

JANUARY 2024

# MONTHLY MUSINGS FROM UUMFE

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## Welcome to Monthly Musings from UUMFE

The Unitarian Universalist Ministry for Earth offers monthly worship and small group ministry resources that are Earth-centered and focused on climate justice.

This month we shift our focus to eco-morality and virtues of religious naturalism as presented by Ursula Goodenough in *The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life Has Emerged and Evolved*.

A religious naturalist orientation is a form of spirituality and philosophy that combines the ideas of naturalism (the natural world is all there is, and everything can be explained through natural causes and laws) with a spiritual outlook that emphasizes people's relationship to nature and the importance of ethical behavior. This month, we focus on the virtue of humility which is an outcome of reverence, awe and wonder.

## January: Humility



UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST  
MINISTRY FOR EARTH

*Respect Life. Restore Earth. Renew Spirit.*

### Worship Service Prompts:

Here are several prompts to guide your sermons and service titles.

1. How do we open our capacity to perceive the sacred?
2. How has your relationship with Nature led you from self-centeredness? As humans, we have inherent worth and dignity, and we are called to humility.
3. There is a humility in learning from other species. From what species do you or we learn?

### CHALICE LIGHTING

In "Nature Needs a New Pronoun", Robin Wall-Kimmerer says, "By learning from other species, we learn humility." As we light this chalice, we honor the more-than-human teachers who inspire how we might live.

## OPENING WORDS

We gather and open with the words of Religious Naturalist, Ursula Goodenough: "Blessed be the tie that binds. It anchors us. We are embedded in a great story of biological evolution, despair, elegant process of mutation and selection and bricolage. And this means that we are anything but alone." (The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life has Emerged and Evolved by Ursula Goodenough)



"Consider the Life of Trees"  
by Cedric Wright

Consider the life of trees.

Aside from the axe, what trees acquire from man is inconsiderable.

What man may acquire from trees is immeasurable.

From their mute forms there flows a poise, in silence,  
a lovely sound and motion in response to wind.

What peace comes to those aware of the voice and bearing of trees!

Trees do not scream for attention.

A tree, a rock, has no pretense, only a real growth out of itself, in close communion with the universal spirit.

A tree retains a deep serenity.

It establishes in the earth not only its root system but also those roots of its beauty and its unknown consciousness.

Sometimes one may sense a glimmer of that consciousness,  
and with such perspective, feel that man is not necessarily the highest form of life.

## READINGS

"Our [great] story [of biological evolution] tells us of the sacredness of life - the astonishing complexity of cells and organisms and the vast lengths of time it took to generate their splendid diversity - and the sacredness of the planetary matrix within which life is embedded. Reverence is the capacity to perceive the sacred, to harbor the sense that there are entities larger and more important than the self to which one accords awe and gratitude and to which one develops obligation and commitment. Theistic persons traditionally offer reverence to a supernatural deity or deities, while nontheistic religious naturalists are called to revere the whole enterprise of planetary existence, the whole and all of its myriad living beings as they catalyze and replicate and mutate and evolve and synergize as ecosystems. Reverence also endows us with humility and hence defeats our susceptibility to self-absorption." (The Sacred Depths of Nature: How Life has Emerged and Evolved by Ursula Goodenough, p. 213.)

"Becoming more fully human involves the transformation of the mind and heart from self-centeredness to a sense of one's self as part of a larger sacred whole and to a deep commitment to the human and natural worlds." (Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century by William R. Murry, p. 152.)

Humanistic religious naturalism promotes an ethical life in which one thinks and acts from a larger perspective than one's own egoistic interests, a life that affirms the worth and dignity of each person, a life filled with wonder and reverence for the extraordinary magnificence of the natural world and human creations. It includes gratitude for the gift of life itself and the capacity to enjoy it." (Reason and Reverence: Religious Humanism for the 21st Century by William R. Murry, p. 153.)

## HUMBLE

by Rev. Jennifer DeBusk Alviar

Healing presence in nature from war and wound

United in holy communion with Earth's elements

Mindful of aesthetic space guided by nature's wisdom for spiritual renewal

Blessed with an artist's eye to envision beauty in the face of injustice

Listening with deep attentiveness to the stones, trees and water to guide and shape Seattle's Kubota Garden

Embracing a posture of humility in quieting the self in order to pay attention to the rhythms, seasons and cycles of life with reverence and awe

## REFLECTION - Rev. Jennifer DeBusk Alviar

In my ministry, I actively seek ways to plant seeds of social change, hope and healing. This is why gardens fascinate me. They offer a tangible source of promising growth through a deep connection with the Earth.

Imagine my delight, then, in being invited to attend a garden tour specifically designed around these spiritual themes through Seattle University's Interreligious Dialogue Initiative. Fujitarō Kubota (1879-1973) was a landscape designer who carried seeds of change – literally and figuratively.

