

Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists A Study Guide

Embarking on Our Spiritual Journey Together

Opening Retreat: All day (9AM – 3PM)

Session One: Welcoming the Soul

Session Two: The Experience of a Spiritual Journey

Unitarian Universalist History and Theology

Session Three: Theology 101 and Our Unitarian Universalist Beliefs

Session Four: Our European Roots

Session Five: Universalism in America

Session Six: Unitarianism in America

Session Seven: Solstice Ritual

Wisdom That Inspires Us

Session Eight: Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism

Session Nine: Transcendentalism

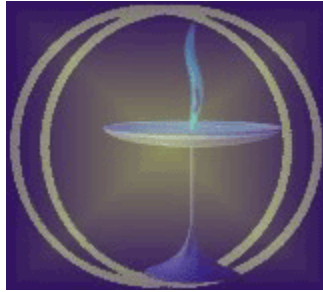
Session Ten: Humanism

Session Eleven: Science and Religion

Session Twelve: Process Theology

Faith in Action

- Session Thirteen:** Unitarian Universalist Perspectives on Evil
- Session Fourteen:** Unitarian Universalism and the Crises of Life
- Session Fifteen:** Voices of Our Heritage and Old Beliefs
- Session Sixteen:** Revisiting Our Theological Common Ground
- Session Seventeen:** Into Action
- Session Eighteen:** Practical Theology
- Session Nineteen:** Celebration and Reflection



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Opening Retreat

Goals:

- Overview of program, including expectations, covenants, spiritual direction and spiritual practice
- Getting to know one another and participants' spiritual histories
- Introduction to spiritual practice
- Development of commitment to and enthusiasm for the journey

Timeline

8:45 – 9:00 Coffee

9:00 – 9:10 Welcome, chalice lighting, silent meditation, and singing the round:

Come, Come Whoever You Are

Come, come whoever you are,
Wonderer, wanderer, lover of leaving,
Ours is no caravan of despair,
Come yet again come.

~ Attributed to Rumi

9:10 – 9:30 Introduce ourselves

- Name
- “Weather Report:” One natural phenomenon that describes how you are feeling today

9:30 – 9:45 Overview
Program elements and curriculum
Logistics of the day

9:45 – 10:15 “Third Things” (from Parker Palmer’s *A Hidden Wholeness*), using Wellspring poem and discussion as an example:

We begin by remembering the sound and feeling of the One Being, the Wellspring of Love.

We affirm that the next thing we experience shimmers with the light of the whole universe.

10:15 – 10:30 Group Covenant, Post-Break Logistics and BREAK

10:30 – noon Spiritual Histories in Small Groups

- Set up (Chalice, ground rules)
- 10 minutes max with 5 minutes for reactions

Noon – 1:00 Lunch

1:00 – 1:05 “Spirit of Life” to call us back

1:05 – 1:30 Spiritual Practice Experiential
Walking the Labyrinth
(Rain option: Watch “Living by Heart” video)

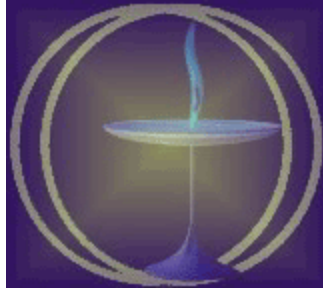
1:30 – 2:00 Spiritual Practice Large Group Discussion

2:00 – 2:50 Journaling and Inspirational Reading Spiritual Practice and Discussion (Small Groups)

- Journal about your personal commitments to yourself and the personal challenges/sticking points you will face this year
- Poems available for reflection
- Small group sharing of one goal and one challenge

2:50 – 3:00 Closing

- Stand in circle
- Each participant says one thing they’re grateful for
- Facilitator closes with phrase, “For all these things and so many more, we are grateful.”
- Extinguish chalice



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session One

Theme: Welcoming the Soul

Pre-Reading: *A Hidden Wholeness* by Parker Palmer

Questions for Reflection: According to Parker Palmer, what is the soul and what can we do that might inhibit or welcome the soul? What rings true or false to you in reading this book? How does it relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session One:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, silence
“Let’s take a few minutes of silence to bring ourselves fully into this circle.”

0:10 – 0:40 Check in and talk about spiritual practice, spiritual direction. Remind people to listen reflectively, practice “no fixing, no saving, no advising, no setting each other straight.” Practice silence after people speak, to honor their “inner teacher.”

0:40 – 1:45 Discussion

If I’m not asking the right questions, let me know.

Reminder that Palmer suggests we take notes on what arises internally, not on what other people say – we’re trying to find our own truth.

What was your response to this book?

Parker Palmer describes a life of wholeness, of living “divided no more.” (p 9) Are there people you’ve known who have lived this

way? What characteristics let you know that they lived undivided lives?

What are the obstacles to living an undivided life? What are the risks?

What is Parker Palmer's basic belief about human nature and purpose?

How does Parker Palmer describe the soul? What do you think about the soul? What about the metaphor of the soul as a wild animal (p 58) – does that ring true to you?

What other metaphors spoke to you as useful for letting the soul emerge? (e.g., the seasons, p. 81)

Is ours a circle of trust? (p 59) Why or why not? What are the hallmarks of a circle of trust? (pp 73 ff) Does our covenant help us build a circle of trust? Is there anything in it that might need to be changed or highlighted?

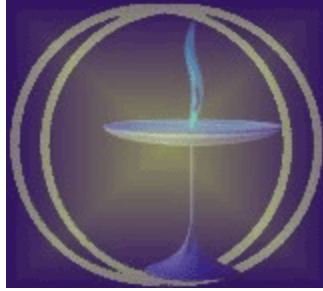
On p. 120 he describes reflective listening – what appeals to you about this kind of listening? What concerns might you have?

Palmer talks about the importance of laughter and silence – laughter with and silence with others. Have you had experiences with healing laughter? Healing silence? Can you tell us about them?

What do you think of Palmer's description of "the truth told slant?" (Emily Dickinson poem, p 92) Have you had experience with this kind of process? What was it like for you?

1:45 – 1:55 So what? What does this reading call you to do? In our circle? In your life?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and closing. All stand, holding hands, around the chalice. Each person, as moved, says one-two words about something from this session for which they are grateful. After everyone has expressed their gratitude, facilitator closes with a brief statement of thanks and appreciation.



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Two

Theme: Theology as Meaning Making

Pre-Reading: *The Spiral Staircase: My Climb Out of Darkness* by Karen Armstrong; *Ash Wednesday* (the poem) by T.S. Eliot

Questions for Reflection: What meaning did Karen Armstrong make out of her life experiences? What rings true or false to you in reading this book? How does it relate to your own life and to the journey of this group? How did Karen Armstrong come to understand her experience as a novice, as a woman living with epilepsy, as a writer? What does she mean when she refers to the image of “the spiral staircase?” How does this image relate to your own spiritual journey?

