

# The Refrigerator Review

*Daily Inspiration and Practice for Families – February 2012*

## **This Month's Theme: Prayer and Spiritual Practice**

This month's theme is Prayer and Spiritual Practice. It will be explored in our worship, chalice circles, and parts of our religious education. There are many ways to engage this theme, including suggested practices for adults and children, reflections by our minister and director of religious education, and opportunities for intellectual exploration. See the rest of this newsletter supplement for details.



## **From your Minister:**

### *Spiritual, But Also Religious*

"If you dismiss every online profile that has 'spiritual but not religious' on it somewhere, you will end up dating yourself." That's how one of my friends put it. The idea of being spiritual but not religious has become a ubiquitous part of our culture. Indeed, studies suggest that phrase characterizes the fastest growing faith identity in America.

The idea of being spiritual but not religious is something for which Unitarians, for better or for worse, are responsible. In the 19<sup>th</sup> century, Transcendentalists in Ralph Waldo Emerson's circle argued that spirituality was larger than any one religion. Their critique of organized church life was blistering. Emerson famously called the religion of his day "corpse cold." His cohorts argued for a vibrant spiritual life apart from the traditions of modern congregations.

Fast-forward 150 years: I would argue that being spiritual but not religious hasn't quite met its grandiose expectations. Spirituality in contemporary American culture is a quixotic and individualistic thing. With the plurality of practices readily available, the spiritual life can be tailored to fit someone like a glove. This fits-like-a-glove spirituality makes us comfortable, tranquil, and even (in some circles) fashionable.

But it's got its problems. It doesn't challenge us. It doesn't push us toward justice. It doesn't place us in a community with others who can hold us accountable to living a better life. It can easily become the version of faith based on consumerism—with all of the attendant problems of loneliness, myopia, and disinterest in other's needs.

When I am feeling particularly piqued by this contemporary phenomenon, I tell people that I am "religious but not spiritual." But that's not totally true. I think we need both religion and spirituality. We need the public activities of worship, religious education, and social justice as much as we need the personal experiences of awe, reflection, and devotion. When we find balance in those things, we will lead a healthy spiritual life.

In faith,

 **post me on your refrigerator**

**More from our newsletter:** Find out more information about upcoming church events! Our newsletter is posted monthly at [UUCiL.net](http://UUCiL.net).

## 10 Minute Spiritual Practice



This month, you are invited to find a reading in the back of the *Singing the Living Tradition* hymnal. If you do not have one readily available, you may find an alternative reading online. It should be a brief piece of prose or a poem that you find inspiring. Recite it each morning. Learn it by heart. And reflect, as the month goes on, how its meaning changes as you learn and recite it.



*Irish Prayer Cells, John Keaton*

### Further Inspiration

Leigh Schmidt's *Restless Souls: The Making of American Spirituality* traces the history of spirituality in the United States. It begins with the Unitarian Transcendentalists and extends to the current day. It is an engaging history that comes highly recommended.

### From Your Director of Religious Education:

#### *Prayer and Spiritual Awareness: A Family Ritual with Children*

Whether you pray or meditate or have ever found such a practice meaningful, consider how you celebrate gratitude, reflect on regret or focus on your deepest hopes. Talk with your children about ways to be intentional in these expressions. Perhaps there is a prayer ritual your family can practice together. Many families say a grace or blessing at mealtimes. If you do, do you consider these words a prayer? Rituals are essential to a child's development. Through them, through their routine and repetition, children find a structure in which their creativity can take root.

Because Unitarian Universalism welcomes a diversity of belief, UUs may engage in prayer, meditation, silent contemplation, worship, and other types of spiritual practice as individuals or congregations. People can pray in lots of different ways and places. Someone sitting quietly alone with their eyes closed might be praying. Some pray by thinking thoughts in their head while taking a walk. Other people pray by saying words or singing together with others in a church. Some people don't pray at all.

What follows is not intended to dictate how to pray, but rather a structure onto which you can hang your own developing prayer practice. It draws upon the prayer practices of a number of religious traditions and seeks to put together a pattern of prayer that you can tailor to your own needs and understandings.

You can begin with just 4 beads strung on a lace:

The 1<sup>st</sup> can be a "gratitude" bead. One way that people pray is they say "thank you" for things that they are grateful for. You can suggest to your child that while she is holding her bead, she could think about what she is grateful for.

The 2<sup>nd</sup> can be an "I'm sorry" bead. Sometimes when people feel really sorry about something they've done, they pray about it. You can ask your child to close his eyes and think about something he's done that he is sorry for while he holds a bead.

The 3<sup>rd</sup> could be a "wishing" bead. Often when people pray they say things that they really hope for. Say to your child, "Close your eyes, and while holding your wishing bead, think about something you really wish for.

The 4<sup>th</sup> bead is a "loving" bead. Sometimes when people pray they think about all the things they wish for the world, or they think about someone they love and make a wish for them. Ask if there is anything your child wishes for the planet Earth, for any animals, for other people, or for anyone they love.

***Rennie Tomley***