



TOUCHSTONES

a monthly journal of Unitarian Universalism

September 2020

Worth and Dignity

Wisdom Story



Introduction to the Theme

Our first principle affirms “the inherent worth and dignity of every person.” This principal affirms the amazing reality that we call life. To be alive and to savor existence on this planet is the most incredible thing that we will ever experience. Love, success, and all the other possibilities are secondary to simply being alive. This principle also reflects the hopes that we have for the unfolding of the incredible potential of each person, as well as our collective aspiration for the good life in which everybody can participate and share.

Conservative Christianity affirms a fallen nature and the belief that we must be saved. It believes that all humanity is

depraved and only the true believers will receive divine blessings.

Judaism teaches that people are born free of sin. This accords with the understanding that humans were created in the image of God. If people sin, it is a consequence of individual choice. Interestingly, Judaism understands sin not as a condition of being, but of doing. It speaks of sin as “missing the mark” of what we are capable of. This is an invitation to begin again and again.

Islam affirms neutrality. It believes that we are born neither good nor bad, but that the potential for either exists. We sin, according to Islam, by forgetting God. If we remember God, we will be continually blessed as our eyes, minds, hands, and hearts pursue goodness.

For Unitarian Universalism, worth and dignity are present as an original condition of being, not of doing. Birth is understood as original blessing, not original sin. This principle calls us to our best selves as we seek to create and

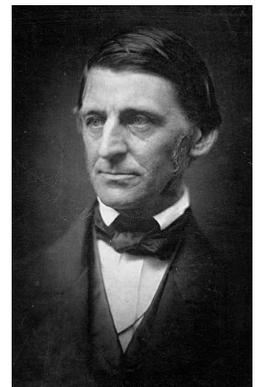
(Continued on page 6)

Huckleberries

Rev. Helen Zidowecki

Mr. Emerson was a Unitarian minister. Eight of his ancestors, like his father and grandfather and great-grandfather were ministers. He

was expected to be one, too. But he didn't like being a minister, so changed to being a writer and speaker instead. He wrote and spoke about many of his ideas. He wanted everyone to develop their own ideas and beliefs. He wanted to spread kindness and joy, and to make people feel better and think more. He was upset that people owned other people, called slaves.



Mr. Emerson was over six feet tall. He stood very straight. He had a deep voice. When he was around, people felt good about themselves. A woman who washed clothes for people came to hear him speak. She ...loved to see him standing before the group making everyone think that they were as good as he was, just by the way he talked!

Mr. Emerson loved children. A child could always go into the room where he was writing. He kept paper, pencils, and scissors for them — and something to eat. He liked to have fun with children and enjoyed picnics. He had four children of his own.

One day he was planning a picnic with his children. They invited children of all ages — and some adults, too — who

(Continued on page 2)

Worth and Dignity & Deepening Connections

Our regard for another is the basis upon which a relationship can be forged. If we are dismissive, scornful, or judgmental, it is difficult it to make a connection that will be deep or meaningful. However, when we assume the worth and dignity of another, and affirm our own worth and dignity, we have the basis for mutual respect. In place of a hierarchical arrangement, we stand on the same level, heart to heart and eye to eye. To assume that worth is inherent is to affirm that the other person is a treasure, a unique individual who has never been, nor will ever be again. It is to invite the best from another. To acknowledge dignity, is to make self-esteem possible. The connection that is forged with this person can expand and deepen over time. Acting on the worth and dignity in others is truly revolutionary.

Touchstones is committed to exploring liberal theology. This journal is supported by subscriptions from Unitarian Universalist congregations. For daily meditations, photos, and more visit/like Touchstones at <https://www.facebook.com/Touchpossibility/>

Deepening Connections

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

enjoyed having fun and liked being together. There was a huckleberrying party, when everyone went hunting for berries,



possibly to make pies. This party was to be led by Henry David Thoreau, because he knew where all the berries were!

The day of the picnic was sunny. Everyone was finding lots of berries.

Suddenly Edward Emerson, who was about four years old, tripped and fell. He was carrying a big basket of berries. They went all over the place and got dirty and squished. Edward started to cry. People tried to give him some of their berries, but he still cried. Mr. Thoreau came over to see why Edward was crying. He put his arm around Edward.

