

# DIALOGUE

## QUARTERLY MAGAZINE

A publication of the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of San Dieguito

*Inspired by our UU principles, we are a vibrant, intentionally diverse congregation that models and promotes both locally and globally: love, spiritual growth, service, right relations and sustainable living.*

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**I Stand on the Side of Love  
WILL YOU?**

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# ***HAPPENINGS AT UUFSD***

## ***Our Two Service Pilot Program***

### **TIMELINES FOR THE TWO SERVICE PILOT PROGRAM**

***8:30 a.m. -12:30 p.m. Nursery (ages 1-3) opens. The nursery, for children under three years of age will remain open for both services.***

***9:00 a.m. First service, RE planned for children Pre-K through Grade 6. JRUU and YRUU children are invited to remain for the complete service. This is an innovated service, including the ministers sermon and alternative music. Children attend the beginning of the service then are excused for elementary RE classes.***

***9:20 a.m. Sunday School begins for Pre-K though Grade 6***  
***Ages 1-3 -- Pinecones (above the back parking lot)***  
***Pre K & K -- Footprints (1st classroom up the hill behind the Admin Building)***  
***Grade 1-3 -- Treetops (2nd building up the hill behind the Admin Building)***  
***Grades 4-6 -- Palmer Library***

***10:00 a.m. First Worship Service ends. Fellowship Hour with light refreshments and conversation in the core area.***

***10:30 a.m. Children 3rd Grade and under should be picked up promptly in their classes at this time.***

***11:00 a.m. Second Worship Service begins. This is a traditional service with all the elements that currently comprise our Order of Service, including the choir. Young children, JRUU and YRUU youth attend the beginning of the service, and then are excused for their classes.***

***11:20 a.m. Pre-K through 6th Grade proceed to a combined class in the Library. JRUU and YRUU go to their Sunday classes.***

***12 Noon Second worship Service ends. We hope to have refreshments after the second service as well, details are still being arranged.”***

***12:30 p.m. RE Program ends. Children 6th grade and under should be picked up promptly in their classroom.***

# SPIRITUAL LIFE AT UUFSD



**Spiritual Growth Circles:** Spiritual Growth Circles are groups of 6-12 people who gather each month to discuss the themes of each month's sermons. New SGCs form each September for the church year ahead. Through facilitated exploration of material prepared by Rev. Miller, these groups stimulate deeper understanding of significant spiritual issues and provide an opportunity for personal growth and for meaningful connections with other participants.

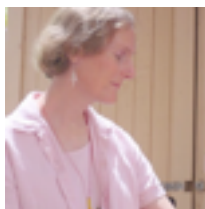
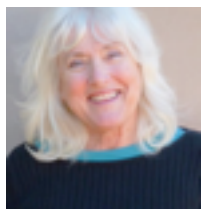
**Coordinator:** Linda Pratt - [spiritualgrowthcircles@uufsd.org](mailto:spiritualgrowthcircles@uufsd.org)



**Mindfulness Meditation Group:** Mindfulness Meditation, for some, is part of a spiritual practice. For others, it is a pragmatic way to consciously be engaged in life with more intention and clarity. Jon Kabat Zinn, founder of the Mindfulness Based Stress Reduction Program (MBSR) describes mindfulness as being "...fully awake in our lives. It is about perceiving the exquisite vividness of each moment. It is about paying attention, on purpose, to the present moment..."

**Teacher:** Livia Walsh - Tuesday 9-10:30 Palmer Library [mindfulmeditation@uufsd.org](mailto:mindfulmeditation@uufsd.org)

**Buddhist Meditation Groups:** We have two meditation groups that have been meeting on Thursday evening and Friday morning for over twelve years. Both groups are open to drop-ins and follow the same format. While we study a variety of Buddhist traditions, we are especially fond of Pema Chodron, an American nun in the Tibetan tradition.



**Facilitators:**

**Christie Turner - Thursday Session - Palmer Library - 6:00-7:15 p.m.**  
[thursdaybuddhistmeditationgroup@uufsd.org](mailto:thursdaybuddhistmeditationgroup@uufsd.org)

**Robin Mitchell - Friday Session - Palmer Library - 10:00 a.m.-Noon**  
[fridaybuddhistmeditationgroup@uufsd.org](mailto:fridaybuddhistmeditationgroup@uufsd.org)



**Buddhist Sangha:** The Sangha is based on the Vipassana tradition. Each session will provide guided meditation instructions and discussion, a talk on Buddha's teachings, a question and answer time, and practice assignments that call for applying the teachings to everyday life. We are open to newcomers. We have quarterly full days of silent meditation on the UUFSD campus.

