



The Path

Introduction from Soul Matters Collective

“Every blade of grass has an angel that bends over it and whispers,
‘Grow! Grow!’”

-The Talmud

This month, we bring you a shorter-than-usual *The Path*. As you may know, in creating *The Path* each month, we utilize content and suggested resources from the Soul Matters Sharing Circle, a UU theme-based ministry collective. We draw on Soul Matters’ bank of monthly themes, which has developed over a roughly eight year period, and occasionally, when we choose a theme that was from the early days of Soul Matters, there are fewer resources than the typical robust collections of recent years. Such was the case for this month’s theme of “growth.”

Fortunately, “growth” of the personal, spiritual variety is already on our hearts and minds at First UU, since it is a core tenet of our congregation’s mission, and something we say aloud and affirm together every Sunday. This month, our theme asks us to explore a topic that is the core of who we are in our congregation - but also as Unitarian Universalists, practitioners of a faith which invites us into a lifelong search for truth and meaning, and a related quest for spiritual growth and development.

At the same time, when it comes to our larger world, many of us question a cultural imperative to a certain version of “growth” over other moral and spiritual values. Our faith has called us to question

What Does it Mean to be a People of Growth?



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a narrative of economic and physical “growth” that imperils the web of life, and that prioritizes the accumulation of wealth and power over the well-being of people and the planet.



How then do we relate to the concept of spiritual “growth”? When I think about the value of “growing” throughout our lives, I think of it not necessarily as becoming “bigger” or “better” but as becoming more who we are meant to be, becoming deeper, wider, become more expansive, open and alive. For me, the best synonyms for growth are “flourishing,” “developing,” “evolving.” And I think of each of our tender spirits like the blade of grass in the quote from the Talmud - with a tender and loving presence that wishes for us a life of deepening and flourishing.



Self-Care for the Spiritual Journey

When we go deeper into spiritual exploration together and individually, there’s always a chance we will encounter some tender spots in our own spirits and stories. Therefore, it is important, when doing deep spiritual work, to have trusted companions and adequate support on the journey, and to know you are welcome to care for yourself and your spirit along the way, engaging in the theme to the level that’s comfortable for you.



Likewise, please know that we are here to offer support if you find yourself struggling with something surfaced by the monthly theme. Rev. Mara is our first point of contact for pastoral care. She may be able to set up a time to meet you, or refer you to **Andre Mol**, our ministerial intern, caring lay leaders through our **Care Network**, or outside resources. She can be reached at revmara@uusociety.org or 802-862-5630 x. 24.

2016/2017 Themes

- September – Connection
- October – Deep Listening
- November – Hospitality
- December – Expectation
- January – Inheritance
- February – Perception
- March – Imagination
- April – Resistance
- May – Growth
- June – Delight

Seeking Submissions for *The Path*

The Path introduces each month’s spiritual theme, which we then explore in greater depth through our Sunday worship services and other programming. We welcome (and need!) your submissions of readings, stories, videos, books and movies for any of our upcoming themes.

For theme submissions to be included in the relevant edition of *The Path*, please send them no later than one month prior to publication. Do feel free to send materials in for upcoming themes at any point up until the one-month-prior deadline.

This month, we especially welcome submissions on our June theme, **Delight**. Please send them to themecircles@uusociety.org.

You are invited to explore our monthly theme through engaging in one of the two spiritual exercises below (or both!). If you are in a Theme Circle, come prepared to talk about your experience with your group.

Option 1: Gratitude for the Growers

20th Century Unitarian Minister A. Powell Davies famously wrote that “life is just a chance to grow soul.”

This month, take some time reflect on who and what has helped you “grow your soul.” What people, places or institutions have been critical to your growth and development? Some you may know well personally, others may be public figures who have affected your path. Who are the “angels” who have whispered around you “grow! grow!”?

After reflecting on these “growers” in your life, consider choosing one to whom you would like to express your gratitude, then finding a way to thank them for helping you grow. Depending on who the person is and your relationship to them (and/or whether or not they are still living), you could consider sending a card or note, calling or messaging, or, if direct communication is not possible/preferred, you could still write them a note of gratitude (and not send it) or hold them in meditation or prayer.

Garden Growth Meditation

This month, the gardeners among us will be getting out into the dirt. If you are spending time in a garden this month - or tending plants in some other way - use your experience with dirt, seeds, and plants as a metaphor to think about growth. What does your experiences a gardener teach you about growing? What do you experience when you are working in the garden, and how does it relate to your own process of spiritual growth?

