



TOUCHSTONES

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Humility

Wisdom Story



ships.

One recipe for a humble pie captures the complexity of humility itself. It calls for 2 cans Understanding, 2 cups Love, 2 cups Compassion, 3 cups Humility, 1 cup Forgiveness, 1/2 cup Peace, 1/2 cup Acceptance, 1/4 cup Success, 1/4 cup Failure, 2 tbsp Temptation, 1 tsp Remorse, 1 tsp Guilt, and 1 part Humor; freshly sliced as a garnish. These ingredients suggest that the purpose of eating humble pie is not to punish, but to restore right relationship; not to chastise, but to challenge; not to criticize, but to care.

Humility shares a common root with words like human, humane, humanitarian, and humus. Its Latin root, *humilitas*, means "grounded." Unfortunately, hu-

(Continued on page 6)

Two Brothers: *a story from the Talmud adapted by Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland*



Two brothers worked the family farm where they grew grain. The land had been given to both of them when their father died. They divided it equally, and each built a house on the opposite end of the farm. Eventually, the younger brother married and had three children. The older brother remained single and lived alone. They were brothers and best friends, and often helped each other.

Each year they harvested the grain and put it in burlap bags. They kept some for themselves and sold the rest at market. This year, as the harvesting was almost done, the older brother awoke from sleep concerned about his younger brother. He thought to himself, "It's not right that I reap as much grain as my brother. With his family, his needs are greater than my own. He needs more of the grain to sell to support his family." With that, he got out of bed, dressed, and went to this barn. He picked up two bags of grain and walked across the field and into his brother's barn. He placed the bags beside the other bags of grain, returned home, and fell into a deep sleep.

An hour later, the younger brother awoke from a restless dream about his

(Continued on page 2)

Introduction to the Theme

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

The term "humble pie" comes from the medieval English "umble" pie, a dish supposedly made with inferior ingredients and served to the lower classes. To "eat humble pie" in common usage is to have to apologize for a significant error. Generally, we are unwilling to eat humble pie. Our reluctance comes, in part, from a misunderstanding of the nature and value of humility, and its importance in human relation-

Humility & the Common Good

Lisa Sharon Harper writes, "In light of death, [and] life ... the common good can feel lofty, insignificant, extra-curricular, or like the self-indulgent rhetoric of the political class. ... As I held my newborn niece, Dove, it hit me: ... I was seeing the common good ... as a laundry list of political issues we should care about. ... But the common good is not only about politics. The common good is about life and how we live it. It is ultimately about how we are all connected. It is about how our love or lack of love affects our families, our neighbors, our communities, our cities, our nation, and our world. ... The common good is about personal brokenness ... reconciliation. ... truth telling. ... The common good is about generosity and humility and ultimately it is about love. Are we cultivating generosity? Are we cultivating humility? Are we cultivating the kind of love ... that flowed from the good Samaritan? ... As much as I love my niece, I love the *quartet of the vulnerable*, as Nicholas Wolterstorff calls them: the orphan, the widow, the immigrant, and the poor through my public voice, my taxes, and my vote. In a democracy, we are all profoundly connected."

Source: <https://sojo.net/articles/faith-action/life-death-taxes-and-common-good>

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Reimagining the Common Good

(Continued from page 1) **Two Brothers** older brother. Recalling the dream he thought, "It's not right that I reap as much grain as my brother. I have a family who will take care of me when I am old, but he has no one. He is all alone and will need extra money when he is old to provide for his care. I must give him some of my grain to make things right." With that, he dressed, took two bags of grain out of his barn, crossed the field, and placed them in his brother's barn.



In the morning, each brother went into his barn and noticed that he had as many bags of grain as yesterday. This was strange indeed, but neither said anything about this to anyone, amazed at such good fortune.

That night both brothers decided to share their good fortune with the other, taking two more bags of grain to his brother's barn. It was so dark they narrowly missed each other while crossing the field. In the morning, they discovered that, despite giving four bags of grain away, they still had as much grain as they had started with.