Session Two:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“May our loving thoughts fill the whole world; above, below, across- without limit; a boundless goodwill toward the whole world, unrestricted, free of hatred and enmity.” (*The Spiral Staircase*, p 296)

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

“Theology is poetry” – read section on p 284. Listening to the unconscious, bringing forth beauty.

Read p 291 (“But (I can almost hear...)) What does Armstrong believe about the nature of God? How did her beliefs change over time? How have your beliefs changed over time?

What does Armstrong believe about human nature and purpose? How does her understanding of the religious life change over time? (core elements of religious life -p272)

What is at the core of her understanding about the spiritual life? Compassion (p290), empathy (p272) What do you think of Hillel’s Golden Rule? (p296) Is it enough?

How did Armstrong’s experience of the role of the church in her life change over time? Read p. 300 (“For years, however...), p 304 (What is vital to all the traditions...). Is she a religious person? What about her willingness to take Jacob to church, have him baptized? What about the concept that practice matters more than belief? (p270 – “...in most traditions, faith was not about belief...”) What is the role of the church in your experience, your spiritual quest? What would UU’s say is “right practice?” What practices have changed your inner world?

This book is one example of a spiritual quest, of one person’s journey. Read p 268 – apparent dead ends lead to opening. Quakers say “way opens.” Where did “way open” for Armstrong? Where has an apparent dead end opened another way for you, carried you along on your spiritual quest?

“Because I do not hope to turn again...” (p 140) How does this phrase resonate in Armstrong’s life? What is the place of hopelessness in spiritual life? Of hope?

Myths and metaphors – the hero on a singular quest (p 268), the spiral staircase (throughout, but esp p 140). Some people use the metaphor of the tides coming in and out, changing. Others use the symbolism of water as connection. What metaphors that she uses resonate with you? What others do you use to explain your spiritual journey? Several times, Armstrong mentions reducing her story to dinner party anecdotes (pp 208, 215). What does it mean to tell your story, write it down, shape it for other people? Does it change your reality? How is story-telling part of your spiritual journey?

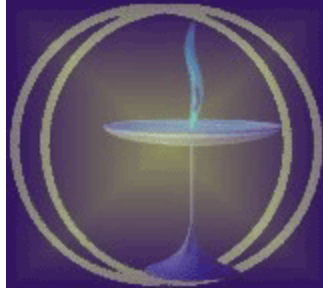
If there’s time - process in your journals. Think about what questions this book raised for you, questions I haven’t asked? How

has reflecting on some of these questions helped you articulate your own theology? Discuss after a 10-minute reflection time.

1:40 – 1:55 After our retreat and this meeting, is this group going as you had expected? Are we addressing the questions you want us to address? Is it helping your spiritual life? What more/different/less should we be doing?

So what? What does this reading call you to do in your life?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Three

Theme: Theology 101 and Our Unitarian Universalist Beliefs

Pre-Reading: “Understanding Theology,” by the Reverend Jen Crow

The UUA Principles and Purposes:

<http://www.uua.org/aboutuua/principles.html>

Questions for Reflection: What are we reacting to in our theological past? Where do we find unity in our theological diversity? Where are we more similar than different?

Session Three:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“The Center,” by Lao-tsu

We join spokes together in a wheel,
but it is the center hole
that makes the wagon move.
We shape clay into a pot,
but it is the emptiness inside
that holds whatever we want.
We hammer wood for a house,
but it is the inner space
that makes it livable
We work with being,
but non-being is what we use

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

What is your understanding of the word “theology” and did the reading help you clarify what it is that we’re talking about?

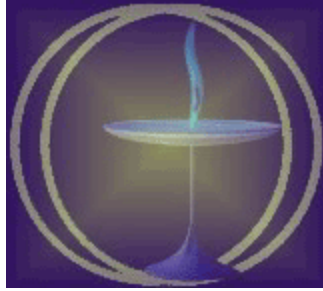
What aspects of your religious past have you maintained in your current belief system? What have you discarded, and why?

Which of our UU Principles most resonates with you, and why? Are there any that do not reflect your beliefs and thinking?

What binds us together as a church? Where do we have differences?

1:40 – 1:55 So what? What does this discussion call you to do in your life? (Some groups may want to pair off and discuss this question, then come back together for the final gratitude circle.)

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Four

Theme: Our European Roots

Pre-Reading: *For Faith and Freedom: A Short History of Unitarianism in Europe*, by Charles Howe: Chapter 2, “The Life and Death of Michael Servetus,” Chapter 3, “The Double Life of Michael Servetus,” and Chapter 6, “Francis David and the Rise of Unitarianism in Transylvania”

Questions for Reflection: Are there any beliefs or causes or ideas that you would be willing to die for? Why or why not? What rings true or false to you in reading this book? How does it relate to your own life and to the journey of this group?

Session Four:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“Whom God enlightened by his spirit must not be silent and must not hide the truth.” ~Francis David

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

Background: moving from our personal spiritual journey to the journey of our movement. Why do we bother looking at Unitarian and Universalist history? What made it important for facilitator?

Start with Michael Servetus – look at the time, still in the Inquisition, but also beginning of the Reformation (look at timeline at back of book). What do we know about the Inquisition? People didn't talk, didn't question - but Servetus did. He was brilliant, looked at the New Testament in the original language, questioned the doctrine of the Christian church. He changed the course of the Reformation with his thinking and writing.

What were the turning points in Servetus's life? Seeing the Pope and all the pomp and circumstance surrounding him (p 21). Others?

What were the threads of his thinking that have carried through to our day?

- Religious toleration – UU's today champion religious toleration, always in the forefront of saying that people shouldn't be forced into belief.
- Jesus was a man, not God – what do UU's believe?
- Children are born innocent, should be dedicated but shouldn't be baptized until later. UU's dedicate their children.
- The Holy Spirit lives within us, a spark of the divine within all – a precursor to Transcendentalism.
- Servetus brought his own intellect to bear on religious ideas – believed that his predecessors could be fallible.

What questions do you have about Servetus? How can we find the answers?

Can you think of times in our recent history when people have fought for what they believe in to the extent of putting their lives at risk? E.g., the civil rights movement. What beliefs would you defend with your life?

What does it mean to be Christian? Do you have to believe that Jesus was the son of God?

Reading from hymnal by Francis David - #566

Francis David – inspired King John Sigismund to accept religious toleration (the only Unitarian king in history, and he didn't last long).

