

# The Path

Inheritance | January | 2017

The Spiritual Theme Newsletter of the  
First Unitarian Universalist  
Society of Burlington



## ***Editor's Note:***

Due to preparations for the Bicentennial celebration, the publication date of this month's edition of *The Path* was moved back, and we bring you a shorter version this time.

Thanks for your patience! The February edition will be released on time.

## **Reflection from the Soul Matters Collective**

The rap on Unitarian Universalists is that we don't put much stock in religious "inheritance." It's a reputation we cultivate. Unitarian Universalists talk regularly about the religious pasts and "baggage" that we've "left behind." We say we're forward-looking folks: Not bound to tradition, Not hemmed in by "outdated ideas."

And yet . . .

We all stand on the shoulders of those who have gone before us. We may be individualists, but we must also recognize how we are bound up in an interdependent web. And doesn't that web include people from the past, ideas we've been given, dreams we've been asked to carry, passions we've adopted, missions we've been asked to

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see to their end? What does spirituality mean if not to be part of something larger? And how can we speak of being part of something larger without talking about and honoring all that we've inherited?

What if real spiritual freedom comes not from breaking with our pasts entirely but from actively and consciously choosing what we want to keep and what we need to give up?

There is a dizzying array of things we inherit: stories and heirlooms, pain and hope, traditions and gifts. Hearing the word "inheritance" can evoke financial advantages, genetic make-up, likes and dislikes, high cheek bones, a good sense of humor, an old old car, our great-grandmother's ring, the cadence of our voice.

In this regard, it's also worth thinking about the origin of the word "heirloom." Loom was the old English word for "tool." This shines a whole new light on those things we inherit. What if we saw them as "tools" given to us to build something, create something, fix something, heal something? Would we treat our inheritance differently? Would we learn to use it better? Would we pull our inheritance out of our spiritual toolbox more often?

Maybe so. This month, let's find out.

## Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, there's always a chance we will encounter some tender spots in our own spirits and stories. Therefore, it is important when doing deep spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on the journey, and to know you are welcome to care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that's comfortable for you.

Likewise, please know that we are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Rev.

Mara is our first point of contact for pastoral care. She may be able to set up a time to meet you, or refer you to **Andre Mol**, our ministerial intern, caring lay leaders through our **Care Network**, or outside resources. She can be reached at [revmara@uusociety.org](mailto:revmara@uusociety.org) or 802-862-5630 x. 24.

## 2016/2017 Themes

September – Connection  
October – Deep Listening  
November – Hospitality  
December – Expectation  
January – Inheritance  
February – Perception  
March – Imagination  
April – Resistance  
May – Growth  
June – Delight

## Seeking Submissions for *The Path*

*The Path* introduces each month's spiritual theme, which we then explore in greater depth through our Sunday worship services and other programming. We welcome (and need!) your submissions of readings, stories, videos, books and movies for any of our upcoming themes.

For theme submissions to be included in the relevant edition of *The Path*, please send them no later than one month prior to publication. Do feel free to send materials in for upcoming themes at any point up until the one-month-prior deadline.

This month, we especially welcome submissions on our January and February themes: Inheritance and Perception. Please send them to [themecircles@uusociety.org](mailto:themecircles@uusociety.org).

We chose the theme of “inheritance” for this month, in part, to align with our Meetinghouse Service of Rededication. [Our historic and iconic building](#) at the top of Church Street is, for the members and friends of the UU Society and our larger community, a form of “inheritance,” passed down to us from prior generations. What will we do with this gift in the years to come?

### Questions for Exploration

We invite you to consider and reflect on the questions below. If you are in a Fall Theme Circle, you might come to your group prepared to speak about one or two of them.

1. Is there a physical item you have inherited that holds significance for you? How did it come to you and what is its significance in your life?
2. What are some intangible things you have “inherited” that guide you in your life now?
3. When you think of the next generation--whether your own children, other children to whom you are close and/or the children in our UU community--what would you hope to pass on to them?
4. There are many things we inherit from our larger culture. Can you think of social or cultural inheritance that has significantly impacted your own life?
5. How would you describe your own religious or spiritual inheritance?
6. Is there something you have inherited that actually you want to let go of? How might you move past such an inheritance?
7. Are there any inheritances that you find helpful in navigating these turbulent times?
8. To whom are you grateful for what they have passed on to you? How might you express that gratitude?

### For children and families

Here is a suggested activity for reflection this month:

Parents and primary caregivers: make some time to share with the children in your life about your “inheritance,” in a way that works for your children and their ages and stages. We are mindful that these questions will have different meanings and resonances in different family structures!



What did you inherit from your parents and/or other ancestors (monetarily, physically, spiritually, culturally, genetically). What of these buoys you? What weighs you down?

What can you identify that has been passed along to multiple generations?

What do you hope to give your children as an inheritance?

What would children hope to give the generation after theirs?

What gifts and challenges has society bequeathed to you? How have those changed over your life? Of what are you both proud and regretful that society is bequeathing to the rising generation?

What does it look like to accept an inheritance? ... to reject it? And how do you decide? What values are at play?

### Words

“Our public lands - whether a national park or monument, wildlife refuge, forest or prairie - make each one of us land-rich. It is our inheritance as citizens of a country called America.”

