



A Bright and Spirited Path

A Deeper Exploration of Unitarian Universalism

Session One:

There is a Unity that Makes us One

1. Welcome and Introductions
2. Meditation/centering
3. Setting Intention
4. On Language and Practice
5. There is a Unity that makes us One - *exploring the homework*
6. Assignments and Closing

Bright and Spirited Path Agreements

- ◆ Honor the call that moved you to come or sign up
- ◆ Be on time
- ◆ Bring an open mind
- ◆ Speak from the heart
- ◆ Make a commitment to your self and the process
- ◆ Honor the thoughts and opinions of others
- ◆ Honor the confidentiality of the group
- ◆ Refrain from cross talk, so that all may hear

Language and Practices - Unitarian Universalism as a Spiritual Path

On Language

We will be developing and using language and practices around the central principle of the Unity that makes us One. We will not try to nail this down in any kind of linguistic, semantic, philosophic, academic, or definitive sense. We will accept the findings of modern science, and we will assume that the ancient wisdom and religious teachings from the world religions have something deeply truthful to tell us.

It is expected and understood that each of us will have different approaches, preferences, hopes, fears, and ways of understanding. Many traditions use the word God for this underlying principle. We will use this word, and many others too. If any of these words make you uncomfortable, please know that we are using the word as a metaphor, a reference to the central principle. Please use or substitute whatever word feels right to you.

Alternative words might be: Infinite Source, Energy, Love, Spirit, Life, First Cause, the Absolute, Universal Mind, Supreme Being, Divine Presence, Life Force, Organizing Principle, Divine Essence, Allah, etc. Emerson called it the Oversoul. Lao Tzu called it the Tao. Einstein referred to his “unified field” theory. Science of Mind calls it “The Thing Itself.” You may call it whatever seems to fit! Trust your intuition.

On Practice

Like any spiritual path, to walk the path of Unitarian Universalism honestly, to do it meaningfully, means we will have to *do* things differently, train ourselves to *think* differently, and come to *see* differently. The goal is to live more consciously, more intentionally, with greater capacity for connection and love.

In follow-up classes we will be teaching the specific methods and disciplines of our tradition: Insight, Community, Nature, Study, Dialogue, Prayer and Blessing. For the time being, we are going to borrow a few disciplines from Buddhism, Christianity, modern psychology, and the New Thought movement.

Affirmations:	A very simple, surprisingly effective tool for spiritual growth.
Meditation:	Another profoundly beneficial discipline for training the mind
Prayer:	When done well, a deeply transformative and humbling practice!

Two Truisms:

- 1. If you do what you’ve always done, you’ll get the results you’ve always gotten.**
- 2. You can’t hire someone to meditate for you.**

Do the exercises! (Especially if you are cynical or skeptical! - See #1.)

Affirmations – A Basic Tool

(With thanks to the United Church of Religious Science.)

There are many excellent resources for learning and understanding this discipline but the basic idea is developing a tool to get us un-stuck. Most of us, most of the time, remain within patterns of thinking, seeing, being, and relating that we've developed over years of time and experience. There is nothing inherently wrong with this. There is nothing inherently wrong with you.

However, if you wish for more out of life, if you long for a sense of possibility and connection rather than a sense of sameness, (or hopelessness, or quiet desperation, or whatever...), affirmations are an excellent tool, and you will want to pay attention.

Affirmations are positive statements that we make about our lives, our spirits, our hopes. They are always stated in the present tense, and they are always personal.

Simply put; they work.

Examples:

"I am a child of the universe, I deserve to be happy."

"Deep inside, I am whole."

"God is my source, I am strong."

"I have, and am, all that I need."

"....."

Some simple guidelines:

1. Make them personal; I am..., I know..., I allow...,
2. Make them short. One sentence if possible. Easy to remember.
3. Make them in the present tense; In this moment..., Right now..., Today...
4. Use your own language. These are your words, for you. They should be in your voice.
5. Focus on "What," now "How." Affirmations are to remind you of who and what you really are, down in your heart of hearts, deep in your soul and being. They are not about what you do, or what might or might not happen. Don't use them for making specific plans or setting yourself up for disappointment or failure.
6. Do them often! Write them down. Post them in places where you'll see them. Ten to twenty times a day is not too many!
7. If the words don't feel right, change them until they do.

Results:

Affirmations often bring hidden beliefs to light. The full benefit comes from paying attention to how you feel when you say an affirmation. If something in you is resisting, reacting, negating what you have said, ask yourself, "What do I really believe about this?" Frequently, the patterns of thinking we have developed over a lifetime come from beliefs about ourselves and the world that developed in childhood. Affirmations are a powerful way to bring those beliefs out to be looked at and re-assessed for their value and truthfulness.

Meditation:

There are literally thousands of meditation techniques, methods, and practices, from all over the world. Some require sitting, walking, sitting then standing, more. Some require silence, others chanting, others are guided by words and imagery. Some focus on nothingness, others on some very specific thing, others simply bring attention to the present moment.

We will use two of these; lightly guided meditation in our group, and for your private practice, using the breath to focus on the present moment.

Part of our journey together will be to establish a habit of quiet, focused, personal time.

