What are your earliest memories of color? Is it the green grass of your childhood backyard? Or the red of your Radio Flyer wagon? Is it the color of broccoli - or some other food color you hated to see on your plate? Maybe it’s the brown and white of your old family dog.

It may depend on the year you were born. For some of us, it might be the moment in the movie, *Wizard of Oz*, when it went from black and white to color. Who can forget the mesmerizing sight of that yellow brick road, or the sparkle of those ruby slippers? For some, it’s the yellow of Big Bird or the green of Kermit the Frog.

It may depend not on when, but on where you lived as a child. You might remember the color of the ocean, or the brown of the desert, or the splash of evergreen against winter snow…perhaps it’s the Big Blue Marble seen from space, or the Goodnight Moon seen from your bedroom window.

Take a moment and try to remember when you first noticed and were moved in some way by a color.

One colorful childhood thing that hasn’t changed is the big 64-piece box of Crayola crayons. It’s a great gift to give a friend of any age. Who doesn’t love the tiered box with row after endless row of colorful choices? Who doesn’t love to turn each crayon sideways and read the name of some of the more exotic colors….puce, cinnamon, aqua, vermilion! Pick up a box this afternoon and just see what memories might be released. Get some drawing paper, too, or even a coloring book. Play a bit with color and watch for memories.

Memories are important pieces of the puzzle of figuring out who we are…and how we are to live. Memories can remind us of what we love (like crayons or clouds). And, as we remember, we create and re-create ourselves anew. Even our vision of the future is anchored in the stories and images and, perhaps, colors that we remember.

*Marcel Proust wrote that memory comes as a rope let down from heaven to draw one out of the abyss of non-being.*
That's what can feel so good about visiting the places where we grew up. Seeing the old neighborhood reminds us of our life journey. We know we lived there in that house, in that school, climbing that tree…memory can draw us out of the abyss of non-being.

Of course, memory is selective and changes over the years. Siblings remember things differently and, try as we might, there is no way to prove who is right.

Like color, music can be a powerful reminder. There are songs that we can sing all of the words to, no matter how many decades have passed. I tried this once with a group of Unitarian Universalist ministers at a retreat. We sang camp songs, Sunday school songs…people kept calling out suggestions, and most of us could sing along.

And I have heard time and time again from family members of how comforting it was to a dying loved one to sing to them as they passed from this world. The familiar words and melodies reminding them of who they were, even as they approached the end of their life.

Memory is a rope and an anchor, drawing us out of the abyss of non-being. And it often draws us back to childhood images.

Research shows that colors have emotional content - green makes us feel peaceful. Remembering colors in our childhood can transport us to feelings of how we loved, how we were free to explore, how long the days of childhood seemed to be.

I’m thinking a lot about children these days. I’ve just returned from days and days of assisting my daughter and son-in-law in caring for their newborn twin boys.

These boys are grandchildren numbers 5 and 6 of 7. How fantastic is that? To grandparent seven new children into the world - what a blessing. Holding the babies is peaceful and comforting to them and to me.

It transports me, takes me back to my own childhood, to my family of origin, to how the world has changed and how crucial it is to keep loving and caring for life. Keeping children alive, keeping all children alive, is a
fundamental responsibility – a responsibility we all share. Caring for life is a moral imperative. Life after birth is what matters.

My grandchildren need you, they need communities of care. They need safety in a harsh world. They need hope in the future of the planet. They need hope for a world at peace.

All the children and grandchildren of the world need us. All children need safety, food, health care, shelter, education, love, and hope. We are responsible for caring for life. Our work is not done.

As a community of faith, we are called to tend and to love the least among us, the most vulnerable. We are called to love and care for all the children of the world.

At child dedications, we often read the words of Kahlil Gibran: “Your children are not your children, they are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself…”

They are the sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself!

All three of my new grandsons were a bit premature. Each one spent two weeks in the neo-natal intensive care - two in New York City and one in Towson. The nurses were wonderful - it was so hard and intense and amazing to see how these tiny babies struggled and longed for life itself.

They have been home for more than two months now, and last week the twins reached 9 pounds. I cried with relief. They are alive, they are growing. Exhausted parents, dedicated health professionals, and loving family members have cared well for these precious newborns, as they longed for life itself.

Life calls to life. That is the hope of the world. Caring relationships are the hope of the world. Crossing boundaries of age and culture, gender and race, class and country…crossing boundaries in order to care for life.

Each morning in Brooklyn, I walked a mile in the morning and I rode the subway. I saw many instances of life calling to life. I saw many signs of hope. People helping one another find their way on the subway. People
dropping coins in the homeless person’s cup. Fathers carrying a tired child on their shoulders. Drivers stopping to let people safely cross the street. Restaurant staff calling 911 when a customer suffered a seizure.

I saw the Statue of Liberty every morning from the F train. It was centering and heartening, and stirred many memories.

Memory plays an important role in both ethics and religion. Judaism understands God as having a role in history, and therefore the sacred texts must be studied and understood anew in each era. Remembering and re-telling the stories and histories of the people of Israel in changing context is midrash. Remembering can bring us to hope. Like the mantra at the end of the seder meal: “Next year in Jerusalem.”

This is something we Unitarian Universalists also do when we say that revelation is not sealed, that there is always new truth to be found. Sermons are a kind of midrash, taking texts from scripture and poetry and the wisdom of the ages, and re-telling and re-framing in the current circumstances, making it meaningful in our daily lives.

We find our identity as a liberal religious people by remembering our story and then retelling it the current context. Our Unitarian story of inclusion, pluralism, and free thought. Our priority of experience over doctrine. Our Universalist story of a God who loves and includes all people.

Memory leading to hope is also part of the Christian ritual of the Eucharist, when the minister or priest remembers the words that Jesus said in the story of the Last Supper: “Do this in remembrance of me.”

These words encourage faithful Christians to remember what Jesus taught, so that they will know how they are to live, so they will have hope in a future of righteousness and peace.

To live with moral purpose, to live the values of our faith, we must return again and again to discover who we are. Who we are now, today, here in this moment, within this congregation, within our families, in our places of work, in our neighborhood.

Memory recalls us to ourselves, draws us out of the abyss of non-being. Do you remember what your grandparents taught you, or the songs you
learned in Scouts, or the way you felt when you wore your favorite color shirt or scarf?

Religion and spirituality give meaning to our lives. And at the core of a meaningful life, is caring relationship. At the core is the longing for one another, the desire to help each other, the need to keep each other alive…it is life calling to life. It is keeping hope alive.

For we all are sons and daughters of life’s longing for itself.

May the children of today and the colors of our childhood remind us that we are precious in the sight of Life.

Preacher and professor at Candler School of Religion at Emory University, Thomas G. Long, gave a series of lectures at Yale Divinity School, titled “Preaching from Memory and Hope.”

Reverend Long reminds us:

All we have is gift.
All we are is grace.

May we know that all life is holy.

And in religious community, may we learn to love one another.

Remember so we can keep hope alive.

So May It Be/Amen