**Teacher:** Bob Isaacson - 1st & 3rd Tuesday of each month - Palmer Library 7:30 -9:00 p.m.  
[buddhistsangha@uufsd.org](mailto:buddhistsangha@uufsd.org)



**Meaning and the Five Senses:** As a participants you will be asked to bring items (based on the nightly theme) to share with the group that have meant something to you in your spiritual journey (however you define that for yourself). There will be time to reflect on the meaning this item has for you and why you wanted to share, and there will be time for others to share reflections on their thoughts about the sharing.. Planned class dates and themes are: **October 9 – Sight; November 13 – Sound; December 11 - Touch; January 22 – Smell; February 12 – Taste.**

**Facilitator:** Rev. David Miller Registration required. Email to [revd@uufsd.org](mailto:revd@uufsd.org)



# *Spirituality in a liberal religion, are the two compatible?*

by Roger Doebke



***“I once listened to an Indian on television say that God was in the wind and the water, and I wondered at how beautiful that was because it meant you could swim in Him or have Him brush your face in a breeze.”***

**— Donald Miller, *Blue Like Jazz: Nonreligious Thoughts on Christian Spirituality***

Spirituality is an amorphous term with such a variety of meanings, that, when we hear someone mention the word we are never quite sure what is intended without further definition from the speaker. In Western religions spirituality is generally based on an awareness of a connection that links an individual to something greater than himself or herself. This link may be between people, other species, nature, the supernatural or almost anything else. But historically spirituality has meant relinquishing the sense of individuality in order to obtain “enlightenment.”

In Eastern religions, monastic adherents commit themselves to achieving their “Enlightenment” by nothing less than the total annihilation of their personal identity, not a practice we observe often in our culture. Many Unitarians proclaim that they are not “Religious,” but rather, “Spiritual.” This may mean they don’t believe in any supernatural or mystical force; they may embrace a form of contemplative practice and identify themselves with Buddhism; it may mean they feel a connection to Nature; or just like being around “like minded” people. The individualistic nature of these pursuits has resulted in a personal conscience that poses a challenge to Unitarians to find a common vocabulary for their cosmology or world view. And, if we are going to be in dialogue as a community, it is incumbent upon us to be able to articulate definitively our convictions.

Unitarian theologian James Luther Adams, said “We do not live by spirit alone. A purely spiritual religion is a purely spurious religion; it is one that exempts its believer from surrender to the sustaining, transforming reality that demands the community of justice and love.”

We, as Unitarians, who claim to be functioning, independent and practical reasoners must be accountable to others and engage with them in pursuit of an understanding of the common good. Our relationship with one another must be one of give and take, a network of relations set in a rich, compassionate and vibrant community. A community wherein each person engages in and contributes to the pursuit of the Common Good; the essence of the associational life.

We are all intertwined in family and community where the answers to our most fundamental questions about the nature of life may be found, explored and shared. Unitarian Universalism is a formal institution representative of a liberal religious community that provides a social dimension to experience many aspects of our spiritual life.

James Luther Adams’s, “Guiding Principles for a Free Faith,” outlined “Five Smooth Stones” as basic belief for the UU community:

- (1) Revelation and truth are not closed, but constantly revealed.
- (2) All relations between persons ought ideally to rest on mutual free consent and not on coercion.
- (3) We have a moral obligation to direct our efforts toward the establishment of a just and loving community.
- (4) Good must be consciously given form and power within history.
- (5) The resources that are available for achievement of meaningful change justify an attitude of ultimate optimism.

We all seek temporary answers to eternal questions but if spirituality and liberal religion are going to survive together we must find a common vocabulary. Members of our congregation have differing spiritual needs and pursue differing paths to meet those needs. Some people hunger for certainty, some seek structure. And as James Luther Adams said, “We are making no plea here for uniformity or for a faith once and for all delivered, but rather a plea for a religious liberalism, which though permitting and encouraging variety and breadth, will acquire a precise character, a cutting edge of its own.” However, to be effective and relevant in American culture we must all know definitively what our convictions are and maintain the expectation that our fellow congregants will take them seriously. This is within our walls.



## Science and Spirituality

by Marylou Gibson

**“Science is not only compatible with spirituality; it is a profound source of spirituality. When we recognize our place in an immensity of light-years and in the passage of ages, when we grasp the intricacy, beauty, and subtlety of life, then that soaring feeling, that sense of elation and humility combined, is surely spiritual. So are our emotions in the presence of great art or music or literature, or acts of exemplary selfless courage such as those of Mohandas Gandhi or Martin Luther King, Jr. The notion that science and spirituality are somehow mutually exclusive does a disservice to both.”**

**--Carl Sagan, *The Demon-Haunted World: Science as a Candle in the Dark***



My daughter Eve, who has spent the better part of four years studying the sciences at Berkeley, says she takes great solace in the orderliness and interdependence of the universe. She has been able to verbalize something that I have known for my whole life but perhaps did not speak until our recent UUFSD Spirituality Group. I have a spiritual practice and I have engrained it into my daily life and my livelihood.

