

# Rabindranath Tagore

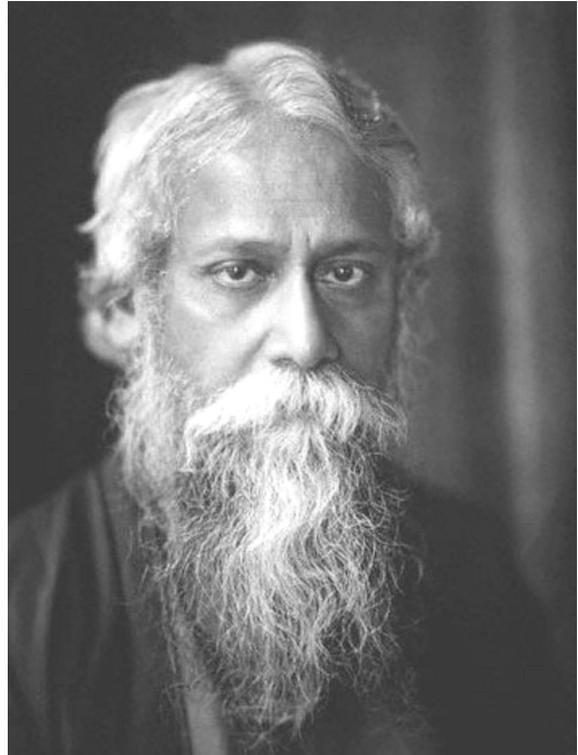
Born 7<sup>th</sup> May 1861

Died 7<sup>th</sup> August 1941

UNESCO has designated  
2011 as the year of  
Tagore

Nobel prize-winning poet

Visionary Indian  
philosopher...  
and relevant to the  
21<sup>st</sup> Century



**A vision of humanity in harmony with planet Earth**

**A worship resource pack to celebrate the  
150<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the birth of Tagore.**

**Compiled by Rev. Dr. Vernon Marshall**

**Promoted and edited  
by the GA Worship Panel**



The General Assembly of Unitarian and Free Christian Churches  
Essex Hall, 1-6, Essex Street, Strand, London WC2R 3HY  
Tel. 0207 240 2384 [www.unitarian.org.uk](http://www.unitarian.org.uk)



*This worship pack contains the main elements for putting together a worship service – often with a choice of materials. There is no set pattern – you may wish to include other aspects of worship.*

## **Opening Words**

Where the mind is without fear and the head is held high;  
where knowledge is free;  
where the world has not been broken up into fragments by narrow domestic walls;  
where words come out from the depth of truth;  
where tireless striving stretches its arms towards perfection;  
where the clear stream of reason has not lost its way  
into the dreary desert sand of dead habit;  
where the mind is led forward into ever-widening thought and action –  
into that heaven of freedom, let my country awake. (*Tagore*)

Let us gather together this day  
to re-enthuse ourselves in the divine mission,  
to upraise the outcast,  
to feed the hungry,  
to heal the sick,  
to deliver those who languish  
and to spread the joyful spirit of freedom. (*J. S. Hoyland –adapt.*)

Welcome into this place of beauty and joy.  
May our hearts be made simple and trustful  
that we may think eternal thoughts,  
wise, child-like thoughts  
whereby the worlds are upheld. (*J. S. Hoyland –adapt.*)

Our God,  
keep us this day clean and white,  
free from all taint of evil thought or low desire.  
Possess our hearts by that affection for your divine beauty and truth.  
And give us joy in simple beauty and untarnished grace. (*J. S. Hoyland –adapt.*)

## **Chalice Lighting**

Light, oh where is the light!  
Kindle it with desire!  
Let not the hours pass by in the dark.  
Kindle the lamp of love with your life. (*Tagore*)

The lamp of the Temple burned brightly in victory.  
May the light of the chalice we now light  
display the victory we have won over ourselves,  
and may the light of truth and beauty continue to burn  
forever within our hearts. (*J. S. Hoyland –adapt.*)

As the chalice light burns brightly before our eyes,  
may the light of the spirit burn brightly within.  
May that light give us strength of purpose  
and stability of direction,  
and find that one direct and steady determination. (*J. S. Hoyland –adapt.*)

## Prayers

You have made me endless, such is your pleasure.  
This frail vessel you empty again and again, and fill it with fresh life.  
This little flute of a reed you have carried over hills and dales,  
and have breathed through it melodies eternally new.  
At the immortal touch of your hands our hearts lose their limits in joy  
and give birth to utterance ineffable.  
Your infinite gifts come to us only on these small hands of ours.  
Ages pass and still you pour, and still there is room to fill.

