Spiritual Maturity

Chalice Lightings and Meditations:

It matters that we remember that each one of us walks this chilly world in some way as a stranger. It matters that we remember that the purpose of the community is to welcome the stranger in from the cold. May the flame of this chalice mark the reality that when we welcome the stranger, we open our hearts to the making of a friend. In the light of this common flame, may we bear witness to our values and recommit ourselves to the dream that one day the world, and our hearts within it, may be whole.

-- M. Maureen Killoran

At times our own light goes out and is rekindled by a spark from another person. Each of us has cause to think with deep gratitude of those who have lighted the flame within us.

-- Albert Einstein

I will not live an unlived life,
I will not go out in fear
Of falling or catching fire,
I choose to inhabit my days,
To allow my living to open to me,
To make me less afraid,
More accessible,
To loosen my heart
Until it becomes a wing,
A torch, a promise.

-- Dawna Markova
Explore the following readings in *Singing the Living Tradition* published by the Unitarian Universalist Association. (Our hymnal)

# 437 by Kenneth L. Patton  
#482 by Jacob Trapp  
#484 by William Ellery Channing  
#496 by Harry Meserve  
#505 by Thich Nhat Hanh  
#576 by Marjorie Bowens-Wheatley  
#592 by William Ellery Channing  
#597 Dhammapada  
#650 by Robert T. Weston  
#657 by Sophia Lyon Fahs  
#669 translated by Stephen Mitchell  
#680 by Barbara Pescan

**Story:**

**The Bird’s Nest Monk**

Long ago in China there was a monk who was known by the people as ‘Bird’s Nest’ because of his habit of sitting to meditate in the top of a tree. As people got used to his presence, they would often stop to talk to him when they passed his tree. His reputation as a wise man began to grow and people began to travel from great distances to hear him speak or to ask his advice.

One day a very important visitor came to speak to ‘Bird’s Nest’. The governor sought him out to ask him about the teachings of Buddhism. He called up into the tree, “Tell me, Master, what is the most important teaching of Buddhism?”

In a few minutes ‘Bird’s Nest’ called down, “Do not do bad or evil things, and do good deeds and acts of kindness.”

The governor grew irritated at such a simple answer. “But I know that,” he yelled up the tree. “In fact even a three year old knows that.”

After a moment, ‘Bird’s Nest’ called back down, “Yes, a three year old may know it, but even an eighty year old finds it hard to do.”

As with most traditional stories, there are many versions available. Several can be found online at: http://history.cultural-china.com/en/59H213H11542.html. This story can also be found in the book *Kindness: A Treasury of Buddhist Wisdom for Children and Parents*, collected and adapted by Sarah Conover, and in the commentary portion of the book *The Hungry Tigress: Buddhist Legends & Jataka Tales* as told by Rafe Martin.

**Story Questions:**

- What is the most important part of the story to you, and why?
• If this is not your first time to hear this story, how are you hearing differently this time?

• What did the governor feel when ‘Bird’s Nest’ gave him the answer to his question? How did he react and why?

• Have you ever found it hard to do what you know is right?

• What things that sound easy to do are the hardest for you to do?

• Can you state the most important teachings of Unitarian Universalism in a single sentence?

Possible Activities:

• Here are two activities taken from the adult curriculum Building Your Own Theology I by Rev. Richard Gilbert

Draw your Spiritual Autobiography:
1. Draw a horizontal line on a piece of paper.
2. At the left margin make a dot and write the date of your birth; at the right margin make another dot and write the date you expect to die (a reasonable estimate); along the line make a third dot and write the current date.
3. Mark on the timeline where significant things have happened to you.
4. Mark on the timeline the approximate time you met three or four people who were significant in your life.
5. Mark two or three formative experiences that helped shape your religious life or spirituality.
6. Mark on the line when you joined communities, religious or not, that have shaped your spiritual development.
7. Mark on the line significant choices you have had to make in your life which have shaped who you are.
8. Mark significant times of joy and sorrow.
9. Add any other times and events that have shaped who you are.
10. If you wish using this timeline as a guide, write out your spiritual autobiography.

• Draw your vision of God, Ultimate Reality, the Spirit of Life, The Great Mystery.
1. Take a piece of paper in fold it in quarters, and then unfold it.
2. In the first quadrant, draw “The God of your childhood.”
3. In the second, draw the “God” of your youth.
4. In the third, draw the God of your pre-Unitarian Universalist adulthood, or your young adulthood if you have been a UU since childhood.
5. In the fourth, draw the “God” of your present understanding.
6. If you wish, share these pictures among family and friends and discuss what you have learned about yourself and your ultimate reality through these changes.

- Here is an activity you can do with all ages. Begin by talking about things you can do now that you were not able to do before. Explain that as we grow and change our bodies and our minds are capable of things we were not able to do when we were younger. Now, change your perspective and ask if there are things that the other individuals used to believe that they no longer believe now. Discuss what those things are and what caused them to change their minds about what they believed. Explain that just as our bodies grow and change our beliefs grow and change too. As Unitarian Universalists we believe that we keep on growing and learning all our lives. We believe that each experience helps form who we are, and that those new experiences will either strengthen what we believe or help lead us to change our beliefs.

**Resources:**

**Resources for Children:**


*Sacred Stories: Wisdom from the World’s Religions*, by Marilyn McFarlane, Aladin/Beyond Words, 2012

**Resources for Parents:**


*Parenting with Spirit: 30 Ways to Nurture Your Child’s Spirit and Enrich Your Family’s Life*, by Jane Bartlett, Marlowe & Company, 2004

*Something More: Nurturing Your child’s Spiritual Growth*, by Jean Grasso Fitzpatrick, Viking, 1991

*Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting*, by Michelle Richards, Skinner House, 2010

**Resources for Adults:**