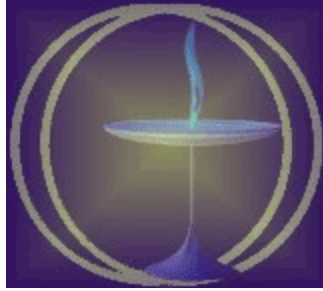
Look at p 99, the Edict of Toleration. But religious thought was frozen in place after King John Sigismund's death, and there was supposed to be no innovation. In Transylvania now, Unitarian churches still celebrate communion, men and women sit on opposite sides, there's a catechism, a bishop, lots that we wouldn't be familiar with. But every Unitarian church says Egy az Isten (God Is One).

Threads from David's thought:

- Preachers should preach their conscience and not an established doctrine (freedom of the pulpit). Ties to Emerson's divinity school address. (p 99)
- David modeled open conversations about religious beliefs, something we still value. "We need not think alike to love alike."
- David held a positive view of humanity, seeing us evolving in the direction of the perfection manifested in Jesus (p 109)

1:40 – 1:55: So what? How does this relate to my spiritual journey? What moments have turned you toward the truth in your own life?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Five

Theme: Universalism in America

Pre-Reading: *Universalism in America: A Documentary History of a Liberal Faith*, edited by Ernest Cassara: Chapter 1: “Two Centuries of Universalism, 1741-1961: A Brief Historical Sketch”

Listen: The John Murray Distinguished Lecture from General Assembly 2006, “Hospitality and Grace” by Rev. Robert Hardies

Questions for Reflection: In what ways do you see Universalism reflected in our church? In your own faith? What rings true or false to you in the readings this week? How do the ideas presented relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Five:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence
Suggested opening words: in *Singing the Living Tradition*, #704 (John Murray – “give them not hell, but hope and courage...”)

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

- In what ways do you see Universalism reflected in your own theology? In our church?
- What is the historical Universalist theology on the afterlife?
- How does this relate to your own theology on the afterlife?
- Read piece on St. Augustine and original sin:

“Augustine especially attacked the group of Christians known as Donatists, who believed that the only true Christians were those people who lived their lives completely free from sin. Augustine argued that no one could possibly be free from sin, because sinfulness is in the very nature of humans. He developed the idea of original sin, saying that all humans are born sinful because all humans are descended from Adam and Eve who committed the first sin.”

Then ask:

- What is the historical Universalist thinking about original sin, free will, and pre-destination?
- What do you believe about these concepts?
- What has been your EXPERIENCE about feeling as if everyday things are occasionally pre-ordained?

(Be sure to differentiate predestination a) about what happens to each person in the afterlife vs. b) pre-destination about everyday events [many New Agers having this kind of belief])

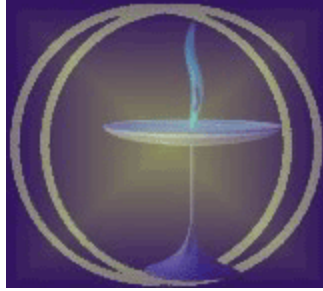
How does Rob Hardies on “Radical Hospitality” demonstrate the Universalist values of love and the “heart” side of our UU faith? How do you/we feel/demonstrate this?

As lead in to pairing off to discuss, “so what?” reference the George Lakoff book, *Don't Think of an Elephant*, especially the introduction (pgs 7 and 12).

http://www.chelseagreen.com/images/DTE_Sampler.pdf

1:40 – 1:55: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Six

Theme: Unitarianism in America

Pre-Reading:

Biography of William Ellery Channing:

<http://www.uua.org/info/origins.html><http://www.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/williamellerychanning.html>

“The Things Most Commonly Believed Among Us” by Rev. William Channing Gannett:

http://www.famousuus.com/writings/things_commonly_believed.htm

Questions for Reflection: In what ways do you see historical Unitarianism reflected in our church? In your own faith? What rings true or false to you from the readings this week? How do the ideas presented relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Six:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

Opening words:

In *Singing the Living Tradition*, read the words of the William Channing Gannett hymn #187, “It Sounds Along the Ages”

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

Background: Why are we talking about Unitarian history? Ours is a living tradition, changing and evolving over time. How do we connect with the ideas and thoughts that have come before? It's important for us to understand what others think, why we are taking this stand, what we are reacting to as we develop our own theologies and belief systems. Growth comes from wrestling with differences.

William Ellery Channing was the first to use the word Unitarian in the US, affirming who we are as a religious people. From the article about Channing, do you get a sense of what he was reacting to in his time? How did Unitarians respond to Calvinism? What made him radical then? Which of his beliefs have carried through to our own principles and purposes?

William Channing Gannett proposed "Things Commonly Believed Among Us" in 1887. Gannett came from a more Western perspective, was closer to Universalism and Transcendentalism. How do you feel about the statements he made? Do they seem radical in today's context? What was he reacting to? Look at several different parts of the statement; e.g., "We hold reason and conscience to be final authorities..." and "We believe that good and evil invariably carry their own recompense..."

Look at Gannett's hymns (#40 and #187 in hymnal). Does it make a difference knowing the background for his writing these words?

Some differences between Universalists and Unitarians: Universalists thought that revelation could come from anyone, that ministers were called from their congregations and didn't need special education. Unitarians were more highly educated, felt that ministers needed lots of education and intellectual capacity (Harvard Divinity School connection). Universalists were more connected with Jesus, felt that God was there for everyone and that you didn't need a minister to intercede for you. Unitarians were trying to let go of the idea of Jesus as savior. Which influences do you see in our church? (How does the culture of the congregation transmit itself over time, even with different ministers?)

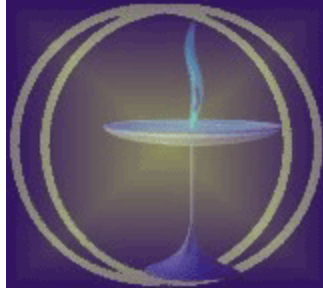
"Thomas Jefferson believed that the ethical system of Jesus was the finest the world has ever seen. In compiling what has come to be called "The Jefferson Bible," he sought to separate those ethical teachings from the religious dogma and other supernatural

elements that are intermixed in the account provided by the four Gospels. He presented these teachings, along with the essential events of the life of Jesus, in one continuous narrative.” (Available online: <http://www.angelfire.com/co/JeffersonBible/>) Jefferson believed that everyone would be Unitarian eventually.

Important to understand how we put our beliefs into practice when we truly respect others, listen to the needs of others. Unitarians and Universalists often took radical positions in social and political thought; e.g., abolition, woman suffrage, war, prohibition, developing public education (Horace Mann), access to health care, reproductive choice, sanitary conditions, the theory of evolution. What was their faith calling them to do then? What does our faith call us to do now? What are some of the issues that we tend to stand together on, and why? (marriage equality, peace, environmental stewardship, separation of church and state, civil rights, anti-death penalty, prison reform) What are the common themes of our faith that call us to action? (the inherent dignity and worth of all people, etc.)

