



Liberal Beacon

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From its inception, *Liberal Beacon* has primarily strived to provide articles of potential interest to religious liberals, lightly dispersed with information about NAUA news and events. But, in case you haven't yet noticed, the association recently began distributing *NAUA Compass*, a bi-weekly digital newsletter that gives our members and subscribers all the information you need about coming events, opportunities, and more. Given that *Compass* offers more timely news about NAUA, *Liberal Beacon* can now focus more on being our online magazine, featuring quality articles we hope you find edifying and informative.

In this issue, we begin with Todd Eklof's reflections on the recent controversy regarding *White Fragility* author Robin DiAngelo and accusations that she'd plagiarized parts of her doctoral dissertation—accusations that turned out to be unwarranted.

Lynn Jinishian offers an insightful article about the decline of leisure reading in our society, full of data and some solid advice about what to do about it.

Speaking of which, we also have two book reviews that you won't want to miss: Candace Schmidt reviews social psychologist Erich Fromm's book on the psychology of human ethics, *Man for Himself*; and Kevin McCulloch reviews Adam Gopnik's more current book, *A Thousand Small Sanities: The Moral Adventure of Liberalism*.

This issue concludes with two additional articles by a couple of our regular contributors, Floyd Vernon Chandler's take on *The Demise of UU Theism* and Ann Pandya's reveries about the *Sharing Circles* she was once part of in a UU congregation.

We hope you enjoy our 15th issue of *Liberal Beacon*. If you haven't done so yet, you can become a

member of NAUA by visiting our website at:

<https://naunitarians.org/membership/join-us/>

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Letters to the Editor

Dear Editor,

Greetings from Australia. I wish to congratulate the *Liberal Beacon* on its latest edition. Here in Australia, Unitarian Universalists join in the

challenge to the Loss of Historical Memory, Communitive Action, and misunderstanding to disciplines of learning among our institutions and peoples. The *Liberal Beacon* will also fill that gap.

Dr Neville Buch, MPHA (Qld),
Founder of the Brisbane Unitarian Universalist Fellowship (BUUF), Queensland, Australia.

How to Submit a Letter to our Editor

We welcome letters from our readers for potential publication in *Liberal Beacon*. Letters should address matters of interest to Unitarians and Universalists and other religious liberals, including current news and events.



Please email your submission no less than five business days before the end of the calendar month in order for publication in our next issue. Letters are shorter than opinion pieces and should be no more than 250 words. Form-letters and letters considered libelous, obscene or in bad taste will not be printed. Anonymous letters will not be printed. NAUA reserves the right to edit all letters for length. The decision to print any submission is completely at the discretion of the editors.

Please write “Letter to the Editor” in the subject line and email your submissions to nauaedboard@gmail.com or mail them to:

North American Unitarian Association
Letters to the Editor
4340 W. Whistalks Way
Spokane, WA 99224

Letters must include the writer’s name, full address, and phone number for verification purposes. Only the name and town will be published.

White Fragility, Plagiarism, and a Case for Reason

Todd F. Eklof

When it was recently reported that Robin DiAngelo, author of *White Fragility* (2018), had been accused of plagiarizing some parts of her 2004 doctoral dissertation while at the University of Washington, I took some guilty pleasure in the news. After all, I was the first to publicly challenge DiAngelo’s poorly substantiated hypothesis (even before the UUA decided to publish her book about it) for which hundreds of its ministers and leaders labeled me “racist,” among other groundless *ad hominem* slurs. After considering the complaint against her, however, UW officials “determined that there was no basis for conducting an inquiry into DiAngelo’s thesis,” according to a *New York Times* report on the matter.

The same report quotes plagiarism expert Jonathan Bailey who agrees there may be a couple of “problematic” passages in her dissertation but that it looks “more like sloppy writing than it did a clinical, deliberate attempt to plagiarize.” Perhaps DiAngelo could have used more quotation marks and included more footnotes, rather than merely listing some sources in her bibliography, but not having done so doesn’t necessarily amount to plagiarism.

On her website, DiAngelo claims the complaint was part of a concerted effort by anti-DEI (Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion) activists “to *dismantle and discredit DEI efforts*. Accusing progressive scholars who write about race of plagiarism is one of their more predictable strategies.” Both may be true; DiAngelo could have done a better job of clearly distinguishing her sources’ words from her own, and some who are against DEI may have used this point as an opportunity to discredit her. What

matters here, to be clear, is that Robin DiAngelo is NOT guilty of plagiarizing parts of her dissertation.

It is illogical and illiberal to discredit the ideas of others by impugning their character. One's ideas must be argued for or against by determining if they are sound or not. A sound argument is supported by solid evidence. Such evidence accounts for the reasons (premises) that make an argument reasonable. As liberals, who prize reason, which requires freedom of speech, we should not engage in *ad hominem* attacks against those we disagree with, whether by

impugning their character ("She's a plagiarist") or by assigning them base motives ("She's just saying that to get rich"). To argue liberally requires us to focus on the quality of our

ideological opponents' claims while treating them with dignity and respect.

In my book, *The Gadfly Papers* (2019), I don't criticize DiAngelo for not citing her sources but for not including what precisely those sources say that's supposed to support her claims. Instead, DiAngelo tends to present the names of bracketed sources as proof she has done her research and has reliable backing. In logic this is somewhat akin to the *argumentum ad verecundiam* fallacy, an appeal to false authority. In her case, DiAngelo's brackets suggest her ideas are supported by experts but, by not presenting us with what they actually say, we can't determine if what they say truly supports her claims. We are left to merely trust their expertise along with her own presumed ability to make sound inferences.

My analysis of her hypothesis in *Gadfly* is based on her original paper on "White Fragility" (*International Journal of Critical Pedagogy*, Vol 3 [3] [2011] pp 54-70), upon which her book by the same



title is based (published by the UUA's Beacon Press in 2018). I also considered some of what she'd said in a 2017 *Yes!* magazine article entitled, "No, I Won't Stop Saying, 'White Supremacy.'"

Although I found many faults in her reasoning, the two fallacies I consider her most common errors are referred to as *hasty generalization* (also known as *converse accident*) and *circular reasoning* (also known as *begging the question*). The first of these occurs when one leaps to a conclusion based on insufficient or anecdotal evidence. In *Yes!*, for

example, DiAngelo says, "If it surprises and unsettles my audience that I use this term [white supremacy] to refer to us and not them [to "white progressives" and not "hate groups"], even after I have explained how I am

using it, then they have not been listening." This statement suggests that it is not possible for anyone who understands DiAngelo to disagree with her, which would further imply she has discovered an infallible truth.

In the same article, she goes on to say, "Many, especially older white people, associate the term white supremacy with extreme and explicit hate groups. However, for sociologists, white supremacy is a highly descriptive term for the culture we live in; a culture which positions white people and all that is associated with them (whiteness) as ideal." Here, DiAngelo implies that sociologists as a group agree with her. "When race scholars use the term white supremacy," she says, "we do not use it the same way as mainstream culture does."

