

On the Journey

April 2025

Exploring themes for deepening wisdom



Trust

These pages are a collection of readings, poems, artwork, and rituals meant to encourage us to consider our theme of Trust. Take note of the readings, poems, and articles that connect to your understanding of trust and please bring to your groups other readings, stories, lectures, articles that speak to you. May these pages be just the beginning as you and your group explore our April theme.

Gathering

Check-In

- What is on your heart as we gather?
- What do you need to leave at the door to be fully present in this space?

Chalice Lighting

Stronger Together (our 2025 Canvass Anthem)

~ Matt Lashoff

We're stronger together
When the world has got us down
And when all hope is lost
Always know it will turn around
Show 'em we're united, not divided
That we'll keep shining when the lights are out
Keep on rising, keep on fighting
'Cause this world needs our love right now

Connecting

Covenant

From our CUUC Covenant: “We foster the journeys of our congregants across generations while in the embrace of community.”

Our covenant is a living, breathing document that encourages us, holds us, in how we want to be in relationship with one another. Is there anything to add, change, or continue to consider as a group?

Invitation to Practice

Checking in on our invitation last month, from CUUC Journey Group facilitator Jessica Lidh: each of us experiences grief differently. We feel differently. We process differently. We cope differently. What works for some might not work for you, and what works for you might not work for some. Find a time when you're in a good headspace, and try to identify the activities you find helpful when you're experiencing sadness.

- Do you have any activities that you find helpful when grief hits?

Defining Moment

Trust Noun

1a : assured reliance on the character, ability, strength, or truth of someone or something
b: one in which confidence is placed
2a : dependence on something future or contingent : hope b: reliance on future payment for property (such as merchandise) delivered : credit bought furniture on trust
3a: a property interest held by one person for the benefit of another b : a combination of firms or corporations formed by a legal agreement especially : one that reduces or threatens to reduce competition
4a: care, custody, the child committed to her trust - b(1): a charge or duty imposed in faith or confidence or as a condition of some relationship - (2): something committed or entrusted to one to be used or cared for in the interest of another

Verb

1a: to rely on the truthfulness or accuracy of : believe, trust a rumor b: to place confidence in: rely on a friend you can trust c: to hope or expect confidently trusts that the problem will be resolved soon
2a: to commit or place in one's care or keeping : entrust b: to permit to stay or go or to do something without fear or misgiving 3: to extend credit to

Quotes and Thoughts

“All the world is made of faith, and trust, and pixie dust.”

~ J. M. Barrie, Peter Pan

“To be trusted is a greater compliment than to be loved.”

~ George MacDonald

“Everyone suffers at least one bad betrayal in their lifetime. It’s what unites us. The trick is not to let it destroy your trust in others when that happens. Don’t let them take that from you.”

~ Sherrilyn Kenyon, Invincible

“Anything that’s human is mentionable, and anything that is mentionable can be more manageable. When we can talk about our feelings, they become less overwhelming, less upsetting, and less scary. The people we trust with that important talk can help us know that we are not alone.”

~ Fred Rogers

“Trust is the glue of life. It’s the most essential ingredient in effective communication. It’s the foundational principle that holds all relationships.”

~ Stephen Covey

“Trust is the heartbeat of genuine love.”

~ bell hooks

“Whatever matters to human beings, trust is the atmosphere in which it thrives.”

~ Sissela Bok

“‘But it does not seem that I can trust anyone,’ said Frodo. Sam looked at him unhappily. ‘It all depends on what you want,’ put in Merry. ‘You can trust us to stick with you through thick and thin—to the bitter end. And you can trust us to keep any secret of yours—closer than you keep it yourself. But you cannot trust us to let you face trouble alone, and go off without a word. We are your friends, Frodo.’”

~ J. R. R. Tolkien, The Fellowship of the Ring

“Trust is like the air we breathe. When it’s present, nobody really notices. But when it’s absent, everybody notices.”

~ Warren Buffet

“Trust everybody, but cut the cards.”

~ Finley Peter Dunne

“All I have seen teaches me to trust the creator for all I have not seen.”

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

“What am I living for and what am I dying for are the same question.”

~ Margaret Atwood

Deepening

Cultivating Trust as an Organizing Strategy: Lessons from Mycelium Mushrooms

~Adaku Utah (from “Let the Choir Say Wow,” an Online Zine to accompany Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds by adrienne maree brown.)