One of my routines is the daily admiration and respect for the biology of nature. I have the opportunity to inspect and ponder my garden and the creatures that live and grow there. My added benefit is that when I work I can interact with the microscopic, perform experiments and test the beauty and orderliness of nature on a daily basis. In biological experimentation I find that I practice my hope to see that perfection in every natural thing. I have thought that the most spiritual aspect of the science that I perform is the hopefulness of discovery and the visualization of the perfect. Nothing delights me more than a beautiful experiment. It is like a work of art.

I was trained as a biological scientist, specifically a microbiologist. I delight at looking at various things under the microscope. Taking something that appears mundane or yucky to some, like an insect or a snowflake, a grain of pollen or even smaller things like a cell or a virus, and studying their organization and pattern is to me like a meditation, like looking into the eye of god. It is amazing, mesmerizing and spiritually awe inspiring. Among my favorite things to study are viruses. To see their patterns and delve into the organization of these microscopic things, so small that you cannot even see a billion of them in the palm of your hand, is so amazing.

Researchers at UC Santa Barbara argue that the association between science and morality is so ingrained that merely thinking about science can trigger more moral behavior. I would agree that thinking and reflecting on science, a virtuous and perfect creation, can bring us to a virtuous and spiritual mindset.



## *Practice makes perfect*

*by Robin Mitchel*



Since I helped lead our Spiritual Practices discussion group for so many years you'd think that I would have a good understanding of what spirituality means, but what I mostly learned from those years is that everyone defines it differently. For some, it's ecstatic transcendence; for others it's being grounded in the here and now.

But one thing I have learned, from other people's experience and my own, is that whatever it is spiritual growth takes practice. The only times I have found myself growing spiritually are the times when I have had a regular spiritual practice.

My own period of adult spiritual growth began accidentally with a very simple spiritual practice. I was a rational agnostic, with very little interest in spirituality and none whatsoever in God, but for reasons of my own I decided that I needed to work on developing an "attitude of gratitude". I had heard somewhere that the one prayer that was always appropriate, regardless of your beliefs or circumstances, was "Thank you." And so I began saying grace every morning before breakfast:

Thank you for the food that sustains my life,  
For the live you gave me to live,  
And for today and all the blessings it will bring.

At first I just said the words, but after a time I started holding parts of my life in mindfulness as I said them. If I was depressed, I would hold that in my mind as I said the part about the live I was given to live and think "even so, thank you!" If I was dreading something that was going to happen that day, I would hold that in my mind as I said the part about today and all its blessings and think "even so, thank you!"

As I did this simple practice every morning over the months and then years, I found myself changing in ways that I had not intended. Over time I began to have a sense of being listened to when I said those words, as if I wasn't just talking to an empty room. And so one day I started with "Thank you, God..." and found that it felt right in a way that it wouldn't have when I started.

And from that moment came all of the spiritual growing I have done in the last twenty years, from joining a Methodist church to traveling to India for Buddhist teachings to becoming part of the worship here at UUFSD. I now begin my day with Buddhist prayers and meditation instead of saying that grace, but they have the same effect on my life and character because they share the same essential nature.

I think that for any practice to truly bring me spiritual growth it has to involve at least a moment of genuine mindfulness, of awareness, and it has to connect me to something larger than myself. Without the former it doesn't seem to really touch my life, and without the latter it can easily spin off into narcissism. (As one Buddhist writer said, if meditation is the act of placing one's mind on an object, then most of us are meditating most of the time and the object of our meditation is ourselves!)

So I have come to define spirituality as the thing that happens as the result of doing any genuine spiritual practice. The practices that work for you may be very different from mine, but my experience with all my different churches and religions is that they will have similar effects in our lives. Practice may not make us perfect, but it really can transform our lives.



**"Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives."**

**— Brené Brown, *The Gifts of Imperfection: Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are***



## *Spirituality in Bhutanese Ritual*

*by Roger and Nancy Harmon*

A learned Bhutanese layman was speaking to us of the use of prayer flags, smoke offerings, and prayer wheels to share blessings for all beings. I asked what daily rituals Bhutanese perform for their individual spiritual progress. He paused, perhaps to consider how to respond gently to my unknowing. He then said: Bhutanese do not have rituals that focus on individual spiritual progress; rather, all ritual is centered on peace and blessings for all.

...What a beautiful gift, this focus on all beings...

We hope these images capture some of this special quality of Bhutan. May viewing these prayer flags flying from mountain tops and above roaring rivers—from which blessings are sent most vigorously out into the universe—bring you happiness! May the images of smoke blessings billowing forth on mountain slopes, the light of butter lamps, and the prayer wheels turned both by human hands and by water from rivers and streams be a blessing to you. May all beings be at peace and may this begin with us.

