

# The Blooming Season Pluralism

A collaboration of First Universalist Church of Rochester,  
Unitarian Universalist Church of Canandaigua, and First Unitarian Church of Rochester.  
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***We celebrate that we are all sacred beings,  
diverse in culture, experience, and theology.***

***We covenant to learn from one another in our free and responsible search  
for truth and meaning. We embrace our differences and commonalities  
with Love, curiosity, and respect.***

UUA Article II

## **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 are now located.

Beloveds,

I invite you to read the language of this value closely. If you do, I think you will find, as I do, that pluralism is not so much a belief about the universe or ultimate reality, but it's a perspective rooted in the facts of being human. This approach sets aside questions of epistemology (what do we know, and how do we know it?) and grand cosmology (what is it that really exists?), and instead focuses on anthropology – what can we say about Humans? Well, one thing we can say is that we are diverse in culture, experience, and theology! As religious progressives, Unitarian Universalists embrace and uplift this reality as being natural and desirable. Diversity is not a problem to be overcome by uniformity or doctrine!

This strikes me as a very sensible approach, in part because we can speak about human nature a lot more confidently than we can about ultimate reality. In my experience, the only thing we can really say about the Big Bigness of Everything is that— well, it's very big. So big, in fact, that it is actually *beyond* anything we could ever try to say about it. So instead, this articulation of our shared value focuses on us, the people – sacred and diverse, having our own experiences, coming from our own cultures, discerning and developing our own theologies. That to be human is to have a particular perspective and experience, and to know that it is not a universal or normative one is an important part of spiritual maturity. I may personally have a conviction that God does or doesn't exist, but I know that a theological conviction held by a single human is not the same thing as the absolute truth that every other person should hold as a conviction.

I want to stress that this liberatory way of relating to truth and diversity is not actually so easy as it may sound. It requires knowing ourselves, cultivating humility and self-awareness, as well as confidence. And it requires really knowing one another – being open to being wrong about what we thought of someone else's belief, or culture, or life experience, being willing to engage the conflict that may arise, and being willing to really listen to each other without preconception or judgement. We must be free, and create the conditions for others freedom – and we must be responsible, and welcome when others aid us in that effort by reflecting back hard truths to us.

Rather than being the “believe whatever you want” value, Pluralism I think is one of the most challenging and demanding of our shared values. It is deeply theological, and at the same time deeply practical. As you engage this packet and explore the shared value of Pluralism, I hope you will be courageous in where it leads you in relationship with others, both with those who are like you, but especially with those who are not.



Rev AJ  
Associate Minister  
First Unitarian Church of Rochester

## **GRATITUDE**

Much thanks to the Blooming Season's packet-team leads, Erin Waller and Mary Hammele, the three-church worship team brainstorm, and numerous contributions from the entire packet team. We hope you find inspiration to explore what pluralism means for you and your community.

## READINGS FOR CHALICE LIGHTING

### **Different Yet United**, by [Pat Uribe-Lichty](#)

We come from many places—  
along different paths, bringing different truths.  
We come with different histories and different realities,  
And yet we come together as one people—  
with faith that we can use our differences  
to heal ourselves, and each other,  
to bring wholeness to a fractured world.  
We come, seeking to find community,  
to find acceptance of who we are.  
In this place we may find others who are much like us,  
and others who are much different.  
May our lit chalice remind us that we are  
a people taught by different stories, with many voices  
but always one people, working for a world  
where love creates justice,  
and justice gives birth to peace.



### **Cherishing Our Differences**, by [Cindy Fesgen](#)

We are all capable  
In different ways  
With various strengths and talents.

We are all holy  
Part of the universe  
And the interdependent web.

We light this chalice  
Cherishing our differences  
And holding each other in sacredness.

## READINGS FOR CHALICE EXTINGUISHING

### **The Richness of Our Differences**, by [Julianne Lepp](#)

...May our hearts be open to unexpected answers.  
May we be reminded that all beings are whole, sacred and worthy.  
Let our hearts be welcoming of multiple truths ...  
What can we learn from each other in the richness of our differences?  
May the heart of compassion help us recognize the sacred in each other  
and bridge differences in these challenging times...

