

OPENING MUSIC –

Gershwin: Three Preludes - II. Andante con moto e poco rubato (Live) (audio – 03:19)

Find it here: <https://youtu.be/6xDpfBktfSQ?si=r2OI3LSY9vKTLnnF>

OPENING PRAYER by Thomas Rhodes

We come in a variety of colours, shapes, and sizes.
Some of us grow in bunches.
Some of us grow alone.
Some of us are cupped inwards,
And some of us spread ourselves out wide.
Some of us are old and dried and tougher than we appear.
Some of us are still in bud.
Some of us grow low to the ground,
And some of us stretch towards the sun.
Some of us feel like weeds, sometimes.
Some of us carry seeds, sometimes.
Some of us are prickly, sometimes.
Some of us smell.
And all of us are beautiful.
What a bouquet of people we are!

CHALICE LIGHTING

CHALICE LIGHTING PRAYER

Joy and grief
Health and sickness
Light and darkness
Peace and anger
Life and death
Wholeness and brokenness
We each bring all of these here to this sanctuary of unity in diversity
For this one hour of this one day
And pour them out
Commingling the oil of our lives
To become the flame of this chalice
The symbol of our shared living faith.

HYMN 147 – Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree (purple book)

Spirit of earth, root, stone and tree,
water of life, flowing in me,
keeping me syable, nourishing me,
O fill me with living energy!
*Spirit of nature, healing and free,
Spirit of love, expanding in me,
Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,
Inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of love, softly draw near,
open my heart, lessen my fear,
sing of compassion, help me to hear,
O fill me with loving energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,
Spirit of love, expanding in me,
Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,
Inspire me with living energy!*

Spirit of life, you are my song,
sing in my soul, all my life long,
gladden and guide me, keep me from wrong,
O fill me with sacred energy!

*Spirit of nature, healing and free,
Spirit of love, expanding in me,
Spirit of life, breathe deeply in me,
Inspire me with living energy!*

Music: 'Leaving of Lismore' Traditional Scottish melody Arr by David Dawson

Words: © Lyanne Mitchell used by permission

POETRY: the Land, by Rudyard Kipling (read by Sheila)

When Julius Fabricius, Sub-Prefect of the Weald,
In the days of Diocletian owned our Lower River-field,
He called to him Hobdenius-a Briton of the Clay,
Saying: "What about that River-piece for layin' in to hay?"

And the aged Hobden answered: "I remember as a lad
My father told your father that she wanted dreenin' bad.
An' the more that you neeglect her the less you'll get her clean.
Have it jest as you've a mind to, but, if I was you, I'd dreene."
So they drained it long and crossways in the lavish Roman style--
Still we find among the river-drift their flakes of ancient tile,
And in drouthy middle August, when the bones of meadows show,
We can trace the lines they followed sixteen hundred years ago.

Then Julius Fabricius died as even Prefects do,
And after certain centuries, Imperial Rome died too.
Then did robbers enter Britain from across the Northern main
And our Lower River-field was won by Ogier the Dane.

Well could Ogier work his war-boat --well could Ogier wield his brand--
Much he knew of foaming waters--not so much of farming land.
So he called to him a Hobden of the old unaltered blood,
Saying: "What about that River-piece; she doesn't look no good?"

And that aged Hobden answered "'Tain't for me not interfere.
But I've known that bit o' meadow now for five and fifty year.
Have it jest as you've a mind to, but I've proved it time on ' time,
If you want to change her nature you have got to give her lime!"

Ogier sent his wains to Lewes, twenty hours' solemn walk,
And drew back great abundance of the cool, grey, healing chalk.
And old Hobden spread it broadcast, never heeding what was in't.--
Which is why in cleaning ditches, now and then we find a flint.

Ogier died. His sons grew English-Anglo-Saxon was their name--
Till out of blossomed Normandy another pirate came;
For Duke William conquered England and divided with his men,
And our Lower River-field he gave to William of Warenne.

