

Spirit in Practice Going Deeper Exercises

October: Toward a Rich and Meaningful Unitarian Universalist Spirituality

Exercise 1 for October

Reflect back on your lifelong spiritual journey

When you were a child, what (if anything) were you taught or shown about practicing spirituality? What practices have you engaged in as a child, youth and adult? How have your spiritual ideas and needs changed throughout your life? What practices might speak to those ideas and address those needs today?

Exercise 2 for October

Turn to Wonder

Quaker educator Parker Palmer has as a touchstone for his personal and spiritual growth the mantra, “When things get difficult, turn to wonder.”

This phrase, urged on both individuals and communities, is an invitation toward a deeper understanding of our selves and a stronger relationship to the world.

What does it mean?

In both personal spiritual practices and in being with a group, things can get rough. Think, as an example, about your initial experiences of Spirit in Practice. Perhaps it was (or if you missed the kick-off, will be) a delightful and inviting experience. But perhaps you found or find yourself disagreeing with the instructor (They don’t know what they are doing), becoming judgmental toward yourself (I am not spiritual enough to be here) or others in your group (She is not spiritual enough to be here), or shutting down in defense (This is not worth my time). When this occurs, Palmer asks you to try turning to wonder. Instead of accepting your feelings as the end of that internal conversation, what if we were to allow our feels or thoughts to become the beginning. What if we were to wonder:

“I wonder what my reaction teaches me.”

“I wonder what’s going on for me right now.”

“I wonder what brought him or her (or me) to this course.”

“I wonder what he’s feeling right now. I wonder what I am feeling.”

Turning to wonder may shift your feelings of judgment to openness and curiosity. It may change your perspective on the situation and allow you to move on or grow or gain clarity.

It may open up such questions as, “What spiritual work does this moment (and do moments like it) touch? I wonder what it would mean to enter into that work?”

We invite one another, therefore, to begin the practice of turning to wonder.

Exercise 3 for October

When hearing the word “spiritual,” many think this is mysterious or thought to be of some divine interaction. Spiritual moments though, can be when you are awoken to the sacred or holy; when you are, if only momentarily, given special glasses that help you see a little clearer or something larger or perhaps, even, something indescribably small that opens you to the vastness of life.

This can come from a divine source, or a human interaction, or a moment of solitude where you connect deeply with yourself. All of these are sacred. All of these are spiritual. How then, can we enter into a practice of recognizing these sacred and spiritual “wow” moments; moments that invite transformation?

What small t transformations came of a “wow” moment you had this week?

When did this happen? What did it feel like? Did it feel sacred or holy?

Must a Spiritual Practice always elicit a big T Transformation? What big T or small t changes have you had as part of a spiritual practice?

In this coming week, I will share this experience with my accountability partner.

November: Personal Spiritual Practices

Exercise 1 for November

Visio Divina

*That we find a crystal or a poppy beautiful means that we are less alone,
that we are more deeply inserted into existence
than the course of a single life would lead us to believe.”*

- John Berger

In our November Spirit in Practice class, we explored the theme of personal spiritual practices. In particular, we considered intercessory prayer as a way to draw ourselves out of the ordinary into the realm of thinking and feeling beyond our own lives.

For Unitarian Universalists, who “pitch a broad theological tent” (Sinkford) another intercessor might be nature. Regularly spending time in nature gives many of us a depth and grounding in reality, as well as a deeper appreciation of our connectedness to all beings. Nature might tip us

out of familiar ways of seeing our own lives, and take us down forgotten roads, and remind us of what exists outside.

How can we engage nature on a regular basis, making it part of our practice? We can simply open the door and walk outside, but there is another method, *Visio Divina* (Latin for "divine seeing") for using nature as an intercessor. Now more than ever, with our culture becoming more and more visually oriented, we need to cultivate intentional seeing. As with *Lectio Divina* (sacred reading), *Visio Divina* nurtures the spiritual life through an intentional practice of reflection on an image. With *Visio Divina*, we see with the eyes, listen with the heart, and respond with intention. We offer here images that have nature as their theme.

Visio Divina invites us to contemplate an entire image at a pace that involves slowing down, and going deeper with the image as we step beyond initial ideas, judgments, understandings and first and second impressions. And in this case it invites images of nature to address, surprise, and transform us .

For many years, Helen Kaar, a member of The Unitarian Church in Summit, has been taking seasonal photos of the natural world around us, in New Jersey, and sending them to friends daily. These photographs provide an opportunity for one kind of *Visio Divina*. We offer you one of her images from November to reflect on.

Suggestions for how to enter into the practice are below:

The Practice:

We set no absolute time for the guided *Visio Divina*, but we suggest five minutes.

When you are ready, slowly look and notice the image, taking your time to let feelings and thoughts come to you as you take in forms, figures, colors, lines, textures, and shapes.



What arises for you? Notice and name it, without judgment. Close your eyes and recall the image. Open them again and look once again at the image. Do you notice new things?

As you look at the image, where are you drawn or repelled? Where do you find your feelings or thoughts taking you?

Consider your relationship to the image. What might it represent for you? What is it inviting you to pay attention to or to take with you after this moment and into your day?

Each photo comes with a title. The title of this one is “Half Life”. As you sit with this phrase and the image where are you drawn in the image? What feelings and thoughts arise in you? What might you take with you from this moment of meditation?

End the practice, in words that feel comfortable to you, with gratitude for this time of reflection and what has arisen out of you inside this practice. Ask that it bear fruit in your life.

- End -

Postscript: Invitation to receive daily images from nature

The power of these particular images, in our experience, is cumulative. Receiving them each day

has an effect that just seeing one by itself does not. We invite you to sign up to get them and try the daily practice for yourself.

Helen Kaar will send her images to all who are interested. Go to the web site to ucsummit.org, under the Religious Education tab for adults, (or click here:

<http://www.ucsummit.org/wordpress/religious-education/adult/2011-2012-adult-programs-spirit-in-practice> to subscribe and you will receive one image for every day of the year. You can also go to: <http://eepurl.com/g8Auo> . With the latter link, you will receive a test image which you should ignore before the real ones begin.

We invite you to use them as opportunities to take time for reflection. You can unsubscribe at any time.