

The Muddy Season

Living in the In-Between

March/April 2024



**What does it mean to
live in the
in-between?**

**How do we make the
transition(s) that will
move us forward?**

Photo Credit: Sue Morgan at Braddock Bay

“Marsh, mire, fen, bog, slough, morass and wetland. These are liminal landscapes. Places of making and unmaking where water cedes to land and land to water. The world here is never topographically still.... And this terrain is not to be trusted. It demands caution, respect and propitiation. Among the sedge, reed and rush, we hear the trickster’s laugh; for the ground underfoot is literally (and materially) ‘shifty’.

From “Liminal Narratives – stories in the betwixt and between: Marsh”
[Marsh as Liminal Space](#)

Beloveds,

March and April constitute the Muddy Season in Western New York. Farm fields are too wet to plow. And yet, the time for planting is upon us. We live in the in-between time from the cold snowy winter and the promise of springtime. We are all living in the in-between time between birth and death. We are at a moment in between past and future.

There's the soul-full experience in between diagnosis of a terminal illness and death. The uncertainty of when death will arrive. The richness of spending time with loved ones. The anticipation of what will come next for the one who dies and those who are left. Too much unknowing amidst knowing with certainty.

Most of us remember early March 2020 when we were told to shut down, work from home, school from home, attend church and meet on Zoom. Not knowing how long this will last. We scrambled to locate masks and hand sanitizer, and to fill the pantry. We were definitely living in the in-between time. Still not over four years later, but we have found ways to live in this space.

Another way of thinking about living in the in-between involves people who are born into one culture and live in another, sometimes described as 'third culture kids'. Many immigrants arrive in the U.S. as children, rooted in their parents' culture and raised in U.S. culture, who must find that third culture in between the two. Our Black siblings learn at an early age to code switch between their Black families/friends and the White culture we all swim in.

Our Unitarian Universalist denomination is in between the current Article II Principles and Sources and the proposed Article II Purposes and Covenant. A significant change is the use of a graphic "Love is at the center" – a flaming chalice overlaid by the word "LOVE" is surrounded by Justice, Interdependence, Equity, Transformation, Pluralism, and Generosity. The graphic is followed by a narrative. You can find it here: [UUA Proposal](#)

During this season, we will experience a total solar eclipse on April 8, 2024. At 2:07 pm the moon begins to move in between the sun and the earth with totality at 3:20 pm lasting 3 minutes 38 seconds. 50,000 years ago, our Neanderthal cousins would have been unprepared for darkness descending during a solar eclipse. 5,000 years ago, our forebears' wise leaders would likely have predicted a solar eclipse and prepared the people. Even though we know about it ahead of time, this will be an experience of living in the in-between. Day will darken into night. Take the moment to observe the bird and animal behavior, to notice the changing temperature and breeze. Pay attention to how you feel when daylight returns?

Take some time this season to contemplate the many transitions in our lives. Savor the past, anticipate the future openly and take the time to live in the in-between.

— Anne J. Perry
Spiritual Deepening Packet Team
First Unitarian Church of Rochester

GRATITUDE

This spiritual deepening packet was guided into existence by Sue Morgan and Anne Perry with the amazing support of the packet creation team, Rev. Verdis LeVar Robinson and the three-church worship team that includes ministers and religious education & music leaders from First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua.

LAND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

We acknowledge with respect the Seneca (Onöndowa'ga:') Nation, Keepers of the Western Door and part of the Haudenosaunee People, on whose ancestral land First Unitarian Church of Rochester, First Universalist Church of Rochester, and the Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua now exist.

READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING / EXTINGUISHING

Chalice Lighting

A Chalice Lighting for Liminal Times

In betwixt and in between
We move in the liminal spaces
that show shades of
what can become what can be
We light this chalice
as a symbol of courage
to move into that time of
this and that
and not this and not that
With patience and faith
and love and hope
that this time will pass
Like the sun that moves
in between rising and setting
Reminding us that beauty resounds
In betwixt and
In between
— *Rev. Summer Albayati, UU*

The Ember of Hope, and Love Set Ablaze

What if
sometimes it's not about a light in the
darkness?
What if
sometimes it's about sparking potential into
possibility, and possibility into existence?
What if
sometimes the flame that burns in the
chalice of our faith is nothing less than the
ember of hope and nothing more than love
set ablaze?
What if
sometimes all we need do is follow this
flame—one among scores, hundreds,
thousands of steadily flickering flames
across the land and among so many
peoples—on the way to justice and into the
land of peace?
What if
we dare to kindle that chalice?
— *Rev. Lisa Doege, UU*

Chalice Extinguishing



All That We Have Been, All That We Will Become

All that we have been separately
and all that we will become together
is stretched out before and behind us
like stars scattered across a canvas of sky.
We stand at the precipice, arms locked
together like tandem skydivers
working up the courage to jump.