Yet, in her article, *The History of White Supremacy: A Sociological Definition* [2019] another sociologist, Nicki Lisa Cole says, "white supremacy was the ideological driver of the European colonial projects

and U.S. imperial projects: it was used to rationalize unjust rule of people and lands, theft of land and resources, enslavement, and genocide.” This definition implies white supremacy is defined by past historical injustices, not as a term describing the current “culture we live in.”

Another sociologist, Eduardo Bonilla-Silva, similarly defines the term by its historical context, as “racially based political regimes that emerged post-fifteenth century.” In his well-researched book, *White Supremacy & Racism in the Post-Civil Rights Era* [2001], Bonilla-Silva rejects too broad a definition of racism, “which is or can be almost everything, is proven by anything done (or not done) by whites.” For such a “definition of racism is so inclusive that it loses its theoretical usefulness,” he says.

These are two sociologists’ definitions of white supremacy that differ from DiAngelo’s, even though she implies that sociologists and “race scholars” agree with hers. True, DiAngelo did not say “all” such experts agree with her, but by not saying “some,” or, better yet, providing a reliable percentage that do, the implication is that hers is the mainstream definition among this class of thinkers.

These kinds of hasty generalizations appear frequently in DiAngelo’s arguments. She uses terms like “whites,” “white people,” “older white people,” “many white people,” “white people as a group,” and so forth, without offering statistical information supporting her claims. Rather, she seems to first consider the pigment of their skin then works her way backward, to her predetermined beliefs about white people, as if their color is enough to infer general conclusions about their morals, motives, and mindsets. This is an example of circular reasoning, but racism itself might best be defined as a fallacy of hasty generalization (of judging a book by its cover), taking one look at the color of one’s skin and believing we’ve seen all we need to know. *Respect*, on the other hand, literally means taking a

“second look.” It means giving people a chance to prove themselves by looking beyond appearances and our own prejudices to see people for who they truly are, for “the content of their character.” It means respecting the inherent worth and dignity of every person.

I first encountered the term “White Fragility” at the Unitarian Universalist Association’s 2017 General Assembly in New Orleans. It was the name of a workshop (facilitated by DiAngelo) in the GA Program Guide, described as follows:

White Fragility is a state in which even a minimum amount of racial stress becomes intolerable, triggering a range of defensive moves, including argumentation, invalidation, silence, withdrawal. This workshop will provide the perspectives and skills needed for white people to build their racial stamina and create more racially just practice.

This was such an obvious example of circular reasoning that I could hardly believe it was being offered at an assembly of Unitarian Universalists who are supposed to “heed the guidance of reason” which helps “warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.” Yet, this workshop description essentially means that anything any white person says or does, or doesn’t say or do, is proof of their white fragility, which is akin to the overly broad definition of racism that Bonilla-Silva rejects as “so inclusive that it loses its theoretical usefulness.”

Such circular reasoning occurs when the conclusion of an argument is already contained within its premises. Here’s an example. *The Bible claims to be the Word of God. The Word of God cannot be wrong. Therefore, the Bible must be the Word of God.* It’s easy to see the fault in this line of reasoning, just as it should be in DiAngelo’s line of reasoning. Simply disagreeing with her does not automatically prove I’m a racist any more than being light skinned does.

Nor does disagreeing with Robin DiAngelo mean I think she’s a bad person who is driven by sinister

motives. She is not my enemy simply because I don't believe she's made a substantive or sound case supporting her "White Fragility" hypothesis. Her ideas, having been made public, warrant consideration and criticism, but she does not deserve to have her character impugned in order to undermine her ideas. Nor does anyone else for that matter. Liberalism relies upon reason and respect. This is how liberals ought to argue because doing so is largely what it means to be liberal. It's the kind of thinking we ought to promote and model for others, even when we're not treated with the same respect.

We mustn't judge, let alone condemn others because of their beliefs, no more than we should do so based upon the color of their skin. Let us, as our liberal religious tradition requires of us, judge ideas based upon sound reasoning and the rules of logic, as we continue to cherish the freedom of all to think and speak for themselves and remain committed to establishing a civil society in which we need not think alike to live peacefully and productively together.

Rev. Dr. Todd Eklof is minister of the UU Church of Spokane in Spokane, Washington, and Board President of the North American Unitarian Association.

Reading Across the Lifespan A Radical Act of Thoughtfulness

Lynn Jinishian

I want to start this piece by laying out all the worrying facts I've gathered about literacy—specifically, about reading books—just to get them off my chest. I have two reasons for this. First, maybe someone will read this and tell me I'm overreacting, in which case I can go back to quietly enjoying my reading life. Second, if the situation really is as concerning as it seems, then those of us

who care about building a better world should probably be paying attention. The good news is that if we *do* need to take action, the research suggests that the solutions are not only effective but also deeply enjoyable—so at least I'll be able to end this piece on a hopeful note.

Here's the Bad News

21% of adults in the U.S. are functionally illiterate, meaning they struggle with basic reading tasks—something that has serious consequences for employment, health literacy, and civic engagement. (*National Center for Education Statistics*)

54% of U.S. adults read below a 6th-grade level. (*National Literacy Institute*)

Americans are reading less for pleasure. Across all age groups, the number of books read and time spent reading for fun, personal growth, or curiosity has been steadily declining since 2011. (*National Endowment for the Arts*)

Even among "readers," book consumption is relatively low. The average number of books read per year by adults who consider themselves readers is **12**, but that number is misleading for the following two reasons:

1) The **median** number of books read per year is just **4**, meaning a small group of avid readers skews the average upward.

2) **23% of American adults say they haven't read a single book**—in any format (print, digital, or audio)—in the past year. (*Pew Research Center*)

Finally, access to books is shrinking in schools. More than **10,000 books were banned in public schools during the 2023–2024 school year**, restricting students' access to diverse perspectives, cultures, identities, and experiences.

There's plenty more to say about the decline of attention span, focus, memory, communication, reflective reasoning, discernment, and decision-making—not to mention the other critical skills that

help us live together tolerantly in a democratic society. We'll save that for another time.

For now, is it any wonder (in a funny-but-not-so-funny way) that Oxford University Press chose “**brain rot**” as the 2024 Word of the Year?

So What Happened to Reading for Pleasure?

It's easy to blame social media, streaming services, and our ever-present digital devices—after all, entertainment and distraction are always just a tap away. But the decline in reading isn't just about screen time. The full picture is a bit more complicated.

Reading will always struggle for attention with so many other ways to spend leisure time. When there are instantly available, highly interactive

forms of entertainment, who can blame young people (or adults) for wanting to be where the action is? Books are up against social media, online gaming, group chats, streaming platforms, and a never-ending feed of digital content. And honestly, much of it isn't bad—it's just different. Unlike reading, which is typically a solo activity, many of these alternatives are social, offering immediate connection and engagement. Reading requires a different kind of investment—one that doesn't provide instant feedback or a flurry of likes, but instead offers something deeper: imagination, reflection, and a quieter kind of joy. The challenge isn't just making time for reading, it's making reading feel as compelling and rewarding as these other options.

