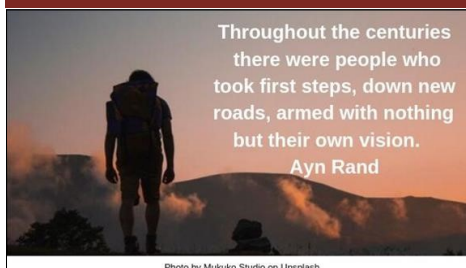




EXPLORATION

Mission & Vision

Readings



Throughout the centuries
there were people who
took first steps, down new
roads, armed with nothing
but their own vision.
Ayn Rand

Photo by Mukoko Studio on Unsplash

Where Are You Going?

The following conversation is taken from Lewis Carroll's *Alice In Wonderland*.

"Cheshire Puss," Alice began... Would you tell me, please, which way I ought to go from here?"

"That depends a good deal on where you want to get to," said the cat.

"I don't much care where..." said Alice.

"Then it doesn't matter which way you go," said the cat.

In terms of our congregations, we must take seriously the Cheshire cat's "where [do] you want to get to" question. It is a question about mission and vision. For many religious liberals, the word mission is somewhat problematic. Former UUA President Gene Pickett writes, "Mission in a religious context has to do with propagation of the faith to those who do not know about it and who might be interested in it or benefitted by it. To propagate is defined as 'to make known,' 'to increase in extent, numbers or influence.' ...This is undoubtedly true for the orthodox church, and it is true for the liberal church if we think of mission not as proselytizing or using ... [coercive] persuasion... but as letting people know what we are about as a religious movement." He concludes, "Without a sense of mission—without a concern for the propagation of the faith, we will not exist for long as a viable or vital religious movement."

Source: Touchstones

How Pursuing a Quest Can Bring Purpose to Your Life

by Chris Guillebeau

I wrote a book about my journey.... In the writing process ...my editor nudged me toward a better goal. "Don't just write about

your own experience," he said. "Write about quests. Write about other people who found a calling of their own, and see how they were changed through the experience."

...I spent my time meeting other people who were also pursuing a quest....

...I heard from an incredible array of remarkable people from all walks of life.

...But I also heard from dozens of ordinary people who had made brave decisions to incorporate adventure into their daily lives.

In Omaha, Robyn Devine set out to knit 10,000 hats. *Why 10,000?* ... "Because having the number ...made it tangible and specific, it gave me something specific to work toward."

In Oklahoma City, Sasha Martin wanted to raise her young daughter with an international perspective. She wasn't able to travel, ...but she had an idea: why not make a meal from every country in the world?

That's exactly what she did, week after week.

...I learned that you must believe in your quest even if no one else does. I learned that experience produces confidence, and many *questers* saw their vision grow in scope as they worked toward the goal.

I learned that many of these people had what I called an emotional awareness of mortality—they were focused on putting each day to good use, aware that life is all too short.

...They found that the quest improved their lives.

Source: <https://www.quietrev.com/pursuing-a-quest-can-bring-purpose-to-life/>

The Non-Sense

by Rev. Gordon McKeeman

We are lovers, we say "Yes" to each other. "Yes" to life—to more and more of life—to its brevity, its grief, its disappointments. To its possibilities, its magnificence, its glory. We quarrel—because we glimpse further possibilities, the non-sense—and wish to lay claim to it. We remember death, and that life is brief, and that the time for love is now and more is possible. One more step toward the holy. It is to know the peace that passes understanding, and that there is no peace. It is to love others as they are, warts and all,

and to believe that more is possible and to bespeak that wanting. It is to pray "Give us this day our daily bread...." And to know that we do not live by bread alone. It is to remember death, and to love life and to accept them both as holy.

Source: Berry Street Essay, 1993

What Unitarian Universalists

Want by Rev. Peter Morales

What really matters to Unitarian Universalists? What do we aspire to become? Is there a shared vision among us that can guide us for the next generation?

The short answer to that last question is, Yes.

In 2010, we began a national conversation we called *Gathered Here*.