Look at your schedule for the coming week and choose a specific 10 to 15 minute time slot each day. Preferably the same time each day. It may help to let everyone in your household know that that you are doing so, and to request their cooperation in leaving you undistracted and undisturbed.

Sit in a comfortable position that will allow you to relax without falling asleep. Most meditation practices recommend a straight back, feet flat on the floor, hands held gently in the lap. Sit with your eyes partially closed and bring your attention to your breath. Breathe naturally, preferably through the nostrils without attempting to control the breath. Try to become aware of the sensation of the breath as it enters and leaves the nostrils. This sensation is our object of meditation. Try to focus attention on this feeling, to the exclusion of everything else.

At first, the mind will be very busy, and you might even feel that the meditation is making the mind busier. What is really happening is that you are becoming aware of how busy our mind actually is. There will be a great temptation to follow the different thoughts as they arise, but try to gently resist this and remain focused only on the sensation of the breath. If you discover your mind has wandered and is following some thought or thoughts, simply and gently return your attention to the breath. Repeat this as many times as necessary until the mind settles on the breath, or until your allotted time is up.

It's that simple.

The goal of this practice has several, highly desirable outcomes. People who practice regularly report being able to create feelings of calm and relaxation at any time, even in the midst of chaos. The practice of focusing on the breath also tends to improve focus in other areas of life. Most importantly, this practice is a concrete, body/mind experience of the Unity that makes us One. The air you breathe is the same air all over the world, shared by billions of creatures and beings, circulated endlessly through cycles of life and death, birth and decay, love and fear. Breathing in, you receive what you need. Breathing out, you are a part of these cycles. Intimately connected, interdependent, One....

Prayer:

Many Unitarian Universalists have a hard time with prayer. "If I don't believe in God, what or who would I pray to?" The model below does not require a god or a belief in God. It is not addressed to any particular notion of God though it can be easily adapted to do so, if desired.

With all gratitude to the Mile-Hi Church of Religious Science, the model presented here is nothing more (and nothing less!) than putting ourselves in right relationship to the Unity that makes us One, whether we assign divine characteristics to that Unity or not. It has five simple steps;

1. State the Unity principle (in your own words, of course).
2. Place yourself within it.
3. Make your prayer, offering, ask, hope, etc.
4. Give thanks.
5. Let it go.

An example might be:

*There's only One Life, that Life is God's Life
That life is my life, now
The universe will conspire to create more love in my life.
I give thanks for this possibility,
And trust that all will unfold as it should*

A more humanist variation might be:

*There's only One Life, That life is Cosmic
I AM that Life, as are all
The pain in my heart will be healed
With gratitude for all that is good
I turn my gaze forward*

A longer prayer might go:

There is a Unity that makes us One. This Unity holds all that is and gives life and breath to the Cosmos and to Spirit. All things arise from Oneness, all things return to Oneness, all is good. My being and my spirit are a part of all that is. I am connected and sourced from the great creative power of the Universe, of God. Into this Universe will arise more peace, more love, and more prosperity for my community. I give thanks for this amazing day, for this chance at Life, for the Love that sustains my family, and the work of many hands. These thoughts and this energy from my being I release back to the source. It is finished.

Construct your own prayer. Write it down. Fiddle with it. Say it out loud...; in your car, in the shower, on your knees, before a meal..., do it frequently. Share it with the people you love. You be surprised at the difference this simple practice will make in your Life!

Reviewing the Homework: There is a Unity that makes us One!

From Unitarian Universalist minister, David Bumbaugh: Beneath all our diversity, there is a unity that makes us one, and binds us forever together, in spite of time and death and the space between the stars.

- We are One: Manifestations of the One, Consciousness, the Universe Aware of itself
- God is One: Conceptual origins of Unitarianism - Bible, Buddhism, Islam, Judaism, etc.
- God and Creation are One: Pantheism, Process concepts
- All is one: Cosmology and the **Universe**, Gnosis (intuition), religious experiences, Analogies

As we can see, the images of a single, unified source for all existence, presented and taught as spiritual truth in the religions and traditions above, is closely mirrored in our very best scientific understanding of the **universe**. To say that all things arise from unified source is **not** simply a metaphor! However, we generally need metaphors to help us communicate about it.

FOR NEXT CLASS

First, there are many fine compilations of daily thoughts/prayers/meditations. Get one, and use it. Read your daily thought just before you dress for the day, and hold it in your mind as you gather yourself for the morning. Or, use it in whatever way makes sense for your particular life and routine.

Second, practice the three disciplines from the preceding pages.

1. Create some affirmations. Use them often.
2. Carve out a quiet space/time to practice meditation
3. Pray without ceasing! Seriously, write out a prayer or prayers using the suggested structure. Keep an open mind, make it personal and meaningful, repeat. Set a target of doing one each day.

Third, spend an hour with the Faith questions on the following page. We will not be spending time on these in class, but most people find the questions useful for clarification or points of focus.

Faith Questions:

Adapted from James A. Fowler

1. What are you spending and being spent for?
2. What commands and receives your best time, your best energy?
3. What causes, dreams, goals, and institutions are you pouring out your life for?
4. As you live your life, what powers do you fear or dread?
5. As you live your life, what powers do you rely on and trust
6. To what are you committed in life or in death?
7. With whom do you share your most sacred and private hopes and fears?
8. What are your hopes, goals, and purposes in life?