The majority of adults who read for pleasure were also once kids who read for fun—not because they

had to, but because they wanted to. And the kids today who choose reading as a leisure activity, without being assigned or rewarded for it, usually have a few key things in common: they grow up in homes where reading is modeled as an enjoyable and valued activity, they have access to books they can choose freely, and their reading preferences are respected. Over time, this helps them build a strong reader identity—one that lasts far beyond childhood—but this identity is unlikely to develop in a home with few books and adults who don't read during their own leisure time.

And it's not that schools aren't teaching literacy—they are. In fact, they do a pretty solid job of it. But fostering a love of reading? That's a different challenge. Schools are pressed for time, their curricula are packed, and very few kids develop a passion for books they're required to read. Joyful, self-directed reading—

the kind that turns children into lifelong readers—often happens outside the classroom, shaped by that culture of reading described at home and in the broader community.

At this point, we have to ask: Are we expecting too much? Maybe our new reality is simply that there are fewer people who genuinely enjoy reading than in the past, and maybe that's okay. Not everyone is going to be a book lover, just like not everyone is drawn to painting, playing music, or hiking in the woods. Maybe we should just accept that reading for pleasure is becoming more of a niche activity.

But before we settle for this, it's worth asking what else we might be losing. Reading isn't just about consuming stories, it's one of the most powerful ways we develop focus, deep thinking, memory,



and reflection. It strengthens our ability to reason, to empathize with others, and to consider perspectives beyond our own. It fuels creativity, insight, and imagination. This is true for readers across the lifespan. If fewer people read, are we at risk of becoming a society that struggles to think deeply, to sit with complexity, or to understand one another? Maybe the real challenge isn't just getting more people to read—it's recognizing what reading gives us that we can't easily replace.

So, What Can We Do?

If we believe that reading matters—not just as a pastime, but as a way to nurture critical thinking, empathy, and imagination—then we, as a liberal religious community, have an opportunity to support and encourage it. And the good news is that promoting a culture of reading doesn't require heavy-handed programs or rigid expectations. It starts with simple, enjoyable practices that make reading feel inviting, social, and meaningful.

At the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane, we've already begun building that culture with a new program called *Reading Across the Lifespan*. One Sunday each month our Children's Chapel in Religious Education becomes a celebration of books and stories. From pre-readers to young adults, kids get to explore a selection of books and choose one to take home, building their own personal libraries, one (or two) books at a time. And when a child has a special request for a specific book? Our growing team of book-loving adults makes sure it lands in their hands as quickly as possible. It's a simple but powerful way to show that reading isn't just encouraged; it's valued, supported, and shared.

Older youth and adults are participating in our Secret Readers Society, which I can't share much about (because it's a secret), but it involves code words and monthly reading prompts and ... well ... maybe I've already said too much ... *Shhhhh*.

Anyway, this is just the beginning. *Reading Across the Lifespan* is growing, with more ideas in the works to bring books and reading into the forefront

of our communal life. Because reading doesn't just make us more informed—it makes us better thinkers, better listeners, and ultimately, better world citizens. As Margaret Mead famously said, “*Never doubt that a small group of thoughtful, committed citizens can change the world. Indeed, it is the only thing that ever has.*” In a time when deep thinking, empathy, and reflection are more important than ever, choosing to read is not just an individual act; it's an act of community and a step toward a more thoughtful, engaged, and compassionate world.

Lynn Jinishian was born and raised in Spokane, Washington. She recently completed a 36-year career as a Registered Nurse and Nurse Educator. Lynn joined UUUCS in 1996 to be part of a religious liberal community with her husband Robert and their then infant son, Brian. Today she enjoys learning the tiniest details of things she didn't have time for previously—like how to make the perfect loaf of sourdough. She loves all dogs. If she is not at church on Sunday to learn more about Unitarian history and values, she's not far away—probably just unplugged at a cabin in the woods of North Idaho where there is a never-ending list of projects.

Erich Fromm's *Man For Himself*

Reviewed by Candace Schmidt

Erich Fromm wrote his book, *Man For Himself: An Inquiry into the Psychology of Ethics*, during the unprecedented upheaval of World War II. It was published in 1947 and explored the contrast between the authoritarian mindset and the humanistic ethic. Fromm contended that goodness mattered in a person's character and personality: “The value judgments we make determine our actions, and upon their validity rests our mental health and happiness.”

I personally read this book with a sense of fascination at the thoughtfulness and depth of Fromm's humanistic perspectives, especially as his viewpoints developed during a time that his homeland, Germany, was dominated by a fascist mentality. Fromm was a German-born psychoanalyst and social philosopher and studied

sociology and psychology at various universities in Germany. He fled the anti-Jewish regime in Germany in 1933 and moved first to Switzerland before settling in the United States. During Fromm's long career as a psychoanalyst he developed an admiration for the forcefulness of his patients' strivings to achieve happiness and health.

Fromm's description of the post-World War I prevalence of moral confusion and doubt of the humanistic values of human autonomy and reason sounded to me somewhat similar to today's postmodern skepticism of objective truth. He claimed the moral relativism of his time made humanity susceptible to irrational value systems, since "man cannot live without values and norms." Reading this made me wonder if the rise of postmodernism in our time has led to the adoption of irrational dependence on authoritarian value systems. Fromm believed it was man's inherent qualities that led to the development of a humanistic set of ethics, because to value and love one's human self spontaneously increases one's capacity for goodness and productiveness. He defined productiveness as an outgrowth of a person's sense of agency, a belief in one's talents and abilities. The person must be free to exercise these abilities and not be dependent on someone else to control them.

The tradition of the humanistic ethic is not incompatible with rational authority, but is in opposition to the authoritarian ethic that says only an authority can determine what is right and wrong and can develop norms and laws for conduct. Fromm explains that rational authority has its roots in competence and permits constant scrutiny and evaluation. The source of irrational authority, in contrast, is always power over people, and thrives on irrational awe, admiration, and intimidation; it

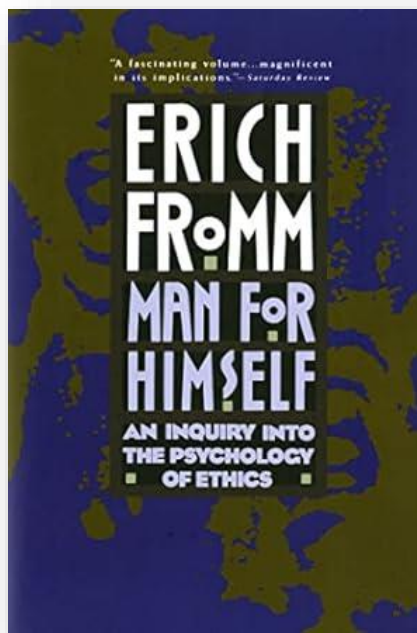
denies man's capacity to know what is good or bad. Rational authority is based on the perceived equality of authority and citizen, while criticism of an irrational authority figure or institution is forbidden and punished.

