



Living by Love

BY AMY ZUCKER MORGENSTERN, MINISTER, UNITARIAN
UNIVERSALIST CHURCH OF PALO ALTO

You don't have to be Christian to admire this ancient and beautiful religion and wish to learn from its wisdom. And that wisdom has a simple core. Above all else, before all else, shining out through all the accretions of twenty centuries, is the central teaching of Jesus: whatever we do, we should be motivated by love and act in love.

This is not the message we usually get. Sure, it's said from many pulpits and lived out in many quiet lives, and we should be grateful for those. But in the most public expressions of this very public American religion, we rarely find—right or left, fundamentalist or liberal, Christian-right evangelical or leftist liberation theologian—anyone speaking as if the most important command to their soul, the imperative their God impressed upon them, was to live by love.

The Christian right has narrowed its focus over the years to an almost single-minded obsession with salvation, particularly saving the individual soul. All the usual expressions of love, such as care for our families, drop by the wayside if they stand in the way of a determined march to personal reconciliation with Jesus. Love as the way to unity with God is a possibility that this branch of Christianity has neglected.

Meanwhile, the Christian left has paralleled this development with a focus on saving others. The social gospel and liberation theology movements—Christian trends dear to my own heart—admittedly get so wrapped up in their own messages of service and justice that they sometimes lose sight of what lies at the core of them all. I'm the first to quote Cornel West and say that "Justice is what love looks like in public." But we can become so focused upon justice that we forget about the love part. Maybe we are embarrassed to talk about loving our neighbor. And it shows.

Yet when asked *What is the supreme commandment?* Jesus answered without hesitation: "Love your God with all your heart, soul, and might; and love your neighbor as yourself" (Matt. 22:35-40).

Not fear God, or obey God, but *love* God.

Not serve your neighbor, or save your neighbor, or even help your neighbor, just *love* your neighbor.

Well. It's no wonder that we shy away from that, because it's a tall order! What does that love even look like? Doesn't it incorporate saving and serving and helping? Of course it does. But since we are so prone to do all those things out of worse motivations than love (such as the desire to look good, to be righteous, to prove ourselves better than those other people), let's set them aside for now, and just ask: what might it look like when we are motivated by love?

Our Universalist forebears sought to answer that question. They, like all the people sitting in Calvinist congregations in the early decades of US history, heard week after week that most of us are headed for punishment, doomed to hell and deserving of it. There is indeed a tension in religion that I think this doctrine was trying to address, a tension between love and justice. Will good be rewarded and evil punished? It sure doesn't look like that gets sorted out in this life.

Instead, as Ecclesiastes says, the rain falls on the good and bad alike, and the sun shines on us all. Maybe a reasonable outrage at this failure of justice led to the invention of hell as a place where things would finally be fair. Punishment would be

Quest

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Love makes your
soul crawl out from
its hiding place.

—Zora Neale
Hurstun

A monthly for religious liberals

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meted out there, while those more deserving would receive a reward. However, early Universalists un-invented hell. They put love first. They believed that God loves us and would not condemn us to eternal punishment. They believed that we should do what is right, not out of fear of punishment, but rather out of unconditional love, such as one feels for a newborn baby. The love of God, the love of each other. That's Jesus's teaching. Right there in our Universalist ancestors. We are to live with the same Universalist love that God feels for us—all of us, the killer as well as his victims.

We make our own heaven and hell, and we make other people's, too.

Whoa. That needs a little exploration. Metaphorically speaking, does God greet mass murderer Adam Lanza with the same loving embrace that awaits the children Lanza murdered?

Yes. Love embraces them all without reservation or distinction.

And a voice in you might be crying out, as it does in me, with a resisting "No, no!" That voice, understandable though it might be, as nearly universal as it might be, is not the voice of love.

