

## **UNITARIAN LITURGIES**

### Foreword

These liturgies are meant to allow immediate or rapid service construction for worship in Unitarian churches. They are divided into belief types. Each service contains all content including suggested hymns, but each can be changed or added to according to choice and preparation.

Any text without a named source in square brackets is written by Adrian Worsfold (sometimes inspired by a source, but only named if remaining alike) and is freely available for use anywhere.

TRADITIONAL

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## TRADITIONAL SERVICE

OPENING MUSIC [TRACK 01]

CHALICE LIGHTING

This is the message we have heard and must proclaim: that God is light, and in him there is no darkness at all. We cannot have fellowship with God while we are walking in darkness, and so we light this chalice to assist the walk in the light.

*Or*

God said, "Let there be light"; and there was light. And God saw that the light was good. [From Genesis 1:3]

*Or*

No one after lighting a lamp puts it under the bushel basket, but on the lampstand, and it gives light to all in the house. [Matthew 5:15 New RSV]

*Light the chalice*

HYMN *Hymns for Living* 070 [Tune: Hanover]  
[TRACK 02] (*Or any other hymn*)

O worship the King, all glorious above,  
O gratefully sing his power and his love;  
Our shield and defender, the Ancient of Days,  
Pavilioned in splendour, and girded with praise.

O tell of his might, O sing of his grace,  
Whose robe is the light, whose canopy space;  
his chariots of wrath the deep thunder-clouds form,  
And dark is his path on the wings of the storm.

The earth with its store of wonders untold,  
Almighty, thy power hath founded of old;  
Established it fast by a changeless decree,  
And round it hath cast, like a mantle, the sea.

Thy bountiful care, what tongue can recite?  
It breathes in the air, it shines in the light;  
It streams from the hills, it descends to the plain,  
And sweetly distills in the dew and the rain.

Frail children of dust, and feeble as frail,  
In thee do we trust, nor find Thee to fail;  
The humbler creation, though feeble their lays,  
With true adoration shall sing to thy praise.

## PRAYERS

### *Purpose of Gathering*

Gathered here, it is right and good for us to come together in spiritual communion, to contemplate and meditate on things seen and unseen. We come humbly to acknowledge that we have done wrong before God and apologise in the company of others, to render thanks, to praise, to learn and seek the good. We come not to ask for an easier life, but in order to live life well as it comes. We seek to discover what duty demands of us, and further seek steadfastness to fulfil it. We thus bow before God, with humble hearts, to have our souls renewed and strengthened. Should we gain true peace of mind in this time then let us thank God for this, helping us to move on into our daily lives refreshed.

### *Prayers*

Into the Holy we place our hope. Into the holy we lift up our hearts and there we long for communion. Here can be placed the heartfelt repentance, the earnest desire and resolve to turn from evil, and to endure holy and righteous discipline: to be redeemed and restored in peace and happiness towards love and goodness, to be found without loss in prayer.

O God we know that we have done what we ought not to have done, and not done what we should have done. We have followed all too readily our own desires. But we understand God as merciful, and we know that in seeking forgiveness we can come to a restored life.

For God is a sustaining Power, and watchful Providence, and fostering Love: we come to hear your divine voice in our souls, and to feel your overarching hand in blessing us. Breathe into our lives your spirit of holiness and love and peace. Raise us above our selfish cares, and as we ascend let us go above

the immediate mists and clouds of the everyday towards the pure brightness of your truths and love; that we may see clearly the paths ahead, walking with you, and for this possibility we can but give our thanks.

### *The Lord's Prayer*

OUR Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy name. Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done on earth, as it is in heaven. Give us this day our daily bread. And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive them that trespass against us. And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil. For thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory, for ever and ever. Amen.

### PSALM, CHANT and/ or MYSTICAL TEXT

#### *Either Psalm 23 [KJV]*

The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.

He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever.

#### *Or this: Psalm 150 [KJV]*

Praise ye the LORD. Praise God in his sanctuary: praise him in the firmament of his power.

Praise him for his mighty acts: praise him according to his excellent greatness.

Praise him with the sound of the trumpet: praise him with the psaltery and harp.

Praise him with the timbrel and dance: praise him with stringed instruments and organs.

Praise him upon the loud cymbals: praise him upon the high sounding cymbals.

Let every thing that hath breath praise the Lord. Praise ye the Lord.

