

# What does it mean to be a people of *Spirituality*?

## To Be a Spiritual Community for Our Time



Is religious or spiritual community still relevant for this time we live in? What does it mean to be a spiritual community for our time? Earlier today, I sat in utter grief with a friend, both of us still in shock, feeling so deeply torn apart by the attack in Orlando, the loss of life, the violation of a place that is sanctuary for gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender and queer people. So many levels of grief to feel. And I remembered last June, the shootings at Mother Emmanuel AME church, another sanctuary. The gay bar, the black church, my understanding as someone who is white and cis- gender female is that these are places where one can find sanctuary from the daily onslaught of fear and discrimination and stereotyping that is nearly everywhere (television, talk radio, politicians, law enforcement, work places). The heartbreak at the devastating loss of life, thinking of the families who lost parents and children and siblings, and the violations of sanctuary – all of these invite a us to make room in our hearts for grief that cannot be put fully into words.

How does a spiritual community for our time speak to this time? Speak to this continuing reality of violence against our very humanity. One way, is by allowing room for the grief and for the pain. Someone asked me on Sunday, the day of the shooting, what do we do? My response was for now, we grieve. Later, we will work and organize. But now, we honor the ones who have died and we grieve. Grief is not an emotion everyone is comfortable feeling or sharing, but grief is a response to something we love, something we value, being hurt or lost. Making room for grief connects us to our humanity. It allows us to feel the pain without becoming the pain. It reminds us of the depth of love and compassion and caring that are deeply a part of being human. A spiritual community for our time needs to make time for grieving, to honor it and not to be afraid of

it, or cast it off. A community, a people, a society that cannot grieve, will also begin to lose their joy. As we compartmentalize our grief, we cut off our emotional capacity for deep joy and deep love too.

In my experience, grief and joy and love – they result as a feeling of connection to life, to others, to the deep places of knowing in ourselves. This connection is the foundation of what many of us call spirituality. It is a broad term we give to the experience of transcendence, a feeling of being a part of something larger than oneself. A spiritual community for our time, then, invites us to remember, practice, celebrate connection. Honoring grief and inviting joy are a part of experience that connection.

It is not a wonder to me why people are turning away from religion as such a fast rate – especially as too much of what we publicly see of religion is cast as extremism, doling out division and judgment. This is why liberal spiritual community is so important – religious communities of all faiths that do not see a role for extremism in religion, but see the foundation of the religious impulse to be that of connection, of compassion and understanding, of gratitude for the precious gift of life – all life. A spiritual community for this time, is one that nurtures our humanity, gives us space to honor the joys and sorrows of our lives and world and reminds us that even while we cannot always avoid pain, that we can still choose to live the values of love and care and solidarity with life. We can choose this, and we will choose it again and again.

Yours,

*Rev. Susan*

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## Living the Theme: Peace

Choose one of the exercises below to engage the theme. Come to the meeting prepared to share how you tried to experience the theme and what you learned from the practice.

**A Create a Spiritual Maintenance Schedule**  
Just like how we have scheduled maintenance for our cars or regular checkups for our bodies, we can come up with some recurring activities that tend to our inner well-being. There are now a variety of phone apps that can be used to both track and prompt meditations, inspiring quotes, moments of silence, and gratitudes. With or without technology, we can create a spiritual maintenance schedule for ourselves based on our own needs and lives. Consider coming up with specific activities for the following intervals:

- Once a day: \_\_\_\_\_
- Once a week: \_\_\_\_\_
- At least monthly: \_\_\_\_\_
- At least yearly: \_\_\_\_\_
- In my lifetime: \_\_\_\_\_

**B Create a Spiritual Collage or Self-Portrait:**  
*Individual, Group or Family activity*  
Gather some magazines or other sources of photos (we have a bunch you can use at UUCP in the RE closet), blank sheets of paper for each person, and scissors, glue, and some markers. If you have easy access to a color printer, Google Images or Flickr.com can be great sources for images. Start looking for images and words that resonate with you – either by describing parts of your spiritual identity, that inspire you, or that might call you to explore something

deeper. With scissors and glue, build a collage that is a spiritual self-portrait. If doing this in a group or with family, give everyone an opportunity to share their portraits. Hang it up somewhere you will see it often, and take time to reflect on it throughout the year.

