



Soulful Home

Finding the Sacred In
Our Everyday Spaces



March 2021
Commitment

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The Welcome Mat

What Does it Mean to be a Family of Commitment

Do you know the poet, Jacqueline Woodson? Have you ever heard or read her poem, [“Church”](#)? Would you be willing to pause here a moment and read it? It’s short.

I hope you did, because otherwise this will be a spoiler: in that beautiful image at the end, Woodson reminds us that what carries us through all our commitments (even the ones that the Miss Ednas in our lives “make” us do) is HOPE. Now, I don’t want to muddy the waters of our theme of commitment here, but I don’t think we can spend our month exploring commitment together if we don’t bring along handfuls of hope, too.

When we make our commitments or promises, there’s no guarantee that we can follow through. But we really, really hope we can, and we work at it. Sometimes, we aren’t even sure we’re making the right commitments or promises. Since we are dedicating a lot of time, energy, and heart space to them, though, we hope they’re the right ones; our covenanted communities can help us discern. Our commitments are likely going to take some sacrifice and striving; we don’t usually call them “commitments” when they’re easy, or things that we do without putting a lot of thought into it. But we hope they will also offer us insight, a sense of satisfaction, camaraderie, and even some joy and fun.

So Woodson’s poem reminds us that the theme of commitment in our lives is actually a multivalent one, having many different parts and applications. And we need each other’s love and support to make good on our promises.

I want to bring another artist and visionary into our minds, and that’s Peter Mayer, who made a new, acoustic recording of his beloved song, [“Blue Boat Home”](#) this time last year, when the pandemic was still new. I bring up this song to remind us that one of our fundamental commitments, as Unitarian Universalists, is to the earth we share. In our Around the Neighborhood section this month, we take our cue from indigenous leaders in the climate justice movement and commit to getting to know the land we live on intimately and respectfully, so that we are better equipped to be part of the solution to climate crisis in the months and years ahead.

Yours in our shared commitment,

Teresa, on behalf of the Soul Matters team



At the Table

Exploring Commitment Through Discussions

At the Table questions explore the monthly theme through a discussion for all ages. They are designed for a family gathering - maybe during a Friday night meal, a quiet moment in the living room or before a board game night.

Introducing the Activity

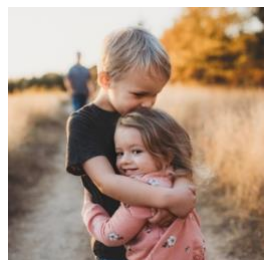
Family members who are readers can alternate who reads the questions. Those who are not readers are invited to share their own impromptu questions. Discussion partners might answer as thoughts come to them or take turns in a circle.

Discussion Questions

1. What would you say are two of the core commitments of your family?
2. What is your commitment to your pet(s)?
3. How about your commitments to the wildlife in your neighborhood?
4. What is one of the hardest commitments you've ever made?
5. What is a family tradition you're committed to, that you make time for each day/week/month/season? What is your favorite thing about keeping that commitment over and over?
6. If your family had an extra day or two every month to commit to being of service to others, what would you do with that time?
7. Who is the most reliable "commitment cheerleader" and "commitment encourager" in the family?
8. Who in the family is the most stubborn and/or refuses to give up when commitments get hard?

Return to the Discussion Throughout the Week

Thoughts develop with time. Find opportunities to bring up particularly compelling questions again during the month, maybe on walks, rides home, when tucking your child in to bed, etc. If thoughts grew or changed, notice together how we are all evolving beings, opening ourselves to new truths and understandings as we live our lives and connect with others.



Around the Neighborhood

Around the Neighborhood activities engage families with their surroundings through the lens of the theme. It's about perceiving our well-known world in new ways. As you safely move around your neighborhood during this time of Covid, these suggestions help you transform your everyday backs-and-forths into a family adventure!

Treasure Hunt for Commitment

The UUA joins other groups in observing [Climate Justice Month](#), March 22 (World Water Day) to April 22 (Earth Day), a commitment to approaching climate justice as a matter of faith. UUs acknowledge that the issue of climate justice is best addressed when it acknowledges North America's legacy of colonization, and looks to the leadership of indigenous peoples who have been protecting the earth and its waters for many, many generations.

This month's treasure hunt can be done in a combination of spaces--online, and in-person outside.