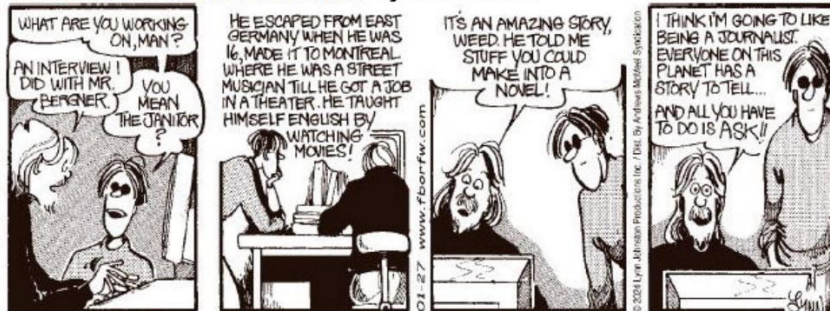
— Rev. Leslie Ahuvah Fails, UU

May You Be Changed

May you leave this time together changed.
May the promises you have made to yourself about who you want to be
feel closer to the reality of who you are right now.
May you share that feeling of transformation wherever you go.
May it spread into every word, deed, thought, and interaction
Until we are all changed, transformed and transforming together,
becoming our better selves.
— Emily Richards, UU Director of Religious Education

SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

FOR BETTER OR FOR WORSE Lynn Johnston



[When preparing these exercises, we seek a variety of experiences – some easy and comfortable / some challenging – that draw on different modes of accessing the sacred. Participants will have a variety of life experiences, different access & mobility needs, and

cultural norms. We write with that in mind.]

A. Transition Artwork

Create a work of art that represents a transition that is happening for you. Life is change, and we are always in between what came before and what is to come, but some transitions feel especially significant. Different cultures and traditions from around the world have used ceremonies, symbols, and stories to signify life transitions such as moving from infancy to childhood, or childhood to adulthood. What transitions are you currently experiencing? Create a picture, collage, piece of jewelry, or other work of art that uses colors, symbols, or images that you feel best represents this transition for you. Here are a few websites to get you started, but you may want to draw from a tradition that has meaning for you, or to make up your own imagery entirely.

Runic symbolism: [Runes Symbols Meanings](#)

Alchemy symbolism: [Alchemy Symbolism](#)

Adinkra symbols and meanings: [Adinkra Symbols & Meanings](#)

Buddhist symbols: [Buddhist Symbols](#)

Animal symbols: [Animal Symbols Meanings](#)

Plant symbols: [The Language of Flowers](#)

B. Halfway Down the Stairs (Multigenerational)

Read the A.A. Milne poem “Halfway Down” together. Find a set of stairs or a ramp that you frequently use to get from one place to another. This might be at your home, at church, at a library, or another location of your choosing. Sit or stand at the middle point and take a sensory inventory – what do things look like, sound like, smell like or feel like in this location? Do you observe anything you don’t usually notice when you go up or down these stairs or this ramp? Talk or write about where you were coming from to get to that spot – what images, feelings, scents, or sounds do you associate with that place? Talk or write about where you will go after you leave this spot – what images, feelings, scents, or sounds do you associate with that place? Are there other in-between places that you could take a sensory inventory of – like traveling between school or work and home? A waiting room or foyer? The feeling of being in-between awake and asleep?

Halfway Down

Halfway down the
stairs
is a stair
where i sit.
there isn't any
other stair
quite like
it.
i'm not at the
bottom,
i'm not at the top;
so this is the stair

where
I always
stop.

Halfway up the
stairs
Isn't up
And it isn't down.
It isn't in the
nursery,
It isn't in town.

And all sorts of
funny thoughts
Run round my
head.
It isn't really
Anywhere!
It's somewhere
else
Instead!

