



TOUCHSTONES

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Spirituality

Wisdom Story



thing we can experience is the mysterious," and yet many of us miss it most of the time. This is the point of Rainer Maria Rilke's 1924 poem entitled, *A Walk*. He writes, "My eyes already touch the sunny hill,/ going far ahead of the road I have begun./ So we are grasped by what we cannot grasp;/ it has its inner light, even from a distance—/ and changes us, even if we do not reach it,/ into something else, which, hardly sensing it, we already are;/ a gesture waves us on, answering our own wave.../ but what we feel is the wind in our faces."

Introduction to the Theme

In his poem, *The Blessing*, poet James Wright wrote, "Suddenly I realize/ That if I stepped out of my body I would break/ Into blossom." Has life ever seized you in that way? Have you ever had a spiritual experience that filled you with awe? A good friend tells of driving to Banff, a town near Lake Louise in the Canadian Rockies. What she saw so overwhelmed her that she stopped driving, parked on the side of the road, and wept for the beauty of it. I suspect that if she had stepped out of her body in that moment, she would have broken into blossom.

Einstein said, "The most beautiful

It is a very simple poem. It's just about a walk up a hill in sunlight. Except he says, we are grasped by what we cannot grasp. Something grasps us and we stop by the side of the road to weep at the breathtaking beauty of the Canadian Rockies. Something grasps us and we know if we step out of ourselves, if we move just beyond the boundary of the body, we will break

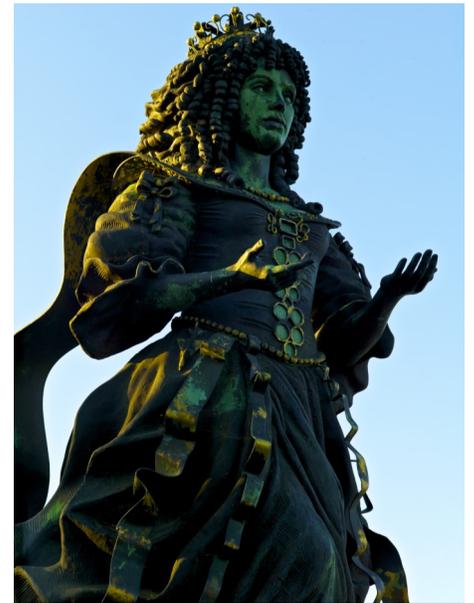
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The Wandering Teacher

Author unknown, adapted

Once upon a time there was a Teacher who was known far and wide as one who had mastered all the great disciplines of a spiritual seeker. She wandered the country, and whenever people heard she was near, they traveled to seek her wisdom and her guidance.

"Great Teacher," one would say, "I



wish to get closer to God." "By what path do you travel now?" she would ask. "I study the scriptures, diligently applying myself day and night to unlocking their mysteries," might come the reply. "Then you should put down your books and walk in the woods—thinking nothing, but listening deeply."

Another would say, "I do good to every person I meet, doing all that I can to serve their needs." "Then for a time," the Teacher would reply, "consider yourself

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Spirituality & Deepening Connections

Frederic and Mary Ann Brussat write, "Separateness is an illusion. That's what we learn through the spiritual practice of connections. Everything is interrelated—in time, space, and our very being. Both religion and science reveal this truth—Hinduism's image of Indra's net, Buddhism's understanding of interbeing, the experiences of the mystics, the teachings of ecology and physics, even the Internet. One definition of spirituality is 'the art of making connections.'" Spirituality is about forging deep connection with ourselves, with others, with nature, and with the transcendent, however we understand it to be. Superficial connections are unsatisfying and fleeting, but deep connections are nurturing and lasting. Spiritual practices are an important means of cultivating deep connections.

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Deepening Connections

Most Alive

(Continued from page 1) **Wisdom Story**

well met and strive to serve your own needs as you have so well served others.”

One day the Teacher noticed someone in the back of the crowd, someone not pushing his way to her as most of the others did. She went to him. “What is it I can do for you?” she asked.