“Edward,” Mr. Thoreau said, “if huckleberries are to continue to grow, some have to be scattered to start new plants.” Mr. Thoreau said that he thought that nature needed to have little children sometimes stumble and scatter the berries. “There will be a lot of berries here someday, and we shall owe them all to you!” Mr. Thoreau said.

Edward began to smile again.

Source: http://www.hzmre.com/sgm/sgm_uupinherent.php



A “Dignitarian” Model of Politics

Robert W. Fuller Ph.D.

...Fair and effective government ...requires a political model in which both parties acknowledge the legitimate functions of power and are conscientious about limiting it to the proper sphere. In the “dignitarian” model, tension between liberals and conservatives is regarded as a natural part of working out the appropriate use of authority.... Instead of being locked in stalemate, the parties engage, without fear or malice, in an open process of give-and-take until a common understanding is reached.

As rankism [i.e., an assertion of superiority], like racism, falls into disrepute, the partisan insults, put-downs, and smears ...will find less favor with the electorate. ...There is no reason to expect dignitarian politics to be less argumentative, but there’s every reason to believe it will be more civil.

...A dignitarian politics, while allowing for partisanship, would be inhospitable to the ideological extremism and dysfunctional incivility that undermine many modern democracies. The most effective thing one side can do to win the cooperation of the other is to discover what it is that’s right about the opponent’s position. Once a party ...feels that some kernel of truth it defends has been appreciated... and incorporated... that transcends the starting positions of both adversaries—it becomes easier for that party to cooperate. ...Dignitarian politics is not so much nonpartisan as it is *transpartisan*.

...To elect politicians who will build a dignitarian society requires the creation of a dignitarian culture. As this culture takes hold, our politicians will find it increasingly difficult, and ultimately impossible, to deny us dignitarian governance. Such a society will not come to us as a gift. It will come as we earn it—by personifying its values and demanding the same from our leaders.

Source: <https://www.psychologytoday.com/blog/somebodies-and-nobodies/201403/the-politics-dignity>

Keeping It Real

Rev. Victoria Weinstein

To make our first principle into a spiritual practice requires us to honestly acknowledge that we have been programmed by our society to treasure and cherish certain kinds of people over others, and to see only a select few as bearing as much worth, value, and dignity as we ourselves have. The rest, we have been trained by many forces, to regard as Other. We are either afraid of that Other, or we feel superior to that Other, or—almost as bad—we have learned to feel a kind of privileged pity or charity toward those Others. ...Please ...spare us from that ... most of all.

...It is not enough for this religious tradition or any other to simply try to have the right, virtuous thoughts and feelings. Something more is asked of us, and the name for that something more is love—that enormous, demanding, divine idea that asks us not only to feel virtuous things but to shape our actions around those feelings. The poet Rilke says that “human love consists in this: that two solitudes protect and touch and greet each other.”



...The Hindus have a beautiful word for this idea. “Namasté,” they say. It means, “The divine in me greets the divine in you.” The inherent worth and dignity in me greets the inherent worth and dignity in you, whoever you are.

That’s the essence of our first Unitarian Universalist principle. Trying to embrace the spirit of *Namasté* is certainly enough for ...[now], and probably for a lifetime.

Source: <https://firstparishnorwell.org/sermons/inherentworth.html>

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: “Lonely, I desire companions. Naked, I long for defenders. Lost, I want to find..., to be found.



Will I touch strangers or enemies or nothing? ... I stretch forth my hand knowing not what I shall touch, but hoping”
Gordon McKeeman

Day 2: “Every life deserves a certain amount of dignity, no matter how poor or damaged the shell that carries it.”
Rick Bragg

Day 3: “We’re all human, aren’t we? Every human life is worth the same, and worth saving.” J.K. Rowling

Day 4: “One’s dignity may be assaulted, vandalized and cruelly mocked, but it can never be taken away unless it is surrendered.” Michael J. Fox

Day 5: “The primal principle of democracy is the worth and dignity of the individual.” Edward Bellamy

Day 6: “Never take a person’s dignity: it is worth everything to them, and nothing to you.” Frank Barron

Day 7: “I’ve known people that the world has thrown everything at to discourage them..., to break their spirit. And yet something about them retains a dignity.” Horton Foote

Day 8: “No work is insignificant. All labor that uplifts humanity has dignity and importance and should be undertaken with painstaking excellence.”
Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 9: “Be kind, acknowledging the inherent worth and dignity of every person.”
David C. Sasser