### **The Restorative Power of Love** by [Rev Dr Sheri Prud'homme](#)

We affirm the power of Love to heal what is broken, to hold us together across pluralities of diverse religious practices and beliefs, to hold us when things fall apart, to grow our capacities, and to guide us as we return again and again in our families and communities to side with Love.

## plu·ral·ism (Oxford Languages definition)

/ˈploʊərəˌlɪz(ə)m/ noun

1. a condition or system in which two or more states, groups, principles, sources of authority, etc., coexist.
  - a political theory or system of power-sharing among a number of political parties.
  - a form of society in which the members of minority groups maintain their independent cultural traditions.
  - Philosophy - a theory or system that recognizes more than one ultimate principle.

## SPIRITUAL EXERCISES

**Exercise 1** Consider the difference between the concepts of tolerance and pluralism. Is one a more active word – or how could it be? How can we learn to *embrace* diversity, or to be *curious* about it? How can we – individually or in groups – continue to lift up and celebrate pluralism, when our current government seems determined to stuff it in a trash can? Share your thoughts with your group (or a friend or two) and see what they think.



**Exercise 2 *Improv!*** The first rule in improv is “Yes, and...”  
Say “Yes and!”

For a story to be built, whether it is short form or long form, the players have to agree to the basic situation and set-up. The who, what, and where have to be developed for a scene to work.

By saying yes, we accept the reality created by our partners and begin the collaborative process from the start of a scene. The collaborative process or group mind helps make us giants, animals, villains, saints and more importantly put us in situations that we would normally avoid.

Scott Adsit, actor & comedian, puts it this way, “The rules of improvisation apply beautifully to life. Never say no - you have to be *interested* to be interesting, and your job is to support your partners.” The Rule of Agreement reminds you to “respect what your partner has created” and to at least start from an open-minded place. Start with a YES and see where that takes you...”

In your group, do some improv to put pluralism into play. Here are some prompts:

- \* A job interview.
- \* A detective gives a lie detector test to a suspect.
- \* A second date at an Outback Steakhouse.
- \* A priest takes a parishioner’s confession.

**Exercise 3 *Belief Spectrum Exercise.*** Because we are a non-creedal faith with many different beliefs and perspectives welcomed, this exercise can explore the diversity of your own small group (or a group of friends) and reflect on where each of us stand on various topics. Use the scales found in Appendix A at the end of the packet. There are **no right answers**, and you should respond according to whatever definition you give to each category. If you meet in person, you can assign a virtual line on the floor with the two extremes on either end of the line. People can arrange themselves along that line to express where they see themselves on the scale.

If you meet on Zoom, you can imagine a scale of 1 to 10 along the scale, with 5 being the midpoint. You will be able to discuss how group members placed themselves on the line. Sometimes, their explanations might inspire you to move along the spectrum as you see the category in a new light.

## 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.*



Stephanie Schindler, Tananka Expedition  
Life

1. The current political climate seems to devalue pluralism and even seek to destroy it. What can you do, in your daily living to affirm pluralism?
2. How can a society balance the needs and perspectives of diverse groups while maintaining social cohesion?
3. What mechanisms can be implemented to ensure equal representation of minority voices in decision-making processes?
4. How does cultural pluralism impact the development of a national identity? What internal & external pressures influence this identity?
5. What are the potential challenges of promoting religious pluralism in a society with strong established religious beliefs?
6. How can education foster understanding and respect for different perspectives within a pluralistic society?
7. How can interfaith groups work toward common goal even when core values are different?
8. When you encounter differences with others, what helps you stay curious rather than getting furious?
9. How do you balance the “free” and the “responsible” in the search for truth and meaning?
10. How can we borrow from diverse traditions without cultural appropriation & in right-relationship with those cultures? Have you seen events or presentations where this has been done well?

## ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

### From Unitarian Universalism

["Pluralism, A Reflection on UU Shared Values"](#) by Rev. Dr. Sheri Prud'homme, part of *Theological Reflection on UU Shared Values*, Sep 30, 2024.

“...understanding there to be a divine spark in all beings; understanding God’s love to embrace all and refusing to separate humankind after death into different groups; and turning to the world, human experience, and other religions of the world as sources of our evolving theological perspective – our theology eventually grew to embrace a pluralism that [our] forebears might not have thought imaginable...”

