

OPENING MUSIC – [In allen meinen Taten, BWV 97: In allen meinen Taten \(Chorus\)](#) – (audio – 03:57)

OPENING PRAYER

Loving and gracious Creator,

We gather today in the light of Your boundless love —

a love that knows no limits, no boundaries, no exclusions.

You have made each of us in Your image,

woven together with care,

and called “good” from the very beginning.

Today, we come as a community —

diverse in our identities, united in our humanity,

and bound together by the hope of a world

where every person is celebrated for who they truly are.

Bless this space with safety, joy, and courage.

May every heart here feel seen,

every voice heard,

and every soul embraced without condition.

As we lift our songs, our prayers, and our stories,

let Your Spirit move among us —

healing wounds, igniting hope,

and reminding us that nothing can separate us from Your love.

We dedicate this time to You,

to one another,

and to the work of justice, compassion, and peace.

In Your holy and inclusive name we pray, **Amen.**

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 43 – Gather the Spirit – purple book

SHORT STORY – The Two Princes and the Sky Garden (anonymous)

Once upon a time, in a kingdom where the clouds brushed the castle towers, there lived two princes, Prince Leo of the Sunlit Valley and Prince Orion of the Moonlit Hills.

They met one summer at the Great Garden Festival, where flowers bloomed in colours no painter could capture. Leo loved to laugh, his voice as warm as sunshine, while Orion spoke softly, his words like the hush of night. At first, they simply enjoyed each other's company, sharing stories, trading sweets, and exploring the winding paths of the royal gardens.

One day, they discovered a hidden staircase spiralling up to the Sky Garden, a place so high it seemed to float among the clouds. There, they planted a single seed together. “Let’s see what grows,” Orion said with a shy smile.

Days turned into weeks, and the seed sprouted into a vine that shimmered gold in the sunlight and silver in the moonlight. The princes tended it side by side, laughing when the wind tangled their hair, and talking late into the night about their dreams.

As the vine grew, so did their feelings. They realised they didn’t just want to be friends; they wanted to share their lives, their adventures, and their hearts. When the vine finally bloomed, it revealed a single, radiant flower that glowed with both sun and moonlight.

The kings and queens of both lands gathered in the Sky Garden. The princes stood together, hands clasped, and declared, “We love each other, and we wish to care for our kingdoms as one.”

The people cheered, for they saw that love, whether between a prince and a princess, a prince and a prince, or anyone at all, was the truest magic of the realm.

And so, under the glow of their sun-and-moon flower, Prince Leo and Prince Orion ruled together, their love as bright and endless as the sky.

READING 1 – How do Unitarians view sexuality? (p.28 from Rev Cliff Reed’s “Unitarian? What’s That?” – **(to be read by Marianne Beale?)**)

READING 2 – Homosexuality (pp.72-73 from Nicholas Coulton’s “The Bible, The Church and Homosexuality” – **(to be read by Sheila? – omit the last 10 lines on p.73!)**)

MUSIC – [Serenata \(Opus 15 No. 1\) - Moritz Moszkowski](#) – (audio – 02:08)

MEDITATION – Extract from Humility, Anger and Grace: Meditations towards a Life that Matters, by Nancy Crumbine

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 the divine. It is through this abundance, unmerited by even our best moments, that we discover the holiness in time, which is grace.

READING 3 – Two readings from Buddhism on Homosexuality

The Dalai Lama, the leader of Tibetan Buddhism has campaigned against prejudice towards homosexuals, but at the same time has adopted a religious view against non-procreative sex

“Homosexuality, whether it is between men or between women, is not improper in itself. What is improper is the use of organs already defined as inappropriate for sexual contact.”; “wrong and against Buddhist ethics.”; “It’s part of what we Buddhists call bad sexual conduct. Sexual organs were created for reproduction between the male element and the female element — and everything that deviates from that is not acceptable from a Buddhist point of view.”

However, the Dalai Lama has also said from “society’s viewpoint,” same-sex relations can be “of mutual benefit, enjoyable and harmless.”

A Japanese Buddhist scholar, Kitamura Kigin, addressing a Christian audience reported that the Japanese interpretations of Buddha in 1676 CE actually said that heterosexuality was to be avoided for priests and homosexuality allowed:

“It has been the nature of men’s hearts to take pleasure in a beautiful woman since the age of male and female gods, but to become intoxicated by the blossom of a handsome youth.. would seem to be both wrong and unusual. Nevertheless, the Buddha preached that Imose (associated with heterosexuality) was a place to be avoided and the priests of the law entered this Way (wakashudo, “the Way of Youth”, i.e. homosexuality) as an outlet for their feelings, since their hearts were, after all, made of neither stone nor wood. Like water that plunges from the peak of Tsukubane to form the deep pools of the Minano River, this love has surpassed in depth the love between women and men in these latter days. It plagues the heart not only of courtier and aristocrat but also of brave warriors. Even the mountain dwellers who cut brush for fuel have learned to take pleasure in the shade of young saplings.” – Wild Azaleas (1676)