Again, both brothers arose at night to share their good fortune. It was even darker than the night before, which is why they collided with each other in the middle of the field. Looking at the bags of grain, they realized what had happened. They burst into laughter and hugged each other. The humility of each brother had prompted extraordinary generosity, and because of this they realized how each was a gift to the other.

Source: adapted from <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/children/toolbox/session13/109859.shtml>

The Necessity of Humility

Wendell Berry

We have lived by the assumption that what was good for us would be good for the world. And this has been based on the even flimsier assumption that we could know with any certainty what was good even for us. We have fulfilled the danger of this by making our personal pride and greed the standard of our behavior toward the world—to the incalculable disadvantage of the world and every living thing in it. And now, perhaps very close to too late, our great error has become clear. It is not only our own creativity—our own capacity for life—that is stifled by our arrogant assumption; the creation itself is stifled.

We have been wrong. We must change our lives, so that it will be possible to live by the contrary assumption that what is good for the world will be good for us. And that requires that we make the effort to know the world and to learn what is good for it. We must learn to cooperate in its processes, and to yield to its limits. But even more important, we must learn to acknowledge that the creation is full of mystery; we will never entirely understand it. We must abandon arrogance and stand in awe. We must recover the sense of the majesty of creation, and the ability to be worshipful in its presence. For I do not doubt that it is only on the condition of humility and reverence before the world that our species will be able to remain in it."

Source: Berry, Wendell. *The Long-Legged House*. Berkeley: Counterpoint Press. 2012.



Combating Narcissism

Jean M. Twenge & W. Keith Campbell

In many ways, humility is the opposite of narcissism. Some people misconstrue humility..., equating it with shame or self-hatred. Humility is not the same as humiliation. True humility is a strength: the ability to see or evaluate yourself accurately and without defensiveness (notice we said 'accurately,' not 'negatively'). ...Julie Exline ...found that humble people are often surrounded by friends and family who support them and allow them to see themselves accurately. Sometimes this support comes through religion, as many religions emphasize humility. Overall, humble people are more connected to others. When you don't concentrate on pumping up the self, it is easier to relate to other people and the wider world. Many people think that humility is a virtue that only great leaders possess, like Gandhi or Mother Teresa, but everyone can practice humility by honestly appraising themselves, remembering the people who have helped and supported them, and truly valuing the lives of others.

Another treatment for narcissism comes from a surprising source: compassion for yourself. ...Compassion for yourself isn't about admiring or esteeming the self or making excuses for shoddy behavior—it means being kind to yourself while also accurately facing reality. "With self-compassion, you don't have to feel better than others to feel good about yourself," writes Kristin Neff. People who practice compassion for themselves experience less anger, fewer uncontrollable thoughts about themselves, less self-consciousness, more positive emotions, more happiness, and more constructive responses to criticism. It also predicts curiosity, wisdom, ...and a growth in compassion for others.

Source: <http://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/19943>



Readings from the Common Bowl



Day 1: "To believe you are magnificent. And gradually to discover that you are not magnificent. Enough labor for one human life." Czesław Miłosz

Day 2: "Fullness of knowledge always means some understanding of the depths of our ignorance; and that is always conducive to humility and reverence." Robert Millikan

Day 3: "Many people believe that humility is the opposite of pride, when, in fact, it is a point of equilibrium. The opposite of pride is actually a lack of self-esteem. A humble person is totally different from a person who cannot recognize and appreciate oneself as part of this world's marvels." Rabino Nilton Bonder

Day 4: "Pride is concerned with who is right. Humility is concerned with what is right." Ezra Taft Benson

Day 5: "Selflessness is humility. ... humility and freedom go hand in hand. Only a humble person can be free." Jeff Wilson

Day 6: "Without humility there can be no humanity." John Buchan

Day 7: "I'm sure I am wrong about many things, although I'm not sure exactly which things I'm wrong about. I'm even sure I'm wrong about what I think I'm right about in at least some cases." Brian McLaren

Day 8: "And when our baby stirs and struggles to be born it compels humility: what we began is now its own." Margaret Mead

Day 9: "Every person that you meet knows something you don't; learn from them." H. Jackson Brown, Jr.