## WISDOM FROM WORLD RELIGIONS

### Buddhist Traditions

"It would be pointless for a plum blossom to try to remake itself as a cherry blossom, no matter how deeply the plum yearns to do so. The plum is happiest when it blooms as itself in full glory. How much of the color and wonder of life would be lost if it weren't for our differences."

– [Daisaku Ikeda](#), Buddhist philosopher and author

## Hinduism

"Reality is one. The wise call It by various names." Rig Veda 1.164.46

## The Qur'ān

"O people, we created you all from a single man and a single woman, and made you into races and tribes so that you should get to know one another." (13:49)

## Jewish Tradition and Text

"Humanity was produced from one man, Adam, to show God's greatness. When a man mints a coin in a press, each coin is identical. But when the King of Kings, the Holy One, blessed be He, creates people in the form of Adam, not one is similar to any other." Mishnah Sanhedrin 4:5

## Christian New Testament

### Spiritual Gifts – Variety and Unity

"There are different kinds of gifts, but the same Spirit; there are different ministries, but the same Lord; there are different works, but the same God who accomplishes all of them in everyone ... Now the body is not one member, it is many. If a foot should say, 'Because I am not a hand I do not belong to the body,' would it belong any less to the body? If an ear should say, 'Because I am not an eye I do not belong to the body,' would it then no longer belong to the body? If the body were all eye, what would happen to our hearing? If it were all ear, what would happen to our smelling? As it is, God has set each member of the body in the place intended. If all the members were alike, where would the body be? There are, indeed, many parts, yet one body." 1 Corinthians. 4-6, 12-20, *The New American Bible*

## POETRY EXCERPTS

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

[Not Yet Time for Paradise](#) (excerpt)  
By [Gerald Dillenbeck](#), 2023

Mistaking side by side pluralism  
for more resonant  
co-infested polyculturalism

Is like mistaking chaotic divisions  
for resilient organic complexity,  
integral multiplicity

Like only perceiving competitive dissonance  
and degenerative confusion  
while missing inside resonant light  
regenerating cooperative mind/body  
health/wealth consciousness

Free from win/lose  
lack-of-capital-driven anxiety,  
Free toward win/win  
co-invested anticipation...  
...LeftHere-RightNow  
resonantly resilient  
amusing sacred communion place  
Body space  
in timeless peaks  
of co-infested Yang/Yin  
space/time bilateral balancing Way,  
EarthTribe universal/unitarian

## To compose a country

To all cultures, colors, characters,  
And conditions of man.  
And so we lift our gazes not  
To what stands between us,  
But what stands before us.  
We close the divide,  
Because we know to put  
Our future first, we must first  
Put our differences aside.

We lay down our arms  
So we can reach our arms out to  
One another.  
We seek harm to none,  
And harmony for all.

– [Amanda Gorman](#), *The Hill We Climb*



## QUOTATIONS

“Light and Dark: each was unaware that the other existed.” – [Ashim Shanker](#), [Don't Forget to Breathe](#)

“We believe that religions are basically the same...they only differ on matters of creation, sin, heaven, hell, God, and salvation.” – [Steve Turner](#), [Up to Date: Poems, 1968-1982](#)

“This is pluralism: not a synonym of relativism, but rather an antonym. Pluralism accepts the moral reality of different kinds of truth, but rejects the idea that they can all be placed on a single scale, measured by a single value.” – [Timothy Snyder](#), [Thinking the Twentieth Century](#)



[Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez](#)

“The construction of civilizational difference is not exclusive in any simple sense... The belief that human beings can be separated from their histories and traditions makes it possible to urge a Europeanization of the Islamic world. And by the same logic, it underlies the belief that the assimilation to Europe's civilization of Muslim immigrants who are--for good or for ill--already in European states is necessary and desirable.” – [Talal Asad](#), [Formations of the Secular: Christianity, Islam, Modernity](#)

## FURTHER ENGAGEMENT

**Books** (links to Monroe County Library System, where available)

[Without Buddha I Could not be a Christian](#), by Paul Knitter. 2009. A quest for truth & spiritual authenticity. From the nature of prayer to Christian views on life after death, Knitter demonstrates how Buddhist perspectives can inspire a more person-centered & socially engaged understanding of Christianity.