See if you can find or find out:

1. The names of the native peoples of [the land you live on](#). Do you know anything about those peoples, historically and currently?
2. A historical marker or heritage site in your area that acknowledges the land's indigenous population. ([The Historical Marker Database](#) might be a place to start, or you could contact your [local historical society](#) for pointers.)
3. Five native plants
4. Five [introduced plants](#)
5. Your [watershed](#); have you been to the body of water that your land's runoff drains into?
6. The landfill closest to you (Not the most exciting field trip, we know, but an important visual to have in mind when we throw things "away.")
7. Who is leading environmental protection efforts in your area? Which one seems like the best fit for your family to be involved with?



From the Mailbox

Our literal mailboxes connect us to the wide world outside, sometimes with messages asking things from us (a donation letter or flyer encouraging us to vote), sometimes with messages offering us gifts (a letter from a friend or a special delivery). Our "From the Mailbox" section applies this metaphor to today's call for families to engage in the work of dismantling white supremacy culture. Together each month, as a Soulful Home community, we open and accept these "invitations" to join some of the many brave, inspiring and wise leaders and organizations who are co-creating a future that is actively anti-racist.

Commitment to Self-Love Meditation with Tracee Stanley

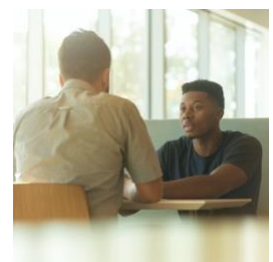
It's a truth almost so ubiquitous that it's tempting to dismiss it as a cliché, but it's too important to let go: in order to be the people we are meant to be, and want to be, and that the world needs, we must, must, must take care of ourselves. Yoga and meditation teacher Tracee Stanley offers a free guided meditation on self-love on her website, where she also links to her podcast, Radiant Rest, as well as her book and courses for purchase.

Invitation: Listen to this [gentle, 15 minute meditation](#). (You need to sign up for her newsletter to access it, but of course, can unsubscribe afterward if you choose.) It is a seated meditation. If that position doesn't work for you, use whatever position does. *If you do this meditation with young children, consider having paper and crayons or markers out so younger children can draw as they listen.* If sustained attention is difficult, try to hold out for minute 11:55, where Stanley asks us to repeat affirmations. This can be a powerful experience for children to do with their adults.

Commit to the Uncomfortable Conversations Around Race

The National Museum of African American History and Culture has [an excellent resource page](#) on the work of talking about race, for both white folk and people of color. Unitarian Universalism calls us to commit to dismantling white supremacy culture, and honoring this commitment takes sustained effort over time.

Invitation: Even if you think you've done the deep work and internalized the needed paradigm shifts, check out this website as a family. There is one section in particular, "A Questioning Frame of Mind," that offers sample scripts for how to interrupt racism in interpersonal conversations, using curiosity and connection. Practice these conversations within the family, and talk about why experiencing the discomfort of confronting racism is worth it.



At Play

Playing Games with Commitment

At Play activities and questions are a way to joyfully, playfully, and imaginatively experience the theme.

Option A: Following Through on a Month-Long Commitment to Gratitude

Gratitude Paper Chain

What do we need to make good on our commitments? We need follow-through... and through... and through... and through! This activity is more playful than game-like, and while it can be competitive, it can also be done cooperatively.

You'll need a lot of strips of paper. Like, a lot. Old calendars work well. Construction paper, too. Scrap office paper does the job, also.

Your commitment for the month is for each person in the family to write down on a strip something they are grateful for: strawberry milkshakes, Ms. Williams, sunny days, roller skates, vaccines. Gratitude practices fuel our spirit for the work of commitment; they increase positive emotions, improve health, boost our resilience in trying times, and help us build stronger relationships.*

You might keep the blank strips and a marker in one jar, and put an empty jar next to it for finished strips.

At the end of the month, you'll make a paper chain to hang in your home or another place.

To add an element of competition, at the end of the month, divide the family members into two teams, and evenly split up the paper strips. Have a race to see who can assemble their half of your family paper chain the fastest.

You might also get a few other families you know in on the fun. Once your paper chains are assembled, arrange to meet somewhere out of doors, or one person do a porch pick-up of each family's chains, and join them together to (temporarily) decorate a favorite park's tree, or the sanctuary of your church. If that's not possible, you could try and "connect" your chains frame-to-frame in a Zoom call you have together.

