

What does it mean to be a people of *Living Tradition*?



Minister's Message

We have a made up holiday in my immediate family. It's called Hyphen Day. My husband created it after our son was born. My husband's birthday is April 13th and our son's is April 15th. Hyphen Day is the day between their two birthdays. The added humor or significance is, of course, that we all share a hyphenated last name.

My husband created this holiday because he knew that with two ministers as parents, our son would not experience holidays in a traditional way. For example, Mom and Dad always work Christmas Eve night. Easter, a holiday in my husband's home growing up, is for him a really busy week with several extra services. And all of those Monday holidays that make a three-day weekend, well, Monday is already our day off, and weekends are our busiest work days. There is Father's Day and Mother's Day, of course, but those are always on Sunday! Fortunately, my husband had the foresight to realize that holidays in our household would in most cases not be time off, and so he created a new holiday. Hyphen Day is a day set aside for dad and son to celebrate by doing things they like to do together. It's a special Father-Son holiday and they even let me tag along too!

Unitarian Universalism is referred to as the Living Tradition. This means that ours is a tradition that has a strong past, but which is also always open to new learnings, new discoveries, willing to change in order to respond to the needs of our times and the longings of our spirits. A tradition that reveres the past, but also trusts the dawning future.

The fall and winter are filled with holidays. Across various communities, nations and cultures there are celebrations of feasts and gift giving. From Thanksgiving and harvest festivals, to celebrations of Diwali, Hanukkah, Kwanzaa, Christmas, La Posada, the Winter Solstice, the Feast of St. Nicholas, to the New Year. This is a season filled with tradition.

Interestingly, for some of these holidays, we may hold onto the tradition long after the religious or practical reason for the holiday holds meaning. It can even be the case that the particular ways we celebrate become more important than the reasons. "The way we do it" becomes more important than why we do it, and when this happens, tradition can lose its meaning, feeling confining, rather than celebratory. But I would caution us against throwing out the idea of tradition entirely. The French writer Antoine de St.-Exupéry describes the role of ceremonies and tradition as a way that we hand down to our children and to the next generation the meaning of our lives, the way we communicate and pass on our values and our ideals.

As we explore the season's holidays and explore our own understanding of our living tradition, I invite you to be especially mindful of the traditions, or lack thereof in your own home, and consider how tradition, even new or made up ones, might help you celebrate, remember and share what is meaningful and important in your life.

Rev. Susan



*We hallow this time
together by kindling
the lamp of our heritage.*

- Albert Thelander, UU

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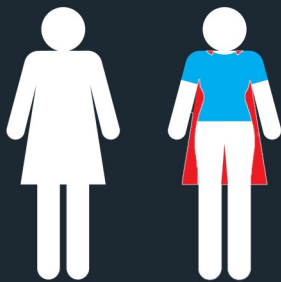


Living the Theme: Tradition

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience gratitude and what you learned from the practice.

1 Mess with Tradition

Sometimes honoring a tradition requires that we approach it anew, even “mess with it.” And this is the perfect month to make “old” traditions come alive. Holiday celebrations can be a time of going through the motions. What might you do this year to make them matter? Come to your group with your story of how you made it matter or plan to make it matter...by engaging it in a way you’ve never done before.



It was never a dress.

Image Credit: www.itwasneveradress.com

2 Take a Second Look at Somebody Else’s Tradition

There is a reason others hold on to tradition even if we don’t understand why. Use this month to explore a religious tradition that seems foreign to you but essential and precious to those maintaining it. Learn more about why the Amish still refuse to drive. Why do some young, modern Muslim women still wear the traditional headscarf? Do you really understand Lent? Or why pilgrimages transform people so deeply? One source of inspiration might be this recent bestseller:

<http://www.amazon.com/The-Year-Living-Biblically-Literally/dp/0743291484>

Come to your group ready to share what you learned and what you are going to do with that learning.

3 Holding On To The Traditions That Help Us Hold On To Ourselves

This one is straightforward: What tradition helps you remember who you are? Come to your group and share a tradition or a ritual that helps you hold on to a precious value, insight or memory.

4 A Hope Chest of Tradition

Whether it is an elegant wooden hope chest handed down from family or just a cardboard box in the attic, many of us have a “hope chest” that carries and contains our memories and traditions. Use this month to re-visit what’s in yours. Bring one of the items from your “hope chest” to your group. And tell the story of how pulling it out again transformed your month.