Day 10: "It is well to remember that the entire population of the universe, with one trifling exception, is composed of others." Andrew J. Holmes

Day 11: "If I only had a little humility, I would be perfect." Ted Turner

Day 12: "Humility is not thinking less of yourself, it's thinking of yourself less." Rick Warren

Day 13: "Life is a long lesson in humility." James M. Barrie

Day 14: "Be it ever so humble, there's no opinion like one's own." Unknown

Day 15: "Religion is to do right. It is to love, it is to serve, it is to think, it is to be humble." Ralph Waldo Emerson

Day 16: "Humility is attentive patience." Simone Weil

Day 17: "Never look down on anybody unless you're helping him up." Jesse Jackson

Day 18: "Do you wish to rise? Begin by descending. You plan a tower that will pierce the clouds? Lay first the foundation of humility." Saint Augustine



Day 19: "Have more humility. Remember you don't know the limits of your own abilities. Successful or not, if you keep pushing beyond yourself, you will enrich your own life—and maybe even please a few strangers." A.L. Kennedy

Day 20: "Humility is at the equilibrium of ego. When we're on center, we manage our ego rather than it managing us." Steve Smith

Day 21: "Real excellence and humility are not incompatible one with the other, on the contrary they are twin sisters." Jean Baptiste Lacordaire

Day 22: "Who is more humble? The scientist who looks at the universe with an open mind and accepts whatever the universe has to teach us, or somebody who

says everything in this book must be considered the literal truth and never mind the fallibility of all the human beings involved?" Carl Sagan

Day 23: "It is a wholesome and necessary thing for us to turn again to the earth and in the contemplation of her beauties to know of wonder and humility." Rachel Carson

Day 24: "To learn which questions are unanswerable, and *not to answer them*: this skill is most needful in times of stress and darkness." Ursula K. Le Guin

Day 25: "But self-abasement is just inverted egoism. Anyone who acts with genuine humility will be as far from humiliation as from arrogance." Stephen Mitchell

Day 26: "One learns to ignore criticism by first learning to ignore applause." Robert Brault

Day 27: "Humility leads to strength and not to weakness. It is the highest form of self-respect to admit mistakes and to make amends for them." John J. McCloy

Day 28: "It is no great thing to be humble when you are brought low; but to be humble when you are praised is a great and rare attainment." St. Bernard

Day 29: "I claim to be a simple individual liable to err like any other fellow mortal. I own, however, that I have humility enough to confess my errors and to retrace my steps." Mahatma Gandhi

Day 30: "Too much humility is pride." Proverb

Day 31: "It stands to reason that anyone who learns to live well will die well. The skills are the same: being present in the moment, and humble, and brave, and keeping a sense of humor." Victoria Moran





mus? All of you who are avid gardeners know what humus is. Says Professor Stephen W. Gilbert: "The very best humus is a

One is hard pressed to imagine anything more humble than humus, an elemental reduction of vegetable matter to its most basic form. But consider the function of humus, and how instructive that might be in our considerations of the meaning and practice of humility. If we think of humus as humble, and recognize how helpful it is to the new growth in a kitchen garden, ...it becomes a fecund, generous willingness to serve....

Humility

An excerpt from *Humility, Humus, Hubris & Humor* (2004) by Rev. Suzanne Meyer



Humility. We say that we all value humility—in others, that is. We say that we much prefer to be around those individuals who are modest, and un-

assuming, rather than around shameless braggarts or egomaniacs. But, if the truth be told, we are drawn to those individuals who display a certain chutzpah, audacity, or even arrogance.

