

# Soul Matters

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



September 2017

UNITARIAN UNIVERSALIST IDENTITY

*We covenant to affirm and promote:*

***equity, justice and compassion in human relations.***

The second Principle of Unitarian Universalism is one reason people walk through the doors of our church. More often than not, when someone says they are familiar with Unitarian Universalism, it is one of two things that they reference about this living tradition: we are diverse in our thinking, beliefs and practices; and, we know how to mobilize and show-up for action around progressive social issues. The curious and justice-minded arrive hoping to find a place to ground their commitment to a more equitable world community. So often I hear people say, “I came here because someone told me I would find like-minded activists working to *be the change* in the world.” Some of those same people add, “I stay because I see the mission of Jesus, the life and teachings of Jesus being lived out in the lives of the members.”

When it comes to our second Principle, I think the call for compassion in human relations may be the hardest. It is similar to our first Principle’s call to *affirm the inherent worth and dignity of ALL beings*. The second principle reminds us to show up with *compassion in human relations*. At first glance, this seems easy, but dig a bit deeper and reflect on those places where you show up with judgment or righteousness, indignation, disdain, denunciation or rejection.

Last month I attended *Changing Maine: Centering Racism in our Movements* hosted by Resources for Organizing and Social Change. This full-day conference offered separate space for people of color, people of color indigenous, and white people to examine racism. It offered space for white people to examine white supremacy (internalized, ideological, interpersonal, institutional) and begin the work of dismantling whiteness. We live in a racialized nation. We have all been racialized; it is something that has been done to all of us. Dismantling racism is NOT the burden of people of color; it is a burden upon our nation that we all must share.

My anti-racist righteousness was cracked wide open as I heard the facilitators and more evolved/awakened participants speak about calling people to the work rather than calling people out. At that moment I found myself in the very uncomfortable place of realizing my own righteousness was getting in my way. As I reflected quietly, I was all too aware of how I am quick to think others just “don’t get it.” This practice of distancing myself lacks compassion for the many ways in which we as a society are racialized and we the people are crying out for alternative ways to heal a nation. My moments of righteousness do very little to build bridges across our divisions and nurture conversations that promote healing and wholeness. I left Lewiston that Saturday very aware of the spaces my practice of righteousness most needed to be dismantled.

We need to show up and speak up; and just as importantly, we need to reach out to each other— as Jesus did and Mohammed did, and Gandhi did, and Mandela did—with compassion, forgiveness, acceptance, and Love. And maybe, just maybe, with the spirit of Desmond Tutu and the enlightenment of the Dalai Lama as our guide, we can approach it with lightness of heart and the shared yearning for laughter to lighten our load and inspire others to join us in the work.

# 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.



## Beloved Community

The Beloved Community... is a constellation of values to be lived out by the individual and the religious community in the wider society. Unitarian Universalism seeks to be a “church without walls” in which social concerns become the agenda of the people as they take their spiritual and ethical values into the public arena. Our congregation seeks to become communities of moral discourse and social action on the frontiers of living, teaching their children by what they are and do. The congregants become conspirators for the Beloved Community– conspiracy meaning, “to breathe together.” There is, then, in Unitarian Universalism, a seamless garment of spirituality and social action; we are a spiritual center with a civic circumference.” Faith exists by mission.

We want our time on earth to mean something; we want the space in which we live and move and have our being to be in good repair. We are ill-content to wear our religion only in our heads and hearts; we want it to be expressed with our hands. Social justice work is not simply another option on the spiritual menu, an “add on” extracurricular activity, but part and parcel of what it means to be a Unitarian Universalist. ~ Richard Gilbert, from “We affirm and promote justice, equity and compassion in human relations” in *With Purpose and Principle: Essays about the Seven Principles of Unitarian Universalism* edited by Edward A. Frost.

I do not want your sympathy for the needs of humanity.

I want your muscle.

I do not want to talk about what you understand about this world.

I want to know what you will do about it.

I do not want to know what you hope,

I want to know what you will work for.

~ Robert Fulghum

Questions to Consider:

1. In what ways do you conspire for Beloved Community?
2. How do you express your religion with your hands?
3. What social issue is most pressing on your heart and mind? Why?
4. How are you engaging as an agent of change?



