

SUMMER
2013

Families

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Sacred
Spaces
We
Create



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Yoga in the Right Place

One morning while visiting my father's house, I unrolled my yoga mat in his studio—a small room with a computer desk, files, books, and musical instruments. My yoga practice that day was so-so, but as I emerged I noticed my stepmother Mandy practicing in the room across the hall.

I noticed soft music coming from her CD player, and the glow of candles and incandescent light. Her yoga practice seemed to match the lovely warmth of the room. Later, someone asked me, "How was your practice?" "Not as good as Mandy's," I replied.

The next morning, I borrowed a CD player, a space heater, and a candle. Getting everything ready took more time, but the process of preparing the space helped prepare me to enter my yoga practice in a different way, aware of

the control I have over not just the setting, but my own intention.

Some would ask how a concept of sacred space has relevance for post-modern Unitarian Universalists. What definition of "sacred" has meaning in a church where many call themselves atheists and agnostics? Many Unitarian Universalists, and people of other faiths, say that when they seek a sacred place—a place that will help them reconnect with themselves, a place that inspires awe—they choose places not made by

continued on page 2



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continued from page 1

people, but that grow organically out of the Earth's processes. We can feel the undeniable power of the ocean. We feel grounded with our feet on mountain rocks. The natural places left in our world are truly worthy of reverence, respect, and awe. But ultimately the place itself is secondary. The sacred space we create is inside us, at the intersection of body, mind, and heart.

After that visit to my dad's I knew that the place I set aside for my yoga practice was important. When I practiced in the small office that contains our family computer, bills, files, and a crowded bookcase, I was surrounded by mental "to-do lists." I decided to do something with this space that would be beautiful to look at and would help me remember my intention. One morning I cleared space on a bookshelf for a few things that reminded me of qualities I like to remember. I took down from the wall a framed piece of art that faced me while I practiced, and replaced it with a hand-dyed flag. I took a sarong I have often used to cover a table for worship, and sewed ribbons to the top. I installed hooks on the bookcase and hung the sarong from the hooks.

Now when I practice yoga I untie those ribbons so the sarong will cover my bookcase. I throw a scarf over my desk and my unfinished work, roll out my mat, and put some Ravi Shankar in the CD player. It takes more time, but in preparing the space, I prepare to enter my yoga practice, dedicating myself and my space to reconnecting with what is really important.

*Adapted from a sermon by
the Rev. Darcey Laine.*

EXPLORING TOGETHER

A mountain peak, a cathedral, an art museum, or a grandmother's kitchen could be someone's sacred place—any place that helps us connect with the widest, largest spirit or the deepest, truest places in ourselves. But it takes more than history, tradition, or even natural beauty to sanctify a space. We must bring our intention to have a sacred experience there.

In some religions, believers can make a pilgrimage to a holy site. What pilgrimage might you make as a UU?

Some of us find the sacred at a UU camp, or the places our forebears preached, experienced nature, or stood up for social justice.

A sacred place could also be a field your ancestors used to farm, or the top of a hill you amazed yourself by climbing.

Walden Pond in Concord, Massachusetts



**I believe every inch
of America is sacred,
from sea to shining sea.
I believe we make it holy
by who we welcome and
by how we relate
to each other.**

– Eboo Patel

Altar

Involve the entire family in creating a sacred space in your home by building an altar together.

It can be in a private, quiet corner, or in a common room where you often gather. What items could you bring into the space to make it special with your intention? UU worship spaces often include a chalice. One family member might use the altar to stay connected to nature and wish to add a seashell or leaf. Another might like to remember your ancestors with a photo from your great-grandparents' wedding. Place a chime if you wish to use the altar in meditation. Use soft music and light to create a worshipful atmosphere as you set up the altar together.

The Rev. Darcey Laine says, "For my altar, I look for things that have a

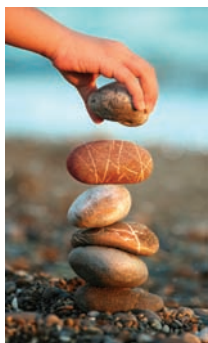
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Creating Our Sacred Space, as a Community



In the Tapestry of Faith program *Creating Home*, children care about one another, have fun, and learn together. The children place a name stone on a labyrinth to show how they each belong. Could the labyrinth be a sacred space? What about starting a labyrinth ritual at home—a sacred space for the community that is your family?

inside a domed structure, i looked up and felt joy—being surrounded by eternal patterns of the universe.

