

The Program

The idea of spiritual practices encourages individuals to take responsibility for their own spiritual development by spending time working on it, deliberating on its meaning and how best to pursue it, seeking to understand the sacred through reading and the counsel of others, and seeking to have contact with the sacred through personal reflection and prayer.

—Robert Wuthnow, scholar of American religious history

Spirit in Practice was created to help Unitarian Universalists develop regular disciplines, or practices, of the spirit—practices that help them connect with the sacred ground of their being, however they understand it. Spirit in Practice affirms religious diversity while seeking unity in our communal quest for meaning and wholeness. Whether participants follow a path they identify as Humanist, Jewish, Christian, Pagan, Theist, Atheist, Agnostic, Mystic, and/or any of the other paths we follow in our diverse congregations, the Spirit in Practice workshops offer a forum for learning, sharing, and growth that can enrich their faith journeys.

In *Everyday Spiritual Practice*, an anthology of writings by Unitarian Universalist clergy and laity about their own spiritual practices, the Reverend Scott Alexander wrote, "In our faith every individual is expected, with the help of clergy and community, to nurture and tend the garden of his or her own religious life each and every day."

Spirit in Practice helps Unitarian Universalists tend that garden. It helps our congregations offer support and challenge to members along their spiritual paths. It is one way to provide the practical support and guidance Unitarian Universalists need for spiritual growth to blossom.

In interfaith dialogue, and in our spiritually diverse congregations, the analogy of a mountain is often used—there are many paths up a mountain. Each path has its own pluses and minuses. The North Face may be faster but also more technically challenging; the South Face may meander more easily and provide more overlooks. Each will appeal to—or repel—different people.

One of the things that make our movement unique is that we do not insist that everyone take the same route. Rather, we encourage people to find the path that most suits them. And then we go a step further—at our best, we keep gathering together to discuss what we've seen and done on our

journeys thus far. That means that the folks going up the North Face get a bit of the flavor of the trip they might have taken, and the folks going up the South Face get to vicariously experience a different kind of climb than the one they're on. This mutual give-and-take, in the context of conversation, not conversion, can only enrich the experience of all who take part in it—even those who are just walking back and forth around the base camp. The workshops that make up the Spirit in Practice series are predicated on three fundamental ideas:

- That the "free and responsible search for truth and meaning" that we affirm in our Unitarian Universalist principles is a spiritual quest
- That this search is more effectively and more evocatively carried out if we have some training and discipline—not to mention some practice, in both senses of the word—that helps us pay attention to the sacred
- That there is nothing in our lives that cannot serve as a tool for this work

Drawing on a model developed by the Zen Mountain Monastery in Mount Tremper, New York, for the training of its students, Spirit in Practice focuses on eight spheres of holistic and wholehearted spiritual practices. These eight spheres are:

- Personal spiritual practices
- Communal worship practices
- Spiritual partnerships
- Mind practices
- Body practices
- Soul practices
- Life practices
- Justice practices

The first workshop introduces this eight-sphere concept, and Workshops 2 through 9 examine each of these spheres in turn. The spheres can be explored as a complete series or as individual encouragements to try new lenses through which to view and engage the depth dimensions of our lives. The tenth workshop is designed to review and integrate the others, since an argument that runs through them all is that these various spheres work best when brought together.

Goals

This program will:

- Nurture a deepening spiritual life and spiritual centeredness
- Consider the value of spiritual practice, in any variety of forms, as a means to deepen faith and enhance the quality of everyday living
- Cultivate individual and communal spiritual practices
- Develop participants' alertness to the wonder and mystery of existence
- Encourage experiences of the sacred through worship, ritual, wisdom of faith traditions, and spiritual disciplines
- Explore possibilities for deepening experiences of spirituality in the context of a Unitarian Universalist congregation