Day 10: “The most attractive quality of all is dignity.” Sherry Argov

Day 11: “Believing you are worthy of love means that you believe I deserve to be treated well—with respect and dignity.”
Suze Orman

Day 12: “Democracy is not just the right to vote, it is the right to live in dignity.”
Naomi Klein

Day 13: “There can be no reproach to pain unless we assume human dignity, there is

no reason for restraints on pleasure unless we assume human worth, [and] there is no legitimacy to monotony unless we assume a greater purpose to life....” Ravi Zacharias

Day 14: “I believe in human dignity as the source of national purpose, human liberty as the source of national action, the human heart as the source of national compassion, and in the human mind as the source of our invention and our ideas.” J.F. Kennedy

Day 15: “Your dignity can be mocked, abused, compromised, toyed with, lowered and even badmouthed, but it can never be taken from you.” Shannon L. Alder

Day 16: “Without dignity, identity is erased.” Laura Hillenbrand

Day 17: “If you are trying to transform a brutalized society into one where people can live in dignity and hope, you begin with the empowering of the most powerless. You build from the ground up.”
Adrienne Rich

Day 18: “Have you ever tried to get to your feet with a sprained dignity?”
Madeleine L’Engle

Day 19: “No race can prosper till it learns that there is as much dignity in tilling a field as in writing a poem.”
Booker T. Washington

Day 20: “Nothing is so essential as dignity.... Time will reveal who has it and who has it not.” Elizabeth Gilbert

Day 21: “Dignity is as essential to human life as water, food, and oxygen. The stubborn retention of it, even in the face of extreme physical hardship, can hold a man’s soul in his body long past the point at which the body should have surrendered it.” Laura Hillenbrand

Day 22: “Stories have been used to dispossess and to malign. But stories can also be used to empower, and to humanize. Stories can break the dignity of a people. But stories can also repair that broken dignity.” Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie

Day 23: “Be strong. Live honorably and with dignity. When you don’t think you can, hold on.” James Frey

Day 24: “Death in anonymity is the ultimate insult to human dignity.” Kathy Reichs

Day 25: “We carry within us a divine spark, and if we chose to recognize it, our lives have dignity, meaning, hope. In her it is bright, a light that heals rather than wounds me.” Dean Koontz

Day 26: “The kind of beauty I want most is the hard-to-get kind that comes from within—strength, courage, dignity.” Ruby Dee

Day 27: “The most important human endeavor is the striving for morality in our actions. Our inner balance and even our very existence depend on it. Only morality in our actions can give beauty and dignity to life.” Albert Einstein

Day 28: “There’s no one with intelligence in this town except that man over there playing with the children, the one riding the stick horse. He has keen, fiery insight and vast dignity like the night sky, but he conceals it in the madness of child’s play.”
Rumi

Day 29: “There is nothing more majestic than the determined courage of individuals willing to suffer and sacrifice for their freedom and dignity.” Martin Luther King, Jr.

Day 30: “It was a life of dignity and honor, not without sorrows yet fulfilling in a way that few experiences ever were.”
Nicholas Sparks

Day 31: “Our first task in approaching another people, another culture, another religion, is to take off our shoes, for the place we are approaching is holy. Else we may find ourselves treading on [people’s] dreams.” Max Warren



Dignity (aka *Dignity of Earth & Sky*) is a sculpture on a bluff overlooking the Missouri River near Chamberlain, South Dakota. The 50-foot (15.24 meter) high stainless

steel statue by South Dakota artist laureate Dale Claude Lamphere depicts an indigenous woman in Plains-style dress receiving a star quilt. For the Lakota people, the *star quilt* represents honor and generosity, and is one of the most valued gifts one can receive



and universal tendency... to ignore the demands of mutuality and thus to waste freedom or abuse it by devotion to the

idols of the tribe.... It cannot be denied that religious liberalism has neglected these aspects of human nature in its zeal to proclaim the spark of divinity in man. We may call these tendencies by any name we wish, but we do not escape their destructive influence by a conspiracy of silence concerning them."

