

Most of us go through our day never thinking about inhaling and exhaling – it’s an automatic function of our bodies to breathe in and breathe out on a regular basis – unless you are running up a flight of stairs or running a mile – then you are acutely aware of your breathing because it is telling your body you need more air quickly! We often say we are “out of breath” after doing something strenuous – or we say “it took my breath away” when we see something beautiful or awesome. There are times in our lives that we do focus on breathing as a means of calming our bodies and minds: we learn how to breathe when we take prenatal classes, to learn how to deal with child labor and delivery. We learn breathing techniques when we do yoga or meditation. We sometimes have to remind ourselves to breathe when we are scared, or shocked, or nervous. And for those of us who have struggled to breathe because of allergies or lung disease, breathing can be a challenge.

When I was a toddler, my parents found out I had asthma. At 2-years-old I was hospitalized with pneumonia and almost died. After that I began the yearly routine of being admitted to the hospital every spring (usually around my birthday in March) and every Fall, usually just after returning to school after summer break. My earliest memory is when I was about 3 years old and was admitted to the hospital for an asthma attack, and they put me in a crib with an oxygen tent. I was so mad that they put me in a baby crib, because I had already been graduated to a “big girl bed” at home, and this was embarrassing to me! For the next 9 years I would suffer with asthma and constantly battle to breathe. By the age of 12 or 13, the asthma became mild, and I could go on breathing freely like everyone else.

What is interesting about all of that is that I remember those first 12 years of my life as some of the happiest!

I enjoyed being cared for by my nurses, I enjoyed seeing my grandparents who came to visit me, I appreciated the volunteer who came to my room to do a craft or read me a book, I cherished the alone time I had with my mother, who had 3 other children to tend to back at home. Being in the hospital I was surrounded by love, and that love healed me so I could return to my childhood life until the next major asthma attack.

Our first reading today, from Philippians, reminds us of how we feel when we are struggling and when we are content; when we are in need and when we have plenty. It’s always a good idea to reflect on these experiences as **a balanced life** of want and need or desire and have...or even joy and despair.

When we think of these “balanced feelings”, we might also consider the act of inhaling love and exhaling gratitude. What would that look like? Let’s explore that together today.

When I think of inhaling love, I think about the word “love” itself, and what that means to me. In the Bible, in I Corinthians, chapter 13, we read the words of Paul the Apostle who says so graciously:

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

In this reading, we experience the word love as a noun...Love is...and that is one way of looking at the word love. That is how we look at the word when we say “Inhale Love”. But in my mind, I also think of the word LOVE as a verb – something you DO. When asked what the most important commandment was, Jesus said: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength and with all your mind’ and then he said, Love your neighbor as yourself. These words are actions – commandments that sound difficult to follow sometimes, but not if you choose to inhale love – almost as a mantra. Inhale love and go out and love. Inhale love and show others love. Inhale love and love all those you meet – even if you don’t like them!

I am fairly new to this church, as a member – although I worked here for 5 years as the Youth Coordinator, but I really didn’t have much chance to worship and become part of the church. So, it’s understandable that I did not know the origins of the Unitarian Universalist chalice and its meaning dating back to WWII.

According to an article in the UU World magazine in Spring of 2022, it was during WWII that the chalice became the symbol of Unitarian Universalism. Needing documents with an official-looking seal to protect people escaping Nazi persecution, the Unitarian Service Committee commissioned an Austrian artist to create that seal, and through that process, the flaming chalice was created. It was created as a symbol that supported ideas of sacrifice and love. I would like to read a brief passage from that article, titled “Embracing an Ethic of Love” , written by UUA president, Rev. Dr. Susan Frederick-Gray:

An ethic of love lives at the heart of our UU faith. It reflects the core question, “How are we to live?” It calls us to courage to continually grow and learn and adapt in ways that foster love and justice. It is not a weak or sentimental love. It burns like the fire at the center of our chalice. It’s fierce in a way that compels us to demand justice in our world, but also fierce in how it calls us to courageous conversations,

to radical practices of welcome, compassion, forgiveness, and belonging. Let this love burn brightly in our hearts and in all our communities. May it be the energy and resilience we need to keep on loving, to keep on learning, to keep on showing up for each other and our neighbors in resistance to evil and in creating refuge from the trauma of oppression.

This has given me a whole new appreciation of the Chalice we light each Sunday morning, knowing that “in the spirit of love” we have agreed to live a life that offers love to ALL, and we have been given the courage to foster that love into compassion and belonging. What a wonderful gift we have been given, even in our Covenant, as we say, “In the love of truth, and in the spirit of Jesus, we unite!” This is exactly what Paul was talking about when he said, “Love rejoices with the truth”. This is the center of our beliefs as we state each week when we come to church.

So, when we inhale love, we take in all the benefits of goodness, of positivity, of comfort and joy and encouragement. But what do we DO with all that love that we inhale?? I suggest we exhale! And more importantly, we should exhale with gratitude.