When you command us to sing, it seems our hearts would break with pride.  
All that is harsh and dissonant in our lives melt into one sweet harmony –  
and our adoration spreads wings like a glad bird on its flight across the sea.  
We know you take pleasure in our singing.  
We know that only as a singer we come before your presence.  
We touch, by the edge of the far-spreading wing of our song,  
your feet, which we could never aspire to reach.  
Drunk with the joy of singing we forget ourselves and call you friend, who is our God.  
(Tagore)

Life of our life, we shall ever try to keep our bodies pure,  
knowing that your living touch is upon the limbs of all.  
We shall ever try to keep all untruths out from our thoughts,  
knowing that you are that truth that has kindled the light of reason in our minds.  
We shall ever try to drive all evils away from our hearts and keep our love in flower,  
knowing that you have your seat in the inmost shrine of our hearts.  
It shall be our endeavour to reveal you in our actions,  
knowing it is your power that gives us strength to act. (Tagore)

*(The following prayer may be read as a responsive prayer between two voices or  
between worship leader and congregation)*

When the heart is hard and parched,  
*come upon us with a shower of blessing.*  
When grace is lost from life,  
*come with a burst of song.*  
When tumultuous work raises its din on all sides, shutting us out from beyond,  
*come to us, God of silence, with your peace and rest.*  
When desire blinds the mind with delusion and dust,  
*come with your light and thunder. (Tagore)*

Thus it is that your joy in us is so fulfilling.  
Thus it is that you have come down to us.  
O God, where would your love be if we were not?  
You have taken us as partners of all your wealth.  
In our lives your will is ever taking shape.  
For this, you have captivated us and your love is lost in ours,  
and it is in that love that you are seen as the perfect union. (Tagore)

## **Meditation**

*(The following meditation may be used in many different ways. It can be read by the worship leader, with plenty of silences; it can be printed in the order of service for members of the congregation to read quietly to themselves- this gives an opportunity for individuals to dwell on those passages that speak to them. Quiet, reflective music may be used with or between the words.)*

Stillness soars as a mountain peak,  
seeking its greatness in height.  
Movement stops in a silent lake,  
seeking in depth its limit.

The fish in the water is silent,  
the animal on the earth is noisy,  
the bird in the air is singing.

But we hear inside us the silence of the sea,  
the noise of the earth,  
and the music of the air.

There is a point where, in the mystery of existence,  
contradictions meet;  
where movement is not all movement,  
and stillness is not all stillness;

where the idea and the form,  
the within and the without, are united,  
where infinite becomes finite,  
yet not losing its infinity. (*Tagore*)

## **Four Readings from the writings of Rabindranath Tagore**

### **1. 'Ungrateful Sorrow' from *Gitanjali***

At dawn when they departed, my mind tried to console me –  
'Everything is illusion.'  
Angrily I replied:  
'Here's this sewing box on the table,  
that flower-pot on the terrace,  
this monogrammed hand-fan on the bed –  
all these are real.'

My mind said: 'Yet, think again.'  
I rejoined: 'You'd better stop.  
Look at this storybook,  
the hairpin halfway amongst its leaves,  
signalling the rest is unread;  
if all these things are 'illusion',  
then why should 'they' be more unreal?"

My mind becomes silent.  
A friend arrived and said:  
'That which is good is real



it is never non-existent;  
the entire world preserves and cherishes its chest  
like a precious jewel in a necklace.'

I replied in anger: 'How do you know?  
Is a body not good? Where did that body go?'

Like a small boy in a rage hitting his mother,  
I began to strike at everything in this world  
that gave me shelter, and I screamed:  
'The world is treacherous.'

