

Soul Matters Theme Packet (Apr. 6 2022 and May 4 2022 meetings)

The theme structure for this church year is: “Inspired by our Unitarian Universalist sources and by the elements of water, fire, earth, and air, we will explore what grounds us, what we value, and how we want to be together this year.”

- **For March, the element theme is “air”, the value theme is “creativity”, and the wisdom source we are considering is “The arts as a source of wisdom”.**
- **For April, the element theme is “earth”. We will consider “wild card” sources of wisdom—sources other than our official six.**
- *Note: Please feel free to reflect on any or all of the themes during the meetings, your focus doesn't have to match the month.*

Thank you to all who contributed practices, questions, quotes and readings for this theme packet.

Practice/Exercise Suggestions:

Unitarian Universalists want to do more than just read and talk about spiritual topics—they enjoy experiential learning. Many of us learn and process concepts best through direct experience. Given this, group members are invited to choose a “spiritual practice or exercise” on each month’s topic to engage prior to the meeting. I ask you to try the exercises, believing that—whether you “enjoyed” it or not—the experience of doing it will help you learn something about life and yourself, something that sitting in a room just thinking about the topic never could.

Option A: Creativity

Choose one concept that you value— for example your favourite fruit, favourite season, favourite place, someone you love, a trait you admire (eg. courage, compassion, strength etc.,) and create a poem, drawing, dance, song, visual, recipe, etc. to celebrate/honour this concept.

Option B: Creativity

Read 21 inspiring creativity quotes that will get your ideas flowing

[Youtube.com/watch?v=Nw_vk5EuzF4](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Nw_vk5EuzF4)

Which quotes have meaning to you? Are there quotes that have no meaning to you?

Write your own quotes.

Option C: Creativity

Using pencil crayons or paint, colour one of the attached pages illustrating the 4 (or 5) elements. Intend for this to be a relaxing, enjoyable activity.

Option D: Arts as a Wisdom Source

Read the following blog by Jenni Calder, Scottish literary historian, poet and novelist, and engage in her presentation by answering one or more of the *questions in italics*.

Art of Wisdom or Arts of Wisdom? (Updated July 20, 2013)

The Blog – Huff Post <https://www.huffingtonpost.co.uk/author/jenni-calder>

Can we separate thinking from being? I'd suggest that thinking, rational and irrational, is part of being, that thinking implies language, and that language is a primary instrument for giving expression to sensation and experience. Literacy is an essential tool, a gateway to knowledge (but not necessarily to wisdom). It is also a means of expression, a gateway to meaning. But not the only gateway to meaning. Pre-literate societies found other ways of individual and collective expression, oral, visual, and physical. Native Americans, for example, recorded their tribal past and individual achievements through oral traditions, through images and artefacts, and through dance. Our society stresses literacy as the key, but in doing so has relegated other forms of expression and response - forms of expression that are beyond the rational, but not, I'd suggest, irrational.

a. How is language, or other forms expressing communication (storytelling, creation of artifacts, dance ...) important methods of transferring wisdom?

Wisdom implies both 'objective' knowledge and experiential - or existential - knowledge. Our education system certainly favours the former, which is easier to transfer and to measure. The current emphasis on marketable skills weighs against experience and the subjective, which resist codification and quantification. It downgrades the arts and humanities. It overlooks at best, derides at worst, imagination, and creativity. (The argument that the 'creative industries' contribute significantly to the UK economy is useful but skews the real value of creativity.)

A range of practical skills is necessary for survival. Most of us are now distanced from an understanding of how to provide food and shelter. We rely on a highly complex network of skills to maintain an existence that we take for granted, and generally have only the vaguest notion of the origins and journeys taken by our food, our water, gas and electricity, our clothes, and the multiplicity of gadgetry that clutters our lives. We don't know how Google finds the information we seek or where the shit goes when we flush the loo. This lack of connection is part of modern life, part of what 'lived experience' is for us. You can argue that in the 21st century 'being' is as much about the disconnection intrinsic to the mundane business of daily life as it is about feeling and expression.

b. How come it is important that our education system emphasizes imagination and creativity to develop wisdom?