In describing humanity's nature and character, Fromm believed we are not free to choose whether or not we have ideals and values because it is part of human nature to need norms in order to live with others in families, communities and societies. However, we are free to choose between alternate sets of ideals with which to guide ourselves. He

states, "a relativistic view which claims that to have some ideal or some religious feeling is valuable in itself is dangerous and erroneous." Instead, we must evaluate ideals according to whether they are conducive to the unfolding of man's abilities and to the extent they lead to the human need for harmony and productiveness. Fromm described the humanistic ethic as one that allows for people to love themselves fully while also loving others. The notion that people can only do one or the other is false; love of self and others is not mutually exclusive. In other words, it is not a zero-sum scenario. Fromm

emphasized that love of self is not selfishness, but an active striving for personal growth and happiness, while also desiring others to strive for their own growth and happiness. In contrast, the selfish person wants everything for the self and takes no pleasure in giving to others.

The section of the book addressing characteristics of the authoritarian conscience was one I found particularly interesting, given the daily assault by our country's new leadership on society at large in the United States. Fromm states that both leadership and those oppressed by that leadership can exhibit an authoritarian conscience. "It is the voice of an internalized external authority, the



parents, the state, or whoever the authorities in a culture happen to be.” The expectations of that authority become part of a person’s personality, leading to a sense of fear if some expectation is not met. An individual is not able to use one’s own value judgment for decisions, but is restricted to only consider what the authority says is good or bad, right or wrong. This type of conscience affects a person’s image of the authority, which is admired and colored by an aura of perfection. These qualities of internalization and projection, according to Fromm, results in an unshakable conviction in the ideal character of the authority and is immune to all evidence to the contrary. Such a person finds inner security by feeling part of the authority and in turn feels part of that authority’s strength.

To read Fromm is to read about the value of productiveness in the life of the individual and society. He believed the humanistic ethic was essential to a person’s ability to be productive and to further the well-being and happiness of the self and of society. He also wrote about four different types of ethical thought that are non-productive and inhibit the flourishing of one’s talents and gifts. The Exploitative Orientation consists of the belief that everything one wants can only be attained from others and the only way to receive is to take from others by force or manipulation. A person with a Receptive Orientation also believes that anything one wants can only be received by something external. Finding someone who can supply them with love, affection and a sense of value is paramount, and they often have a hard time saying “no” and standing up for themselves. A third orientation is Hoarding, in which people base their security on hoarding and saving, and protect themselves by developing a psychological fortress that does not allow for the freedom of others and focuses on the retention of things and people. Fromm identified a fourth non-productive type he called a Marketing Orientation, characterized by the personality market. The individual is focused on always “being in demand” and “experiences one’s self as a commodity” and furthermore considers others to be commodities, too. Fromm believed all of these non-productive orientations blocked the natural individual striving for authenticity in relating

to oneself and others with mature and non-possessive love.

Fromm concluded his book by stressing his belief that every individual has the ability to think for him- or herself and by encouraging people to take themselves, their lives, and their happiness seriously. He firmly believed in man’s capacity for growth and in the value for society to create the conditions conducive to human flourishing.

Candace Schmidt is a member of the Unitarian Universalist Church of Spokane and a retired counselling psychologist. She identifies as a humanistic psychologist and during her clinical work with clients strove to provide the compassion, authenticity, and unconditional positive regard conducive to individual growth.

A Thousand Small Sanities: The Moral Adventure of Liberalism

Reviewed by Kevin McCulloch

The new identity-based orthodoxies in progressive spaces are hard to pin down, so it has been tricky for me to identify what word I think best encapsulates their fundamental error. I don’t describe myself as “anti-woke” because woke is too broad a pejorative, and it gives the impression that I’m aligned with perspectives that deny the reality and continued impact of America’s racist past. A much better word is “illiberal,” since it highlights the problem with certain kinds of behavior, such as cancel campaigns, without dismissing the concerns that inspire it. The question, for me, is not whether we should be anti-racist. Of course we should. The question is: are we going to be liberal anti-racists, or illiberal ones?

I think this is a good framing, but it invites the obvious question: what does it mean to be “liberal”? I’ve been looking for books to help articulate an answer. This is how I came across Adam Gopnik’s 2019 book-length essay, *A Thousand Small Sanities: The Moral Adventure of Liberalism*.

It's an excellent book: clear, concise, memorable, and quotable. It's short enough to read in a weekend, but it's rich and worth lingering over. I recommend it highly.

Gopnik is a staff writer for *The New Yorker*, where his contributions range from art and book criticism to international reporting and fiction. Although his book is full of historical anecdote, it is not academic. There are no footnotes or endnotes (but we do learn in an afterword that it was extensively fact-checked by his *New Yorker* colleagues). He describes himself as "a middle-aged essayist with a taste for epigrams," which is exactly right. You will want to read with pen and paper at hand to jot down the turns of phrase you find most resonant.

As with any good argumentative essay, his book has a clear, simple structure. His three main chapters, "What Is Liberalism?," "Why the Right Hates Liberalism," and "Why the Left Hates Liberalism," allow him to stake out his position and defend it against objections from both sides of the political spectrum. His characterization of right- and left-wing objections seemed fair to me, although this strategy always leaves an author open to the accusation that they're arguing against straw men. There are always other objections, or objections that could be stated in different ways. People are good at twiddling with their views in order to slip away from the traps set by their opponents. But his approach allows him the opportunity to offer something of a taxonomy of right- and left-wing thinking, which is almost as useful as the positive conception of liberalism he advances.

