



Living the Life of a Seeker

Small Groups: July/August 2014

With some frequency I am asked, “How can Unitarian Universalism be a religion if you don’t have beliefs, if you don’t have a doctrine? How can you be a religion and yet welcome beliefs and wisdom from all different religious traditions?” One answer I give is that at its heart Unitarian Universalism is a particular approach to religion and religious questions. No, we don’t have a creed, or a list of beliefs. I cannot tell you what Unitarian Universalists believe about God, or Heaven, or the problem of evil. There is a diversity of beliefs and perspectives among us. But what we share is a way of looking at religion, at life and the nature of things with openness and curiosity. We can think of Unitarian Universalism as an open-source faith, a religious perspective that welcomes ideas, wisdom and challenges from many sources, including other religious traditions, the discoveries of science, and even the changing dynamics of our world.

When I was first considering the ministry, I visited the minister of my home congregation. I was afraid and uncertain about this “call” I felt and I wanted to see what he thought. We talked for a long time and at one point I asked him whether he believed in God. He said, “I see myself as always seeking God.” I liked his answer. It allows for uncertainty, for non-belief, but it also has within it a willingness to adventure into the mystery of things we may never understand fully. It meant I could be a minister without believing in God and it was exciting to think about religion and ministry as a journey of discovery, seeking greater understanding and wisdom, even if our whole lives we remain seekers.

Throughout the month of July and August, we will explore what it means to live the life of a Seeker. Seeking is a theme very close to the heart of Unitarian Universalism. We call our faith, “The Living Tradition” because we know it changes. It’s not stagnant, it is not defined by static beliefs. It is, at least at its best, responsive to life, responsive to new discoveries, flexible, malleable, always seeking to remain relevant to the context of our world and the longings of our spirits.

As Unitarian Universalists, I suspect most of us see ourselves as seekers. It is how many of us found our way to a UU congregation. The nature of our particular way of approaching life and religion is to remain curious, always looking for greater insight, for deeper understandings, for wisdom that we can gain from reading and learning, from listening to the stories of others, from ancient wisdom scripture and our own experience. For us, the journey is often more important than the destination, and keeping an open heart and mind along the journey, remaining open to new opportunities and ways to see the questions as well as understand the answers is the way we approach the journey.

May our hearts and minds always remain open. May we remain curious. These are keys to ensuring that our lives lead us to grow in wisdom, in depth and in meaning.

In gratitude for the ways we share the journey,

Rev. Susan



Living the Theme: Living the Life of a Seeker

Use these exercises to reflect on how you experience seeking and what living the life of a seeker might mean to you. Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience welcome and what you learned from the practice.

Our theme spans both July and August, so these exercises are a bit more open ended. Be flexible with them, follow your heart – the heart of a seeker – in trying out one or both of them for the summer.

1. **TRY SOMETHING NEW:** Seek out something new this summer. Try something you haven't done before. Do something you would not normally do. Take some time to get outside your comfort zone.
Have fun with this exercise. Read a book from an author you've never read before, or think you wouldn't like. Try out mysteries, or Harry Potter, or even a book from an author that doesn't share your politics. Try it out with openness and curiosity; suspend judgment and go for it. Or try out an activity you've never done, or haven't done in a long time. For example, pick up a new game with friends, try ice skating, do something with a friend or partner or spouse that they like to do that you think you wouldn't like. (At General Assembly, I am going to be rappelling off the Providence Convention Center. I've never done anything like that before.) If there is something that you can't figure out why anyone could possibly enjoy it (some style of music, or food, or activity), try it – and try to be open hearted as you try it.

What is trying something new like for you? Is it difficult to do something you are not great at? Was it scary, thrilling, fun or annoying? Did you gain a new perspective or insight into yourself, your comfort zone, by trying something new?

2. **MAKE ROOM FOR DISCERNMENT:** There are times in all of our lives when we feel something moving in our hearts, some change or deep question arising for us. If you are in a time of discernment, invite a deeper level of seeking and reflection this summer. You may be seeking a future path for yourself, seeking an answer to a question about how we want our life to be, contemplating some kind of change. The Rev. Laurel Hallman, in *Living By Heart*, suggests drawing a picture (stick figures will do) of a person from the other end of a winding road waving back to you from your future. Write word "bubbles" over your head and that of your future self. Imagine what your future self might be saying (or asking) to you, and what you might be saying or asking your future self. Use this exercise a few times over the summer (even if you don't do the drawing). Open your heart to a conversation you might have between yourself today and your future self.

Discernment usually doesn't end with some clear resolution, but sometimes the time we spend in this type of reflection can keep us open to listening for how our heart is leading us. Bring to your group some of what you have imagined in this conversation with your future self; what insight does it offer to where you are in the present?