**C Family Activity: Breathing Meditation**  
Invite everyone to sit comfortably and quietly with eyes closed and then offer these words to guide the meditation. *Be aware of your breathing. Focus on the way the air enters your nose and then how it feels when you breathe out. What does it feel like? If other thoughts come let them pass gently away like clouds moving across the sky. Now count silently as you breathe in and out. One. Two. Three. When you get to ten, start counting again.* Then sit in silence. This should last just a few minutes. Future sessions can be longer.



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## Questions to Live With

Simply look over these questions and find one that “hooks” you. Live with it for a while. Allow it to regularly break into – and break open – your ordinary thoughts. Then come to your group prepared to share the journey.

1. **How do you feel about the concept of “spirituality?”**  
Does it have meaning for you?

2. What were important spiritual, religious, or value related practices, experiences, and **beliefs of your childhood?**

3. **What transitions have occurred** as an adult in your spiritual, religious, or value related practices and beliefs?

4. **What unanswered spiritual, religious, or value related questions do you have now?**

5. **What transitions do you anticipate might occur in the future** in your spiritual, religious, or value related practices and beliefs?

6. If you have a regular spiritual practice, **can you share something about it** and how it affects your life, and/or the changes it has made in your life

7. Is spirituality just a private aspect of your life? **Are there ways that spirituality shows up in your home, your work, or in other daily activities?**

8. **Are there places that feel more inherently sacred or spiritual** – like nature, or specific times of day (sunset), or times of the year

(solstice, full moon?)

9. **How do you experience spirituality on Facebook, Twitter, Instagram, and other social media?**

10. Much attention has been on the increase of people who identify as “**spiritual but not religious.**” Does this resonate with you, or how you see society at large?

11. **Have you ever had an experience that you have difficulty describing,** like a near-death experience, or similar moment?

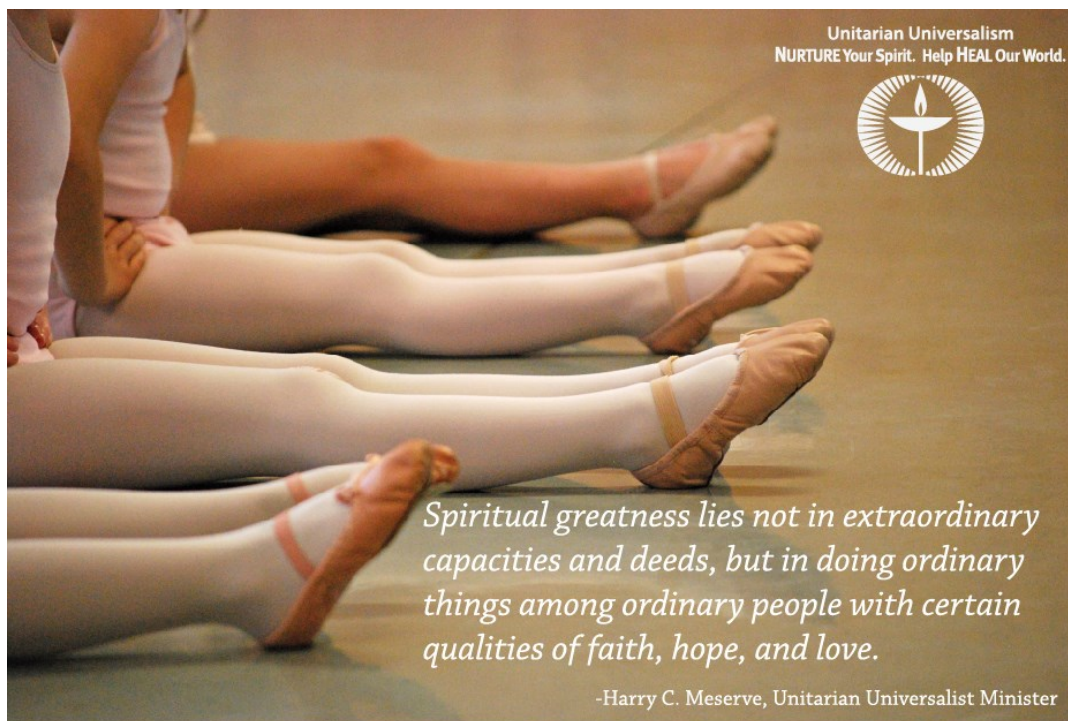


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# What does it mean to be a people of *Spirituality*?



## Wise Words

Spirituality is a commitment to a life of depth and compassion that connects each of us to a larger whole.

*Joan Borysenko*

By spiritual, I mean the ancient and abiding human quest for connectedness with something larger and much more trust-worthy than our egos—with our own, with one another, with the worlds of history and nature, with the invisible winds of the spirit, and with the mystery of being alive.