“I don’t know,” he relied. “I feel in need of something, but I do not believe in God and have nothing you could call a ‘practice.’” “When do you feel most alive?” the Teacher asked. “When I am playing with my children,” the man said without hesitation. “Then play with your

children,” said the Teacher.

“And you will find what you seek.”

This Teacher was indeed wise. She met each person where he or she was, knowing that if they were going to grow, they

had to find a new way of being. That is how it is for so many of us. What we are doing in life is often significant, but not sufficient. There is something more that is required, and sometimes the more is the opposite of what we have been doing.

The first person studied books to seek wisdom, but it was not enough. The Teacher said, “Stop studying. Stop thinking. Go into the woods and walk and just listen. Wisdom will come to you.”

The second person treated every one she met in ways that met their unique needs. The Teacher said, “Stop giving to others and care for yourself for a while. In this way, Love will come to you.”

The last man was simply lost, not knowing what to do. The Teacher asked, “When do you feel most alive?” That is a question we all should ask ourselves. The Teacher would tell us what she told him: “Go do what makes you feel most alive, and you shall find Life, for that is what we all seek.”

Source: <https://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/practice/workshop1/wandering-teacher>

Everyday Adventures

Everyday Spirituality

Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat

What do we mean when we talk about everyday spirituality? There are numerous definitions. “The spiritual life is, at root, a matter of seeing,” John Shea ...reminds us. “It is all of life seen from a certain perspective. It is walking, sleeping, dreaming, eating, drinking, working, loving, relaxing, recreating, sitting, standing, breathing. ... spirit suffuses everything; and so the spiritual life is simply life, wherever and whatever, seen from the vantage point of spirit.”

...Two simple but profound definitions are offered by Alan Jones ...who regards spirituality as “the art of making connections,” and by Jewish scholar, David Ariel, who calls it “heart knowledge.”

...Regina Coll suggests that spirituality is an “awareness of the ‘more than meets the eye’ in our daily lives ...it refers to our hopes and dreams, our patterns of thought, our emotions, feelings, and behaviors.” ...

Many define spirituality as a way of being in the world. ...Latin American liberation theologian Leonardo Boff calls spirituality “that attitude which puts life at the center, and defends and promotes life against all the mechanisms of death, desiccation, or stagnation.”

The journey toward wholeness is a common motif in some definitions of spirituality. Psychotherapist Molly Young Brown writes: “When we expand our awareness, strengthen our center, clarify our purpose, transform our inner demons, develop our will, and make conscious choices, we are moving toward deeper connection with our spiritual self.” Many definitions, subtle differences in emphasis. All of them allow for spirituality to be an everyday adventure that can touch more and more areas of our lives.

Source: *Spiritual Literacy*, Frederic & Mary Ann Brussat, Scribner, New York, 1996.

Deep Wells

Soul River

L. Robert Keck

Religion is manifested in a culture through institutional forms and traditions on the surface landscape, as it were, just as are science, education, politics, economics, health care, etc. Spirituality, on the other hand, is all-pervasive. It is the underground river which nourishes the entire landscape. Spirituality is that which emerges from our soul. It both stimulates our questions regarding meaning and purpose, and guides us toward answers. The spirituality that is the organic outcome of the deep, soul-level value system precedes and informs all religions on the surface, just as it precedes and informs all the other institutions and traditions in our culture.

Religion, if it is doing its job, gives more intentionality than other institutions to providing a well, as it were, for



access to the underground river of soul. Ideally, that is the special role of religion in a culture. The root of the word religion is *religare*, which means “to bind back,” or “to re-connect.” Religion, if it is true to the name, assists us in re-connecting with our soul. If an old institution is to tap into the new soul-river, it must be courageous enough to dig a new well. If religious institutions are not up to that transformative task, they will eventually fail to serve as a re-connecting force for their people, will lose legitimacy, and will eventually die. Unfortunately, there has been a great deal of evidence over the past three decades, of just such a massive loss of legitimacy on the part of mainstream religion. It is a time of crisis for religion — grow ...or die off.”