*Or this:* Psalm 95 Verses 1 to 7 [NRSV]

O come, let us sing to the Lord; let us make a joyful noise to the rock of our salvation!

Let us come into his presence with thanksgiving; let us make a joyful noise to him with songs of praise!

For the Lord is a great God, and a great King above all gods.

In his hand are the depths of the earth; the heights of the mountains are his also.

The sea is his, for he made it, and the dry land, which his hands have formed.

O come, let us worship and bow down, let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker!

For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.

*Or this.* Derived from the Sikh tradition:

We ask the Holy and life-sustaining: what do we know?

The drop of water is in the ocean, and the ocean is in the drop.

The day is in the night and the night is in the day. The same is true of heat and cold.

The male is in the female and the female is in the male.

The soul is the Light and the Light is the soul.

Who understands these?

Who knows but the Teacher of the Divine.

The word is concentration, and in concentration there is knowledge. The one who meditates on the knowledge can understand.

The Teacher sacrifices this understanding to those who meditate into the Holy.

[Derived from the 'Rag Ramkali', *Adi Granth*, 878, using Thomas, D. A. T. (trans.) (1978) in Foy W. (1978), *The Religious Quest*, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 267-86, reproduced in Beckerlegge, G. (ed.), *World Religions Reader*, second edition, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 443.]

*Or 'Life be Beautiful'* derived from the late Liverpool Ethical Church Lecturer Harry Youlden [This can involve congregational responses]

The strain upraise of joy and praise:

**Life be beautiful.**

In the vision of the new day, let the ransomed people say:

**Life be beautiful.**

They who have left the gloom of ancient creed; they in this song of songs shall lead:

**Life be beautiful.**

They who in peace with all do dwell; all trustful souls the chorus swell:

**Life be beautiful.**

By the love that cheers the lost who call; by the grace that saves weak feet that fall:

**Life be beautiful.**

By lofty aims that banish fear; by simple hearts and deeds sincere:

**Life be beautiful.**

Ye floods and oceans billows, ye storms and winters snow; ye days of cloudless beauty, hoar frost and summer glow; ye groves that wave in spring, and glorious forests sing:

**Life be beautiful.**

(After Youlden, H., section of 'The Strain Upraise' in *Manual of Ethical Devotion*, 1914, 97-9)

Or A Muslim and Qur'anic sourced Reflection: 'Pearl of al-Kabir' (The Grand One) by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali, translated by Edwin Arnold.

Seven heavens God made: first Paradise.

Next the gate of eternity, the third the house of peace,

The fourth Felicity, the fifth the home of golden light.

The sixth the garden of delight, the seventh the

Footstool of the Throne. And each and every one

Sphere above sphere, and treasure over treasure,

The great decree of God made for reward and pleasure.

Saith the perspicuous Book: 'Look up to heaven! look!

Dost thou see fault or flaw, in that vast vault,

Spangled with silvery lamps of night,

Or gilded with glad light

Of sunrise, or of sunset, or warm noon?  
Rounded He well the moon?  
Kindled He wisely the red lord of day?  
Look twice! Look thrice, and say?'  
Thy weak gaze fails:  
Eyesight is drowned in yon abyss of blue:  
Ye see the glory but ye see not through:  
God's greatness veils  
Its greatness by its greatness - all that wonder  
Lieth the lowest of the heavens under,  
Beyond which angels view  
God and God's mighty works, asunder:  
The thronged clouds whisper of it when they thunder.  
Allah Kabir, in silence we  
Meditate on Thy majesty!

[Arnold, E. (trans.) (1954), *Pearls of Faith*, Lahore: Orientalis, 80-1, Beckerlegge, G. (ed.), *World Religions Reader*, second edition, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 162-163.]

[Al-Kabir is the one who possesses grandeur, an expression for the perfection of the essence, the perfection of existence - eternity and from which all things emanate. The above is a commentary on the ninety nine Beautiful Names of God by Abu Hamid Al-Ghazali (1058-1111 CE) after he became a Sufi mystic in 1096 CE.]

Or

'Before I Was Born' by the Jewish mystic Solomon Ibn Gabirol (b. 1021/22 CE)

Before I was born your love enveloped me.  
You turned nothing into substance, and created me.  
Who etched out my frame? Who poured  
Me into a vessel and moulded me?  
Who breathed a spirit into me? Who opened  
The womb of Sheol and extracted me?  
Who has guided me from youth-time until now?  
Taught me knowledge, and cared wondrously for me?  
Truly I am nothing but clay within your hand.  
It is you, not I, who have really fashioned me.  
I confess my sin to you, and do not say  
That a serpent intrigued, and tempted me.