Mycelium mushrooms have been one of my greatest teachers of trust. The word mycelium means “more than one.” The mycelium organism is a dynamic root system of mushrooms that utilizes trust as a mechanism to build and sustain a vast, reciprocal, underground network that connects the roots of trees and plants and skillfully shares nutrients and resources to support the health of the entire ecosystem with which it moves. This mycelial network cannot exist without trust. The mycelium communication highway recognizes and believes in the collective ability to channel and receive nutrients where needed, protect against parasites and expand roots into necessary sites of growth. The network process also fosters intergenerational relationships that welcome the myriad of ancient wisdom and connections that reside in older trees to benefit younger trees. These mushrooms affirm a commitment to building relationships of trust that encourage all life to bloom. One that I aspire to embody more and more in my organizing practice.

Roughly 100 white and reddish-brown mushrooms growing on a decaying tree trunk. Most are seen from above, emphasizing their round caps.

It takes courage to bring our trust forward and invite another person to meet us there. This sometimes sure, often shaky, surrender is an opportunity to discover something deeper than the confines of our individual experience. A catalyst to grow beyond ourselves. To find the places where love can exist even when we are unsure of the destination. To embrace a kind of faith brave enough to yield a wider focus often unseen with a singular lens.

Cultivating trust is an organizing strategy.

It illuminates the distinct potential to generate meaningful communication, yield collaboration grounded in sustenance, bolster collective commitment, and acknowledge competence and worth. Trust intercepts blame and attack and invites care and compassion to take the lead. It takes the time to ensure that practices are aligned with values. In times of crisis, trust knows that you won’t be intentionally hurt by comrades. It relies on our imagination’s harvest and initiates possibility filled with hope and inspiration. It encourages us to delegate and share our work so imbalance dissolves and burnout fades. Trust invites us to come together for the sake of collective liberation.

- Is trust important to you?
- How do you know when you trust someone?
- Is there something you have always trusted?

All That We Have Been, All That We Will Become

~ Leslie Ahuvah Fails

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.

Tell me, friends:
What have we got to lose?
Our fear of failure?
Our mistrust of our own talents?

What have we got to lose?
A poverty of the spirit?
The lie that we are alone?

What wonders await us in the space
between the first leap
and the moment our feet, our wheels
however we move our bodies
across this precious earth
touch down softly on unknown soil?
What have we got to lose
that we can't replace with some
previously unimaginable joy?

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

Give us courage in our leaping,
and gratitude in our landing.
And share with us in the joy of a long
and fruitful ministry together.

**This sentence is an adaptation of a Hebrew prayer called the shehecheyanu. In Leslie's words, "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."*

- Who taught you about trust?
- How did you learn about trust?
- How do you cultivate trust in yourself?

The Anatomy of Trust

~ Brené Brown

Trust is built in very small moments. When people talked about trust in the research, they said things like, "Yeah, I really trust my boss. She even asked me how my mom's chemotherapy was going." Or, "I trust my neighbor because if something's going on with my kid, it doesn't matter what she's doing, she'll come over and help me figure it out." One of the top things we found as a small thing that engenders trust: attending funerals. Someone shows up at your sister's funeral, it really adds to your sense of trust in them. Another big factor: asking for help when you need it. I have an acronym for trust: BRAVING. When we trust, we are braving connection with someone.

B, boundaries. I trust you if you are clear about your boundaries and you hold them, and you're clear about my boundaries and you respect them. There is no trust without boundaries.

R, reliability. I can only trust you if you do what you say you're going to do -- over and over and over again. In our working lives, reliability means that we have to be very clear on our limitations so we don't take on so much that we come up short and don't deliver on our commitments. In our personal life, it means the same thing.

A, accountability. I can only trust you if, when you make a mistake, you are willing to own it, apologize for it, and make amends. I can only trust you if when I make a mistake, I am allowed to own it, apologize, and make amends.

V, the vault. What I share with you, you will hold in confidence. What you share with me, I will hold in confidence. And it's not just whether you hold my confidences. If you gossip with me about someone else—share with me a story that isn't yours to tell—then my trust in you is diminished. The Vault means you respect my story, and you respect other people's stories.

I, integrity. I cannot trust you and be in a trusting relationship with you if you do not act from a place of integrity and encourage me to do the same. Integrity has three pieces: choosing courage over comfort; choosing what's right over what's fun, fast, or easy; and practicing your values, not just professing your values.

