

**USG Small Group Ministry ~ November 2012 ~ Prayer**  
Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
**Prayer**  
Philadelphia/Germantown, PA

**Quotes for Inspiration**

Pray as you can, not as you can't.  
~John Chapman

Prayer invites God to be present in our spirits and in our lives. Prayer cannot bring water to parched land, nor mend a broken bridge, nor rebuild a ruined city, but prayer can water an arid soul, mend a broken heart, and rebuild a weakened will.  
~ Abraham J. Heschel

...What we need to push aside is the idea that we need to have a systematic theology all worked out about the nature of God, the universe, human purpose, before we are qualified to turn our hearts in prayer. We don't need to have a definition of ultimate reality to pray. There's no specific idea of God that's necessary. Prayer is simply getting in touch with the deepest desires and currents of the heart in quiet, and in as much trust as we can muster, with as much honesty as we can possibly find. That's all. Prayers pray themselves. As Paul says in his letter to the Romans, "We cannot pray as we ought, but the spirit prays for us in groans too deep for words."  
~Excerpt from "A Spiritual Maintenance Schedule" by Arvid Straube, in *Everyday Spiritual Practice; Simple Pathways for Enriching Your Life*

If the only prayer you ever say in your entire life is thank you, it will be enough.  
~Meister Eckhart

**Spiritual Exercises**

**1. "I Say a Little Prayer for You"-Aretha Franklin**

People of the UU denomination often arrive there via a spiritual journey, and thus have likely been exposed to numerous backgrounds stemming from numerous traditions. Unitarian Universalism encourages us to nurture our spiritual growth by ways we best know how, and by way of accepting one another. While "prayer" does not necessarily hold a central spot in our Faith as it does in many others, many of our UU Family routinely practice the act of prayer.

- Bring a prayer that speaks to you and share it with your group.
  - What about this particular passage compels you to share it?

**2. "Prayer for Dummies" – Provided by Dictionary.com**

Prayer (n):

1. a devout petition to God or an object of worship.
2. a spiritual communion with God or an object of worship, as in supplication, thanksgiving, adoration, or confession.

Communion (n):

1. association; fellowship.
2. interchange or sharing of thoughts or emotions; intimate communication: *communion with nature*.
3. the act of sharing, or holding in common; participation.

Supplication (n):

1. to pray humbly; make humble and earnest entreaty or petition.

Take a moment to understand what prayer is, or could be- the act of taking time out to become aware of a situation and momentarily reflecting upon that situation in the form of a silent or spoken plea, wish, or petition.

- In the upcoming weeks take notice of whether or not you have "prayed" this month.
- Are there times when you prayed without even noticing it? Did you "Thank God" when the traffic eased? Did you utter a plea before you took a big test? Was somebody ill and you hoped they would be okay?
- Do you "say grace" of any sort before meals?
- Share your observations of your prayers with the group.

**3. " Pray"**

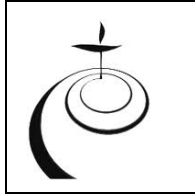
In reflecting on this exercise Rev. Kent says "I am very aware and highly respectful of the fact that a number of folks in our UU faith tradition have no experience, or affinity with prayer. If you are one of

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those folks, I invite you to put aside your aversion or objections. Look at the most liberal definitions of prayer in this curriculum and just give it a try. For example, you can sit quietly, with an open sense of heart and look prayerfully at a tree. That could be your prayer. Or simply say 'thank you, thank you, thank you' to whomever or whatever you want. Give this a try. In some way, pray."

### Chalice Lighting

Let the white light of the Universe  
enfold, protect me  
and bathe me in its healing love...  
~Susan H. From serenityfound.org



### Check-in

*Share briefly what's been on your mind lately or your highs and lows since we last met.*

### Reading

*(One person to read the bold, another to read the plain text)*

#### **Our Father, who art in heaven, hallowed be thy Name**

God, you are greater than anything this world has to offer.

#### **Thy kingdom come, thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven.**

And I can't wait for you to come back and get us- but until that time comes would you help me just to live my life day after day as though I am walking hand in hand with you.

#### **Give us this day our daily bread.**

God, I have a lot of needs- and I have a lot of wants- sometimes I get those things confused. Help me to just trust you to meet my needs, and be thankful when you give me those other things I just want.

#### **And forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us.**

God I have blown it so many times today, and I'm sorry- thank you for your forgiveness, I don't take it for granted.