More than 1,000 UUs were involved. Here is my distilled version—my "elevator speech," if you will—of the shared aspirations that form Unitarian Universalism's core today: "We aspire to a faith in which our spirituality is deep, experiential, and relational, and which moves us to action." The *Gathered Here* leadership team describes what they learned another way. We are at our best, they found, when we:

- ◆ Grow into our best selves and honor the divine in each person;
- ◆ Practice "spiritual justice:" justice-making grounded in faith and worship;
- ◆ Embrace fellow travelers within and beyond our faith, building community together;
- ◆ Invite people to share ...their gifts;
- ◆ Have such a strong sense of our religious purpose and identity that we must act on it;
- ◆ Covenant together to create sustained relationships across all ages and cultures;
- ◆ Transcend geographic, national, and language barriers; and

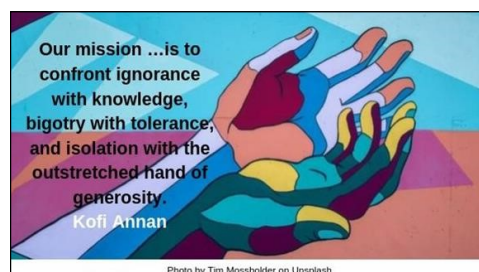


Photo by Tim Mossholder on Unsplash

Wisdom Story

The Wandering Teacher

Once upon a time there was a Teacher who was known far and wide as one who had mastered all the great disciplines of a spiritual seeker. She wandered the country, and whenever people heard she was near, they traveled to seek her wisdom and her guidance.

"Great Teacher," one would say, "I wish to get closer to God." "By what path do you travel now?" she would ask. "I study the scriptures, diligently applying myself day and night to unlocking their mysteries," might come the reply. "Then you should put down your books and walk in the woods—thinking nothing, but listening deeply."

Another would say, "I do good to every person I meet, doing all that I can to serve their needs." "Then for a time," the Teacher would reply, "consider yourself well met and strive to serve your own needs as you have so well served others."

One day the Teacher noticed someone in the back of the crowd, someone not pushing his way to her as most of the others did. She went to him. "What is it I can do for you?" she asked.

"I do not know," he relied. "I feel in need of something, but I do not believe in God and have nothing you could call a 'practice.'" "When do you feel most alive?" the Teacher asked. "When I am playing with my children," the man said without hesitation. "Then play with your children," said the Teacher. "And you will find what you seek."

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/practice/workshop1/59181.shtml>

Snippets

Mission

"The poor have a mission to the rich, the blacks have a mission to the whites, the handicapped have a mission to the 'normal,' the gay people have a mission to the straight, the dying have a mission to the living." *Henri J. M. Nouwen*

Having a vision is not enough. It must be combined with imagination, determination, faith, hope and assion.
Victoria June

Photo by Ran Berkovich on Unsplash

How do you know if
your mission in life
is finished?
If you're still alive,
it isn't.
Richard Bach

Photo by Mathias Konrath on Unsplash

♦ Experience spiritual depth, individually and collectively.

We want to feel our faith, share our faith, and live our faith. We want a religious path in which there are intimate and inevitable links among our spiritual experiences, our treatment of one another, and our actions together in the world.

Source: <https://www.uuworld.org/articles/what-uus-want>

Blinders by Neal Shusterman

In horse racing they put these slats on either side of the horse's head, blocking the creature's peripheral vision. They're called blinders. They don't actually blind the horse, but they allow the horse to see only what's right in front of it; otherwise it might freak out and lose the race. People live with blinders too; but ours are invisible, and much more sophisticated. Most of the time we don't even know they're there. Maybe we need them, though, because if we took in everything all at once, we'd lose our minds. Or worse, our souls. We'd see, we'd hear, we'd feel so deeply that we might never resurface. So, we make our decisions and base our lives on those decisions, never realizing we're seeing only one-tenth of the whole. Then we cling to our narrow conclusions like our lives depend on it.

Source: <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1934354-bruise>

A Vision Beyond our Lifetime

by Margaret Wheatley

The journey of perseverance begins with fire, with passion for our cause, with hope to change things.

As the journey continues, passion dissolves into weariness. The obstacles are larger than we expected. The insanity is more than we can bear. But still we travel on, one foot in front of the other.