5 Prove that Kitchen Traditions are Spiritual

Food produces more traditions than almost any other element of our lives. From the outside these traditions of cooking and eating can seem sweet and sentimental. But we know they are much more than that. We know that there is a deeper reason we fiercely defend homemade birthday cakes or eating the same food every year at Christmas or Thanksgiving. Why is it that you cook Great-Grandma Elaine’s chicken soup every time you’re sick? Why won’t you throw away that old skillet your mom left you? There is a deeper meaning – a life-giving meaning – to traditions of the kitchen and dinner table. Come to your group with a story that proves that is true. (And maybe even a dish that proves it is true!)

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Questions to Live With

Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. How have your parents’ traditions shaped who you are? Are those traditions a legacy you are grateful for? Or are they a source of struggle or pain? How have your own, new family traditions been a reaction to those of your parents? Or a sharing of the past?
2. Overall, do you appreciate the traditions in your life? Which ones?
3. Are there traditions you feel bound by or obligated to that feel confining, that you would rather not continue? What are the complications to letting it go?
4. Are you a tradition or non-traditional person? Are you proudly traditional in any way? Are you “traditional” in ways that are not easy to see?
5. Are there traditions that help you feel rooted, grounded or connected in positive ways?
6. Has breaking with tradition ever saved or improved your life?
7. Do you view tradition as a hindrance or comfort? Or some of both? In what ways?
8. What traditions do you want to pass on to your children? How are you cultivating those traditions? What is the meaning that you wish to pass along with these traditions?

9. Reverend Jack Mendelsohn says that our UU religion is “not bound by tradition.” And yet, we do have our own traditions – sometimes across congregations, some that are very specific to each community. What traditions in this congregation, or in your experience as a Unitarian Universalists hold special meaning?
10. Have you helped to create, change or end certain traditions that you felt needed to be changed?
11. Have you ever tried to adopt a tradition from another source? Maybe you heard about it from a friend’s family, or from another religious tradition. What was your motivation? What were the results?
12. Have you ever created a new tradition? What was it? What was your motivation? What were the results? Do you still do it?



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Wise Words

Tradition: a way of thinking, behaving, or doing something that has been used by a group of people, family, or society for a long time; a belief or behavior passed down by a group or society with symbolic meaning or special significance with origins in the past.

We can either emphasize those aspects of our traditions, religious or secular, that speak of hatred, exclusion, and suspicion or work with those that stress the interdependence and equality of all human beings. The choice is yours.

*Karen Armstrong,
Twelve Steps to a Compassionate Life*

All major religious traditions carry basically the same message, that is love, compassion and forgiveness the important thing is they should be part of our daily lives.

Dalai Lama

“The Larger Circle”

We clasp the hands of those that go before us,
And the hands of those who come after us.
We enter the little circle of each other’s arms
And the larger circle of lovers,
Whose hands are joined in a dance
And the larger circle of all creatures
Passing in and out of life
Who move also in a dance

To a music so subtle and vast that no ear hears it.
Wendell Berry

There is no creation without tradition. The "new" is an inflection on preceding forms. Novelty is always a variation on the past.

Carlos Fuentes

Tradition is a guide, not a jailer.

W. Somerset Maugham

Tradition is not the worship of ashes, but the preservation of fire.

Gustav Mahler

When we respect our blood ancestors and our spiritual ancestors, we feel rooted. If we find ways to cherish and develop our spiritual heritage, we will avoid the kind of alienation that is destroying society and we will become whole again. Learning to touch deeply the jewels of our own traditions will allow us to understand and appreciate the values of other traditions, and this will benefit everyone.

Thich Nhat Hanh

Looking too deeply into a tradition may be peeling an onion--remove all the cultural accretions and what is left? Christmas in the US has absorbed the Yule log, the German Christmas tree (thank Edison for electric lights, no more candles on the trees), Saturnalia, and Goddess only knows how many other pre-Christian traditions.

Worship Associate

Tradition, which is always old, is at the same time ever new because it is always reviving—born again in each new generation; to be lived and applied in a new and particular way.

Thomas Merton

Build traditions of family vacations and trips and outings. These memories will never be forgotten by your children. *Ezra Taft*

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Wise Words

“Generation to Generation”

In a house which becomes a home,
one hands down and another takes up
the heritage of mind and heart,
laughter and tears, musings and deeds.