[Try My Jesus](#) (Available through Inspirit), by [Rev Carlton E Smith](#), 2022. “You don’t have to be a prisoner to other people’s beliefs about God, Jesus, heaven or hell – you can be free. You don’t have to be conflicted about your faith and how you live your life – you can go deeper with integrity. You don’t have to feel separated from the Universal Love of God – you can open your heart to it so that you and everyone around you are blessed.” (from the introduction to *Try My Jesus*)



[Old Turtle](#), by [Douglas Wood](#), watercolors by [Cheng-Khee Chee](#)

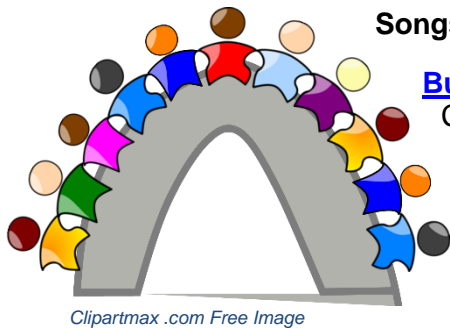
At a time when all the living things of the world could communicate an argument broke out over who and what God is. Old Turtle, in his wisdom, settles the argument in this parable which promotes our relationship with the earth and all the beings that inhabit it. [YouTube Read Aloud link here](#).

### Articles for Further Study

[Cultural Pluralism](#). July 11, 2023. Anthroholistic.com. “Pluralism acknowledges that it is appropriate to have a multiplicity of opinions... cultural pluralism has been proposed as a goal and a set of social behaviors for properly managing modern society’s rising variety and connection. Cultural pluralism emerges when a society’s social, political, and legal structures are built to accommodate variation and difference in a way that promotes rather than inhibits community cohesiveness...”

### [Blogpost – Hilchot \(the laws of\) Pluralism: What makes true pluralism possible?](#)

[Rabbi Danya Ruttenberg](#) gives us a brilliant examination of what pluralism asks of members within a diverse faith community. Rabbi Ruttenberg’s discussion and examples are specific to Jewish communities with generally shared beliefs/values but with divergent interpretations, for example of dietary laws or how to observe the Sabbath. How does the community structure itself so that no one has to compromise on core values?



### Songs

[Building Bridges](#), #1023 *Singing the Journey*, performed by UUUtica Choir. Words by the women of Greenham Common peace occupation, England 1983, set to a Quaker round.

[True Colors](#), by [Cyndi Lauper](#), 2009

[Stronger Than You](#), as performed in [Steven Universe](#) (Cartoon Network), performed by [Estelle](#) (voice of Garnet), 2017



## Videos

[Pluralism as an Antidote to Cultural Ignorance](#). Moiz Rajwani, TEDxYouth, May 2018  
Moiz's talk focuses on the idea of cosmopolitan ethics, cultural fragmentation and stereotypes associated with religion. He promotes the idea of "pluralism" as a way forward in battling these preconceived notions towards more equity and justice in a globalized world.

[Disagreement: An Essential Part of Pluralism](#), by Sahil Badruddin, TEDxOshkosh, Jan 2019  
More disagreement means more intellectual diversity, more opinions, more ideas. Peace and progress, thus, can never be achieved by suppressing disagreement but instead can be achieved by embracing and respecting what they represent.

Ted Lasso: [Be Curious, Not Judgmental](#), 2021, What if we asked questions, instead of making assumptions? Jason Sudeikis stars in television series on Apple +, 2020-present.

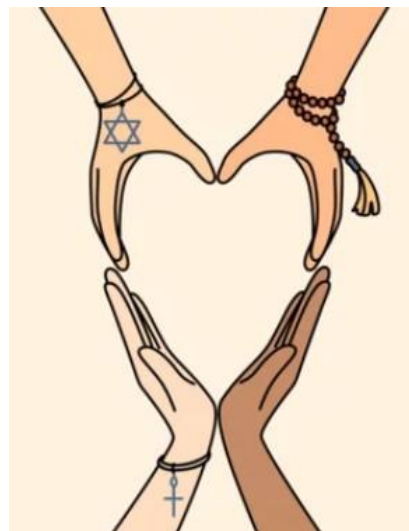
[That Which Holds All](#), by [Nancy Shaffer](#), Unitarian Universalist minister and author (1950-2012)  
Because she wanted everyone to feel included in her prayer, she said right at the beginning several names for the holy. "Spirit," she said, "Holy One, mystery, God ..."