1:40 – 1:55 “So what?” How does this discussion/reading relate to my spiritual journey? To my life in the world? What am I called to do because of it?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Seven (Solstice Ritual)

Theme: Checking In

Pre-Reading: None

Assignment: Bring a favorite poem, reading, food, photograph, or other object to share with the group and think about why it's important to you.

Questions for Reflection: How does your spiritual practice sustain you at this darkest time of the year? How can we support one another in our practice and in our faith? What gifts do we share with one another?

Session Seven:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting. Introduce time of silence with: “In the comforting power of silence”

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion and sharing:

What sustains you in times of darkness? What does darkness mean to you? What works, what doesn't? What beliefs hold true for you, especially in this darkest time of the year?

What favorite poem, food, reading have you brought to share with the group, and why?

Solstice Ritual:

- Turn off all lights, keeping one candle lit.
- Read Rebecca Ann Parker's "Winter Solstice"

At
 this winter's
 turning
 of the year
 let us go gently
 - for once - into the night,
 its dream-drenched,
 glittering stillness
 a haven for our souls.

There
 is something
 beyond the dull
 brightness of mid-day,
 fluorescent and buzzing.
 Something to praise
 beyond the sun,
 triumphing over the intricacies
 of shadowed moonlight.

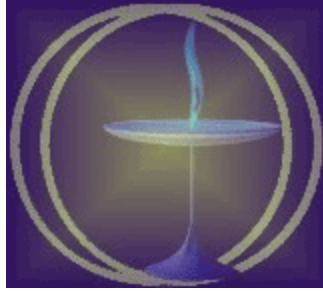
Bring
 in the old,
 beautiful realm
 of Holy Night,
 echoing with ancient voices,
 rustling with intimacy's passion
 luminous with stars.

Cradled in darkness,
 be restored
 to the embrace of mystery.
 Glory wakes here.

Let it kindle
 your joy.

- Listen to music in the darkness.
- Each person lights a candle, speaks about what the darkness has taught her. Hold one another in loving silence as you listen.
- Closing music.

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Eight

Theme: Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism

Pre-Reading: *Buddhism Without Beliefs* by Stephen Batchelor
or
It's Easier Than You Think, by Sylvia Boorstein

Article in *UU World*: <http://www.uuworld.org/life/articles/23523.shtml>

Questions for Reflection: What similarities do you see between Buddhism and Unitarian Universalism? What major differences? How does the spiritual path outlined in this book challenge and support your own journey?

Session Eight:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“The way of the Buddha is to know yourself;
To know yourself is to forget yourself;
To forget yourself is to be awakened by all things.”

---Dogen

Genjo Koan quoted in *Buddhism Without Beliefs* by Stephen Batchelor, p 91

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

How does this reading inform your spiritual practice? What does it add to yours? What struck you most strongly? What did you find challenging?

Many UU's have drawn ideas from Buddhism. Look at UUWorld article

Basic precepts from workshop at 2006 General Assembly:

1. Stuff happens
2. Things change
3. Don't take it personally – you're not the center of the universe.
4. We suffer because we imagine that we're separate, different.

If reading *Buddhism Without Beliefs*: Batchelor says dharma practice is a course of action, not a belief system. UU's often use the expression "deeds, not creeds." What does this mean to you?

On p 29, he offers a meditation: *Since death alone is certain and the time of death uncertain, what should I do?* Have you tried this? What do you think about it?

On p 34, he writes: "Religions are united not by belief in God but by belief in life after death." What do you think about this idea?

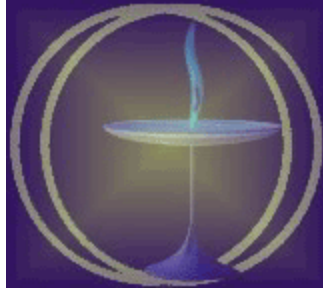
Does Batchelor's description of meditation in the chapter on Awareness help you? Are there other resources, images, practices that help you that you can share with the group?

On p 79, he writes, "I am who I am not because of an essential self .. but because of the unprecedented and unrepeatable matrix of conditions that have formed me." How does this compare with what Parker Palmer says about the soul? With what you think about your soul/ your self?

In the chapter on Compassion, he says we are free to choose how to perceive the world and offers a meditation to help see an enemy, a friend, and a stranger. Can we cultivate compassion? How have you cultivated compassion for challenging people in your life? What does it call you to do?

1:40 – 1:55: Pair off and talk about the big question: "So What?" How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Nine

Theme: Transcendentalism

Pre-Reading:

“Out From Walden,” Sermon by Rev. Dr. Patrick T. O’Neill
http://www.uua.org/ga/ga05/2124_sermon.html

Walden – “Where I Lived and What I Lived For,” by Henry David Thoreau
<http://eserver.org/thoreau/walden02.html>

Biography of Ralph Waldo Emerson
<http://www.uua.org/uuhs/duub/articles/ralphwaldoemerson.html>

“American Transcendentalism,” by Ian Frederick Finseth
<http://eserver.org/thoreau/amertran.html>

”Henry David Thoreau: Who He Was and Why He Matters,” by Randall Conrad
<http://eserver.org/thoreau/whowhy.html>

Questions for Reflection: What similarities do you see between Transcendentalism and your own faith? What rings true or false to you in these readings? How do they relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Nine:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“Going to Walden,” by Mary Oliver

It isn't very far as highways lie.
I might be back by nightfall, having seen
The rough pines, and the stones, and the clear water.
Friends argue that I might be wiser for it.
They do not hear that far-off Yankee whisper:
How dull we grow from hurrying here and there!

Many have gone, and think me half a fool
To miss a day away in the cool country.
Maybe. But in a book I read and cherish,
Going to Walden is not so easy a thing
As a green visit. It is the slow and difficult
Trick of living, and finding it where you are.

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

Context: Early/mid 1800's, pre-civil war, a time of great social change in US. Transition from agrarian to industrial society, advance of technology and rise of consumerism. Abolitionist movement, woman suffrage (1848 convention).

Transcendentalism arose in reaction to the intellectualism of Unitarianism, which was dominant religion in Boston in early 1800's. It was a movement away from the intellectual to the belief that intuition was important. Never a real movement because it was so individual, solitary nature of contemplating the soul. Main leaders were Emerson, Thoreau, Margaret Fuller, Bronson Alcott, others. Emerson and Thoreau challenged Unitarian ideas, weren't embraced by the denomination until much later.

Underlying ideology: “the quest for personal development and satisfying social relationships and for a society that will make that development possible.” (Robinson , 86) Many Transcendentalists believed that “the deepest religious and moral truths – the existence of God, the difference between right and wrong – could only be known intuitively, by faculties that transcend the senses.

Hence the term transcendentalism. (*Thoreau as Spiritual Guide*, 13) They criticized contemporary America for its uniformity.