...Is the worth and dignity of every person *inherent*? No, inherency is a political construct—perhaps a very useful myth, but a myth nonetheless—designed to cover up the fact that we all are sinners and that we are not always certain which sins (and hence which sinners) are worse



than others. Each of us has to be assigned worth—it does not come automatically—and taught to behave with dignity because, as Sartre once said, "If it were not for the petty rules of bourgeois society, we humans would destroy each other in an instant."

But who does the assigning of worth? How *do* we decide that something is a sin? How do we know that torture is wrong? What is the basis for human rights?

There are only three options. Rights are established by divinity, by natural law, or by pragmatic consensus. I wish we could get everybody to agree on one of the first two. But because we cannot..., we are left with public opinion as the basis for determining rights. Global public opinion, to be sure, but public opinion.

...Human rights are whatever the international community—through its vari-

ous declarations, covenants, treaties, and conventions—say that they are. ...If there is one arena in which Theodore Parker's famous dictum that "the arc of the moral universe bends toward justice" seems to have been borne out, it is the evolution of human rights.

...If we can't rely upon the inherency of human worth and dignity, if we have to *assign* worth and *teach* dignity, then we cannot escape confrontation with the forces of idolatry who would reserve worth to only a few and save dignity for their immediate neighbors....

...If these twelve years [at Amnesty International USA] have caused me to rethink the nature of God, the inherency of human worth and the credibility of individual authority, they have more than confirmed two other bedrock Unitarian Universalist principles, the indomitability of the spirit and the mysterious workings of an unfettered grace.

...Perez Aguirre was tortured mercilessly in a South American prison. Many years later, walking along the street, he ran into the man who had tortured him. The torturer was now among those being prosecuted.

...Aguirre took the initiative. "How are you?" he asked his torturer. The man said he was very depressed. There was a long pause and then Aguirre said, "If you need anything, come to see me." And then, "Shake hands, friend. I forgive you." What torture has taught me, what all those brave souls and, yes, even a few of their tormentors, have taught me, is to never give up on the glimmers of grace for not everything is all that it seems. If even survivors of torture can reclaim a sense of life's bounty, then surely you and I and all to whom we minister can too. If the torturer cannot fully break the human spirit, nobody can. ...

Source: Excerpt from the 2006 *Berry Street Essay*, "What Torture Has taught Me" by William Schulz

What Torture's Taught Me

Rev. William F. Schulz

...The opportunities Amnesty [International USA] provided me were singular and I am deeply grateful for them, but I have always regarded myself first and foremost as a Unitarian Universalist minister. This faith and community have always been the principal resources from which I draw my strength....

And of those things that I have seen nothing has had a deeper impact on me than my exposure to torture—to both victims of torture and perpetrators of it and, not incidentally, to all of us in between.

...Sallie McFague ...said that "there is no place where God is not." ...But I would submit that no God worthy of the name is present in a torture chamber.

...Whatever our conception of God, it needs to be both complex enough and circumscribed enough to account for the fact that God's absence—true absence—is as real a phenomenon as God's immanence.

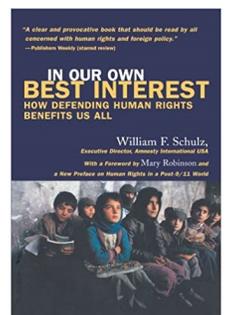
Similarly, our traditional doctrines of human nature rest uneasy in a world full of torturers. In what sense can we defend the notion that a torturer is a person of "*inherent* worth and dignity?"

...So, who are the torturers? ...The horrible truth is that the vast majority of torturers are average Joes (occasionally, but rarely, average Janes).

And it is remarkably easy to turn Joe into what most of us would regard as a monster.

...Who is this creature of "inherent dignity" who is so easily led astray? [In 1941] ...James Luther Adams delivered the most heralded Berry Street Lecture of the twentieth century entitled *The Changing Reputation of Human Nature* in which, while rejecting the doctrine of total depravity, he resurrected the notion of "sin:" "...whether the liberal uses the word 'sin' or not, [Adams said], he cannot correct his 'too jocund' [i.e., blithe] view of life until he recognizes that there is in human nature a deep-seated

William Schulz is also the author of *In Our Own Best Interest: How Defending Human Rights Benefits Us All*. (2002)



The Reality Wall

Michelle Richards

We teach our children from an early age about the inherent worth and dignity of every person; they learn that it is important to seek justice, equity, and compassion; we emphasize a responsible search for truth and meaning and the goal of world community with peace, liberty, and justice for all. Then they hit a brick wall. Sometimes it's middle school, sometimes it comes earlier or later in life. But come it does: the realization that we are different from a large part of the world.