How can I conceal from you my faults, since  
Before I was born your love enveloped me?

[Goldstein, D. (trans.) (1963), *The Jewish Poets of Spain 900-12 CE*, London: Penguin Books, 97, in Beckerlegge, G. (ed.), *World Religions Reader*, second edition, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 34.]

## FIRST LESSON

*Either* The Beatitudes, *which can be responsive or not.*

Blessed are the poor in spirit; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are they that mourn; for they shall be comforted.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are the meek; for they shall inherit the earth.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness; for they shall be filled.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are the merciful; for they shall obtain mercy.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are the pure in heart; for they shall see God.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are the peacemakers; for they shall be called the children of God.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Blessed are they which are persecuted for righteousness' sake; for theirs is the kingdom of heaven.  
**We write these words into our hearts.**

Write these words us our hearts, O Lord, we beseech thee.

*Or* Surah 93, Ad-Duha The Glorious Morning Light, in *The Qur'an*

By the Glorious Morning Light,  
And by the Night when it is still -  
Thy Guardian-Lord hath not foresaken me, nor is he displeased.  
And verily, the hereafter will be better for thee than present.  
And soon will thy Guardian-Lord give thee (that wherewith) thou shalt be  
well pleased.  
Did He not find an orphan and give thee shelter (and care)?  
And He found thee wandering, and He gave thee guidance.  
And he found thee in need, and made thee independent.  
Therefore, treat not the orphan with harshness,  
Nor repulse the petitioner (unheard);  
But the bounty of the Lord - rehearse and proclaim!

[Ali A. Y. (2000, originally 1934), *The Holy Qur'an*, Wordsworth Classics of  
World Literature, Ware: Wordsworth Editions.]

Or from the Sikh Adi Granth

If I were to live for millions and millions of years,  
If I were to exist on air as my food and drink,  
If I were to live in a cave deprived of the sun and moon and never dream of  
sleeping,  
Still I would not be able to estimate Thy worth  
Nor say how great Thy name is.

True is the Formless One and unique.  
Hearing and hearing one repeatedly proclaims.

If it pleases him, only He can grant us awareness of Him.  
If I were slashed and cut in pieces and ground into a pulp,  
If I were consumed by fire and my ashes scattered,  
Even then would I not be able to estimate Thy worth.  
Nor say how great Thy Name is.

If I were to become a bird and fly through a hundred skies,  
If I were to vanish completely and exist without drinking or eating,  
Still I would not be able to estimate Thy worth,  
Nor say how great Thy Name is.

Nanak, had I thousands of tons of books and read them diligently,  
Could my pen write with the speed of the wind and the ink never dry,  
Even so I would not be able to estimate Thy worth

Nor say how great Thy Name is.

['Sri Rag', *Adi Granth*, 14, as from Thomas, D. A. T. (trans.) (1978) in Foy W. (1978), *The Religious Quest*, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 267-86 reproduced in Beckerlegge, G. (ed.), *World Religions Reader*, second edition, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 437-438.]

*Or this from St. Paul, 1 Corinthians 13 [KJV]*

Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not charity, I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal.

And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge; and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not charity, I am nothing.

And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not charity, it profiteth me nothing.

Charity suffereth long, and is kind; charity envieth not; charity vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up,

doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil;

rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth;

beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.

Charity never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away.

For we know in part, and we prophesy in part.

But when that which is perfect is come, then that which is in part shall be done away.

When I was a child, I spake as a child, I understood as a child, I thought as a child: but when I became a man, I put away childish things.

For now we see through a glass, darkly, but then face to face: now I know in part; but then shall I know even as also I am known.

And now abideth faith, hope, charity, these three; but the greatest of these is charity.

*Or use another reading from a world scripture.*

HYMN *Hymns for Living* 178 [Tune: Sweet Hour of Prayer L.M.D.]  
[TRACK 3] (*Or any other hymn*)

A shelter from the vast we win  
In homely hearths, and make therein  
The glow of light, the sound of mirth,  
That bind all children of the earth  
To fellowship: and when the rain  
Beats loud upon the window-pane,  
The shadows of the firelight fall  
Across the floor and on the wall.