The dictionary definition of “transcendental” – 1) concerned with the a priori (based on theory rather than experience) or intuitive basis of knowledge as independent of experience. 2) asserting a fundamental irrationality or supernatural element in experience. Definition of “transcendent” - lying beyond the ordinary range of perception.

Questions: “American Transcendentalism,” by Ian Frederick Finseth (article in handout), places this movement in the context of Unitarianism, which stressed ethical conduct and the ability of the intellect to understand what that was. Unitarians believed that individuals could discover the nature of the universe and God’s laws through empirical investigation or reason. In Emerson’s Divinity School Address, he talked about bringing individual experience and emotion back into the church – that one doesn’t need a priest to stand between oneself and God.

The article talks about Transcendentalists yearning for more spiritual experience – “one’s inner striving toward spiritual communion with the divine spirit. From this wellspring of belief would flow all the rest of their religious philosophy.” (p23 in handout) The heresy of the Transcendentalists was believing in the potential of the human mind to commune with God, a God who is present in all nature.

“The Silent,” by Jones Very

‘Tis all unheard; that Silent Voice,
whose goings forth unknown to all,
Bids bending reed and bird rejoice,
And fills with music Nature’s hall.

And in the speechless human heart
It speaks, where’er man’s feet have trod;
Beyond the lips’ deceitful art,
To tell of Him, the Unseen God.

Does this sound like heresy to you today? Does the Unitarian church support your quest for spiritual growth? What do you think about the Transcendentalists’ belief that God is present in all nature? That we have the ability to connect directly with God?

Self-Culture Transcendentalism was a “self-culture” movement, cultivating the individual soul. Margaret Fuller wrote in her memoirs about the concept of self-culture. “Very early on I knew that the only object in life was to grow. I was often false to this knowledge, in idolatries of particular objects, or impatient longings for happiness, but I have never lost sight of it, have always been controlled by it, and this first gift of love has never been superceded by a later.”

Do you agree that growth is the object of life? How do you grow? Is it something you prepare yourself for, something you make happen? What will you do to cultivate your soul after Wellspring? Where do you struggle with the balance between your personal inner growth and your desire to make the world better? How do you use your intuition to guide you in that struggle?

Thoreau In the excerpt from Thoreau’s *Walden*, what appealed to you? Did you find any input for your own spiritual practice? Transcendentalists engaged primarily in five different spiritual practices: reading, writing, conversation, contemplation, and walking. Characteristics of Transcendentalist spirituality include beliefs that each moment is precious and it is up to us to make the most of each; the greatest challenge of life is to wake up before we die and that this striving to wake up is the essence of religion. Does this connect for you to the readings in Buddhism, where one main goal of living is waking up?

Have you ever had a “Walden” experience? Can you tell us about it, and about what made it “transcendental?” What would that look like for you now?

If we need society for our individual self-fulfillment, and if society can be toxic in terms of squashing our creativity and originality and our inner natures, how do we balance that dilemma? Do we know people who have done it well? How have they done it?

Emerson Emerson wrote about self-reliance, which he took to mean listening to “the still small voice of God within” instead of looking to institutions for the answers. He believed in the full development of the latent divinity in each individual. He also believed in self-mastery, especially of our passions and temper. He was criticized for his doctrine being “over-optimistic, lacking any sense of irony, and without a doctrine of evil.”

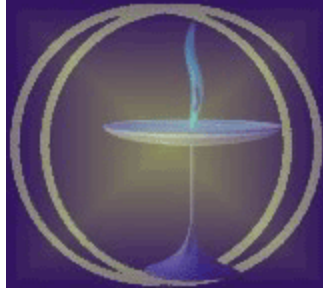
How do you respond to his writing? Why do you think he has always been so popular? There was a renewal of interest in Emerson and Thoreau during the 60’s – any idea why?

O'Neill In his sermon, O'Neill chastises UU's for too much self-culture and not enough social justice work. What do you think? What does our church call us to do? Is it fair to make this an either/or question, or would it be more helpful to strive continually to strike a balance and understand how our personal spiritual practice and our social activism support one another?

Social Action Both Emerson and Thoreau ended up in the anti-slavery movement because they believed that every person had a right to cultivate their own soul. What do your beliefs call you to do?

1:40 – 1:55: Pair off and talk about the big question: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? What am I called to do in the world? How does this discussion relate to my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Ten

Theme: Humanism

Pre-Reading:

“Toward a Humanist Language of Reverence” by Rev. Dr. David Bumbaugh
<http://www.uua.org/news/2003/vocabulary/bumbaugh.html>

Humanist Manifesto I, 1933
<http://www.americanhumanist.org/humanism/manifesto1.php>

Humanist Manifesto II, 1973
<http://www.americanhumanist.org/about/manifesto2.php>

Humanist Manifesto III, 2003
<http://www.americanhumanist.org/3/HumandItsAspirations.php>

For a deeper understanding of humanism, here are some links to additional sermons and articles:

“Humanism: A Humble Responsibility” by Rev. Paige Getty, February 5, 2006
http://www.uucolumbia.net/files/sermon20060205_humanism.pdf

“Salvation and the Sacred” by Rev. Jen Crow, July 24th, 2005
<http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/2004-05/20050724.html>

“The Faith of a UU Humanist” by Rev. Sarah Oelberg
<http://www.uua.org/pamphlet/3013.html>

Questions for Reflection: What similarities do you see between the humanist theology described and your own faith? What rings true or false to you in these readings? How do they relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group? Choose one or two passages from the readings that especially spoke to you.

Session Ten:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

Excerpt from reading: "My Easy God is Gone," James Kavanaugh

I have lost my easy God - the one whose name
I knew since childhood.
I knew his temper, his sullen outrage, his
ritual forgiveness.
I knew the strength of his arm, the sound
of his insistent voice.
His beard bristling, his lips, full and red
with moisture at the moustache,
His eyes clear and piercing, too blue
to understand all,
His face too unwrinkled to feel my
child's pain.
He was a good God - so he told me -
a long suffering and manageable one.
I knelt at his feet and kissed them,
I felt the smooth countenance of his forgiveness...

Now he is gone - my easy, stuffy God - God,
the father-master, the mother-whiner...
Now the world is mine with all its pain and
warmth, with its every color and sound;
The setting sun is my priest with the ocean
for its altar.
The rising sun redeems me with the rolling
waves warmed in its arms.
A dog barks and I weep to be alive, a
cat studies me and my joy is boundless.
I lie in the grass and boy-like, search the sky.
The clouds do not turn to angels, the winds
Do not whisper of heaven or hell.

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

Humanism Readings

Go around the circle and have each person read the selection they chose from the Humanism readings, without comment.

Questions:

Why did you choose the reading you did?

Are there common threads running through the readings we chose as a group? What are they?

