

**“Accepting Each Other” ©**  
**Shoreline Unitarian Universalist Society, Madison, CT**  
**The Rev. Jeanne Lloyd**  
**May 31, 2020**

**Reflection**

Today we continue with our 3rd in a 7-part worship series on our Unitarian Universalist Principles. Our third principle calls us to, “Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth . . .”<sup>1</sup>

To accept one another. Four small words that challenge us to go beyond a superficial tolerance of another and to a deep understanding of and empathy for each other. To do it well is a challenge to our integrity and character.

Encouragement to spiritual growth: the act of supporting another in the growth of their spirit. It is an act focused on the other, rather than ourselves, and in so doing our society is made richer and more resilient. It is strengthened when everyone’s spirit is nurtured and grows. Today, we will explore this principle through a variety of voices, and by their voices try to understand its through line in our faith.

First, these words contributed by one of our members, Bill Townsend, written by Ruth Bebermeyer.

This poem<sup>2</sup> provides context, reminding us of what it feels like when we are not accepted, and we know it. It is titled:

**Words Are Windows (or They’re Walls)**

I feel so sentenced by your words,  
I feel so judged or sent away,  
Before I go I’ve got to know  
Is that what you mean to say?

Before I rise to my defense,  
Before I speak in hurt or fear,  
Before I build a wall of words,  
Tell me . . . did I really hear?

Words are windows, or they’re walls,  
They sentence us or set us free,  
When I speak and when I hear,

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles> May 16, 2020

<sup>2</sup> Ruth Bebermeyer, in **Nonviolent Communication, A Language of Life**, by Marshall B. Rosenberg, Ph.D., 2003.

Let the love light shine through me.

There are things I need to say,  
Things that mean so much to me,  
If my words don't make me clear,  
Will you help me??? to be free?

If I seemed to put you down,  
If you felt I [didn't] care,  
Try to listen through my words,  
To the feelings that we share.

PAUSE

This has been a difficult week. As we watched with dread, the death toll rise toward the 100,000 mark this week, on Monday, a black man who had been laid off due to the pandemic, was accused of passing a counterfeit \$20 bill. Later he died, *unarmed and handcuffed*, by the hands of 4 policemen in Minneapolis. His name was George Floyd. On Tuesday, the 4 officers were fired, and both peaceful and violent protests began in Minneapolis. On Wednesday, the protests continued. Protestors carried signs that had these words on them:

**Change the System**

**Black Lives Matter**

**Your Silence is Consent**

Windows were broken, stores were looted, cars and buildings set ablaze, lives lost. The Vice President of the Minneapolis City Council called "for peace and for the declaration of a state of emergency, calling racism a public health issue."<sup>3</sup> On Thursday, while we grieved the monumental milestone of 101,000 Americans and an additional 257,000 global citizens who have died in this pandemic in 3 ½ months, Minneapolis' 3<sup>rd</sup> Precinct Police headquarters was set ablaze, and protests and looting spread to St. Paul. That night we held a vigil here at SUUS for all these events, those who have died, those who are suffering, the grief we hold, and the chaos and brokenness of our society. On Friday, former Police Officer Chauvin was arrested<sup>4</sup> and both peaceful and violent multiracial protests spread to Los Angeles; Bakersfield; Sacramento; San Jose; Oakland;

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<sup>3</sup> Greta Kaul, "What we know about the events surrounding George Floyd's death and its aftermath: a timeline," Minnpost.com, May 29, 2020.

<sup>4</sup> Greta Kaul, "What we know about the events surrounding George Floyd's death and its aftermath: a timeline," Minnpost.com, May 29, 2020.

San Francisco; Denver; Atlanta; Chicago; Des Moines; Indianapolis; Fort Wayne; Louisville; New Orleans; New York City; Boston; Detroit; Las Vegas; Charlotte, North Carolina; Columbus & Cincinnati, Ohio; Dallas; Houston; Richmond, Virginia; Miami; Nashville; Pittsburg; Philadelphia; and Washington, DC<sup>5</sup> . . . so far. Each protest remembering the deaths of ordinary people, while living as black citizens . . . at the hands of officers with guns. Each crying out simply and profoundly, Black Lives Matter.

PAUSE

The Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. once said, in an interview,

***“in the final analysis, a riot is the language of the unheard.  
[What] is it that America has failed to hear?”<sup>6</sup>***

We live in a flawed society, built on the backs of black people and other people of color for 400 years. Our society is structurally broken, and these protestors know it. They see through it. Some may try for peaceful solutions, others have had enough. Many others. Black and white.

Change must come, and it must come from each of us, because too often our way of being with each other is at the heart of an institutionalized oppression that started with this nation’s birth.

PAUSE

The poem I just read includes these words,

***“try to listen though my words to the feelings” . . .***

How often do we truly listen for the feelings behind the words? How often do we listen to the Spirit of Life at the center of all our spirits? There is an opportunity in this moment, for us to *listen* to the feelings *behind* the words and actions, and then to *harness* our collective power to *change* a structurally broken society. In doing so, we can make it true that the lives of people at the margins, *do indeed matter* as much as anyone else’s. Can we finally affirm that Black Lives do Matter?

