



THE JOURNEY: A Guide for Reflection Heritage

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Among my favourite PBS programs is *Finding Your Roots*, hosted by Dr. Henry Louis Gates, Jr. Through expert research in genealogy, history and genetics, guests are presented with an album documenting previously unknown details of their ancestors' lives and an impressive family tree poster.

The formula is the same every time, but I never tire of watching the discovery unfold. What touches me deeply is the sense of gratitude, even awe, expressed by so many guests as they apprehend the improbability of their own existence, but for the meeting of a succession of strangers. Each invariably reflects on a newfound appreciation of the bearing on their own lives of their ancestors' secrets or bold choices, their lives of service and survival against tremendous odds. I'm reminded, each time, of the wisdom of the Torah "we drink from wells we did not dig; we are warmed by fires we did not build". I am humbled to remember that who I am, and what I have, are connected to the strength of my own ancestors, mindful of the unearned privilege I carry.

Whatever we may or may not know about our own ancestry or genetic profile, as Unitarian Universalists by birth or by choice, each of us shares in the rich heritage of our faith tradition; each taking up our place in a long line of doubters, freethinkers and heretics (the Greek origin of the word means "choice") upon whose sacrifices we continue to build an ever-expanding circle of love, hope and understanding.

Perhaps heritage, like revelation, is not sealed – but continually unfolding as we come to know *who we are* and *who's we are*, as members of this tradition and in our families of blood and of belonging.

Spirit of Life – help us to delight in this precious incarnation of ours, mindful of the endless thread of energy passed on by our ancestors. Give us courage that we might faithfully carry the flame of our spiritual inheritance – the light of truth in our minds and the flame of love in our hearts to guide us. May we find ways, no matter how small, to use our unique gifts and powers to change something for the better.

In faith and love,

Angela

Questions to Live With



Photo by Anne Nygard Mosley on Unsplash

1. What story told by, or about, your ancestors (of birth or choice) has shaped you the most?
2. If you could talk to one of your ancestors, who would you choose? And what would you ask them?
3. If you could change one thing about your family heritage, what would it be?
4. Often parents consciously or unconsciously transfer their unfulfilled dreams onto their children. What have you learned about dancing with your parents' unfulfilled dreams?
5. What story do you want to be remembered by?
6. If these questions don't address how you need to explore heritage this month, what is your question?

For Inspiration

Land Acknowledgement

Our congregation gathers on the traditional lands of the Anishnaabe Mississauga, the Haudenosaunee, Ojibway/Chippewa, and Wendat peoples. This territory was the subject of the Dish With One Spoon Wampum Belt Covenant, and is also covered by the Upper Canada Treaties. As a congregation, we are striving to help heal the wounds of our past and our present, in the essential and ongoing work of reconciliation.

The circumstances surrounding your birth are not as important as the opportunity to live.

- Lailah Gifty Akita

Blood does not define family. Love does.

- Sejal Badani

When we lie about the past, we steal from the future.

- Abigail Bengson

I have four children. Two are adopted. I forget which two.

- Bob Constantine

No Time

In a rush this weekday morning,
I tap the horn as I speed past the cemetery
where my parents are buried
side by side beneath a slab of smooth
granite.

Then, all day, I think of him rising up
to give me that look
of knowing disapproval
while my mother calmly tells him to lie back
down.

- Billy Collins

Portrait Of Mother And Daughter

She's standing up, straddling the portable
commode,
her soft black leggings down around her
ankles.

I am wiping her after she is done
and for the first time I feel how soft and frail
she is down there; for the first time I see
how much of her has become thin, and soft
as bruised petals.

The hair is gone here too
as it is from her head and the rest of her,
a thing I should have expected
but hadn't thought about.

We never talked about this moment.
I never asked what shame or pride or love it
held for her.