We know that countless hearth-lights burn  
In darkened places, and discern -  
Inwoven with the troubled plan  
Of worlds and ways unknown to Man -  
The shelter at the heart of life,  
The refuge beyond doubt and strife,  
The rest for every soul out-cast:  
The homely hidden in the vast.

Amid the boundless and unknown,  
We call some darkened spot our own;  
Though all without is unexplored,  
Unchartered lands and seas and world,  
We doubt not that whatever fate  
May lie beyond us, soon or late,  
However far afield we roam  
The unknown way will lead us home.

SECOND LESSON [from a secular source or use another from above.]

Either *Happy the Man* (John Dryden 1631 - 1700)

Happy the man, and happy he alone,  
He who can call today his own:  
He who, secure within, can say,  
Tomorrow do thy worst, for I have lived today.  
Be fair or foul or rain or shine  
The joys I have possessed, in spite of fate, are mine.  
Not Heaven itself upon the past has power,  
But what has been, has been, and I have had my hour.

[From <http://www.poemhunter.com/poem/happy-the-man/> ]

*And add* by Alexander Pope

Happy the man, whose wish and care  
A few paternal acres bound,  
Content to breathe his native air,  
In his own ground.

Blest, who can unconcern'dly find  
Hours, days and years slide soft away,

In health of body, peace of mind,  
Quiet by day.

Sound sleep by night, study and ease,  
Together mixt, sweet recreation:  
And innocence, which most does please  
With meditation.

Reproduced in Haddon, C. (1989), *The Yearbook of Hope and Inspiration*,  
London: Michael Joseph, for June 06.

Or from Orin L. Crain

Slow me down Lord!  
Ease the pounding of my heart by the quietening of my mind.  
Steady my hurried pace with a vision of the eternal reach of time.  
Give me, amid the confusion of the day, the calmness of the everlasting rills.  
Break the tensions of my nerves and muscles with the soothing music of the  
singing streams that live in my memory.  
Help me to know the magical, restoring power of sleep.  
Teach me the art of taking minute vacations – of slowing down to look at a  
flower, to chat with a friend, to pat a dog, to read a few lines from a good  
book.

[Reproduced in Haddon, C. (1989), *The Yearbook of Hope and Inspiration*,  
London: Michael Joseph, for February 13.]

*And add this* from Mark Rutherford

As I got older I became aware of the folly of this perpetual reaching after the  
future, and of drawing from tomorrow and from tomorrow only, a reason for the  
joyfulness of today. I learned, alas! when it was almost too late, to live in each  
moment as it passed over my head, believing that the sun as it is now rising  
is as good as it will ever be.

[Reproduced in Haddon, C. (1989), *The Yearbook of Hope and Inspiration*,  
London: Michael Joseph, for March 07.]

Or from Dyne Neil Shaffron, on 'Time as a Useful Conditioner':

Time is simply journeying in third dimension. We have been conditioned in  
time as in sleep, dinner, nap, vacation, work, rest. Play, etc.. As time is a  
significant power here, let us use it to condition ourselves to natural time, at

harmony with the elements at play. Time is naturally flowing in and out, circular, and not always linear. *Linear* is not bad, as used for what the concept is, but cyclical is closer to the true nature of creation, journey and then transition.

If you are laughing, there is never enough time in the world. If you are suffering, it is never over fast enough. Suffering is a conditioned mind thing. Laughing is the mind in a natural state of self-contentment.

[Shaffron, D. N., Earle, N. (ed.), 'Time as a Useful Conditioner', *Mind Shampoo: for the Conditioned Mind – a Practicum*, Los Angeles: Black Diamond Book Publishing, 55.]

## MEDITATIONS and PRAYERS

Intercessions [Can be responsive or not - as indicated]

We make our prayers to God as the source of all love, joy, and peace.

**We continue together on the journey of faith - and the Holy Spirit travels with us.**

We pray for the people of faith and we pray that they are well led. We pray for a greater expression of trust, co-operation, and unity across all the religions. We pray for our Unitarian Churches: for the central European tradition, and the Anglo-American tradition, and the new Unitarians in Africa and Indonesia and the Americas. We are thankful that the Internet is making what was once hidden available to many worldwide, so that they may join us, or begin their own fellowships.

**We continue together on the journey of faith - and the Holy Spirit travels with us.**

We pray that the conflicts and disasters in the world can come to some healing. We especially think about [Name some].

