

JOURNEYS

Theme Packet for November 2015
The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough

What does it mean to be people of Ancestry?

Spiritual History

Let my body remember.
Let my hands and feet remember.
Let my breath remember
those who have come before me,
those who have come before us.

Didn't Muhammad wait quietly in his cave?
And didn't Jesus sigh silently by the blue lake?
And Guan Yin, didn't she sit in silence
thinking about what to do before doing it?

And what was Siddhartha the Buddha doing
anyway under that tree if not just sitting quietly?
And Susan B. Anthony, didn't she push back
from her desk, and take a breath now and then?

And Florence Nightingale, didn't she
put down her nurse's hat
and think silently about what to write
in her essay on mysticism before she actually wrote it?

And Sophia Fahs, didn't she stop telling
stories sometimes and just sit there?
And didn't Black Elk just notice the sunlight
glancing off his chair sometimes?

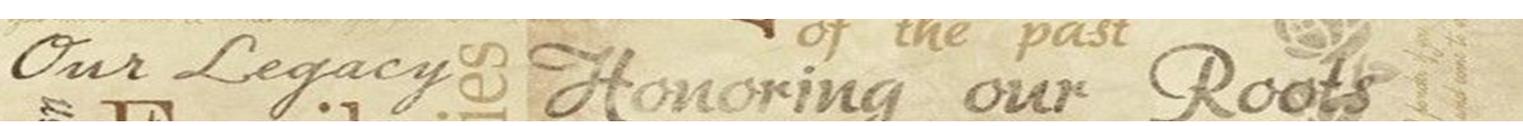
And Starhawk, does she only talk and write, or
does she too keep silence?

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copy, and would like to receive
these monthly packets by email,
sign up to be on UFP's email list,
by sending a request to
office@peterboroughunitarian.ca

Let us remember them all with our bodies.
Let us remember them with the silence
they too knew.

~ Mark Belletini





Wonderings *about* ANCESTRY

“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, American writer*

If we are to make a distinction between relatives and ancestors, it is this: relatives give us our brown eyes and bowed legs; ancestors bless and burden us with a legacy. Relatives are those we tell stories about; ancestors call us to carry the story forward. Our relatives allowed us to be here; our ancestors tell us why we are here and why being here right now matters. The difference is huge. To choose our ancestors is to choose what values we want to live by.

Take success. There's an old line that challenges the hubris of some people with privilege: “He was born on third base but believes that he hit a triple.” But people of ancestry choose to remind themselves how they really got there. Instead of talking with puffed up chests about how they hit a triple, you will hear them speak of “the shoulders on which I stand.” Awareness of our ancestors breeds humility.

You will also hear ancestor-conscious people speak of blessings differently. People of ancestry look at their blessings and choose to see not only a gift, but also a responsibility. To be people of ancestry means recognizing that something of value has been entrusted to you and that there is a long line of people behind you counting on you to pass it on.

And whether that expectation feels to you like a blessing or a burden, it most surely also reminds you that you are part of something larger. Whether the story continues to be told is up to you! Whether a family tradition continues is up to you! Whether the native language continues to be taught to the children is up to you! Whether the family cycles of health are strengthened or the family cycles of dysfunction are stopped is up to you! Ancestors plop these incomplete and intimidating endeavors in our laps and say, “We've done our part and taken it as far as we can. The next step of the journey is in your hands.”

Which of course also means that our hands are connected... backward and forward in time. Ancestors have handed gifts to us. We are asked to hand them on in a sacred chain.

And in the end, maybe it all boils down to that: seeing ourselves as part of a sacred chain. We are not small. Our lives are not insignificant or independent. Our choices are not without consequence to others. We are part of a story, not just a set of random happenings. Our choices tell the next chapter. Our choices connect the next link. Our choices pass on that which is precious and remind us we are preciousy connected. This is what choosing to be a people of ancestry means. This is how it asks us to see our lives.

So, in this month, as people of ancestry, let us choose to be part of that precious chain.

