

# When Love is the Strength You Need



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Recently a Young Adult Unitarian Universalist I know asked me "I know Love is at the center of our faith but how the hell am I supposed to love my oppressor?!" This is such a good question. As we embark on a new year with the knowledge a genocide is happening on one hand and constant consumer messaging on the other, how do we center Love?

To be clear, there are as many different kinds of love as there are grains of sand on a beach. Family love, friend love, partner love, pet love, etc. But when we talk about Love being at the center of our faith, the most relevant love is called Agape Love. Agape Love is known for its qualities of empathy and sacrifice. It wants the best for everyone and is intended for everyone. In the Christian faith, from which both Unitarianism and Universalism was born, it is the love God extends to us and the reciprocal love we extend to God. That love includes all things and all people. It is a covenant of unending care.

What Agape Love is not is absolutism. It does not mean that we do not hold each other accountable for wrongs. It does not mean we do not name a genocide as a genocide. It does not even mean we have to like one another. We can go so far as to hate

someone and still find Agape Love for them. This is because even in our hatred we still must see the humanity in the other person. Even if they have acted in inhumane ways, Agape Love, our UU Love, calls us to uphold their worth and dignity as we hold them accountable for the terrors they have committed. See the difference there, we can hold people accountable and uphold their humanity. We can Love them.

So after I got through that mini sermon, of course this UU had more to say! Here's a replay of the rest of our conversation:

**YOUNG ADULT:** So I can tell them I love them even if I hate them...that seems hypocritical.

**ME:** Why are you even talking to them if you hate them?! If they've done something so terrible to you, why are you allowing them into your life?

**YOUNG ADULT:** Well you just said I have to affirm their humanity, don't I have to engage with them to do that?

**ME:** Goddess no! Agape Love says that you affirm their humanity, it doesn't say that you are solely responsible for that.

**YOUNG ADULT:** So I can hate them and love them, just from a distance?

*Love, continued on page 4*

# Quest

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"Have enough  
courage to trust  
love one more  
time and always  
one more time."

MAYA ANGELOU

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# LOVE

*What does it mean to center the value of love?*



PHOTO BY KELLY SIKKEMA ON UNSPLASH

## HANK

*CLF member, incarcerated in LA*

Through my eyes, I see all humans with equal vision, regardless of diverse qualities, color, gender, and belief — this is what love looks like

to me. Through my senses, I perceive all as one and the same, directed by cosmic order, consciousness, self, God or Guru, which are all synonymous — this is what love feels like to me.

Through my ears I hear and hold no

judgment, condemnation, ridicule, or punishments for whatever is said — this is God, through me, in me at all times. Love is God, and God is love: not separate from me, and never forsaking me, for we are one and therefore I am. ■

## DONALD

*CLF member, incarcerated in CO*

Love is a simple yet complex emotion for us to truly describe. However, we seem to know it when we feel it. Problems arise when we grasp at, try to control or desire love. Problems also happen when we reject or do not reciprocate love.

Love is at its best when we just allow it to be, and in turn, when we just “be” in it. Love exists outside of us, sometimes with, sometimes without us. We are not necessary for love, but love is a necessity for us. ■



PHOTO BY SASKIA JOHNSON ON UNSPLASH





PHOTO BY KYM MACKINNON ON UNSPLASH

## What is Love?

RYAN

*CLF Member, incarcerated in FL*

L-O-V-E. Probably one of the most misunderstood words in the English language. Mostly due to the fact we only have one word for it. The Greeks however have multiple words to describe different types love. Here are four of them:

*Eros*, the easiest, is physical love. This is where we get words like erotic. It's the love of how things look/feel/smell/

taste or any other physical property. This might be an initial feeling towards someone we're attracted to.

*Philia* is brotherly love. Think of philanthropy, coming together to raise money for a cause. This describes the love towards friends, co-workers and even humanity as a whole.

*Storge* is familial love. Not a common root word in the English language, but this is the love one typically feels towards parents, children, siblings or cousins.

The most powerful form of love is *agape*, or unconditional love that continues despite and perhaps even due to our flaws.

This is sometimes the hardest to achieve because as humans we put conditions on so much, usually unconsciously. This is what we as UUs strive for, especially in our acceptance of the LGBTQ+ and incarcerated members. This is the love to strive for.