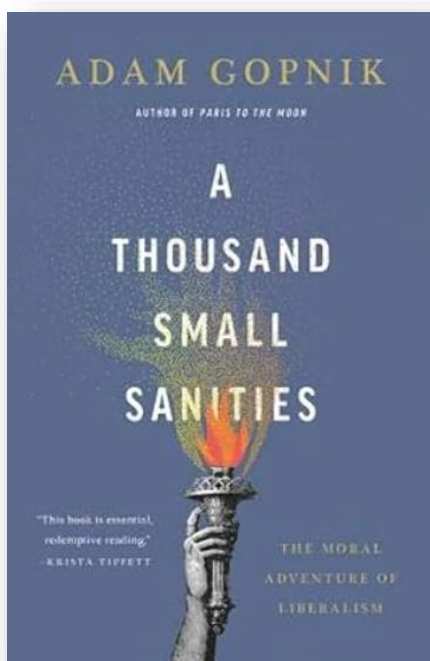
As to that conception, Gopnik follows scholars such as Kwame Anthony Appiah in defining liberalism as

a demonstration of moral sentiment, not just an enthusiasm for contracts and procedures. "Liberalism isn't a political theory applied to life," he assures us. "It's what we know about life applied to a political theory." To show this, he tries to sketch in the emotional lives of the figures he discusses, from the unconventional romances of John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor, and, a few decades later, George Henry Lewes and Marian Evans (a.k.a. George Eliot), to the insistent authenticity of openly-gay civil-rights leader Bayard

Rustin, to the sympathy with which Adam Smith kept David Hume company as he lay dying. It's an affecting approach that underscores a key argument, which is that liberalism is never a philosophy of big ideas. It's a philosophy of small, insistent reforms, tailored always to the circumstances at hand. He allows that this approach is rhetorically weak; "What do we want? Modest, reasonable reforms!" is not a cry for the balustrades. But its modesty is precisely its strength, for the liberal approach allows the reformer to build broad, durable

coalitions that are more effective, in the long run, than short-sighted radicalism. If you'll remember the famous quote, the moral arc of the universe not only bends toward justice; it is *long*. The moral project of turning human hearts away from cruelty cannot be rushed.

This, in Gopnik's telling, is the chief moral aim of liberalism: not to make an imperfect world perfect, but to make it less cruel. This conviction rests on two foundations. First is the recognition of human fallibility—"the truth that we are usually wrong about everything and always divided within ourselves about anything we believe." This is the truth that sets liberalism decisively against its polar



opposite, dogmatism. Second is the insight that we do not need a perfect conception of the good to recognize what is bad. Cruelty, starvation, and state murder are bad things, and we don't need an airtight political theory to recognize this. We only need to consult our hearts. Humanism precedes liberalism, Gopnik insists, and to underscore this point he focuses on Michel de Montaigne, the 16th century inventor of the essay and, arguably, the first modern liberal. Montaigne arrived on the scene a good two centuries before the "age of reason" that we think of as liberalism's flowering, at a time when state power reflected the arbitrary will of kings and even the powerful had only the hope of fair treatment. Montaigne "knew that abstract justice almost never gets done, certainly not in his time," says Gopnik. "But he also knew that individual acts of cruelty could stop if people simply stopped doing so many cruel things." Gopnik is right on these points, and his arguments should serve as a rebuke to the UUA ideologues who think they have effected radical change by jettisoning their liberal principles and replacing them with a mushy cloud centered on the word "love." As Gopnik ably shows, love has been at the center all along.

Gopnik's chapters on right- and left-wing objections to liberalism are long but engaging, and they are made stronger by the sympathy he shows to the concerns of each side. For the right, he allows that modernity can, indeed, displace people and uproot communities, and he speaks admiringly of "constitutional conservatives," those on the right who pursue their aims within a liberal, democratic framework. He turns to figures such as Disraeli, Churchill and de Gaulle to illustrate how patriotism can strengthen, rather than undermine, democratic flourishing. As for the illiberal authoritarians, he classifies them into three groups: the triumphalist, who despise liberalism because they think it weak; the theological, who object to liberal materialism; and the tragic, who object to liberal hubris—the confidence that all problems can be solved with reason. He does not have much sympathy for the strongman politics of the triumphalists, but to the theological and the tragic, he counter-argues that a

base norm of liberalism is more amenable to their concerns than they allow. It is not as anti-communal, nihilistic or intolerant as they claim; in fact, on this last point, he emphasizes that pluralism is more accepting of genuine religious conviction than theocracy.

But I think his chapter on left-wing objections to liberalism will be of most value to *Liberal Beacon* readers, given the long-simmering tension between liberals and leftists in our churches. Gopnik is sympathetic to the core criticism of the left, which is that, for all our high-minded talk of reform, liberal societies such as ours remain cruel: we fail to feed and house our poor, and we outsource our worst cruelties overseas, where grim atrocities facilitate the cheap labor that keeps us fed and entertained. Indeed, Gopnik readily allows the point: genocide is as much a product of Western civilization as public health and civil rights, and it would be blinkered to ignore the fact. And yet, he writes, "over the centuries, the fallibilism central to liberalism has sponsored within it a corrective conscience," and this conscience has provided a humane way forward even when our darker impulses reign. "The urge to commit atrocities is standard to all human systems; the institutionalized urge to amend them is not." This is the enduring strength of liberal society, but it depends on a point that the left is loathe to cede: that reform is actually possible within the liberal framework, and that the sins of our past have not left our present society so corrupted that the only proper response is to burn it down and start again.

Gopnik does address the turn toward cultural criticism in recent left-wing thought, and shares his liberal alternatives to concepts such as intersectionality and privilege, but he doesn't dwell on them. Anyone looking for a point-by-point refutation of, say, anti-racist dogma will find more comprehensive arguments elsewhere. He's also (as befits a Canadian) more sympathetic to the argument that speech should be curtailed to avoid harming minority groups than America's free-speech absolutists would like, although he ultimately agrees that speech should be curtailed as

little as possible. In the end, he hopes to lay the ground for a reconciliation between liberals and radicals, and as his example of this possibility he spends several pages recounting the life of “perhaps the greatest of all Americans,” Frederick Douglass, who evolved from a radical, prophetic critic of Lincoln’s pragmatism into one of Lincoln’s most devoted admirers and, after the war, a liberal, institutionalist politician himself. “Douglass was a prophetic absolutist *and* a political constitutionalist,” he concludes, “and the almost unimaginable bravery of his journey should remind us that both are essential.”

Essential for our nation, and essential for our liberal church. I’ve long argued that Unitarian Universalism is at its best when our radical, prophetic yearning for justice is tempered by our liberal humility and awareness of our own limits. It has been hard, for those of us whose instincts are rooted more firmly in that liberal sentiment, to watch our association become a hotbed of rash and counterproductive infighting over dogma and jargon. Someone badly needs to stand up for the liberal perspective, so long maligned, that is the true heart of our tradition. Gopnik’s book can help.

Kevin McCulloch is a lifelong Unitarian Universalist who helps to coordinate adult religious education at his local congregation in Roswell, Georgia. He is a member of the Liberal Beacon editorial board.

The Demise of Unitarian Universalist Theism

Floyd Vernon Chandler

This reflection is a collection of stories. The first story begins in 2002. The location was Camp Bondsteel, Kosovo. I was on an eleven-month tour of duty as the senior U.S. Army Chaplain for the Kosovo Force (KFOR), a NATO peacekeeping operation with international troops stationed primarily in the countries of Kosovo and Macedonia. The key mission of our Area Support Group chaplain

office was to provide logistical support, training, and worship aids for the U.S. Army chaplains and chapels scattered throughout the footprint. Most Sunday mornings were spent visiting various worship services among the six Army chapels located in Kosovo and Macedonia. Sometimes I was asked to deliver a guest sermon during the visit. Usually, my chaplain assistant and I sat in one of the chapel pews and participated as members of the congregation. Before or after the scheduled service, we might meet with assigned chaplains and chaplain assistants to ascertain any needs or problems that might require our assistance. If the worship service concluded around lunchtime, we often joined the chapel staff for lunch in their respective dining facilities. Most Sunday afternoons, we were back in our offices located in the South Chapel at Camp Bondsteel.