## *A Few Questions to Think About*

- **What is your definition of spirituality?**
- **How do you experience spirituality?**
- **What spiritual needs do you have met at UUFSD and what spiritual needs do you find in other ways?**
- **Are you aware of the spiritual programs at the UUFSD?**
- **What kind of stories about spirituality would you like to see published in this publication?**
- **How can the quarterly magazine be a useful tool to add to the spiritual life of the congregation?**
- **Are there any communications vehicles, written or on the web, that would help you in your spiritual journey?**

## Healing and Spirit

by Chaplain Michael Esehun



Webster's first definition of "heal," is "to make sound or whole." How can we talk about healing in a serious way without addressing all those components of our wholeness? Certainly physical well-being is a big piece of that, but it's not the whole picture. How can we discuss healing and yet ignore a large aspect of a person's wholeness—namely one's spirit? Attending to the spirit, that's my role as an inter-faith chaplain at the Simms/Mann-UCLA Center for Integrative Oncology. So what does that look like—tending to one's spirit?

***"When you connect to the silence within you, that is when you can make sense of the disturbance going on around you."***

— **Stephen Richards**

In the population I serve, I find that a vast majority of the patients and families I see describe themselves as "spiritual not religious." That often begs the discussion of what do we mean by that? I often ask patients (and they often ask me), what does spirituality mean? In my view, I'd have to go back to the Latin root of the word—*spiritus*... which only means breath. What is it that breathes life into your life? What is it that gives your life meaning, what is it that makes you get up and face the day... that makes it worth your while, worth fighting for? For some that would be religious community or a ritual or a relationship to God or a higher power, and for some it might be their family, their work, a good round of golf or surfing the perfect wave! For some it may be a place where they can feel that greater connection to the larger circle of life—be it the seashore, a forest, or the Thanksgiving dinner table. What I have witnessed to be sure is that a

diagnosis of cancer can really mess with all of that (as can any significant life crisis!) Perhaps the very thing that used to give my life meaning now seems meaningless, or I don't seem to have access to it in the same way. I might have to find a new meaning, or at least a new pathway to connect to the old one. That could serve as a good working definition of "spiritual crisis."

So in this way, I see myself as fellow traveler on that pathway—as one who can walk beside those in spiritual crisis for a time, exploring the questions, the old definitions and the new, holding the space of calm, and the room to tend to spirit, however one defines it. That is what compassion is. Compassion, at its Latin root, "com-pati" literally means WITH suffering. Not fix suffering, correct suffering, relieve suffering, judge suffering, or feel bad about the suffering... but to be with... to walk beside the one who is suffering. That is not at all easy, though it is simple. And it's something all of us can learn to do for one another and for ourselves—to be with our own suffering in a compassionate way..

## Spirituality and Art

by Linda Luisi



When we focus on the chalice, we miss the profiles around the chalice. In daily life, when we focus too much on our own "stuff," we miss the needs of the people around us.

***"To create art with all the passion in one's soul is to live art with all the beauty in one's heart."***

— **Aberjhani, Journey through the Power of the Rainbow: Quotations from a Life Made Out of Poetry**

When painting murals, the subjects and the empty space around them are equally important. And when teaching art, students need to see the outline of the empty space around

their subject. You can see that if you are aware of the profiles on each side of the chalice, you can draw this specific chalice more accurately. Try it. This is true of all else we attempt to draw. This is true of all else we attempt to do.



L. Luisi

By paying attention to the empty or quiet moments that are before and after the exciting or busy moments, we can redefine or reshape our lives. This leads to making better decisions, leading more balanced lives, and enjoying more. If we spend our empty quiet time for reflection and for increasing our awareness of our connection to others, our spirituality will take shape and our busy moments will have more grace. Try it.

Busy moments are quite likely the times I am with people, such as surrounded by traffic, teaching art, or at a family dinner. So I find it a good idea to work on this in any way I can—especially in quality "alone" time, with or without a brush in hand. Seeing art makes us happy. Doing art makes us happy. Doing art can be an excuse to spend a moment alone—quality time for oneself. It is an empty space that is radically different from our busy lives. Empty, yet full of possibilities. We can be with our thoughts on a deeper level. From that place is where we move with more courage, strength, and passion.

There is no need to reserve art for those with a credential or prior experience. Those of us who don't think we are artists have yet to discover our creativity. Try it.

## What Does It Mean to be Spiritual?

by John Atcheson

***“The first peace, which is the most important, is that which comes from within the souls of people when they realize their relationship, their oneness with the universe and all its powers, and when they realize at the center of the universe dwells the Great Spirit, and that its center is really everywhere, it is within us.”***

**-- Black Elk**



For most of us, the root of our spirituality lies in the fact that we are alive, we exist in a universe that is as inexplicable as it is awe-inspiring, as stunning in its beauty as it is in its occasional brutality, at once benign and demanding.

For many, finding ourselves in the midst of such mysteries leads us to say, “There must be a God. Where else would all this miraculous stuff come from?” In short, the presence of miracles demands a Miracle Worker.

Indeed, this is precisely the argument theologian William Paley made in his 1802 book, *Natural Theology*. His metaphor, that the existence of a watch implies an intelligent watchmaker, served as the basis of the title for Richard Dawkin’s *The Blind Watchmaker*. Theists then invest much of their sense of wonder, awe, and meaning in this God first and “his” works second.