What about your love? ■

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*Love, continued from page 1*

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ME: Yes, set a boundary. Make sure that their access to you is exactly as much or as little or as none as you want. There is no need to take care of your oppressor or abuser. Agape love means that when they are held accountable for their actions, it is done by someone else and it done while keeping their humanity intact.

YOUNG ADULT: Well what about revenge, what if I want them to suffer?

ME: Ah, that's really getting to the crux of it all isn't it? It's not about not

wanting to love them or not. It's that we want them to feel what we felt, suffer the way we've suffered. And we know that if we're called to Love them, we can't allow them to suffer. Even if we have. Even if we have at their hands. That's really what this conversation is about isn't it?

YOUNG ADULT: Well, yeah.

ME: Will their suffering heal you? Will it make the world a better place? Will it in any way change what happened in the past?

YOUNG ADULT: No but...is this like the time you told me that hate is like

drinking poison hoping that the other person will die?

ME: Do you think it's like that?

YOUNG ADULT: Hmmmm, maybe. I'm gonna have to think about it.

ME: Absolutely, that's part of our faith too! And if you can, please let me know what you come up with because that's how I learn and grow as a Unitarian Universalist too.

So beloveds, there it is. Let me know what you think so we can learn and grow together. ■



PHOTO BY BEN MATER ON UNSPLASH



# This Trans Heart

ELAINE

*CLF member, incarcerated in AR*

Desperate and alone, this trans heart has been,  
forever seeking its needs in places bereft of such things.  
Trying to make due with what's at hand,  
knowing its needs would never be met.

Dark and tainted this trans heart has been,  
always ignored and forgotten in a world so cold.  
Always being refused and abused,  
rarely has it known the warmth and light of real love.

Hated and jaded this trans heart has been,  
just for refusing to adhere to the world's ignorance and lies.  
Never rewarded for standing true to itself,  
but always cast aside, unwanted by others.

Begging and pleading, this trans heart implores you,  
those who have the capacity for love and caring.  
Don't let others rule who and how you should be,  
let your heart judge; it knows the deepest truths.

# Rain

DANNY

*CLF member, incarcerated in CA*

Drops of water fall  
Onto sidewalks and raincoats  
Gloomy clouds stretch on  
Shifting winds and sunshine say,  
"This will not be forever."