...I vividly remember the struggle my daughter Shannon faced in seventh and eighth grade when her school friends made it their mission to "convert" her to Christianity. Her church had taught her since she was a pre-schooler the importance



of respecting the beliefs of others, and she just couldn't understand why her friends didn't follow the same code of morality that she did. It was only after multiple conversations between us, accompanied by lots of hugs and moral support from her church, that she was finally able to understand that her friends actually believed that they were helping her by trying to get her to accept Jesus as her Lord and Savior.

...Did I as a parent let her down by not preparing her for this life lesson? At the time I feared that I did. But parents cannot anticipate every challenge our children will face, nor can we cushion them from all the difficulties they will experience in their lifetime. I did try to explain to her that other people in the world thought differently than we did, but it was mainly in the context of bullying and standing up for others. Instead, it was her friends who demeaned her by trying to convince her she was wrong, not her adversaries.

We cannot possibly protect our children against all the evil and pain in the world, and we shouldn't even try. But we do need to provide a safety net for

them when they fall, and give them a sledgehammer of Unitarian Universalist faith for when they come up against that wall.

Source: <http://www.uuworld.org/articles/reality-wall>

Family Activity: Dignity

Watch the short YouTube video, *The 30 Articles of Human Rights*, at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=36CUlaqmFi4>, adopted by the United Nations in 1948, with your children. After watching, discuss what each article means and how our communities and world would be better if we all treated each other with dignity and respect. To facilitate this discussion, download a copy of the 30 articles at http://www.eycb.coe.int/composito/chapter_6/pdf/1.pdf. The first two pages are in child-friendly language that aligns with

the video.

Inherent Worth

Anne Andrew

Inherent Worth is the idea that everyone has the same worth—infinite worth—by virtue of just being, regardless of race, religion, gender, health, status, wealth or any other external factor.

...Inherent worth doesn't depend on what we accomplish or don't accomplish it is always there no matter what our external circumstances. We don't have to earn it and there's nothing we can do to taint it. It is a constant throughout our lives, though our awareness of it may vary.

Self-esteem is the measure of our worth by our own estimation based on external evidence such as the approval of others or skills we've mastered. As such, it is variable, and can be lost if we fail to measure up to the standards we have set for ourselves or which others have set for us.

Source: <https://www.anneandrew.com/approach.html#:~:text=What%20does%20Inherent%20Worth%20mean,or%20any%20other%20external%20factor.>

A Soft Answer

Terry Dobson

At one train station the doors opened, and suddenly the quiet afternoon was shattered by a man bellowing at the top of his lungs.... Just as the doors closed, the man still yelling, staggered into our car. He was big, drunk, and dirty.

...I'd been putting in a solid eight hours of Aikido training every day for the past three years. ...[But] as students of Aikido, we were not allowed to fight. ..."This is it!" I said to myself, as I got to my feet. "...People are in danger. If I don't do something fast, somebody will probably get hurt." ...Seeing me stand up, the drunk saw a chance to focus his rage.

"Aha!" he roared, "a foreigner! You need a lesson in Japanese manners!" ...A split-second before he moved, someone shouted, "Hey!"

...We both stared down at a little old Japanese man. ... "C'mere," the old man said ... beckoning to the drunk, "C'mere and talk with me." He waved his hand lightly. ... "Why ...should I talk to you?"

...The old man continued to beam at the laborer. "What'cha been drinking?" he asked lightly, his eyes sparkling with interest. "I been drinking saké," the laborer bellowed back....

"Oh, that's wonderful.... You see, I love saké too [and have some each evening with my wife.]" ...He looked up at the laborer, eyes twinkling. ...The drunk's face began to soften. His fists slowly unclenched. ... "Yes," said the old man, smiling, "and I'm sure you have a wonderful wife." "No," replied the laborer, "my wife died." ...Tears rolled down his cheeks, a spasm of pure despair rippled through his body. ...I heard the old man cluck sympathetically. "My, my," he said..., "that is ...very difficult.... Sit down here and tell me about it."

[As I left the train,] I turned my head for one last look. The laborer was sprawled like a sack on the seat, his head in the old man's lap. The old man looked down at him with compassion and delight, one hand stroking the filthy, matted head.