But for me, the miracle of what exists *is* the font of my spirituality. The fact that the Big Bang emerged from seemingly nothing – that some 10 billion years later (if not sooner) life emerged, then flourished, and that it continues to thrive and seek out ways to carry DNA forward is a source of endless wonder and profound gratitude. It is also a source of humility for, to me, what we like to think of as the culmination of God’s work – intelligent beings aka humans – is merely one more survival strategy designed to carry DNA forward. We are merely vessels, experiments developed by the blind watchmaker to propagate the miracle of life.

I can think of nothing more miraculous than the fact that I am here, now. I am aware. At this juncture in time, at this one precious moment snatched from a river of eternity, I exist in a world of wonder and love and strife and danger and I *know* it.

I feel this wonder when I walk in the hills and mountains; stroll along beaches; when I see hawks soar, hear the waves pound. When I see the smile in my wife’s eyes, or feel the laughter from a shared joke with a friend.

How could one not be spiritual? How could a belief in a God add anything to this literally incredible state of being? I am not saying that such a belief necessarily detracts from spirituality, merely that, for me, it is totally unnecessary.

In fact, upon reflection, it may be that the theist’s God does us a disservice in the spirituality department. Deflecting our sense of reverence from that which truly sustains us – a world and universe in which the carefully wrought balances of energy, material, chance and time have produced the one physical world and climate that allows us to survive – to a “God,” perhaps we don’t value it as much as we should. At this perilous juncture in our brief sojourn, maybe we’d benefit from focusing more on the miracles and less on the Miracle Worker. Perhaps by revering God, we can more easily turn a blind eye to the blind watchmaker’s works, and, in doing so, feel free to foul our air, consume our natural capital, and destroy our life-sustaining climate.

But these are distinctly unspiritual thoughts. The miracle that is our universe will go on long after we are gone as individuals, long after we are gone as a species, long after our planet and solar system are consumed in a supernova.

This, then, is the source of my spirituality. To walk in this time and place immersed in natural treasures and know that I – we – are truly the stuff of stars, animate and self-aware for a time, capable of choosing good, wonder and joy while here.



## Spirituality and Animals

by Bob Isaacson



I practice the teachings of the Buddha, called the Dharma, which has been at the center of my life for almost twenty years. The Buddha gave very specific instructions in the Mahayana scriptures to his followers not to eat flesh. Although two of the three main traditions of Buddhism, Tibetan and Zen, follow these scriptures, today we find Buddhists who are vegan, vegetarian, and neither vegan nor vegetarian. The Buddha's message in the third tradition, Theravada, is contained in the Pali Cannon and is more subtle, yet quite clearly encourages the renunciation of eating animals. I made a decision to not eat animals almost 40 years ago, long before I ever heard the words of the Buddha. As my Dharma practice deepened, so has my heart-felt connection to the animals I don't eat.

***"While spirituality provides an efficient and endless fuel for your mind and body, you must burn that fuel with human action towards your goals, dreams, and desires."***  
— Steve Maraboli,  
***Unapologetically You: Reflections on Life and the Human Experience***

As I opened to the reality of what actually happens to an animal raised for slaughter, I began to feel the deep pain and suffering of the animal that might otherwise wind up on my plate; bacon became a dead pig, hamburger a dead cow, chicken salad a dead chicken, and fish and chips a dead fish, most often the species cod or haddock. The Buddha often said that all "sentient"\* beings should be

included in our circle of non-harming and compassion. I feel connected to all life, those forms that look like me and those that don't. It has taken most of my life to uncover some of the mysteries of being in this body. I have only begun to uncover the mystery of other life forms. Scientists are just beginning to understand the rich and complex life experienced by calves, chickens, and fish.

And, it's not like I need to eat other animals to survive. There is no need for a farmed animal to experience the pain of being raised for slaughter and the slaughter itself on my account. In the 21<sup>st</sup> century there are abundant healthy and tasty choices that don't require the harming of another sentient being. This is not a practice of depriving myself, but instead one of mercy and generosity.

Each time I buy food at a store, order at a restaurant, or eat one of my three daily meals, the food I eat reflects my heart-felt wish that all beings be free of suffering. Transitioning to not eating animal flesh flowed easily once my connections to animals other than myself grew. My heart was touched again and again. Once I made the change to vegetarianism and then to veganism\*\*, I felt more energetic, more connected, more one with nature and the world.

Supporting the violence against animals with our food choices tears at the harmony of our interconnection with all of life. My meals are celebrations of life and peace. The brightness of mindfulness shines on what so touches my heart. I often feel a oneness with the food I eat and with life itself. Veganism is at the heart of my compassion practice. By sparing the life of the most vulnerable of our fellow sentient beings, I extend the ring of compassion beyond myself, my family, and friends, to those beings I don't know and will never meet. Love understands.