Gratitude is such a vague word. I don't think of it as a very strong word. You can HAVE gratitude about many things, some great and some menial. Often, we use the word gratitude around Thanksgiving when we give thanks once a year for ALL the things! We set aside ONE day a year to thank God for EVERYTHING he has given us in 365 days. That, to me, is how I sometimes think of gratitude. But not today. Today we are going look at gratitude as a means of sharing love – of taking the love we inhale and turn it into something we can share as we exhale.

I want to read you this children's book called Gratitude Soup, by Olivia Rosewood. I have adapted the story for the sake of time, but I think you will enjoy the story just the same.

(See Appendix I)

This story reminds us of how simple it is to be grateful for even the smallest, silliest things, and how being grateful FEEDS into being more grateful. And part of that gratitude comes from inhaling love, which feeds the soul, and allows us to exhale gratitude.

The last line in our first reading this morning said:

“I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want. <sup>13</sup>I can do all this through Him who gives me strength.”

If we believe that God is Love, and we allow ourselves to breathe in that love, then HE creates the strength and comfort and blessings that allow us to feel gratitude – even in times of struggle, or want, or need. Like Violet, the 5-year-old girl, who THINKS she needs more toys – but in fact, when she reflects on everything that brings her joy, she realizes she has much more to be grateful for than she thought. Instead of saying, “I WANT MORE TOYS”, we can look deep with in our souls and say, “I AM HAPPY BECAUSE I HAVE....” and what I HAVE was given to me, by God, with love. And the only way that I can appreciate that love is to share it with others.

I have this picture (Appendix II) hanging in my kitchen. It was given to me by my sister-in-law because I was visiting her one day, and saw this sign on her wall, and I told her I loved it, and I loved what it said! The next time she saw me, she gave it me! Talk about sharing the love!

I hope when you return to everyday life of not paying attention to breathing in and out all day and night, that you'll find a mantra – or even a picture, or a song that you hum, or a flower that you grow, or a soup that you create – I hope you find something that will remind you to live life with

gratitude, and share the love that you inhale. However, just to be sure, I will be giving you a gift from me during the postlude to show you how much I appreciate all of the love that I have inhaled today. AMEN.

**Benediction:**

May the Love which overcomes all differences,

Which heals all wounds,

Which puts to flight all fears,

Which reconciles all who are separated,

Be in us and among us

Now and always.

AMEN

Please be seated for the postlude while I share my gift of gratitude with you all.

## Appendix I

### **Gratitude Soup by Olivia Rosewood (adapted by Lesa McWalters)**

This is a story about Violet, a five-year-old girl, who wants to share her story of gratitude.

Violet tells it like this:

You see, usually I was ready to be silly  
Easily, breezily, ready to be willy-nilly  
Giggles funning  
Smiles bouncing, jumping running,  
Happiness could flow you know  
From my head to my toe

Except that sometimes I became a cranky one  
Almost undone and not much fun  
I screamed to the outside  
“I need more toys”  
But mommy and daddy didn’t give me toys  
I didn’t need more  
But their poor girl  
They couldn’t just ignore  
Mommy said sweetly:  
It’s not toys that you need  
It’s your soul we’ll feed.  
I know just where to start  
We’ll make Gratitude Soup in your heart.

I know how  
And we can make some right now  
All you need is not a lot  
And imaginary spoon and a pot  
And then search your mind, rewind  
See if you can find  
All that you love and like  
Like riding a bike  
And all that you enjoy and appreciate  
Like cookies you create  
Then make a perfect Gratitude Soup  
It’s so much fun you’ll likely Whoop!

I’m grateful for my friends and fun  
And when I get to run, run, run  
I am grateful for my cinnamon bun,

and the prize that I won!  
I am grateful for watching the waves at the beach  
And biting into a delicious ripe peach  
I am grateful for sitting under a tree  
Under a tree is a perfect place to be and feel free  
I am grateful for the sunset and the sunrise  
Rainbows and blue skies.

One by one I put them in the pot  
My, my I can think of a lot!  
The more I think about my gratitude  
The happier and happier is my attitude  
Changing my focus is like hocus pocus  
My heart lightens, my feeling brightens


Now, this is the serious part.  
It's so serious  
I almost don't know where to start  
Feel all of your gratitude alive in your heart  
Flowing and growing  
Knowing the beauty of this gratitude art

Then watch the swirl and whirl  
As you stir  
All that you're grateful for  
All that you adore  
Your gratitude growing more and more  
Can you feel your heart soar?

You can add some love in there  
And even tender loving care  
If you are aware  
That you still have some to spare.

You can sip Gratitude Soup all day  
And you can sip Gratitude Soup all night  
Gratitude makes the best soup, I say  
Filling me with love and light  
And it's just right there  
Ready to share, ready to care  
In my heart, ready to exude  
And FEED my soul with gratitude.



INHALE  
LOVE.   
EXHALE  
GRATITUDE.