

**Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website**  
**SMALL GROUP MINISTRY**  
**~ Revelation**  
**Unitarian Society of Germantown, PA December 2012**

“The events in our lives happen in a sequence in time, but in their significance to ourselves they find their own order: the continuous thread of revelation.” ~ Eudora Welty

**Spiritual Exercises**

**Spiritual Exercise 1: Try meditation**

Personal revelation often comes to us during times of calm and reflection. A great way to seek out this state is through meditation. Let's try one type of meditation using a simple mantra, and record our thoughts afterwards.

You will need a pen and some paper for this exercise.

1. Think of a simple word that has little meaning to you. Anything will do.
2. Find a comfortable place in your house where you will not be interrupted for a ten minute stretch. Have a seat, and get comfortable, then slowly close your eyes.
3. Once you are set, start repeating your mantra in your head. Do not force it to come, just repeat it slowly in the back of your mind. Let whatever thoughts appear come openly. Do not force them out, just let them float on by as you repeat your mantra.
4. Continue for about five minutes, then stop thinking the mantra.
5. Rest for a few moments and then open your eyes.
6. Record some of the things you saw or thought as they floated by during your meditation. Repeat this exercise throughout the month and bring your findings to the group.

**Spiritual Exercise 2: Keep an Aha! Journal**

Revelation comes at the oddest of times. Try this month to carry a small notebook with you and when you have those moments of epiphany, take note of what you were doing when you got your Aha! Moment. Throughout the month look back at your notebook. Do you see any patterns? Are there times or places where you are more inspired than others? Bring your experiences to the group to share.

**Sitting in Silence**

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

**Questions for Contemplation**

- Have you ever experienced a moment of personal revelation, or an epiphany about something? Where were you during that experience?
- One meaning of revelation is the realization of the divine by humanity. Have you ever experienced a glimpse of the divine in your life? How did it make you feel?
- Locke speaks of the importance of applying reason to revelation stating “he that takes away reason to make way for revelation, puts out the light of both.” Does this concept diminish the idea of revelation for you, or does applying reason to revelation strengthen the power of revelation?
- For the transcendentalists, nature was the greatest manifestation of revelation, or the experience of the divine. Where do you find revelation in your own life?

**Sharing/Deep Listening**

*Respond with your thoughts/experiences with the Spiritual Exercises and Questions for Contemplation.*

**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.

### Extinguishing the Chalice

“The highest revelation is that God is in every man” ~ Ralph Waldo Emerson

## Additional Resources

### On-Going Revelation

(Rev. Jonalu Johnstone, *The New UU*)

Because Unitarian Universalism supports freedom of thought and belief and does not require subscribing to a creed, we are free to look for truth in many different places. "Revelation" is the word traditionally used to describe how God becomes known to human beings. We have adopted the word to describe truth more generally. We look in different places for truth which keeps emerging, rather than being sealed, or confined, to a particular book or tradition. We look to our own personal experience, trusting it as much, or more than, the words from the past.

Beginning with the Transcendentalists, Unitarians began to find truth in religions other than Christianity. Emerson, for example, studied the *Bhagavad-Gita*, a Hindu scripture. In 1893, Jenkin Lloyd Jones, a prominent Midwestern Unitarian leader, brought the Parliament of World Religions to Chicago, hosting participants from a breadth of religious backgrounds to share their thinking. By that time, Universalists, too, had begun broadening the concept of Universalism beyond the idea of universal salvation to embrace what is universal in human experience.

With revelation not limited to biblical sources or the authority of (mostly male) clergy, women claimed their place in our religious tradition. Thus, Unitarians and Universalists became early supporters of women's rights, including suffrage, the ordination of women, and the economic independence of women from their fathers and husbands.

Around the same time, many Christians were shaken by scientific ideas. Charles Darwin proposed his theory of evolution. Unitarians and Universalists had already realized that science, too, was a source of truth, so had little difficulty with Darwin's ideas. Even harder than Darwin's theory for many orthodox Christians to accept was the 19th-century movement of historical-literary criticism of the Bible, which examined biblical texts as products of a particular time and place. Again, Unitarians and Universalists had no problem with such ideas, because they embraced the ever-widening sphere of truth from a variety of sources.