PAUSE

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<sup>5</sup> <https://www.cnn.com/us/live-news/george-floyd-protest-updates-05-28-20/index.html> May 30, 2020

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KOBWXjV5s> CBS News: 60 Minutes Interview with Rev. Martin Luther King, Jr. by Mike Wallace, Quote at 1:55, May 30, 2020.

From Diane Stark, a neurological scientist and member of SUUS,

"For me, the secret to accepting others isn't a matter of patience, tolerance, compassion or grit. It is a belief that the way we perceive and interpret the world is *inherently* limited. That is the nature of the mind. We readily accept that *others* misconstrue, but are *certain* of our own perceptions, interpretations and beliefs. But no matter how strong we are intellectually, our minds are, by design, chained to the wall of past experience . . . watching shadows in a cave.

PAUSE

One of our newest members, Paula Gallagher, offers us a reflection she wrote when serving as a hospice nurse. Would that our hearts would *break open* with compassion, instead of fear or hate, when presented with a challenge. It is called . . .

**Prison Guard**

~ Paula Gallagher

Benita was dying of AIDS.  
Her body wasting away, frail to the bone . . .  
minimally responsive  
but still able to open her eyes and speak in soft whispers.

Arrangements had been made by the hospice social worker  
for her son to visit his dying mother from prison.  
He arrived in shackles  
accompanied by a [black] prison guard  
who was assigned with keeping continuous watch over him.

We took Benita in her hospital bed  
to the meditation room  
where mother and son could have some privacy.  
The door remained open . . . with the young prison guard standing tall,  
keeping a watchful eye from the doorway.

The [black] prisoner knelt at his dying mother's bedside,  
shackles still in place,  
tenderly holding her hand and speaking in whispers.  
A quiet hush emanating from the room.

As the RN on duty  
I passed by the meditation room intermittently  
to check on the patient and her son.  
Making sure that all was well  
while maintaining a respectful distance.

I noticed that the prison guard  
had turned his back to the doorway  
and had turned his face to the wall.  
On closer look I saw that he was in tears[.]  
[As] I approached him, he began sobbing uncontrollably.  
[He said,] "*I don't know how you . . . do this work,*"  
his face and body trembling with emotion.

Mother and son  
quietly continued their bedside reunion  
as the hospice staff gathered around to support the young guard,  
holding space . . . for his heart to break open . . . with compassion.

PAUSE

We are not the labels and attributes of rejection that others give us. And, each of us must fully and irrevocably reject the judgments we are inclined to make of others. This is a challenge to our character and integrity. We must accept people where they are at, always knowing that we are each prisoners and beneficiaries of our respective experiences in life. None of us have full control over those experiences. Each of us learns to cope differently. Each of us seeks the spiritual wholeness found only in our search for the Spirit of Life and Love found *in other's eyes*.

PAUSE

I offer you this poem, submitted by Jenny Lee: It's a poem written by Ed Biewald, their friend and a Unitarian Universalist, submitted in his memory.

### **AND VENUS SAYS TO MARS . . .**

Rather than attempt to mold each other to our own design  
let us willingly open our souls to awareness[,]  
to gain respect for our contrasting values

and view our differences as treasure rather than threat.

Is it necessary to make the whole world one?  
If every man were exactly like his father  
and every woman a copy of her mother,  
progress would cease[!]  
[T]he vigor of diversity is the vital element of our growth.

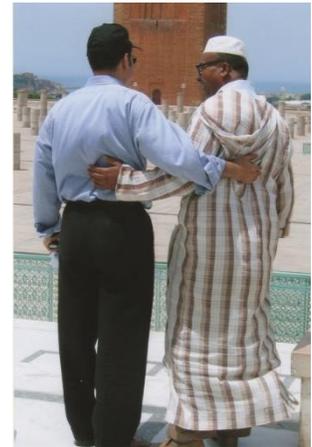
Let us not diminish each other  
but use the limited time we have together  
seeking out that goodness which already exists  
by celebrating those values we hold in common.

In our search for affirmation  
the fusion of our differences has made us one,  
and now I see myself  
a part of you  
as though reflected through a sacred mirror.

Several years ago, Jenny took a photo in Morocco. She says, “I interpret this moment at the site of an Islamic Minaret as representing ‘acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth’. To me, the body language and difference in dress conveyed the coming together in friendship of two cultures . . . perhaps, even of two different faith traditions.

PAUSE

May we accept one another and *encourage all lives*, including Black Lives and People of Color, toward spiritual growth and healing. Let us recall the words of the Talmud.



*Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world's grief.  
Do justly now.  
Love mercy now.  
Walk humbly now.  
You are not obligated to complete the work,  
but neither are you free to abandon it.”<sup>7</sup>*

This charge we carry as we move forward, in faith and love, together.

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<sup>7</sup> Attributed to the Talmud.