C. Reflect on a period of living in the in-between.

Consider a time when you were living in the in-between. It could be when a friend or relative had been diagnosed with a terminal condition and you were very involved with them. It could be the couple of years immersed in the COVID-19 pandemic. Perhaps the period between engagement and wedding. Maybe it's the period of interim ministry between a familiar presence and an unknown future. Those are just a few examples – you will find what's important to you. Over a period of a week or two, write your thoughts about that period. What stands out? Is it the memories of the time before? The grappling with the time of uncertainty? The fear of the unknown to come? How did you handle it? Tell your story to your small group.

D. Intentionally experience a 'liminal' space.

Go for a walk along a 'liminal' space – the brushy transition zone where a field gives way to the forest, or the marshy area where the lake meets the shore. Often these spaces are less hospitable to humans than the biomes they separate, but they host species of plants and animals that are unique to these areas. Take or sketch some pictures, write down your reflections, or simply experience what it feels like to be in environment that is not just a buffer between two more defined, familiar landscapes, but its own place.

E. Eclipse Activities and Experience

With the moon passing in between us and the sun, we are about to experience a magical, mythical, scientifically explainable event. There are many activities available in the Rochester area, culminating on the afternoon of Monday, April 8th. Attend and/or participate in as many events as possible in the lead up to the eclipse. Join fellow UUs at First Unitarian April 8th for a full afternoon of kids and adults' activities before the eclipse starts, collective viewing and then worship/music and food to follow. Be sure to get the glasses that protect your eyes while watching the eclipse. Decide in advance where you will watch the eclipse. As the spirit moves you, create an artwork about the eclipse, write a poem, take a series of photos, or write a prose reflection. Come to your April spiritual deepening small group meeting prepared to talk about this experience.



Eclipse Events

[Rochester Museum and Science Center](#)
[Montezuma Audubon](#)
[Rochester Eclipse Events](#)
[Penfield](#)

[Perinton](#)
[Brockport](#)
[SUNY Brockport](#)
[Genesee Country Museum](#)
[Visit Rochester](#)

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

[These questions aren't "homework" that need to be covered entirely. Instead, simply pick the one question that speaks to you most and let it lead you where you need to go. The questions often lead not to answers, but more questions.]

1. What does it mean for us as Unitarian Universalists to live as a people of hope and imagination—especially during in-between times? How can we challenge ourselves (and each other) to learn and grow in uncertain times?
2. Sometimes we don't recognize at first that we are in an in-between state – getting internally ready to leave a job, a relationship, or a place, and getting ready for what comes next - before we consciously understand that it is happening. Can you think of a time when this was true for you?
3. How do you transition between various aspects of your life, such as work vs personal or hobby vs family time? Resource: [Work Home Transition](#) article from Harvard Business Review.
4. Can you think of a time when you were in an in-between place longer than you thought you would be? What did it feel like to exist in that in-between time longer than you anticipated?
5. Our culture tends to see some aspects of identity (such as race, gender, sexuality, religion, class) as “either this or that”, but many people exist along a spectrum within that dichotomy. Are there parts of your identity that inhabit or move along that spectrum?
6. In a piece of music, there is generally a period of rest between movements. When you find yourself at an in-between place, are you able to take a pause and rest? If so, how do you do it?
7. T. S. Eliot said “Between the idea and the reality, between the motion and the act, falls the shadow”. When you have a goal, what are the “shadows” that get between your ideas and the things you want to achieve?
8. Recall times you were falling in love with a person, an idea or a thing, and recognize that time as an in-between time. Are there similar traits or experiences that happen?

RESOURCES

Just as we select spiritual exercises that speak to a diversity of experience, we draw from a diversity of sources and include a diversity of voices here. We explicitly seek voices and perspectives of people with disabilities, BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color), Women, Trans and NonBinary People, other members of the LGBTQ community, children and youth.

FROM UNITARIAN UNIVERSALISM

Hymns in *Singing the Living Tradition*

Hymn #98. Loveliest of Trees

Now, of my threescore years and ten,

Twenty will not come again,
And take from seventy springs a score,
It only leaves me fifty more.

Loveliest of Trees

Hymn #96. I Cannot Think of Them as Dead

I cannot think of them as dead,
who walk with me no more;
along the path of life I tread
they are but gone before

Lyrics by Frederick Lucian Hosmer, 19th century Unitarian minister.