A couple of months following my arrival in Kosovo, I initiated Unitarian Universalist worship services late every Sunday afternoon in the South Chapel. It was announced by sign on the chapel door, and it was noted in the “Worship Opportunities” flyer that was passed out to new soldiers arriving in Kosovo. We rarely had more than four or five in attendance. The service was more akin to an adult religious education class. I might provide a religious reading, and the gathered soldiers discussed the material while sharing with one another aspects of their faith journeys. Some attendees were members of Unitarian Universalist congregations in the USA, but many soldiers visited the service out of curiosity.

One fellow officer, a young Army Major I will call “Chuck,” checked out one of the Unitarian Universalist services after a conversation he and I had had the previous week. Chuck had been raised in a more conservative Christian tradition and he was genuinely interested in trying to find a spiritual community that was more open to his questions and doubts. He seemed interested when I shared with him aspects of the Transcendentalist movement within Unitarianism and the Universalist concept of universal salvation, and he became a regular attendee at the Sunday afternoon Unitarian Universalist services/discussion group.

You say “Hello” to new comrades in the Army and you later say your “Good-byes” to the very same soldiers who have become dear friends. Personnel

are coming and going in most military units. However, it is uncanny how old Army buddies often resurface at later assignments and the friendships can be re-established. So it was with Chuck and me. A year later, when I was assigned to Heidelberg, Germany, he appeared in a hallway down from the V Corps chaplain office. He had been reassigned to V Corps!

We went to lunch at the nearby military dining facility and caught up on one another's life. Chuck asked me if there were any Unitarian Universalist services in the Heidelberg area. I told him of a group that met twice monthly at a nearby Army chapel. There was no Heidelberg service slated for the

following Sunday, but it just happened that I had planned, the very next Sunday, to attend the only other English language Unitarian Universalist congregation in Germany. The service was scheduled to be conducted at a U.S. Air Force chapel located about an hour drive from Heidelberg. I invited Chuck to ride along with me. He accepted the offer.

The term "God" was a bit of a mystery to Chuck (as it is for most everyone) but he believed in a spiritual presence or higher power. He also believed in the soul and embraced some notion of immortality, and he held much respect for the teachings of Jesus. Yet he couldn't understand the church of his childhood where eternal hell had been preached. The concept of universal salvation better appealed to Chuck. Although prayer was a mystery to him, he believed that it could impact both the person praying and the one for whom prayers are made. He considered himself an "open-minded Christian."

When we arrived at the Air Force chapel, Chuck and I took a seat on a pew near the front. There were about 35 individuals in attendance. It was a lay led service and the gentleman leading it began by

welcoming attendees. Afterward, he added a strange comment, "I guess you visitors had to come out and see what this bunch of atheists were all about!" There were a few chuckles among the congregation, but not from Chuck or me.

I was startled by the words, but I felt more concern for my friend Chuck. Other than the small and informal services in Kosovo, this was the first time he'd experienced a real Unitarian Universalist worship service. I looked over at him and could sense his discomfort. Visiting with a bunch of atheists was not why he had accepted my invitation to attend the service. Still, we stayed until it was over.



I can no longer recall its program topic, but I will never forget that welcoming comment. On the drive back to Heidelberg, I tried to assure Chuck that not all Unitarian Universalists were atheists but welcome people from all theological perspectives, including atheists. He was

friendly during the drive back to Heidelberg, but he never again inquired about attending such gatherings and politely declined any of my invitations to do so.

The founders and early leaders of both Unitarianism and Universalism were theists and self-identified as Christians. John Murray, Elhanan Winchester, George de Benneville, Hosea Ballou, Thomas Starr King and many others considered themselves Christian Universalists. William Ellery Channing, Ralph Waldo Emerson, and Theodore Parker considered themselves Unitarian Christians. They were all theists. "Unitarian" was used to refer to the oneness of God. "Universalist" was used to refer to universal salvation and the destiny of the soul following the death of the human body. Both Unitarians and Universalists believed in prayer and held high regard for the teaching of Jesus of Nazareth.

In the early 1800s, worshipers in Unitarian and Universalist churches did not think of themselves as Sunday morning atheists. Both groups considered themselves liberal Christians. In the late 1800s, the Universalist Church of America was the 6th largest denomination in the United States. How Unitarianism and Universalism have changed!

A rather progressive United Methodist minister (and a classmate from my student days at Candler School of Theology) recently shared the following story with me. I will call him “Luke.” Luke had served United Methodist parishes for several years before accepting a church-related teaching position that allowed him

free Sundays. He used his free Sundays to visit various churches near his new home and later told me of his visit to the local Unitarian Universalist congregation. Upon his first Sunday visit, he was impressed by the signs and notices in the vestibule. He read of Buddhist meditation classes, a pro-choice abortion rally, and an upcoming Wiccan Beltane service. He also noticed an area casually draped off to the side of the vestibule.

Luke attended two Sunday worship services at this local Unitarian Universalist congregation, which was without a minister for one reason or another, so both services were lay led. He felt neither felt like a worship service. There were no references to the Bible or God. There was no prayer. He thought that the two programs seemed more like civic club meetings, but found the members were welcoming and friendly.

After the second Sunday he’d attended, Luke engaged a member of the congregation in the vestibule and inquired as to what was behind the draped area. The member walked over to the drapes and untied the knots holding the curtain in place. Hidden behind the cloth covering was a beautiful and intricate wood carving of the Last



Supper. The carving had been made into the actual wooden wall of the vestibule.

“That is so beautiful!” Luke exclaimed. After examining it in more detail, he asked, “Why do you keep this stunning artwork hidden behind cloth drapes?”

“A member of the church made the carving over 75 years ago,” the member replied. “It is beautiful, but some members thought it was too Christian and that the carving might offend some potential members if it was left undraped. So, the church members voted to keep it covered to avoid

offending anyone.”

Luke glanced around the vestibule again and saw the Buddhist meditation notice, the Pro-choice abortion rally information, and the invitation to the

Wiccan Beltane service, all taped to the wall near the drapes covering the Last Supper carving. He thanked the member for showing him the carving but never returned there for another service.

I was employed as a Department of Veterans Affairs hospice chaplain for three years. Hospice chaplaincy has to be one of the most rewarding and meaningful of any of my ministry experiences. When a veteran died in our hospice unit, we often conducted a short memorial service at bedside, or in the small hospice chapel, prior to the body being transported to the medical center morgue.