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/14234>

Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "The two hardest tests on the spiritual road are the patience to wait for the right moment and the courage not to be disappointed with what we encounter." Paulo Coelho



Day 2: "Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality." Carl Sagan

Day 3: "Our goal should be to live life in radical amazement.Get up in the morning and look at the world in a way that takes nothing for granted. To be spiritual is to be amazed." Abraham Joshua Heschel

Day 4: "We are not human beings having a spiritual experience. We are spiritual beings having a human experience." Pierre Teilhard de Chardin

Day 5: "I have lived with several Zen masters—all of them cats." Eckhart Tolle

Day 6: "The spiritual life does not remove us from the world, but leads us deeper into it." Henri J.M. Nouwen

Day 7: "Being spiritual has nothing to do with what you believe and everything to do with your state of consciousness." Eckhart Tolle

Day 8: "The desperate need today is not for a greater number of intelligent people, or gifted people, but for deep people." Richard J. Foster

Day 9: "And the world cannot be discovered by a journey of miles, no matter how long, but only by a spiritual journey, a journey of one inch ...by which we arrive at the ground at our own feet, and learn to be at home." Wendell Berry

Day 10: "I want my spirituality to rid me of hate, not give me reason for it." Donald Miller

Day 11: "True spirituality makes you loving and grateful, and forgiving, and patient, and gentle, and long-suffering. True spirituality breathes reverence into every act and deed." Marjorie Pay Hinckley

Day 12: "I define love thus: The will to extend one's self for the purpose of nurturing one's own or another's spiritual growth." M. Scott Peck

Day 13: "Our whole spiritual transformation brings us to the point where we realize that in our own being, we are enough." Ram Dass

Day 14: "The fact that I can plant a seed and it becomes a flower, share a bit of knowledge and it becomes another's, smile at someone and receive a smile in return, are to me continual spiritual exercises." Leo Buscaglia

Day 15: "Rest and laughter are the most spiritual and subversive acts of all. Laugh, rest, slow down." Anne Lamott

Day 16: "The most creative act you will ever undertake is the act of creating yourself." Deepak Chopra

Day 17: "Zen does not confuse spirituality with thinking about God while one is peeling potatoes. Zen spirituality is just to peel the potatoes." Alan W. Watts

Day 18: "People who've had any genuine spiritual experience always know that they don't know. They are utterly humbled before mystery." Richard Rohr

Day 19: "Spiritual growth involves giving up the stories of your past so the universe can write a new one." Marianne Williamson

Day 20: "The best political, social, and spiritual work we can do is to withdraw the projection of our shadow onto others." C.G. Jung

Day 21: "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

Day 22: "Love is what we are born with. Fear is what we learn. The spiritual journey is the unlearning of fear and prejudices and the acceptance of love back in our hearts. Love is the essential reality and our purpose on earth." Marianne Williamson

Day 23: "You have to grow from the inside out. None can teach you; none can make you spiritual. There is no other teacher but your own soul." Swami Vivekananda

Day 24: "Happiness cannot be traveled to, owned, earned, worn, or consumed. Happiness is the spiritual experience of living every minute with love, grace, and gratitude." Denis Waitley

Day 25: "Like those in the valley behind us, most people stand in sight of the spiritual mountains all their lives and never enter them." Robert M. Pirsig

Day 26: "The closer you get to real matter, rock, air, fire, and wood, ...the more spiritual the world is." Jack Kerouac

Day 27: "There are many sources of spirituality; religion may be the most common, but it is by no means the only. Anything that generates a sense of awe may be a source of spirituality. Science does this in spades." Michael Shermer

Day 28: "Crying is one of the highest devotional songs. One who knows crying, knows spiritual practice." Kripalvanandji

Day 29: "Fearlessness is the first requisite of spirituality." Mahatma Gandhi

Day 30: "Perhaps the most 'spiritual' thing any of us can do is simply to look through our own eyes, see with eyes of wholeness, and act with integrity and kindness." Jon Kabat-Zinn

Day 31: "To live a spiritual life we must first find the courage to enter into the desert of our loneliness and to change it by gentle and persistent efforts into a garden



of solitude. The movement from loneliness to solitude, however, is the beginning of any spiritual life because it

is the movement from the restless senses to the restful spirit...." Henri J.M. Nouwen



Faith and Theology

A Humanist Spirituality

Rev. Kenneth Phifer

Joseph Sittler ... [said,] "Spirituality — the power, presence, dynamics of the spirit — is not a definable reality." The truth of that statement is what makes spirituality so elusive. That which is not a thing — which is not material, has no spatial extension — is hard to define, hard to contain, impossible to measure. Spirituality, like love, defies all efforts to encompass it within the boundaries of defined logic, language, or usage. What then shall we say of spirituality? Six things.