~ *Rev. Julie*

an·ces·try
'an,sestrē/*noun*

1. family or ancestral descent; lineage.
2. honorable or distinguished descent: famous by title and ancestry.
3. the inception or origin of a phenomenon, object, idea, or style.
4. the developmental process or history of a phenomenon, object, idea, or style.

STORIES *about* ANCESTRY

Round in Circles ~ from "Friedman's Fables" by Edwin H. Friedman (abridged)

Late one afternoon a moth emerged from its cocoon and watched a fly buzzing about a window. The moth was fascinated by the industry and vigorous intent of the other insect. Over and over, the fly would land on the pane, stay motionless for an indefinite time, and then suddenly, retreat into the air, only to land inches away.

"What are you doing?" the moth asked. "I notice how you keep taking off and landing. Yet, you don't seem to be getting anywhere."

"Well, it won't help any talking to you," said the fly. "Time's a-wasting, and I only have today." The fly rebounded upon the pane, circled to another spot, came back to the first, and finally stayed still.

"Don't you ever get tired?" asked the moth. "There just doesn't seem to be any way to get to the other side."

"Look," said the fly. "I don't tell you how to run your life. I can't allow myself to think. I just have to keep trying." The fly rocketed, re-landing so frequently that he appeared to be bouncing off the surface.

"You might try another approach," yelled the moth. "Maybe it's the angle, or your attitude, or the distance?"

"What's that?" asked the fly, intent on the glass window before him.

But the moth never heard the question. By now it had become dusk, and from somewhere far off, a light source began to radiate. The spark attracted the moth's attention, and suddenly, as if by some secret command, the moth fluttered and took wing in the direction of the glow, where it crackled itself to a crisp on an electric arc.



Heritage Site, Onehundredeight Mile House

The Farmer's Hidden Treasure: an Aesop's Fable from Greece

~ as told in "The Moon in the Well"

An old man spent his lifetime farming a fertile valley. On his dying day, his sons and daughters, who were thinking how rich they would be when they sold the land, gathered at his bedside. The old man gathered his strength and said, "A treasure lies within the valley, no deeper than a foot beneath the ground." These words were the farmer's last.

His daughters and sons surmised that he must have buried gold someplace in the valley. They decided not to sell the land right away, but rather carefully plowed around each tree and loosened the soil around every vine. They painstakingly pulled weeds, all the while searching for the buried gold. Try as they might, they found no gold. But with the land so beautifully turned, they decided to till in some compost, just as their father would have done.

Come spring, they plowed again, searching beneath every clod of soil for treasure, but all they found was rich earth. After going to so much trouble, they decided to plant crops rather than sell the land. All summer they tended to the crops; when fall came along, they celebrated a grand harvest. Then they plowed extra deep, determined to find the gold. This time they loosened every clump of dirt by hand. The only satisfaction they gained was that of working the soil.

Over the years their satisfaction grew until they couldn't imagine selling the farm. Where else could they so readily enjoy the turn of the seasons and the bounty of the land? How else could they so plainly see the results of their own efforts? They came to understand that their father's last words had not been about gold at all, but something finer.

Inspirations on the theme of ANCESTRY

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*

To be here now, alive in the twenty-first century and smart enough to know it, you had to be extremely – make that miraculously – fortunate in your personal ancestry. Consider the fact that for 3.8 billion years, a period of time older than the Earth's mountains and rivers and oceans, every one of your forebearers on both sides has been attractive enough to find a mate, healthy enough to reproduce, and sufficiently blessed by fate and circumstances to do so. Not one of your pertinent ancestors was squashed, devoured, drowned, starved, stranded, stuck fast, untimely wounded, or otherwise deflected from its life's quest of delivering a tiny charge of genetic material to the right partner at the right moment in order to perpetuate the only possible sequence of hereditary combinations that could result – eventually, astoundingly, and all too briefly – in you. ~ *Bill Bryson*

The very air surrounding us and moving the flame is the air our Ancestors were breathing. There is no other. ~ *Mi-Shell Jessen*