But the Brook (you know her habit) rose one rainy autumn night
And tore down sodden fitches of the bank to left and right.
So, said William to his Bailiff as they rode their dripping rounds:
"Hob, what about that River-bit--the Brook's got up no bounds? "

And that aged Hobden answered: "'Tain't my business to advise,
But ye might ha' known 'twould happen from the way the valley lies.
Where ye can't hold back the water you must try and save the sile.
Hev it jest as you've a mind to, but, if I was you, I'd spile!"

They spiled along the water-course with trunks of willow-trees,
And planks of elms behind 'em and immortal oaken knees.
And when the spates of Autumn whirl the gravel-beds away
You can see their faithful fragments, iron-hard in iron clay.

.....
Georgii Quinti Anno Sexto, I, who own the River-field,
Am fortified with title-deeds, attested, signed and sealed,
Guaranteeing me, my assigns, my executors and heirs
All sorts of powers and profits which-are neither mine nor theirs,

I have rights of chase and warren, as my dignity requires.
I can fish-but Hobden tickles--I can shoot--but Hobden wires.
I repair, but he reopens, certain gaps which, men allege,
Have been used by every Hobden since a Hobden swapped a hedge.

Shall I dog his morning progress o'er the track-betraying dew?
Demand his dinner-basket into which my pheasant flew?
Confiscate his evening faggot under which my conies ran,
And summons him to judgment? I would sooner summons Pan.

His dead are in the churchyard--thirty generations laid.
Their names were old in history when Domesday Book was made;
And the passion and the piety and prowess of his line
Have seeded, rooted, fruited in some land the Law calls mine.

Not for any beast that burrows, not for any bird that flies,
Would I lose his large sound council, miss his keen amending eyes.
He is bailiff, woodman, wheelwright, field-surveyor, engineer,
And if flagrantly a poacher--'tain't for me to interfere.

"Hob, what about that River-bit?" I turn to him again,
With Fabricius and Ogier and William of Warenne.
"Hev it jest as you've a mind to, but"-and here he takes command.
For whoever pays the taxes old Mus' Hobden owns the land.

SHORT STORY – Sufi Story from Rumi's Masnavi: the thirsty man who threw bricks into the water stream

Once upon a time, in a small village nestled amidst lush green fields, there lived a man, who sought solace in the simplicity of nature. His favourite spot was a tall brick wall that overlooked a gentle water stream, its sparkling waters meandering through the countryside. The wall was his refuge, a place where he could sit and ponder, feeling the cool breeze against his face as he gazed at the tranquil flow of the stream.

However, on one fateful day, as he settled atop his familiar perch, he found himself trapped. A sudden gust of wind had blown the only ladder away, leaving him stranded atop the tall wall. Panic gripped him as he realised he couldn't climb down to quench his growing thirst.

As the scorching sun beat down upon him, his desperation grew. He felt an unbearable thirst, his throat parched and dry. Frustration and despair washed over him, and in a fit of desperation, he started picking at the bricks of the wall. One by one, he tore them away, throwing them into the water stream below.

As the bricks splashed into the water, a symphony of soothing sounds filled the air. The gentle splashing became a balm to his ears, momentarily easing his thirst and providing a sense of relief. The more bricks he threw, the more enchanting the sound became. It was as if the water itself was singing to him, whispering secrets of comfort and respite.

Driven by the captivating music of the water, he continued to dismantle the wall, brick by brick.

"Why [are] you throwing bricks on me?", he heard the water stream complaining to him. "There are 2 benefits", the person replied. "With each brick thrown in water, it is music to my ears. Second, the more bricks I throw, the closer I get to the water"

With each brick he removed, the wall grew shorter, bringing him closer to the inviting stream below. As the wall diminished in height, his spirit soared. He felt an indescribable connection with the flowing water, as if it was calling out to him, promising relief from his plight.

Each brick of nafs that you break and throw away the closer it is taking your Allah.