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\*The word "sentient," is defined in dictionaries as sensitive to pain.

\*\*Veganism is vegetarianism without dairy, eggs, and honey, the production of which supports significant suffering.

## Spiritual Growth Circles



by Linda Pratt

"We gather as a Spiritual Growth Circle to deepen our sense of meaning and community. In this community, we seek to care for one another and to work together toward creating a kinder, more compassionate, more loving and just local and global community." The essence of the SGC is captured in that Covenant, recited together at each meeting.

***"Like those in the valley behind us, most people stand in sight of the spiritual mountains all their lives and never enter them, being content to listen to others who have been there and thus avoid the hardships."***

— Robert M. Pirsig

How often do we have a chance to intentionally discuss something more than the weather, politics, or the latest news with our fellow UUFSD'ers? When do we take the time to open our thoughts, minds and hearts and enter into a deeper, richer conversation about what forgiveness has meant in our life, how we have experienced fear and courage, and what aging means to us at this point of our life? Once each month, the Spiritual Growth Circles provide a comfortable space to gather and share our thoughts about these and many other topics and to listen with openness to people who you may or may not agree with. This has truly enriched my life and is one of my favorite parts of the UUFSD experience.

Through facilitated exploration of material prepared by Rev. Miller, these groups stimulate deeper understanding of significant spiritual issues and provide an opportunity for personal growth and for meaningful connection with other participants.

***(Continued on page 8)***

## *The Spiritual Journey*



by *Sheila Fugard*

*From Sheila Fugard's Buddhist memoir  
"Lady of Realisation."*

I have been a Buddhist for many years, and very much aware that both the past and the present inform my practice. Buddhism has many doors that can be opened into silence....the activity of compassion....the fearlessness of speaking out against oppression and most of all the respect for the lives of all sentient beings with whom we share the planet.

If I am to truly understand my own commitment to Buddhism I have to go back many years to my encounter with a western Tibetan Buddhist nun, Sister Palmo, in South Africa, where I lived. I have written about that meeting.....

Cape Town, and the late summer of 1972. The mountains glisten with a last flush of sustained heat. The place is a secluded house in a quiet suburb. You had arrived from India, and are staying with Rosemary, an elderly devotee whom you had encountered in India ten years ago.

***On life's journey faith is nourishment, virtuous deeds are a shelter, wisdom is the light by day and right mindfulness is the protection by night. If a man lives a pure life, nothing can destroy him.***

***--Gautama Buddha***

Sister Palmo, you sit cross-legged upon a couch. You are a woman of sixty-one. Shaven headed. Clothed in the maroon robe of the Mahayana Buddhist nun. You are a woman stripped to the barest essentials. Grey deep set eyes. Firm bone structure. Your skin, though aging, bears a unique softness. You gesture toward a chair. There is a tranquillity about your bearing of one who has lived many years in the East Yet, you possess an intellect that is eminently western. Skills of your early life add to your collectedness.

"Sister Palmo, I have visited many teachers seeking inner stillness...the void...written about in scripture and sutra. Sufi teachers and swamis have offered advice and explanation

as regards the nature of mind; meditation; problems of living. None has really helped. The knots of personality remain unresolved."You see through my spiritual materialism. You sense that I am groping in ignorance. You speak in a soft English accent. Suffering occurs through desire. Meditation can cut through ignorance. Your experience is no different to others who are equally bound by attachment, and thereby incur suffering. You force me to listen. It is more than the words which you speak. It is your presence. For you are like a radiant and immaculate example of the Buddha.....

Today, many years later, I am very much aware of how the teachings of the Buddha are evolving in the contemporary life of the twenty first century. Meditation and breathing are no longer the tools of formal Buddhism but are available to all.

They bring about the growth and rehabilitation of both the mind and body in a secular society. Buddhism shares the UUU concerns for social justice, compassionate activism, and loving kindness, as well as the deep questioning of how we can be of service to our society. The teachings are restorative and return us to an innocence that is still there in our hearts, and often forgotten by our minds.

### *Spiritual Growth Circles (continued)*

The same small group meets every month with their facilitator for a period of 6-9 months. The meetings are held either in the facilitator's home or at the Fellowship. The meetings last for 90 minutes. The format includes lighting a chalice, check-in, opening reading, and questions for discussion. Some groups undertake a service project during the year, giving them another way to get to know each other and to put their shared values to work.

The facilitators are Fellowship members, and they meet together to prepare for each month's topic, usually the same theme as the one Rev. Miller plans to use for the Sunday services.

There is an expectation of confidentiality within each Spiritual Growth Circle. Participants develop a trusting relationship that encourages deep personal exploration and sharing as the year progresses.