N, nonjudgment. I can fall apart, ask for help, and be in struggle without being judged by you. And you can fall apart, and be in struggle, and ask for help without being judged by me. When I think less of myself for needing help, whether I'm conscious of it or not, when I offer help to someone, I think less of them too. You cannot judge yourself for needing help but not judge others for needing your help. Real trust doesn't exist unless help is reciprocal free of judgment.

G, generosity. Trust requires that we evince a generosity of spirit in how we understand and interpret each other. Our relationship is only a trusting relationship if you can assume the most generous thing about my words, intentions, and behaviors, and then check in with me.

This BRAVING acronym works with self-trust, too. If braving relationships with other people is braving connection, self-trust is braving self-love. We can't ask people to give to us something that we do not believe we're worthy of receiving. And you will know you're worthy of receiving it when you trust yourself above everyone else.

- Does this concept or “braving” resonate for you? Are there pieces that surprise you or things you would add?
- How do you build trust with others?
- Have you changed how you think or feel about trust?

Where Healing Begins

~ Erika Hewitt (<https://www.uua.org;braverwiser/where-healing-begins>)

“The work of forgiveness is so challenging—the actual work of it. The naming, grieving, empathizing, releasing. It's like a death of what we wanted, what we expected, what we'd hoped for, what we deserved and didn't receive. We don't get to control other people or outcomes. I am as devastated about this as you.”

~ Jen Hatmaker, in *Of Mess and Moxie*

All of us have holes in our hearts where arrows have landed. One of my arrows landed five years ago when a friend—who used to refer to us as sisters—ghosted me. That doesn’t mean that we lost touch or she was too busy to respond to my texts and calls and emails; it means that time revealed her to have made an ongoing choice, however passive, to end our relationship with neither warning nor explanation.

Every relationship is an ongoing story that unfolds between people, and yet it took me years to stop trying to will a new chapter of this relationship into existence. Where there was once a loving relationship, there’s now an echo and an ache. Where a stinging question once haunted me—Why?—a new question emerged: What shall I do with this pain?

The first question is unanswerable. The second one prodded me into connection, where healing begins. I talked over my pain with both Spirit and my therapist (those were very different conversations) and—once I let go of shame—I received a healing balm in learning how many of my friends have also been ghosted.

I thought I was done (“done”! as if our spiritual journeys are ever complete) until a worship experience bestowed me with grace that I hadn’t even known I’d needed. Softened by music and prayer and the ministry of my colleagues, I found myself with the capacity to pray for the “sister” who abruptly left my life. That’s more free than I’d ever imagined getting... but that’s what grace does: it’s a spiritual ladder amid all of life’s chutes.

Ministers like to say that we go to church because others are in need of us. We’re a people of relationship and promise; trust and accountability (and it’s why you can’t be a UU in isolation). Sometimes I need to receive; to rest in a power greater than myself: more forgiving, more compassionate, more soothing than any force that lives inside of me. What a wondrous gift that we both summon and create that power in community: lifting one another into wholeness through giving and receiving.

Prayer

For things we may never understand, Compassionate One, may your grace transform our despairing questions into curiosity about how connection, agency, and grace conspire to heal us and free us.

- Have you had an “arrow land in your heart?” How did that impact your experience of trust?

Embodying

Invitation to Practice

~ Jessica Lidh, CUUC Journey Group Facilitator. This exercise was inspired by Jim Malloy's article in [Medium](#), "Trusting that the Universe Has Your Back is a Real Game Changer"

An ancient Chinese parable, “塞翁失馬 (Sāi Wēng Shī Mǎ or Sāi Wēng lost his horse)”:

An old Chinese farmer saved up small amounts of money over a year to buy a new horse. Just a day after the farmer bought the horse, it ran away. His neighbour expressed grief, but the farmer himself was calm. “I hope you can get over this bad news,” said the neighbor. “Good news or bad news, can’t say,” replied the farmer.

The next day, the horse returned to the farmer’s house by itself, and brought another stray horse with it. “Cheer up, we’re going to multiply our farm income. That’s great news,” said the farmer’s son. “Good news or bad news, can’t say,” replied the farmer and carried on with his work.