Suddenly I was startled.  
It seemed someone admonished me: 'You – ungrateful!'

I looked at the crescent moon  
hidden behind the tamarisk tree outside my window.  
As if the dear departed one is smiling  
and playing hide-and-seek with me.

From the depth of darkness, punctuated by scattered stars,  
came a rebuke: 'When I let you grasp me you call it a deception,  
and yet when I remain concealed,  
why do you hold on to your faith in me with such conviction?' (*Tagore*)

## **2. 'The Flower-School' from *Gitanjali***

When storm clouds rumble in the sky and  
June showers come down,  
the moist east wind comes marching over the heath  
to blow its bagpipes amongst the bamboos.  
The crowds of flowers come out of a sudden,  
from nobody knows where,  
and dance upon the grass in wild glee.

Mother, I really think the flowers go to school underground.  
They do their lessons with doors shut,  
and if they want to come out to play before it is time,  
their master makes them stand in a corner.  
When the rains come they have their holidays.

Branches clash together in the forest,  
and the leaves rustle in the wild wind,  
the thunder-clouds clap their giant hands and  
the flower children rush out in dresses of  
pink, yellow and white.

Do you know, mother, their home is in the sky,  
where the stars are.  
Haven't you seen how eager they are to get there?  
Don't you know why they are in such a hurry?  
Of course, I can guess to whom they raise their arms,  
they have their mother as I have my own. (*Tagore*)

### 3. 'Deliverance' from *Gitanjali*

Leave this chanting and singing and telling of beads! Whom do you worship in this lonely dark corner of a temple with doors all shut? Open your eyes and see your God is not before you!

God is where the tiller is tilling the hard ground and where the path-maker is breaking stones. God is with them in sun and in shower, and God's garment is covered in dust. Put off your holy mantle and even, like God, come down onto the dusty soil!

Deliverance? Where is this deliverance to be found? Even God has joyfully taken on the bonds of creation and is bound with us all for ever.

Come out of your meditations and leave aside your flowers and incense! What harm is there if your clothes become tattered and stained? Meet your God. Stand by your God in toil and in the sweat of your brow. (*Tagore*)

### 4. 'The Joy of Unity'

Our needs are always in a hurry. They rush and hustle, they are rude and unceremonious; they have no surplus of leisure, no patience for anything but fulfilment of purpose. We frequently see in our country at the present day people utilising empty kerosene cans for carrying water. These cans are emblems of discourtesy; they are curt and abrupt, they have not the least shame for their unmannerliness, they do not care to be ever so slightly more than useful.

The instruments of our necessity assert that we must have food, shelter, clothes, comforts and convenience. And yet people spend an immense amount of their time and resources to contradicting this assertion, to prove that they are not a mere living catalogue of endless wants; that there is in them an ideal of perfection, a sense of unity, which is a harmony between parts and a harmony with surroundings.

The quality of the infinite is not the magnitude of extension; it is in the mystery of unity. Facts occupy endless time and space; but the truth comprehending them all has no dimension; it is One. Wherever our heart touches the One, in the small or the big, it finds the touch of the infinite.

I was speaking to some of the joy we have in our personality. I said it was because we were made conscious by it of a spirit of unity within ourselves. He answered that he had such feeling of joy about himself, but I am sure he exaggerated. In all probability he had been suffering from some break of harmony between the surroundings and the spirit of unity within him, proving all the more strongly its truth. The meaning of health comes home to us with painful force when disease disturbs it; since health expresses the vital functions and is accordingly joyful. Life's tragedies occur, not to demonstrate their own reality, but to reveal that eternal principle of joy in life, to which they gave a ride shaking. It is the object of this Oneness in us to realise its infinity by perfect union of love with others. All obstacles to this union create misery, giving rise to the baser passions that are expressions of finitude, of that separateness which is negative and therefore an illusion.