Jesus, after all, has a lot of authority on this question. He was murdered, too, and he knew he was being murdered. Yet among his last words were prayers for those who jeered at him while he went to his death, that they might be forgiven. Words of love, under almost unimaginable circumstances

The Universalist answer to the cry for justice, the wish for evil-doing to be punished, is that hell actually does exist—in *this* world, in the hearts of those who can't speak in the tender whispers of love, but only in the angry shout of a gun. We make our own heaven and hell, and we make other people's, too.

That is a tough nut, and here is possibly an even tougher one: what must we do to live by love? Must we stop being angry or confrontational? Must we swallow our disappointment and our judgment?

Who can show us what Jesus meant?

Why not Jesus himself?

Ah, that's interesting. Jesus was not always sweet and patient, much less cheerful. He didn't match up very well with the cliché Christianity of our culture, that Hallmark-card sweetness. The soft-focus Jesus with the long, flowing, light-brown locks and the ever-gentle expression? He's almost unrecognizable to anyone who spends some time reading the Gospels.

The real Jesus—by which problematic term, I mean the Jesus who emerges from the complex and contradictory stories told by his early biographers—was not all sweetness and light. He was impatient with the poor disciples, who were so slow to understand his simplest teachings and didn't get the message even when he put it into parables and stories. He punished a poor fig tree just because it didn't bear fruit out of season for his convenience. He lost his temper and threw tables around—in the Temple, of all places.

This is the kind of person we can relate to. And I think he has a few things to teach us about love.

We could have gotten a different figure. Christmas could have celebrated someone less like the baby who would grow up to be this rather irascible teacher, and more like, say, Santa Claus. Well, Santa only has to be cheery and generous one day of the year. The rest of us have to plug along all 365 days, so we need an exemplar who lives in the real world; who's messy, like our lives; who can get angry and dismissive and impatient and even rude at times.

It might be easier for us to love St. Francis, with the birds lighting on his shoulders. Or Mary, with her patient

forbearance and almost complete lack of personality. It might be easier to see them as the exemplars, as perfect love. But that's not who's at the center of this story.

As Zooey says in J. D. Salinger's *Franny and Zooey*, "If God had wanted someone with St. Francis's consistently winning personality for the New Testament, he'd've picked him, you can be sure. As it was, he picked the best, the smartest, the most loving, the least sentimental, the most *unimitative* master he could possibly have picked."

And he goes on to say that if that's not who we see in Jesus, then we're using prayers to Jesus as requests to live in an easy world where no one else is difficult or real. But the world is full of prickly people, downright mean people, even violent people, and, oh boy, look at that. That's who we're supposed to love.

That's who we are sometimes, ourselves. Good thing we have this prickly person to show us how. Jesus was no saint. And yet there he was, teaching love, living love, even in the midst of his cruel, slow death.

So let us clear away some of the detritus of judgment and anger and self-righteousness and narrow political agendas that put themselves forward as the core of Christianity. Let us dismiss the gauzy, soft-focus saints. Let us move past the easy Jesus of Christmas, the sweet cooing baby, and look ahead just a few years to when he grows into an occasionally angry young man, and see how, in all his humanness, he showed us that we, too, could put love at the center of our lives—our flawed, irritable, selfish lives.

From the simple, poor rabbi who taught wherever he went, the Jewish prophet who spoke in the long tradition of Jewish prophets speaking in temper and in love to hold their people to the highest standard—the man who never intended to found a new religion—let us remember the simple words: *Love one another.* ■

Sharing the Love

BY **KIMBERLEY DEBUS**, INTERN MINISTER,
ONE ISLAND FAMILY, KEY WEST, FLORIDA



Love is a way of life.

It should be how we make our way in the world. And truth be told, we should be preaching love every Sunday. I think at our

best, those who are fortunate enough to fill Unitarian Universalist pulpits each week *are* preaching love every Sunday. But sometimes we need to be woken up, given a spiritual wedgie, and reminded to actually talk *about* love, not just talk around it.