...One wag has written: "Humility is a virtue all preach, none practice. The master thinks it good doctrine for his servant, the laity for the clergy, and the clergy for the laity." ...And famous architect Frank Lloyd Wright expressed it this way: "Early in life I had to choose between honest arrogance and hypocritical humility. I chose the former and have seen no reason to change."

...Very few laud humility in strong, positive terms, leading to the notion that authentic humility means one must become little more than a doormat. To most of us, the one who is humble, modest, or self-effacing would seem to lack that all-important self-esteem, that good self-image we all seek.

...Our culture's preference seems to be for those individuals who display strong egos and unbridled self-assurance—even hubris, that is, arrogant pride. Given that none of us likes to think of oneself as a doormat; and given that we get the message through our culture that lack of self-esteem is the root of all evil, it was not at first easy to find much good to say about humility. Nor was it easy to find reasons why it is a virtue we Unitarian [Universalists] might want to cultivate.

...Did you know that the words "human," "humility," and "humor" all share the same common Indo-European root word, *ghôm*, best translated by the English word "humus"? What is hu-

careful combination of rotting vegetable matter. Kitchen garbage is an excellent contribution, and autumn leaves always appear to play an important role. The kitchen garbage, in a rather thin layer, sets up a composting process, hastened if it is covered with a (slightly thicker) layer of leaves....

"I have actually known only one great authority on the proper construction and composition of the humus pile, the compost heap. That authority was my father, a Unitarian minister and a gardener.... He often referred to it as the 'humanist pile,' unaware, I am sure, of the etymological seemliness of his small witticism.



"However we might construct our own humus pile, if we are fortunate enough to

have the space and the garden which might require it, we can benefit ourselves by reflecting on the deeper insights offered by the apparent etymological link [between humus] and the words human, humor, and humility." (*Etymologies of Humor: Reflections on the Humus Pile, Sincronía: An E-Journal of Culture Studies, Winter 1996*)

Professor Gilbert's making the etymological connection between humility and humus, kitchen garbage, and other decomposing organic matter might seem to fit perfectly with some of our other assumptions about the meaning of that word, humility. In our ego-driven culture in which we have all but raised arrogance to the status of a virtue, we might imagine that the relationship between humility, and humus is obvious—humility stinks! But that is not where Professor Gilbert is going with his metaphor. He sees an entirely different, much more positive relationship between humanity, humility, and humus. He continues: "Humility is easy enough, at first glance, to connect to its Indo-European roots.

"The naming of our humanity at least should reflect something of our deepest understanding of what it is to be human. Surely the commonness of our end, what we have in common with all other living things, is reflected in this etymology. But I also believe that the relation between humus and humanity touches on what is best about us—our ability to give without expectation of reward, but with the confidence that our giving is a valued contribution.... The knowledge that we end as matter that continues to be used, that is, in fact, recycled purposefully, can be cause for great comfort. And for great laughter."

...When you and I are living up to our best as human beings, we are functioning like humus, not in the sense of garbage, but as the fundamental nurturing substance of life, the compost out of which new life emerges and reemerges. For an individual to act with true humility is also to act generatively: to help make things and people grow. Likewise, humble people are not lacking in pride or self-esteem, rather they are like humus, that is to say, they are down to earth, grounded, not pompous or puffed up; and thus they have enough self-confidence to be able to laugh even at themselves.

...Far from being a sign of weakness, inferiority or poor self-image, I have discovered that true humility requires both courage and high self-esteem. It is the courageous person, one who has a strong sense of his or her own self-worth, who can admit his own limitations and say, "I don't have all the answers. I don't know. I'm not perfect. I need your help. Teach me. Help me grow." It is the wise person who knows his own ignorance and the strong person who knows her own weak-

(Continued on page 7)

Teaching Humility

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

James M. Barrie, the author of the play *Peter Pan*, wrote, "Life is a long lesson in humility." While he meant that we will experience humility over and over again in a lifetime, it is also true that it takes effort to understand humility and its value. By teaching children humility, we can instill in them values like empathy, compassion, and respect for others.



