



October Monthly Theme

COVENANT

the practice of traveling together

*The intention of the themed year is to help Unitarian Universalists build a robust spiritual and ethical vocabulary. The themes are points of departure for religious liberals seeking to think, speak and act theologically, prophetically and prayerfully. The themes reclaim religious language, casting old terms in a new key to deepen spiritual grounding and sharpen moral reasoning. Find more at: www.wbuuc.org/themes
Sign up for a Theme Circle at wbuuc.org/classes.*

QUESTIONS

What does it mean to be bound by covenant and not by creed?
With whom are you in covenant?
How do we call each other back into covenant after it has been broken?

QUOTES

Perhaps travel cannot prevent bigotry, but by demonstrating that all peoples cry, laugh, eat, worry, and die, it can introduce the idea that if we try and understand each other, we may even become friends.

- Maya Angelou

In Dakota we say “Mitakuye Oyasin,” which means “all my relations.” We understand that all beings have a spirit and we are required, as good relatives, to treat all of our relations—including plants, animals, air, water, land—with respect. One must obey kinship rules; one must be a good relative.

- Diane Wilson and Ella Deloria, Dakota

God established [a covenant] with Noah after the destruction wrought by the flood. There we read: "I set my bow in the clouds to serve as a sign of the covenant between me and the earth . . . everlasting covenant that I have established between God and all living beings — all mortal creatures that are on earth" (Genesis 9: 13-16). Human beings must feel that they are sons and daughters of the rainbow, those who translate this divine covenant with Gaia, the living super-organism, and with all the beings existing and living on it, with new relationships of kindness, compassion, cosmic solidarity, and deep reverence for the mystery that each one bears and reveals. Only then will there be integral liberation, of the human being and of Earth, and rather than the cry of the poor and the cry of the Earth there will be common celebration of the redeemed and the freed, human beings in our own house, on our good, great, and bountiful Mother Earth.

- Leonardo Boff, Brazilian theologian, writer, and activist

POETRY

You do not have to be good.
You do not have to walk on your knees
for a hundred miles through the desert repenting.
You only have to let the soft animal of your body
love what it loves.
Tell me about despair, yours, and I will tell you mine.
Meanwhile the world goes on.
Meanwhile the sun and the clear pebbles of the rain
are moving across the landscapes,
over the prairies and the deep trees,
the mountains and the rivers.
Meanwhile the wild geese, high in the clean blue air,
are heading home again.
Whoever you are, no matter how lonely,
the world offers itself to your imagination,
calls to you like the wild geese, harsh and exciting -
over and over announcing your place
in the family of things.
- Mary Oliver

...as an intimate of earth I came to know
That this gaunt wretched moment long ago
Was written in my covenant with the soil;
That all who hold a lien on life contract
With the elemental earth to hold the pact
Subject to all its varied terms, its sweet,
Its bitter, its endless trouble and its toil....
- from *Covenant with Earth* by Lew Sarrett

Covenant

If you are happy, I will give you an apple,
if you are anxious, I will twist your arm,
and if you permit me, I will be glad to hold you
close to my heart forever and do you no harm.

If I am happy, will you give me an apple?
If I am anxious, you may twist my arm.
And if you would like to, I would like you to hold me
close to your heart forever and do me no harm.

(con't.)

This is a bargain, only two can make it.
This is a covenant offered with desperate calm,
it being uncertain that lovers can drive out demons
with the gift of an apple or the twist of an arm.

- Tennessee Williams

Song:

Walk together children
Don't you get weary
Oh, walk together children
Don't you get weary
There's a great camp meeting in the promised land

Walking Meditation

Take my hand.
We will walk.
We will only walk.
We will enjoy our walk
without thinking of arriving anywhere.
Walk peacefully.
Walk happily.
Our walk is a peace walk.
Our walk is a happiness walk.
Then we learn
that there is no peace walk;
that peace is the walk;
that there is no happiness walk;
that happiness is the walk.
We walk for ourselves.
We walk for everyone
always hand in hand.

Walk and touch peace every moment.
Walk and touch happiness every moment.
Each step brings a fresh breeze.
Each step makes a flower bloom under our feet.
Kiss the Earth with your feet.
Print on Earth your love and happiness.

Earth will be safe
when we feel in us enough safety.

- From *The Long Road Turns To Joy - A Guide To Walking Meditation* by Thich Nhat Hanh

READINGS & EXCERPTS

Pilgrimage is premised on the idea that the sacred is not entirely immaterial, but that there is a geography of spiritual power. Pilgrimage walks a delicate line between the spiritual and the material in its emphasis on the story and its setting: though the search is for spirituality, it is pursued in terms of the most material details—of where the Buddha was born or where Christ died, where the relics are or the holy water flows. Or perhaps it reconciles the spiritual and the material, for to go on pilgrimage is to make the body and its actions express the desires and beliefs of the soul.

Pilgrimage unites belief with action, thinking with doing, and it makes sense that this harmony is achieved when the sacred has material presence and location. Protestants, as well as the occasional Buddhist and Jew, have objected to pilgrimages as a kind of icon worship and asserted that the spiritual should be sought within as something wholly immaterial, rather than out in the world.

There is a symbiosis between journey and arrival in Christian pilgrimage, as there is in mountaineering. To travel without arriving would be as incomplete as to arrive without having traveled. To walk there is to earn it, through laboriousness and through the transformation that comes during a journey. Pilgrimages make it possible to move physically, through the exertions of one's body, step by step, toward those intangible spiritual goals that are otherwise so hard to grasp. We are eternally perplexed by how to move toward forgiveness or healing or truth, but we know how to walk from here to there, however arduous the journey. Too, we tend to imagine life as a journey, and going on an actual expedition toiling along a road toward some distant place is one of the most compelling and universal images of what it means to be human, depicting the individual as small and solitary in a large world, reliant on the strength of body and will. In pilgrimage, the journey is radiant with hope that arrival at the tangible destination will bring spiritual benefits with it.

The pilgrim has achieved a story of his or her own and in this way too becomes part of the religion made up of stories of travel and transformation...In going on pilgrimage, one has left behind the complications of one's place in the world—family, attachments, rank, duties—and become a walker among walkers, for there is no aristocracy among pilgrims save that of achievement and dedication. The Turners talk about pilgrimage as a liminal state—a state of being between one's past and future identities and thus outside the established order, in a state of possibility. Liminality comes from the Latin *limin*, a threshold, and a pilgrim has both symbolically and physically stepped over such a line: "Liminars are stripped of status and authority, removed from a social structure maintained and sanctioned by power and force, and leveled to a homogeneous social state for by a sacred power, however—the power of the weak, derived on the one hand from the resurgence of nature when structural power is removed, and on the other from the reception of sacred knowledge.

Much of what has been bound by social structure is liberated, notably the sense of comradeship and communion, or *communitas*.

- From *The Uphill Road to Grace* in Rebecca Solnit's book *Wanderlust*