1. Spirituality is a process. It is a process that moves us towards that which is beyond description, the very nature of reality itself. It is about the journey, not the arrival. It is the eight-fold path, not the ending of sensation in Nirvana. It is ways and means more than it is ends, of which we know virtually nothing. *Spirituality is process.*

2. It is also an attitude. Part of what is involved in spirituality is a stance, a commitment, a will. ... What we see and understand is partly determined by what we are trying to see and understand. ... Whatever the ultimate truth may be, we are both aided and limited in our finite grasp of it by what we expect to find. *Spirituality is an attitude towards reality.*

3. It is as well an experience. We know life not just from thinking about it, but also and far more importantly from living it. ... Spirituality is not a shallow piety of mere words and gestures. It cannot be purchased, as ... indulgences were. Nor can it be possessed, thus denying it to others. And it cannot be known vicariously. Each of us must develop our own spirit, and do so by living, feeling, and helping to make a better world.... *Spirituality is experience.*

4. Spirituality is awareness. It is awareness of the self: unique, precious, fearful, full of hope, the same across years and yet ever changing and always difficult to grasp. It is awareness of what we are — body, mind, emotions — and what we dream of becoming. It is

time spent alone, pondering our frailties and our passions and our growth. ... Spirituality is awareness of the self.

... It is awareness of the transcendence of time. It is a sense of history, an appreciation of those who have come before us and given us a heritage that is strong and supportive. It is a sense of responsibility to those who will come after us that we will leave them a better world than the one we inherited. It is a feeling for the continuity of the generations into which we have come ... unbidden, that will go on long after we have died. Time is greater than we are.

Spirituality is awareness of the transcendence of space and matter.... It is awareness of the vastness beyond imagination of the universe.... It is awareness of the interior worlds of matter we describe and use but cannot see that seem endlessly to recede from us as we learn more about them. ...

Spirituality is awareness of Mystery. It is awareness that life is full of paradox and contradiction.... It is awareness of the miracle of growth.... It is awareness of the sheer wonder of existence, of the fact that there is something and not nothing, however it all came to be. *Spirituality is awareness: of self, of the transcendence of time and space, of Mystery.*



5. Spirituality is also a bond. It is a bond with nature. It is a recognition that we humans are part of the world of nature, part of the way that life has happened on this planet so full of life. We are made of the same elements that are in abundance on earth and of elements that are found in distant stars. We are bound up in a process of life that embraces sun, rain, air and us. ... *Reverence for Life* was Albert Schweitzer's phrase for the spiritual bond we have with nature.

Spirituality is also a bond with ... human kind. It is seen in our reaching

out to other people to connect, physically touching and hugging, but more importantly in the relationship we call love. It is the sense of responsibility we feel and the joy we take in being parents and grandparents. It is the special glow of warmth and intimacy we feel with our lover. It is the respect and honor we give our parents. ... It is the discovery of the humanity of another person across national, linguistic, gender, [racial,] age, or philosophical barriers. *Spirituality is a bond with nature and humanity.*

6. Spirituality is as well a deed. Spirituality is an act of creativity. Alfred North Whitehead spoke of a creative principle in the universe, opposed by destructive forces. The principle is everywhere. It is continuous. It is open to our participation with it, and as we become co-creators with this principle, we attain the only immortality possible for us or worth mentioning. Spirituality then ... is every deed that begins, nurtures, and furthers families, institutions, systems, or ideas that help, heal, and hold up people in all the varying seasons of life. *Spirituality is creative deed.*

It is a caring deed as well. It is the perception of and the struggle for justice.... It is the determination of some people to continue to seek ways to peace.... It is, as Joanna Macy has taught us, the willingness to bear the pain known by others: victims of crime, disease, or natural disaster, those scarred by war or the loss of job or family. Spirituality is, in Matthew Fox's ... phrase, "creative compassion."