Questions for Reflection

1. What are some of the ways you have grown in your life? If you had to choose one “growth spurt” - one experience of significant personal growth and change--that you are most grateful for, what would it be?
2. How are you growing now? Is there a kind of growth calling to you?
3. Are you a “person of growth” or part of “a people of growth”? In other words, how does growth most often happen in your life? Through personal or internal work? Or through relationships with others? Or both?
4. How do you relate to change? Growth is not always about getting further along the path; sometimes it requires turning your back on the comfortable path you know and risking the new and unknown. How are you with this kind of spiritual challenge?
5. Is growth always about change? About action? About doing something? Sometimes the first step toward growth is to stop moving! Sometimes sitting still is the only way to notice that growth or change is needed. How has sitting still been a part of growth in your life? Is sitting still something that your life is whispering to you now?
6. In what ways do you think our culture needs to “grow”?

Resources

Words for Inspiration

Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who knew me best, that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower where I thought a flower would grow.

- Abraham Lincoln

You've got to do your own growing, no matter how tall your grandfather was.

- Irish saying

Change is inevitable, growth is intentional.

- Glenda Cloud

One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.

-Carl Jung

Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow.

-Ralph Waldo Emerson

If everything was perfect, you would never learn and you would never grow.

-Beyonce

Under a sky the color of pea soup
 she is looking at her work growing away there
 actively, thickly like grapevines or pole beans
 as things grow in the real world, slowly enough.
 If you tend them properly, if you mulch, if you water,
 if you provide birds that eat insects a home and winter food,
 if the sun shines and you pick off caterpillars,
 if the praying mantis comes and the ladybugs and the bees,
 then the plants flourish, but at their own internal clock.

Connections are made slowly, sometimes they grow underground.

You cannot tell always by looking what is happening.

More than half the tree is spread out in the soil under your feet.

Penetrate quietly as the earthworm that blows no trumpet.

Fight persistently as the creeper that brings down the tree.

Spread like the squash plant that overruns the garden.

Gnaw in the dark and use the sun to make sugar.

Weave real connections, create real nodes, build real houses.

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Resources

Live a life you can endure: Make love that is loving.
Keep tangling and interweaving and taking more in,
a thicket and bramble wilderness to the outside but to us
interconnected with rabbit runs and burrows and lairs.

Live as if you liked yourself, and it may happen:
reach out, keep reaching out, keep bringing in.
This is how we are going to live for a long time: not always,
for every gardener knows that after the digging, after the planting,
after the long season of tending and growth, the harvest comes.

Marge Piercy, "The Seven of Pentacles"

Hokusai says look carefully.
He says pay attention, notice.
He says keep looking, stay curious.
He says there is no end to seeing

He says look forward to getting old.
He says keep changing,
you just get more who you really are.
He says get stuck, accept it, repeat
yourself as long as it is interesting.

He says keep doing what you love.

He says keep praying.

He says every one of us is a child,
every one of us is ancient
every one of us has a body.
He says every one of us is frightened.
He says every one of us has to find
a way to live with fear.

He says everything is alive --
shells, buildings, people, fish,
mountains, trees, wood is alive.
Water is alive.

Everything has its own life.

Everything lives inside us.

He says live with the world inside you.

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Resources

He says it doesn't matter if you draw,
or write books. It doesn't matter
If you saw wood, or catch fish.
It doesn't matter if you sit at home
and stare at the ants on your veranda
or the shadows of the trees
and grasses in your garden.
It matters that you care.

It matters that you feel.

It matters that you notice.

It matters that life lives through you.

Contentment is life living through you.
Joy is life living through you.
Satisfaction and strength
is life living through you.

He says don't be afraid.
Don't be afraid.

Love, feel, let life take you by the hand.

Let life live through you.

- Roger Keyes. (The Hokusai of the title's poem is the Japanese artist and printmaker of the Edo period, who lived in the 17 and 1800's, and created "The Great Wave of Kanagawa," which depicts a huge blue wave crashing with Mount Fugi in the background).

A few resources for exploration . . .

Here is a framework for thinking about different kinds of spiritual growth from a UU adult faith development curriculum:
<http://www.uua.org/re/tapestry/adults/practice/workshop1/60806.shtml>

TED Talk: The Power of Believing You Can Improve



Creative Space

Use this section to write, doodle, and create!

AHA! Moments



Notes