#### **And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil.**

And God as I start this day out, I'm just reminded that this world is filled with so many spiritual pot holes- please help me to walk in such a way where I won't stumble so much.

#### **For thine is the kingdom, and the power and the glory, forever and ever amen.**

And as I'm going thru this day, God- help me to live my life in such a way that would bring you glory and honor- may the life that I live be a life of worship to you- amen

~ The Lord's Prayer and adaptations by "The Skit Guys"

### Sitting in Silence

*Take a few moments to sit quietly and reflect upon your thoughts related to prayer.*

### Questions for Contemplation

- What does prayer mean to you?
- Has your background provided a foundation for you on which to elevate prayer?
- Can you pray if you don't know who/what you are praying to?
- What room, if any, do you see for prayer, meditation or contemplation in your UU faith?

### Sharing/Deep Listening

*Respond with your thoughts/experiences with the Spiritual Exercises.*

### Reflection

*This is a time to respond briefly to something another person said or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared.*

### Singing

Spirit of Life,  
come unto me.

Sing in my heart all the stirrings of compassion. Blow in the wind, rise in the sea;  
move in the hand,

giving life the shape of justice.

Roots hold me close; wings set me free;

Spirit of Life,

come to me, come to me.

~ Spirit of Life p.123 of Singing the Living Tradition

### Extinguishing the Chalice

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Track of the sun across the Sky leaves its shining message,  
Illuminating, Strengthening, Warming us who are here, showing us we are not alone,  
we are yet ALIVE!  
And this fire.....Our fire.....Shall not die  
~Atoni (Choctaw)

### **Additional Resources**

Unitarian Universalism draws from many sources. Here are a few instances of how prayer can be used in other religions that have been fundamental in shaping ours.

A great resource for all kinds of prayers: [worldprayers.org](http://worldprayers.org)

### **What is the function of prayer in:**

#### **Buddhism**

The purpose of Buddhist prayer is to awaken our inherent inner capacities of strength, compassion and wisdom rather than to petition external forces based on fear, idolizing, and worldly and/or heavenly gain. Buddhist prayer is a form of meditation; it is a practice of inner reconditioning. Buddhist prayer replaces the negative with the virtuous and points us to the blessings of Life.

For Buddhists, prayer expresses an aspiration to pull something into one's life, like some new energy or purifying influence and share it with all beings. Likewise, prayer inspires our hearts towards wisdom and compassion for others and ourselves. It allows us to turn our hearts and minds to the beneficial, rousing our thoughts and actions towards Awakening. If we believe in something enough, it will take hold of us. In other words, believing in it, we will become what we believe. Our ability to be touched like this is evidence of the working of Great Compassion within us.

What's more, it can a function as a form of self-talking or self-therapy in which one mentally talks through a problem, or talks through it aloud, in the hope that some new insight will come or a better decision can be made. Prayer therefore frequently has the function of being part of a decision-making process.

(Taken from the Buddhist Fellowship of Connecticut web page  
[http://buddhistfaith.tripod.com/pureland\\_sangha/id14.htm](http://buddhistfaith.tripod.com/pureland_sangha/id14.htm) )

#### **Native American Tradition**

We focus on Native American spiritual practices rather than religion. For the Native American, spirituality was a way of life. There were 500 hundred plus nations scattered from "sea to shining sea" north to Alaska and south to the Yucatan peninsula. It is a mistake to believe that all of the 500-600 tribes were alike in their beliefs. Like most indigenous peoples, their ceremonies were tied to the land and their way of life. Each tribe's rituals were connected to the specific qualities of the land that they called "home".

One general truth that threads throughout the Native American spiritual beliefs is the belief of the Mother Earth spirituality. The Native Americans felt that the earth was our mother, the sky our father, and all things were interconnected. The many Creation myths of the Native American stress the mutuality and interdependence between people and other forms of life. There is mutual respectfulness required when interacting with trees, birds, and plants and also natural forces such as the wind and the rain. Their creation stories empathize that Creation did not just happen a million years ago and end there, but that the Spirit that first infused the world is still with us now and can be experienced as "immanence", the spirit which imbues all things.

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There are many prayers in Native American traditions for various purposes, including, wisdom, healing, peace, hunting, planting, fertility, transition, wisdom, guidance, etc.