Spirituality is process, attitude, and experience. It is awareness, bond, and deed. It is something noted by Leon Trotsky....

"Natasha has just come up to the window from the courtyard and opened it wider so that the air may enter more freely into my room. I can see the bright green strip of grass beneath the wall, and the clear blue sky above the wall, and sunlight everywhere. Life is beautiful. Let the future generations cleanse it of all evil, oppression, and violence, and enjoy it to the full."

May we each see the realization that life is beautiful and the challenge to bring justice and peace fully into the world as the deepest expressions of our spirituality, and may we "enjoy it to the full."

Source: *Becoming at Home in the World*, Ken Phifer, The Castillo Press, Ann Arbor, 1992.

Spiritual Practices for Children

Michelle Richards

Since children are ...full of wonder ...they do not need spiritual practices to help them connect; they need them in order to stay connected as they grow and mature. While children are born with an innate spirituality, most of them will lose it as they grow older and are taught ...to ignore their perceptions in favor of intellectual pursuits.

However, engaging in spiritual practices does not necessitate leaving behind reason and logical thinking. Expressing spirituality is a way of connecting with ...the deepest parts of ourselves....

...Children often express their spirituality most naturally with their physical selves, particularly those who are kinesthetic learners. For them, yoga can promote inner peace as they physically manipulate their bodies into various poses. The martial arts can help them establish discipline, concentration, and focus. Free-style dancing ("as the spirit moves") is another great avenue of spiritual expression for children....

...Since a child's attitude toward spirituality is derived ...from his or her parents, the spiritual practices we engage in or introduce to our children will have an impact on their lifelong view of spiritual expression. Therefore, it only makes sense to honor our yearnings by pursuing those practices that give us the most meaning. And while our children may not ultimately choose to express their spirituality in exactly the same way we do, they will feel the freedom to explore and engage in spiritual practices that provide meaning and enrich their lives.

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

Roots and Wings

The two most precious gifts that parents can give children are ROOTS and WINGS. These two gifts are not in opposition. They complement each other. Both are necessary if our children are to live life to the fullest.

If the roots have grown deep and strong, it is due to the cultivation that only love can provide. If they have

grown deep and strong, then these roots will be nourished by the traditions and values that have been handed down from one generation to the next. Without roots, our children would never know where they stand, or why. Without roots, they would not have anything to anchor their lives in difficult times. Without roots, they would have little of that which is "wordless and full of wonder" to bless their lives and to pass on to the next generation.

But roots are not enough. Without wings, children would not be able to find the freedom to explore the fullest possibilities of their own lives. While the cultivation of roots involves much time and attention, it is the easier of the two gifts to give. The gift of wings requires letting go. We are asked to open our hearts and to bless the winged flight that will take our children onward. It is the gift of wings that gives our children the ability and inspiration to create their own future.

And how can we ever thank and honor our parents for these precious gifts? The largest measure of our gratitude is to do as they have done. To pass on these roots and wings to our children, to pass on a parent's love.

Source: Touchstones

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.*



Mature Faith & Spirituality

James Fowler

James Fowler shares a wonderful story about himself that offers a way of examining faith and spirituality. He writes, "I started out from Interpreters' House, where I worked, toward Asheville, North Carolina, where I was leading a workshop on faith. Driving along, I reflected on my plans for the workshop. I rehearsed a set of questions I planned for the opening session, a set of questions designed to open up some honest talk about faith in our lives. I thought about what I would ask: What are you spending and being spent for? What commands and receives your best time, your best energy? What causes, dreams, goals, or institutions are you pouring out your life for? As you live your life, what power or powers do you fear or dread? What power or powers do you rely on and trust? To what or whom are you committed in life? In death? With whom or what group do you share your most sacred and private hopes for your life and for the lives of those you love? What are those most sacred hopes, those most compelling goals and purposes in your life?"

