

# Soul Matters

*A kaleidoscope of thoughts, images, stories, poetry, podcasts, and videos to engage hands, hearts, and minds.*

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UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IDENTITY

We covenant to affirm and promote  
**a free and responsible search for  
Truth and meaning**



*According to a theory favored by many physicists, the universe bloomed from the breaking of symmetry in the first smidgen of a second after the Big Bang... When Buddhism speaks about recognizing our true Self, or Taoism about centering ourselves in the Way, or Judaism about Eden before the fall, or Christianity about being One in Christ, they point, longingly, toward an unbroken symmetry, a primal unity.*

*~Scott Russell Saunders, Staying Put: Making a Home in a Restless World*

Here is the good thing about the Unitarian Universalist Principles—they begin with *we covenant*. Those first two words are a grand reminder we are not in this alone. Our promise or pledge is made in and with community. Our quest for what is right and true, our search for simple truths and deep meaning, our longing for purpose and belong, begins first and foremost in relationship with all of creation. For it is in relationship with the *interdependent web of all existence* that we not only know who we are but also what we are. Life is a holy journey of connecting, belonging, and living in relationship to each other, to all of creation, and to that which is unknowable. We are not in this alone!

While this awareness is the foundation of all seven principles, it is fundamental in the fourth principle, *a free and responsible search for truth and meaning*. In this principle we are reminded that while our personal quest for guiding beliefs is rooted in free thought and free will, it is tethered to responsibility. While we may be self-determining in our search and process of discerning *truth and meaning*, we are interdependent beings with obligations to the greater good of the whole. Our covenant reminds us we are duty-bound by the pledge and promise of community, creation, and universe.

In relationship with others, *our free and responsible search for truth and meaning* comes alive. It is a fluid, ever changing quest. It is an adventure. May we journey together toward what is right and good.



This Soul Matters packet was prepared by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, Maine. If you would like to share your experience and wisdom for future packets, please email [minister@augustauu.org](mailto:minister@augustauu.org). To receive an electronic copy, please email [info@augustauu.org](mailto:info@augustauu.org). To learn more about Unitarian Universalist Community Church, please visit our website [www.augustauu.org](http://www.augustauu.org).

# QUESTIONS TO WALK WITH

Below is a list of questions to open the mind's gateway to reveal the wisdom that is right below the surface of our ordinary, everyday lives. Pick one question, any, the one that grabs you and won't let go, then walk with it. Let your mind wander and wonder. Let the question percolate. Listen curiously to what surfaces. Live into the answers. Be surprised by what is discovered. Share what you learn with someone you meet along the way.



## Fetish on Fads

by David Rankin

I felt sorry for Jake. We were friends in seminary—many years ago. He was now a broken soul.

When he was a college student, he was into existentialism—Camus, Sartre, and Kierkegaard.

When he was a graduate student, he was into world religions—Taoism, Hinduism, and Buddhism.

When he was a theological student, he was into the new psychology—Fromm, Rogers, and Maslow.

When he was a minister, he was into experimental worship—guitars, folk-songs, and dialogue.

When he was a community organizer, he was into direct action—marches, sit-ins, and rallies.

When he was a welfare recipient, he was into human potential—ESST, Rolfing, and holistic medicine.

Jake had discovered all kinds of things—but never the center of himself.

He could not dance in the empty spaces, or listen to the song of no birds singing.

*The difficulty and hardship for Jake, and others like him, is never being in one place long enough to enjoy the truth and meaning that might be there, not staying at an oasis long enough to fuel the spirit and nurture the soul. For Jake and others, the search has so many stops and starts, turns and detours that it's no wonder they can't center and focus. It's a journey not a race; a search, not a scavenger hunt; for a lifetime, not until the next book comes out or a fad begins. The see-saw approach is unbalanced and leads nowhere. The free and responsible search is characterized by balance.*

~ Fredrick Muir in "With Purpose and Principle: Essays about the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism"

### Questions to Consider:

1. What parts of Rankin's poem or Muir's reflection resonate with your spiritual quest?
2. Is your spiritual journey more like a see-saw, a wandering, an oasis, or a desert?
3. What deep truths lie at your center? How do you walk with this center and *dance in the empty spaces*?

### OPENING WORDS

We come together  
In faith and hope,  
To find what meaning life holds for us,  
To laugh and sing with one another,  
To soothe the wounds of daily life,  
And to grow together in wisdom and love.

~ Marjorie C. Skwire

### CLOSING WORDS

To walk purposefully in the light truth sheds,  
Steadily in the openness justice creates,  
And compassionately in the warmth love radiates  
Shall advance us surely toward the good  
And shall, in the end, make us responsibly on the  
earth and fit companions for one another.

~ Commissions on Common Worship

# Spiritual Practice ~ Deepening Experiences

*This is the religious and spiritual task of life: the realization, making real,  
of the Profound Beauty, the Untarnishable Integrity that defines you.*

*the Profound Beauty... can [only] be found...  
within the human heart,  
within the souls of our lives,  
under the floorboards of our living.*

*~ Kenneth W. Collier*

## OPTION A

### **A Person of Faith? Or...**

Many things continue to amaze me, even well into the sixth decade of my life. I'm startled or taken aback when people walk up to me and tell me they are Christians. My first response is the question "Already?" It seems to me a lifelong endeavor to try to live the life of a Christian. I believe that is also true for the Buddhist, for the Muslim, for the Jainist, for the Jew, and for the Taoist who try to live their beliefs. The idyllic condition cannot be arrived at and held on to eternally. It is in the search itself that one finds ecstasy.