HYMN 84 – Justice for Persons (purple book)

REFLECTIVE ADDRESS – Sexual Orientation and Spirituality throughout History with Emphasis on Ancient Religions, Islam and Humanism

Today, we have an opportunity to open our hearts and minds to a long, human story: the interweaving of sexual orientation and spirituality. From a Unitarian perspective, we begin not with fear but with reverence, for the dignity of each person, the complexity of history, and the sacredness that shimmers in love and longing. We inherit traditions, but we are not their prisoners. We also inherit courage, and today we draw on it to reflect across centuries: in ancient religions, in Islam's vast and varied past, and in the living stream of Humanism, seeking wisdom for a more compassionate future.

The oldest roots of religion hold surprises. In many ancient cultures, sexuality was not merely tolerated; it was seen as a mirror of cosmic creativity. In Mesopotamia and Canaan, sacred narratives spoke of gods whose relationships and transformations crossed the boundaries we later learnt to police. In the ancient Mediterranean, Plato's Symposium spoke of love between men as one face of the Good, a school of virtue as much as of delight. In classical Greece, same-sex desire existed alongside problematic power dynamics; yet it also carried philosophical weight and cultivated friendship as a pathway to the beautiful. In Rome, too, moral judgment centred not on orientation in our modern sense but on status and propriety, a different moral map than our categories presume.

Further east and south, in India's broad religious imagination, the Mahabharata and the Puranas give us gods who change gender and bodies that tell truths in more than one register. In some *shakta* and tantric traditions, sexuality is a sacrament, its power neither shameful nor trivial but divine energy seeking balance. Indigenous traditions around the world often recognised what we now call gender diversity: Two-Spirit identities in many Native nations, for example, were spiritual roles as well as social ones, evidence that human communities, left to their wisdom, often find ways to bless difference. None of these histories are pure idylls; each contains its contradictions. But they remind us: the sacred is larger than our fears, and love has long sought sanctuaries where it could speak its own name.

With the rise and spread of Islam, we meet a civilisation of breath-taking breadth: legal schools, poetry that can make the heart tremble, mysticism that longs to dissolve the self into the Beloved. The Qur'an's ethical vision is rooted in justice, mutual care, and the remembrance of God. Interpretations concerning sexuality, including same-sex desire, vary enormously across time and place. Medieval jurists, often framed sexual ethics through public order and procreative norms, and many issued prohibitions we now find excluding. Yet the same civilisation produced love poetry; think of Abu Nuwas's candour (homoerotic poem by Abu Nuwas towards the end of the service) or the Sufi longing that blurs the line between divine and human beloveds, where eros becomes a ladder to the Absolute. It is true that piety and law have often collided with lived experience; it is also true that Muslim communities, like all communities, include LGBTQ+ people whose faith and dignity persist.

A Unitarian perspective seeks nuance: we note that scriptural interpretation has never been static. Context matters: the legal and social aims of early jurists; the dangers of dishonour cultures; the struggle to define communal boundaries under pressure. Across the centuries, reformers have returned to first principles, compassion, human dignity, the aim of preventing harm, and have reread their sources accordingly. Today, a growing number of Muslim scholars and communities are re-examining received teachings, asserting that God's mercy is expansive and that justice includes protecting LGBTQ+ lives. As Unitarians, committed to freedom of conscience, we honour this work not as outsiders pronouncing judgment, but as fellow travellers who believe faith's heart is love.

Humanism — religious and secular — enters our reflection as the insistence that human flourishing is the measure of moral systems. In Unitarian Universalism, our humanist inheritance teaches us to test beliefs by their fruits: Do they yield compassion or cruelty? Do they help real people live whole lives? Humanism resists superstition, but more deeply it resists indifference to suffering. It bids us trust reason, science, and shared experience. From psychology, we have learnt that sexual orientation is a natural variation of human affection. From public health we have learnt that shame kills and that acceptance saves. From the testimony of countless lives we have learnt that integrity, living outwardly the truth one knows inwardly, is a form of holiness available to all.

This is not a call to flatten differences between traditions. Each religious lineage has its genius and its wounds, but we can ask a common question across them: what would it mean to take love seriously? Not sentimentality, but the steady, courageous practice of seeing the other as fully human. Ancient religions remind us that the sacred has always overflowed our categories. Islam reminds us that mercy and justice belong together, and that interpretation is a living art. Humanism reminds us to measure moral claims by their consequences in human lives. The Unitarian spirit binds these insights with a thread: the sanctity of conscience, the interdependence of all, the commitment to seek truth in love.

