

Worship Is . . .

**A service encouraging us
to think about the meaning of worship
and share our thoughts and experiences with one another**



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Notes for Worship Leaders

Origin

Worship Is ... began as a workshop created by the then Worship Subcommittee for the 1992 Unitarian Annual Meetings. In the next year or two, several local congregations made it part of Sunday services; and Celia Midgley and Dawn Buckle compiled an original printed version, which was published in 1994. Since then, participation in services has become more the norm for many of our churches; and it seems time to produce this re-edited version for those who have not yet discovered *Worship Is*. We on the Worship Panel hope you and your group will enjoy using it.

Preparation

You will need:

- One or two large boards, placed at the front of the worship area
- 'Post-its' for each member of the congregation
These small, lightly adhesive papers, come in pads from stationery shops. Hand them out or paste one in the back of each hymn book.
- Readers, chosen beforehand, for the "Worship is ..." passages (which can be found at the end of this booklet)
- Gentle music (live or recorded) for the "Worship is ..." exercise

Include Everyone

Create a safe atmosphere in which people are happy to contribute to the worship, especially if your congregation is not used to active participation.

You may want to "lighten" the service somewhat if children are to take part.

If some attenders are likely to have difficulty writing or reading handwriting, consider a different way of working. For instance, people could speak their "Worship is ..." responses and listen to each other (without discussion) in twos or threes.

Worship Is . . .

Suggested Order of Service

Prelude

Opening Words

Let us worship with our eyes and ears and fingertips;
Let us love the world with heart and mind and body.
Let us worship with the opening of all the windows of our beings,
With the full outstretching of our spirits.
Let us worship and let us learn to love.

Kenneth Patton

Hymn "O Life that makest all things new"
Hymns for Living no. 8; *Hymns of Faith and Freedom* no. 9

Ingathering Prayer

We gather here once again to worship.

Our worship is to the holy spirit of the universe, who sustains it in love and makes it ever new in each moment of time.

Our prayer is for light to see the way, truth to teach us how to walk, faith to give us courage to keep on through all discouragements.

Our friendship is with one another, as fellow-seekers after true happiness, fellow-workers in the service of the spirit.

May our worship, our prayer, our friendship be fully blessed in this hour, and may we go out stronger and wiser to work in a world that so profoundly needs strength, wisdom and compassion. Amen

Verona Conway

Response

The Lord's Prayer, spoken or sung *or* Candles of Concern

or "God be in My Head" (HL 307, HFF 473) *or* "Spirit of Life" (*Let Us Sing* no. 11)

Reading "Rat And Mole Worship" from *The Wind in the Willows* by Kenneth Graham

Rat and Mole paddle their boat up the river very early one morning. As the sun rises, they sense they are in the presence of some divine being, a god. In this presence they feel it is natural to worship.

Slowly, but with no doubt or hesitation whatever, and in something of a solemn expectancy, the two animals passed through the broken, tumultuous water and moored their boat at the flowery margin of the island. In silence they landed, and pushed through the blossom and scented herbage and undergrowth that led up the level ground, till they stood on a little lawn of a marvellous green, set round with Nature's own orchard-trees - crabapple, wild cherry, and sloe.

"This is the place of my song-dream, the place the music played to me," whispered the Rat, as if in a trance. "Here, in this holy place, here if anywhere, surely we shall find Him!"

Then suddenly the Mole felt a great awe fall upon him, an awe that turned his muscles to water, bowed his head, and rooted his feet to the ground. It was no panic terror - indeed he felt wonderfully at peace and happy - but it was an awe that smote and held him and, without seeing, he knew it could only mean that some august Presence was very, very near. With difficulty he turned to look for his friend, and saw him at his side cowed, stricken, and trembling violently. And still there was utter silence in the populous bird-haunted branches around them, and still the light grew and grew.

"Rat!" he found breath to whisper, shaking. "Are you afraid?"

"Afraid?" murmured the Rat, his eyes shining with unutterable love. "Afraid! Of Him? O, never, never! And yet - and yet - O Mole, I am afraid!"

Then the two animals, crouching to the earth, bowed their heads and did worship.

Silence or Quiet Music

Hymn "Prayer is the soul's sincere desire" HL 58; HFF 365

Notices and Collection

Prayer and Meditation

We need a pause from our workaday routine; it gives us rest and refreshment. We know the truth of the saying, "A change is as good as a rest."

We need to pause in our worship, a rest from words said for us, a time to speak inside ourselves our prayers and our thoughts.

Our thoughts may be concerned with the world's problems,
so great at this moment... Mention current world concerns.
Our thoughts may be about personal matters, or family, friends, congregational
matters... Mention any current congregational issues or concerns

Or we may wish to remain silent in our hearts, quiet and receptive.

Let us unite now simply, wordlessly, by sharing silence. Here, Together, Now.

Silence

May the peace that we have created here go with us into the world when the time
comes. Amen

from a prayer by Peter Sampson

Hymn "A fire mist and a planet" HL 233
"Make channels for the streams of love" HFF 316; HL 186

Worship Is...

Leader's Introduction

At the General Assembly Annual Meetings in 1992, the then Worship Subcommittee invited nine leading lay people and ministers from across the spectrum of Unitarian belief to say what "Worship is" to them. Their answers provided the spark for an electrifying meeting, which became an act of worship in its own right. The nine contributions were later printed in *The Inquirer*, and published in part in the pamphlet "Unitarian Views of Worship".

Here are seven of those pieces, read by members of our congregation. We shall hear four of them and then have a musical interlude, before hearing the other three readings and more music.