Model humility: Children can learn humility from their parents when it is consistently modeled by demonstrating a concern for others and for self through both actions and words. In a sense, it is practicing the golden rule: "doing unto others as we would have others do unto us." Children have a keen sense of fairness and can understand why this is important.

Build self-esteem: Building a child's self-esteem is a key to humility. To the extent that a child feels good about him- or herself, he or she can begin to recognize the inherent worth and dignity in others. Humility is enhanced when children realize that they are valued for who they are and not solely on what they do.

Encourage children: Encourage literally means "putting heart into." Doing well at most things requires effort. As a child makes the link between effort and result, he or she has better appreciation for accomplishments, both his or hers, and others.

Cultivate understanding of others: Part of our ability to understand others is based on empathy, the ability to imagine what it would mean to be in someone else's shoes. Being "other-focused" can

also be cultivated by having a child recognize and name what he or she values in others, even pets.

Tell stories of those who exhibited humility: Telling stories of people like Jesus, Mother Teresa, Buddha, Gandhi, the 14th Dali Lama, etc., help children understand the positive role that humility can play in a person's life.

Teach children praise: Children learn praise by being praised and by praising others. Humility becomes an asset as a child discovers that praising others does not diminish his or her value or accomplishments.

Teach children to serve: In serving others, children's natural compassion is awakened. Care should be taken to emphasize the value and worth of those being served, rather than just the circumstances that cause them to be in need. It is also helpful to invite a child to reflect on the benefits that come back to the child through acts of service.

Help children admit mistakes and apologize: We all make mistakes. That is part of being human; it is also one of the ways in which we learn. Making a mistake does not diminish our inherent worth and dignity. Understanding that making mistakes is OK can be freeing to a child. Related to this is supporting a child in apologizing and helping him or her understand how an apology can help restore right relationship. Often the desire to be right gets in the way of apologizing. Our Universalist ancestors understood the difference between being right and being good. When possible, help your child choose goodness.

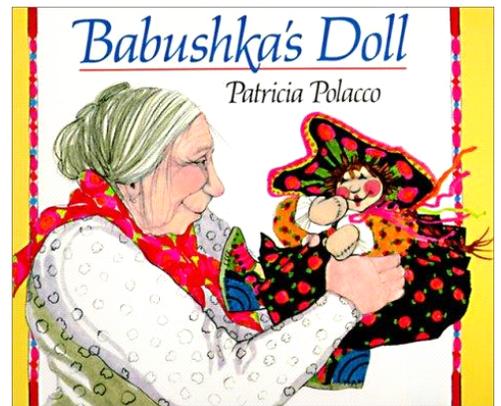
Teach children respect: We teach respect by respecting children, expecting respect from them, and engaging disrespectful language and behavior in a loving, but firm manner. By encouraging mutual respect, we cultivate the capacity for humility in our children.

Invite children to express gratitude: Tony Dungy writes, "A genuinely grateful heart is a key building block for humility. Gratitude, practiced and eventually

owned, enhances humility at every turn. The person saying "Thank you," affects a posture that is unassuming and modest. ...It's the kind of response that eventually soaks in, grows roots, and blooms humility."

Informed by <http://www.allprodad.com/10-ways-to-teach-your-children-humility/>

Family Activity: *Who Should Go First?* Invite a discussion with your children about who should go first in a game or other activity. Ask what is nice about going first, and why they or others would want to go first. How can we determine who should go first if more than one person wants to go first? Why might we be willing to go second or even last?



Babushka's Doll

Patricia Polacco

Natasha is very selfish and wants her grandmother to stop all of her work to pay attention to Natasha and meet her needs. Babushka, her grandmother, finally becomes exhausted from all the demands. She goes out and leaves Natasha alone with Babushka's doll. The doll comes to life and makes the same kind of demands as Natasha did. Natasha becomes very tired and humble. She realizes what she was doing and replaces her demanding ways with gratefulness.