3. **GET LOST ON PURPOSE:** Take the long days of summer as an opportunity to allow yourself to literally or metaphorically get lost. Open yourself to possibilities, adventure, new things. This activity comes from members at the First Unitarian Church of Rochester, NY.

Getting lost can be frightening for any of us. Knowing where we are and where we're going is expected of adults. We stick to well-worn paths so we don't risk feeling out of control. It gives us a sense of security. We spend a lot of time planning our life so we don't get lost, and our technology has made it all but impossible with GPS and Smart Phones.

But this summer we encourage you to shift focus and consider the positive ways of getting lost, such as getting lost in a good book, aimlessly taking a summer stroll on the beach, getting lost in someone's eyes, or your memories. Get lost in your garden, or go fishing; play in the sand with your child, race through the waves with your dog.

Getting lost suspends time, allows the ordinary demands of life to be put on "pause" while your heart and soul delve deep into a singular experience. When we allow ourselves to get lost, serendipitous insights arise, we meet unexpected people and we discover unanticipated things about ourselves and our relationships and our world. So take time this summer to get lost, however you like. Pay attention to how things change for you, notice with interest how you respond to the experience.



Some Questions to Think and Talk About

As always, don't treat these questions as "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and find one that "hooks" you most. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your small group prepared to share that journey with the group.

1. Leo Buscaglia says, "*Life is a great and wondrous mystery, and the only thing we know that we have for sure is what is right here and right now. Don't miss it.*" **One piece of seeking is asking ourselves, what do we have right here and right now, for sure, that we do not want to miss? Before you seek afar, what are the things that you have right now that you love, that are good?**
2. **Do you have any great memories of seeking and finding, of adventures that taught you important life lessons, of mistakes that led to good outcomes?**
3. **What is the most interesting place you have ever been, or the most interesting experience you've ever had? Where was it and what made it so interesting?** Take a little time with this question. Maybe it isn't the most faraway place (maybe it is). Sometimes our most interesting experiences happen close to home.
4. One of our Small Group Facilitators said that as she nears the end of her life, she doesn't feel as much like a seeker, at least she doesn't seek out answers to questions like the "why" of life with as much eagerness as when she was young. **Are there answers you have found to questions you used to seek after? What are some of the truths you have come to understand for yourself that may mean you no longer need to seek?**
5. **What questions about life, the meaning of life, the nature of reality, or even questions just for your own life are you currently seeking out answers? Are you in a time of discernment?**
6. **As you've become older, does seeking play a larger or smaller role in your life? And would you say your sense of "seeking" has gotten more spiritual or less so?**
7. **Are you more curious about seeking an inward journey, to understand yourself better, or an outward journey to understand others, or the world or nature better? Has this changed over time?**
8. **Has curiosity or seeking every led you astray? Is there a shadow side to seeking, a compulsive side, or one that is the opposite of acceptance? Have you experienced a shadow side of seeking?**
9. **Have you had times when you felt lost? What was most helpful to you in those times? Has discernment helped you in times of feeling lost and what was that (your discernment) like?**
10. **Have you ever felt the mystic quality of a seeker?** The Sufi mystic poet, Jelaladdin Rumi speaks a lot of the spiritual kind of seeking. Have you ever felt or delved into this kind of seeking? What was it like? What insight did you gain?
11. **When you come to UUCP, or to your small group, do you come seeking anything in particular? Do you arrive hoping for something in particular? What do you find?**



Recommended Resources

These are **not** required reading. We will not dissect these pieces in our group. They are simply meant to get your thinking started and offer different ways to see and explore the theme.

First Thoughts and Wise Words

“**Seek**”—to go in search of, look for, try to discover, ask for, go to, try to acquire or gain, aim at...

Origin of the word

Old English — *inquire, search for, pursue, long for, wish for, desire, look for, expect from*

Before Norse Influence—*besech*

Latin cognates—*sagire (to perceive quickly or keenly), sagus (presaging, predicting)*

If you're going through hell, keep going.
Winston Churchill

*Ask, and it will be given to you,
seek, and you will find;
knock, and it will be opened to you.
For everyone who asks, receives,
and he who seeks finds,
and to him who knocks it will be opened . . .*
Matthew 7:7

*I have been and still am a seeker, but I have
ceased to question stars and books; I have
begun to listen to the teaching my blood
whispers to me.*
Hermann Hesse, *Demian*

*We travel, some of us forever, to seek other
states, other lives, other souls.*
Anais Nin, *The Diary of Anais Nin*

*The variable that marks some periods as
barren and some as rich in prophetic vision
is in the interest, the level of seeking, the
responsiveness of the hearers. The variable
is not the presence or absence or the
relative quality and force of the prophetic
voices. The prophet grows in stature as
people respond to his [or her] message . . .
It is the seekers, then, who make the prophet.*
Robert K. Greenleaf
The Servant as Leader