(In Islam, "nafs" (نَفْس) refers to the self or soul, encompassing an individual's essence, emotions, desires, will, and intellect. It is a complex concept with three main types:

Nafs ul Ammarah (the commanding self) - often associated with base desires.

Nafs ul Lawwamah (the self-reproaching soul) - which reflects self-awareness and moral consciousness.

Nafs ul Mutmainnah (the soul at peace) - representing tranquillity and contentment in faith.)

HYMN 242 Green book: 'For the Strength of the Hills'

For the strength of the hills, we bless thee,
Our God, eternal God;
Thou hast made thy people mighty
By the touch of the mountain sod;
Thou hast fixed our ark of refuge
Where the spoiler's feet ne'er trod.
For the strength of the hills, we bless thee,
Our God, eternal God.

We are watchers of a beacon
Whose light can never die,
We are guardians of an altar
'mid the silence of the sky.
The rocks yield founts of courage
Struck forth as by thy rod;
For the strength of the hills, we bless thee,
Our God, eternal God.

For thy dark resounding mountains
Where thy still small voice is heard,
For the strong pines in the forest,
Which by thy breath are stirred;

For the storm on whose free pinions
Thy spirit walks abroad,
For the strength of the hills, we bless thee,
Our God, eternal God.

The eagle proudly darteth
On her quarry from the height,
And the stag that knows no master
Seeks there his wild delight.
But we, for thy communion,
Have sought the mountain sod –
For the strength of the hills, we bless thee,
Our God, eternal God.

Tune: 'Mountain Christian' J. Mannin

Words: Felicia Dorothea Hemans (nee Browne) 1798 – 1835

MEDITATION – Extract from Humility, Anger and Grace: Meditations towards a Life that Matters, by Nancy Crumbine **(followed by a couple of minutes of silence)**

Time is the heartbeat of existence: this moment here, when grace breaks through the meaninglessness of objects in space. Meaning breaks through our busyness and stops us in our tracks. With a simple turning, we are met with divinity.

...The infinite dwells in the finite: the moments of this world are worthy of love, worthy of our attachment and devotion because it is through those moments we enter into the divine. It is through this abundance, unmerited by even our best moments, that we discover the holiness in time, which is grace.

READING 1 – “Do Unitarians see environmental issues as religious?”, from Rev Cliff Reed’s “Unitarian? What’s That?”, p.29 **(read by Marianne)**

As people who place their primary religious emphasis on life in this world, Unitarians are much concerned with environmental issues. Historically, we have been deeply interested both in the scientific study of our natural environment and in seeing it as a spiritual resource – alive with the divine.

This remains the case today. Unitarian devotional writing and hymnody reflect a deep sense of the sacredness of the natural world. Many Unitarians are active in environmental and conservation organisations. Unitarian worship often reflects spiritually on these subjects, and also celebrates the natural cycle of the seasons. Among Unitarians there is considerable interest in “creation spirituality” (not to be confused with “Creationism”). Unitarians may see creation spirituality in a Judaeo-Christian context: the creation as blessing, as the pregnant manifestation of God’s unfolding creative power. They may also look to other traditions which, for example, see the earth as Mother – to be revered and respected – and all natural phenomena replete with spiritual significance.

Whatever the theological underpinning (which some may not see as necessary anyway), care for the environment is now seen as an important aspect of liberal religious life. This is both for its own sake

and for the sake of all present and future generations of the earth's inhabitants. Unitarians regard the maintenance of a sustainable, diverse, and beautiful environment – “natural” and “human” – as needful for our survival and our well-being as a species.

