the elderly woman who refuses to go to the back of the bus, public figures who tell the truth and stand by it, activists who give their lives to a cause.

Finally, we are looking for stories about the little heroes of our personal lives, the people who have gone out of *their* way to help us on *ours*.

## Quotations

### Activity

*[Facilitators: this is a writing meditation—group members will need pen and paper]*

Villains and heroes share some characteristics and qualities. Think of a villain-hero pair. Here are some examples: Sherlock Holmes and Professor Moriarty, Snidely Whiplash and Dudley Doright, Batman and the Joker, Luke Skywalker and Darth Vader, Dorothy and the Wicked Witch of the West, Scarlet O’Hara and Melanie Wilkes, Bob Cratchett and Ebenezer Scrooge, J. R. and Bobby Ewing, Cain and Abel. What makes one a hero and one a villain? What characteristics do they share?

### Questions for Group Reflection

1. When you were younger do you remember having heroes in the public sphere that you admired, imitated, obsessed about, longed to meet? What about them was particularly attractive to you at that time in your life?
2. Share an insight you experienced during the villain-hero activity earlier. Tell us a story about someone who acted heroically in your own life.
3. Have you ever been failed by someone who was a hero to you?
4. What acts of heroism have you heard about or witnessed that most inspired you?
5. In the poem by David Wagoner that we read as Opening Words: “they” chose and called the hero, gave him/her amulets, armor, a goodbye and told him/her to find certain things. “They”—your parents, teachers and others—may have sent you on certain quests when you were young, some for your own benefit, some maybe for theirs. What were some of those heroic quests of your early years? Later, you identified and pursued your own quests. Can you describe a few quests you engaged in as an adult?

### Likes and Wishes

What happened during this Sharing Circle session that you wish would happen more often? Did anything happen that you hope never happens again? Is there someone (in this circle or not in this circle, someone alive or someone who has died) that you would like to thank for something?

## Closing Words and Chalice Extinguishing

Rachel Naomi Remen tells a story in her book *Kitchen Table Wisdom* called "The Ordinary Hero." She talks about the time her beloved uncle came home from the war and everybody was calling him a hero. She was seven and she was amazed to see that people were giving him all this adulation since he was still the bald, pot-bellied man wearing glasses that she remembered. She told him she knew he must be very brave and not afraid of anything. He told her that he had actually been very frightened, that he would have been a fool not to have been afraid, and that they don't give medals to people for being fools. She tells us that at that time she was very much afraid of the dark and she had been greatly ashamed of this. But now she thought about how if her uncle could be a hero even though afraid, there was hope for her too.

## Quotations

Heroes take journeys, confront dragons, and discover the treasure of their true selves.  
~Carol Pearson (*The Hero Within*)

How important it is for us to recognize and celebrate our heroes and she-roses! ~[Maya Angelou](#)

We live in a world in which we need to share responsibility. It's easy to say "It's not my child, not my community, not my world, not my problem." Then there are those who see the need and respond. I consider those people my heroes. ~ Fred Rogers

[I think of a hero as someone who understands the degree of responsibility that comes with... freedom.](#) ~ Bob Dylan

Above all, be the heroine of your life, not the victim. ~Nora Ephron

Heroes didn't leap tall buildings or stop bullets with an outstretched hand; they didn't wear boots and capes. They bled, and they bruised, and their superpowers were as simple as listening, or loving. Heroes were ordinary people who knew that even if their own lives were impossibly knotted, they could untangle someone else's. And maybe that one act could lead someone to rescue you right back. ~Jodi Picoult ([Second Glance](#))

It does not take a great supernatural heroine or magical hero to save the world. We all save it every day, and we all destroy it -- in our own small ways -- by every choice we make and every tiniest action resulting from that choice. The next time you feel useless and impotent, remember what you are in fact doing in *this very moment*. And then observe your tiny, seemingly meaningless acts and choices coalesce and cascade together into a powerful positive whole. The world -- if it could -- will thank you for it. And if it does not... well, a true heroine or hero does not require it. ~Vera Nazarian

[A hero is no braver than an ordinary \[person\], but... is braver five minutes longer.](#)  
~Emerson

Our heroes are men who do things which we recognize, with regret, and sometimes with a secret shame, that we cannot do. We find not much in ourselves to admire, we are always privately wanting to be like somebody else. If everybody were satisfied with him- [or her-]self, there would be no heroes. ~ Mark Twain

My own heroes are the dreamers, those men and women who tried to make the world a better place than when they found it, whether in small ways or great ones. Some

succeeded, some failed, most had mixed results... but it is the effort that's heroic, as I see it. Win or lose, I admire those who fight the good fight. ~George R. R. Martin

We are all ordinary. We are all boring. We are all spectacular. We are all shy. We are all bold. We are all heroes. We are all helpless. It just depends on the day. ~Brad Meltzer

Real heroes are [people] who fall and fail and are flawed, but win out in the end because they've stayed true to their ideals and beliefs and commitments. ~Kevin Costner

The hero is one who kindles a great light in the world, who sets up blazing torches in the dark streets of life for [others] to see by. ~Felix Adler

True heroism is remarkably sober, very undramatic. It is not the urge to surpass all others at whatever cost, but the urge to serve others at whatever cost. ~Arthur Ashe  
Heroism is a badly remunerated occupation, and often it leads to an early end, which is why it appeals to fanatics or persons with an unhealthy fascination with death. ~[Isabel Allende](#)

Who is a hero? [One] who turns [an] enemy into a friend. ~the Talmud

Villains are undone by what is worst in them, heroes by what is best. ~Voltaire

We do not have to become heroes overnight. Just a step at a time, meeting each thing that comes up, seeing it is not as dreadful as it appeared, discovering we have the strength to stare it down. ~Eleanor Roosevelt

To go against the dominant thinking of your friends, of most of the people you see every day, is perhaps the most difficult act of heroism you can perform. ~Theodore H. White

I am convinced that a light supper, a good night's sleep, and a fine morning, have sometimes made a hero of the same [person], who, by an indigestion, a restless night, and rainy morning, would have proved a coward. ~ Lord Chesterfield