He continues, "Not an easy set of questions. No simple game of values clarification. I congratulated myself on my cleverness in coming up with such a useful, probing workshop opener. Then it hit me. How would I answer my own questions? My sense of cleverness passed as I embraced the impact of the questions. I had to pull my car over to the shoulder [of the road] and stop. For the next forty minutes, almost making myself late for the workshop, I examined the structures of values, the patterns of love and action, the shape of fear and dread, and the directions of hope and friendship in my own life."

Fowler was trying to make sense of faith. His questions and self-examination was an exploration of mature faith and spirituality.

Source: *Stages of Faith: The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning* by James Fowler, 1981

Lived Connection

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

into blossom. I have in mind becoming a common dandelion, now bright and yellow, now snowy white, a bouquet of seeds about to be set free by the wind.



These epiphanies, these peak experiences,

these moments of grace, these spiritual experiences change us, Rilke says, into something we already are. Isn't all life change in which each change seeks to bring us closer to our true nature? Yet most of the time, we miss what is happening. Life or God or Mystery, you choose the name to call what is most precious and most profound, waves to us, beckoning, but what we feel is the wind on our faces.

We are grasped by what we cannot grasp: by mystery, by love, by the spirit of life itself. Such is the nature of spirituality, but what we feel is the wind in our faces. The Hebrew word for spirit (*ruach*) is wind or breath. We can explain the wind, measure its direction and velocity, and relate its intensity to changing weather systems and various atmospheric conditions. We can experience the wind, but we can't control it. We can feel the wind on our faces, but it is much harder for many of us to embrace with our arms or our minds this thing called spirituality.

Spirituality involves a heightened sense of connection with the deepest part of oneself, with others, and with a transcendent reality, whether that is understood as nature, the unfolding universe, God or, as the seventh Unitarian Universalist principle affirms, "the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." This sense of connection relates to a desire for wholeness, which is seen as a goal of life.

Spirituality is also the process of growth that leads to that wholeness, a process that is marked by awareness; by a sense of awe, wonder, and gratitude at the reality of being alive and being a witness to existence; by an appreciation of the mystery that extends beyond the

boundary of human knowledge (a boundary that is always changing as human knowledge evolves); and by the meaning and purpose that we create and/or discover, including the way we live in response to that meaning and purpose.

Spirituality is a "lived experience" as opposed to being solely an emotional or intellectual process. The pursuit of spirituality can become anti-intellectual, but at its best and most effective spirituality values intellect and emotion, reason and intuition, knowledge and wisdom, and personal growth as well as the pursuit of the common good through "justice, equity and compassion in human relations." (This emphasis on the common good is a counterbalance to the tendency for spirituality to be pursued solely for personal well-being.)

The sense of lived connection that is the cornerstone of spirituality can be cultivated and deepened through a variety of spiritual practices: meditation, journaling, walking in nature, worship, music, reading (e.g. poetry), prayer, or simply sitting in silence.

The encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations was added to our principles when they were revised in 1985. Such language was absent from the statement of principles crafted in 1961 when the Unitarians and Universalists merged. This was a recovery of something that had been an important part of our tradition in the mid-1800s. The Transcendentalism of Ralph Waldo Emerson and other New England Unitarians emphasized an interest in self-culture. This was fundamentally an interest in spiritual growth. A great pendulum swings slowly within our tradition over time. It moves between the poles of yin and yang, reason and intuition, the intellectual and the spiritual. Neither pole by itself fully articulates the essence of our religious tradition. We need both.

In the end, spirituality has to do with the cultivation of the inner life that we might live and act with more authenticity, integrity, humility, and compassion in the world. It is a gateway to transformation.

Experience into Words

A Language of Spirituality

Paul W. Pruyser, adapted

The following word groupings capture aspects of spirituality. Why they can be defined in different ways, it is important to consider what our own understandings of these words are and the ways they can be used to reflect on our experiences and feelings.

Holy/Divine: The sense of the holy or the divine is a sense of the vertical dimension in life, your connection with that which transcends you. What is sacred to you? What do you revere? Is there anything that you regard as untouchable or sacrosanct? Have you had feelings of awe? What were they caused by? What are the ultimate concerns in your life? (or) What has ultimacy for you? For what would you be willing to make a sacrifice?



