

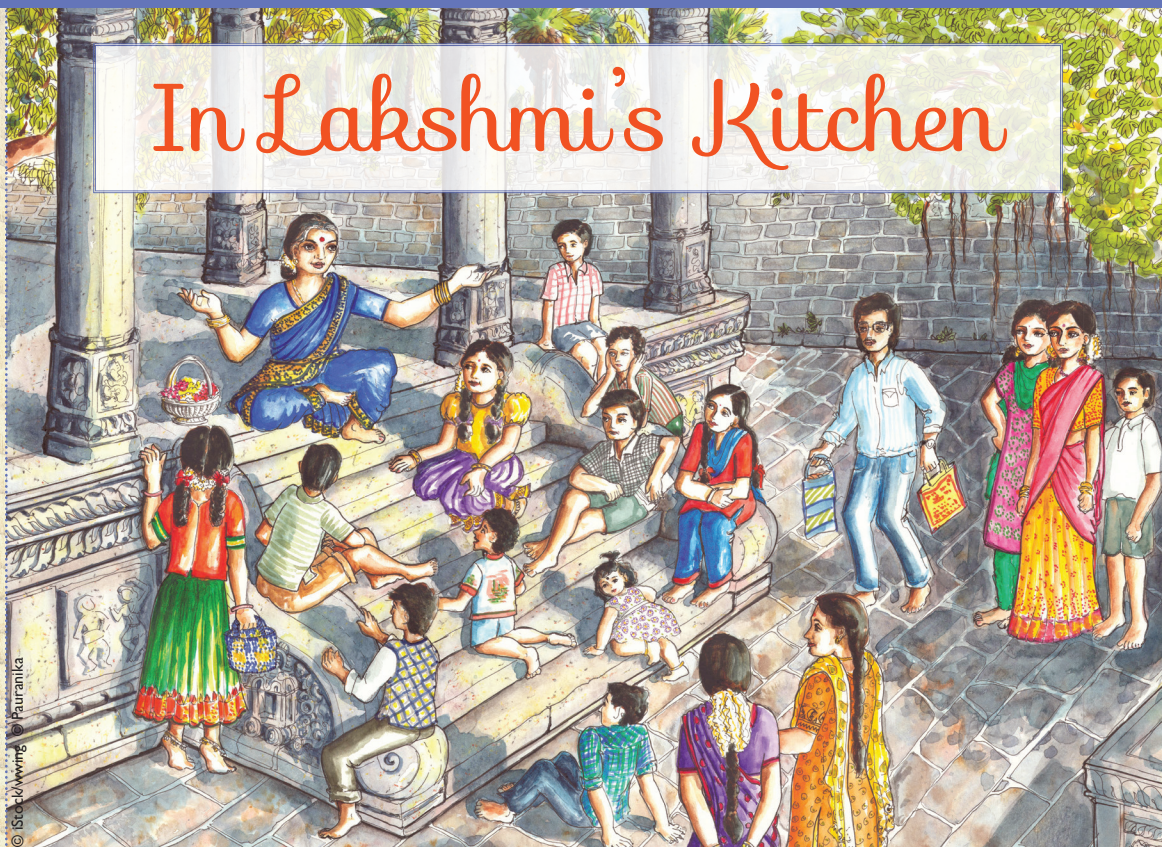
WINTER
2018

Families

WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

In Lakshmi's Kitchen

Aging
Is for
Everyone



Excerpted from *Katha Sagar, Ocean of Stories: Hindu Wisdom for Every Age*

Lalitha appears bright and early in the large kitchen. Her grandmother Lakshmi, the *pauranika* (storyteller), reminded her before bed last night that today would be the birthday of Lalitha's deceased but beloved great-great-grandfather. In honor of that fact, Lakshmi might have a before-school story for her.

"Namaste, Grandmother!" Lalitha says. Already bathed, with coconut oil combed through her long hair to keep it silky and dressed in her school uniform, she stands at eager attention. Lakshmi points to the table so Lalitha will take a seat. She puts before the child a plate of two idlis—steamed rice cakes mixed

with ground lentils—and a small metal bowl of coconut and coriander chutney.

Needing no silverware, Lalitha pours the green chutney on her plate and pushes some of it around in circles with a piece of the rice cake. A look of bliss appears on her face when she starts chewing.

Watching her eat, Lakshmi asks, "What do you remember of your great-great-grandfather, Lalitha?" They both look up at the photograph of him on the wall. Lakshmi had earlier placed a small table before his image with an offering of a lit sesame oil lamp and a stick of incense.

"He was very old? That's what I remember."

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The Families pages are adapted from Tapestry of Faith lifespan faith development programs.

uua.org/tapestry

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The storyteller laughs. "What else? What is he best remembered for?"

"Oh! That he was very generous and kept a vow his whole life never to eat on a day he hadn't fed a poor and hungry person!"

"Right you are," says the pauranika. "I admired him so much. Even though he was a successful businessman, his real wealth was his goodness."

"Didn't he stop robbers one time, Grandma?" Lalitha asks, starting on her second rice cake.

"Well—yes and no. My grandmother and her sisters were headed to the city on their cart when robbers overtook them.

But when the bullock cart driver told the thieves the family's name, they gave everything back right away. 'We don't rob that family,' they said. 'They are very good to many!' So in a way my grandfather was actually there, don't you think?"

"Uh huh," Lalitha mumbles with a last mouthful of food.

