In Unitarian Universalists our “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, draws from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience. This tradition encourages us, calls us, no requires of us, a willingness to suspend knowing long enough to make room for the multiple ways of understanding and experiencing the Mysterious beyond our comprehension. Unitarian Universalism heartens us to listen curiously that we might learn the ways in which others perceive unknowable truths. We are encouraged to discover for ourselves what source(s) affirm and sustain our way of walking in a complicated and joyful universe.

Unitarian Universalism celebrates the diversity of our worldviews and religious stories while acknowledging the contradictory ways in which our individual truths interact with each other. We believe these seemingly competing manners of being do not have to be at odds with each other, rather, they expand our capacity to genuinely, authentically, and passionately reach beyond ourselves. The vast expanse of varied cultural perspectives need not threaten our own way of being but rather broaden and enrich our ways of knowing.

Our task as Unitarian Universalists is to explore the sources of knowing with spaciousness rather than rigidity; to discern what is right and good from our observations and reflections; and then to hold it lightly in the palm of our hand that it might be refined and shaped by our unfolding experiences and our interactions with an infinite universe.

During this season of holiday merriment and this national time of unrest, I invite you to slow down and consider the Unitarian Universalist Sources. Attend weekly services to deepen your understanding of the multitude of possibilities. I invite you to settle into one of the books listed on page 4 of this Soul Matters Packet. Take time to consider each the sources listed on page two. Discern that which sustains you in times of joy and times of heartache. Consider developing a spiritual practice to center and guide your living.

At the end of the day, when you fall exhausted and overwhelmed into the comfort of your home, your animal beings, your family, your community, what mysterious source connects you to all that is, was, and ever will be? What is it that sustains you in the joyful and in the painful? What do you find at the well to restore hope, life and love?

In faith, Rev. Carie Johnsen
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 meet along the way.

Unitarian Universalist congregations affirm and promote seven Principles, which we hold as strong values and moral guides. We live out these Principles within a “living tradition” of wisdom and spirituality, drawn from sources as diverse as science, poetry, scripture, and personal experience. These are the six sources our congregations affirm and promote:

- 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;
- Humanist and Christian teachings which call us to respond to God’s love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- 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.

Questions to Consider:

1. What source resonates with you the most? What source resonates the least? Why?

2. How easy is it for you to suspend knowing to make room for another person’s belief system? In what ways do you do this well? In what ways do you struggle? Is there a particular source in which you relate to with more tension? Why?

3. Reflect upon a time when you felt the presence of something beyond yourself (community, God/Goddess, Spirit, Creator, Nature) present in your life? How did this affirm, change or transform your sense of being in the world.

CLOSING WORDS

Our eyes and minds turn now toward the ordinary.

Leaving this space made sacred by our presence, take with you at least some seed of understanding, hope and courage and drop it into the confusion of the world.

Nourish the seed that it might grow as a tree of life giving shelter to the weary and hope to the despairing.

Be yourself a branch of the tree of life. Amen.

~ Norman V Naylor

OPENING WORDS

Let us be united;
Let us speak in harmony;
Let our minds apprehend alike.
Common be our prayer,
Common be the end of our assembly;
Common be our resolution;
Common be our deliberations.
Alike be our feelings;
Unified be our hearts;
Common be our intentions;
Perfect be our unity.
~ from the rig veda
Spiritual Practice – Deepening Experiences
A new way of being for all ages

Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent:*
not to draw you into a fixed wisdom tradition,
but to draw out of you the wisdom
that surpasses all traditions.

Option A
Five Questions: The Heart of Spiritual Quest

Who am I?
Where did I come from?
Where am I going?
How shall I live? And
Why?

Start a conversation. Invite friends to dinner. Reflect in private. Write each day. Meditate. Walk with these questions curiously. Ask someone to explore these questions more intentionally over a period of time. Purchase the book and dive deep into essays clarifying the questions and teachings from a variety of religious traditions that speak to the questions.

Option B
Passage Meditation

The secret of meditation is simple: you become what you meditate on. When you use an inspirational passage every day in meditation, you are driving the words deep into your consciousness. Eventually they become an integral part of your personality, which means they will find constant expression in what you do, what you say, and what you think.

Shapiro encourages readers to choose a text that articulates one’s deepest insights and values then commit it to memory. Shapiro encourages practitioners to internalize texts through memorization. Like planting a seed in a garden, what is nurtured and allowed to germinate grows and blossoms.

* This month the spiritual deepening practices are inspired by and taken from Perennial Wisdom for the Spiritually Independent: Sacred Teachings –Annotated & Explained. Annotation by Rami Shapiro
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
Dakata: A spiritual geography, by Kathleen Norris
Einstein’s God: Conversations about Science and the Human Spirit, by Krista Tippet
Gandi: 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

Other Wise Words...

On Self-Knowledge
By Kahlil Gibran

And a man said, Speak to us of Self-Knowledge.
And he answered, saying:
Your hearts know in silence the secrets of the days and the nights.
But your ears thirst for the sound of your heart’s knowledge.
You would know in words that
which you have always known in thought.
You would touch with your fingers the naked body of your dreams.
And it is well you should.
The hidden well-spring of your soul must needs
rise and run murmuring to the sea;
And the treasure of your infinite depths
would be revealed to your eyes.
But let there be no scales to weigh your unknown treasure;
And seek not the depths of your knowledge
with staff or sounding line.
For self is a sea boundless and measureless.
Say not, "I have found the truth"
but rather, "I have found a truth."
Say not, "I have found the path of the soul."
Say rather, "I have met the soul walking upon my path."
For the soul walks upon all paths.
The soul walks not upon a line, neither does it grow like a reed.
The soul unfolds itself, like a lotus of countless petals.

Today, in the opening years of the twenty-first century, we find ourselves in a critical moment when the religious traditions need to awaken again to the natural world as the primary manifestations of the divine to human intelligence. The very nature and purpose of human is to experience the intimate presence that comes to us through natural phenomena. Such is the purpose of having eyes and ears and feeling sensitivity, and all our other senses. We have no inner spiritual development without outer experience. Immediately, when we see or experience any natural phenomenon, when we see a flower, a butterfly, a tree, when we feel clear water, our natural response is immediate, intuitive, transforming, ecstatic. Everywhere we find ourselves invaded by the world of the sacred.

~ Thomas Berry.