The joy of unity within ourselves, seeking expression, becomes creative; whereas our desire for the fulfilment of our needs is constructive. The water vessel, taken as a vessel only, raises the question, 'Why does it exist at all?' through the fitness of construction, it offers the apology for its existence. But where it is a work of beauty it has no question to answer; it has nothing to do, but to be. It reveals in its form a unity to which all that seems various in it is so related that, in a mysterious manner, it strikes sympathetic chords to the music of unity in our own being. (*Tagore*)



## Three Readings on Tagore by other authors

### 1. from Swami Adiswarananda

The inner-seeking spirituality of India infused all of Tagore's writing. He wrote in many genres of the deep religious milieu of Hinduism. The values and core beliefs of the Hindu scriptures permeated his work. His philosophical and spiritual thoughts transcend all limits of language, culture, and nationality. In his writings, the poet and mystic takes us on a spiritual quest and gives us a glimpse of the infinite in the midst of the finite, unity at the heart of all diversity, and the Divine in all beings and things of the universe.

Tagore believed that 'true knowledge is that which perceives the unity of all things in God.' Tagore, through his vast body of immortal literary works taught us that the universe is a manifestation of God, and that there is no unbridgeable gulf between our world and God's, and that God is the one who can provide the greatest love and joy.

### 2. from W. B. Yeats

The verses in *Gitanjali*...as the generations pass, travellers will hum them on the highway, and men rowing upon the rivers. Lovers, whilst they await one another, shall find, in murmuring them, this love of God a magic gulf wherein their own more bitter passion may bathe and renew its youth... The traveller in the red-brown clothes that he wears that dust may not show upon him, the girl searching in her bed for the petals fallen from the wreath of her royal lover, the servant of the bride awaiting the master's homecoming in the empty house, are images of the heart turning to God. Flowers and rivers, the blowing of conch shells, the heavy rain of the Indian July, or the moods of that heart in union or in separation; and a man sitting in a boat upon a river playing lute, like one of those figures full of mysterious meaning in a Chinese picture, is God himself....'

### 3. from Sitansu Sekhar Chakravarti

Spirituality for Rabindranath Tagore is the dynamic principle that touches every aspect of life and is the guiding principle that leads human existence from partiality to fullness. Life's journey, for Tagore, achieves its fulfilment through the creative interaction of an artist or a poet, and not through renunciation of the world. He characterises his spirituality as that of an artist.

This implies a change in one's attitude to the world; one should move away from an egoistic appropriation of the world, which results in experiences of the world as a source of suffering and happiness, to an artistic experience of the world, where it is the source of unconditional joy.

Integral to the spirituality of Tagore is the notion that everything is Brahman, and Brahman is blissful. Tagore was also influenced by the traditions that focused on the indwelling presence of God. Thus, in many of his writings Tagore stresses the need to respond to the call from within, from the person 'of the heart.'



## **Benedictions**

In the night of weariness let us give ourselves up to sleep without struggle,  
placing our trust in you.

It is you who draws the veil of night upon the tired eyes of the day  
to renew its sight in a fresher gladness of awakening. (*Tagore*)

When we go from here let this be our parting word,  
that what we have seen is unsurpassable.  
Our while bodies and our limbs have thrilled  
with the touch of one who is beyond touch.  
And if the end comes here, let it come  
Let this be our parting word. (*Tagore*)

Master...  
without thee we perish.  
A few years, and the earth knoweth us no more,  
we are dead for ever.  
Here and now  
we partake of thy sacrament of eternal life. (*J. S. Hoyland – adapt.*)

## **Hymns**

### **From *Sing Your Faith:***

20 Come, all who look to God today  
30 Each seeking faith is seeking light  
64 How can we confine  
92 Let us renew our covenant  
105 Nature shouts from earth and sky  
155 The day will come, must come, and soon  
208 When our heart is in a holy place

### **From *Hymns for Living:***

126 The Larger View  
127 Gather us in  
128 Heritage  
130 All faiths  
131 All earth's children  
172 All are welcome here

### **From *Hymns of faith and Freedom***

201 One holy Church of God appears  
202 City of God, how broad and far  
215 Gather us in  
223 We limit not the truth of God  
309 For the healing of the nations  
319 When I needed a neighbour

## Rabindranath Tagore 1861-1941 : an overview

Rabindranath Tagore was born in Calcutta into a wealthy and prominent family, his father, Debendranath, being a religious reformer and scholar. His mother, Sarada Devi, died when he was only very young. The Tagores tried to combine traditional Indian culture with Western ideas. Rabindranath, the youngest of the children, started to compose poems at the age of eight and his first book, a collection of poems, was published when he was 17.