*Parker Palmer*

To me, spirituality is not tied to a religion or culture, but is a part of human nature. The ability to experience wonder and awe, the desire to understand and connect to the unknown, have evolved in us. The more we can know about the universe, the more we can feel a natural part of it.

Traditionally, people have used words like "mystical" or "supernatural" as descriptions of the spiritual, or the world of the spirit. As UU's, we relate to the phrase "Spirit of Life".

Our hymn by that name invites us to open ourselves to whatever energy force, by whatever name, may be "out there."

*Small Group Facilitator*

I want my spirituality to rid me of hate, not give me reason for it.

*Donald Miller*

Worship will cease when wonder dies in the heart of man.

*Thomas Starr King, Unitarian*

What is it to be spiritual? To recognize the finer harmonies of conduct—to live to the ideal—to separate the incidental, the evanescent, from the perpetual—to be enchanted with the perfect melody of truth—open to the influences of the artistic, the beautiful, the heroic—to shed kindness as the sun sheds light—to recognize the good in others, and to include the world in the idea of self—that is to be spiritual.

*Robert Green Ingersoll*

Stepping out of the busyness, stopping our endless pursuit of getting somewhere else, is perhaps the most beautiful offering we can make to our spirit.

*Tara Brach*

If you can cultivate the right attitude, your enemies are your best spiritual teachers because their presence provides you with the opportunity to enhance and develop tolerance, patience and understanding.

*The Dalai Lama*

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## Wise Words

### “Angels”

You might see an angel any time and anywhere. Of course you have to open your eyes to a kind of second level, but it's not really hard. The whole business of what's reality and what isn't has never been solved and probably never will be. So I don't care to be too definite about anything. I have a lot of edges called Perhaps and almost nothing you can call Certainty. For myself, but not for other people. That's a place you just can't get into, not entirely anyway, other people's heads.

I'll just leave you with this. I don't care how many angels can dance on the head of a pin. It's enough to know that for some people they exist, and that they dance.

*Mary Oliver*

Not only are we in the universe, the universe is in us. I don't know of any deeper spiritual feeling than what that brings upon me.

*Neil Degrasse Tyson* from *Beyond Belief: Science, Reason, Religion and Survival*

I have lived with several Zen masters—all of them cats.

*Eckhart Tolle*

Prayer invites God to be present in our spirits and in our lives. Prayer cannot bring water to a parched land, nor mend a broken bridge, nor rebuild a ruined city, but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.

*Rabbi Abraham J. Heschel*

I cannot conceive of a personal God who would directly influence the actions of individuals or would directly sit in judgment on creatures of his own creation. I cannot do this in spite of the fact that mechanistic causality has, to a certain extent, been placed in doubt by modern science. My religiosity consists in a humble admiration of the infinitely superior spirit that reveals itself in the little that we, with our weak and transitory understanding, can comprehend of reality. Morality is of the highest importance—but for us, not for God.

*Albert Einstein, from Albert Einstein: the Human Side*

When we understand that constant change, at least gradual constant change, is the spiritual playing field, we approach the challenges of change – such as dealing with loss and the sense of insecurity as well as new opportunities for growth and learning – as a deep, intentional, regular practice of what life in a faith community is all about. Developing change as a spiritual practice helps us bounce back when conflict or difficulties arise. Change as spiritual practice makes us resilient.

*Rev. Tony Lorenzen in “UU World”*

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I've generally thought of myself as an atheist, because "spirituality" has never meant anything specific to me. But as I've gotten older, I've found that unless someone is really spelling out a cosmology of heaven and hell, people who speak about spirituality are rarely talking about things I don't believe in- just describing things with religious language that I would describe differently.

This reminds me of the Joseph Campbell quote, "God is a metaphor for a mystery that absolutely transcends all human categories of thought, even the categories of being and non-being. Those are categories of thought. I mean it's as simple as that." So if that's true, and I just use different language, perhaps I'm not so un-spiritual after all.

*Worship Associate*

In this country, we treat spirituality as a health additive, like the protein powder you can get sprinkled on your imperial smoothie. For just a small extra charge, a little prayer or meditation can make you run better, smoother, in service to the exploitative systems in which we are immersed. No! Our spiritual practice is meant to make us dangerous, to temper us like steel into cogs that grind the wheels of injustice to a halt.