Love is vital to who we are as Unitarian Universalists. Many of our congregations use an affirmation each week that begins “Love is the doctrine of this church.” Probably half our readings and hymns contain the word love. Others use “compassion,” but I like the word “love.” It’s both simple and complex, particular and all encompassing.

And it’s no wonder—love is central to all the world’s religions.

In Hinduism, love is one of the three central virtues (along with charity and self-control). In Judaism, love emerges in many forms, most strikingly in the image of God as a loving, steadfast father. So too in Islam, where the first prayer of the morning is to God the Compassionate, the Merciful. In Buddhism, the cultivation of loving-kindness and compassion is at the heart of practice. We see writings on love and compassion in the Transcendentalist and humanist texts as well. Love is everywhere—in our practices, prayers and in our sacred texts.

One of the most famous passages in sacred texts is about love, found in Christian scriptures: 1 Corinthians 13. We hear this passage all too often, generally at weddings. But while it can be applied to romance, the writer’s original purpose was quite different. I think it has something to say to us to-

day: for all our talk about love, love is not easy. It takes work, because it is something we do with one another. This passage in 1 Corinthians is all about sharing the love.

Now, it’s interesting that this is perhaps the most famous passage in the Christian scriptures and it doesn’t mention God or Jesus. This tells me it’s about how we are with one another, how we act in the world. So whether you are humanist, pagan, theist, Christian, atheist, Buddhist, something else or somewhere in between, let us today reclaim this passage for our own and hear what it has to say to us.

It’s a digression of sorts. Paul, a first century Roman Jew turned Christian, ministered to the churches he founded across what is now Greece and the Middle East through letters, some of which are collected in the Christian scriptures. In the first of such epistles, to the people in Corinth, Paul addresses a number of issues that have come up in the church, including some divisive arguments over immorality, marriage and the resurrection.

But in answering the church’s questions, the notion of spiritual gifts arose. It seems that some in Corinth were making a show of their ability to prophesy or speak in tongues, and that was causing a major rift. Paul addresses them this way:

If I speak in the tongues of mortals and of angels, but do not have love, I am a noisy gong or a clanging cymbal. And if I have prophetic powers, and understand all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have all faith, so as to remove mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. If I give away all my possessions, and if I hand over my body so that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

For the Corinthians, and indeed most of the early Christians, spiritual gifts were signs that God was working in

their lives, and they understood them to be ways to manifest God’s kingdom on earth. These gifts are not unlike our own; where the Corinthians embraced prophesy, healing, and speaking in tongues, we embrace prophetic witness, reason, and generosity.

Now, these gifts themselves are fine; in fact, just as Paul preached on them to his flock, we preach on our gifts. They are important ways in which we move through our days, putting our faith into action. Some of us are great at hospitality, others at caring for one another, still others at speaking with a prophetic voice, or using intellect to understand the world.

But the problem in Corinth, and the danger among us, is when gifts become a sign that divides the believers from the non-believers, the good UUs from the bad. The gifts are not the thing. They are useful to encourage and develop, but they are not the point.

The main thing—and the reason for Paul’s diversion—is love. Without love, Paul says, “I gain nothing.” And frankly, neither does anyone else. Love is what allows our gifts to function.

And what a thing it is. In the middle of this passage, Paul outlines love’s characteristics as a reminder about behavior that is and isn’t loving:

Love is patient. Love is kind. Love is not envious or boastful or arrogant or rude. It does not insist on its own way. It is not irritable or resentful. It does not rejoice in wrongdoing but rejoices in the truth. It bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things.

Paul may not be able to tell us exactly what love is, but he sure knows it when he sees it.

How many times have we gotten irritated when our justice endeavors run into road blocks? Maybe the volunteers don’t show up. Maybe we

don't get the donations we expected. Maybe the people we're helping don't appreciate it. We get resentful—a sign that we may not be acting out of love.

How many times have we limited ourselves or expected the worst, so we didn't go the full distance? There's a sign that we may not be acting out of love.

How many times have we been so an-

No matter what else is going on, it's all about love.

gry at injustice in the world that we've become paralyzed? There's a sign we may not be acting out of love.