—Cait Benton, astrologer

Invention and Intention

R. Buckminster Fuller, a 20th-century Unitarian, was driven to devise ecologically sound, efficient, low-cost ways to improve life for all people. Some have called his geodesic dome an example of “sacred geometry.” Can a place be sacred because of the beliefs and dreams put into building it?



> **Search online for a model, then use marshmallows and toothpicks to build a geodesic dome at home.**

Sacred Places Collage

- > **Take or find pictures of places you have experienced as sacred or you imagine might be sacred to someone else.**
- > **Can you arrange the pictures by features they have in common?**

Some may be intimate, indoor spaces, and others wild outdoor spaces. Some may be “official” sacred sites, and others so personal that their sacredness speaks only to the one who chooses them.

Memorials and Monuments

Some places help us feel connected to other people in sadness, joy, or understanding. A cemetery can be such a place, or a roadside memorial that marks the site of a fatal accident. The world has built many monuments to inspire reverence and reflection on sites of genocide, disaster, and triumph over injustice.

- > **Have you been to a public place that seemed to invite your most powerful emotions?**
- > **Did you feel it to be a sacred place?**
- > **What did you bring to the space that helped transform it into a sacred one?**
- > **What was there already, waiting for you?**



The sacred is present and available to us whenever we look or are willing to find it...

The sacred is connection—to one's self, one's faith, world, universe, cosmos, and God.

—The Rev. Abhi Janamanchi

feeling or color I like. I go with my intuition: ‘I don’t know what this sparkly thing means, but it makes me happy, so it’s going on my altar.’”

Putting something on your altar has a way of clarifying intention. What item might remind you to be open to new experiences? What item can prompt you to notice beauty in your life?

Remember, your altar gives you unlimited second chances: Keep looking at it. If you don’t like it, or it no longer feels right, change it.



Making Our Own Sacred Places

BY JESSICA YORK

When visiting the Vatican, I bought my sister a rosary that had been blessed by the Pope. A rosary is used in prayer to facilitate a connection with God. My sister wears it only on holy days, tucked away from the world, inside her shirt. She has another rosary for other days. The Vatican rosary feels more sacred to her because of the Pope's blessing. Yet I would say that her intentional use of it on only the holiest days also makes it more sacred.

We can choose to give an object sacredness, and we can intentionally create sacred space. Because my connections are personal and unique, my sacred object or space will be different from anyone else's. I have a home altar, and the most sacred object on it is a photograph of my mother. It reminds me of what is most



important to me—my family. It reminds me of the gifts of my ancestors, that I am privileged to carry their strength beside me in life. It reminds me that I will be an ancestor someday, which means I have a responsibility to give out strength—to my family, yes, but, since ancestors are not only those with whom we share blood, also to the world.

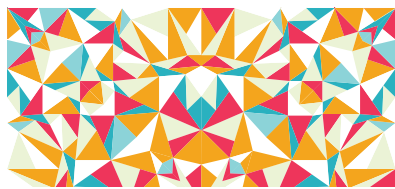
I believe most objects only remain sacred through my intentional actions. So, I do not lock away my mother's photo in a velvet-lined box. I touch it regularly, as I do all the objects on my altar. Sometimes I use the photo to bring forth precious memories. At other times, I use it to pray to my ancestors for guidance. Interacting with the objects on my altar in the morning keeps me grounded and focused throughout the day.

- > **Do you have an altar in your home, or another space you have made sacred?**
- > **Is it a space you use alone? Do other family members have their own sacred spaces in the home?**
- > **Discuss the meaning of the word "sacred" with your family. How can you invite a child to experience your sacred space, or to create their own?**



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FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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FIND OUT MORE

■ Since Europeans colonized the "New World," many places held sacred by Native American tribes have been repurposed. In some cases, land rich with spiritual meaning was disrupted for development; in other cases, disruptions destroy resources considered sacred, such as clean water. Support contemporary Native groups working to preserve sites like Manataka in Arkansas, where leaders of multiple tribes would meet amid abundant healing herbs and miraculous precious minerals; the ancient Ogallala Aquifer in Nebraska, which sits in the path of a proposed oil pipeline; and the land known by Sioux as Pe' Sla in South Dakota's Black Hills.

■ *Unitarian Universalist Views of the Sacred*, a pamphlet edited by Paul Rasor, is available from the UUA Bookstore.

■ Tapestry of Faith resources that inspired this insert include *Spirituality and the Arts*, by Nita Penfold, available online.

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