We all grow up with the weight of history on us. Our ancestors dwell in the attics of our brains as they do in the spiraling chains of knowledge hidden in every cell of our bodies. ~ *Shirley Abbott*

We are a continuum. Just as we reach back to our ancestors for our fundamental values, so we, as guardians of that legacy, must reach ahead to our children and their children. And we do so with a sense of sacredness in that reaching. ~ *Paul Tsongas*

Tradition means giving votes to the most obscure of all classes – our ancestors. It is the democracy of the dead. Tradition refuses to submit to the small and arrogant oligarchy of those who merely happen to be walking around. ~ *G. K. Chesterton*

When you start talking about family, about lineage and ancestry, you are talking about every person on earth. ~ *Alex Haley*

"You're never alone, even during what you think are your weakest moments. You have thousands of years of powerful ANCESTORS within you, the blood of The Divine Great Ones in you, supreme intellect and royalty in you. Infinite strength is always on tap for you. Know that!"
-Author Unknown

©Teach Me Genealogy

The man who has nothing to boast of but his illustrious ancestry is like the potato - the best part underground. ~ *Thomas Overbury*

If the means were available, we could trace our ancestry - yours and mine - back to the first blob of life-like material that came into being on the planet. ~ *Clifford D. Simak*

Man is physically as well as metaphysically a thing of shreds and patches, borrowed unequally from good and bad ancestors, and a misfit from the start. ~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

When our hearts turn to our ancestors, something changes inside us. We feel part of something greater than ourselves. ~ *Russell M. Nelson*

To forget one's ancestors is to be a brook without a source, a tree without a root. ~ *Chinese Proverb*

We do not inherit the earth from our ancestors; we borrow it from our children. ~ *Native American*

Every man is a quotation from all his ancestors. ~ *Ralph Waldo Emerson*

Shards of Light

Nowhere on this planet
Where people have built
Shrines, temples, mosques
Or stood to pray (in groves or on mountaintops)
Ever loses the spirit.
Prayers do not disintegrate,
Their power, To all aware,
Is always available.
Prayers fall on us or
Rise up through archeological debris.
No place is free of them.
And we in turn are free to absorb them --
Not their tenets, Not their rules,
Not the evil that may have lurked around the edges
But the spirit -- The shards of light.
We are responsible for transmitting that light,
Moving it through the universe,
Giving it to each other.

~ *Mim Neal*

Questions for Reflection *on the theme of* ANCESTRY

- How are your ancestors speaking today? Are they wise? Do they have secrets?
- To what are you anchored? Where, or in what, do you put down your roots?
- What have your ancestors entrusted with you, and how have you passed it on?
- Do you feel burdened by an ancestry that you can't control or change? Like the moth or the fly in the story, is there some pattern in which you feel trapped?
- Do you know whose shoulders you stand on? Have you decided whose legacy you want to help live on? Do you have a favorite UU ancestor? For help see: <http://www.famousuus.com>
- What happened to that tradition you so loved as a kid? Why did it disappear? Is there a way to creatively bring it back?
- What's your question about ancestry? As always, if the above questions don't include what life is asking from you, spend the month with the question(s) that resonate for you.

Practicing ANCESTRY

Option A: Bring it Back

Being people of ancestry may include the passing on of family traditions...the recipe that was required at every Thanksgiving but now no one bothers with...the outdated and supposedly tedious task of writing a handwritten letter...the passing on of a family heirloom...bedtime stories...family game night...marking the height of your kids on the kitchen doorway wall...sitting down at the dinner table to eat together.

Are these traditions disappearing? Or even already gone?

