

STORY FOR ALL AGES

Anansi and the Pot of Wisdom

Anansi, the spider, loves to spin a tale! He can regale you for hours with stories full of wonder, stories full of fun, and stories full of facts, too. Because he is so nosy, Anansi knows almost everything about almost everybody. Almost.



But Anansi wants to know everything! So, one day, he goes to the house of the Sun God. "Oh, mighty Sun God! You see everything and everyone! Won't you share your great wisdom with me? I'll use it wisely to spin tales of wonder and fun for everyone."

The Sun God says, "Anansi, I will put all the wisdom in the world here in this clay pot. You must share this wisdom with everyone." Anansi promises to do so.

Anansi takes the pot home. He looks deep into the clay pot and sure enough, he sees sights he has never seen before. He hears sounds he did not know existed. "This is too good to give away. I will keep this great wisdom for myself," thinks Anansi. "I must hide it!"

He looks around for a good hiding place.

Anansi decides to climb to the top of the tallest tree. There he will tie up the clay pot and the leafy branches will hide it. He starts climbing the tree, holding the pot in front of him. The climbing is hard! Have you ever climbed a tree

while holding a pot? Anansi wishes he had nine limbs!

His youngest daughter is outside and sees what a hard time Anansi is having. "Father, it would be easier if you tied the pot to your back. Then all your limbs would be free for climbing."

Do you think Anansi is happy to get good advice from his daughter? Think again!

"She is right—that would be easier! But why is it some young pup thinks of this, when I who possess all the wisdom of the world did not?"

Anansi gets so angry that he throws the pot to the ground.

All the wisdom of the world comes flowing out of the pot. Some falls here, some falls there. No one gets all the wisdom, but everyone gets some. This is why, even today, wisdom is everywhere. If you listen to the stories—stories spun from storytellers all around the world—you will hear it.

A wisdom tale in *Amazing Grace*, a sixth-grade Tapestry of Faith program.



Harvest the wisdom of our Unitarian Universalist Sources

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

www.uua.org/tapestryoffaith

What was in Anansi's clay pot? Can we ever know? In Unitarian Universalism, we harvest our Sources, then harvest again.

EXPLORING TOGETHER

Home Hearth

We gather as Unitarian Universalists, often around a lit chalice or food, and enjoy together the wisdom of our Sources. Long ago, people kept a fire burning in a hearth, sometimes all day and all night, to cook their food, eat together, tell stories, and stay warm. Where do you gather to share food for the body and food for the spirit?

When homes were built of rocks, plants, and earth, and most food was gathered or grown, Earth-centered peoples made hearths of compacted earth or a ring of stones. Their rituals honored the spirit of life believed to be in all natural beings and things.



> **Make a symbolic hearth.** Fill a shallow dish (or pie tin) with earth or sand. Set a votive candle firmly. Circle the candles with stones.

> **Place your hearth where family members gather.** Light it to mark your time together and your connection with the Earth and all its gifts. Draw from the wisdom of other Sources, with blessing words that resonate for you.

Six Unitarian Universalist Sources

1 **Direct experience** of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life.

2 **Words and deeds** of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love.

3 **Wisdom** from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life.

The Wisdom of Thanks: Table Graces from Our Sources

Thank you, Great Spirit, for the roof over our heads, for being together, for all the food we eat.

—UU blessing inspired by Earth-centered traditions

For each new morning with its light,
For rest and shelter of the night,
For health and food, for love and friends,
For everything your goodness sends,
Thank you!

—Adapted from a grace of Ralph Waldo Emerson by the Rev. Phil Lund, sung to the tune of "Praise God from Whom All Blessings Flow"

Hamotzi lechem
min ha'aretz,
we give thanks
to God for bread.

—Jewish blessing



For seeds—that, like memories and minds, keep in themselves the recollection of what they were and the power to become something more than they are...

—From "Gratitude for the Garden" by the Rev. Max Coats

Loving spirit be our guest.
Dine with us, share our bread
That our table might be blessed
And our souls be fed.

—By the Rev. Gary Kowalski, sung to the tune of "Mary Had a Little Lamb"

We receive this food in gratitude to all beings
Who have helped to bring it to our table,
And vow to respond in turn to those in need
With wisdom and compassion.

—Buddhist mealtime blessing

Heifer Project

Humanism says we can and must work for a more fair world. Science shows us effective ways to do it. Teachings from Judaism, Christianity, and other religions lift up compassion and our responsibility for one another. Earth-centered wisdom affirms the interconnectedness of all life.

Wisdom from our Sources leads many UUs to help Heifer International redistribute wealth and opportunity to fight poverty and hunger. Donations to Heifer provide animals, seedlings, and technical assistance to families who then reap the harvest: Wool from sheep. Nuts from cashew trees. New generations of livestock and crops to pass on to other families.