## *Spirituality in Music*

by *Richard Franzwa*

***“Music is the wine which inspires one to new generative processes, and I am Bacchus who presses out this glorious wine for mankind and makes them spiritually drunken  
-Ludwig van Beethoven***



From the first notes, though subconsciously, my inner senses are alerted to picking up the drift of the music that has come into ear reach. My mind continues to be aware of the world around, but not for much longer. As the phrases continue to stream into invisible view, more and more of my unawareness begins to be tied up by the simple flattening of a third, wrenching up a sad impression from somewhere unknown, the surprising appearance of a seventh, bringing a sense of humor into the mix, the occasional major seventh offering sweet, soft innocence and relaxation, the awkward diminished chord upsetting the expectations yet opening another door to new experience. Soon, the melody has sewn shut the portal on one reality and raised the curtain on a beautiful antechamber to the beyondness that connects us all. A space that is far more visceral and fantastic than that which we normally occupy.

I can't imagine a world without music. Myriad beautiful tones that impart such rich texture to the sounds. Notes that string together as melodies to tug at your emotions. Chords and harmonies that together give such complexity and depth to the experience. Rhythms that give the music life and punctuate its phrases. Dynamic changes that pronounce its beingness, or only hint at its nature. To me, these provide a backdrop to nearly every moment. Even when there is actually no music to be heard, my subconscious is usually putting together a mini symphony from the aural building blocks sifting through the day. Rhythm can be found almost anywhere — it doesn't take much to get me tapping. (Sorry, I know it drives a lot of people crazy.) The rhythm then suggests a tune that was born ...(somewhere?), that could have been pieces of things I had heard, or something else. These then, will course through me, given half a chance, and quickly put me into a semi-trance that many times culminates in a deep contemplative state or even sleep.

Spirituality, being a need/want to connect with other life endowed with some sort of feelings or emotion, or to be in unity with a larger existence/beingness/aliveness, can be realized in many ways. Some might connect through the practice of yoga, some through the awareness of nature all around, some through the focus on sounds. Most people probably find pathways to spiritual awareness and growth through all of these means at different times. Probably my most used vehicle to finding my spiritual self and meeting some of my desire for deep connectedness is through music.

Connectedness is...

- Singing with the choir - connection to the other living voices. Finding where my voice fills an empty spot in the whole sound and pouring myself into it.
- Playing music alone - connection with my deeper self, finding and pulling from what's inside. Bringing more of my uniqueness to the surface.
- Playing music with others - listening to the interlacing instruments and voices inspiring new and unthought-of directions in my own playing and singing, which in turn adds to the experience of the group.
- Listening to music - letting it sweep me away to places made of imagination, seasoned with experience, and laced with — insight?
- Music in the sounds around - The ever-present background noise ranges from tranquil white noise to the din of unstructured and unrelated sounds. The mind, given the means to an unagitated state, can use these aural cues as breadcrumbs back to the matrix.
- Music in the silence - Even in near silence, music begins to imbue my consciousness and off I go...

Overlaid on top of these basic relationships/connections between sound and being(s) is the movement of the melody, the counterpoint, the rhythm, and the dissonance or harmonies that all work together to augment the emotions and intensify the feelings that twist together my *self* with my higher self.

Music will be a strong catalyst in my spiritual journey toward understanding, feeling, and connectedness.

## *Letting our Lights Shine*

by *Katy Kroll Swanson*

The four-minute mile seemed impossible to elite runners until May 6, 1954, when Roger Bannister “broke the mark.” Within a few months, several other runners also broke four minutes.



Terry Orlick in his book “In Pursuit of Excellence: How to Win in Sport and Life Through Mental Training” says “The greatest barriers we confront in our pursuit of excellence are psychological barriers which we impose upon ourselves, sometimes unknowingly. It wasn’t the physiological make-up of the runners that changed; it was their knowledge of what was possible. As [our] beliefs about limits change, the limits themselves change.”

In a class I took on the Spirituality of Sport this spring, I learned that sports are one of the only places where we can be in complete control of our goals, without any pressure from anyone or anything else to achieve a certain outcome. The pool is one of the only places where I have complete control over my ability to try things that seem impossible. Swimming allows me to test my limits and learn about who I am – not just who I *think* I am.

***“When we meet challenges that seem insurmountable with courage and gratitude we open to our potential, discovering what we are capable of doing and overcoming our perceived limits.”***

***Katie Kroll Swanson***

Before I joined a masters swim team I wasn’t sure that I would be able to keep up with the masters swimmers. When I started going to practices, though, I noticed that after I finished a hard workout I felt more capable in general. The surprising thing about swimming with the team has been how the feeling of competence I get from swimming bleeds into other areas of my life. When I do something I don’t think I can do in the pool, it helps me believe that I can do other difficult things.

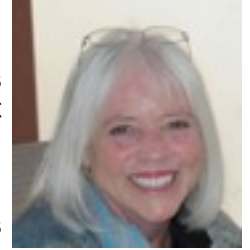
Unless we challenge our limits in some way we cannot know what we are capable of. Until we let it our light shine, we cannot know how bright it is. Whether we do it through sport or another practice or pursuit, we need to be able to challenge ourselves to try to overcome our limits so we can know who we are and what we can do in the world.