This practice simply asks you to bring one of them back. *Here's your task:* Dust off an old, forgotten family tradition and protect it from extinction. For inspiration, check out one of these links:

https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/book-review-to-the-letter-a-celebration-of-the-lost-art-of-letter-writing/2013/12/06/8f6608e0-5c71-11e3-95c2-13623eb2b0e1_story.html

<http://www.artofmanliness.com/2013/10/16/60-family-tradition-ideas/>

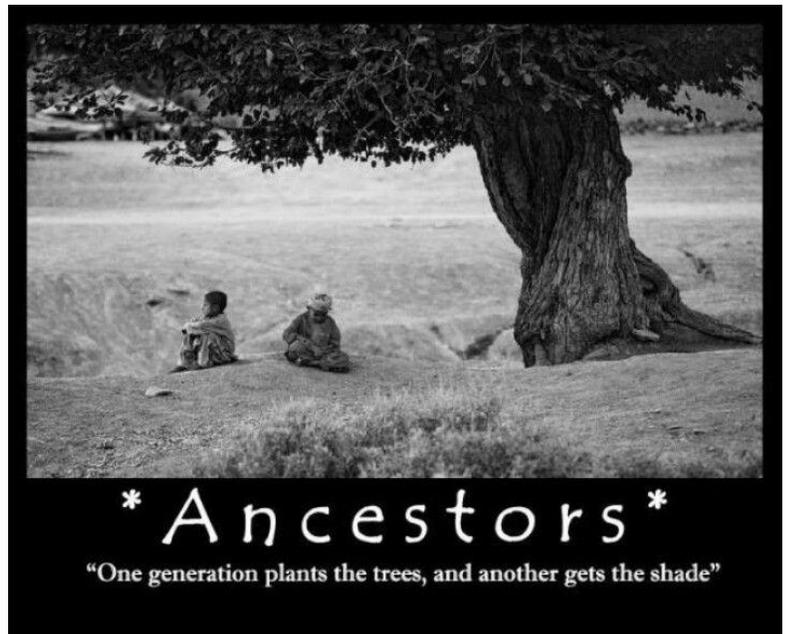
Option B: Pass the Wisdom On

Traditions are important to pass on, but so is wisdom. While you may not feel you possess ancestor-like wisdom, you do have useful lessons to share. You have learned a lot about life that will be useful to those who come after.

Younger folks may be more open than you imagine, so don't be shy. Share your wisdom! *Your assignment:* Find someone younger than yourself who you think has open ears and tell them something you've learned that you think might be useful to them. (And if that's too intimidating, then at least come to your group and share what you would like the younger generations to know.)

Watch this video as inspiration: How to Age Gracefully:

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sycgL3Qg_Ak





Option C: The Ancestors Are Watching

Sometimes they're on our wall. Sometimes on the dresser or our desk. Many of them have been placed in a locket we wear around our neck. We are of course talking about pictures of ancestors, and placing them in prominent places so as not to forget that they are watching us. It's a habit that has fallen out of style. This month bring it back. And in doing so, hear their voice, wisdom, comfort and call anew. *Your instructions:*

1. Find or print out a picture of a relative that was important to you or played a major role in your family's

story. You might also pick a picture of your chosen ancestor (one that you've adopted by choice rather than given by blood) or a spiritual ancestor (a political or religious hero whose life inspires your own.) The goal is to pick someone who you want to be looking down on you.

2. Place that picture in a prominent place for the entire month and take a brief moment to look at it at the beginning of each day.

3. Pay attention to how bringing them into your awareness alters your days.

Option D: Embracing All of Our Relations

There is spiritual power in embracing the ancestors that inspire us, but there is spiritual necessity in embracing our ancestors who fell short. To fail to embrace the dark parts of our ancestral past is to set ourselves up for the inability to embrace the dark parts of ourselves and to create a new storyline. This "shadow work" includes *these instructions:*