Source: <http://easternhealingarts.com/Articles/softanswer.html>

(Continued from page 1)

sustain a life that expresses our worth and dignity. In this, we have a sacred responsibility to support children in their noble endeavor of becoming their best self. This principle also demands that we treat others with extraordinary respect befitting their worth and dignity. When we do this, every interaction can be a mutual blessing.

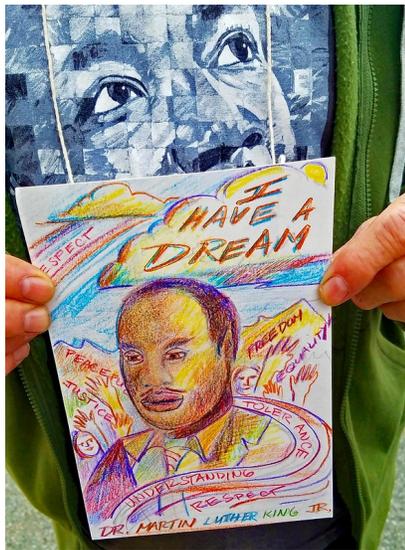
In an address in January 1980 at First Parish in Cambridge, a Unitarian Universalist church, novelist Kurt Vonnegut (1922-2007) said that, "Dignity is something human beings give to each other." He believed that if we do not do this, there is no other way that dignity can be acquired. Literary critics of Vonnegut's work generally agree that the most important aspect of his writing was a belief in "human dignity." As an example, Vonnegut's 1973 novel, *Breakfast of Champions*, explores his concern that human beings are just machines, each doing what he or she is programmed to do. They are devoid of self-respect or dignity. For Vonnegut, the truest example of this reality are the American poor; people trapped in the mechanical monotony of just struggling to try to make ends meet. In our society, the poor are too often thought to be undeserving of respect because they have no inherent worth. This attitude disgusted Vonnegut. As Professor Jerome Klinkowitz writes, "The key solution to human problems, Vonnegut kept insisting, is to find human dignity for all human beings—even those who seem to least deserve it." Klinkowitz goes on to explain that Vonnegut believed that dignity isn't an exclusive privilege for the well-to-do or successful, but is intrinsic to simply being a human being.

Some question the principle of inherent worth and dignity, suggesting that the evil acts of some people undercuts the universal application of this principle.

When we are selective about designating who has inherent worth and dignity, we divide humanity into two groups: the haves and have-nots. This is a slippery slope. How will we know? How will we choose? Inherent worth and dignity can no longer be based on being. As Vonnegut knew, our strong societal bias toward "doing" concludes that our worth and dignity are conditional on what we do, not on who we are. It teaches that worth and dignity are external rewards, not internal realities. What are you worth when you are not doing anything? Nothing?

Is it not obvious that the foundation for doing is being? The closer these two dance together, the better. It is not a case of either/or, but both/and; continuous interplay, not a binary reality. Ignoring the interplay of being and doing may make it easier to put people in boxes of good and bad, but it ignores human complexity, circumstance, and so much more. It also ignores the possibility of redemption following bad choices and terrible deeds, and conveniently excuses us from a wider, deeper, and more challenging compassion. Obviously, a person by his or her deeds may forfeit his or her inherent worth and dignity as doing overwhelms being. And that may be a permanent reality, but redemption can happen when least expected, especially when least expected by the offender.

The affirmation of inherent worth reminds us that life is sacred and valuable beyond any other measure. If this was widely shared, what a wonderful world it would be. The affirmation of inherent dignity is an abiding reminder to all to hold heads high that we may all look into each other's eyes and see ourselves lovingly reflected there as we become the mirror for the other. Our eyes and our hearts work best when they are both windows and mirrors.



The Dignity of Difference

Jonathan Sacks

...I [once met] ...the head of a large group of Jewish mystics. I was inspired by his teachings and impressed by the spirituality of his followers. But ...in its intense and segregated piety, it shut out the rest of the world. Was there not—I asked him—beauty and value outside the narrow walls in which he lived? He answered me with a parable.

Imagine, he said, two people.... One carries bags of diamonds. The other hauls sacks of rocks. Each is now asked to take a consignment of rubies. Which of the two understands what he is now to carry? The man who is used to diamonds knows that stones can be precious.... But the man who has carried only rocks thinks of stones as a mere burden. They have weight but not worth.