READING 2 – “Gratitude for Your Bounty” by Gretchen Woods, (United Way luncheon) from L. Annie Foerster's “For Paying Out Loud: Interfaith Prayers For Public Occasions”, pp.120-21

Source of all that is, was, will be. Loving Spirit moving in and through all,
we call ourselves to awareness of your presence.
In awe and wonder,
we remember your power and grace,
the beauty of the world you have given us,
the amazing diversity of life,
the richness of the challenges of creation to which you call us.
You remind us to care for and about one another and all creation,
to be worthy stewards, responsible for our part in process.
We are grateful for the gifts and the challenges.
We are grateful for brothers and sisters
who rise to the call to give generously and fully of time, energy and money.
As we gather today
may we never forget your bounty and our gratitude,
nor discount the challenges to which your bounty and our gratitude.
We are indeed blessed by generosity.
May we also honour and fulfil our promises with love to you.
So be it! Blessed be! Shalom! Amen!

READING 3 – “The Fruitful Earth” from “A Golden Treasury of the Bible” (Lindsey Press), Psalm 65 pp.495-6 (**read by Lisa**)

Praise waiteth for thee, O God, in Zion:
And unto thee shall this vow be performed,
O thou that hearest prayer,
Unto thee shall all flesh come.
Blessed is the man whom thou choosest, and caused to approach unto thee,
That he may dwell in thy courts:
We shall be satisfied with the goodness of thy house,
Even of thy holy temple.
By terrible things thou wilt answer us in righteousness,
O God of our salvation;
Who art the confidence of all the ends of the earth,
And of them that are afar off upon the sea:
Which by his strength setteth fast the mountains,
Being girded about with power:
Which stilleth the raging of the seas, the noise of their waves,
And the tumult of the people.
They also that dwell in the uttermost parts are afraid at thy tokens:
Thou makest the outgoings of the morning and the evening to rejoice.
Thou visiteth the earth, and waterest it:
Thou greatly enrichest it
With the river of God, which is full of water:
Thou providest them corn, where thou hast so prepared for it.
Thou waterest the furrows thereof abundantly:

Thou settlest the ridges thereof:
Thou makest it soft with showers:
Thou blessest the springing thereof,
Thou crownest the year with thy goodness:
And thy paths drop fatness.
They drop upon the pastures of the wilderness:
And the hills are girded with joy.
The pastures are clothed with flocks:
The valleys also are covered over with corn;
They shout for joy, they also sing.

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS – Faith, the Land, and the Future: a Unitarian Reflection on Rural Development

Let us begin our reflection with gratitude for the gift of the earth beneath our feet and for the communities which have shaped, cultivated, and cherished it through countless generations. Rural life has always demanded patience, resilience, cooperation, and hope. Whether we farm the land, steward woodlands, care for animals, or simply find renewal in open landscapes, we are reminded that our lives are woven into a greater web of relationships. As Unitarians, we do not claim a single creed or exclusive revelation. Instead, we seek wisdom wherever it may be found, believing truth is enriched through dialogue, experience, reason, and compassion. We affirm that every person possesses inherent worth and dignity, and that our shared responsibility extends beyond humanity to the wider community of life. Rural development, therefore, is not merely an economic challenge. It is a moral and spiritual calling. It asks how we might create communities where people flourish without diminishing the flourishing of the earth itself.

The land is not simply a resource to be consumed. It is our home, our teacher, and our inheritance. We receive it from those who came before us, and we hold it in trust for those yet to come. Every field carries memories. Every river bears witness to generations who drank from its waters. Every ancient tree reminds us that time moves more slowly than our own ambitions. This understanding is echoed in many of the world's spiritual traditions. Within Hinduism, the natural world is often understood as infused with the sacred. Rivers are honoured as living realities, mountains become places of pilgrimage, and the earth herself is approached with reverence. The principle of *ahimsa*, or non-harm, encourages us to consider carefully how our actions affect every living being. While no society perfectly embodies its highest ideals, this vision reminds us that development should never become detached from compassion or respect for life.

