

Renew your spirit

Written by the then UUA President Peter Morales in the 2015 Winter edition of the UU World

We Unitarian Universalists claim to have a lot of theological diversity. Yet every UU I have ever known, whether that person is a humanist, theist, pagan, Christian, or Buddhist—or refuses all labels—shares a core conviction. We all believe that things do not have to be the way they are. We refuse to accept that inequality, hatred, environmental destruction, racism, and war are inevitable parts of the human condition. We believe that we can make things better, especially when we act together.

Historically, many religions have taught the opposite. They have taught that we are to accept our lot in life, that we deserve to suffer, and that things are the way they are because of predestination, original sin, karma, or some such. Religions have taught that the earthly powers that shape our world have divine sanction. They have taught that kings and queens have their power by divine right, or that the emperor or chief is a god.

Why, then, are we UUs convinced that things need not be the way they are? We believe it because we have experienced life's possibilities. We have experienced love, beauty, joy, friendship, and a peace that transcends our understanding. We have all had some variety of spiritual experience of mystical connection. (What is love if not connection?)

We need to remember. When we witness brutality, injustice, the stupidity of our politics, heartless human exploitation by the economically powerful, and the wanton devastation of nature—when we find ourselves becoming bitter, we need to remind ourselves of our most treasured experiences.

Actually, we need to do more than remember. We need to experience life's gifts and possibilities once more. Renewing contact with what is most precious in life is really a spiritual practice. It is an essential practice. If we do not feed our spirits, they will wither. Even the good deeds we strive to do will become acts of anger and joyless obligation rather than efforts to share and to heal.

We all need to ask ourselves, "What does my spirit need right now?" Perhaps it is quiet time in nature. Maybe a visit to a new exhibition in a museum. How about some time in the garden? Why not attend a concert by a favorite artist, or take a walk with an old friend? The possibilities go on and on.

Even better, how about creating something rather than being passive? Play some music. Sing in a chorus. Paint or sculpt again. Knit or quilt or sew. (I have always marveled at how many UUs knit.) Cook up something new and special. Play with a child. Now and then we all need to visit the world we are trying to create.

There is a part of me that feels guilty and self-indulgent when I do things that I enjoy and that feed my spirit. There are always articles or sermons to write, people to call, meetings to attend, emails to answer, projects to move forward. Yet deep down, I know better. Just as practices such as prayer and meditation give us clarity and strength to re-engage with the world, so too do other practices that get us in touch with what is most precious.

I urge you—yes, you—to make some space to reflect on what your spirit needs right now. Deep down you know; we all do. Our deepest longings will guide us. Make space for beauty and love and play. Let your spirit heal and soar.

When our spirits are strong and reconnected, our work for compassion and justice has enduring power. When our spirits are renewed, we are blessings to one another and to the world.