Link to Video of book being read: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9CnzDpBHldE>

Family Activity: *Babushka's Doll* Read the book together or watch the video. Discuss how Babushka felt and how that changed. Why did Natasha become humble? What did Natasha learn?

(Continued from page 1) **Theme Introduction** Humility also shares a root with humiliation, which means “reduced to dirt.” Humiliation is destructive. It involves an abuse of power, a sadistic act done to one person, group, or nation by another. The overwhelming sense of shame that results can strip away all dignity and self-esteem. Our fear of humiliation is well placed, but let us not be confused. Humiliation says, “You are a mistake.” Humility says, “I made a mistake.” Humiliation, then, is the antitheses of authentic humility, which grows out of intrinsic self-worth. To be humbled is to learn from life in profound and constructive ways, an experience dramatically different from the corrosive effects of humiliation.

Humility was one of seven medieval virtues included in a poem (*Psychomachia*, i.e., *Contest of the Soul*) by the 5th century Latin poet, Aurelius Prudentius, as an antidote to the deadly sin of pride. This poem was wildly popular in the Middle Ages, and promoted the value of cultivating virtue. Today, humility seems hopelessly out of date in a society increasingly driven by intolerance, meanness, and greed.

Our first Unitarian Universalist principle, “to affirm and promote the inherent worth and dignity of every person,” is best practiced in the context of humility. This is not a stance of inferiority, as some may assume, but one of radical equality. Because I acknowledge and act out of my own inherent worth and dignity, I am able to see and respond to you based upon your inherent worth and dignity.

One dictionary defines humility as the state of being modest, respectful, and egoless. True humility is a sign of spiritual maturity. False humility, on the other hand, is the height of deception. It involves being fraudulently self-deprecating of one’s talents and accomplishments in order to win praise from others. An archetype for this kind of behavior was Uriah Heep, a fictional character in Charles

Dickens’s book, *David Copperfield*. He fabricated humility to endear himself to others in order to achieve his less than honorable goals. Near the end of the novel, he is in prison where, in another show of false humility, he declares that he is a model prisoner.

St. Francis of Assisi, the 13th century mystic, made humility the foundation of the Franciscan Order. A prayer attributed to him, but from an anonymous source, includes these words: “Lord, grant that I may seek rather to comfort than to be comforted; to understand, than to be understood; to love, than to be loved.” This is what the Hebrew prophet Micah meant when he said to “walk humbly.” It does not mean that we are rejecting comfort, understanding, or love for ourselves because we are somehow unworthy or less than others. In fact, by being proactive we are insuring that there will be more comfort, understanding, and love in the world for everyone.

To cultivate humility is to become an architect of mutual compassion. As Rabbi Tarfon said, “Do not be daunted by the enormity of the world’s grief. Do justly, now. Love mercy, now. Walk humbly, now. You are not obligated to complete the work, but neither are you free to abandon it.” To cultivate humility is to see grief, despair, confusion, and so many other things in another and reach out with your heart and your hand. It is to consider the ingredients from the recipe for humble pie listed earlier and to bring those to whatever table you happen to sit at. And it is possible that some people seated around you will ask for seconds.



Humility as Virtue

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland



In Judaism, the humility of Moses was a sign of divine strength and purpose, and not of weakness. In Numbers 12:3, it states, “For Moses was a man exceeding

meeek above all men that dwelt upon earth.” An opinion put forth in the Talmud concludes, “Even if you be otherwise perfect, you fail without humility.” Rabbi Simon Jacobson in *Counting the Omer – A Spiritual Guide*, comments on the attribute of humility or *Hod* (from the root of the Hebrew word *hoda’ah*). He writes, “A full cup cannot be filled. When you’re filled with yourself and your needs, ‘I and nothing else,’ there is no room for more. When you ‘empty’ yourself..., your capacity to receive increases beyond your previously perceived limits. Humility is the key to transcendence; to reach beyond yourself. Only true humility gives you the power of total objectivity. Humility is sensitivity.... Although humility is silent it is not a void. It is a dynamic expression of life....”

