

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Sources of Our Living Tradition #1
Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, Branches Group #38, November 2021

OPENING WORDS

The living tradition we share draws from many sources. The first is: Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold life.

CHECK-IN

READINGS

(all quotations in these readings are from *A Chosen Faith*, by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church, Beacon Press, 1998)

Small is our whole system compared with the infinitude of creation, brief as is our life compared with the cycles of time, we are so tethered to all by the beautiful dependencies of law, that not only the sparrow's fall is felt to the outermost bound, but the vibrations set in motion by the words that we utter reach through all space and the tremor is felt through all time. ~ Maria Mitchell

I can believe a miracle because I can raise my own arm. I can believe a miracle because I can remember. I can believe it because I can speak and be understood by you. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

In every life there are certain moments which partake of another, higher order of experience – peculiarly precious moments which offer serenity, hope, and strength and which allow us to return to the demands of daily life with renewed vitality and confidence. The growth of a spiritual dimension in each of us as individuals seems to result in a multiplication and a deepening of such moments both in ourselves and in the world. ~ Elizabeth M. Jones

Sometimes our light goes out but is blown into flame by an encounter with another human being. Each of us owes the deepest thanks to those who have rekindled this inner light ~ Dr. Albert Schweitzer

A person has no religion who has not slowly and painfully gathered one together, adding to it, shaping it; and one's religion is never complete and final, it seems, but must always be undergoing modification. ~ Forrest Church

Awakening is not a moment, but an ongoing process. By remaining open to experiencing the mystery of life anew, we get born again and again. Each time we encounter life's transcending mystery and are moved to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces that create and uphold us, we awaken. ~ Forrest Church

God does not die on the day when we cease to believe in a personal deity. But we die on the day when our lives cease to be illuminated by the steady radiance, renewed daily, of a wonder, the source of which is beyond all reason. ~ Dag Hammarskjold

QUESTIONS Please respond to any of the questions you feel moved to answer or any of the readings that you find to be particularly meaningful.

1. Share an example of a personal direct experience of transcending mystery and wonder that moved you to a renewal of spirit or an openness to the forces that create and uphold life.
2. Share an example of a moment that you consider to be of a higher order of experience or of a spiritual dimension.
3. What does "miracle" mean to you and have you experienced miracles?
4. Share an example of when you felt that your light might go out, but was blown into flame by an encounter with another human being.
5. In the unfolding of your life, has your experience of religion been slowly and painfully gathered together, always undergoing modification?

CLOSING WORDS

Why should not we enjoy an original revelation to the universe? Why should not we have poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition, and religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs? The sun shines also today. Let us demand our own words and law and worship. ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson, quoted in *A Chosen Faith*, by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church, Beacon Press, 1998

notes on people quoted

Maria Mitchell (1818-1889), the first American woman astronomer, was the first professor of Astronomy at Vassar College and the first director of Vassar's observatory. Honored internationally, she was one of the most celebrated American scientists of the 19th century.

- <https://uudb.org/articles/mariamitchell.html>
- <https://www.mariamitchell.org/about-maria-mitchell>
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Maria_Mitchell
- <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/10202> *Maria Mitchell: Life, Letters, and Journals*

Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803-1882) began his career as a Unitarian minister but went on, as an independent man of letters, to become the preeminent lecturer, essayist and philosopher of 19th century America. Emerson was a key figure in the "New England Renaissance," as an author and also through association with the Transcendental Club. He and other Transcendentalists did much to open Unitarians and the liberally religious to science, Eastern religions and a naturalistic mysticism.

- <https://uudb.org/articles/ralphwaldoemerson.html>
- first quote from *Collected Sermons*
- closing quote from introduction to *Nature*
<https://www.gutenberg.org/files/29433/29433-h/29433-h.htm>

Elizabeth M. Jones, Unitarian Universalist layperson, quoted in *A Chosen Faith*, Beacon Press, 1998.

Dr. Albert Schweitzer, member, Church of the Larger Fellowship (Unitarian Universalist). In his *Civilization and Ethics* (1923) he concluded that ethics was synonymous with reverence for life: "Reverence for Life affords me my fundamental principle of morality, namely, that good consists in maintaining, assisting and enhancing life, and to destroy, to harm or to hinder life is evil." In 1952 he received the Nobel Peace Prize for his Reverence for Life philosophy

- <https://www.uua.org/international/blog/remembering-dr.-albert-schweitzer>
- <https://www.danielharper.org/yauu/tag/albert-schweitzer/> The quotation comes from Schweitzer's *Aus meiner Kindheit und Jugendzeit* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1924). It is from a short essay titled "Influence" found in chapter five of the memoir.
 - https://archive.org/stream/memoirsofchildho012023mbp/memoirsofchildho012023mbp_djvu.txt

Dag Hammarskjöld (1905-1961) was a Swedish economist and diplomat who served as the second Secretary-General of the United Nations from April 1953 until his death in a plane crash in September 1961. In 1953, soon after his appointment as United Nations Secretary-General, Hammarskjöld was interviewed on radio by Edward R. Murrow. In this talk Hammarskjöld declared:

But the explanation of how man should live a life of active social service in full harmony with himself as a member of the community of spirit, I found in the writings of those great medieval mystics [Meister Eckhart and Jan van Ruysbroek] for whom 'self-surrender' had been the way to self-realization, and who in 'singleness of mind' and 'inwardness' had found strength to say yes to every demand which the needs of their neighbours made them face, and to say yes also to every fate life had in store for them when they followed the call of duty as they understood it.

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Dag_Hammarskj%C3%B6ld

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/V%C3%A4gm%C3%A4rken>

Vägmärken (Markings, or more literally Waymarks), published in 1963, is the only book by former UN secretary general, Dag Hammarskjöld. The journal was discovered after his death, with a covering letter to his literary executor, "a sort of White Book concerning my negotiations with myself - and with God."

The Rev. Dr. F. Forrester Church (1948-2009) served the Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York City as senior minister since 1978 and as minister of public theology since 2007. He died September 24, 2009, of esophageal cancer. A frequent contributor to UU World, he is the author of many books.

- <https://www.uua.org/offices/people/forrest-church>

- <https://www.uua.org/pressroom/news/news/memorial-rev-dr-forrest-church-theologian-author>