And then there comes a point when we

realize that we will not see our work bear fruit before we die. And that's o.k. We feel content that we have planted seeds for some future harvest. That we have met good people. That we have learned many things. That we have survived this far and lived to pass on the stories.

We're certainly not the first ones to have our dreams pushed so far into the future that we won't live to see them. Consider Moses or Abraham or Martin Luther King, Jr. They each carried clear visions revealed to them by their God, but they also knew they would not live to see these promises fulfilled.

What led them forward was faith, not hope. Faith in the truth of their visions that came from a source beyond petty needs for satisfaction and accomplishment. Perhaps holding true to the vision and not losing our way is enough for one lifetime.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/20324>

The Task of the Religious Community

by Rev. Mark Morrison-Reed

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives, and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice.

It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own, but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength is too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.

Source: SLT #580



"The great mission of our day is not conquering the sea or space, disease or tyranny. The grand quest which calls to the hero in every one of us is to become fully alive—to stand up and claim our birthright, which is inner freedom, love and radiant purpose. By fulfilling this, we transform the world." *Jacob Nordby*

"It's not our mission to change or direct another person's path. There is no wrong way or right way. We each have our own life journey and our mission is to just become a LIGHT that enlightens other people's pathways." *Jan Mckingley Hilado*

"In the next 30 years, we can destroy our world. With the very same powers—spiritual, social, scientific—we can evolve our world. Our mission is to serve as catalysts for a planetary awakening in our lifetime, to take a non-violent path to the next stage of our evolution." *Barbara Marx Hubbard*

"There are two missions we are obligated to carry out during our life journey. The first, is to seek Truth throughout our lifetime. The second, is simply to be good." *Suzy Kassem*

Frank Lloyd Wright wrote, "The mission of an architect is to help people understand how to make life more beautiful, the world a better one for living in, and to give reason, rhyme, and meaning to life." *Eraldo Banovac* writes, "The universal mission of all educators is to let the torch of knowledge illuminate the world." *A Unitarian Universalist minister* suggests that, "The mission of Unitarian Universalist churches is to transform people who will transform the world."

Vision

"Vision depends on imagination—the ability to see what cannot be seen in the present and, indeed, the capacity to picture a new

reality. Vision requires a) using more than ordinary insight, b) being rooted in a historical memory, and c) building upon some experience of what you are seeking to envision. Such vision is indispensable to any society, but especially one in crisis, both for problem solving and for creativity." *Jim Wallis*

"I think of the warning, 'Where there is no vision, the people perish.' Let us see what vision we can come to by thinking back and thinking forward along love's road. Thinking back, we are asking ourselves the question that is asked in ..., 'Where do you come from?' And thinking forward, we are asking ourselves the other great question that is asked there, 'Where are you going?' Thinking on the road behind and the road ahead, we are able at last to discover where we are now." *John S. Dunne*

"When politics is being shaped by visions that defend wealth and power, rather than opening up more opportunity; that are more exclusionary than inclusive; that pursue policies that destabilize families and communities; that exalt private interests over the common good; that simply leave too many people behind; that seek national or corporate self-interest over international peace and justice; or that increase conflict rather than reducing it—then such political vision can be as destructive as having no vision at all." *Jim Wallis*

"Why did God create human beings with two eyes, rather than with one or three or four?" a disciple once asked his master, Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk. 'Because human beings need no more and no less than two eyes,' answered the master. "They need one eye for looking outward, at the world. And, they need a second eye for peering inward, into the self." *Rabbi Mendel of Kotzk*

"A woman complained to a visiting friend that her neighbor was a poor housekeeper. 'You should see how dirty her children are—and her house. It is almost a disgrace to be living in the same neighborhood as her. Take a look at those clothes she has hung out on the line. See the black streaks on the sheets and towels!' The friend walked up to the window and said, 'I think the clothes are quite clean, my dear. The streaks are on your window.'" *Anthony de Mello*