Across many African spiritual traditions, we find another profound insight: the recognition that humanity exists within a living network of relationships that includes ancestors, the natural world, and future generations. Land is rarely viewed as private property alone. It is a place of belonging, memory, identity, and sacred responsibility. Communities understand that the wellbeing of people and the wellbeing of the land are inseparable. When one suffers, so does the other. Pagan traditions, both ancient and contemporary, likewise remind us of the sacred rhythms of the seasons. The turning of the year, the cycles of planting and harvest, the waxing and waning of light, all become occasions for gratitude and reflection. Rather than seeking to dominate nature, many Pagan paths encourage participation within it, recognising that human life is healthiest when it follows the patterns of balance, renewal, and reciprocity. As Unitarians, we need not adopt every belief within these traditions to appreciate the wisdom they offer. Instead, we recognise shared values: reverence for life, humility before nature, gratitude for abundance, and responsibility for stewardship. These insights enrich our own understanding and deepen our commitment to care for creation in all its diversity. The

challenges facing rural communities today are considerable. Climate change alters familiar seasons. Young people often leave in search of opportunity elsewhere. Traditional skills disappear. Farms struggle against economic pressures. Biodiversity declines. Rural isolation affects mental health and community resilience. Development cannot simply mean larger profits or greater productivity if it leaves communities fragmented or landscapes exhausted.

True rural development asks different questions. Does this strengthen local communities? Does it preserve fertile soil for future generations? Does it protect rivers, forests, wildlife, and pollinators? Does it create opportunities for young families while honouring the wisdom of older generations? Does it encourage cooperation instead of exploitation?

Faith has an important contribution to make here. Faith reminds us that value cannot always be measured in financial terms. A healthy woodland, a thriving village hall, neighbours who know one another, children able to play safely outdoors, and traditions passed from one generation to another all represent forms of wealth that no market can fully calculate. Our spiritual lives invite us to cultivate virtues especially needed in rural development: patience rather than haste; stewardship rather than ownership; generosity rather than greed; cooperation rather than competition. These are not merely personal virtues; they become guiding principles for community life and public policy.

The farmer who improves the soil rather than exhausting it performs an act of hope. The volunteer who restores a footpath strengthens community. The conservationist protecting wetlands serves both wildlife and future generations. The teacher helping children appreciate local landscapes plants seeds which may flourish for decades. Rural development succeeds not through one heroic effort but through thousands of faithful acts of care. There is also an important lesson in diversity. Healthy ecosystems depend upon diversity of species. Healthy rural economies depend upon diversity of livelihoods. Healthy communities depend upon diversity of gifts, experiences, and perspectives. Likewise, healthy spiritual life is enriched through listening respectfully across traditions.

Unitarianism has long encouraged freedom of thought alongside responsibility of conscience. We need not fear learning from others. Indeed, our own faith grows stronger when we encounter different ways of understanding the sacred. Hindu reverence for life, African spiritual understandings of community and ancestry, Pagan celebration of the seasons, and the Unitarian commitment to reason, compassion, and freedom all remind us that wisdom is never exhausted by a single voice.

Yet reverence alone is not enough. Reflection must become action. If we speak of loving the earth, we must care for it. If we honour rural communities, we must invest in them. If we celebrate biodiversity, we must protect habitats. If we value future generations, we must leave them clean water, healthy soil, stable climates, and thriving communities. Hope is not passive optimism. Hope is an active decision to participate in renewal. Every tree planted, every stream restored, every apprentice trained, every community garden established, every local enterprise supported becomes a declaration that the future matters. As people of faith, and as people of goodwill, we are invited to become partners in that work. We recognise that none of us owns the earth. Rather, we belong to it, just as those before us did, and just as those after us will. Our task is not to perfect the world in our own lifetime, but to leave it healthier, fairer, and more beautiful than we found it.

