

# *Love It or Leave It*

Unitarian Universalist Church of Olinda

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*Signs of Affirmation, Toronto Distillery District* © 2021 Rod E.S.Q.

When I moved for seminary studies to one of the bagel capitals of North America – Montreal – I hadn't really appreciated the significance of people's devotion to their preferred "sect" of bagel.

I would soon learn that these can mean much to some folks.

As my new room-mate and her dad helped with the move, I quickly staked out my new neighbourhood, making notes of its amenities and its local flavour. It was a blue-collar Anglophone neighbourhood along one of the city's main streets. I was glad to see that there were two grocery stores within a block, as well as a *depanneur* convenience store. My main bank was a short walk away, right next to a post office. I also liked that there was a public park right across the street, and even a small pub. There was also an independent local coffee shop that hosted open mics, as well as a greasy-spoon diner that offered student specials for breakfast. Taking all this in, I thought I'd fit right in.

As I was bringing in some boxes, my room-mate walked in enthusiastically – “Hey, Rod, did you look around the neighbourhood? What do you think?”

“Looks great!” I replied, “there’s lots of good stuff around here!”

“I know!” she exclaimed, “Did you see the bagel shop at the corner?”

I admit I was rather taken aback by this... out of all the things I noticed during my reconnaissance mission around my new neighbourhood, the bagel shop at a nearby corner hadn’t even entered my radar, and I was perplexed as to why this was the *one* thing she would care to mention.

A few minutes later, my room-mate’s dad walked in with a batch of things. The first thing I remember him saying was, “Hey, Rod – did you see the bagel shop at the corner?”

I was dumbfounded, and admitted that I had not seen it... but had already been made aware of it.

It simply did not compute to me that a nearby bagel shop would be noteworthy amid the many other things our neighbourhood had to offer.

In truth, I have always been puzzled when people waxed poetic about that special spot in town that had *the perfect* bagel, that you *just* couldn’t possibly miss out on.

I’ve never felt like I’ve missed out by being unaware of the bagel geography of the places where I lived. And the fact that some people would have deep discussions, and sometimes lively disagreements, about this subject always presented me with an unsolved mystery. I simply didn’t get the passion behind it.

Same goes for the competing fandoms behind the schisms between the New York versus Montreal factions, each one evangelizing to me the nuances that distinguished one from the other. And even though I have

heard detailed exegesis parsing out these differences, I simply don't have enough interest on the subject to retain the details as to why different kinds of bagel are the way they are, nor why it's supposed to matter.

The folks that are into bagels – many of you may be among them – are often equally puzzled by my indifference... which they have sometimes interpreted as active hostility.

The fact is, I don't *hate* bagels. If someone offers one to me, I'll eat it without argument... I'll *even* enjoy it. But to me it's simply an adequate, edible snack. I also appreciate that, when used as sandwich bread, they're a highly effective protein-delivery mechanism. I simply will never understand the fervent following that other people have for them. I'll just as easily have a mildly greater enthusiasm for other ring-shaped breads, such as donuts. I'm simply not always into the same things that others are into.

And that's OK. The truth is that other people's passion for bagels doesn't really affect me. And they don't need my permission to enjoy what they enjoy. I can love it... or leave it alone. You don't need my permission to follow your passion. As long as no one gets hurt, you don't need anyone's permission to love what you love. You can be into things that other people aren't into, and other people can be into things that you are not into. You can love it... or leave it alone. That's the value of a community that has mutual respect for each other's dignity and which celebrates the diversity that comes with sharing our lives with others.

Some folks are into poppy seeds, some like sesame seeds of different colours. Some prefer onion and others garlic... others are even into burnt cheese. And some people are into "everything".

My friends, on a day when we celebrate love, we also open ourselves to recognizing how love comes in many forms. In our Unitarian Universalist tradition, this is not an entirely new conversation. We

know that some people express their love in different ways than some of us might. Some people are into something that we might not be into. As long as no one gets hurt, that's perfectly fine – in fact it's worth celebrating... even if we don't understand why some folks are so passionate about something that might not speak to us. We can love it... or leave it.

Part of this ongoing conversation has included our affirmation of LGBTQ+ communities and individuals. We affirm and celebrate Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Trans, and Queer... *plus*, communities and individuals. Sometimes, it takes a bit of work to explore the fuller spectrum of the LGBTQ+ circle. Lately in the past few years, we've paid closer attention to what it means to better appreciate and recognize the trans experience. There are also parts of that "plus" that we still don't talk about often: such as the identities of two-spirit, polyamorous, pansexual, and asexual folks, as well as other sexual and gender identities that make part of our congregations and our wider communities. This past year, for instance, the Canadian Unitarian Council has been paying closer attention to the polyamorous identities of folks in our national denomination, and that might be a deeper conversation for us some other time.

My friends, how people identify, how they express their love, and how they develop relationships is also part of who their family is. We know that in our church's community, and in our larger community, the definition of family goes beyond what was traditionally called the nuclear family – a straight married couple, with children. Some of you have that kind of family, and that is perfectly fine. Many of you don't – either you don't want it that way, don't need it that way, or you don't any more, or you don't yet... there are single parents, couples without children, single folks, intentional communities of companions and friends – and whatever that family is, it is also worthy of recognition and celebration. Not everyone's family is like yours. It might be hard for us to understand, why some folks' families are they way they are, or why they might want them that way, but that's beside the point. Your families of origin, and your families of choice, are the people who you

love and who love you, who hold you and support you. And that is worth celebrating. That is worth at least a holiday, or two.

My friends, in this Valentine's Day and this coming Family Day, may all who you love, all whom you hold dear, and who hold you dearly, be a cause for celebration.

So may it be,  
In Solidarity and Love,  
Amen

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*Suggested Hymns*

**Opening Hymn #151 I Wish I Knew How**

Words & Music: Billy Taylor and Dick Dallas,  
~)-| arr. by Mary Allen Walden, 1946-1997, © 1992 UUA  
MANDELA

**Hymn #299 Make Channels for the Streams of Love**

Words: From Richard Chenevix Trench, 1807-1886  
Music: American folk melody, arr. by Annabel Morris Buchanan, 1889-1983, © 1938, renewed 1966 J. Fischer & Bros. Co., harmony by Charles H. Webb, 1933- , © 1989 J. Fischer & Bros. Co.  
LAND OF REST

**Closing Hymn #95 There Is More Love Somewhere**

Words & Music: African American hymn  
BIKO