How many times have we been so proud of our own actions that we look down upon those who don't—or can't—do as much justice work? There's a sign we may not be acting out of love.

How many times have we simply gotten burned out? There's a sign we may not be acting out of love.

I told you it's not easy. But love is permanent. Paul emphasizes this point in the next three verses:

Love never ends. But as for prophecies, they will come to an end; as for tongues, they will cease; as for knowledge, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we prophesy only in part; but when that which is perfect comes, the parts will come to an end.

We could rewrite that for our own time:

Love never ends. But as for our prophetic witness, it will come to an end; as for speaking truth to power, that will cease; as for intellect, it will come to an end. For we know only in part, and we reason only in part, but when justice and inclusion and peace

are complete, the parts will come to an end.

No matter what else is going on, it's all about love. Love is where we begin, whether with each other, with the Divine, with our families, our communities, or our world. Without love, anything we do is half a loaf, ineffective, uninspiring. It can cause bitterness.

I think about how large corporations are forced to pay for mistakes like cleaning up the Gulf of Mexico after an oil spill, or when philanthropists give large amounts of money just to get the tax breaks, and those acts always feel empty to me. Yes, the money is important to solve the issues, but if they walked through the world in love, maybe they wouldn't have caused problems in the first place.

What if we shared love from the start—not just when things get bad, but pre-emptively? UU theologian Rebecca Parker implores us to “Choose to bless the world”:

The choice to bless the world can take you into solitude to search for the sources of power and grace; native wisdom, healing and liberation.

More, the choice will draw you into community, the endeavor shared, the heritage passed on, the companionship of struggle, the importance of keeping faith, the life of ritual and praise, the comfort of human friendship, the company of earth, its chorus of life welcoming you.

None of us alone can save the world. Together—that is another possibility, waiting.

Together, we must share love, because it is the greatest gift of all. Ultimately, it is all we have. It burns in us; it is our pilot light, which we can keep low and hidden under a bushel or we can turn up so it is a beacon bright and clear—a beacon stoked by hope and faith. Everything else may fade away, but first and always, share the love. ■

Love Is...and Isn't

BY KENDYL GIBBONS, SENIOR MINISTER,
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Love is patient—as opposed to people who rush to judgment; as

opposed to those who insist that everybody should agree immediately on the obviously right answer, whether or not they have had time to think it through.

Love is kind—as opposed to those who are willing for other people to suffer as long as they get their own way; as opposed to those who say everything they think without regard to how anyone else might feel.

Love does not envy—as opposed to those who want to make sure they get credit for all they do; as opposed to those who like to say “I told you so.”

Love is not proud—as opposed to those who can never admit being wrong or needing help; as opposed to those who feel that their status or their contributions should privilege their ideas.

Love is not rude—as opposed to those who interrupt, shout, or bully people with whom they disagree; as opposed to those who make sarcastic remarks, or pointedly stop speaking to someone who differs with them.

Love is not self-seeking—as opposed to those who would impose their preferences on everyone; as opposed to those who would score points by taking advantage of someone else's weakness or trouble.

Love is not easily angered—as opposed to those who find pleasure in their indignation; as opposed to those who are quick to take offense, for themselves or on behalf of others, whether or not offense was intended.

Love keeps no record of wrongs—as opposed to those who sulk, pout, and nurture intentions to settle old scores.

Love does not delight in evil, but rejoices with the truth—as opposed to those who whisper and insinuate; as opposed to those who routinely look for the worst rather than the best possible explanation for someone else's behavior or decision.