Therefore, to conclude, may we walk gently upon the land, may we cultivate wisdom alongside knowledge, may we honour the labour of those who work the fields and care for the countryside, may we learn from the many spiritual traditions that teach reverence for the living world, and may our choices, individually and together, nurture communities where both people and nature may flourish in harmony. For in caring for the land, we discover that the land also cares for us. In serving one another, we strengthen the bonds that

sustain every community; in recognising the sacredness of life in all its forms, we begin to build a future rooted not only in prosperity, but also in justice, gratitude, and hope. Amen. So be it.

MUSIC – Debussy - Clair de Lune (Harpe) - Héroïse de Jenlis - (video – 04:31)

Find it here: <https://youtu.be/vVTPbLhlbfl?si=9iwytgcjOvFNxIOY>

PRAYER: “a Prayer for Our Rural Communities” ([A Prayer for Our Rural Communities](#)
COUNTRY SQUIRE MAGAZINE)

We come before You today, giving thanks for the ties that bind us and the places we call home. Lord, You who taught us that we are all neighbours, we lift up our community—its people, its spirit, and its shared life.

Bless our village greens, our local shops and public houses, our churches and village halls. Where there is fellowship, let it deepen; where there is isolation, let it end. Grant us the wisdom to listen, the courage to speak, and the grace to understand those whose lives walk a different path to our own.

We pray for those who serve quietly among us—the volunteers, the carers, the neighbours who lend a hand without a thought of reward. Strengthen them and multiply their kindness. For those who lead and make decisions on our behalf, grant them discernment and a heart for the common good.

In times of disagreement, grant us unity. In times of hardship, grant us resilience. And in times of joy, may we celebrate together. Lord, weave our individual stories into a stronger, kinder whole, that this community may be a reflection of Your love, a place of welcome and peace for all. Amen.

POETRY: ONE by Mary Oliver (**be read by Dr Christine Avery**)

The mosquito is so small
it takes almost nothing to ruin it.
Each leaf, the same.
And the black ant, hurrying.
So many lives, so many fortunes!
Every morning, I walk softly and with forward glances
down to the ponds and through the pinewoods.
Mushrooms, even, have but a brief hour
before the slug creeps to the feast,
before the pine needles hustle down
under the bundles of harsh, beneficent rain.

How many, how many, how many
make up a world!
And then I think of that old idea: the singular
and the eternal.
One cup, in which everything is swirled
back to the colour of the sea and sky.
Imagine it!

A shining cup, surely!
In the moment in which there is no wind
over your shoulder,
you stare down into it,

and there you are,
your own darling face, your own eyes.
And then the wind, not thinking of you, just passes by,
touching the ant, the mosquito, the leaf,
and you know what else!
How blue is the sea, how blue is the sky,
how blue and tiny and redeemable everything is, even you,
even your eyes, even your imagination.

HYMN 66: How wonderful this world of thine (purple book)

How wonderful this world of thine,
a fragment of a fiery sun,
how lovely and how small,
where all things serve thy great design,
where life's adventure is begun
in God, the life of all.

The smallest seed in secret grows,
and thrusting upward answers soon
the bidding of the light;
the bud unfurls into a rose;
the wings within the whole cocoon
are perfected for flight.

The migrant bird in winter fled,
shall come again with Spring, and build
in this shady tree;
by secret wisdom surely led,
homeward across the clover field
hurries the honey bee.

O thou, whose greater gifts are ours –
a conscious will, a thinking mind,
a heart to worship thee –
O take these strange unfolding powers,
and teach us through thy Word to find
the life more full and free.

Music: 'Nesfield' David Dawson, 1939 - 2020

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CLOSING WORDS

Go now in peace.
Deeply regard each other.
Truly listen to each other.
Speak what each of you must speak.
Be ready in any moment to disarm your own heart,
And always live as if a realm of love had just begun.
So be it. Blessed be. Amen.

EXTINGUISH CHALICE

CLOSING MUSIC –

Bach Es-dur Sonata flute - BWV1031 Siciliano -Pete Lilla (video – 02:38)

Find it here: <https://youtu.be/9nKoTMI6GpI?si=VW78jDWeldnnW0Jr>