"If you belonged to the Ojibwa or some other rooted people, when you returned from a long and perilous journey, your family and neighbors would ask if you learned a new song, met a new animal, come upon a healing herb or a source of food or a holy place. What vision had you brought back for the community? The prime reason for traveling, after all, was to enrich the life at home. 'What did you find?' my father would ask when I returned from a camping trip or an after-dinner stroll. And I would show him a fossil or feather, tell him how the sun lit up the leaves of a hickory, how a skunk looked me over; I would recall for him the taste of elderberries or the rush of wind in the white pines or the crunch of locust shells underfoot. Only in the sharing of what I had found was the journey completed, the circle closed." *Scott Russell Sanders*

Questions

1. How would you answer the Cheshire Cat's question, "Where are you going?" For yourself? For your congregation?
2. UUA President Gene Pickett offers his perspective on the importance of mission. Do you agree that a sense of mission is necessary for Unitarian Universalism to survive and/or thrive? Why or why not?
3. Chris Guillebeau writes about the value of a quest. Have you been or are you on a quest? If yes, how did it/is it impacting your life? If no, why not? Is it possible that life itself is a quest? Why or why not?
4. Do you have a strong "emotional awareness of mortality?" How can such an awareness affect how we live our lives?



5. Some may say that say that mission and vision don't make sense. In this respect, the Rev. Gordon McKeeman stressed the importance of non-sense. What do you think of the way he values the non-sense? What are some examples of non-sense to you?
6. The Rev. Peter Morales summarized the results of the 2010 conversation, *Gathered Here*. Of the eight aspirations he lists, which are the most meaningful to you? Why? What would you add to the list?
7. Neal Shusterman writes about the blinders put on horses, as well as the blinders that can limit our vision. Human blinders include hidden assumptions, prejudice, fear, arrogance, and more. What other blinders affect our vision? How do blinders limit us? How do they protect us?
8. Margaret Wheatley writes about the fact that some of our most important work may be unfinished at our death. How would this affect how you regard your work, especially work on behalf of social justice? Do you agree with Wheatley that "holding true to the vision and not losing our way is enough for one lifetime?" Why or why not? What have you planted that might bear fruit after your lifetime? As in question #4, how does this affect your "emotional awareness of mortality?"
9. Do you agree with Langston Hughes that "if dreams die, life is a broken-winged bird that cannot fly?" Why or why not? What was an especially important dream that you valued as a child? Is there a dream that you hold now that gives meaning to your life? Please share it. Have you experienced the death of a dream? How did that affect you?
10. How would you answer this question



asked by the wandering teacher, "When do you feel the most alive?" What can you/do you do to keep that feeling alive?

11. Henri Nouwen suggests that the dispossessed have a mission to the privileged. What do you think he means by this? What do the dispossessed know that the privileged do not?
12. Jacob Nurdy suggests that our personal mission is to become "fully alive." Do you agree? Why or why not? What else do you think should be part of our personal mission if our goal is to transform the world?
13. Jan Mckingley Hilado offers a radical revisioning of the role of a missionary. It is not to change or direct someone, but to offer to be a LIGHT to enlighten another's path. Do you agree? Why or why not?
14. Barbara Marx Hubbard suggests that we have the power to destroy the world in the next 30 years or save it. Do you agree? Why or why not? While she does not mention climate change, that seems to be at the top of destructive forces.

How should we respond to this?

15. Suzy Kassem suggests that we have two missions: seek the truth and be good. How would doing these transform the world? Are there other missions that you would add to these two?
16. Frank Lloyd Wright proposed a mission for architects, while Eraldo Banovac focused on educators. What was/is your profession/occupation? What do you think the mission for that should be? As above, one Unitarian Universalist minister suggested that the mission of a Unitarian Universalist congregation is to transform people who will transform the world. Do you agree? Why or why not? How might our congregations support this?
17. Jim Wallis links vision to imagination. He offers three requirements for envisioning. What, if anything else, would you add to his list? Is our society in crisis? If yes, how? What vision would you put forth to address this crisis?
18. Jim Wallis criticizes politics shaped by visions of the wealthy and powerful. How do such visions undermine the common good and the beloved community?
19. How do you balance your vision per Rabbi Mendel, given the need to look outward and inward?
20. Per Scott Russell Sanders, what would you share of value with others that you have discovered on your life journey? How have those discoveries impacted you?