Love bears all things—including the clumsiness and bad judgment and moral failures of those we love;

Love hopes all things—including the promise of community and our potential for learning, growth and change;

Love endures all things—including the pain of recognizing how we all fall short of the values we proclaim and our aspirations for community; including the delicate, tedious, awkward effort to make it right, picking up the pieces of covenant to try again. ■

*Excerpted from her sermon
"What Communities Learn."*

CLF Invites GA Delegates

Would you like to represent the CLF at the UUA's General Assembly (GA) this summer? The CLF is entitled to 22 delegates at GA in Portland, Oregon, from June 24-28, 2015. You will also be able to attend workshops, programs, and worship services, while meeting Unitarian Universalists from near and far. And as a delegate you will be able to vote during plenary sessions. You can also meet our minister, Rev. Meg Riley, and members of the CLF board and staff. Delegates are responsible for their own expenses for GA.

Our delegates are asked to attend and usher at the CLF Worship Service and to work a minimum of three hours in the CLF booth. CLF delegates vote their conscience in plenary sessions. If you'd like to participate in GA 2015 in this role, call **Lorraine Dennis** at 617-948-6166 or e-mail ldennis@clfu.org. Visit the GA website at www.uua.org/ga for details. ■

Tucked In

BY **ROBERT WALSH**, MINISTER EMERITUS, FIRST PARISH CHURCH UU, DUXBURY, MASSACHUSETTS

On a quiet suburban street on a Sunday evening, just as it was getting dark, I saw a car pull into a driveway, and then the silhouette of a man walking from the car to the front door of the house, carrying a sleeping child. The child's head lay on the man's shoulder, his arms and legs dangling like the limbs of a puppet. They went in the door, and my imagination filled in the rest of the story.

I imagined that the family had been on a day trip in the car. During the warm summer day the boy had run, played, jumped, shouted, eaten. On the way home, he had fallen asleep in the back seat.

My mind went back twenty-five years, to a time when I was that Dad, driving home from a picnic and a hike in the mountains, singing songs in the car, at last seeing the familiar neighborhood in the car lights, pulling into our driveway, and finding one or more of the kids sleeping so soundly that even carrying them in and dressing them for bed did not disturb their slumber.

And then my mind went back fifty years, to when I was that boy, and I remembered how safe I felt in the darkening back seat, with my parents up front. I could put my head down and doze off, trusting that nothing bad would happen. And I would wake up in bed, thinking, "How did I get here? The last thing I remember is being in the back seat of the car." And I realized that my parents had carried me from the car, put me to bed, and tucked me in.

The early Universalists believed that the fate of a human being was like that. No matter how rough the trip might have been or how badly

you might have behaved, at the end you would come home, and it would be a place of trust, safety, and love. Two centuries ago, many people were amazed to hear this message, because most churches told them that at the end of their journey they were more likely to face punishment for all their failings.

So is the Ultimate Truth that our souls will be taken care of in the way a loving parent takes care of a child? I don't know. Certainly much of life is not like that. I was lucky. Many children do not have happy homecomings.

I have no answers for Ultimate Questions, but I do have some Partial Truths that I'm quite sure of. Here is one: There is love in this world. There is trust, and there are places of safety where a person can lay down his or her head for a while. The world is not entirely so, but I'm absolutely certain that the world is partially a place of love. And wherever that love comes from, it is manifested in this world by human beings. We are the agents of that love. ■

From Stone Blessings: Meditations, by Robert Walsh. Published by Skinner House in 2010, and available through the UUA bookstore (www.uuabookstore.org or 800-215-9076).

"Post-Traumatic Stress Disorder is such a struggle since coming back home from deployment. Thank you for being there for me, as it is hard to be with people right now."

—Tim

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From Your Minister

BY MEG RILEY
SENIOR MINISTER,
CHURCH OF THE
LARGER FELLOWSHIP

Before I had the good fortune to serve the Church of the Larger Fellowship as senior minister, I was part of a team that designed and launched the Standing on the Side of Love Campaign at the Unitarian Universalist Association. Standing on the Side of Love (SSL) is a public advocacy campaign, created to launch Unitarian Universalist values out into the world as boldly as possible. You may have seen people wearing those yellow t-shirts with the chalk hearts that say LOVE in bold letters—I hope so!