The Enlightenment was practical as well as intellectual. It involved engaging with observed facts and experimenting with cause and effect. As a crucible of new and applied ideas it was creative - you can't have innovation without creativity. As life gets increasingly more complicated, as we struggle to define and connect its complexities, the need for creative thought becomes not just increasingly important but perhaps urgent. Creativity is a conduit for spiritual as well as inventive energy. It can translate 'the joy of being' - and much else - into language, colour, sound, shape, movement - and share these responses. It interprets the world we observe and experience and opens doors into further worlds. But it can't function without imagination. We need to acknowledge, through our education system and in our

individual and community lives, the essential role the imagination plays in helping us to relate to the contexts in which we live and to find our place within them.

c. What is your interpretation of how creativity and spiritual well being are linked? Provide a personal example how your creative expressions are linked to your spirituality.

'Being' is not enough. We need actively to foster and nurture imagination and the means of expression. We need to provide environments where the imagination can flourish, where adults and children can both give and receive its benefits. Imagination is what makes us human. Without it and the expressiveness that it fuels, society is sterile.

d. How is fostering and nurturing imagination and the means of expression important to the development of wisdom? Provide an example.

To suggest a dislocation between 'rational thought' and 'lived experience' is perhaps not entirely helpful. But to move beyond 'the art of wisdom' to 'the arts of wisdom' - that might get us somewhere.

e. In your own words explain what the writer means here.

Option E: Arts as a Wisdom Source

Brian Kiely wrote: I have had the good fortune to visit many art museums in my life in Europe and North America. I have been up close and personal with the great masters (and mistresses). And it took me a long time to realize that some of those great works... I just didn't care for very much. It wasn't that they weren't incredible works, and it wasn't that I was some kind of bumpkinish dullard. It was that particular piece did not speak to me, did not connect with me. Nothing wrong with that.

I developed a little game I would play with myself, and later with my children or whomever I was with in a gallery. Walk into one of the gallery rooms. Stand in the middle. Slowly turn a circle and briefly take in each work. Then pause a moment and ask yourself, which one or two catches your eye? Go study that one for awhile and then explain to your companion why you like it. And vice versa. Each opinion is valid. My kids loved that game.

And the point? Appreciate the pieces that speak to you. You don't need to disparage the rest, for they will no doubt speak to others. But spend time appreciating the work of an artist that has touched you.

Visit a gallery/poetry reading with a friend and play the "Which piece speaks to you most" game. Share your experience with the group.

Option F: Arts as a Wisdom Source

Read through the quotes in the quote section. Share with the group which quote resonates with you and any of your life experiences around that.

Option G: Air

Watch this TedX talk on the conscious use of breathing techniques:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v= QTJOAI0UoU>

Change Your Breath, Change Your Life | Lucas Rockwood | TEDxBarcelona

We do it as long as we live but mostly aren't aware of it: breathing. In his talk Lucas breaks down the fundamentals of yoga breathing in a way that you can easily remember and apply to your practice. Lucas shows us how three breathing practices - water, whiskey, or coffee - can be used as a tool and help us in various situations.

Option H: Earth

Mindfully prepare your plot for this year's garden. What do you need to make this experience enjoyable: Sunny day? Equipment? Company? Permission to stop before you've finished? Set an intention to enjoy the process. Report back anything that stood out for you.

Option I: Earth

Lectio Divina is a meditative way of reading in which we let go of our own agendas and open ourselves to what the passage is trying to say to us.

In his book, *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*, Richard Wagamese writes:

Walk gently on the earth and do each other no harm.

Take a sheet of paper and write this sentence over and over again for 5 minutes. What comes up for you? Write down any insights, or questions.

Repeat the process once more, this time repeating the quote out loud over and over again for 2 to 3 minutes.

Let the group know how the experience was for you.

Option J: Earth, Nature as a Wisdom Source

The following quotes are from Richard Wagamese's book titled *Embers: One Ojibway's Meditations*

"Blessings are in the wind."

"Fog drifts across the harbour the way a cat slinks across a room, and in that jaw-dropping silence are mystery and elegance and power. Sitting here on a morning grey as stone, in a city on an island tucked against a mountain, you come to realize how dynamic living on a planet can be when you remember that we're on one. This great island tucked against the bowl of space is home. It is majestic and at the same time a humble being – allowing us to grow and evolve. Aki – Earth. I will walk her skin today attuned to her heartbeat, the feel of her thrumming against the soles of my feet."