* "Giving thanks can make you happier," Healthbeat, Harvard Medical School, November 2011. <https://www.health.harvard.edu/healthbeat/giving-thanks-can-make-you-happier> (Last accessed February 1, 2021)



Option B: Committing to Your Character

It's really hard to get things right the first time, every time. In fact, another name for that is perfectionism, and it doesn't feel good. Perfectionism is a feature of [white supremacy culture](#) -- think of executives around a long table in an 80s movie about corporate takeovers; we could all do with less of that kind of energy in our lives!

One way to resist perfectionism is to commit to our ideals before we can live them out "flawlessly." The science behind "fake it 'till you make it" is pretty strong, too, as this gives us a subconscious message that we are already capable of doing the tough thing we feared we might not be able to do.

The games below all call for an element of bluffing, announcing yourself to be something that you aren't. We're going to playfully engage our sense of commitment by doubling-down on our untruths!

[The Pretender](#) is a group card game for 12+, but for many families, it could be played successfully with 9+. It's also a video call-friendly game. Sets of cards contain ideas that must be communicated by charades, but one of the players has a card that only says "pretender" on it. The pretender is trying to bluff that they know what the idea is, and at the end, either pass as someone in the know, or guess what the original idea really was. It's about \$15 online.

[BS](#) is a card game all about bluffing. Three or more players attempt to get rid of as many cards as possible, and they bluff about how many cards they are discarding at a time. If their bluff is called, they must take the whole discard pile back into their own hand. If they were telling the truth, the one who called the bluff gets all the cards. You need one deck of 52 cards, minus the jokers, and the game is fun for people of all ages.

[Among Us](#) is a smartphone game very popular with tweens and teens right now. It involves an imposter trying to blend in with the rest of the space station maintenance crew while secretly killing all the other players. Note that the killings, while cartoony, are pretty graphic. It's free to download and play.

[Cockroach poker](#) is another card game for purchase, and comes in around \$15. It's a single-loser game, so keep that in mind with younger players who might get hurt feelings if they are the one who loses. The point is for each player to try and stick another player with four of a kind (cockroach cards, stinkbug cards, spider cards, etc.) by bluffing about the face-down cards they are passing around.



On the Message Board

A Monthly Reminder

The On the Message Board section lifts up a theme-related mantra, graphic, quote, or gesture for your family to carry with them throughout the month. Think of these “family sayings” or “family signs” as tools for the journey, reminders that help us refocus and steady ourselves and our kids as we navigate through life’s challenges and opportunities.

March’s Message

A Family Sign: Writing Your Own Name on Your Heart

New science on self-talk shows that when you harness the power of your inner voice, and maybe especially if you consciously use your own name as you do so (in the 3rd person), your neural pathways seem to interpret your statements and assessments as challenges to rise to.**

This month, let’s test these new ideas out by committing to loving self-talk for the whole of the month.

1. Set a timer on your phone, or decide on a time of day that works for the whole family.
2. Gather together, and either out loud or silently to ourselves, in the too-often unfriendly space of our own minds, say “(Your own name), you are beloved. Write it on your heart.”
3. When you get to the heart part, everybody write their own name with their finger across their heart, or if they are very young, draw a heart over their own heart.

Why are we doing this? Because our commitments are rooted in love. And all love begins with self-love. But humans are not so consistent, so even if you have loved yourself in the past, or love yourself easily in some areas of your life, we could all use the boost and reminder that we are beloved.

Last month, we explored beloved community together. Beloved community and commitment are intertwined. So this practice and movement is also a way to remind us of the greater good we are working for when we put this effort into self-love. If we believe and are willing to commit to the manifestation of a beloved community for all, then we have to acknowledge that we belong there, too. Love isn’t just for other people. It’s for us, too, whether or not we believe in any particular moment that we’re worthy of it.

Throughout the month, if someone in your family seems down on themselves, or as if they could use a reminder of their divine nature, you might consider making eye contact across a room and wordlessly drawing a heart over your own heart. Especially after doing the above ritual together a few times, the meaning will be clear: You are made of and for love; I see you.

**Kross, Ethan. *Chatter: The Voice in Our Head, Why it Matters, and How to Harness It*. New York: Crown Publishers, 2021.



At the Bedside

At The Bedside activities engage the theme through storytelling. This takes place during the dreamy, almost otherworldly hour or so before children or youth drift off to sleep. Through stories and the questions and realizations that they prompt, we come to understand the nature of and our own place in the cosmos. But also, these selections invite you to remember, shape, and share stories from your own past, using thoughtful narratives to help your child weave the tale of who they are and whose they are.