Her grandmother takes the empty plate away and sits down beside her. "Turn your chair so that your back is to me, Lalitha. I will braid you a story and I will also braid your hair. Maybe you have heard this before," says the pauranika, "but even so, every time I tell it I find myself thinking about it for a long time, and it reminds me of my grandfather. Ready?"

What stories do you know about people who died before you were born?

What family story can you share with someone younger than you?

EXPLORING TOGETHER

When we celebrate a birthday, we add a year to our age. ■ Aging can bring new privileges or new responsibilities. We may gain maturity or wisdom. One thing's for sure: As we age, we will change. ■ What do you remember about being younger? ■ What do you like about the age you are now? ■ Can you imagine what you will be like when you are an older age?



How Old Am I?

Watch a Clock or Watch a Tree

Without clocks and calendars, people counted their age by nature's signs of passing time: days and nights, cycles of the moon, and seasons. Trees pay no attention to our clocks and calendars yet age along with time, just as we do.

A pear tree has green leaves that pull in nutrients in the spring. During the summer leaves produce flowers that attract bees. The pollination produces the pear. Many animals will eat the fruit and its seeds will be blown or carried to a new place, perhaps to begin a new pear tree.

The rings of growth inside the pear tree's trunk show years like our birthdays, but, a pear tree grows older all the time.



Stereotypes Are Age-Old. Fight Them with Love!

What do you think about old people?

On television, seniors are often portrayed as confused, frail, unattractive, or grumpy. These stereotypes can make older people lose their self-confidence and enjoyment of life. For younger folks, negative stereotypes make us dread instead of welcoming our own aging.

One way to fight stereotypes with love is to get to know real life individuals.

Here are some ideas for young and old people to get to know one another while celebrating Unitarian Universalist Principles together.

1st and 2nd Principles: Service to help immigrants – dignity, justice, compassion

Almost every older person has a story of being a newcomer in a town, at a job, in a new family. How can kids and grandparents help welcome people who are new?



5th and 6th Principles: Justice travelers – conscience, democracy, world peace

Be “armchair justice travelers” together. Learn about the issues people in history have faced and what they did to make the world better. Old postcards, foreign coins, or a news article may spark an elder’s first-hand story of fighting for justice.



3rd and 4th Principles: Multi-age book group – acceptance, growth, search for truth

The adults of the Venice, Florida UU congregation have a monthly book group. Last year, children suggested a book (*The Jumbies*) and led the discussion. In a reading group, people can help one another.



Stronger readers (young or old) can read to a partner (young or old).

All ages may enjoy...

The Wright Bothers by David McCullough

On the Come Up by Angie Thomas

Watership Down by Richard Adams

7th Principle: Gardens and parties – interconnectedness

A community garden has plenty of jobs for older and younger neighbors. End the growing season with a community potluck.

No local garden? Invite an older neighbor to help organize a block party to celebrate a turning of the seasons.



Milestones

Get some paper, pencils, and markers. Invite family members to make timelines about their lives. Help each other decide what events to include.

The time I lost a tooth

The time we moved

The time I joined the Navy

Ask each other questions like:

What event changed your life?

When did a special person come into your life?
Why are they special to you?

When did something happen that changed your beliefs?

When did you learn how to do something new?

Some of your milestones might be similar (everyone was born!). Important moments can happen at any age.

Our Grand-Generational Gifts

By Pat Hoertdoerfer

Grandma Sophie lived on a farm in northern Wisconsin. She was a down-to-earth, hard-working, always humming, practical idealist. Growing up I loved summers there, living close to the land and experiencing the abundance of the season—vegetables from the garden, eggs from the hens, fruit from the trees, milk from the cows.

But most of all, water from the well. At the end of a hot day we would haul up the bucket and pass the dipper around, each drinking deeply. Laying back, we looked up at the millions of stars. We knew somehow that this earth was home and that we were all connected—blue sky, neighbors and all the love that surrounded us.

Now, my husband and I tell our seven grandchildren our family heritage stories, from Grandma Sophie and her garden of rhubarb, green tomatoes, and braids of four-leaf clover to Opa Heinrich and his workshop of wood, stained glass, and bowls of ripe cherries. We share our own stories about how we met in Germany, learned to speak “Germlish” and

gave birth to four children, their parents.

Harvesting wisdom and blessing future generations are gifts of grand-relationships where younger and older persons come together across generations and find a sense of kinship and mutuality. Every elder is a grand-parent, related to the grand-children in their family, cultural, and congregational life.

Grandparents who are freed from a parenting role can offer children a different kind of support, empathy and understanding, making them trusted confidants and compassionate companions.

Stories of their lives and connections to the past are gifts that elders can

bring. Grandchildren bring stories out of their wondering, questioning, and imaginations, helping elders find new meanings, more hope, and amazing joy.

What do you get when you connect an elder with a youngster? Grand-generational gifts of wonder and creativity, wisdom and spontaneity, insight and stories, stories, stories!



Pat Hoertdoerfer and five of her seven “grands” enjoying time together.

Rev. Patricia Hoertdoerfer is a retired Unitarian Universalist minister, the recipient of the 2017 Angus H. MacLean Award, and a certified Sage-ing® Leader.

FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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FIND OUT MORE

■ In the picture book, *Grandfather Counts*, a young, American-born child connects with their Chinese grandfather across the language and custom differences.

■ The story, “In Lakshmi’s Kitchen,” comes from *Katha Sagar, Ocean of Stories* (Skinner House, 2016), a collection of Hindu wisdom for every age by Sarah Conover with Abhi Janamanchi. The illustration by Shanthi Chandrasekar also comes from the book, which is available from InSpirit, the UU Book and Gift Shop.