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“Discussion with Old Woman

Me: Why am I alive?

Old Woman: Because everything is

Me: No, I mean the purpose.

Old Woman: That is the purpose. To learn about your relatives.

Me: My family?

Old Woman: Yes. The moon, stars, rocks, trees, plants, water, insects, birds, mammals. Your whole family. Learn about that relationship. How you’re moving through time and space together. That’s why you are alive.”

What thoughts come to your mind when reading these? Do they bring you closer to your own spiritual truth? How do these images resonate with you?

Option K: Earth, The Wisdom of Caring for Our Earth

Watch one or all of the videos below.

When The World Gets 1°C Hotter | Climate Change: The Facts | BBC Earth

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dlsjcG7hTmo>

How to Save Our Planet. / WWF Planet

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0Puv0Pss33M>

Climate Change - We are the PROBLEM & the SOLUTION (Animated Infographic)

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=-D_Np-3dVBQ

Lytton, B.C., evacuees capture fiery escape from burning town CBC

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wizfgB1Hlek>

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=cnyZb72UYsl>

BC floods: Abbotsford

https://www.youtube.com/results?search_query=flooding+Abbotsford

How are you presently the solution to climate change?

What would you be willing to change to increase your solution to climate change?

Option L: Purposeful Seeking of Well-being as a Wisdom Source

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/us/blog/science-choice/202101/10-sources-wisdom>

Wisdom is a human strength that leads to well-being and growth. Wisdom can be defined as purposeful seeking to enhance the well-being of the self and of the society. People on the development path toward wisdom are motivated to achieve a common good, rather than optimizing personal gains (Sternberg and Gluck, 2019).

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Some aspects of wisdom:

1. Open-mindedness.
2. Empathy.
3. Self-reflection.
4. A balanced approach.
5. Managing uncertainty.
6. Wisdom in aging.
7. Wisdom develops through mastery of crises.
8. Seeing the bigger picture.
9. Purpose.
10. Emotion regulation.

Read the entire blog and comment on anything that stood out for you. What areas have you experience with? Where do you want to choose to develop? What comes to mind about how to go about developing that area?

Option M: The Subconscious as a Wisdom Source

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/understanding-hypnosis/202112/understanding-the-subconscious-its-central-role-in-hypnosis>

Ran D. Anbar, M.D., FAAP, is board-certified in both pediatric pulmonology and general pediatrics, offering hypnosis and counseling services at Center Point Medicine in La Jolla, California, and Syracuse, New York. Dr. Anbar is also a past president, fellow, and approved consultant of the American Society of Clinical Hypnosis. He writes:

Your subconscious is the part of your mind of which you are usually unaware but that plays vital roles in your life. Once you've connected to your subconscious through hypnosis, you can have actual conversations with it. Information gained through interactions with the subconscious often leads to much more effective therapy.

Read the entire blog if this grabs your interest. Have you ever been hypnotized? Was the experience helpful? In what way?

Questions to Live With:

*Don't treat these questions like "homework." You do not need to engage every single one. Instead, simply look them over and **find the one that 'hooks' you most**. Then let it take you on a ride. Live with it over the next couple of weeks. **Let it wander around in your unconscious the rest of the time**. Allow it to break into--and break open--your ordinary thoughts. And then come to your Soul Matters meeting prepared to share with the group something of what came up for you.*

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Ask yourself?

1. What are some of my personal sources of wisdom? What is one example of when that wisdom source helped me to move forward in my life.
2. What if I chose to think of myself as an artist? What would be different? What would be the same? What gets in the way?
3. How has art (in any form) helped me to learn, understand, and shift in my attitudes and approaches?
4. What is my favourite painting, poem, song, dance, composition, book etc? Share it with the group.
5. How do I honour the earth? The air?
6. What inspires me? What “de-spires” me? Can I choose my focus?
7. What art form am I enjoying engaging in at the moment?
8. What kind of community art projects can I engage in?
9. In what way are the following subjects considered to be artful? The art of meditation, the healing arts, the art of mediation, the art of relationships. What other subjects might qualify as an art? What is my ‘arts’ specialty?
10. What question do I wish had been included here? I’ll ask myself that question instead.