This month, we have two stories to share about the kind of commitments we make to one another by simply showing up, waiting, and being present for whatever or whomever shows up. This is a special kind of commitment that's not so much about doing, but more about being. One story can be told in a few minutes, and the other story can be read aloud over a few nights.

Committing to Consistency: Lynn Ungar's "Sustaining the Tree of Life"

In the story, a village is blessed to live around a big, ancient, generous, and mysterious tree. But rather than simply take what the tree offers, the villagers make a commitment to it, and to each other. Every day, one of the villagers takes the role of keeper of the tree. And that's how the real magic happens:

<https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/sustaining-tree-life>

For Discussion:

- What do you think it would be like to take your turn as keeper of the tree? What have you "kept" and protected this way in your own life?
- How do you think the merchant's mind changed after talking with the keeper of the tree? Tell about a time someone else helped you to consider how your words or actions were impacting others.

Committing to Showing Up: 八千公 Hachiko the Dog

Hachikō was a dog who lived in Tokyo, Japan from 1924 to 1935. "Hachi" became famous in Japan, and all over the world, for the devotion he showed to his owner. As a very young dog, Hachi would wait at the train station for his owner to get home from work, and they would walk home together. But suddenly, Hachi's owner died at work, and his owner never got off the train again. For the next nine years, Hachi went to the train station every day, waiting for his loved one whom he would never again see. This is a special kind of commitment. When we commit ourselves to our loved ones, we show up for them. That showing up becomes our practice, the container that holds our commitment to the very idea of love itself.



For this month's At the Bedside, you can read the details of Hachikō's story [here](#), on Wikipedia; the three, consecutive sections titled "Life," "Publication," and "Death" tell a complete story.

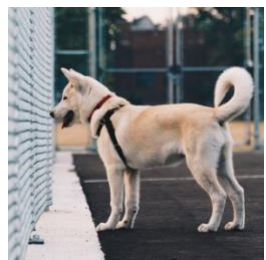
Or you can check your library for the book, [Hachiko Waits: A True Story](#). You can buy this book used for \$5-10. Something special about this particular book is that it takes great care with the cultural context of Hachiko's story, artfully and respectfully showing Japanese life in the 1920s. And, the illustrator, Machiyo Kodaira, is herself a native of Tokyo. The version linked here is a chapter book, which you can enjoy over several evenings of reading, or as a Zoom read-aloud if you're doing the At the Bedtime story with friends or family members who aren't in the same household.

If you look up the book on [Amazon](#), you can listen to the first half of chapter 2 of the audiobook by clicking on the "Listen" link beneath the cover; if you do not speak Japanese, this recording gives a good sense of some of the pronunciation.

For Discussion:

- Do you think Hachi knew that his owner would never come home again? If he had known, do you think it would have mattered to him?
- When you arrive somewhere, and find someone you love waiting for you, how do you feel?
- We might say that Hachi was committed to his owner, in the sense that he was devoted and loyal to him. What is an idea that you are committed to--devoted to, and loyal to--even if you're not certain it will ever come to be?

Note: If you haven't yet seen the 2018 Wes Anderson movie, [Isle of Dogs](#) (or, if you'd enjoy seeing it again), you will find at least one--and possibly more--references to the Hachiko story in that film!



On the Porch

Raising a Child of Commitment Together

On the Porch supports sharing realizations, challenges and hopes around the theme with other supportive adults. Perhaps this happens on a literal porch or front stoop, but it could happen wherever parents and their circle of support gather and talk (online or in person) over the soulful parts of parenthood. The “A Sip of Something New” section invites you and your discussion partner to take in a new idea shared by someone else. The “Spiritual Snacks” section stimulates personal storytelling and the sharing of your own wisdom and experience.

A Sip of Something New

Not all of our commitments are written on our hearts--some are smoothed into our shirtsleeves, baked and eaten warm, or woven in our hair. In other words, sometimes, that to which we commit ourselves isn't expressed in language at all, but rather in feelings, images, sounds, smells, and in-breaths.

With your trusted parenting partner or supporter, spend some time on Sonya Clark's website, especially on the home page where she has a scrolling display of her work, and in the gallery section.