...So it is, he said, with faith. If we cherish our own, then we will understand the value of others. We may regard ours as a diamond and another faith as a ruby, but we know that both are precious.... But if faith is a mere burden, ...we will see both as equally useless. True tolerance, he implied, comes not from the absence of faith but from its living presence.

...Difference does not diminish.... Only when we realize the danger of wishing that everyone should be the same—the same faith on the one hand, the same McWorld on the other—will we prevent the clash of civilizations, born of ...fear.

We will learn to live with diversity once we understand the ...world-enhancing dignity of difference.



Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14654>

A Basic Need

Principles of Dignity

Robert W. Fuller & Pamela A. Gerloff

Dignity is a basic need. It is necessary for healthy growth and development. Therefore, dignity is not optional. ...

Rankism begets rankism. The human tendency is to respond to rankism [i.e., the assertion of superiority] with rankism. We can stop that cycle ...by proactively creating a climate of dignity.

Dignity works. Not only is treating others with dignity advisable on moral and humanitarian grounds, but it is practical. ...

Always keep others' dignity intact. Protect others' dignity as you would your own—even those who are insulting yours. ...

Proactive is more effective than reactive. It is usually more effective to prevent rankism by creating a proactive plan for change, rather than by reacting to rankism when it occurs.

A paternalistic system is inherently rankist, no matter how benevolent it may be. A leadership system that does not

allow people to voice their own needs, hopes, and concerns is inherently rankist because it presumes that those in power always know best what is important and necessary to others' lives, even without asking them

Rankism creates a dysfunctional system. Rankism produces psychological, emotional, and organizational dysfunction [including] ...undue fear, bullying, unproductive gossip, silencing of cautionary or creative voices, cliques, bootlicking, backbiting, undermining, or sabotage. To create a healthier system, eliminate rankism. ...

Allow everyone a voice—and listen attentively. In a culture of dignity, everyone's voice is important, even essential—not just because it's "the right thing to do," but also because it is in everyone's self-interest. ...

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/26244>



No Exceptions

The Worth and Dignity of All

Rev. Beth Ellen Cooper

...In some ways, our first principle, the inherent worth and dignity of all people, is the most widely known, most commonly invoked, and perhaps most easily mis-used principle It is also the one that has the most far-reaching theological implications.

...Every single human being on this planet, alive or dead, possesses some innate, essential virtue as part of their very humanity.

...If each of us have that spark, that essence, then how could we fail to recognize it in one another?

We fail all the time.

We fail in large ways...we torture, slaughter, oppress, dehumanize and ob-

jectify each other. And while most of us might consider ourselves more compassionate than that, we all fail in small ways, too.

...In these failings we deny, ignore, try to steal away others' worth and dignity. In doing so, we lose, deny, or forfeit some of our own.

...And yet, at the most fundamental level, our failures do not make us unworthy. They do not render us undignified. We were all born this way, both flawed and worthy....

...Human beings are capable of just about any good and any evil. At some level, we are neither inherently good nor inherently evil, but have great capacity for both. ...No matter how great our flaws, there is always also contained within every human the very essence of our humanity—our inherent worth and dignity—which gives us our capacity to give and receive love. It is that capacity that finally reconciles all people, in the end, to wholeness and to the source of all Love.

Source: <https://blog.chron.com/keepthefait/2011/06/the-worth-and-dignity-of-all-people-no-exceptions/>

The First Principle

Making Sense of Faith

Andrew Hidas

...This question of "the inherent worth and dignity of every person" ...is the ...one that I have had trouble with....

...What is the source of my doubts? I think they center on evil—plain and simple.

Evil people doing evil things, their wreck of a moral life causing them to abdicate all sense of decency and compassion and regard for their fellow humans.

...I find myself grappling with nuanced questions in trying to work it out. And I think I've come to rest with it here: That my faith, my default, my approach to every person I meet and observe in my life, has always been that they are essentially good and decent and reflective of my belief in their worth and dignity. That no one is perfect, but everyone is "saved."

So yes, I do believe in our first principle, and I live out that belief with great passion. *And yet...*

I think that lives can sometimes go so terribly off the rails, become so twisted in obsessive hatred and a peculiar kind of insanity, that worth and dignity have been vacated, are absent and no longer accessible to that person. And for those of us outside, we knock and we peer in there with our baseline faith in their worth and dignity, but there is no one home, no human response possible to our gesture.