But I tell you: I carry no greater memory
than this, of cleaning and caring for
this place where I am from,
this bare and honest earth,
this old house of passion
now a country cottage
who has begun the slow collapse
back into the wild garden of herself,
who is showing me even now the path home,
my own way forward
into soft earth,
the wild fertility of ruin.

- Alexandra Donovan

Remember

Remember the sky that you were born under,
know each of the star's stories.

Remember the moon, know who she is.

Remember the sun's birth at dawn, that is the
strongest point of time. Remember sundown
and the giving away to night.

Remember your birth, how your mother
struggled

to give you form and breath. You are evidence of
her life, and her mother's, and hers.

Remember your father. He is your life, also.

Remember the earth whose skin you are:
red earth, black earth, yellow earth, white earth
brown earth, we are earth.

Remember the plants, trees, animal life who all
have their

tribes, their families, their histories, too. Talk to
them,

listen to them. They are alive poems.

Remember the wind. Remember her voice. She
knows the

origin of this universe.

Remember you are all people and all people
are you.

Remember you are this universe and this
universe is you.

Remember all is in motion, is growing, is you.

Remember language comes from this.

Remember the dance language is, that life is.

Remember.

- Joy Harjo



Photo by Rod Long on Unsplash

Adoption is the most intentional process on Earth.

- Jody Cantrell Dyer

Some people are your relatives, but others are your ancestors, and you choose the ones you want to have as ancestors. You create yourself out of those values.

- Ralph Ellison

End and Beginning

When it ended,
we were looking down at the head of the
hospital sheet,
where it was still white.

Caroline was kneeling,
turned over by the storm of labour,
her arms an arch to the bedstead.

The midwife placed Eleanor
under us on the bed.
The umbilical twisted from her like a thrown
line:

A distance swimmer
greased with vernix
and still panting from her red sea crossing.

- Sir Maurice Flanagan and Julian Flanagan



Photo courtesy of Canada Museum of Immigration at Pier 1

What I keep coming back to is a single point: I wish others (and our own people) understood that Unitarian Universalism stands as securely in the lineage of Christianity (and Judaism) as any other branch that has emerged from the Christian story--even though many of us (myself included) consider our tradition largely post-Christian. We didn't arrive on the scene 60 years ago, ex nihilo. We have a storied past that finds continuity with our present. So much of what undergirds our Principles is grounded in the mandate of love and justice found in Jewish and Christian scripture. We distort ourselves unnecessarily when we ignore our roots, or worse, pretend they don't exist. My wish is that we would take up the mantle to be a shining example of the best that these parent traditions have to offer.

- Rev. Shawn Newton, now Gauthier

Photo Album

Something's gone wrong
with my photo album
it's filled with dead
people
who lean on trees that
turn yellow
they are set in picnic scenes
that tilt and curl
and buckle at the corners.

Like a snowstorm
gummed corners
fall and blow around
the figure of my father
smiling through a glue-on
mustache
and tipped though always smiling
at me as I close the
book and hear the folding
of the tablecloths the paper
falling of the picnic dishes.

- William Gough

Answers

If I envy anyone it must be
My grandmother in a long ago
Green summer, who hurried
Between kitchen and orchard on small
Uneducated feet, and took easily
All shining fruits into her eager hands.
That summer I hurried too, wakened
To books and music and circling
philosophies.
I sat in the kitchen sorting through
volumes of answers
That could not solve the mystery of the
trees.
My grandmother stood among her kettles
and ladles.
Smiling, in faulty grammar,
She praised my fortune and urged my
lofty career:
So to please her I studied – but I will
remember always
How she poured confusion out, how she
cooled and labeled
All the wild sauces of the brimming year.

- Mary Oliver

It's important to realize that we adopt not
because we are rescuers. No. We adopt
because we are rescued."

- David Platt

When a society or a civilization perishes,
one condition can always be found. They
forgot where they came from.

- Carl Sandburg

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I tell you
someone will remember us
in the future.

