

## November Theme

### ***Power: The Practice of Humility***

*Humility is a character trait, a demeanor, a manner, a virtue, a way of holding or conducting oneself that creates space for others, that allows others to breathe; it's a way of moving lightly through the world, walking softly upon the earth; it's an open, inviting, welcoming, hospitable way of engaging others. It's a way of service. It's a virtue.*

~ Reverend Josh Pawelek, UU minister

### **Introduction**

Humility is deeply revered by spiritual traditions and many consider it to be the mother of all virtues, but practicing humility is challenging in a society that puts so much value on external things. This notion of humility as a virtue, as a way of *'walking softly upon the earth'* requires a self-acceptance that emerges from grounding our worth in our inherent value as human beings. Humility requires that we truly listen to one another and to the universe, to understand that we have a great deal to learn from each other. This sense of curiosity and willingness to be open to the beliefs and experiences of others, and to the possibilities of life, is at the heart of Unitarian Universalism.

How does the practice of *Humility* relate to the theme of *Power*? We need to practice humility to recognize where we belong and how we can contribute to the world around us, to truly exercise our power. We often misinterpret the demonstration of humility to be a sign of weakness, when, in truth, humility may be an indication of tremendous inner strength, of power. Marianne Williamson said, 'our playing small does not serve the world'. This teaches us that our ideas, our skills, and our gifts are too important to keep to ourselves. Practicing humility requires that we recognize and work on our limitations by being open to new ideas, advice, and criticism; and this ability cultivates an awe-inspiring inner strength. Humility is knowing who we are and where we stand and feeling comfortable and confident in the place that we have created. Consider what researchers of the "quiet ego"—a construct similar to humility—suggest happens when we gain control of our ego: we become less likely to act aggressively, manipulate others, express dishonesty, and destroy resources. Instead, we take responsibility for and correct our mistakes, and keep our abilities in humble perspective.

Humility plays a critical role in how we exercise our power and our faith in the world around us, through the living of our seventh principle - the interrelationship and the connectedness of all living things. Humility is about being mindful of the ways that we are not isolated beings, but deeply connected and dependent on one another, on those who came before us, and on this life-giving and life-sustaining planet. By exercising humility, we open our eyes and see that our lives are not solely our own. Humility calls on us to consider our responsibilities and reminds us how our choices affect others, and the many ways we are bound to others.

Being around a person that exudes humility is a precious gift that allows our protective walls to come down. Perhaps truly humble people offer this gift to us because they see and accept their own strengths and limitations without defensiveness or judgement. Imagine if we viewed true power as sitting back and observing with logic, and practicing restraint, rather than the more forceful and dominant display of power we see today? Who wouldn't want that kind of leadership for our country, and for the world?

Research suggests that humility is good for us individually and for our relationships; humble people handle stress more effectively and report higher levels of physical and mental well-being, and show greater generosity, helpfulness, and gratitude, all traits that can only serve to draw us closer to others. Research also provides three tips for cultivating humility: 1) embrace your humanness; 2) practice mindfulness and self-compassion; and, 3) express gratitude. Let us all practice humility in our congregation and in our lives in a way that leads us to feel empowered to live out our Unitarian Universalist principles. Let us imagine a world where people do not approach each other with preconceived ideas, with prejudices, with pre-formed bias, but instead remain open to one another, willing to listen, to understand, to learn. Humility enables us to move closer to this ideal, and in doing so, may we exercise true power.

This month's theme was composed by Alex Businger and the Worship Associates.

### **Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:**

1. When you practice humility, or practice being humble, do these practices draw you closer to others? Describe.
2. How do you feel when you meet someone who radiates humility? Does something inside you 'let go'? Do you feel that you are fully seen, heard, and accepted for who you are? Describe.
3. What may help you offer your humanness just as it is? When you do this, do you feel powerful? Or, do you feel weak and powerless? Describe.
4. In what settings or places do you feel comfortable practicing humility? In what settings is it challenging to practice humility?
5. Do you think humility is lacking in our culture, or lacking in a certain generation? If so, why do you think that is?
6. Why may it be challenging for us to express humility?
7. Do you think you need courage to practice humility? What would our congregation, and our world, look like if everyone did?
8. How does the practice of humility factor into congregational life, and how may it help define our identity as Unitarian Universalists?
9. How does practicing humility impact our beloved community and the larger world?
10. What does humility have to do with being a good UU? What about power?

### **Quotes and Short Readings**

Without humility, we lose our connection to one another. We risk fragmentation. We risk replacing material goods for honest connection. We risk being overwhelmed when life or nature take us by surprise. In those moments when we are confronted with the fierceness of life, when we feel caught at the mercy of another force, it is humility which allows us to have hope despite the present moment and to find confidence to trust ourselves to the life that is larger than our own.”

~ *Reverend Susan Frederick Gray*

What if we were to be together and listen to each other's comments with a willingness to expose rather than to confirm our own beliefs and opinions? What if we were to willingly listen to one another with the awareness that we each see the world in unique ways? And with the expectation that I could learn something new if I listen for the differences rather than the similarities? ... What might we see, what might we learn, what might we create together, if we become this kind of listener, one who enjoys the differences and welcomes in disturbance? To be humble, my father told me, was to remain teachable. Whenever we think we know it all, real humility reminds us to stay open and willing to learn. The magic words, 'I don't know,' are at the essence of both awe and humility.