One such service remains etched into my memory. A member of the family had asked me to read the prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Knowing that the prayer was in the Unitarian Universalist hymnal, *Singing the Living Tradition*, I walked to the nearby chaplain office and retrieved my copy. On my way back to the hospice unit, I thumbed through the pages and found the reading. I bookmarked the page, then joined family members and various

hospice staff for the service. At the appropriate time I read from the hymnal what I thought was the Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi. Afterward, however, one of the Catholic nurses approached me and asked, “Why did you omit the final sentence in the St. Francis prayer?”

I opened the hymnal and checked to see how I might have missed reading the last sentence. With the nurse standing by me, I pointed to the passage and read the last sentence aloud to her, “For it is in giving that we receive, and in pardoning that we are pardoned.”

“Yes,” she proclaimed. “That is what you read, but that is not the last sentence of the prayer!”

She took the hymnal from my hands and studied the words. She looked surprised. “The last sentence is missing in this book,” she said. “The final verse is, ‘It is in dying that one is raised to eternal life.’”

I returned to my office and checked other sources. Sure enough, the editors of the Unitarian Universalist hymnal had deleted the most theologically theistic verse in the entire prayer. The words of St. Francis referring to the soul and immortality had been edited out of the prayer. That was the day that I decided I’d never again trust the accuracy of any reading found in a Unitarian Universalist hymnal!

How did Unitarian and Universalist congregations move from Christian theism to predominately anti-Christian atheism? I suspect the progression, or regression, has been death by a thousand cuts. One significant laceration was the signing of the *Humanist Manifesto* in 1933. Of the 34 signers, about half were prominent Unitarian and Universalist ministers.

Article I of the *Manifesto* rejects any creation motif or creative intelligence for the origin of the universe. Article III rejects philosophical or

theological dualism (body and mind/spirit). Article VI affirms that the time has passed for theism and deism.

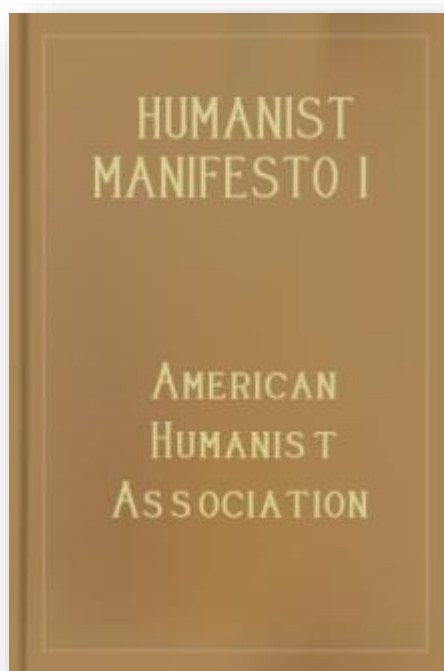
The signers of the *Humanist Manifesto* stated that their goal was to create a new “Religious Humanism.” However, the Unitarian and Universalist signers remained active in their respective Unitarian and Universalist parishes and ministerial associations. Did the emergence of the *Humanist Manifesto* signal the beginning of the revising of Unitarian and Universalist hymns and responsive readings? Was the *Manifesto* behind the Unitarian and Universalist efforts to delete words/phrases that supported dualism and theism?

The impact of the *Humanist Manifesto*, and the movement of Unitarians and Universalists away from theism, might be worthy of additional research.

My intention is not to paint humanism as evil. Most people of faith embrace the humanist ethic that humankind shares a responsibility for the care of the planet and the human condition. Even among fundamentalist Christians, there are many who interpret the Genesis creation stories as sacred paradigms supporting this humanist ethic.

Nor do all atheists embrace humanist philosophy. But, per the *Humanist Manifesto*, all humanists profess atheism. Humanism/atheism is a legitimate philosophical position.

Among many of my humanist friends and colleagues are some of the more ethical individuals I know. Many humanists adhere to admirable moral codes. Heck, it takes much more belief, or unbelief, to uphold humanism/atheism than does the rather muddled conviction of agnosticism! But humanism/atheism and theism make for some rather strange bed partners within a religious faith.



Here are two diametrically opposed world views seeking a common spiritual language.

What about the spiritual phenomena of piety, conviction, spiritual rebirth, repentance, prayer, penance? Does the soul have any relevance for a non-theist? Can a moral code ever transcend to the level of faith?

The early Universalists were men and women of faith. Piety and repentance were foundational teachings among our Universalist forebearers. In his autobiography "Life and Trance of Doctor George de Benneville," America's first Universalist preacher and teacher recounts his own fifteen months of agonizing and soul-searching repentance that accompanied his spiritual rebirth. Later in life, his 42-hour near death experience further convinced de Benneville of the necessity of spiritual repentance. Akin to John the Baptist and Jesus of Nazareth, Universalist George de Benneville stressed that one must "Repent for the kingdom of God is at hand."

The kingdom of God is not a physical place or a geographical location. The kingdom of God is an unseen spiritual realm, in and around us, permeated by the awesome and radiant energy of love. Spiritual awakening, or spiritual rebirth, is necessary for one to sense the spiritual realm. Pietism, another word for a daily devotional or prayer life, is a helpful prelude to spiritual awakening. The spiritual phenomenon of repentance always follows spiritual awakening or spiritual rebirth.

The early Universalists firmly believed in the spiritual realm. Atheism was incompatible with early Universalism.

When I was ordained a Unitarian Universalist minister, at a very young twenty-three years of age, I claimed humanism as my religious orientation. (In truth, I was more of an agnostic with some humanistic leanings.) It was after the age of 30, seven years after embarking upon the UU ministry, that I came to embrace a more natural theism, or pantheism, following a profound spiritual awakening. My evolving theology drew me to the mystical and theistic aspects of the early Christian Universalist faith. This was when I initially became aware that theism was no longer nurtured within

Unitarian Universalism. Unitarian and Universalist theism was dying.

I doubt that the *Humanist Manifesto*, or any other one-time event, was the fatal stab against Unitarian and Universalist theism. The death of liberal religious theism was by a thousand cuts.

I will close with a joke.

A newcomer took a seat in one of the pews at her local UU church. When the minister began preaching about Unitarian Universalism, the newcomer became more and more enthusiastic, and finally she shouted "Amen!" when the minister proclaimed that Unitarian Universalists were free to believe or not believe anything about God.

There was a long-time member of the church in the next pew, who leaned over and glared at the newcomer. The long-time member hissed, "In this church, we do not shout 'Amen' during the sermon."

Floyd Vernon Chandler Vernon served as an ordained Unitarian Universalist minister for 47 years. In February 2024, he resigned from ministerial fellowship with the Unitarian Universalist Association and is now recognized as an ordained Universalist minister with the Christian Universalist Association and is currently pursuing the Benedictine oblate path via the World Community for Christian Meditation. He and his family reside in Ansbach, Germany.