- Sappho, translated by Julia Dubnoff

The mission of your life should be to
leave a better world behind than what you
inherited.

- Sri Ravi Shankar



Photo courtesy of Black History Album on Flickr

Few are the giants of the soul who
actually feel that the human race is their
family circle.

- Freya Stark

Whereas history pleads, "Protect what we
put into place!" Heritage urges, "Know the
plotline of which you are a part." History is
what happened; Heritage is a story still
unfolding. History tends to trap us in tales
about what they did; Heritage inevitably
gets us talking about what we are called
to do.

- Rev. Scott Tayler

Every child deserves a home and love.
Period.

- Dave Thomas

I was chosen, I was wanted, I was
cherished, I grew in their hearts, I was the
missing piece, I was loved, I was
adopted.

- Unknown

"Who's to say how much of anythin' we are?"
Becka said. "Seems to me the truth of us is
where it can't be seen. Comes to dyin', I
guess we all got a right to what we believe."

"I can't know what he believes. He talks a lot,
but I still got no sense of him. So far it's all
been stories."

She only nodded. "It's all we are in the end.
Our stories."

- Richard Wagamese

To acknowledge our ancestors means we are
aware that we did not make ourselves.

- Alice Walker

Carrying Our Words

'U'a g T-ñi'oki

T-ñi'oki 'att 'an o 'u'akc o hihi
Am ka:ck wui dada.
S-ap 'am o 'a: mo has ma:s g kiod.
mat 'am 'ed.a betank 'i-gei.
'Am o 'a: mo he'es 'i-ge'ej,
mo hascu wud. i:da gewkdagaj
mac 'ab amjed. behě g ñe'i.
Hemhoa s-ap 'am o 'a: mac si has elid, mo
d. 'i:mig.

We travel carrying our words.
We arrive at the ocean.
With our words we are able to speak
of the sounds of thunderous waves.
We speak of how majestic it is,
of the ocean power that gifts us songs.
We sing of our respect
and call it our relative.

- Ofelia Zepeda, translated into English
from O'odham by the poet

Each of Us Has A Name

Each of us has a name
given by God
and given by our parents
Each of us has a name
given by our stature and our smile
and given by what we wear
Each of us has a name
given by the mountains
and given by our walls
Each of us has a name
given by the stars
and given by our neighbors
Each of us has a name
given by our sins
and given by our longing
Each of us has a name
given by our enemies
and given by our love
Each of us has a name
given by our celebrations
and given by our work
Each of us has a name
given by the seasons
and given by our blindness
Each of us has a name
given by the sea
and given by
our death.

- Zelda, translated by Marcia Lee Falk



Photo courtesy of Trans Canada Trails

Optional Spiritual Exercise

The Memento that Matters

We all have one: a favorite family memento that holds something important about our family heritage and history. Most of the time, these mementos also keep us grounded in a value or offer us comfort or inspiration when we need it most.

So this month reflect on one of your favorite family mementos and figure out why it has such a hold on you? If possible, bring that memento with you to show to your group.

Join Us

Join a Journey Group

Journey Groups are a great way to go deeper with our monthly theme by sharing with small group of people for a couple of hours each month. Groups meet online on Zoom and are scheduled at different times during the month.

For more information, visit our website firstunitariantoronto.org/journey-groups/ or look for the link in *First Light*. Registration for the 2023-24 congregational year is expected to open in early October.

Upcoming Themes

November – Generosity | December – Mystery | January – Liberating Love | February – Justice & Equity | March – Transformation | April – Interdependence | May – Pluralism

Upcoming Services | Sundays at 10:30 a.m.

October 8 | Because they dreamed, we are
Rev. Victoria Ingram
Service includes Bread Communion ritual

October 22 | Ultimate Commitment
Rev. Stephen Atkinson

October 15 | TBD
Rev. Nicole McKay

October 29 | TBD
Rev. Victoria Graham

The Journey Team

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