Quotes:

The foremost reason that artists create, and the rest of us value their art, is because art forms a priceless living bridge between the everyday psychology of our minds and the universal spirit of humanity.

This is the thing: art comes from the heart and, likewise, speaks to the heart; but this asks something of the witness, too, a kind of emotional and spiritual sensitivity with which to receive the generous gift of the artist.

I remember, some years ago, standing transfixed before a self-portrait of an older Rembrandt in an exhibition in London. It was hot and crowded in that dark, airless space. I was aware of people coming and going beside me, but I stood there in a kind of timeless personal bubble, filled with fascination and wonder. I also recall a similar experience when, as a teenager on a family holiday in Spain, I heard on the radio for the first time Rodrigo’s

magnificent "Concerto de Aranjuez." I was entranced, delighted, and awestruck for the entire duration of the piece, and did not want it to end. These were not simply aesthetic experiences—moments of pleasure. They were, I would say, spiritual experiences, because they were in some small way transformative. I was not entirely the same person afterwards. I was somehow better connected, through the art and the artist, to the entirety of humanity and the cosmic whole. And the proof is that the most vivid memory of these and other similar experiences has stayed with me ever since.

—Larry Culliford

Spiritual Wisdom for Secular Times

<https://www.psychologytoday.com/ca/blog/spiritual-wisdom-secular-times/201712/spirituality-and-art>

But I have come to believe that the real power of art is not the product or the message it conveys. Rather art is about the transformation of the artist.

—Brian Kiely

And why do artists do art and composers compose and musicians interpret music and writers write? Mostly they write to express something they feel, or have seen, or heard in their head. That someone else comes along and appreciates it is a bonus. That someone comes along and gives you money to do it, well that's a lottery win. And while some people will go and commercialize their work just to get money and fame, well that happens. But somewhere underneath all of that is someone who started to do it just for love.

—Brian Kiely

Various quotes from many sources:

Art is a response to a call. The call is an invitation, a challenge to engage with the world.

Making images is as natural a human endeavour as speaking.

Art is power, an instrument of communion between the self and all that is important, all that is sacred.

The artistic process is the chance to encounter dimensions of our inner being and to discover deep, rewarding patterns of meaning.

All creative journeys begin with a challenge to introspection, to fathom not only "what's out there", but "what's in here"...

... This is a time of trusting head and heart to find their way. Allow the mind to follow -- not lead -- the hand.

Art explores what it is to be human.

To "draw from within" is to draw upon a source of wisdom that no one else could possibly have... These deep troughs of uniqueness are our particular gift and genius.

The longer we look, the more we see. The more we see, the more there is to consider.

Meaning, not beauty, is what we are after. Big, deep, wide meaning.

Art is not a religion but a practice and a path. As a path it can take us more deeply into whatever place it is that our soul calls home.

Creation will always create.

Opening Words:

For What Shall We Give Thanks?

By Laura Horton-Ludwig

For what shall we give thanks?

For this moment;

for friends near and far;

for our breath;

for love;

for courage and clarity;

for strength;

for delight;

for laughter;

for beauty;

for the sun and moon and stars in the sky;
for the trees who have seen so much
and still stand proud, stretching themselves to
the sky;
for the bright voices of children;
for the wisdom of elders;
for actions that bless the world;
for hard work that makes a difference;
for music and art and celebration;
for generosity;
for compassion;
for endurance;
for joy;

for hope.
For all these things, we give thanks
as we worship together

By Dag Hammarskjold

Each morning we must hold out the chalice of
our being, to receive, to carry and give back.

Closing Words

Universal Rhythm

By Israel Buffardi

My friends, when you go from here know that
our hearts are always in a holy place, for we are
always connected to one another.

Know that deep down, our hearts beat in one
universal rhythm.

May we each find the sacred space to hear it.

Benediction by Eric Williams

The world is too beautiful to be praised by only
one voice. May you have the courage to sing
your part.

The world is too broken to be healed by only
one set of hands. May you have the courage to
use your gifts.

May you go in peace.