*Nichola Torbett*

The great awareness comes slowly, piece by piece. The path of spiritual growth is a path of lifelong learning. The expression of spiritual power is basically a joyful one.

*M. Scott Peck*

Vulnerability is the birthplace of love, belonging, joy, courage, empathy, and creativity. It is the source of hope, empathy, accountability, and authenticity. If we want ...more meaningful spiritual lives, vulnerability is the path.

*Brené Brown*

The fruit of the spirit is love, joy and peace.

*Galatians 5:22*

If the sight of the blue skies fills you with joy, if a blade of grass springing up in the fields has power to move you, if the simple things in nature have a message you understand, rejoice, for your soul is alive.

*Eleanora Duse*

We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience.

*Pierre Teilhard de Chardin*

When you do things from your soul, you feel a river moving in you, a joy.

*Jalaluddin Rumi*

My religion is nature. That's what arouses those feelings of wonder and mysticism and gratitude in me.

*Oliver Sacks*



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## Wise Words

To be alive in this beautiful, self-organizing universe—to participate in the dance of life with senses to perceive it, lungs that breathe it, organs that draw nourishment from it—is a wonder beyond words.

*Joanna Macy*

What is a soul? It's like electricity—we don't really know what it is, but it's a force that can light a room.

*Ray Charles*

When before the beauty of a sunset or a mountain, you pause and exclaim, "Ah," you are participating in divinity.

*Joseph Campbell*

“Like a Silkworm Weaving”

Like a silkworm weaving  
her house with love  
from her marrow,  
and dying  
in her body's threads  
winding tight, round  
and round,  
I burn  
desiring what the heart desires.  
Cut through, O lord,  
my heart's greed,  
and show me  
your way out,  
O lord white as jasmine.

*Akka Mahadevi*

Every second a million petitions wing past the ear of God. Let it be door number two. Get Janet through this. Make Mom fall in love again, make the pain go away, make this key fit. If I fish this cove, plant this field, step into this darkness, give me the strength to see it through. Help my marriage, my sister, me. What will this fund be worth in thirteen days? In thirteen years? Will I be around in thirteen years? And the most unanswerable of unanswerables: Don't let me die. And: What will happen afterward? Chandeliers and choirs? Flocks of souls like starlings harrying across the sky? Eternity; life again as bacteria, or as sunflowers, or as a leatherback turtle; suffocating blackness; cessation of all cellular function?

We crack open cookies and climb fortune-tellers stairs and peer into the rivers in our palms. We scour the surface of Mars for signs of liquid water. Who hasn't wanted to flip to the last page? Who hasn't asked: *Let me know, just this once, how it will turn out.*

*Anthony Doerr, About Grace: A Novel*



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## Recommended Resources

### Books:

#### **For Adults:**

The Power of Myth by Joseph Campbell

Campbell reminds us that all cultures have embraced myths which lead to spiritual guidance. He lets the reader decide which myths hold meaning for their lives and come to their own discoveries.

#### **For Young Adults:**

The Prophet by Kahlil Gibran (Young Adults)

The Prophet was written in 1923 by a Lebanese artist, poet and author.

It is considered a book of wisdom for young adults as well as mature adults.

A philosophical, spiritual and inspirational treasure!

#### **For Children:**

The Missing Piece by Phil Silverstein (Children)

Allison, age 5:

"This book is easy and hard to understand at the same time. Just think about it!"

The Missing Piece reminds people of all ages that life is a journey and not a destination.

### Articles and Websites:

Before words: Spirituality is an awareness of the gap between what you can experience and what you can describe.

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/spirituality-humanism>

Spiritual practices for children and youth

<http://www.uuworld.org/articles/children-youth-spiritual-practice>

The Aesthetics of Silence: Susan Sontag on Art as a Form of Spirituality and the Paradoxical Role of Silence in Creative Culture

<http://tinyurl.com/art-as-spirituality>

How to Prioritize Spirituality in the Workplace

<http://www.chopra.com/ccl/how-to-prioritize-spirituality-in-the-workplace>

### Videos and Music:

Song "Holy as the Day is Spent" by Carrie Newcomer

<http://tinyurl.com/carrie-newcomer-holy>

### Apps for Meditation, Inspiration, and Organization:

Illuminations (a UU app)

ConZentration

Insight Timer

Smiling Mind (kid-friendly)

Stop, Breath & Think

Calm

Take a Break

Many apps exist for daily quotes... Consider: The Four Agreements Cards, Tao De Ching, Rumi, etc.

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