(Information secured from the Wayshowers Community Fellowship webpage  
[http://www.wayshowerscommunityfellowship.org/native\\_american\\_tradition.htm](http://www.wayshowerscommunityfellowship.org/native_american_tradition.htm) )

For Example:

"Oh Great Spirit, Whose voice I hear in the wind, whose breath gives me life to the world, Hear Me! I come to you are one of your many children. I am small and weak. I need your strength and wisdom. "May I walk in beauty. Make my eyes behold the red and the purple sunset. Make my hands respect the things that you have made, and my ears sharp to hear your voice. Make me wise so that I may know the things that you have taught your children—the lessons that you have hidden in every leaf and rock. Make me strong, not to be superior to my brothers, but to be able to fight my greatest enemy: myself. Make me every ready to come to you with straight eyes, so that when life fades as the faded sunset my spirit will come to you without shame".

-- John Yellow Lark

These prayers generally call upon various aspects within Mother Earth to fulfill the prayer's intention.

### Judaism

Recitation of prayer (Tefillah) is the central characteristic of Jewish worship. These prayers, often with instructions and commentary, are found in the siddur, the traditional Jewish prayerbook. Observant Jews are expected to recite three prayers daily and more on the Sabbath and Jewish holidays. Tefillah is the medium which God gave to man by means of which he can change himself, and thereby establish a new *relationship* with God—and thus a new destiny for himself in life. While solitary prayer is valid, attending synagogue to pray with a minyan (quorum of 10 adult males) is considered ideal.

Many Jews sway their body back and forth during prayer. This practice is referred to as *shokeling* in Yiddish, but is not mandatory. Proper concentration (*kavvanah*) is considered essential for prayer, and there are certain prayers that are invalid if recited without the required awareness and intention. These are the first line of *Shema Yisrael* and the first of the nineteen benedictions of the *Amidah*.

(Excerpts taken from: [http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/practices/worship\\_prayer.htm](http://www.religionfacts.com/judaism/practices/worship_prayer.htm))

### Christianity

Prayer is not a mysterious practice reserved only for clergy and the religiously devout. Prayer is simply communicating—listening and talking to him. Believers can pray from the heart, freely, spontaneously, and in their own words. If prayer is a difficult area for you, learn these basic principles of prayer and how to apply them in your life.

*What Does the Bible Have to Say About Prayer?*

The Bible has a lot to say about prayer. The first mention of prayer is found in Genesis, chapter 4.

#### **Genesis 4:26**

*And as for Seth, to him also a son was born; and he named him Enosh. Then men began to call on the name of the LORD. (NKJV)*

*What is the Correct Posture for Prayer?*

There is no correct or certain posture for prayer. In the Bible people prayed on their knees (1 Kings 8:54), bowing (Exodus 4:31), on their faces before God (2 Chronicles 20:18;

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Matthew 26:39), and standing (1 Kings 8:22). You may pray with your eyes opened or closed, quietly or out loud—how ever you are most comfortable and least distracted.

*Should I Use Eloquent Words?*

Your prayers need not be wordy or impressive in speech.

### **Matthew 6:7**

*"When you pray, don't babble on and on as people of other religions do. They think their prayers are answered only by repeating their words again and again." (NLT)*

### **Ecclesiastes 5:2**

*Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. (NIV)*

*Why Should I Pray?*

Prayer Develops Our Relationship with God.

If we never speak to our spouse or never listen to anything our spouse might have to say to us, our marriage relationship will quickly deteriorate. It is the same way with God. Prayer—communicating with God—helps us grow closer and more intimately connected with God.

### **Zechariah 13:9**

*I will bring that group through the fire and make them pure, just as gold and silver are refined and purified by fire. They will call on my name, and I will answer them. I will say, 'These are my people,' and they will say, 'The LORD is our God.' " (NLT)*

### **John 15:7**

*But if you stay joined to me and my words remain in you, you may ask any request you like, and it will be granted! (NLT)*

The Lord Instructed Us to Pray.

One of the simplest reasons to spend time in prayer is because the Lord instructed us to pray. Obedience is a natural by-product of discipleship.

### **Matthew 26:41**

*"Keep alert and pray. Otherwise temptation will overpower you. For though the spirit is willing enough, the body is weak!" (NLT)*

### **Luke 18:1**

*Then Jesus told his disciples a parable to show them that they should always pray and not give up. (NIV)*

### **Ephesians 6:18**

*And pray in the Spirit on all occasions with all kinds of prayers and requests. With this in mind, be alert and always keep on praying for all the saints. (NIV)*

(from Christianity.about.com)