> In Honduras, Heifer helps villages purchase bees, bee boxes, and the equipment to collect and process honey to sell. The beekeeping enterprises support families and help protect the stingless Honduran honeybee from extinction.

> In China, the Leshi Women's Silkworm Project seeds silk farms to support more than 500 families.

> In Ukraine, milk-processing equipment strengthens a rural dairy farm cooperative. Heifer promotes ecological balance and economic sustainability around the world.

Explore www.heifer.org for ways to get involved.



4 Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.

5 Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit.

6 Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Mindful Eating

In his book *Present Moment, Wonderful Moment: Mindfulness Verses for Daily Living*, Thich Nhat Hanh offers meditations from the Vietnamese Buddhist tradition for tasks such as brushing one's teeth and washing one's hands. Here is a way to bring a meditative, reflective attitude to the everyday, physical experience of eating.

> Choose two fruits or vegetables that everyone in the family can eat—for example, strawberries and carrots. Get enough for everyone to have one of each.

> Wash the strawberries and carrots. Slice them and arrange them on simple trays or plates. Use a separate tray for each fruit or vegetable.

> Gather silently in a circle and sit down.

> Pass the tray of strawberries. Invite each person to take one and slowly, quietly chew it. Encourage everyone to take their time, to chew thoroughly and deliberately, to fully experience texture and flavor. Ask them to imagine the earth, the sun, the water, and the air that nurtured the strawberry. Invite everyone to taste the sunlight in the strawberry.

> When everyone is done, pass the tray of carrots, with the same instructions.

> Share a moment of silence.

> Then, talk about what it was like to eat such simple foods silently, together. What new understandings came about strawberries? About carrots? About food and eating?

> Can you imagine eating a whole meal in mindful silence? Why or why not?



PARENT REFLECTION

Gandhi's Truth

Many of us recall Mohandas Gandhi as a slight man with a shaved head, wrapped in simple, white cloth. But as a law student in London and a lawyer in South Africa, Gandhi wore European clothes. He thought it would improve his status—the status of all Indians. He encouraged Indians to fight for Britain in World War I, for the same reason.

So, who was the true Gandhi? The man in suit and tie who promoted military service, or the avatar of nonviolence? Gandhi would have a ready answer. He once wrote, “What I am concerned with is my readiness to obey the call of truth, my god, from moment to moment, no matter how inconsistent it may appear.” He had to experiment to know his own truth—at each moment of his life. Multiple sources nourished his prophetic wisdom: a humanist certainty that we must help one another, teachings from his Hindu upbringing, reasoned conclusions from history and political science,

and his own direct experience.

Gandhi was raised a vegetarian, as part of his parents’ Hindu religion. Once, a friend urged Gandhi to eat meat, arguing that India would never be independent of colonial rule if its people did not eat meat. Gandhi saw merit in the argument. He tried meat. But when he returned home, he felt shame. He saw that his loyalty to his parents was the stronger truth.

Later, he found another truth: the principle of *ahimsa* that motivated his parents’ Hindu practice. *Ahimsa* rejects violence



to any living thing; vegetarianism became Gandhi’s own moral choice.

Gandhi listened to Christians; he learned of Jesus and read the Gospels, using his inner light to sort Truth from mere religion.

He read about Buddha and Muhammad. He grew to appreciate more aspects of Hinduism. From an American source—Henry David Thoreau, who also contributed to Unitarianism—Gandhi learned about nonviolent civil disobedience, and used it to lead the Indian people to confront power while keeping their own integrity: “Look at our truth: We are human beings of dignity and worth. Our oppressors may use violence, but we do not sink to that level.”

Adapted from a story by Greta Anderson in *Riddle and Mystery*, a Tapestry of Faith sixth-grade program.

Gandhi’s Hindu upbringing taught him to practice vegetarianism. But only when his own direct experience made him feel that truth was he ready to make it his own.

- What do you do to “seed” your personal wisdom so it will grow?

- How do you harvest the new wisdom you experience or learn about?

- What if a new truth contradicts wisdom you had been sure of?

FAMILIES: WEAVE A TAPESTRY OF FAITH

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FIND OUT MORE

- Tales about the spider, Anansi, give us West African and Caribbean wisdom. Many other Earth-centered cultures use animal stories to teach about who we are, why we are here, and how we should live. Search folk tales and myths on the Tapestry of Faith website.
- The UUA’s Beacon Press offers the only authorized American edition of Mohandas Gandhi’s autobiography, *The Story of My Experiments in Truth*, with an introduction by Sissela Bok.
- Listen to *Sources: A Unitarian Universalist Canata* by the Rev. Jason Shelton and the Rev. Kendyl Gibbons (2006). The third movement, “All Lifted Hearts,” celebrates multiple faiths’ wisdom we know as the Golden Rule; the last movement, “The Promise,” features UU hip-hop artist Justice Whittaker.

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