Perhaps this means that our first principle is as much for us as it is for those we extend it to. That it's an *orientation* and a faith that will serve us well in this fallen world, even if a given person has lost or forsaken the humanity to receive it.

Source: <http://andrewhidas.com/on-the-inherent-worth-and-dignity-of-every-person/>



Small Group Discussion Guide

Just To Be is a Blessing

Theme for Discussion

Inherent Worth & Dignity

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “We find these joys to be self-evident: That all children are created whole, endowed with innate intelligence, with dignity and wonder, worthy of respect. The embodiment of life, liberty and happiness, children are original blessings, here to learn their own song. Every girl and boy is entitled to love, to dream, and belong to a loving ‘village.’” *Raffi Cavoukian*

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “The first principle is not a moral assessment. It is not a claim that human nature is basically good. It is not an attempt to condone terrible acts of violence or to passively accept the inevitability of evil. Instead it is an active assertion that a human being, virtuous or not, good or

evil, possesses a value that cannot be taken from them—it’s a condition of our very humanity to believe this.”

Rev. Ann Marie Alderman

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on. Do you have inherent worth and dignity? Why or why not? If yes, how did you come to have worth and dignity? How does your sense of inherent worth and dignity influence how you act?

Has your inherent worth and dignity ever been dismissed by someone else? What were the circumstances? What was the impact? How did you respond?

Have you found it difficult to recognize the human dignity of some?

Do you agree with Rev. Alderman that all people possess “a value that cannot be taken from them, and that it is a condition of our very humanity to believe this?” Why or why not?

Per Kurt Vonnegut, how can we bestow and affirm the worth and dignity of others? How have you done this for others?

What would change in the world if everyone’s inherent worth and dignity was recognized and honored always and everywhere?

Is it possible to sustain justice without the idea of human dignity? Why or why not? Without economic rights?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles (In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Reflection on the First Principle

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker

Reverence and respect for human nature is at the core of Unitarian Universalist faith. We believe that all the dimensions of our being carry the potential to do good. We celebrate the gifts of being human: our intelligence and capacity for observation and reason, our senses and ability to appreciate beauty, our creativity, our feelings and emotions. We cherish our bodies as well as our souls. We can use our gifts to offer love, to work for justice, to heal injury, to create pleasure for ourselves and others.

“Just to be is a blessing. Just to live is holy,” the great twentieth-

century Rabbi Abraham Heschel wrote. Unitarian Universalists affirm the inherent worth and dignity of each person as a given of faith—an unshakeable conviction calling us to self-respect and respect for others. Source: <https://www.uua.org/beliefs/what-we-believe/principles/1st>



Attribution for Images

Page 1: Emerson, Scewingderivative work: 2009 - Ralph_Waldo_Emerson_ca1857.jpg, Public Domain, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=11868430>

Page 2: Thoreau, https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Benjamin_D_Maxham_-_Henry_David_Thoreau_-_Restored_-_greyscale_-_straightened.jpg, Public Domain / **Montana Huckleberry**, photo by Julie, July 5, 2007, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/roosterfarm/757701435/> / **Namaste Design**, by Kyle Pearce, August 3, 2014, (CC BY-SA 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/keepitsurreal/15286264217>

Page 3: Round Melon Shape Bowl, by Wicker Paradise, August 25, 2013, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/wicker-furniture/9592646138/> / **Dignity**, photo by Amy Meredith, June 3, 2018, (CC BY-ND 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/jjandames/41867583674>

Page 4: Torture, photo by Newtown Graffiti, August 28, 2012, (CC BY 2.0), https://www.flickr.com/photos/newtown_graffiti/7880174056

Page 5: Girl at Wall, photo by Samantha Salazar on Unsplash

Page 6: Dreamer, Hero for Justice and Human Rights, by moonjazz, January 20, 2020, (Public Domain), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/moonjazz/49417212547/> / **Hands**, photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

Page 7: Dignity, photo by Dave Lowe on Unsplash

Page 8: Amplifying Unitarian Universalism! by UUA Stewardship, May 14, 2015, (CC BY 2.0), <https://www.flickr.com/photos/125010817@N07/17638078875>