**We continue together on the journey of faith - and the Holy Spirit travels with us.**

We pray for the people of Hull and the surrounding towns and villages. And we pray for families and neighbours. We think of those who find life a continuous struggle, for economic and social reasons. It is also a human

indeed biological experience to fall ill, but some are part of our company, and we pray for those we know who are unwell. [Name them if appropriate, otherwise retain silence.] Strengthen all those who suffer in body, mind, and spirit.

**We continue together on the journey of faith - and the Holy Spirit travels with us.**

Some have died, and it will be the anniversary of others who have died. We pray for all those who mourn the loss of loved ones. We think of those who have died and offer our prayers with them in mind. [Keep silence or name well known people who died recently.] Let light perpetual shine upon those who have departed.

**We continue together on the journey of faith - and the Holy Spirit travels with us.**

Rejoicing in the fellowship of our church and churches, we commend ourselves and all people to God's unfailing love. Merciful God, accept these our prayers. Amen.

*And* For what God is this? Let us pray:

Our senses and imaginings offer our worship!

God, we may say, is like this:

The heavens are the silver salver, the sun and moon the lamps;

The stars in their paths are the scattered pearls;

The fragrance of sandalwood is the incense;

The wind is the fan

All the forms are as the flowers!

The unstruck word is like the musical instrument in this house of worship when waiting to be played.

Thousands are God's eyes, yet God has no eye;

Thousands are God's appearances, yet God has no form;

Thousands are God's pure feet, and yet God has no feet;

Thousands are God's fragrances, yet God has no smell;

The Adi Granth tells us that this is fascinating.

Offer light in this house of worship and God is pleased.

In all there is light: God is that light.

Such brilliance shines in all hearts.

This light is manifested.

The bee is attracted to honey, and we are attracted to the Holy;

We are attracted day and night.

God give the pure rainwater of mercy to the teacher who lives in God's name.

Amen.

[Derived from the 'Rag Dhanasri', *Adi Granth*, 663, using Thomas, D. A. T. (trans.) (1978) in Foy W. (1978), *The Religious Quest*, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 267-86, reproduced in Beckerlegge, G. (ed.), *World Religions Reader*, second edition, London: Routledge/ The Open University, 437.]

HYMN *Hymns for Living* 118 All Loves Excelling [Tune: Love Divine]  
[TRACK 04] (Or any other hymn)

Love divine, all loves excelling,  
Joy of heaven to earth come down;  
Fix in us thy humble dwelling;  
All thy faithful mercies crown.

Thou, O God, art all compassion,  
Pure unbounded love thou art;  
Visit us with thy salvation;  
Enter every trembling heart.

Come, Almighty, to deliver,  
Let us all thy life receive;  
Suddenly return and never,  
Never more thy temples leave.

Thee we would be always blessing,  
Serve Thee as Thy hosts above,  
Pray and praise Thee without ceasing,  
Glory in Thy perfect love.

Finish, then, Thy new creation;  
Pure and spotless let us be.  
Let us see Thy great salvation  
Perfectly restored in Thee -

Changed from glory into glory,  
Till in heaven we take our place,  
Till we cast our crowns before Thee,  
Lost in wonder, love, and praise.

SERMON [optional]

*Offer some thoughts on any of the readings or talk about recent events or a topic of interest and give a religious interpretation.*

Collection and Notices.

HYMN [if a sermon] *Hymns for Living* 019 Now Thank We All Our God Tune:  
Nun Danket  
[TRACK 05] (*Or any other hymn*)

Now thank we all our God,  
With heart, and hands, and voices,  
Who wondrous things hath done,  
In whom his world rejoices;  
Who from our mother's arms  
Hath blessed us on our way  
With countless gifts of love,  
And still is ours to-day.

O may this bounteous God  
Through all our life be near us,  
With ever joyful hearts  
And blessed peace to cheer us;  
And keep us in his grace,  
And guide us when perplexed,  
And free us from all ills  
In this world and the next.

All praise and thanks to God  
In joyfulness be given,  
To whom we lift our hearts,  
Whom reigns in highest heaven,  
The One Eternal God,  
Whom earth and heaven adore;  
Who was of old, is now,  
And shall be evermore.

BENEDICTION

THE Lord bless us and keep us; the Lord make his face to shine upon us, and be gracious unto us; the Lord lift up the light of his countenance upon us, and give us peace. Amen.

Closing Music [Track 6]