Closing by Jim Magaw

When I say go in peace, I don't mean "go in
mindless oblivion."

When I say go in peace, I don't mean "go
without challenging yourself or others."

When I say go in peace, I don't mean "go in
utter ease and comfort."

When I say go in peace, I mean "go in peace,
seeking justice."

I mean, "go in peace, committed to equal rights
and opportunities for all."

When I say, go in peace, I mean "Go in the
peace that is created when, together,

We build communities of true solidarity, deep
compassion, and fierce, unrelenting love."

Go in peace.

Blessed by Our Connections

Susan Karlson

<http://www.uua.org/worship/words/closing/184746.shtml>

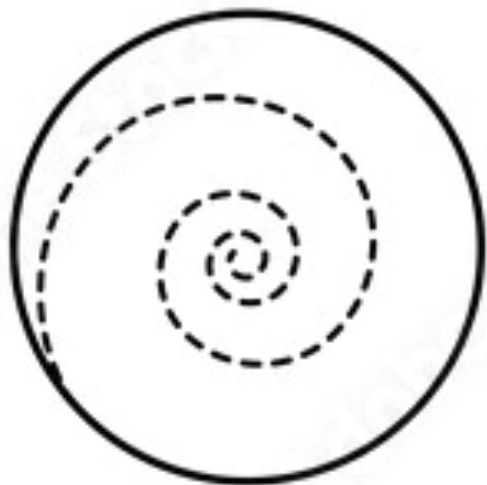
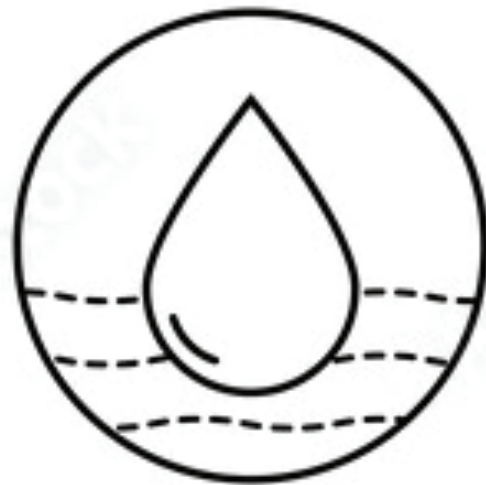
We leave blessed by our connections to one
another and to the spirit of life.

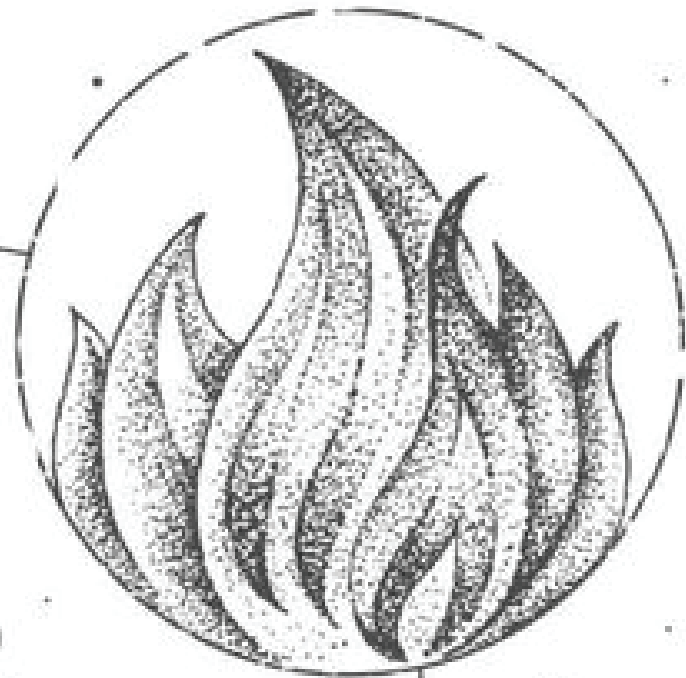
Walk lightly that you may see the life that is
below your feet.

Spread your arms as if you had wings and could
dance through the air.

Feel the joy of the breath in your lungs and the
fire in your heart.

Live to love and be a blessing on this earth.





FOUR
ELEMENTS