For many LGBTQ+ people, the path through religion has been perilous: exile, silence, sometimes violence. Let us say clearly: trauma carried in the body is not an argument; it is a wound that deserves healing. When doctrines break lives, the doctrines, not the lives, require revision. Our ancestors revised their cosmologies when they saw new stars. We can revise our moral maps when we encounter new courage. Repentance, in its deepest form, is not shame; it is turning towards life. Communities that have excluded can turn, and in turning, find a brighter fidelity to the divine.

At the same time, let us honour the resilience of LGBTQ+ faith: the clandestine prayers, the kitchen-table sanctuaries, the friendships that were sacraments when altars were barred. Spirituality does not wait for permission; it burgeons where it can. Perhaps this is one meaning of the ancient claim that Spirit blows where it will. It breathes in a transgender teen who writes a psalm to survive the night. It breathes in an imam who counsels mercy

though it costs him standing. It breathes in elders who once risked everything to dance in the open air. If we listen, we will hear that breath now.

What then is asked of us? First, humility; we are speaking of mysteries: desire, identity, God. We will make mistakes. So we practice confession and repair. Second, courage; hospitality is not merely a posture; it is a policy. It means liturgies that name us all, education that de-stigmatises, pastoral care that protects. It means advocating in the public square for the safety and equality of LGBTQ+ people because religious freedom is not the freedom to harm. Third, joy; the spiritual life is not only struggle; it is delight in embodiment, art, and the simple holiness of two people choosing one another with tenderness and consent.

History shows that ideas once unthinkable become tomorrow's common sense when people choose compassion over fear. Ancient religions, Islam, and Humanism all contain resources for this choosing. From the ancients, we glean reverence for the life-force that animates and connects. From Islam, we receive a fierce commitment to justice tempered by mercy, and a mystical wisdom that every lover is, in some way, seeking the One. From Humanism, we inherit a clear-eyed devotion to human dignity, empirical truth, and the prevention of harm. Joined, these streams can irrigate a parched moral landscape.

From a Unitarian viewpoint, spirituality is not assent to a fixed ledger of propositions; it is a way of being that enlarges the heart. If sexual orientation is part of who we are, given, discovered, unfolding, then welcoming it is not an exception to spirituality but an expression of it. To bless LGBTQ+ lives is to bless reality as it is, and to trust that the Holy, by whatever name, meets us in truth, not pretence. In that trust, we can become communities where no one must choose between their soul and their self.

Let us then commit ourselves anew: to study with rigour, to listen with tenderness, to act with courage. Let us learn our histories, their glories and their failures, so that we can write a better chapter. Let us honour the plurality within Islam and within every tradition, refusing caricature. Let us embrace Humanism's call to build a world where love does not have to ask permission; and let us, as Unitarians, keep returning to the well of love, for it is deeper than our fears and stronger than any law that would narrow the human heart.

May our seeking make us brave! May our bravery make us gentle! And may our gentleness make it possible for every person, to love, to belong, to become, under the sheltering sky of a boundless grace! Amen. So be it.

MUSIC [J.S. Bach / A. Marcello - Adagio BWV 974 \(Anne-Isabelle de Parcevaux, organ\)](#) (video, 04:05)

ISLAMIC HOMOEROTIC POETRY – Love in Bloom by Abu Nuwas (756-814), translated by Victor Monteil

I die of love for him, perfect in every way,
Lost in the strains of wafting music.
My eyes are fixed upon his delightful body
And I do not wonder at his beauty.
His waist is a sapling, his face a moon,
And loveliness rolls off his rosy cheek
I die of love for you, but keep this secret:
The tie that binds us is an unbreakable rope.
How much time did your creation take, O angel?
So what! All I want is to sing your praises.

PRAYER

In the name of Providence, which implants in the seed the future of the flower and in our hearts the longing for people to live in harmony.
In the name of the highest, in whom we move and who makes the mother and father, the brother and sister, lover and loner what they are.
In the name of sages and great religious leaders, who sacrificed lives to hasten the coming of the age of mutual respect.
Let us renew our resolution – sincerely to be real brothers and sisters regardless of any kind of bar which estranged us from each other.
In this holy resolve, may we be strengthened knowing that we are God's family; that one spirit, the spirit of love, unites us; and endeavour for a more perfect and more joyful life.
Amen.

HYMN 201 – What shall we say to them (purple book)

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.

CLOSING MUSIC – [Andrew von Oeyen plays J.S. Bach: Siciliano from Flute Sonata No. 2 \(arranged by Wilhelm Kempff\)](#) (video – 03:52)

ANNOUNCEMENTS by Sheila

ORDER OF SERVICE

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