

Thought for Contemplation: *“Create a new table where the values of our faith are both promised and practiced without reservation.”*

Dr. Leon Spencer

INGATHERING CHIMES

WELCOME AND ANNOUNCEMENTS

CHALICE LIGHTING

We light this chalice
As we gather again
Calling us to our highest values
Inviting us to the widest welcome.

-Anita Farber-Robertson

CALL TO WORSHIP *On the Brink* by Leslie Takahashi

All that we have ever loved
and all that we have ever been
stands with us on the brink of all that we aspire to create:
a deeper peace,
a larger love,
a more embracing hope,
a greater generosity of spirit,
a deeper joy in this life we share.

Come, let us worship together.

HYMN *When the Spirit Says Do* #1024

CHILDREN'S TIME *Bob Moseley*

Song (seated) *Go Now in Peace* #413

(Children are invited to go now to their program)

MUSIC FOR REFLECTION

JOYS AND SORROWS

MEDITATION AND PRAYER

ANTHEM

READING *Red Brocade* by Naomi Shihab Nye reader: Barbara Murray 11:00 am

The Arabs used to say,
When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care.

Let's go back to that.
Rice? Pine Nuts?
Here, take the red brocade pillow.
My child will serve water
to your horse.

No, I was not busy when you came!
I was not preparing to be busy.
That's the armor everyone put on
to pretend they had a purpose
in the world.

I refuse to be claimed.
Your plate is waiting.
We will snip fresh mint
into your tea.

OFFERING

SERMON

With You in Mind

The Rev. Dr. Anita Farber-Robertson

For as long as there has been racism, there has been anti-racism. I began my intentional anti-racism work a long time ago, when I was fourteen, organizing for CORE (Congress of Racial Equality), spending my Saturdays knocking on doors in Harlem, encouraging parents to keep their children out of school on days designated for boycotts of under-served schools. I was eager, passionate and hopeful.

Then life intervened. I grew up, got married, had children, and went into the ministry. While I still cared about racial equity through those house-holding years, my privilege allowed me to put it on the back burner. I did not bring it, the work or the passion, to my faith community until 1992 when I was recruited by the Unitarian Universalist Ministers Association to represent them on the new Racial and Cultural Diversity Task Force which was charged to make the UUA reflective of the global village in which we lived. In other words, to become racially and culturally diverse. I was pleased to be back in the work.

The Task Force, of which I was to become the chair along with Leon Spencer, decided at our first meeting, that before we went out recruiting people of color to join our churches, we first needed to figure out what it was about us that was creating barriers in the first

place. After all, if Unitarian Universalism is a faith with a sustaining and salvific message for all people, but only white people come and respond, there must be something about who we are or how we do it that sends the message that this is an organization and a religion for white people. Conscious or not, aware or not (Woke or not) we can infer that the UUA and our member congregations are racist, by the nature of the outcome our practice has produced- an essentially segregated faith community. So, in responding to our charge, we determined that the first thing we needed to do was address the racism endemic in our institution. We invited anti-racism trainers to lead us in a three-day workshop.

Joining the members of our newly formed task force were members of the UUA's Black Concerns Working Group. We went around the room that first day, each saying who we were, in what capacity we had been invited to this training event, and why we cared about this at all.

About halfway around the circle we got to Norma Pointsett. I did not know her, although she had been a member of the UUA Board of Trustees and was the chair of the Black Concerns Working Group. She was an older woman, African American, and as she spoke, her passion came through. She told us more than what the initial questions posed

requested; she told us what it was she thought we needed to know. And we listened.

Norma had been part of the initial Black Concerns Working Group, created by denominational leaders in 1985. They were charged, she told us, with eliminating racism within the UUA. The UUA gave the group a few thousand dollars to do it and a couple of years. She stopped and looked at us, one by one around the room. We wriggled and laughed uncomfortably. She repeated. “They gave us a few thousand dollars and a couple of years, and told us to go off and eliminate racism in the UUA.” More silence. “And now they have asked you. Good-luck.”

And on that sobering note, we started.