*We may fondly imagine that we are
impartial seekers after truth, but with a few
exceptions, to which I know that I don't
belong, we are influenced -- and sometimes
strongly -- by our personal bias; and we
give our best thoughts to those ideas which
we have to defend.*

August Krogh

*I recently heard a great writer say that an
essential element in the life of a writer is to
have been an outsider in childhood, to have
been given the "gift" of not belonging.*
Elizabeth Lesser
*The Seeker's Guide: Making Your Life a
Spiritual venture*

*We never become truly spiritual by sitting
down and wishing to become so. You must
undertake something so great that you
cannot accomplish it unaided.*

Phillips Brooks

The journey begins simply by seeking.
Jeffrey Moses



Life is not primarily a quest for pleasure, as Freud believed, or a quest for power as Alfred Adler taught, but a quest for meaning.

The greatest task for any person is to find meaning in his or her life.

Harold Kushner

People who have faith in life are like swimmers who entrust themselves to a rushing river. They neither abandon themselves to its current nor try to resist it. Rather, they adjust their every movement to the watercourse, use it with purpose and skill, and enjoy the adventure.

David Steindl-Mast

Why should any of us be confined within a single area of religious culture? When I read Amos and Jeremiah, I say 'Would to God I were a Jew.' When I read the Parable of the Samaritan, I say 'Would I were a Galilean.' When I read the 13th of the 1st Corinthians, I wish with all my heart that I might be a Christian after the manner of the Apostle Paul. When I think of Buddha and his Eightfold Path, I say, 'I, too, would be a Buddhist.' And when I remember the trial of Socrates, I say in awe but with exalted spirit, 'Oh, that I might be so brave a humanist.' And thus at the end, there is nothing I can say but that, like Emerson and Channing, I want to live with the privilege of the illimitable mind.

A. Powell Davies, UU

If the future road looks ominous or unpromising, and the roads back uninviting, then we need to gather our resolve and, carrying only the necessary baggage, step off that road into another direction.

Maya Angelou

When one door of happiness closes, another opens; but often we look too long at the closed door that we do not see the one which has been opened for us.

Helen Keller

*Here on the pulse of this new day
You may have the grace to look up and out
And into your sister's eyes, into
Your brother's face, your country
And say simply
Very simply
With hope
Good morning.*

Maya Angelou
On the Pulse of Morning

Every exit is an entry somewhere else.

Tom Stoppard

Every man has his own destiny: the only imperative is to follow it, to accept it, no matter where it leads him.

Henry Miller

Life is a great and wondrous mystery, and the only thing we know that we have for sure is what is right here and right now. Don't miss it.

Leo Buscaglia

Change is not merely necessary to life—it is life.

Alvin Toffler

No limits are set to the ascent of man, and the loftiest precincts are open to all. In this, your choice alone is supreme.

Hasidic proverb

Beware that you do not lose the substance by grasping at the shadow

Aesop



*We are here, together,
like-minded people, arriving after
different journeys, ready to
respect and learn from each*

*other, ready to search together for the
meaning of our puzzling lives—indeed for
the great puzzle and wonder of life itself.*

*Our journey is not ended, but we
now take it together in companionship. As
we travel, may we grow in wisdom and as
spiritual people. Let us be aware of the
great miracle that our different paths have
led us to discover each other.*

Elspeth R. Vallance
One and Universal

*Go with the arms of your soul stretching
beyond your expectations, preparing you for
whatever it is that calls you to bend and flex
and grow.*

Rev. Jan Carlson-Bull

*We shall not cease from exploring—
And the end of all our exploring will be to
arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.*

T.S. Eliot

*Far above the timberline, on the western
slope of Mt. Kilimanjaro,
lies the dried and withered body of a
mountain lion. The question is not how he
got there, but what was he seeking at such a
high altitude?*

Ernest Hemingway
The Snows of Kilimanjaro

*I shall be telling this with a sigh somewhere
ages and ages hence:
Two roads diverged in a wood, and I,
I took the one less traveled by,
and that has made all the difference.*

Robert Frost
The Road Not Taken

*The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep*

Robert Frost
Stopping by Woods On A Snowy Evening

The gull sees farthest who flies highest
Richard Bach

*A man approaches a Buddhist master and
says, "I am seeking enlightenment. All I do
is chop wood and carry water. Can you help
me?" The master does some words and
waving, and then says: "Now you are
enlightened." The man says, "Great, what do
I do now?" The master says, "Chop wood
and carry water."*

Buddhist Teaching (paraphrased)

*I will take the ring, though I do not know the
way.*
Frodo Baggins (J.R.R. Tolkien)
The Hobbit

*If you want to build a ship, don't herd people
together to collect wood and don't assign
them tasks and work but rather, teach them
to long for the endless immensity of the sea.*

Antoine de Saint-Exupéry

*I am being driven forward
Into an unknown land.
The path grows steeper,
The air colder and sharper.
The wind from my unknown goal
Stirs the strings
Of expectation.*

*Still the question:
Shall I ever get there?
There where life resounds,
A clear pure note
In the silence.*

Dag Hammarskjöld



Izzy, Did You Ask a Good Question Today?