The Readings *The texts can be found on the two last pages of this booklet.*

Leader's Introduction continued

At the workshop, after the nine people had spoken, others from the body of the hall made impromptu contributions. Everyone listened, some made comments very different from those of the speaker before them, but there was no acrimony. There were more than a hundred people present, but the atmosphere was quiet, yet electric - as if everyone there was really listening to the voices around them and perhaps also to a voice within. At the end of the session, people wrote a sentence or two about what "worship is" for them. This is what I am going to invite you to do in a minute, using the post-it inside the back cover of your hymn book. First, here are a few of the responses made at the workshop.

"Worship for me is having my spiritual batteries recharged."

"Worship is touching depths in community."

"Worship is fellowship, sharing ourselves with God and with each other."

"Humility in the presence of something more powerful than you"

"To contact God"

"Participation, prayer, peace, fellowship"

"Saying 'thank you' for this day, for my children, for a view, for sharing"

Invitation to Respond

What would *you* say? What is worship for you? Take some space first. Close your eyes if that helps. Try to summon up your own, "Worship is..." thought. And when you are ready, write on the post-it what you feel is at the heart of worship. Then, while the music plays, please come forward quietly and put it on one of these boards, and return to your seat to make way for others. After the service, you may like to come back and read what others have written. Let's share the silence now.

Silence - followed by quiet music

Concluding Words *when all the post-its are on the boards*

'Tread softly, for you tread on my dreams'.

William Butler Yeats

Hymn

"Now let us sing in loving celebration" HL 191

"He whom the master loved has truly spoken" HFF 190

Benediction

May the power and the mystery go before us to show us the way,
Shine above us to lighten our world,
Lie beneath us to bear us up,
Walk with us and give us companionship,
And glow and flow within us to bring us joy. Amen

Judith Walker Riggs

Postlude

The Readings

**taken from "Unitarian Experiences of Worship"
published by the Unitarian Information Department**

Worship is about connecting - connecting with that of God in me and connecting with that of God in others. For me, it begins with a focusing of my whole attention on coming into relationship with that which I call God. I am also worshipping when that of God in me connects with that of God in the pebble I hold, the flame I see, the tree I touch, the water I taste, the earth I stand upon.

Elizabeth Birtles

Worship is a patchwork quilt of people of different shapes, different characters, different sizes, different prejudices, different colours, different enthusiasms, different ages, different moods. Worship is a patchwork quilt to creep under from the colds of solitariness, fear and partialness, and to experience the quilt's warmth of companionship, wholeness and love. It is to leave the quilt's warm cosiness for the openness, opportunity and challenge of the wider world. Worship is a patchwork quilt - a whole in which the many become one while keeping their individual identities - a patchwork quilt in the vast interdependent patchwork of creation.

Andrew Hill

Worship is both of the world and of the spirit, our outer and inner lives. It is our concern for social justice, for freedom of thought, speech and inquiry. Worship is about turmoil: disturbing, challenging, relevant to our times. It should offer comfort, but it should never evade the dark, the sad, the arid. It is about the constellations and about the mighty beauty of nature and our essential co-existence with our world. It is about the cry of the curlew and the cry of the child. It is of tension and harmony. Worship is also of the spirit. It is of the everlasting light. Essential to me is the sense of the indwelling spirit, the sense of the God within me and all things. For me, therefore, it is a time of prayer, of meditation, of quiet. This is the heart of worship, giving rest and renewal.

Eila Forrester

Worship is elusive - impossible to define, impossible to predict. It happens as if by chance, often in the silences that follow the words which may transform, too deep for words yet created by them. No one can make worship happen - there is no formula, no guarantee; there is always an element of the unexpected. We have traditions and practices in places where generations have come to seek to know the deepest that is in them and between them and around them, but worship can never be taken for granted. Like Thoreau, I would come to worship with 'an infinite expectation of the dawn', in the hope, even sometimes the faith, that chance will favour the mind that is prepared, so that a sense of the God that is with us may enter in.

Keith Gilley

Worship is the awareness that we are in the presence of a power much greater than ourselves, yet which, through ourselves united, is within each one of us. I am conscious of creative love in myself - in those around me. Then comes to birth the will to share that same love in yet wider and wider circles. Then the knowledge that I must bring my whole being, if I am to receive the whole being of the ONE I worship. Only if I bring thankfulness, only if I bring sorrow for wrongdoing, only if I bring my dependence, only if I bring my weakness, may I receive the strength, the Love, the Peace that is lasting - the Spirit - the sense of completeness that heals and transforms.

Denise Boyd

Worship is a gathering with friends and loved ones, opening ourselves to each other and to an inner, restorative and regenerative mystery - the Eternal Holy Spirit of Life. The great problem is how to bring into our worship those things which promote our intention and avoid those things which hinder it. We do not always make it to the moon, - but when we do it is a passion, an ecstasy; amongst the most beautiful and worthwhile experiences human beings may share. Good worship binds us together as a community; and individually it nurtures and confirms our faith.

David Doel

Worship is giving expression to the music that lies within us. The music of worship comes with many voices. When we Unitarians worship freely together, we are not like a choir singing the same words in parallel harmonies; we are more like an orchestra. Each instrument has its own kind of sound, its own melody. One plays and then another; sometimes different instruments play together, their individual melodies interweaving. For each there are periods of silent waiting. Together, these separate and fragmented airs make up a symphony. Yet when we worship formally, alone or together, it is less a concert than a practice session. We are working toward the goal of making our whole lives a hymn of worship, as we practise the presence of God.

Joy Croft