Here is her website: <http://sonyaclark.com/>

Here are the scrolling images on the gallery page: <http://sonyaclark.com/gallery/>

For Discussion:

- What commitments do you see in Clark's work? To whom and what does she give her brilliance, her love, her exquisite attention?
- What, in your life, would that subject be? And what would you use, besides language, to express it?
- Tell your conversation partner your thoughts. And, if you're feeling bold about it, and if it's feasible, gather the materials you'd need to manifest your commitment. Choose another time later in the month to share your creative pieces with each other.

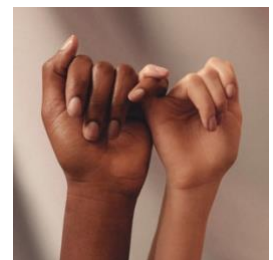


Spiritual Snacks to Share

Bring these questions with you when the time comes to hang out with your co-parent or buddies. Don't treat the questions as a list to go through one by one. Instead pick the one or two that speak to you the most. Treat the questions less as a quiz and more like doorways inviting you into the world of storytelling and memory.

Questions

1. What commitments fit easily into your life? Which do you struggle to make room for?
2. How did you learn what commitment meant? What did your family of origin teach you, explicitly or implicitly?
3. Where does your faith fit into your commitments? How has your UU faith reshaped your commitments?
4. What did the elders of your youth such as grandparents, older mentors, or family friends teach you about commitment? What “secrets to keeping promises” did they pass on to you?
5. What does your child seem committed to that you wish they weren't?
6. Which of your child's commitments excite you? Which leave you hoping they will continue on into adulthood?
7. What's one commitment that you hold that comes so naturally to you that you almost forget it's a commitment?
8. Where do you rank commitment in your list of values? Is it important to you to be a person of commitment?
9. On a scale of one to ten, how might you rate yourself on your commitment to self-care? How about to self-love?
10. When it's time to make good on a commitment you made to yourself, how do you psych yourself up for following through?
11. Tell about a commitment that you dropped, for the better.
12. What new commitment might you make to your neighborhood? Your town or city? Your state? Your country? Your planet?



The Extra Mile

The Extra Mile section is for families who want to continue exploring the theme of the month through larger adventures, more complex projects or simply through additional modalities not otherwise included in the packets. The Extra Mile suggestions often surpass what is considered an “everyday moment” in a family, and may involve more preparation, planning, or time to accomplish. A bit more effort, but well worth it!

Commit a Poem to Memory

Poems that we have memorized become companions on the journey, popping up at unexpected times to remind us of beauty, awe, connection, and any number of other themes that lend richness to this life we live together.

So spend some time this month memorizing a poem as a family. You might pick a small one that everyone memorizes or a larger one that everyone memorizes a part of.

Here are some other resources that may be helpful:

- [The Poetry Foundation](#) and [The Academy of American Poets](#) both have excellent selections of some of the best old and new writers.
- Book Riot put together [a good list specific to short poems](#); the Jacqueline Woodson poem, “Church,” that we referenced in the introduction is on that list. Also notable are Poet Laureate Joy Harjo’s “Invisible Fish” and Anais Nin’s “Risk.”
- This site has some [tips for how to memorize a poem](#). (There’s a short list of oft-memorized poems there, too, but none by people of color, so keep that in mind.)
- Here’s another great site to explore, including [Instagram poems](#), a popular genre with teens and young adults:



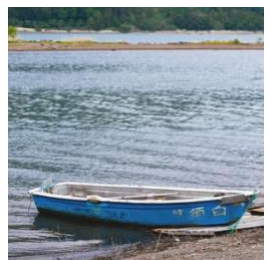
Blessing of Commitment

Set your course with intention, friends: we make our promises, and our promises make us. It's a journey through deep and unknown waters.

Whatever your north star – causes, people, practices, hopes, futures, dreams, or all of these arching overhead in great swaths we might call love or justice – may this and your reading of the winds lead you home.

May your commitment beckon and steady you in fair weather, and be a port in which to dock the boat of your becoming when conditions are unfriendly.

We are a fleet of the faithful, beloveds; steady as we go.



Connect with more Inspiration for your family, and for you!

Parents can Join our Facebook and Instagram pages for
daily inspiration on our themes:

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/soulmatterssharingcircle/?ref=settings>

Instagram: https://www.instagram.com/soul_matters_circle/

Parents and youth will want to check out our music playlists on the monthly themes.
One playlist is one [Spotify](#) and another on our [YouTube](#) channel

Credits

Soulful Home packets are prepared by
Teresa Honey Youngblood,
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