Tagore was educated at various schools and places of learning. He attended University College, London to study law, but left after a year - objecting to the English weather. He married in 1883 and was father to two sons and three daughters. He moved to East Bengal, now Bangladesh, and collected folk stories. Between 1893 and 1900 he wrote seven volumes of poetry, writing mostly in the common language of the people, earning criticism from some scholars. He wrote prose work too, novels and short stories, many of the latter in a Bengali periodical.

In 1901 Tagore founded a school near Calcutta, Visva-Bharati, which sought to teach both Indian and Western philosophy. In 1921 it became a university. He produced poems, novels, short stories, a history of India, textbooks and lectures. In 1902 his wife died, and within the next four years he lost two of his children.

For Western readers, Tagore's most well-known work was *Gitanjali* - about divine and human love. These poems he translated into English himself. His work was admired by many Western writers and poets, including W. B. Yeats and Ezra Pound. In 1913 he was awarded the Nobel Prize for Literature.

Much of Tagore's ideas were drawn from the *Upanishads* and from his own beliefs that God can be found through personal discovery and human service. He called for a new world order based on trans-national values and ideas. He was politically active in India and supported Mahatma Gandhi's opposition to British colonialism but avoided a narrow nationalism. In 1915 he was awarded a knighthood but surrendered it in 1919 in protest at the Massacre of Amritsar where British troops shot dead over 400 Indian protesters. His version of politics was not widespread and he retired into solitude. He nonetheless travelled widely and sought to spread his views about the need to unite East and West.

At the age of 70 Tagore took up painting and continued his interest in composing music, setting hundreds of poems to music. One of his own songs, "Our Golden Bengal" became the national anthem of Bangladesh. He died in 1941 leaving behind an incomplete collection of his works filling 30 substantial volumes.

For Unitarians he will be remembered for his liberal and inclusive religious ideas. He was a member of the Brahmo Samaj, a liberal Hindu movement with some Western ideas, and he had knowledge of Western religious liberalism as suggested by his visit to Manchester College, Oxford during his visit to England. It is certainly now the time to reconsider his contribution and to find a way of integrating Tagore's insights into a modern Unitarian spirituality.



## Tagore Quotes

A mind all logic is like a knife all blade. It makes the hand bleed that uses it.

Age considers; youth ventures.

Beauty is truth's smile when she beholds her own face in a perfect mirror.

Bigotry tries to keep truth safe in its hand with a grip that kills it.

By plucking her petals, you do not gather the beauty of the flower.

Clouds come into my life, no longer to carry rain or usher storm, but to add colour to my sunset sky.

Death is not extinguishing the light; it is only putting out the lamp because the dawn has come.

Depth of friendship does not depend on length of acquaintance.

Do not say, 'It is morning,' and dismiss it with a name of yesterday. See it for the first time as a newborn child that has no name.

Don't limit a child to your own learning, for his was born in another time.

Emancipation from the bondage of the soil is no freedom for the tree.

Every child comes with the message that God is not yet discouraged of humanity.

Every difficulty slurred over will be a ghost to disturb your repose later on.

Everything comes to us that belongs to us if we create the capacity to receive it.

Facts are many, but the truth is one.

Faith is the bird that feels the light when the dawn is still dark.

From the solemn gloom of the temple children run out to sit in the dust, God watches them play and forgets the priest.

Grey hairs are signs of wisdom if you hold your tongue,  
Speak, and they are but hairs, as in the young.

He who is too busy doing good finds no time to be good.

I have become my own version of an optimist. If I can't make it through one door, I'll go through another door – or I'll make a door. Something terrific will come no matter how dark the present.

**THANKS** The GA Worship Panel would like to thank Rev. Dr. Vernon Marshall for providing this worship resource. It is also available on the GA web site.