~ *Margaret Wheatley*

There is a universal respect and even admiration for those who are humble and simple by nature, and who have absolute confidence in all human beings irrespective of their social status. As I have said, the first thing is to be honest with yourself. You can never have an impact on society if you have not changed yourself. Great peacemakers are all people of integrity, of honesty, and humility.

~ *Nelson Mandela*

I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors and to retrace my steps.

~ *Mahatma Gandhi*

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Matt Andrus, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, and Gary Strichartz.

Humility requires sincerity, honesty, and introspection. Perhaps most important of all, humility asks us to listen to one another and to the universe. To believe that we have a great deal to learn and that we will never know everything.

~ *Serge Kahili King*

It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know the sense of wonder and humility.

~ *Rachel Carson, The Sense of Wonder*

A great man is always willing to be little.

~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less.

~ *CS Lewis*

To share your weakness is to make yourself vulnerable; to make yourself vulnerable is to show your strength.

~ *Criss Jami*

I have three precious things which I hold fast and prize. The first is gentleness; the second is frugality; the third is humility, which keeps me from putting myself before others. Be gentle and you can be bold; be frugal and you can be liberal; avoid putting yourself before others and you can become a leader among men.

~ *Lao Tzu*

Life is a long lesson in humility.

~ *J.M. Barrie, The Little Minister*

I never lived, that I remember, what you call a common natural day. All my days are touched by the supernatural, for I feel the pressure of hidden causes, and the presence, sometimes the communion, of unseen powers. It needs not that I should ask the clairvoyant whether a spirit-world projects into ours.

~ *Margaret Fuller, Free Hope, p. 128.*

Be careful not to mistake insecurity and inadequacy for humility! Humility has nothing to do with the insecure and inadequate! Just like arrogance has nothing to do with greatness!

~ *C. JoyBell C.*

My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground upon which I stand.

~ *Thich Nhat Hahn*

The power of transgression is the archetypal foundational story of the Bible because we transgress; because we want to break our own codes, sometimes of morality, sometimes of ethics, sometimes of the power structures... because there is freedom in transgression, and there is power in transgression.

~ *Esther Perel*

Go out on a limb. That's where the fruit is.

~ *Unknown*

These are the few ways we can practice humility:  
To speak as little as possible of one's self.  
To mind one's own business.  
Not to want to manage other people's affairs.  
To avoid curiosity.  
To accept contradictions and correction cheerfully.  
To pass over the mistakes of others.  
To accept insults and injuries.  
To accept being slighted, forgotten and disliked.  
To be kind and gentle even under provocation.  
Never to stand on one's dignity.  
To choose always the hardest.  
~ *Mother Teresa, The Joy in Loving: A Guide to Daily Living*

### Impassioned Clay

Deep in ourselves resides the religious impulse.  
Out of the passion of our clay it rises.  
We have religion when we stop deluding ourselves that we are self-sufficient, self-sustaining, or self-derived.  
We have religion when we hold some hope beyond the present, some self-respect beyond our failures.  
We have religion when our hearts are capable of leaping up at beauty, when our nerves are edged by some dream in the heart.  
We have religion when we have an abiding gratitude for all that we have received.  
We have religion when we look upon people with all of their failings and still find in them good; when we look beyond people to the grandeur in nature and to the purpose in our own heart.  
~ *Unitarian Universalist Minister Rev. Ralph N. Helverson*

### The Call to Live Everything

One of the sad things today is that so many people are frightened by the wonder of their own presence. They are dying to tie themselves into a system, a role, or to an image, or to a predetermined identity that other people have actually settled on for them. This identity may be totally at variance with the wild energies that are rising inside in their souls. Many of us get very afraid and we eventually compromise. We settle for something that is safe, rather than engaging the danger and the wildness that is in our own hearts. We should never forget that death is waiting for us. A man in Connemara said one time to a friend of mine, 'Beidh muid sínte siar,' a duirt sé, 'cúig mhilliúin blain déag faoin chré' – We'll be lying down in the earth for about fifteen million years, and we have a short exposure. I feel that when you recognize that death is on its way, it is a great liberation, because it means that you can in some way feel the call to live everything that is within you. One of the greatest sins is the un-lived life, not to allow yourself to become chief executive of the project you call your life, to have a reverence always for the immensity that is inside of you.  
~ *John O'Donohue Excerpt from WALKING IN WONDER: Eternal Wisdom for a Modern World*

Our pain for the world, and our power to take part in the healing of our world, both come from the same place.  
~ *Joanna Macy, Allegiance to Life*

Opportunities to find deeper powers within ourselves come when life seems most challenging.

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Matt Andrus, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, and Gary Strichartz.

*~Joseph Campbell*

### **Resources and Acknowledgements**

*The content of this theme's Introduction is sourced from the following article and sermon:*

Article: "How Humility Will Make you the Greatest person ever"

[https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/humility\\_will\\_make\\_you\\_greatest\\_person\\_ever](https://greatergood.berkeley.edu/article/item/humility_will_make_you_greatest_person_ever)

Sermon: "Willing to be Little"

<http://www.uucdc.org/worship/sermons/willing-be-little>

For more on this month's theme go to: <http://uuac.org/worship/themes-for-spiritual-practice/>

The Worship Associates are: Matt Andrus, Jeff Brown, Jen Ryan Brown, Alexandra Businger (chair), Alan Cantor, Erin Collier, Jess Jonas, Katherine McHugh, and Gary Strichartz.