PHOTO BY DAUDI AISSA ON UNSPLASH

# Love at the Center: Exploring the New UU Values



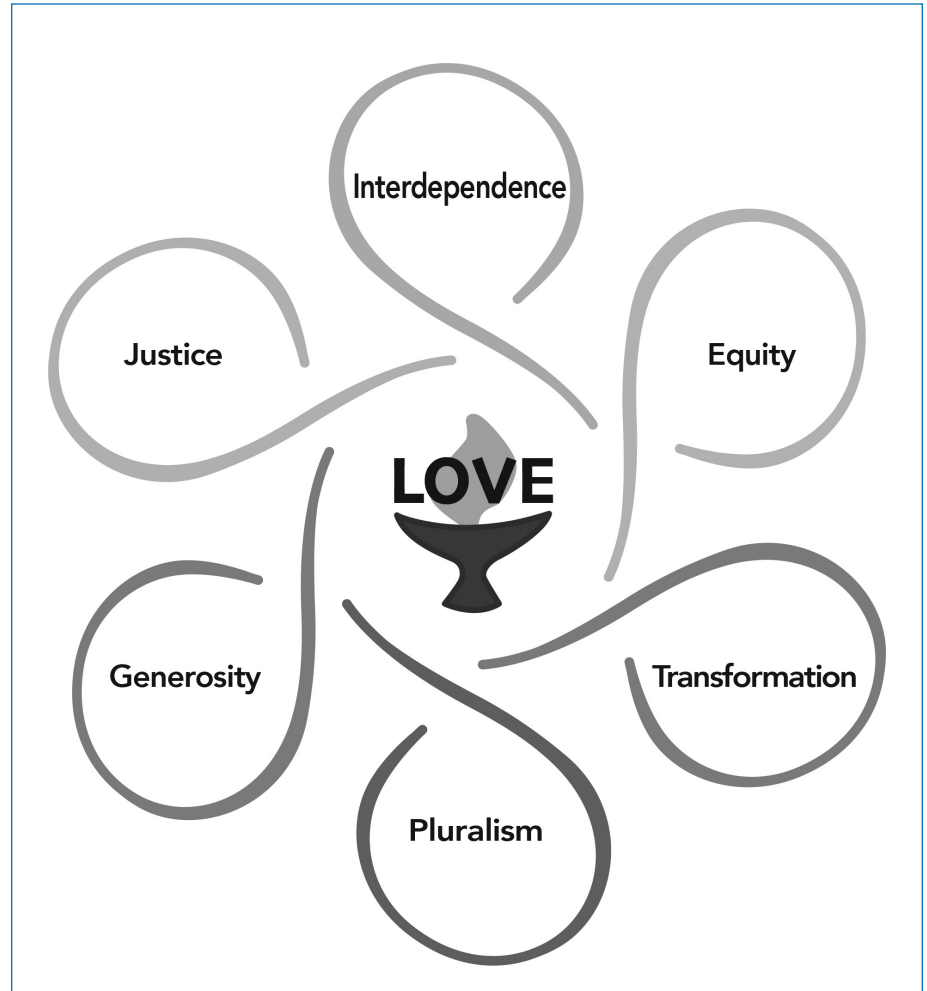
ROSE GALLOGLY

*Publications Coordinator,  
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If you've been tracking the next 6 months of Quest themes, you may have noticed something: we're using these themes to explore the Values of Unitarian Universalism, as articulated in the proposed new Article II of the Unitarian Universalist Association (UUA) Bylaws.

In the February 2022 issue of Quest, in an article titled "Embracing the Living Tradition," Rev. Michael Tino introduced these new values and the process through which they may be adopted by our Association. During the 2023 UUA General Assembly, delegates voted to move forward with the proposed language; there will be a vote during the 2024 General Assembly on whether or not to adopt these as the official articulation of our shared faith.

We're looking forward to exploring how we relate to and understand each of these values over the next six months. As Rev. Michael wrote last February: "One of the defining characteristics of our Unitarian Universalist faith is that ours is a 'living tradition.' We do not etch our faith in stone precisely because we hold sacred that it must change. It must adapt to new challenges, it must meet new understandings, and it must evolve based on new experiences and connections."



*From the Article II Study Commission Report: a visualization of the new proposed language for Article II, defining six Unitarian Universalist Values, with the value of Love at the center. Design by Tanya Webster (chalice4days.org)*

As beloved as the Principles of Unitarian Universalism have become in the almost 40 years since they were adopted, working with these new values is an important way to lean into the promise of our living tradition.

For those of you who will be submitting reflections for upcoming issues of Quest, I invite you to consider these

values through the particular lens of how they may shape our shared faith. If the new Article II is adopted as our official faith language, that is the next phase of work ahead of us: to continue to co-create this faith with these values in mind, shaping and expanding their meaning by how we live them together. I'm so looking forward to being in that work together. ■



## Quest Themes

All CLF members (incarcerated and free world members) are welcome to submit reflections on upcoming Quest themes, original poetry and artwork. If you have access to the internet, you can email your submissions to CLF Publications Coordinator, Rose Gallogly, at [rgallogly@clfu.org](mailto:rgallogly@clfu.org). Submissions can also be mailed to us at CLF UU, 24 Farnsworth Street, Boston, Massachusetts 02210. Here are the next few Quest themes:

Approx. Due Date	Quest Monthly Theme	Response Question
January 15, 2024	February 2024 - Interdependence	How do you relate to and honor interdependence?
February 1, 2024	March 2024 - Pluralism	What does it mean to be pluralistic in our beliefs?
March 1, 2024	April 2024 - Transformation	How do we remain open to change and transformation?
April 1, 2024	May 2024 - Equity	What does it mean to value equity? How does it look?
May 1, 2024	June 2024 - Generosity	How does it feel to be generous?
June 1, 2024	July/August 2024 - Justice	What does justice look and feel like in our communities?

## FOR YOUR REFLECTION

*In this section, we offer questions for reflection based on ideas explored in this issue. You may wish to explore it individually or as part of a group discussion. To submit your reflection for possible inclusion in a future issue of Quest, tear off your answer and mail it back to us using the envelope included in the middle of this issue, or mail a longer reflection separately.*

**What does it mean to hold love at the center? How does that play out in your own life, and what does that value mean for us as a faith community?**

*If you would like us to be able to publish or share your writing in the future, remember to include "You have permission to edit and publish my words" somewhere on your submission.*



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