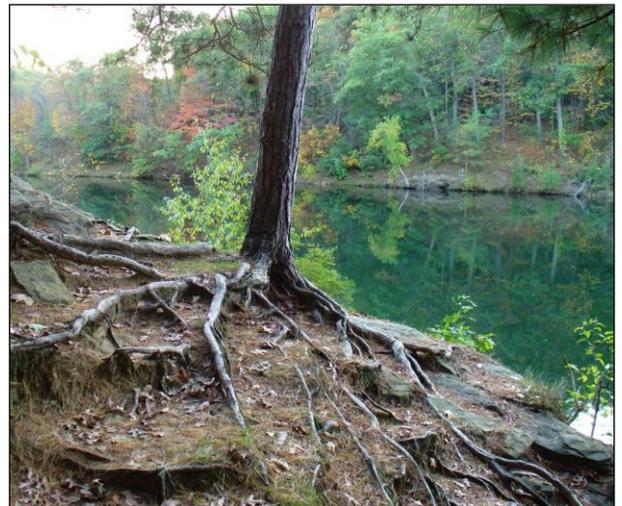
1. Set aside time to listen multiple times to the following song/meditation by the Native American women's acapella group, Ulali. Make sure you are centered and prepared to listen not only to the words but to the rhythmic beat that invites us to connect to the larger 'heartbeat' of which we are a part. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBeCixbql_c&feature=youtu.be

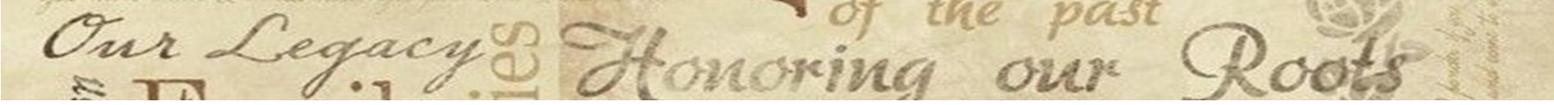
2. Pay particular attention to the phrases that focus on those ancestors who have fallen short, caused pain and continue to perpetuate harm.

3. Let this focus on these difficult-to-embrace ancestors bring to mind the ancestors in your own life that you would prefer to "disown."

4. Then, decide what your own personal work is. Is there room for a new perspective on these ancestors and their actions? What might be your new storyline? Who could help you to write this?

5. Come to your group ready to share the invitation you heard in the song and how you responded to that invitation.





Resources on ANCESTRY

ON THE WEB (skip the ads when you can!)

Donna Laura - a poem by Maria Mazziotti Gillan
<http://writersalmanac.publicradio.org/index.php?date=2008/01/04>

It is that time and place by Qiyamah Rahman, from *Becoming: A Spiritual Guide for Navigating Adulthood*
<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/poetry/it-time-and-place>

Seeds of Our Ancestors, Seeds of Life by Winona LaDuke
TED talk about “food as our ancestor and as the link to our ancestors” ... about ancestor relationships, sustainable development, renewable energy and food systems.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=pHNlel72eQc>

Ancestors & Angels by spoken word poet and activist Drew Dellinger

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zLUHC-m2kfs>

How It All Began - TED speakers explore our origins as a species – who we are, where we come from, where we're headed – and how we're connected to everything that came before us.

<http://www.npr.org/programs/tes-radio-hour/?showDate=2015-10-09>

A new species of human kin is discovered:
https://www.washingtonpost.com/national/health-science/fossils-found-in-african-cave-are-new-species-of-human-kin-say-scientists/2015/09/09/b9b4dbec-56f7-11e5-abe9-27d53f250b11_story.html

Who Apes Whom - About the way we tend to understand our relation to our evolutionary ancestors:
<http://www.nytimes.com/2015/09/15/opinion/who-apes-whom.html>

What They Dreamed Be Ours To Do - A reflection by the Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker about the covenants we inherit as UUs
<http://www.uua.org/ga/past/1998/123808.shtml>

Our Ancestors - A worship service and sermon by the Rev. Keith Kron
<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/sermon/20135.shtml>

MOVIES and TELEVISION

The Descendants (2011-R)
The world of native Hawaiian Matt King (George Clooney) shatters when a tragic accident leaves his wife in a coma. Not only must Matt struggle with the stipulation in his wife's will that she be allowed to die with dignity, but he also faces pressure from relatives to sell their family's enormous land trust.

Finding Your Roots - PBS Series
<http://video.pbs.org/program/finding-your-roots/>
Each episode of this series “journeys deep into the ancestry of a group of remarkable individuals ... bound together by an intimate, sometimes hidden link.” The show “treks through layers of ancestral history, uncovers secrets and surprises ... and shares life-altering discoveries.”