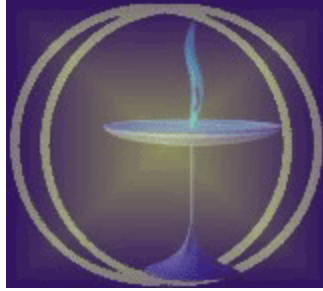
Do you see common threads to the previous sessions? What are they?

What was your reaction to the manifestos? Are there parts that you agree with? Disagree with? Why?

How do you see humanism manifesting itself in the life of our church?

1:40 – 1:55: Pair off and talk about the big question: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Eleven

Theme: Science and Religion

Pre-Reading:

“Darwin’s God,” from the New York Times Sunday magazine, March 4, 2007
<http://www.nytimes.com/2007/03/04/magazine/04evolution.t.html?ei=5090&en=43cfb46824423cea&ex=1330664400>

“Is Science a Religion?” by Richard Dawkins
<http://www.thehumanist.org/humanist/articles/dawkins.html>

“The Ultimate Canvass,” by Gary Kowalski in the UU World
<http://www.uuworld.org/2003/04/feature3.html>

Film: (optional) “What the Bleep Do We Know?”

Questions for Reflection: What role do the insights of science play in your faith? What rings true or false to you from our readings this week? How do these ideas relate to your own spiritual journey and to the journey of this group?

Session Eleven:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

Suggested reading: From a letter by Albert Einstein to a child in the sixth grade who asked whether scientists pray, and if so what they pray for. (January 24, 1936)

... every one who is seriously involved in the pursuit of science becomes convinced that a spirit is manifest in the laws of the Universe — spirit vastly superior to that of man, and one in the face of which we with our modest powers must feel humble. In this way the pursuit of science leads to a religious feeling of a special sort,

which is indeed quite different from the religiosity of someone more naive.

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

What in the readings did you find particularly meaningful? Was there anything that you disagree with? Can you tell us why?

What role do the insights of science play in your faith? Did the readings change the way you think about science and/or religion?

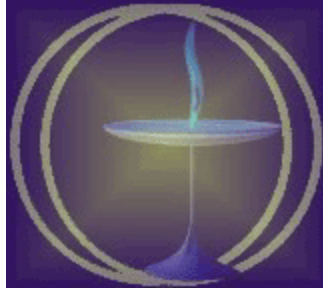
Do you need to be able to prove something in order to believe it? Think of a belief you hold – something as seemingly simple as the belief that you'll arrive home safely or a complex belief in God - can you rationally or reasonably test your beliefs? How important is that? Is it enough for a belief to be useful in your life?

What do you think about the statement, "What I believe matters everything and nothing." What does this statement mean to you?

How do these ideas relate to your own spiritual journey and to the journey of this group?

1:40 – 1:55: Pair off and talk about the big question: "So What?" How does this relate to my spiritual journey? What does it call me to do in the world? How does it relate to my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Twelve

Theme: Process Theology

Pre-Reading: “Wholly, Holy, Holey” – A Sermon on Process Theology by Rev. Jen Crow <http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/2004-05/20050717.html>

Listen to CD: “Reminiscences of Process Theologian, Charles Hartshorne” – by Rev. Dr. Rebecca Parker, especially tracks 3-8

Questions for Reflection: What similarities and differences do you see between the ideas of process theology and your own faith? What rings true or false to you in these readings? How do they relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Twelve:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“A Theology Adequate for the Night,” by Nancy Shaffer

Not God as unmoved mover:
One who set the earth in motion
and withdrew. Not the One to thank
when those cherished do not die –
for providence includes equally
power to harm. Not a God of exactings,
as if love could be earned or subtracted.

But – this may work in the night:
Something that breathes with us, as others
sleep; something that breathes also
those sleeping, so no one is alone.
Something that is the beginning of love,
and also each part of how love is completed.

Something so large, wherever we are,
we are not separate, which teaches again
the way to start over.

Night is the test, when grief lies uncovered,
and longing shows clear, when nothing we do
can hasten earth's turning or delay it.

This may be adequate for the night,
this holding: something that steadfastly breathes us,
which we also are learning to breathe.

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

As we discuss process theology, keep in mind that we'll be writing our own beliefs later on in Wellspring. Suggest that participants start writing down their theology. After this session, the focus of our program shifts and we begin talking about how these beliefs apply in our lives.

Main points of process theology: God is changeable, doesn't know what's happening next. God is more like a tree than a rock, growing, changing, impacted by the world. God can help us transform as we cannot transform ourselves. Inherent worth exists in all things, not just human beings. Human beings contain both good and evil. God acts as a "lure" toward the good. God does not and cannot control the unfolding of the world or of individual actions. God is not all-powerful, all-knowing, all-good. Rather, God can act only as a lure = we are agents in the co-creation of the world. God does not know the future, but experiences it as we do. Some see process theology as an attempt to preserve "God" in some meaningful way. God is created in the relationship, in the creative interchange.

What similarities and differences do you see between the ideas of process theology and your own faith?

Do you see common threads to the previous sessions? What are they?

What rings true or false to you in these readings?

How do they relate to your own life and to the journey of this group?

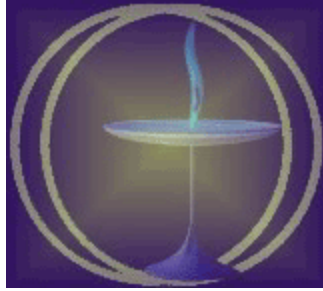
How does process theology relate to your own idea of God?

What metaphors can you use to describe this philosophical concept?

What in the readings particularly resonated with you? Challenged you?

1:40 – 1:55: “So what?” What are you called to do by what we have talked about tonight? How do we create the conditions that encourage creative interchange, allow space for God in our relationships?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Thirteen

Theme: Unitarian Universalist Perspectives on Evil

Pre-Reading: “What Torture’s Taught Me” by Rev. Dr. William Schulz, former UUA President and Executive Director of Amnesty International:

<http://www.meadville.edu/Lectures/Torture.pdf>

“Understanding Evil in Islam, Buddhism, and Unitarian Universalism,” by Rev. Jen Crow

Questions for Reflection: How do you define evil? How does your Unitarian Universalist faith help you to understand and respond to evil in the world? What in the readings rang true for you? What did you disagree with? How do the ideas presented in the readings relate to your own life and to the journey of this group?

Session Thirteen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“An Earthly Beauty,” by Jane Hirshfield

Others have described
the metal bull placed over fire
it singing while the man inside it died.
Which emperor listened, in which country,
doesn't matter, though surely
the thing itself was built by slaves.
An unearthly music, all reports agree.
We – the civilized – hearing this story,
recoil from it in horror: Not us. Not ours.
But why does my heart look back at me,
reproachful? Why does the bull?

from *Poems to Live By in Uncertain Times*, edited by Joan Murray

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

Recalling our original discussion of theology, why are we talking about evil? What is your definition of evil?

