



NEW HORIZONS

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Theme Based Ministry Newsletter of the First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto

CHARACTER

We know it when we spot it: character.

It seems every few months I come across the story posted on Facebook about the runners Abel Mutai from Kenya, and Ivan Fernandez from Spain. Here's how it's often told:

Mutai was just a few feet from the finish line but became confused with the signage and stopped, thinking he had completed the race. Fernandez was right behind him and, realizing what was happening, started shouting at Mutai to continue running. Mutai didn't speak Spanish and didn't understand what was being said. And in that instant, recognizing his competitor's confusion, Fernandez pushed Mutai to victory.

A journalist asked Fernandez, "Why did you do that?" He said, "My dream is that someday we can have a kind of community life where we push and help each other to win." The journalist insisted: "But why did you let the Kenyan win?" He replied, "I didn't let him win, he was going to win. The race was his." The journalist insisted, and again asked, "But you could have won!" At that moment, Fernandez looked at him and replied, "But what would be the merit of my victory? What would be the honour in that medal? What would my Mother think of that?"

This race took place eight years ago. Yet the reports of what happened that day keep being told over and over again, posted and shared repeatedly on Facebook and on other platforms. It's fair to wonder why that is. I believe it has something to do with our deep recognition of the fundamental right-ness of such moments. Moments that speak of fairness and choosing the honourable path. Moments that speak of character.

This month we take up the quest for such moments in our lives and in the wider world. May we find many examples to inspire us to move towards the dream Ivan Fernandez described, a place where we help one another to build a better world.

In faith and love, Shawn

Questions to Live With

1. Whose strong sense of character do you admire and why? What is it you have learned from them?
2. Where does character come from?
3. What is most shaping your character at this stage in your life?
4. Is there a particular aspect of your character that you are working on, or need to?

For Inspiration

Character cannot be developed in ease and quiet. Only through experience of trial and suffering can the soul be strengthened, ambition inspired, and success achieved.

- Helen Keller

Talent develops in tranquility, character in the full current of human life.

- Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

In each human heart are a tiger, a pig, an ass and a nightingale. Diversity of character is due to their unequal activity.

- Ambrose Bierce

To be capable of embarrassment is the beginning of moral consciousness. Honor grows from qualms.

- John Leonard

I prefer to be true to myself, even at the hazard of incurring the ridicule of others, rather than to be false, and to incur my own abhorrence.

- Frederick Douglass



People grow through experience if they meet life honestly and courageously. This is how character is built.

- Eleanor Roosevelt

The thought manifests as word; the word manifests as the deed. The deed develops into habit, and habit hardens into character. So watch the thought and its way with care and let it spring from love, born out of concern for all beings. . . as the shadow follows the body, as we think, so we become.

- from the *Dhammapada*

Character contributes to beauty... mode of conduct, a standard of courage, discipline, fortitude, and integrity can do a great deal to make a [person] beautiful.

- Jacqueline Bisset



Well, one survives that, no matter how... You survive this and in some terrible way, which I suppose no one can ever describe, you are compelled, you are corralled, you are bullwhipped into dealing with whatever it is that hurt you. And what is crucial here is that if it hurt you, that is not what's important. Everybody's hurt. What is important, what corrals you, what bullwhips you, what drives you, torments you, is that you must find some way of using this to connect you with everyone else alive. This is all you have to do it with. You must understand that your pain is trivial except insofar as you can use it to connect with other people's pain; and insofar as you can do that with your pain, you can be released from it, and then hopefully it works the other way around too; insofar as I can tell you what it is to suffer, perhaps I can help you to suffer less. Then, you make — oh, fifteen years later, several thousand drinks later, two or three divorces, God knows how many broken friendships and an exile of one kind or another — some kind of breakthrough, which is your first articulation of who you are: that is to say, your first articulation of who you suspect we all are.

- James Baldwin

Character isn't inherited. One builds it daily by the way one thinks and acts, thought by thought, action by action. If one lets fear or hate or anger take possession of the mind, they become self-forged chains.

- Helen Gahagan Douglas

The best people possess a feeling for beauty, the courage to take risks, the discipline to tell the truth, the capacity for sacrifice. Ironically, their virtues make them vulnerable; they are often wounded, sometimes destroyed.

- Ernest Hemingway

The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.

- Martin Luther King, Jr.

We [Unitarian Universalists] are concerned with the ethical relations and understanding of life, not about the salvation of souls. For us, salvation is by character; religion is a matter of deeds, not creeds; and this natural world is the centre of our lives.

- George Marshall, UU historian

Whatever you are physically..., strong or weak, ill or healthy--all those things matter less than what your heart contains. If you have the soul of a warrior, you are a warrior. All those other things, they are the glass that contains the lamp, but *you* are the light inside.

- Cassandra Clare, *Clockwork Angel*

People do not seem to realise that their opinion of the world is also a confession of their character.

- Ralph Waldo Emerson

To live content with small means; to seek elegance rather than luxury, and refinement rather than fashion; to be worthy, not respectable, and wealthy, not, rich; to listen to stars and birds, babes and sages, with open heart; to study hard; to think quietly, act frankly, talk gently, await occasions, hurry never; in a word, to let the spiritual, unbidden and unconscious, grow up through the common—this is my symphony.

- William Henry Channing

The great Universalist preacher Hosea Ballou was riding the circuit between several churches he often preached at in the New Hampshire hills with a Baptist preacher one afternoon. They argued theology as they traveled. At one point, the Baptist looked over and said, “Brother Ballou, if I were a Universalist and feared not the fires of hell, I could hit you over the head, steal your horse and saddle, and ride away, and I'd still go to heaven.” Hosea Ballou looked over at him and said, “If you were a Universalist, the idea would never occur to you.”

- as told by Rev. Elizabeth Strong

“Refuse to Fall Down” - Clarissa Pinkola Estés

Refuse to fall down.
If you cannot refuse to fall down,
refuse to stay down.
If you cannot refuse to stay down
lift your heart toward heaven
and like a hungry beggar,
ask that it be filled,
and it will be filled.
You may be pushed down.
You may be kept from rising.
But no one can keep you
from lifting your heart
toward heaven —
only you.
It is in the midst of misery
that so much becomes clear.
The one who says nothing good
came of this,
is not yet listening.

Upcoming Services

Every Sunday morning at 10:30 a.m. our worship services will be held online, via both Zoom and YouTube.

Visit the First Unitarian Toronto website (www.firstunitariantoronto.org) for links to services and other online activities.

Nov 1: “We Contain Multitudes”, Rev. Shawn Newton | Nov 8: “Take Courage”, Revs. Lynn Harrison & Shawn Newton | Nov 15: “Blursday”, Rev. Lynn Harrison | Nov 22: “Discernment” Rev Shawn Newton | Nov 29: “Wheeeeeee!”, Rev. Shawn Newton

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First Unitarian Congregation of Toronto



Seek • Connect • Serve

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