Roots (1977) - TV Mini-Series
A dramatization of author Alex Haley's family line from ancestor Kunta Kinte's enslavement to his descendants' liberation.

The Human Family Tree (2009) - TV Documentary
On a single day on a single street, with the DNA of just a couple of hundred random people, National Geographic Channel sets out to trace the ancestral footsteps of all humanity.

My Ancestors Were Rogues and Murderers (2005)
This documentary is a thoughtful contribution to the debate on Canada's seal hunt. The film revisits the 1977 Newfoundland visit, orchestrated by the International Fund for Animal Welfare, of French actress turned animal rights activist Brigitte Bardot to protest the area's ancestral sealing activities.
https://www.nfb.ca/film/my_ancestors_were_rogues_murderers

Table Grace on ANCESTRY

For seeds – that, like memories and minds, keep in themselves the recollection of what they were and the power to become something more than they are...
~ From “Gratitude for the Garden” by Rev. Max Coats

BOOKS

Between the World and Me by Ta-Nehisi Coates
What is it like to inhabit [and inherit] a black body and find a way to live within it? And how can we all honestly reckon with this fraught history?

Hidden Inheritance: Family Secrets, Memory, and Faith by Heidi B. Neumark - Challenges readers to explore their inheritance, calling readers to discover hope for transformation that is only possible when what has been hidden is finally brought to light.

The Spiritual Practice of Remembering by Margaret Bendroth - Argues that remembering must become a regular spiritual practice, part of the rhythm of our daily lives as we recognize our world to be, in many ways, a gift from others who have gone before.

A History of Religion in 5 ½ Objects: Bringing the Spiritual to Its Senses by S. Brent Plate
A scholar explores the importance of physical objects and sensory experience in the practice of religion.

Deep Ancestry: Inside The Genographic Project The Journey of Man: A Genetic Odyssey
Two books by Spencer Wells, National Geographic [The author] shows how tiny genetic changes add up to a fascinating story in which each individual's DNA contributes another piece to human history. And why, if modern humans share a single prehistoric ancestor, do we come in so many sizes, shapes, and races?

Your Mythic Journey: Finding Meaning in Your Life through Writing and Storytelling by Sam Keen and Anne Valley-Fox - Includes a section on "The Past" and how it affects our lives.

Children's Books about ANCESTRY

Are You My Mother by P.D. Eastman
The Hundred Penny Box by Sharon Bell Mathis
Forever Fingerprints: An Amazing Discovery for Adopted Children by Sherrie Eldridge
The Keeping Quilt by Patricia Polacco
The Kids' Family Tree Book by Caroline Leavitt
Older than the Stars by Karen C. Fox
Who Do You Think You Are? Be a Family Tree Detective by Dan Waddell

Chalice Lighting on ANCESTRY

One of the old ones stood up into the morning light and spoke to those who had come back to the river: "Now we have come again to this place; it is a good thing. My life apart from you is not as strong. "Yes, I have danced and I have told the stories at my own fire and I have sung to all the six directions. "But when I am with you, my friends, I know better who it is in me that sings."

~ Barbara J Pescan

MUSIC

Listen to the Voices by Labi Siffre
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PlchuyHj0u8>

Johnny Clegg by The Crossing (Osiyeza) -
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_D9QSkfsRz0

My Father by Judy Collins
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CdqJZRHJcu4>

Mist of Memory by Jim Hurst
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jxnWZtyZlpU>

All My Relations by Ulali
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bBeCixbql_c&feature=youtu.be

We Will by Ann Reed
"All the souls who came before are standing here"
<http://www.jango.com/music/Ann+Reed>
(scroll down to "We Will")

Rank by Rank Again We Stand
#358 in Singing the Living Tradition

December's theme: What does it mean to be
people of **EXPECTATION**?

Email your ideas for themes, or suggestions for
resources to share in this packet to uurevjs@gmail.com

The Unitarian Fellowship of Peterborough
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