*~ 40 Day Journey with Maya Angelou, edited by Henry F. French*

As a person of faith, how would you describe yourself? As a believer? As a seeker? As on the journey? As following a way or a path? In some other way? Write about your relationship between faith and the daily decisions you make.

Credo is a Latin word that means "I believe" but the literal translation of the parts of the word means "To this I give my heart." Write five of your core beliefs.

## OPTION B

### **Crafting Truth and Meaning**

Gather together glue, scissors, blank cards or papers and an assortment of magazines, old picture books, advertisements, catalogs. Linger through the print material collecting assorted items: images, words, colors, shapes, and letters. It might be a particular hue of yellow that you find appealing or the way a shadow falls upon an image. The image of a sailboat or animal or sunset draws you in closer. A word catches you curiously or you like the way a letter is formed. The shape of a ball, the swirl of a wave, the star in the night sky speak to you for unknown reasons. Once you have collected an assortment of items sit with the images, words and colors. Listen to the ways in which each item invites you into a story. Listen to the way your delight in the placement or your heart longs for the black sky to contrast the rising sun. Take time to meditate while you arrange them on a blank card or piece of paper.

Sit back with the collage at a distance and reflect quietly on the whole.

What themes, questions, thoughts, and messages emerge?

What deeper truths are hidden in the images? What unknown meaning is seeking further reflection?

If you choose to engage in creating a collage with others, take time at the end to share what you see and hear. Ask others what questions, curiosities, or thoughts emerge as they look at your collage. Take the collage home, keep it out where you will see it everyday. Walk with the emerging revelations. Ask your family to offer thoughts and insights. Bring the collage back to your circle of friends a few weeks later to finish reflecting and sharing further learnings and insights.



## Other Wise Words...

An anonymous source reports that as they were leaving the Garden of Eden, Adam said to Eve: "My Dear, we are living in an age of transition."

Twice-upon-a-time, near the border of the future-past, a story lies curled in the eternal kernel of always. It is Adam's tale of exile, Ulysses' saga of wandering, the search for the Holy Grail, my autobiography and yours. It is the Gilgamesh epic and it was first recorded four thousand years ago in what is now Iraq. It will be retold as long as we remember that human beings are homesteaders who have been dispossessed of our hearth, gypsies who long to live forever in a lush valley beside still waters. It is the recurring drama of crisis and quest.

~ Sam Keen *Hymns to An Unknown God: Awakening the Spirit in Everyday Life*

Why do we come, sometimes spontaneously, to wonder about something? I think that wondering to one's self occurs when an experience conflicts with our fixed ways of seeing the world. I had one such experience of wondering when I was a child of four or five and my father showed me a compass. This needle behaved in such a determined way and did not fit into the usual explanation of how the world works. That is that you must touch something to move it. I still remember now, or I believe that I remember, that this experience made a deep and lasting impression on me. There must be something deeply hidden behind everything.

~ Albert Einstein taken from *Einstein's God: Conversations About Science and Human Spirit* by Krista Tippet

*"How can I stay present to this world—the light and the dark—while still keeping an open loving heart: Who ever promised me the world would be perfect... I need to set a different course by reminding myself that humankind has always been flawed...and Love and light continue to exist anyway."*

~ Ann O'Shaughnessy, former co-editor of "Heron Dance" and founder of soulflares.org

In order to know what is just in a person-to-person encounter, love listens...Listening love is the first step to justice in person-to-person encounters

~ Paul Tillich

## ***Suggested books for a winter's day...***

My first semester at Harvard Divinity School, I was required to read one spiritual memoir every week. Ten weeks, ten memoirs from ten different traditions. Below you will find some of those required readings and a few more.

With each book I entered the daily life of extraordinary people as they discerned what mattered most true. As each author revealed their struggle with God/Goddess, Creator, Spirit, and/or humanity, I came to comprehend, and truly appreciate, the deep wisdom hidden beneath the surface of my everyday ordinary life.

I encourage you to put another log on the fire, let a pot of soup simmer, get a cup of hot tea and settle into the faith story of another that your own truths might be revealed anew.

*An Open Heart: Practicing Compassion in Everyday Life*, by the Dalai Lama

*Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer

*Dakota: A spiritual geography*, by Kathleen Norris

*Einstein's God: Conversations about Science and the Human Spirit*, by Krista Tippet

*Gandhi: An Autobiography The Story of My Experiments with Truth*

*Mama Lola: A Vodou Priestess in Brooklyn* by Karen McCarthy Brown

*New Seeds of Contemplation*, by Thomas Merton

*Open Secrets: A Memoir of Faith and Discovery*, by Richard Lischer

*On Being Muslim: Finding a religious path in the world today*, by Farid Esack

*Radical Integrity: The Story of Dietrich Bonhoeffer*

*Siddartha*, by Herman Hesse

*Standing in the Light, My Life as a Pantheist*, by Sharman Apt Russell

*Upon This Rock: The Miracles of a Black Church*, by Samuel G. Freedman

*Waiting for God*, by Simone Weil

*When God is Gone Everything is Holy: The Making of a Religious Naturalist*, by Chet Raymo