General Assembly in 1993, held in Charlotte proved a watershed moment for many. Timing, I guess, is often the key. We had planned a Racial Justice General Assembly with powerful, credible speakers (the Reverends Mark Morrison-Reed and Bill Jones) telling the delegates about the nature and function of racism and how it hides and manifests. The delegates listened and engaged. In the midst of the General Assembly was scheduled the one big, all Assembly social event that happens each year. This year, because it was the 250th anniversary of the birth of Thomas Jefferson, and because Charlotte was in the Thomas Jefferson District, the gala event was scheduled to be a Thomas Jefferson Birthday Ball. That might have gone over okay, sort of. But

the planned ball got more specific. It was to be a costume ball, and people were asked to come in costume of the period. Clearly (we can now see from 20/20 hindsight) that was not a reasonable request to make of African Americans whose costumes of the period would have been those of slaves- rags and chains. For many whites it would have been people with whips. These are not ways in which people were apt to want to dress up. It revealed the crazy-making mind set of those who would present the antebellum south as romantic and pretty, and something to remember with nostalgia. The insidiousness of White Supremacy culture was painfully exposed. The positive outcome, was that more Unitarian Universalists, leaders and people in the congregations, now recognized that we had some institutional work to do on our own.

A lot of work was done by our task force over the five years, offering trainings and workshops to leaders, lay and ordained, around the country, as well as doing research on the perceived barriers. In 1997 our Task Force issued its report to the General Assembly with a study guide and recommendations, producing the next generation of anti-racism work- the Journey Toward Wholeness. It was greeted with near unanimous approval. It appeared that Unitarian Universalism was going to meet its challenge, and seriously dismantle racism/white supremacy in its ranks.

And while I can affirm that indeed we have been trying, somewhat, on an uneven basis, we are not there yet, and the challenge continues. White supremacy culture has continued within the UUA structures itself, privileging white male ministers for promotions and leadership, and it continues within our congregations, from our reticence to calling ministers who are from different demographics from our membership, to withholding a willingness to consider that there may be healthy and appropriate ways of doing church that are different from how we, who are white New Englanders, always have done them.

We here, at A2U2, have identified a desire for a more diverse congregation. I am not sure exactly what kinds of diversity it is you desire- likely it is different for different folks. But I am fairly confident that making that desire a reality will involve changing not only how you do things, but changing what you think is normal, what values are paramount, how you think about yourselves, and what identities you embrace.

A few examples:

I visited a Caribbean Pentecostal Church. They were celebrating an anniversary and had brought a special speaker up to Massachusetts from Connecticut. They took the collection during the service. About

fifteen minutes later they announced that they had not collected enough to pay the speaker. They took another collection. They did that for as long as they had to, until they had enough to pay their speaker. They were not budget driven. They were intent on fulfilling their mission.

I served a Black church. In that congregation, the values of relationship were paramount. If someone who moved away had returned for a visit, they would be invited to say a few words during the service. No one worried that the service would “run over.” Relationships were a higher priority than time.

My son lives in California. When I visited him, years ago, before he was married, we would go to church together, to the First Unitarian Church of San Diego. “Do you go when I’m not here?” I asked him.

“No, Mom. I don’t. I go to a non-denominational church.”

“Why?” I innocently asked, more than a little confused.

“Mom! I’m a single, red-blooded American male. I go out on Saturday nights. I am not getting up to go to church on Sunday morning. I go to a church that meets at 5:00 on Sunday evening. That is a time I can do. And most of the people there are like me. They are just not Sunday morning people.” This congregation met the needs of single people who needed grounding and community. It was not

particularly theologically driven. It supported people, many of whom were transplants from other places, with a community and an anchor.

Different ways of understanding church.

Last month I spent a week at a continuing education seminar for Accredited Interim Ministers. We worked on understanding White Supremacy culture. I brought back some excellent material to help us think about and understand these challenges, and I hope we create the space for exploring them together.

The single most meaningful challenge I experienced that week though, I want to share with you today, and offer for your consideration. Come with me.

Imagine you are coming to a new place and see a sign that says; “You are welcome here.” Imagine how that feels.

Now, imagine that same situation, but the sign now says, “Welcome. We created this with you in mind.”

“We created this with you in mind.” Feels very different. To the one being welcomed, yes. But think of what it requires of the one doing the welcoming. Purpose. Intentionality. Humility. Curiosity. What would our guest need, to be included? What would help our visitor participate? If our first priority was to embrace the other, the

one we do not know, how would that play out? What would it look like? How would we be different?

When a stranger appears at your door,
feed him for three days
before asking who he is,
where he's come from,
where he's headed.
That way, he'll have strength
enough to answer.
Or, by then you'll be
such good friends
you don't care. ¹

Welcome. We created this with you in mind.

Come in.

May it be so. Amen and Blessed Be.

CLOSING HYMN *We're Gonna Sit at the Welcome Table* #407

BENEDICTION

CLOSING MUSIC (please remain seated for the closing music)

¹ Naomi Shihab Nye, *Red Brocade*