Love, like a carefully loaded ship,
crosses the gulf between the generations.
Therefore, we do not neglect the ceremonies
of our passage: when we wed, when we die,
and when we are blessed with a child;
When we depart and when we return;
When we plant and when we harvest.

Let us bring up our children. It is not
the place of some official to hand to them
their heritage.

If others impart to our children our knowledge
and ideals, they will lose all of us that is
wordless and full of wonder.

Let us build memories in our children,
lest they drag out joyless lives,
lest they allow treasures to be lost because
they have not been given the keys.

We live, not by things, but by the meanings
of things. It is needful to transmit the passwords
from generation to generation.

Antoine de St.-Exupéry

The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and
prejudice must have strong wings.

*Kate Chopin,
The Awakening*

As people are walking all the time, in the same spot, a path ap-
pears.

John Locke

The thinking (person) must oppose all cruel customs, no mat-
ter how deeply rooted in tradition and surrounded by a halo.
When we have a choice, we must avoid bringing torment and
injury into the life of another.

Albert Schweitzer

These are the days that have been given to us. Let us rejoice
and be glad in them. Let us make of them stories worth telling
to those who come after us.

William R. Murray

“Let Nothing Living Slip”

When love is felt or fear is known;
when holidays and holy days and such times come;
when anniversaries arrive by calendar or consciousness;
when seasons come — as seasons do — old and known, but
somehow new;
when lives are born or people die;
when something sacred is sensed in soil or sky; mark the time.
Respond with thought or prayer or smile or grief.

Let nothing living slip between the fingers of your mind,
for all of these are holy things we will not, cannot, find again.

Max A. Coots

Our religion is the traditions of our ancestors - the dreams of
our old men, given them in solemn hours of the night by the
Great Spirit; and the visions of our sachems, and is written in
the hearts of our people.

Chief Seattle

Every culture has something to be ashamed of, but every cul-
ture also has the right to change, to challenge negative tradi-
tions, and create to new ones.

Azar Nafisi

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Wise Words

Typically, when I think of tradition, I think of rituals and celebrations around the holidays, or the way things are done. But there are also incredible traditions of resistance against injustice, and legacies that those before us have left that speak of the traditions of love, of justice, of humanity and dignity. This is the kind of tradition I hear in this Adrienne Rich poem from our hymnal:

My heart is moved by all I cannot save:
So much has been destroyed
I have to cast my lot with those who, age after age,
perversely, with no extraordinary power,
reconstitute the world.

Rev. Susan Frederick-Gray

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes, our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking about.

G. K. Chesterton, in "The Ethics of Elfland"

If the future is to remain open and free, we need people who can tolerate the unknown, who will not need the support of completely worked out systems or traditional blueprints from the past.

Margaret Mead

Tradition is the living faith of the dead; traditionalism is the dead faith of the living. Tradition lives in conversation with the past, while remembering where we are and when we are and that it is we who have to decide. Traditionalism supposes that nothing should ever be done for the first time, so all that is needed to solve any problem is to arrive at the supposedly unanimous testimony of this homogenized tradition.

*Jaroslav Pelikan,
The Vindication of Tradition*

You do not understand your own tradition if you do not see it in relation to others.

John Searle

What I like about seasonal traditions is that they are so ancient. Historians tell us that, regardless of culture, humans have always marked the turning of the seasons with families and groups gathering together to celebrate with special food, special music and special rituals. The specific meanings may evolve, but the big picture fact is that humans seem to need traditions. They connect generations to each other, and connect members of a group to one another. We may all have personal traditions, but our collective traditions can keep us connected, and can tell us much about who we are.

Small Group Facilitator

When men are oppressed, it's a tragedy. When women are oppressed, it's tradition.

*Letty Cottin Pogrebin,
Deborah, Golda, and Me: Being Female and Jewish in America*

The less there is to justify a traditional custom, the harder it is to get rid of it.

*Mark Twain,
The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*

I grew up in traditional black patriarchal culture and there is no doubt that I'm going to take a great many unconscious, but present, patriarchal complicities to the grave because it is so deeply ensconced in how I look at the world. Therefore, very much like alcoholism, drug addiction, or racism; patriarchy is a disease and we are in perennial recovery and relapse. So you have to get up every morning and struggle against it.

*Cornel West,
Breaking Bread: Insurgent Black Intellectual Life*

The telling and hearing of stories breaks through our illusions of separateness, and activates a deep sense of our collective interdependence.