What in the readings particularly resonated with you? Challenged you?

Schultz's article appeared in the UU World and several readers responded about the inherent worth and dignity of every individual. What do you think about this important UU principle in light of your understanding of evil?

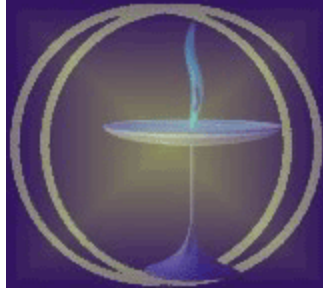
Is there a seductive power of evil? Stanley Milgram's experiment discovered that people were willing to administer heavy doses of electric shock when told to do so by an authority figure who assumed responsibility. What kinds of situations might pull someone into evil behavior? Have you ever been in that situation?

Thinking about Schulz's experience as a child with his dog, tell us about a time when you might have slid toward evil yourself. What brought you back? What's the role of the church and of society in keeping us from acting in evil ways? (Joy's story of a man who was beating his wife, stopped the behavior when confronted by neighbors who could hear what was going on and told him "We don't do that here.") When do you confront evil behavior? What's our responsibility as a church? Many churches now face the question of how (and whether or not) to integrate known sex-offenders into their congregation. Should the church be open to all people? Why or why not?

How are we to behave toward people who have committed evil acts? Do prisoners who have committed horrible crimes, for instance, have the right to humane treatment in prison? Do they have the right to exercise machines, television, education?

1:40 – 1:55: "So what?" What are you called to do by what we have talked about tonight? How do we respond to evil in our lives? In our world?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Fourteen

Theme: Unitarian Universalism and the Crises of Life

Pre-Reading: None

Questions for Reflection: How has your faith supported you during the crises in your life? Bring something (poem, music, writing, etc.) with you to the group meeting that represents the support you've received from your faith.

Session Fourteen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

From "The Anxiety Pro," by Kimberly French *UU World* Spring '07

John Dacey, a lay minister in Lexington MA, is a believer in the power of amulets such as prayer beads, a lucky charm, or an object given personal meaning. When his granddaughter was five, she developed a strong fear of thunderstorms. Dacey gave her a brass medallion she knew was important to him and invited the family to a ceremony to bless it and each say a prayer for her courage. She used the medallion through the next few storms. After that, she knew her family wanted her to know she was safe and [she] no longer needed it.

0:10 – 0:40 0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

There are no specific reading requirements. But there is pre-work. Think about how your faith has supported you during the crises in your life. Bring something (poem, music, writing, etc.) with you to the group meeting that represents the support you've received from your faith. What do you turn to? Be willing to be in touch with the illogical, deeply rooted part of yourself. Another way to think about this is imagine you are being rushed to the hospital in an ambulance and it's not clear if you will survive or not. What words, images, childhood prayer, music, person, etc. would come to you at this time? What would sustain you? Look through books that are meaningful to you, put on music that touches you deeply, or look around your home for what anchors you in a crisis.

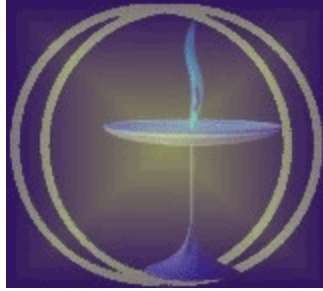
Mentally divide the hour by the number of participants. Ask each person to share what he/she brought and to take about x minutes to describe how and why it helps them through life crises. Remind participants this is frequently at odds with our rational sides, but can nonetheless be powerful and anchoring. Also remind participants of Parker Palmer's method of creating a circle of care by not judging what others share. More than most sessions, if you have any "in the head" participants, you may need to coax them to share at a deeper level.

Re-read the pre-work and possibly the opening reading to set the tone.

Once everyone shares, if there is enough time, ask people to comment on what themes they noticed about how UUs manage the crises of life. Do they see any contrasts to how other faith groups manage their crises?

1:40 – 1:55: "So what?" What are you called to do by what we have talked about tonight? How will you support yourself and others during the crises of life?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Fifteen

Theme: Voices of Our Heritage and Old Beliefs

Pre-Reading: Selections from our church's history website:

<http://www.luminguild.com/heritage.htm>

“Voices From Our Heritage”

<http://www.rochesterunitarian.org/2004-05/20050313.html>

Pre-Work: Ironically, sometimes we get clearer by identifying what we DON'T believe. Perhaps that is how many of you first arrived at this church. We would like you to look again at the theology discussion we handed out in Session Three and identify three things you no longer believe that relate to the significant areas of theology, such as the nature of death and the afterlife, the existence of a purposeful God, why we are here, etc.

Questions for Reflection: How do you see our congregation's history reflected in our present day existence? Are there aspects of our history that you find inspiring or discouraging? What rang true or false to you in these readings? How do they relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Fifteen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

Suggested reading (from Richard S. Gilbert's final sermon in 2002)

“We are sparks of that divine impulse at the center of things come to life. We are bits of star fire passing on the torch to those who follow. We are beacons of brief fire between the portals of life and death. Like shooting stars we flash across the dark sky giving light for a time, and then are no more. What are we to make of this wonder while it is ours?”

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

Voices of Our Heritage:

What surprised you or pleased you about the history of our church?

How does reading about our heritage help you feel more identified with our UU traditions?

What do the readings and the website cause you to want to act upon as a member of this church?

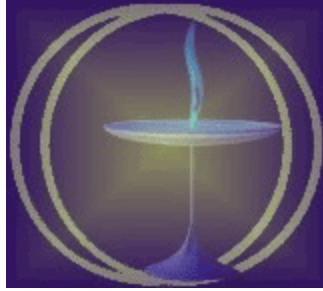
Old Beliefs:

Pre-work reminder: Sometimes we get clearer by identifying what we DON'T believe. Perhaps that is how many of you first arrived at this church. We would like you to look again at the theology discussion we handed out during Session Three and identify three things you no longer believe that relate to the significant areas of theology, such as the nature of death and the afterlife, the existence of a purposeful God, why we are here, etc.

Ask participants to share their three. If you have a shy group, share one or two of your own. If time is short, ask people to share without commentary and then, as time allows, open it up for discussion of themes, similarities, differences, etc. If you allow discussion as each person shares, be mindful of time so all get a chance to speak.

1:40 – 1:55: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Sixteen

Theme: Revisiting our theological common ground

Pre-Reading: UUA Principles and Purposes:
<http://www.uua.org/visitors/6798.shtml>

Jen Crow's chapter from "Reverend X" (new publication)

Commission on Appraisal Report: Engaging Our Theological Diversity
(2006) Read at least these two sections:

Chapter on "Culture: Who Are We?" (pp 31 – 42)

Appendix on "Agreements and Tensions" (p 155 ff)

<http://www25.uua.org/coa/TheoDiversity/EngagingOurTheoDiversity.pdf>

Questions for Reflection: Where do we find unity in our theological diversity?
Where are we more similar than different?