To the Editor:

Isidor I. Rabi, the Nobel laureate in physics who died Jan. 11, was once asked, "Why did you become a scientist, rather than a doctor or lawyer or businessman, like the other immigrant kids in your neighborhood?"

His answer has served as an inspiration for me as an educator, as a credo for my son during his schooling and should be framed on the walls of all the pedagogues, power brokers and politicians who purport to run our society.

The question was posed to Dr. Rabi by his friend and mine, Arthur Sackler, himself a multi-talented genius, who, sadly, also passed away recently. Dr. Rabi's answer, as reported by Dr. Sackler, was profound: "My mother made me a scientist without ever intending it. Every other Jewish mother in Brooklyn would ask her child after school: 'So? Did you learn anything today?' But not my mother. She always asked me a different question. 'Izzy,' she would say, 'did you ask a good question today?' That difference - asking good questions - made me become a scientist!"

This world of "Ready, Fire, Aim" would be a far better place if all the world's leaders, starting in particular with our President, hearkened to this wisdom. It's time to stop giving answers before we understand the questions.

*Donald Sheff
New York Times, Jan. 12, 1988*

A soul that longs for something is a soul that is growing — one way or another, smaller or larger. What have your longings done to your life and its horizons — broadened them or crippled them?

Joan Chittister, The Psalms

*"Today, like every other day, we wake up empty and frightened. Don't open the door to the study and begin reading. Take down a musical instrument.
Let the beauty we love be what we do."*

Rumi

*Beauty surrounds us,
But usually we need to be walking
In a garden to know it.
The body itself is a screen
To shield and partially reveal
The light that's blazing inside your
Presence.*

*....all things we do, are mediums
That hide and show what's hidden.
Study them,
And enjoy this being washed
With a secret we sometimes know,
And then not.*

Rumi

And like mystics of every tradition, [Rumi] resolved the searcher's question, "Should we look outside our experience, or deep within it? Should we be seeking in another world or delving into this one?" by saying: neither, and both. Yes, we are on a journey...but the search begins and ends where we are right now. Spiritual Transformation is a death as well as a birth. The teachers who help us grow know that it can't happen without this pain. They don't save us from it—in fact, what they do usually intensifies it. The spiritual teacher demands so much, not out of cruelty, but out of love and necessity, because the spiritual life is demanding. The transformations we seek aren't trivial

Rev. Amy Zucker Morgenstern, UU



Since I'm in the last days of my life, I'm not feeling like much of a seeker any more. At least I'm certainly not seeking answers to the "why" of life with the same eager enthusiasm of my younger years. As a UU, I still try to keep a very open mind, listen to new ideas, and accept that the way we've "always done it" is not necessarily the best way. But the truth is—and I say this with humility—I feel perfectly content with a very simple answer to the whole mystery of the meaning of life, one that's been around for thousands of years: Love.

Small Group Facilitator

At different times in life I've witnessed and experienced how many people can be looking at the exact same set of circumstances and have such varying observations and feelings about a situation.

Good people can honestly claim to be seeking the truth in a given situation and still arrive at very different attitudes, conclusions and feelings. The "truth" that is sought and "found" is very different depending on one's viewpoint.

Maybe when we seek, we'll not necessarily "arrive at" the same "truth," but maybe the truth which we find has more to do with how we care for and respect each other in the seeking?

Connie Jahrmarkt
UUCP Choir Director

Seeking is a journey—a seeker is always on a journey, never coming to the end of seeking. "Life is an unfinishedness." (or an unfinished mess). And there are an awful lot of stumbling blocks and side roads along the way. Forgetting that the seeking is never over. Being sure of final answers. Looking for answers in places where answers will not be found. Believing that I am the only one seeking - or that I can accomplish my seeking alone.

Seeking is more about the questions than the answers. Questions abound - which are worth pursuing? What makes a good question? One of the biggest stumbling blocks seems to be asking the wrong questions for the wrong questions distract us from ourselves and from what is important, true, good in the world.

Worship Associate

Books, Movies, Podcasts, Videos

“Speaking of Faith Radio Show: Curiosity Over Assumptions”

We shine a light on two young leaders of a new generation of grassroots Muslim-Jewish encounter in Los Angeles. They're innovating templates of practical relationship that work with reality, acknowledge questions and conflict, yet resolve not to be enemies — whatever the political future of the Middle East may hold.

PODCAST: <http://speakingoffaith.publicradio.org/programs/2009/newground/>

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