I Cannot Think of Them as Dead

WISDOM FROM WORLD RELIGIONS

Buddhist practice

The Five Remembrances attributed to Shakyamuni Buddha remind us that we are always in a state of impermanence, in between youth and age, health and illness, present and future:

1. I am of the nature to grow old. There is no way to escape growing old.
2. I am of the nature to have ill health. There is no way to escape having ill health.
3. I am of the nature to die. There is no way to escape death.
4. All that is dear to me and everyone I love are of the nature to change. There is no way to escape being separated from them.
5. My actions are my only true belongings. I cannot escape the consequences of my actions. My actions are the ground on which I stand.

Living Your Yoga, p. 96:

“One day I was filling out a form that asked for my permanent address, and whether I owned my home. I may live in the San Francisco Bay Area now, but where is my home after I die? And don't I need permanent possession of something to own it? It appears that I am renting everything for this lifetime, including my body, my family, my education and knowledge, my experiences, and my ATM card. Nothing is truly mine . . . nothing is permanent except impermanence.”

— Judith Hanson Lasater, PhD, American author and physical therapist

Hebrew Blessing

Blessed are you, Spirit of Life
who has sustained us, enlivened us
and enabled us to reach this moment.

This sentence is an adaptation of a Hebrew prayer called the shecheheyanu. "It's a blessing for anytime you do something you haven't done in a long time or you're doing something for the first time—or when doing "annual" events that you should feel blessed for having lived to see come around the wheel of the year again. Or: for when you survive a close call. Or when you are about to do something adventurous."

— *Rev. Leslie Ahuvah Fails, UU*

Old Testament

The story of Noah's Ark as a major in-between time.

Genesis 8:1-14

8:1 But God remembered Noah and all the wild animals and the livestock that were with him in the ark, and he sent a wind over the earth, and the waters receded. . . . 13 By the first day of the first month of Noah's six hundred and first year, the water had dried up from the earth. Noah then removed the covering from the ark and saw that the surface of the ground was dry.

From Bible Gateway: [Noah Ends In-Between Time](#)

The story of Esther establishes the Jewish celebration of Purim (March 23/24, 2024)

"Esther is also a story about exile, about being an exiled Jew, an exiled person of faith, and what it means to live in a place that is foreign, to live in a place where you are foreign, where you and your kinsman are aliens. Esther is a book about how to live with your community in a place that is indifferent to you or hostile to you."

From Esther Actually: Purim, Persia, Patriarchy – Setting the Stage, by Rachel Held Evans, American Author

[Esther and Purim](#)

"Living Between the Times" – June 9, 2016, Westminster Theological Seminary

The story of the book of Numbers is written to a people whose lives are lived between . . . the exodus and the Promised Land." In this article, the 40 years in the wilderness is described as an "in-between" time: [40 Years in the Wilderness](#)

— Iain Duguid, PhD., Professor of Old Testament

POETRY EXCERPTS

To respect copyright laws and support artists, we provide links to the full work from which an excerpt is taken.

Excerpt from "The Hollow Men" by T.S. Eliot

full poem: [The Hollow Men](#)

Between the idea

And the reality

Between the motion

And the act

Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Between the conception

And the creation

Between the emotion

And the response

Falls the Shadow

Life is very long

Between the desire

And the spasm

Between the potency

And the existence

Between the essence

And the descent

Falls the Shadow

For Thine is the Kingdom

Excerpt from "The Dash," a poem

I read of a man who stood to speak

at the funeral of a friend

He referred to the dates on the tombstone

from the beginning . . . to the end.

He noted that first came the date of birth

and spoke the following date with tears,

but he said what mattered most of all was the dash between those years.

[The Dash poem](#)

— Linda Ellis, American author, speaker and poet

QUOTATIONS

In the Shadow of the Moon: The Science, Magic, and Mystery of Solar Eclipses

“Too often we neglect the power of religion in framing responses to natural phenomena . . . Religion is far more than a simple byproduct of human cognition without function. It serves as a way of coping with the mysterious forces in the universe that move the sun and the moon and create startling phenomena like eclipses.” Ppg 59-60.

— Anthony Aveni, an American academic anthropologist, astronomer, and author.

FURTHER ENGAGEMENT: PODCASTS, SONGS, ARTICLES, FILMS, & BOOKS

MUSIC

“Between the Devil and the Deep Blue Sea”

Music by Harold Arlen and lyrics by Ted Koehler.