## *Spirituality and Compassion*

by *Livia Walsh*

As the core of his spiritual path His Holiness the Dalai Lama teaches that Compassion is the most central element to our spiritual growth. Mahatma Gandhi embodied the Hindu philosophy of “ahimsa,” translated as



compassion, as central to his own political philosophy and spiritual practice. Christianity, Judaism, in fact all of the major world religions teach the meaning and value of compassion as part of one’s spiritual development and growth.

As one who has explored many of these religious teachings and ways of actually cultivating both self-compassion and compassion for others I derive my daily practice from the Buddhist teachings. The following is one (briefer version) of the particular practices I teach in all my meditation classes as well as in the program I offer in my private psychotherapy practice entitled, **Living A Mindful And Compassionate Life:**”

### ***Loving Kindness and Compassion Meditation***

***May I Be Safe and Free from All Harm And Well in All Ways***

***May I Be Free from Suffering and Know the Causes of My Suffering***

***May I Be Happy and Know the Causes and Conditions of My Happiness***

***May I Know and Trust My Own Wisdom***

***May I Receive Loving Kindness and Compassion Each Day from Myself And Others***

***May I Be Peaceful and Live My Life with Ease***

***May I Live My Life Mindfully, Compassionately and with Gratitude***

Repeating any one or several of these compassionate messages for self, another or all sentient beings could be considered a radical act of kindness and compassion.

I offer each of you these good wishes. Metta

***“I have learned silence from the talkative, tolerance from the intolerant and kindness from the unkind. I should not be ungrateful to these teachers.”***

***-- Kahill Gibran***



## *Spiritual Growth Circles*

### *What Participants Come Away With*

**I have participated in** the SGC meetings for the past two years. Exploring the concepts addressed by recent sermons has resulted in some very interesting discussions. One of the most interesting aspects of the meetings, for me, was hearing different perspectives on the same concept, which in turn helped expand my thoughts as well. **John Sherman**

**The Spiritual Growth Circles** creates an environment in which individuals can personally opine on the themes of sermons with a great deal of sincerity and openness. I was impressed and surprised at how we, the members of my SGC, were willing to openly and honestly express deeply personal accounts on how the topics of the sermons related to our life experiences. The element of confidentiality added to everyone's willingness to be forthright and vulnerable. **Irving Himelblau**

**I appreciate the opportunity** to participate in the monthly Spiritual Growth Circles this year. It is a treat to meet with other church members and friends to hear their thoughts and to contemplate my own reactions to the spiritual themes. **Darlanne Hocter Mulmat**

**Our spiritual growth circle** enabled us to more deeply learn about several others in the fellowship. It created a regular opportunity to discuss some meaningful aspects of our faith and to think about and reflect on our own beliefs in the context of the topic under discussion that month. I had no expectations at the start and some fear in sharing my thoughts and feelings, but the group was welcoming and accepting. **Anonymous**

**I have participated in** and also facilitated SGCs first at First UU and then at UUFSD for a number of years. To me, these gatherings are deeply satisfying as a way to get to know other members on a deeper level. It's lovely to be able to share thoughts/reflections -- hear different views. **Vicky Newman**

**How often do we** have a chance to intentionally discuss something more than the weather, politics, or the latest news with our fellow UUFSD'ers? When do we take the time to open our thoughts, mind and heart and enter into a deeper, richer conversation about what forgiveness has meant in our life, how we have experienced fear and courage, and what aging means to us at this point of our life? Once per month, the Spiritual Growth Circles provide a comfortable space to gather and share our thoughts about these and many other topics... and to listen with openness to people who you may or may not agree with. It has truly enriched my life and is one of my favorite parts of the UUFSD experience. **Linda Giannelli Pratt**

**I cannot recommend the** SGC enough after my experience from this last year. It was such a treasure to be able to participate in open and honest sharing and listening with the people in my circle who I now truly consider my family. **Leslie Uke**

**I enjoy our Spirituality** Circles because they enable us to get to know each other a little bit better. It is an opportunity to talk about things that matter to us as individuals, in the context of a greater topic. It is also an opportunity for me to expand my ways of thinking which happens from hearing others' points of view. **Linda Luisi**

**Get to know people** on a deeper level than casual post service coffee conversation. **Steven Rosen**

**At each monthly SGC** I am invited to look inside myself and my own spiritual journey. I am invited to listen deeply to the reflections of other UUFSD members in our circle. I have come know myself and other SGC participants in a more nuanced way that fosters a deeper sense of connection all around. **Ashley Philips**

**I signed up for SGC** expecting a homework-assigning adult RE program. Sadly, there was no homework. However, there were cookies, new friends, and some time carved out of a busy month to consider things bigger than myself. It was great. I recommend it. If I feel I can, I'll do it again next year! **Shawn Anderson**