Session Sixteen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

The Center by Lao-tsu

We join spokes together in a wheel,
but it is the center hole
that makes the wagon move.

We shape clay into a pot,
but it is the emptiness inside
that holds whatever we want.

We hammer wood for a house,
but it is the inner space
that makes it livable

We work with being,
but non-being is what we use

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

“The Parker Question” from “Tools for Theological Conversation,” p 168 in *Commission on Appraisal Report: Engaging Our Theological Diversity* (2006): “What features of UU-ism, if they were taken away, would leave something that is no longer recognizably Unitarian Universalism?”

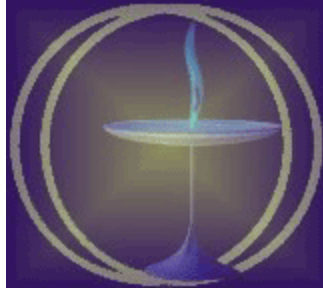
What did you agree with or disagree with in the Statement of Agreements and Tensions from 2004?

How well do you fit the Psychological Profile? Does it ring true for you about other UUs?

Which of our UU Principles most resonates with you and why? Are there any that do not reflect your beliefs and thinking?

1:40 – 1:55: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Seventeen

Theme: Into Action

Pre-Reading: *The Prophetic Imperative: Social Gospel in Theory and Practice* by Rev. Richard Gilbert, chapters 2,5, and 8

Questions for Reflection: What is the prophetic imperative for Unitarian Universalists? How might this understanding of a prophetic imperative impact your ministry in the world? What rings true or false to you in reading this book? How does it relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Seventeen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“And what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your god?” (Micah)

0:10 – 0:40 0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

In the forward, Gilbert says, “When spirituality is only about the inner life and does not involve concern for others – especially for the most vulnerable among us – then there is a need to ask if this is truly an authentic form of religious living.” What do you think about this statement? What does the religious life mean to you?

Reread the opening reading from Micah. What does “justice” mean to you? How does the book inform your understanding of what this phrase means?

What is the role of the church in terms of social justice? Go back to the sermon about Thoreau, which was addressed to ministers: what are we called to do as a congregation? Think about the covenant in the congregation: when do we act for the good of the group and when for the individual’s needs?

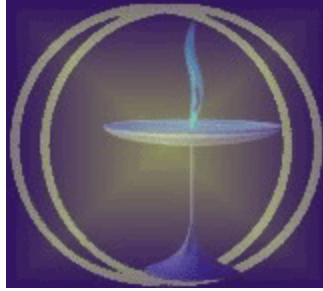
Can we be religious people in isolation from others? Mary Oliver’s poem, “The Place I Want to Get Back To,” (in *Thirst*, © 2006) expresses a different sense of what it means to be spiritual. Is this enough, according to Gilbert? According to you?

What does it mean to be a spiritual person? How does social justice work fit into that concept? Are there other ways of expressing your commitment to social justice (e.g., family, church)?

How do we balance our personal spiritual growth with our commitment to justice? How does the church help us with this?

1:40 – 1:55: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Eighteen

Theme: Practical Theology: Putting Our Beliefs Into Action in Our Lives

Pre-Reading: *Let Your Life Speak*, by Parker Palmer

Questions for Reflection: Who do your beliefs call you to be in the world, and what do they call you to do? What rings true or false to you in reading this book? How does it relate to your own life, and to the journey of this group?

Session Eighteen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening words, silence

“Ask not what the world needs. Ask what makes you come alive ... then go do it. Because what the world needs is people who have come alive.”

- Howard Thurman

0:10 – 0:40 Check in

- What are you carrying in your heart tonight?
- How is your spiritual practice going?
- Your work with your spiritual director?

0:40 – 1:40 Discussion

What was your response to this book? What rings true or false to you? Were there sections that felt especially meaningful? Could you share them with us and tell why they were important to you?

Read aloud the passage from *A Hidden Wholeness* on pp 92-93, about “third things.” Remind people to listen, hold one another’s thoughts in silence for a moment before speaking. Then give each participant a copy of the William Stafford poem on page 1. Read

through together, having each participant read 2 – 3 lines, so that we can hear the poem in a variety of voices. Ask, “What is this poem about for you? How does it intersect with your life at this moment? Is there a phrase or a line that speaks directly to you?”

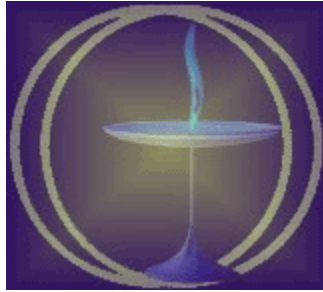
What does Palmer mean by “vocation?” Have you ever experienced this gift of being called to do something? Can you tell us about it?

How does your vocation connect with your spiritual journey? What does a grounded life mean to you?

On p. 73, Palmer says, “Go far enough on the inner journey, [the great wisdom traditions] all tell us – go past ego toward true self – and you end up not lost in narcissism but returning to the world, bearing more gracefully the responsibilities that come with being human.” What human responsibilities have you discovered on your spiritual journey?

1:40 – 1:55: “So What?” How does this relate to my spiritual journey? To what I am called to do in the world? To my own personal theology?

1:55 – 2:00 Gratitude and farewell



Wellspring: Spiritual Deepening for Unitarian Universalists Session Nineteen

Theme: Celebration and Reflection

Note: This final session should take whatever form feels right for the group. It may include a shared meal, gifts, music, poetry, laughter. It may take more than the normal two-hour meeting, depending on the size of the group and the activities chosen.

Questions for Reflection: Using whatever medium works best for you (art, music, poetry, written or verbal presentation, etc) prepare a brief presentation for the group that articulates your theology and identifies who these beliefs call you to be in the world and what they call you to do.

Session Nineteen:

0:00 – 0:10 Chalice lighting, opening silence

0:10 – 2:30 Presentations: Remind group that presentations should be honored with silence and listening, that if the presenter wishes, there may be a time for questions that help understand what's been presented, not challenging the beliefs that have been presented.

Allow each person 10 – 15 minutes to present, in whatever form they choose, the articulation of their theology and what those beliefs call them to do in the world. Allow time for questions if the presenter agrees.

2:30 – 2:45 Gratitude exercise: facilitator provides cards with sayings, allows participants to choose one, put their name on it. Pass cards around so that each member of group can write a statement of gratitude for that person, a remembrance to carry away.

2:45 – 3:00: Final circle: What has Wellspring meant to you? What will you carry with you after we're done with this small group? Farewell.