The 14th Dalai Lama has said, “I’m nothing special. I’m just an ordinary monk.” Elsewhere he wrote, “The whole purpose of religion is to facilitate love and compassion, patience, tolerance, humility, and forgiveness.” In Buddhism, humility is seen as a virtue. Chen Yu-His writes, “In the Buddhist text on *Mahakaruna* (great compassion), humility is one of the ten sacred qualities attributed to *Avalokite Bodhisattva*, or Buddha of Compassion.” He notes that in Mahayana Buddhism humility is a moral precept required to open oneself to the Buddha’s teachings and the possibility of spiritual liberation.

For Sikhs, *nimrata* or humility is central to their faith given their belief that all must bow in humility before God. The fruits of humility are peace and pleasure. Guru Nanak, the First Guru of Sikhism said, “Make contentment your ear-rings, humility your begging bowl, and medita-

(Continued on page 8)

Humility: Antidote to Pride

Christopher Peterson & Martin E.P. Seligman

In the time of Thomas Aquinas, pride was considered sufficiently evil to be included among the deadly sins. Some even considered pride the ultimate sin, the root of all others. Yet—in the guise of self-esteem—modern Western culture encourages the pursuit of pride. ...The crusade to raise self-esteem has spawned countless self-help books.... If people can only feel better about themselves, the logic goes, they will be happy and behave well—and society will benefit. ...

But society's eagerness to facilitate positive views of the self at all costs has created a dangerous imbalance. By focusing attention on the benefits of positive views of the self, we can easily overlook... the benefits of some rather unassuming virtues [like] humility....

The past decade has ...witnessed a surge of interest in the link between humility and science and in the role that humility might play within organizational and business settings (e.g., Jim Collins, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*). June Tangney identified a number of humility's key features:

- An accurate (not underestimated) sense of one's abilities and achievements
- The ability to acknowledge one's mistakes, imperfections, gaps in knowledge, and limitations...
- Openness to new ideas, contradictory information, and advice
- Keeping one's abilities and accomplishments in perspective
- Relatively low focus on the self or an ability to "forget the self"
- Appreciation of the value of all things, as well as the many different ways that people and things can contribute to our world.

We believe that humility involves a non-defensive willingness to see the self accurately, including both strengths and limitations.

Source: Peterson, Christopher & Seligman, Martin E.P., *Character Strengths and Virtues*, Oxford University Press. 2004.

Humility & Leadership

Rev. Kirk Loadman-Copeland

Jim Collins 2001 book, *Good to Great: Why Some Companies Make the Leap... and Others Don't*, describes how some companies made a transition from being good companies to great companies. These companies were compared to similar companies that failed to make the transition. One factor involved the difference between an Effective Leader and what Collins calls a *Level 5 Leader*, one who exhibits a paradoxical combination of humility and willpower. Collins writes that, "Level 5 leaders are a study in duality: modest and willful, shy and fearless. To grasp this concept, consider Abraham Lincoln, who never let his ego get in the way of his ambition to create an enduring great nation." In terms of humility, these leaders demonstrate compelling modesty; act with quiet, calm determination; and focus on the success of others. In terms of willpower, they serve as a catalyst; demonstrate unwavering resolve; and translate core values into high standards. According to Collins, an interesting pattern in Level 5 leaders was what he called the "window and the mirror." Level 5 leaders, inherently humble, look out the window to give credit to factors beyond themselves. If they can't give credit to specific people or events, they simply credit good luck. When things do not go well, instead of citing bad luck or external factors, they look in the mirror and take personal responsibility.

Carl Robinson writes that developing Level 5 leadership skills "requires a willingness to be introspective and self-reflective and then to engage in what Collins calls 'conscious personal development.' Most truly confident people have experience looking honestly at themselves, accepting themselves, warts and all, and then coming to terms with their imperfections. ...The trick isn't to change who you fundamentally are but to accept who you are. If you do the latter you can begin to honestly understand your strengths and weaknesses which will allow you

to effectively parlay your strengths and work around your weaknesses."