Annette Simmons

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Recommended Resources

The Wheel of the Year is an annual cycle of seasonal festivals, observed by many modern Pagans. It consists of either four or eight festivals: either the solstices and equinoxes, known as the "quarter days", or the four midpoints between, known as the "cross quarter days"; syncretic traditions like Wicca often celebrate all eight festivals. *-from Wikipedia*

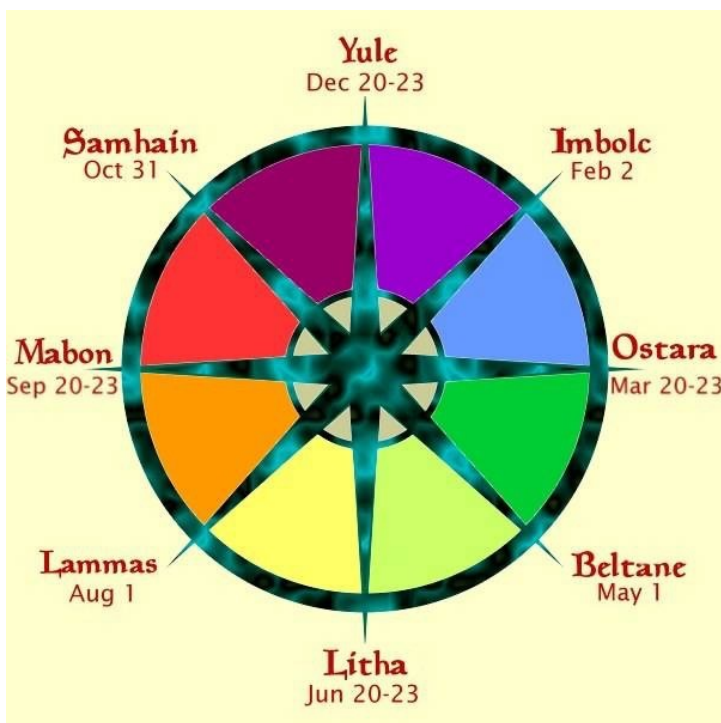


Image Credit: www.ocuuc.org

For information on Women's/Girl's Rites of Passage, please consider enrolling in the Spring Session of "Cakes for the Queen of Heaven" or contact KristinaBenner@phoenixuu.org for copies of ritual ceremonies.

Books:

[Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting](http://www.uuabookstore.org/Tending-the-Flame-P17090.aspx) by Michelle Richards

<http://www.uuabookstore.org/Tending-the-Flame-P17090.aspx>

[From Beginning to End: The Rituals of Our Lives](#) by Robert Fulghum

Films:

Suffragette

<http://www.focusfeatures.com/suffragette>

Compared to What? The Improbable Journey of Barney Frank (documentary)

<http://www.barneyfrankfilm.com/>

Articles:

New Family Traditions: Create rituals with and for your children to celebrate your family's values by Meg Cox:

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/creating-rituals-with-for-children>

The Portals to Conscious Elderhood- Understanding life transitions and the importance of rites of passage, by Ron Pevny

<http://tinyurl.com/conscious-elderhood>

Chitlins, Tradition and Food Justice by Carolyn Wysinger

<http://www.blackgirldangerous.org/2014/01/chitlins-tradition-food-justice/>

Coming Home Like Rivers to the Sea: A Women's Ritual by Carolyn McDade and Lucile Schuck Longview

<http://www.uuwr.org/resources/the-water-ritual>

Playing with Tradition:

<http://www.oprah.com/omagazine/How-to-Create-or-Change-Holiday-Traditions>

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Recommended Resources

Videos and Music:

Fiddler on the Roof - Tradition!

<http://tinyurl.com/fiddler-tradition-youtube>

The Maasai Warrior's Spear:

<http://www.oprah.com/own-operation-change/The-Maasai-Warriors-Spear>

Susan Sarandon creates rites of passage for her children:

<http://www.oprah.com/own-master-class/The-Rites-of-Passage-Susan-Sarandon-Created-for-Her-Family-Video>

TED Talk: Radical Women, Embracing Tradition

http://www.ted.com/talks/kavita_ramdas_radical_women_embracing_tradition

TED Talk: Faith vs. Tradition in Islam

http://www.ted.com/talks/mustafa_akyol_faith_versus_tradition_in_islam



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