-Terry Tempest Williams

“Blessed are the meek, for they shall inherit the earth.”

-Gospel of Matthew

“Our ideals, laws and customs should be based on the proposition that each generation in turn becomes the custodian rather than the absolute owner of our resources - and each generation has the obligation to pass this inheritance on in the future.”

- Alberto Moravia

“The best inheritance a parent can give his children is a few minutes of his time each day.”

- Orlando A. Battista

“We are all gifted. That is our inheritance.”

- Ethel Waters

“To live a life of inheritance, you may be grateful for the pieces of your ancestors that are alive in you, and you may also be grateful for the gift of your own life and the power you have to shape how others will remember you.”

-A Soul Matters Member

“You don't need to accept what you inherit - in fact it is really your right, responsibility and opportunity to refuse what is offered (foisted, dumped, laid, imposed) and replace it with better.”

-A Soul Matters Collective Member

“What I have been thinking about is the different types of inheritance we have--immediate family and genetics, extended family, community, friends, religious community, national and global, how these all interact negatively and positively to make us who we are. One of the things that I noticed growing up was that there was a dissonance between my family inheritance and the community inheritance and maybe even the national one.

How do you work with being or feeling like you are an "outsider"? How do you keep up the strength to do what you think is right even though everyone else thinks you're crazy? How do you stay on a spiritual path when the pull is away from that toward mindless consumerism? How does inheritance enable you to reject what everyone else believes?”

-A Soul Matters Collective Member

*Mixed Media: Videos, Articles, Sermons, Podcasts*

\*RadioLab Podcast: *Inheritance* (Season 11, Episode 2)

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/251876-inheritance/>

<http://www.radiolab.org/story/255054-moms-and-inheritance/>

\*Legacy.com: Where Stories Live On

A global network of online obituaries, including public figures: [www.legacy.com](http://www.legacy.com)

\*The Inheritance Project: <http://inheritance-project.com/cms/>

Founded in 1992 to explore the emotional and social impact of inherited wealth and to show heirs how to claim their personal power and use it to bring meaning to their lives and benefit others.

\*TED Talk: Taryn Simon - The stories behind the bloodlines

Taryn Simon captures the essence of vast, generation-spanning stories by photographing the descendants of people at the center of the narrative. In this riveting talk she shows a stream of these stories from all over the world, investigating the nature of genealogy and the way our lives are shaped by the interplay of many different forces.

[http://www.ted.com/talks/taryn\\_simon\\_the\\_stories\\_behind\\_the\\_bloodlines](http://www.ted.com/talks/taryn_simon_the_stories_behind_the_bloodlines)

\*TED Talk: Frank Warren - Half a million secrets

"Secrets can take many forms — they can be shocking, or silly, or soulful." Frank Warren, the founder of Post-Secret.com, shares some of the half-million secrets that strangers have mailed him on postcards:

[http://www.ted.com/talks/frank\\_warren\\_half\\_a\\_million\\_secrets](http://www.ted.com/talks/frank_warren_half_a_million_secrets)

\* “From Riches to Responsibility”: *UU World* article about Chuck Collins, who gave away his inheritance. Chuck spoke at First UU in December:

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/riches-responsibility>

\* “Will Your Children Inherit Your EBooks?”

<http://www.npr.org/2012/06/21/155360197/will-your-children-inherit-your-e-books>

\*This I Believe: Dag Hammarskjöld: Old Creeds in a New World

<http://thisibelieve.org/essay/16608/>

\* “Our Congregationalist Heritage”: A *UU World* piece about our Puritan inheritance as modern-day UU’s.

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/our-congregationalist-heritage>

\* “My Life as an Heiress,” Nora Ephron, *The New Yorker*, 2010

<http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2010/10/11/my-life-as-an-heiress>

### Books

*Between the World and Me*, by Ta-Nehisi Coates

*Far From the Tree: Parents, Children and the Search for Identity*, by Andrew Solomon

*The Hour of Land: A Personal Topography of America’s National Parks*, by Terry Tempest Williams

*Hillbilly Elegy*, by JD Vance

*Inheritance: How Our Genes Change Our Lives and Our Lives Change Our Genes*, by Sharon Moalem

*Inheritance*, by Louisa May Alcott

*Orban’s Inheritance*, by Aline Ohanesian

*The Rules of Inheritance: A Memoir*, by Claire Bidwell Smith

*300 Questions to Ask Your Parents Before It’s Too Late*, by Shannon Alder

Our UU theological and religious inheritance:

*A Chosen Faith*, by John Buebrens and Forrest Church

[Engaging Our Theological Diversity](#), a Commission on Appraisal Report



Movies

*Everything is Illuminated*: [http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/everything\\_is\\_illuminated/](http://www.rottentomatoes.com/m/everything_is_illuminated/)

*The Way*: <http://www.imdb.com/title/tt1441912/>

Credits: This month’s edition of *The Path* is based on the template provided by the Soul Matters Collective, with adaptations and additions from Rev. Mara Dowdall and Martha Dallas.

**Creative Space**

Use this section to write, doodle, and create!

AHA! Moments



Notes