Given the aspirations of Unitarian Universalism, our seven principles, and the challenges of congregational life, we would do well to aspire to this kind of leadership which combines humility and willpower in equal measure in order to create beloved community. (Note: Jim Collins monograph, *Good to Great and the Social Sectors*, applies his concepts to non-business settings like community organizations and congregations.)

Dust & Ashes

(Continued from page 4) **Faith & Theology** nesses, and the expansive person who knows his own limitations—and is not ashamed of them, but open to learning and giving and growth from wherever or from whomever it may come. Humility is also about a willingness to nurture the gifts of others, to be that medium through which they grow. The humble person is not threatened by the talents, gifts, or successes of others, but rejoices in them.



Humanity, humility, humus, humor: all of these are deeply interconnected and tell us something important about this life that we share. Considered together, these words remind us of what it really takes to become authentically human.

The rabbis of old, in an Hasidic Midrash, put it this way: "To be fully human in the best sense of that word, each of us should walk around with two pockets. In each of those pockets is a slip of paper. One of the slips of paper says, "For my sake this whole magnificent, amazing universe was created." The other slip of paper says, "I am but dust and ashes." Humus we are and to humus we will return.

Source: <http://www.uupuertorico.org/Sermons/Humility.htm>

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion: Humility

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of *Touchstones* and the questions.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: "Take nothing and no one for granted, be humble always, be kind especially when it's difficult and never forget the place where you came from and the people that helped you get where you are. These things will live on in you and through you, long after the words have faded."

C.K. Webb

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page 1.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group Members read selections from Readings from the Common Bowl (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: "To have humility is to experience reality, not in relation to ourselves, but in its sacred independence. It is to see, judge, and act from the point of rest in ourselves. Then, how much disappears, and all that remains falls into place. In the point of rest at the center of our being, we encounter a world where all things are at rest in the same way. Then a tree becomes a mystery, a cloud a revelation, each man [or woman] a cosmos of whose riches we can only catch

glimpses. The life of simplicity is simple, but it opens to us a book in which we never get beyond the first syllable."

Dag Hammarskjöld

Living the Questions

Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving to the next.

1. As you grew up, did you regard humility as a sign of strength or weakness? Why?
2. Our society does not consider humility to be a virtue. Why do you think that is so? Do you regard it as a virtue? Why or why not?
3. Everett L. Worthington, Jr. concludes, "We cannot fully reach humility by striving for it." Why do you think this is so?
4. Can humility be taught? Or must it be learned? If yes, how have you learned humility?
5. How does humility enhance relationships?
6. Who have been the people that you have known that seemed to possess humility? How did that quality shape who they were?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person the time claimed. Using a timer allows the facilitator to also listen fully.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together and the experience of exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice (Elizabeth Selle Jones) *We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.*

Closing Words
Rev. Philip R. Giles
(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*



Truly Human

(Continued from page 6) **Humility as Virtue** tion the ashes you apply to your body," and "Modesty, humility and intuitive understanding are my mother-in-law and father-in-law," both of which are recorded in the *Guru Granth Sahib*, the religious text of Sikhism.

Within Christianity, humility has been a virtue in several monastic orders. It was featured in the *Rule of St. Benedict* and was a cornerstone of the order established by St. Francis of Assisi. Franciscan piety led to the artistic development of the *Madonna of Humility*, which was first used by them for contemplation. In this iconic painting, the Madonna symbolizes humility by sitting on the ground or on a low cushion.

In the *Qur'an*, Arabic words used to convey "humility" are *tawadu'* and *kho-shou'*. The word, Islam, which means surrender to God, also conveys the subtext of humility. Muslim writer Fethullah Gülen concludes that, "Humility is a sign of one's having become truly human."

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