Sharing Circles

Ann Pandya

During the years when I was part of Unitarian Universalist congregations, an activity that I found to be the most satisfying was something called "covenant groups" or "chalice circles."

Groups of 6 to 8 people committed to meeting once or twice a month for approximately two hours each. Agenda topics ranged from the simple (humor, best loved books, travel experiences) to the profound (forgiveness, money, aging). The agenda was comprised of quotes and readings. These led into 3

to 4 questions that each attendee was invited to respond to in turn.

Why I Found this Appealing

Over time, the people in my covenant group became some of my closest friends. I got to know them in 3D through knowing their life journeys. I am sure they got to know me in the same way as well.

I had grown up in a society where I had daily interacted with people of differing ages, education levels, and socio-economic classes. These interactions had taken place as a result of the lifestyle, even while I was fully engaged in my family, education, and job.

In contrast, my everyday life as an adult in America was, in current lingo, optimized to focus on family/work commitments. I imagine most people experience some version of this when they have a young family. But my situation was more extreme because I lacked a social network of parents, siblings, relatives, college friends... people with whom I shared a past and expected to share a present and a future. This had led to what I came to see as a one-dimensional and artificially texture-free life. Self-focused and disconnected from the human condition.

My covenant group filled this lack and made it possible for me to feel less atomized.

Storytelling

Maybe all it was, was a hunger for stories. To know others' stories and to tell my own. And, through some alchemy, to feel seen, enriched, supported.

In my day job, I was creating websites for surveys (designed by psychologists) that were meant to help corporate employees become more self-aware and therefore more productive at work.

One survey was about the physical, mental, emotional, and spiritual state of a person. While most of the survey questions were on the usual 5-point scale, one section was entirely comment based. It was called the Storytelling survey, and it had 2 or 3 simple questions of the kind, "The high point in my life so far has been:" It was an invitation for the survey participants to get in touch with their inner lives and articulate what mattered to them.

I occasionally reviewed the data because, as a personal project, I was trying to find the major themes in the tens of thousands of data points/narratives available to me. I consistently found myself affected by the responses to this question. People wrote with feeling and nuance. One of the most common responses to the question about the high point of the person's life was "the birth of my child."

(As an aside, the short survey section that children in the 10-18 age range were invited to complete asked a question about their relationship with their parents. The most common theme was "I would like to spend more time with mom/dad." This was poignant to me. These two sets of responses taken together provided a snapshot about the state of corporate employment in the country and its effect on families. Unfortunately, neither my employer nor our client was interested in such a meta-analysis.)

Over years of working with this survey, I came to realize the importance of storytelling for self and for others. When we tell our stories we become visible to ourselves and can affect those who engage with our stories. In turn, we feel more connected, and transformed even when we come in contact with others' stories.

When it came my turn to create an agenda for the covenant group, is it any surprise that I chose storytelling as the topic?

My Storytelling Agenda

Welcome and Opening Thoughts

- Welcome to this gathering! We have come together to create a sacred space where we can step aside from our everyday busyness and concerns, and spend our brief time together in companionship, reflection, and wonder.
- Throughout history, stories have served to pass on cultural and practical knowledge from one generation to another—think fables, myths, tales around the campfire, or stories around the kitchen table. Today's meeting is an invitation to share our own stories. Events, experiences, or encounters that left a mark. We hope to learn from our own reflections, and from the

thoughtful exchange of our thoughts and experiences with each other.

Statement of Intention

- Let us honor everyone's privacy.
- Let us respond with appreciation, never judgment.
- Let us make sure everyone has a voice in the conversation.

Sharing and check-in, followed by group responses and support

- How have you been since we last met? And how are you today—spiritually, emotionally, physically?

Thoughts to guide today's session

- It has been said that next to hunger and thirst, our most basic human need is for storytelling—Kahlil Gibran
- Stories make us more alive, more human, more courageous, more living—Madeleine L'Engle
- Results repeatedly show that our attitudes, fears, hopes, and values are strongly influenced by story. In fact, stories seem to be more effective at changing beliefs than writing that is specifically designed to persuade through argument and evidence—Jonathan Gottschall
- The most basic and powerful way to connect with another person is to listen. Just listen. Perhaps the most important thing we ever give each other is our attention. A loving silence often has far more power to heal and to connect than the most well-intentioned words—Rachel Naomi Remen

Sharing and deep listening

After each person has shared, we will have a minute of silent reflection. Then we will respond to the

speaker. This way, each speaker will get deep listening and full engagement. Tell a story about:

1. Something that happened to you as a child.
2. Something that happened to you as an adult.
3. A time when you changed your mind about a person or about a deeply held belief/value.

Gathering

This is our time to supportively respond to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.

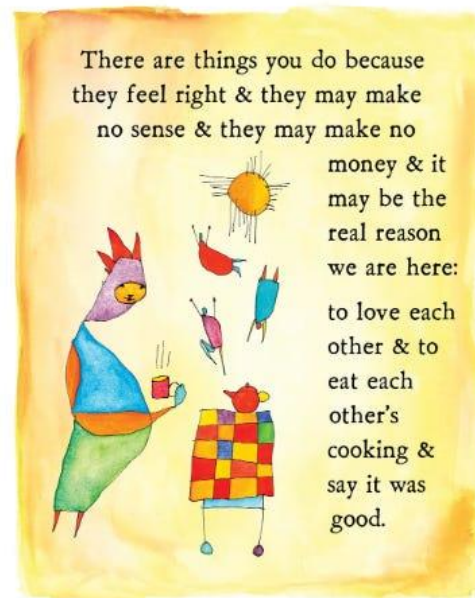
Closing

- Each story is a piece of us, a gift to the world. May each story we heard today help us become more connected to ourselves and to universal humanity. May our search for community with each other deepen our perception of ideas and forces that are both within and greater than ourselves.

Conclusion

I am no longer a member of any Unitarian Universalist community. For a variety of reasons—mainly mismatch with their racist narrative—I don't expect to rejoin. I miss the many ways that being part of a faith community offered to connect with strangers who became friends. Book clubs, writing groups, movie clubs, dining out, circle dinners, all conducted under an umbrella of goodwill. Of these, I miss most the covenant group in which I participated for over three years.

I no longer recall the finer points of the stories that I heard during those meetings. But I do remember the people and their openness to being authentic and vulnerable. Like the contours that ocean waves leave on a sandy beach, the stories leave their contours on our souls. Or, as Maya Angelou eloquently put it:



“I’ve learned that people will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel.”

There are things you do because they feel right & they may make no sense & they may make no money & it may be the real reason we are here: to love each other & to eat each other's cooking & to **know each other's stories** & say it was good.

Ann Pandya grew up in Mumbai and has lived in the United States for nearly four decades. She has a graduate degree in mathematics from the Indian Institute of Technology and is a former software

developer. You can also read more of her writing by subscribing to her blog “Notes from a Naturalized American” at [Notes from a Naturalized American | Nandini | Substack](#)