“I should hate you

But I guess I love you

You’ve got me in between the devil and the deep blue sea”

Cab Calloway, Traditional version: [1931 Version](#)

George Harrison, ukelele version: [Uke Version](#)

In Between by Sydney Lau

[In Between Sydney Lau](#)

Sydney Lau died in August 2023 at age 22 in a car accident. The following is from her obituary:

“One of her creations, “In Between,” written and performed by Sydney, was chosen by her family to accompany her on her Honor Walk at the University of Iowa Hospital, just prior to the organ recovery surgery that ultimately saved three lives.”

Selected Lyrics: “I come from a place, a place in between, a place nobody’s ever seen . . . Not here nor there. Not dark, not light. I don’t really know where I’m going.”

From an NPR podcast: “I don’t know, there’s so much uncertainty in life, but this is all about letting go and embracing the journey and just letting it lift you and take you wherever it’s going.”

Scroll to 36:06 in the podcast: [NPR MusixMatch Podcast 2023 Impactful Songs](#)

“Closer to Fine”, performed by the Indigo Girls – Amy Ray and composer Emily Saliers

“Well, darkness has a hunger that’s insatiable

And lightness has a call that’s hard to hear

And I wrap my fear around me like a blanket

I sailed my ship of safety till I sank it
I'm crawling on your shores"

[Closer to Fine Indigo Girls](#)

This song can be heard in the 2023 hit movie "Barbie" in the context of Barbie seeking to understand the universe and the uncertainties of life.

[Closer to Fine The Barbie Album](#)

"Orpheus" by Sara Bareilles

"You were written in the stars that we are swimming in
And it has no name, no guarantee
It's just the promise of a day I know that some may never see"

[Orpheus sung by Sara Bareilles](#)

TED talk

Between Two Cultures by Smriti Ram

[Third Culture Kid TED Talk](#)

Like many first generation immigrants, Smriti Ram grew up with the unique challenge of reconciling her own identity with the different cultures surrounding her. Through her experiences with racism, cultural detachment, and her own identity explorations, Ram shares why it is important for our communities to embrace diversity and cultural variety.

The Middle Passage

Amistad: The Middle Passage is the in-between time when Africans were stolen from their homes, people and cultures and transported to the Americas where their enslaved free labor built the world we know today. Chained aboard ships, they had no idea where they were going or what their future held. One-fourth didn't make it across. Some died due to the inhumane conditions and some lost hope. African Americans are the descendants of those who survived such brutality, survived that in-between traumatic horror, and whose resilience flows them. They can inspire us all. Consider the Amistad Case:

In February of 1839, Portuguese slave hunters abducted a large group of Africans from Sierra Leone and shipped them to Havana, Cuba, a center for the slave trade. . . On July 1, 1839, the Africans seized the ship, killed the captain and the cook, and ordered Montes and Ruiz to sail to Africa.

[National Archives Amistad](#)

Amazing Grace: The poem was written in 1772 by John Newton, a seafarer who was involved in the slave trade. His story is one of transition from actively transporting slaves from Africa to the Americas until he was eventually called to ministry in the Anglican Church and later became an abolitionist. [Library of Congress Amazing Grace Story](#)

How Far the Light Reaches, p.150

"I'm not interested in writing toward some resolution of belonging. Maybe it's a side effect of coming out twice in adulthood, but I do not want to feel resolved about myself. My experience as a mixed-race person is not fixed but always oscillating, between Chinese and white, longing

and irritation, pride and guilt. I want to imagine my mixed-race existence in the present and into the future. I want to think about my mixed-race being – not as a noun but as a gerund. I want to imagine how I am continuing to live.”

— Sabrina Imbler, American LGBTQ+ author and science journalist

American Symphony, a documentary film by musician Jon Baptiste, distributed by Netflix, is the story of composing American Symphony and its first performance. The story takes place in the context of Baptiste’s spouse coping with the return of a rare cancer. Her story is in the book [Between Two Kingdoms](#) by Suleika Jaouad. Living in the in-between in multiple layers.

[NPR Between Two Kingdoms](#)



The Terminal is a 2004 American comedy-drama film produced and directed by Steven Spielberg and starring Tom Hanks . . . The film is about an Eastern European man who is stuck in New York's John F. Kennedy Airport terminal when he is denied entry to the United States and at the same time is unable to return to his native country because of a military coup.

Description available in Wikipedia: [Wikipedia - The Terminal](#)

Available to rent on Prime Video.

HUMOR



UU Hysterical Society



“By God, for a minute there it suddenly all made sense!”

Gahan Wilson, UU Hysterical Society