[New Ideas Shaping a More Perfect Union](#), author Eboo Patel and Raj Vinnakota talk on *Preamble*, a Citizens & Scholars YouTube series, May 13, 2024. "...Pluralism is not a birthright in America, it's a responsibility. Pluralism does not fall from the sky, it does not rise up from the ground. People have fought for pluralism, people have kept the promise..."

## FAITH IN ACTION

### Activities to celebrate pluralism that you can organize or attend in your local community

- **Multicultural festivals:**  
Hosting events that showcase food, music, and traditions from various cultures. Especially invite experts from showcased communities to present. Be cautious of cultural appropriation by not recognizing and celebrating sources & providing financial compensation when possible.
- **Interfaith dialogues:**  
Organizing discussions between people of different religious faiths to foster understanding and respect. Local colleges & interfaith organizations often host this type of event.
- **Community service projects with diverse groups:**  
Collaborating with people from different backgrounds on initiatives like neighborhood clean-ups or food drives
- **Culturally diverse curriculum in schools:**  
Integrating lessons and perspectives from various cultures into the educational program.
- **Language learning initiatives:**  
Providing opportunities to learn languages spoken by different communities.
- **Guest speaker series:**  
Inviting individuals from diverse backgrounds to share their experiences and perspectives.
- **Group projects with diverse teams:**  
Forming teams with people from different backgrounds to work on projects together.



- **Celebrating heritage months:**  
Recognizing and celebrating the cultural contributions of different ethnicities throughout the year.
- **Promoting inclusive language:**  
Using language that respects and acknowledges diverse identities.

**Key aspects of pluralistic activities:**

- **Openness to different viewpoints:**  
Encouraging respectful dialogue and the sharing of diverse perspectives.
- **Active listening and empathy:**  
Fostering the ability to listen to and understand others' experiences.
- **Collaboration and shared decision-making:**  
Involving people from different backgrounds in planning and decision-making processes. "Nothing about us without us."
- **Respect for cultural identity:**  
Recognizing and valuing the unique characteristics of different groups.

**HUMOR**



**Appendix 1**

**Belief Scale for Exercise 3**

I'M A THEIST .....AGNOSTIC.....ATHEIST / NON-THEIST

FOR THE THEISTS:

GOD HAS "PERSONHOOD" ..... GOD IS AN EVENT OR EXPERIENCE

(i.e., god possesses consciousness, will & intention) or is (an impersonal happening or feeling)

FOR THE AGNOSTICS:

I LIVE AS THOUGH THERE IS A GOD..... I LIVE AS THOUGH THERE IS NO GOD

FOR THE ATHEISTS/NON-THEISTS:

I'VE HAD EXPERIENCES TO CONVINCE.....I'VE NEVER FOUND A REASON  
ME THAT THERE IS NO GOD TO USE A GOD CONCEPT TO  
EXPLAIN MY EXPERIENCE

THE UNIVERSE IS  
FRIENDLY.....INDIFFERENT.....HOSTILE

HUMAN BEINGS ARE .....HUMAN BEINGS  
ARE INHERENTLY GOOD ARE BASICALLY  
FLAWED

THE EXAMPLE/TEACHINGS OF .....JESUS AND JESUS TALK  
JESUS INSPIRES ME TURN ME OFF

THE EXAMPLE/TEACHINGS OF .....BUDDHISM ISN'T  
THE BUDDHA INSPIRE MEANINGFUL TO ME

ORGANIZED RELIGION IS A .....A NEGATIVE INFLUENCE  
POSITIVE FORCE

I FIND SPIRITUALITY IN INTROSPECTIVE.....I FIND SPIRITUALITY IN  
"ME-TIME" RELATIONSHIPS