This Soul Matters packet was prepared by Rev. Carie Johnsen at Unitarian Universalist Community Church of Augusta, ME. 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).

# Spiritual Practice - Deepening Experiences

## A new way of being for all ages

### Option A

#### WHAT GETS IN YOUR WAY?

*Reread the letter on the first page of this Soul Matters issue.*

Yes, we need to show up and speak up. Yes, we need to do the hard work of speaking truth, confronting injustice and dismantling the *-isms*. Education, advocacy, reflection, and action are vital to creating a more just and equitable global community. And it will serve us well to remember our work begins at home, in our heart, our mind and our spirit. Honest and humble self-reflection is the only way we can see the ways in which we perpetuate the systems we wail against.

This month, I invite you to engage in deep and demanding reflection. Not the easy type of reflection that affirms all that you are doing, but rather the hard reflection that looks how we get in the way of the work that needs to be done. The kind of internal observation that decenters and destabilizes the self. The kind of internal mining that breaks open the heart and prepares a space for something new, something radical, something transformative. Cleaning the cerebral cobwebs shines light on the work that needs to be done—this work we have been called to do—this work of dismantling the *-isms*.

**The exercise:** Spend this month observing the ways in which you create obstacles and barriers, the ways in which you separate yourself and engage in the practice of “othering.” No need to berate yourself. No need to call in shame or guilt. Just observe, notice. This is the first step to getting out from under that which binds us to the systems (internal, ideological, interpersonal, institutional) of oppression.

#### OPENING WORDS

Welcome to this place of possibility!  
This is love's hearth, the home of hope,  
a refuge for minds in search of truth unfolding,  
ever beautiful, ever strange.  
Here, compassion is our shelter,  
freedom our protection  
from the storms of bigotry and hate.  
In this place, may we find comfort and courage.  
Here may our sight become vision to see the unseen,  
to glimpse the good that is yet to be.  
~ Marianne Hachten Cotter

#### CLOSING WORDS

May the love  
which overcomes all differences,  
which heals all wounds,  
which puts to flight all fears,  
which reconciles all who are separated,  
be in us and among us  
now and always.  
~ Fererick E. Gillis



We, the member congregations of the Unitarian Universalist Association, covenant to affirm and promote:

1. The inherent worth and dignity of every person;
2. Justice, equity and compassion in human relations;
3. Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations;
4. A free and responsible search for truth and meaning;
5. The right of conscience and the use of the democratic process within our congregations and in society at large;
6. The goal of world community with peace, liberty and justice for all;
7. Respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part.

The living tradition we share draws from many sources:

- Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of prophetic women and men which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- Jewish and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

Grateful for the religious pluralism which enriches and ennobles our faith, we are inspired to deepen our understanding and expand our vision. As free congregations we enter into this covenant, promising to one another our mutual trust and support.

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### *Other Wise Words...*

Welcome darkness. Don't be afraid of it or deny it. Darkness brings relief from blinding sun, from scorching heat, from exhausting labor. Night signals permission to rest, to be with our loved ones, to conceive new life, to search our hearts, to remember our dreams. The dark of winter is a time of hibernation. Seeds grow in the dark, fertile earth."

~ Jacqui James (Been in the Storm So Long)

The central task of the religious community is to unveil the bonds that bind each to all. There is a connectedness, a relationship discovered amid the particulars of our own lives and the lives of others. Once felt, it inspires us to act for justice. It is the church that assures us that we are not struggling for justice on our own, but as members of a larger community. The religious community is essential, for alone our vision is too narrow to see all that must be seen, and our strength too limited to do all that must be done. Together, our vision widens and our strength is renewed.

~ Mark Morrison-Reed

Because we are not in church to be with people who want to sing the same music, or rally for the same cause, or attend the same retreats. We are in church to learn to love better.... We disagree, we annoy, we flake out on one another. And we worship, we support, we hold, and we affirm one another.... This is really only one choice: between imperfect community and no community. Again and again, we are all called to choose to commit ourselves to building a more just, more diverse, and yet ever messy and imperfect beloved community.

~ Laila Ibrahim, Bless the Imperfect