A week later, the farmer took the first horse to his farm and his son took the second horse to follow his father to work. On the way, the second horse pushed the boy down and ran away. The boy’s leg was fractured badly. That evening back home, the farmer’s wife groaned, “We will have to spend all our extra savings on our son’s broken leg. What terrible news.” Once again, the farmer replied: “Good news or bad news, can’t say.”

A month later, the farmer’s King announced a war on the neighboring nation. Citing a lack of foot soldiers, the King ordered all able-bodied men in the nation to get drafted into the military without excuses. The farmer’s son was spared because of his broken leg. Later, the inexperienced soldiers got slaughtered in the war. “You are lucky that your son did not get drafted. Mine returned with severe injuries. Many have been handicapped or killed” complained the farmer’s best friend. Unabashed, the farmer responded: “Good news or bad news, can’t say”.

So goes the story.

At different moments throughout our lives, some of us find it helpful to lean into the belief that the Universe has its own plan. Some people might find comfort learning to TRUST that larger, cosmic blueprint. How can you learn to nurture that trust? Some people might find this exercise helpful. Others might find it difficult or painful. Discuss your thoughts with your group with an open heart. All experiences and beliefs are welcome here.

1. Remember times in your life when the Universe had your back.

Looking back over the course of your life, find situations in which the Universe was looking out for you, supporting your efforts, or guiding you to a place or person that turned out to play a significant role in your life. It doesn't have to be a miraculous situation — it can be anything you can recall where this occurred (or appeared to have occurred). Then let the memory of those situations sink in.

2. Consider how you might be a part of the Universal Spirit.

Maybe—just maybe—you are an integral part of the Universal Spirit. The more deeply you TRUST this belief, the more you might find examples of the Universe taking care of you. And, in taking care of you, the Universe is likewise taking care of Itself.

3. Consider you might have a team of “unseen helpers.”

Some people believe in “unseen helpers.” Your team can be made up of spirit guides, angels, past family members, or other entities in the spirit world, depending on your specific needs. Open your mind to the possibility that they exist, and that they are working in accord with the Universal Spirit to protect, support, and guide you.

4. Recognize how your mind deals with worrisome future possibilities.

The worrying mind tends to project into the future to find potentially threatening, challenging, or stressful situations, and then develop a plan (or various plans), for how to deal with these imagined situations. For many, our minds consider themselves to be our protectors—believing it is their role to save us from whatever threats come down the road. If you find your worrying is affecting your ability to experience joy or hope, you might want to consider a plan to...

5. Shift your mindset into a place of TRUSTING that the Universe has your back.

How? First, recognize that your mind is playing the protector game. Once you've recognized this, it can be helpful to tell your mind that it has done its job, thank it for its efforts, and tell it that it's time to turn the situation over to the Universe. Then, shift into a mindset wherein you believe—or at least are willing to believe—that the Universe has your back.

6. Hand your worry over to the Universe and your team.

Handing a situation over to the Universe and your team can be done by simply putting forth the intention to do so, and then letting it go. However, some find that repeating an affirmation like this one a few times—silently or aloud—can be very helpful:

“The Universe has my back. My team has my back. No worries. I hand this situation over to them, TRUSTING that everything will be all right.”

Releasing

Chalice Extinguishing

Hug the Prayer

~ Jennifer Pratt-Walter

Hug the prayer before
it leaves your body. Float
it along like murmuring leaves.

Deepen the prayer to minnows, to starfish
in a wordless sea; water it into the soil,
gilding every earthworm and root.

Your prayers are both journey
and destination. Trust in your heart
that they will find your name already alight

in the cosmos, the somewherelessness of you
before speech or heart, before minnow
or earthworm, before the eyeless leaves.

Even if there is no target or deity,
may the words of your heart roll on like numbers,
a living monument with no taste of an end.

Hug your prayers close, then fling wide
their cage.

Checkout Question

- In one word, what is something you will take with you from our gathering?

For the Road



Check out our community playlist filled with music celebrating our theme for the month. Sometimes only music can bring us into our bodies, into our hearts, so deep we can't help but tap our feet to the beat: <https://bit.ly/JGmusic-Jan25>

*The journey is long.
The journey is beautiful.
The journey is hard.
Know this, beloved: you never journey alone.*



On the Journey is produced by the Unitarian Universalist congregations of Westchester County, New York, for use in small groups. Each month (ten months a year) explores a different theological or spiritual theme.

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