Not only did he bring seeds from his native Japan to plant in his Japanese-inspired Kubota Garden in Seattle, but he carried these same seeds to the internment camp in Minidoka, Idaho during WWII. Fujitarō's nature-based Shinto religion sustained his spirit in the face of racial injustice. By grounding himself in the natural world, he found the inner resources to design a beautiful rock garden within the walls of his imprisonment. The war may have contained his body, but not his spirit.

Father Richard Rohr expressed it best in these words: "If we do not transform our pain, we will most assuredly transmit it." Fujitarō embodied a generative spirit to transform pain into beauty and healing grounded in the Earth's deep wisdom. May we find inspiration in his example and do likewise.



## “Homage to Rocks” by Annmarie Fore

I always want to be the exuberant bird,  
Soaring swooping down, then elevating dancing  
on a breath.  
I always want to be the bird,  
Not the rock.

But the rock is reverent,  
Quiet and still,  
Patient and humble,  
Grounded and able to hold the warmth of the Sun.

The rock allows another's resting:  
A stool, a grave's guardian, a smooth bed for  
sunbathing;  
A home for lichen and moss and mussels growing,  
A shelter for snakes and lizards and marmots  
hiding,

A rock possesses willingness to be cracked open  
by tree roots  
To clench clusters of delicate Columbines in their  
fists,  
To nestle glaciers in their cavernous bosoms,  
And even to be smashed apart by a hammer's  
insistence  
To reveal a galaxy of crystals within.

A rock is stepped over, kicked, even tossed into  
streams,  
Ground into powder, chiseled and mortared,  
Tumbled and polished and tucked into pockets;  
Yet it never refuses its gifting.  
They've fallen victim to avalanche and dynamite,  
Been revered in Rushmore and the Pieta.  
Immortalized in music and movies  
By Elvis and Flintstones and Rocky Balboa;

From huggable boulders creating alluvial fans  
To heart stones adorning my prayer table,  
From monumental sculptures to the gravel  
crushed beneath our feet,  
I honor you, oh humble rocks.

A lightheaded part of me will always  
Long to be wings dancing in the wind.  
But today I see the rocks before me and bless  
them,  
For they possess an immortal gift of presence,

Of solid serenity,  
Of both holding onto self and being given away.  
Oh divine Rock, Throne of Belonging,  
I place myself in your Being.



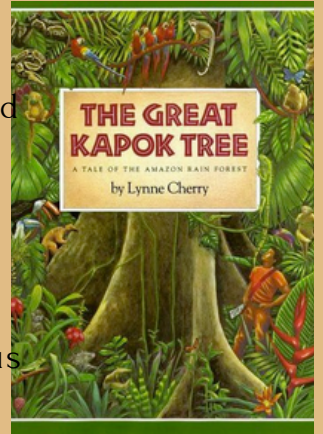
## Closing words

We close our time together, open to the sacred and enriched by the teachings of more-than-human species. We leave here today more humble. And we give thanks for this community and the reminder that we are embedded in a great story of biological evolution; we are anything but alone..

## TIME FOR ALL AGES

The Great Kapok Tree written and illustrated by Lynne Cherry (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1990; Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2020)

A would-be agent of deforestation is humbled as representatives of a Kapok tree's ecosystem are given voice in this classic conservationist tale featuring indigenous characters.



## RESOURCE

If you are inspired to speak even more from your heart during worship, we recommend Speaking by Heart by Rev. Stephen Shick.

## MUSIC

- #1003 Singing the Journey: Where Do We Come From?
- #1020 Singing the Journey: Woyaya
- #1068 Singing the Journey: Rising Green

## Small Group Resources

Use any of the materials for your time together.

Prompts and Activities:

- Discuss past experiences of how Nature and reverence have led you to humility and overcome your/our susceptibility to self-absorption.
- What could you plan to immerse yourself in Nature so you can learn from species other than our own?
- Who might you gather with for that immersion experience?
- What trees speak to you, inspire you, nurture you? How do you offer something in return?
- What stone has allowed you to rest? What do offer the stone in thanksgiving?
- How do you transform pain into beauty and healing, grounded in the Earth's deep wisdom?
- Host a community meal that invites people into humility as they eat. Think about who grew, harvested, cooked the food. Bring stories to the table.

Thanks to our team this month: Colleen Hamilton, MA Ed, PhD, Director of Religious Education, Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Sunnyvale (CA); Rev. Jennifer DeBusk Alviar, Unitarian Universalist community minister in Seattle (WA); Annmarie Fore, Unitarian Universalist, poet and sound healer; Zoe Johnston and Rev. Kelly Dignan, UUMFE;

**\*\*If you have been enjoying Monthly Musings, consider attending or promoting our new Weekly Live Meditations. Starting Thursday Sept. 14, 2023 join UUMFE for a weekly, online, live meditation for 30 minutes. More info:**

**<https://www.uumfe.org/spiritual-gatherings/weekly-live-meditation-gatherings/>**

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**QUESTIONS ABOUT MONTHLY MUSINGS? PLEASE EMAIL  
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