### Excerpt from Of Enthusiasm

(John Locke, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*, IV, XIX, 14-16)

**Revelation must be judged of by reason.** He, therefore, that will not give himself up to all the extravagances of delusion and error must bring this guide of his light within to the trial. God when he makes the prophet does not unmake the man. He leaves all his faculties in the natural state, to enable him to judge of his inspirations, whether they be of divine original or no. When he illuminates the mind with supernatural light, he does not extinguish that which is natural. If he would have us assent to the truth of any proposition, he either evidences that truth by the usual methods of natural reason, or else makes it known to be a truth which he would have us assent to by his authority, and convinces us that it is from him, by some marks which reason cannot be mistaken in. Reason must be our last judge and guide in everything. I do not mean that we must consult reason, and examine whether a proposition revealed from God can be made out by natural principles, and if it cannot, that then we may reject it: but consult it we must, and by it examine whether it be a revelation from God or no: and if reason finds it to be revealed from God, reason then declares for it as much as for any other truth, and makes it one of her dictates. Every conceit

that thoroughly warms our fancies must pass for an inspiration, if there be nothing but the strength of our persuasions, whereby to judge of our persuasions: if reason must not examine their truth by something extrinsic to the persuasions themselves, inspirations and delusions, truth and falsehood, will have the same measure, and will not be possible to be distinguished.

**Belief no proof of revelation.** If this internal light, or any proposition which under that title we take for inspired, be conformable to the principles of reason, or to the word of God, which is attested revelation, reason warrants it, and we may safely receive it for true, and be guided by it in our belief and actions: if it receive no testimony nor evidence from either of these rules, we cannot take it for a revelation, or so much as for true, till we have some other mark that it is a revelation, besides our believing that it is so. Thus we see the holy men of old, who had revelations from God, had something else besides that internal light of assurance in their own minds, to testify to them that it was from God. They were not left to their own persuasions alone, that those persuasions were from God, but had outward signs to convince them of the Author of those revelations. And when they were to convince others, they had a power given them to justify the truth of their commission from heaven, and by visible signs to assert the divine authority of a message they were sent with. Moses saw the bush burn without being consumed, and heard a voice out of it: this was something besides finding an impulse upon his mind to go to Pharaoh, that he might bring his brethren out of Egypt: and yet he thought not this enough to authorize him to go with that message, till God, by another miracle of his rod turned into a serpent, had assured him of a power to testify his mission, by the same miracle repeated before them whom he was sent to. Gideon was sent by an angel to deliver Israel from the Midianites, and yet he desired a sign to convince him that this commission was from God. These, and several the like instances to be found among the prophets of old, are enough to show that they thought not an inward seeing or persuasion of their own minds, without any other proof, a sufficient evidence that it was from God; though the Scripture does not everywhere mention their demanding or having such proofs.

**Criteria of a divine revelation.** In what I have said I am far from denying, that God can, or doth sometimes enlighten men's minds in the apprehending of certain truths or excite them to good actions, by the immediate influence and assistance of the Holy Spirit, without any extraordinary signs accompanying it. But in such cases too we have reason and Scripture; unerring rules to know whether it be from God or no. Where the truth embraced is consonant to the revelation in the written word of God, or the action conformable to the dictates of right reason or holy writ, we may be assured that we run no risk in entertaining it as such: because, though perhaps it be not an immediate revelation from God, extraordinarily operating on our minds, yet we are sure it is warranted by that revelation which he has given us of truth. But it is not the strength of our private persuasion within ourselves, that can warrant it to be a light or motion from heaven: nothing can do that but the written Word of God without us, or that standard of reason which is common to us with all men. Where reason or Scripture is express for any opinion or action, we may receive it as of divine authority: but it is not the strength of our own persuasions which can by itself give it that stamp. The bent of our own minds may favour it as much as we please: that may show it to be a fondling of our own, but will by no means prove it to be an offspring of heaven, and of divine original.

### Excerpt from Unitarian Universalist Views of the Bible

*(Mark Christian, UU Church of Las Cruces)*

"Revelation is not sealed," we have long proclaimed. This is a keystone and distinguishing feature of the free church. However much truth we discover in the world we remain open to new truth, "from wherever it may come." For the Transcendentalists of the nineteenth century this meant experiencing nature directly. For the Free Religionists of that same century it meant exploring world religions. For Humanists in the twentieth century, it means turning to science. For me as a third generation Unitarian Universalist, ironically, it has meant rediscovering the Hebrew and Christian scriptures.

When I entered seminary, I worried about my ignorance of the Bible. "Growing up as a UU," I explained to my seminary's president, "I didn't learn much about the Bible. I know I'll have to work overtime to overcome this deficit." He reassured me: "Don't worry. You're already aware that you know very little about what's in the Bible. That lesson is painful for many seminarians." He was right.

As I explored the Bible free of traditional interpretations, I found compelling insights to add to my sources of revelation. The complexity of Jesus' parables caused me to reorient my world-view. The archetypal truths in the Genesis stories, the human anguish in Job, and the existential angst of Ecclesiastes all unfolded before me in a way I found forceful and inspiring.

Interpretations of the Bible can be outmoded, sexist, racist, and excessively violent. The Bible can also be a source of hope-filled compassion, honest introspection, motivation toward justice, and comforting inspiration. If indeed "revelation is not sealed," then we must remain open to the possibility of new and higher truths that may come to us from diverse sources . . . including the Bible.