By now, hundreds of people wearing those t-shirts have been arrested protesting cruel immigration policies, speaking out for marriage equality, witnessing against racism and occupying various city streets for economic justice. The tagline for the campaign is “harnessing love’s power to stop oppression, exclusion and violence.” But what does it mean to claim our place as people who stand on the side of love? I believe it’s about speaking the language of love both in public and in private. Doing so is countercultural and sometimes very frightening. And yet being silent is more frightening still—it reinforces helplessness and renders us without a voice.

I’ve had the privilege, here in my home state of Minnesota, to experience disciplined, courageous, effective use of the language of love to change public policy. In 2012 some members of our legislature put a ballot initiative up for a vote that would have defined marriage as between one man and one woman. Thirty states had already voted on such an initiative; thirty states had passed it. Learning from those losses—with the help of marriage equality guru Evan Wolfson, year after year, urging

us to “lose forward”—focus groups determined that the only conversation that actually swayed undecided voters were about love.

And so, tens of thousands of private conversations took place at dinner tables and on city buses about what it means to love. I was a trainer for people having these conversations with family and friends. We helped people to practice, looked for triggers that would throw people into defensive postures, and figured out how to stay centered when those triggers came up. We gently but firmly urged them not to talk about legal history, fairness, or the Bible. Time and time again, we coached people in how to turn the conversation back to what it means to love.



At first, I became a trainer because I was too scared to do what looked like the hardest work to me—making cold calls to strangers to talk about love. Soon, though, I was intrigued. What would it be like to discuss love with someone I was cold-calling from a list? It turned out that if you could actually have such a conversation with an undecided voter, two-thirds of them would move to voting against the constitutional amendment. I can still remember some of those conversations—a widow pouring out her heart about how much she still grieved her late husband, a mother realizing that her convictions were costing her connection to her gay son. Minnesotans of all kinds suddenly realized that this ballot initiative was hurtful when they had never thought of it that way. “It’s not personal,” caller after caller would say, and we were trained to respond, “I know you don’t mean it that way, but let me explain why it feels personal to me.”

During trainings, and at the end of the nights of calling, we would all gather and share stories of the most inspiring conversations. One story in particular has really stuck with me. This woman,

like many Twin Cities residents, came from farm country. Lately, when she had visited her elderly mother she had been dismayed to see signs all over the town, including her mother’s yard, urging people to vote in support of this bill which would encode discrimination into the Minnesota constitution. The woman tried every angle she could think of to persuade her mother to change her vote. Finally, exasperated, she said, “Mom, you struggled when we were young. We were poor, you were divorced; you’ve told me how hard that was.” Her mother nodded agreement. The woman asked, “Then why would you want to make other people’s lives any harder?” The woman said that the next time she visited her mother a different sign was in the yard—a “Vote No” sign. And not only in her mother’s yard, but in several neighbors’ yards, too, in the heart of this conservative area. “I thought about what you said,” her mother told her, “and I realized all of our lives are hard. We are not here to make them any harder. So I told my neighbors about it, and they changed their minds, too!”

Maybe that’s the bottom line of what it means to stand on the side of love. It means that we say *everyone’s life is hard—let’s not make them any harder*. I believe that the grassroots campaign which defeated that ballot initiative and eventually landed marriage equality here in Minnesota is what is needed on so many fronts: Hundreds of thousands of personal, focused conversations that talk about what it means to love each other in our communities. So many communities around the world are torn apart through silence and through active violence. I believe that only sustained love has any prayer of knitting them back together.

So let’s be about that work of speaking on the side of love. Wherever you are, no matter with whom you speak, try staying focused on love when disagreements arise. At the least, I promise you more interesting conversations. ■

February 2015

REsources for Living

BY LYNN UNGAR, MINISTER FOR LIFESPAN LEARNING, CHURCH OF THE LARGER FELLOWSHIP

A few years ago, Unitarian Universalists got a new nickname. In 2010 lots of UUs went to Arizona to protest the way immigrants were being treated. Many of us showed up in bright yellow "Standing on the Side of Love" t-shirts and stood behind bright yellow "Standing on the Side of Love" banners, marching and chanting and working with organizations from Arizona, and even getting arrested for civil disobedience. There were so many UUs in yellow that other folks started referring to us as The Love People.