Ecstasy/Bliss: What has caused you to feel intense joy? Have you ever had an experience that seemed to transport you beyond your self, an experience where you have been carried away by strong emotions? Have you been moved to laughter or tears by the aching beauty and power of an experience?

Grace/Gratitude: Does God (or the Universe or Nature or Fate) ever seem to smile on you? Have blessings come into your life unasked for and undeserved? What are the gifts that you have received from life? What role has serendipity played in your life? Is your orientation toward life characterized by gratitude, resentment, indifference, etc. Are you grateful? For what? To whom?

Communion/Connection/Compassion: In large measure this has to do with the horizontal dimension in life, the way that we are connected with others and with ourselves. Do you experience yourself as continuous or discontinuous with humankind and nature? Do you feel embedded in life or estranged, open to the world or encapsulated, in touch or isolated, united or separated? Does the caring of others flow towards you and does your caring reach out to others?

(Continued on page 8)

The Depth of Life

What is a Sacrament?

Rev. Clarke Dewey Wells

What is a sacrament? A sacrament is anything you believe to be holy. Whatever for you is set apart, solemn, breathtakingly special—that is a sacrament. Sacraments are old and new. They occur inside churches and out. Weddings and their joys are not confined to place, nor is a funeral and its grief. We christen (name, welcome, dedicate) a baby in a ceremony, but in less formal ways, too—in our laughter, in touching our palms over a quickening life within, in our prayers, in kissing the newborn. These moments also are consecrating, dedicatory, celebrative. Sacramental.

A sacrament can be traversing the bridge at Golden Gate, walking at Gettysburg, viewing earth from the Canadian Rockies, strolling near crashing waves on sunlit coasts, or in the silence of sequoias, wading ...[in a] brook in Minnesota.... A sacrament is reading the Second Inaugural at the Lincoln Memorial or ...working a garden, or praying in our Gethsemanes.

Sacraments hover around the essentials of life, in ...deep reunions of flesh and spirit, in meals together, a last supper, at an altar rail with bread and wine, or a picnic with strawberries and milk. Sacraments occur when the depth of life is disclosed.

Sometimes all life becomes sacramental. We walk on holy ground, the divine is present, interfused. We celebrate it, call it Thou. These moments of sacred recognition flee and the world retreats to dreariness, as do we. But men and women and artists remember—to give liturgical shape, ceremonial form, some permanent hallowing to the sacredness we do meet in life. We recall, reclaim, and transmit our times of sacred memory, the holy events and places of our lives, history, and traditions. Sacraments are ...special because ...we enter the mystery and holiness of our common life....

Source: *Continuously Creating Spirit*, edited by Barbara Carlson, AuthorHouse, Bloomington, IN, 2012

Spiritual & Religious

Spiritual, but Not Religious

Rev. Laurel Hallman

People who say they are “spiritual, but not religious” mean that they have found meaning and purpose and even a set of beliefs about life and its mysteries outside [religious traditions].

...Religion has failed many people who have found their spiritual path on their own. ...Religion has failed many who put their faith in belief systems and have been broken by them. ...Religion has bored people until they couldn't stand it anymore. ...Religion has excluded, restricted, and ruled over many people until they said “no more” and left.

...To be spiritual *and* religious is to show up at ... [your Unitarian Universalist congregation] each week. To bring your discouraged and sometimes battered spirit to this place to be lifted up, to be challenged, to be sustained ...among all the... others [there] and to be blessed back into the world to continue your work—the investment of the time and resources of your life in things which matter.

...To be spiritual and religious is to show up ...each week, in this place where two come together, where we search for inner space of our lives together. Where we, one more time, make space for hope to emerge, together. Where we are not alone in our grief.

Not alone in our search. Where we are not alone.

So ... the next time someone

speaks to you about your faith, tell them you have found [a] ...church, where your spiritual life is nurtured, and where you have found a *religion* of inclusion, freedom, faith, and hope for your life, for your family, for our future together. Tell them you are spiritual and religious, and that it has made all the difference.