I like that. The Love People. If you want to find a way around the difficult problem of defining who Unitarian Universalists are, you can call us The Love People. It's written into our history, and it's written into our Principles statement, the closest thing we have to an explanation of who and what we are as UUs.

We affirm "the worth and dignity of every person," which is to say that we think every person—whatever they are and whatever they might have done—deserves to be loved. Our Universalist roots say that God loves each and every person, and wants them to be happy. Our commitment is that while we know that people don't always make good choices, and some actions need to be stopped or even punished, every single person is still worthy of love.



We affirm "justice, equity and compassion in human relations," which means that we are dedicated to making love the foundation

of how people treat one another. Sometimes love is a one-on-one feeling of caring about someone or wanting to give them a hug. But sometimes love needs to apply to people we don't even know. When we work for a world in which all people are treated fairly and with compassion we are working for a world where we operate from the foundation of love.

We affirm "acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth."

We recognize that love pulls us in two directions at the same time. It asks us to take people exactly as they are, without needing them to change to make us happy.

But love also hopes that people can be their best, most whole, most complete selves, which pretty much always involves some kind of growing. And so love holds us in that impossible and necessary place of loving people just as they are while also making a place for them to grow.

We affirm a "free and responsible search for truth and meaning," which is to say that we don't just love people, we also love possibilities. We love connecting to ideas, exploring new ways of seeing the world. We believe in keeping our minds as well as our hearts open, because love isn't just something you feel, it's something you choose.

We affirm "the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process," which means we believe that people make better decisions when they choose based on love, rather than on what the outside world tells them. And we know that even when people are choosing from their own sense of what is loving, they don't always make the same choice. We believe that everyone should get a vote, so that we can make group decisions in a way that allows each person to express what seems right to them.

We affirm "the goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all." We are committed to loving not just the people around us, or the people of our own race or ethnicity or country, but all people around the world. We want everyone to treat one another in the ways that love demands. Love that doesn't include peace, freedom and justice is a pretty flimsy kind of love.

If you want to find a way around the difficult problem of defining who Unitarian Universalists are, you can call us The Love People.

Finally, we affirm "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." Our love doesn't just go out to all the people of the world; it goes out to all the *beings* of the world. We know that only when we treat the natural world as a planet-wide community deserving of love and respect do we act to preserve life for all of us. We realize that love is about seeing the connections between us, and our seventh principle reminds us that all of life is connected at the very deepest level.

It isn't necessarily easy being The Love People. It can be hard enough to treat your family and friends in a loving way all of the time; to expect to extend love and respect to every last person, animal and plant on the planet seems pretty much impossible. And maybe it is impossible to act with love all the time, let alone to feel loving at every moment.

But being The Love People doesn't mean we're perfect. It means we have a goal, and some principles that set out the various ways that we might work toward that goal. It means that we have a question to ask ourselves whenever we have a choice to make: *How do I stand on the side of love?*

What Would The Love People Do? It might not go so well on a bracelet, but it's a pretty good way to live. ■



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Merlin Said

by **Patrick Murfin**, Woodstock, Illinois

Love is the only magic—
It enriches the giver
as it nourishes the object.
It serves the instant
and washes over the ages.
It is as particular as the moon
and as universal as the heavens.
If returned it is multiplied,
yet spurned it is not diminished.
It is as lusty as the rutting stag
but as chaste as the unicorn's pillow.
It comes alike to the king on his throne
and the cutpurse in the market.
If you would have magic,
place faith in love or nothing.



From We Build Temples in the Heart: Side by Side We Gather, published by Skinner House in 2004, and available from the UUA bookstore (www.uuabookstore.org or 800-215-9076).