Source: *Reaching Deeper*, Laurel Hallman, Xlibris, Philadelphia, 2008.

Loving Reverence

Eco-Spirituality

Charles Cummings

The reverence that people spontaneously feel at places like the Grand Canyon is the attitude we need to cultivate



toward the entire earth. Eco-spirituality honors the earth. We walk the earth with humility and reverence, not with the arrogant air of an insensitive landlord.

Every feature of the global landscape has its value even though we may not be able to identify that value or explain its role in the total ecosystem. It took millions of years for the forces of nature to carve out the Grand Canyon, and every feature of the earth's surface is the result of similar historical processes. The antiquity and functional success of these planetary systems demand reverence.

Our physical environment forms us in obvious as well as subtle ways. We are shaped by the landscape and imbued with the spirit of the place where we live. It could be said that the earth gives birth to us because it conditions the way we live and support ourselves. People in the tropics are different in many ways from people in the arctic; the environment affects their quality of life and also their outlook on life.

It is because the earth shapes and nurtures us that the earth is our mother. People rightly associate the earth with maternal qualities of fruitfulness, growth, creativity, protection, healing, guidance, beneficence. Mother earth deserves a loving reverence similar to that which we show to our human mothers.

Source: <https://www.spiritualityandpractice.com/book-reviews/excerpts/view/25237>



Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion Spirituality

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: “If a person measures his spiritual fulfillment in terms of cosmic visions, surpassing peace of mind, or ecstasy, then he is not likely to know much spiritual fulfillment. If, however, he measures it in terms of enjoying a sunrise, being warmed by a child’s smile, or being able to help someone have a better day, then he is likely to know much spiritual fulfillment.”

Arthur Miller

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) (adapted) (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: “I want first of all... to be at peace with myself. I want a singleness of eye, a purity of intention, a central core to my life that will enable me to carry out these obligations and activities as well as I can. I

want, in fact—to borrow from the language of the saints—to live “in grace” as much of the time as possible. I am not using this term in a strictly theological sense. By grace I mean an inner harmony, essentially spiritual, which can be translated into outward harmony. I am seeking perhaps what Socrates asked for in the prayer from the *Phaedrus* when he said, “May the outward and inward man be one.” I would like to achieve a state of inner spiritual grace from which I could function and give as I was meant to in the eye of God.”

Anne Morrow Lindbergh

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on.

How do you understand spirituality?

What makes something spiritual?

Is spirituality important to you? Why or why not?

What does “everyday spirituality” mean to you?

How do you contrast religion and spirituality?

As a gardener of your spirit, how have you enriched the soil of your soul? What have you planted in yourself and others, and what has been harvested?

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth, the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment. These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Exploring Non-Sense

(Continued from page 6) **Language of Spirituality**

Trust/Faith: Is there anything good or friendly in the world, or is it all misery? Is Life on your side, indifferent to your reality, or opposed to you? What or whom do you trust? Why? Do you trust that you can be helped when the need arises? Do you feel worthy of help? Is your answer to Life “Yes,” “No,” or “I’ll see?” What has been providential to you? Are your interactions characterized by openness to experience and to others or are you more reserved and closed off? Are there things in which you place your trust and your faith?

Sin/Repentance/Forgiveness: While sin can convey the sense of a defect in being as in the Christian concept of original sin, it can also mean “missing the mark” as it does in Judaism. Are there significant ways in which you have missed the mark, in which you have not lived up to your own values or expectations? In these instances did you assume responsibility for your action or inaction (i.e., sins of commission and omission)? What role did remorse play in these for you? How were you changed by the event? Did you seek and receive forgiveness? Did you forgive yourself? How willing are you to forgive others?

Despair/Fear: What are the negative dimensions of your life? How have they shaped you? How have you overcome them, endured them or surrendered to these negativities? What do you fear? Why? How do you engage your fears?

There are other words that can be included (e.g., hope, mystery, love, compassion, etc.). What words would you add and what questions would they prompt?

Source: *The Minister as Diagnostician* by Paul W. Pruyser, The Westminster Press, Philadelphia, 1976.

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