

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Sources of Our Living Tradition #6
Unitarian Church of Baton Rouge, LA, Branches Group #38, April 2022

OPENING WORDS

The living tradition we share draws from many sources. The sixth is: Spiritual teaching of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

CHECK-IN

READINGS

- Native American teachings describe the relations all around—animals, fish, trees, and rocks—as our brothers, sisters, uncles, and grandpas. . . . These relations are honored in ceremony, song, story, and life that keep relations close—to buffalo, sturgeon, salmon, turtles, bears, wolves, and panthers. These are our older relatives—the ones who came before and taught us how to live. ~ Winona LaDuke
- Is not the sky a father and the earth a mother, and are not all living things with feet or wings or roots their children? ~ Black Elk
- A rock has being or spirit, although we may not understand it. The spirit may differ from the spirit we know in animals or plants or in ourselves. In the end we all originate from the depths of the earth. Perhaps this is how all beings share in the spirit of the Creator. We do not know. ~ Leslie Marmon Silko
- The old people came literally to love the soil and they sat or reclined on the ground with a feeling of being close to a mothering power. It was good for the skin to touch the earth and the old people liked to remove their moccasins and walk with bare feet on the sacred earth. . . . The soil was soothing, strengthening, cleansing, and healing. . . . Wherever the Lakota went, he was with Mother Earth. No matter where he roamed by day or slept by night he was safe with her. ~ Luther Standing Bear
- “Waconda,” it says in the Ojibwe language, Great Mystery, meaning that vital thing or phenomenon in life that cannot ever be entirely comprehensible to us. What is understood though, through the spoken word, is that silence is also Waconda, as is the universe and everything that exists, tangible and intangible, because none of these things are separate from that life force. It is all Waconda. ~ Anna Lee Walters

- Ethics are complete, profound and alive only when addressed to all living beings. Only then are we in spiritual connection with the world. Any philosophy not representing this, not based on the indefinite totality of life, is bound to disappear. ~ Albert Schweitzer
- We are an integral part of Nature, which we should cherish, revere and preserve in all its magnificent beauty and diversity. We should strive to live in harmony with Nature locally and globally. We acknowledge the inherent value of all life, human and non-human, and strive to treat all living beings with compassion and respect. ~ from the World Pantheism Movement Statement of Principles

QUESTIONS Please respond to any of the questions you feel moved to answer or any of the readings that you find to be particularly meaningful.

These questions are adapted from session 7 of the study guide for the book *A Chosen Faith*, by John A. Buehrens and Forrest Church, at <https://www.beacon.org/Assets/ClientPages/AChosenFaithdg.aspx>

1. Does the celebration of the changing seasons, the sacred circle of life, or other Earth-based observance play a part in your life?
2. Do you have a sense of living in harmony with the rhythms of nature? Are there ways in which you wish to introduce a deeper appreciation of nature into your life?
3. Do you believe that an earth-centered spirituality can fill one's soul with hope and love? Why or why not?
4. Our seventh principle, corresponding to this sixth source, calls for "respect for the interdependent web of all existence of which we are a part." What are some of the ways in which you now practice respect for the interdependent web? Are there other things you might do to carry your practice further?

CLOSING WORDS

Religion is, in reality, living. Our religion is not what we profess, or what we say, or what we proclaim; our religion is what we do, what we desire, what we seek, what we dream about, what we fantasize, what we think - all these things - twenty-four hours a day. One's religion, then, is one's life, not merely the ideal life but the life as it is actually lived. ~ Jack D. Forbes

notes on people quoted and sources of quotes

Winona LaDuke (1959-) is an American economist, environmentalist, writer and industrial hemp grower, known for her work on tribal land claims and preservation, as well as sustainable development. Her father was from the Ojibwe White Earth Reservation in Minnesota, and her mother of Jewish European ancestry from The Bronx, New York. Due to her father's heritage, she was enrolled with the Ojibwe Nation at an early age, but did not live at White Earth, or any other reservation, until 1982. Quote from *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (1999)

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Winona_LaDuke

Heñáka Sápa, commonly known as **Black Elk** (1863–1950), was a *wichásha wakǵáŋ* ("medicine man, holy man"), *heyoka* of the Oglala Lakota people and educator about his culture. He was a second cousin of the war leader Crazy Horse and fought with him in the Battle of Little Bighorn. He survived the Wounded Knee Massacre in 1890. Black Elk is best known for relating his religious views, visions, and events from his life to poet John Neihardt, who published these in his book *Black Elk Speaks* in 1932. Black Elk converted to Catholicism, becoming a catechist, but he also continued to practice Lakota ceremonies. The Roman Catholic Diocese of Rapid City opened an official cause for his beatification within the Roman Catholic Church in 2016. Quote from *Black Elk Speaks*.

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Elk
- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Black_Elk_Speaks

Leslie Marmon Silko (1948-) is an American writer. A Laguna Pueblo Indian woman, she is one of the key figures in the First Wave of what literary critic Kenneth Lincoln has called the Native American Renaissance. In 1974 she published a volume of poetry called *Laguna Woman*. Her works primarily focus on the alienation of Native Americans in a white society and on the importance of native traditions and community in helping them cope with modern life. Quote from *Landscape, History, and the Pueblo Imagination*

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Leslie_Marmon_Silko
- <https://www.poetryfoundation.org/poets/leslie-marmon-silko>
- https://psych.utah.edu/_resources/documents/psych4130/Silko_L.pdf

Luther Standing Bear (1868-1939) was a Sicangu and Oglala Lakota chief notable in American history as a Native American author, educator, philosopher, and actor of the twentieth century. Standing Bear fought to preserve Lakota heritage and sovereignty; he was at the forefront of a Progressive movement to change government policy toward Native Americans. Standing Bear was one of a small group of Lakota leaders of his generation who was born and raised in the oral traditions of their culture, educated in white culture, and wrote significant historical accounts in English of their people and history. Standing Bear's discussions of his early life, years at the Carlisle Indian Industrial School, Wild Westing with Buffalo Bill, and life on government reservations presented a Native American viewpoint during the Progressive Era in American history. Standing Bear's commentaries on Native American culture and wisdom educated the American public, deepened public awareness, and created popular support to change government policies toward Native American peoples. Standing Bear helped create the popular twentieth-century image that Native American culture is holistic and respectful of nature. Quote from *Land of the Spotted Eagle* (1978).

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luther_Standing_Bear

Anna Lee Walters (1946-) is a Pawnee/Otoe-Missouria author. She obtained her BA from Goddard College in Plainfield, VT, where she also obtained her MFA in Creative Writing. She is an instructor in the Humanities Division at Diné College in Arizona where she has experience as an administrator and teacher, and as a publisher of educational and trade publications with Navajo Community College Press. Quote from *Talking Indian: Reflections on Survival and Writing* (1992).

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Anna_Lee_Walters
- <http://www.hanksville.org/storytellers/ALWalters/>

Albert Schweitzer (1875–1965) was an Alsatian-German theologian, organist, musicologist, writer, humanitarian, philosopher, and physician. A Lutheran, Schweitzer challenged both the secular view of Jesus as depicted by the historical-critical method current at this time, as well as the traditional Christian view. He received the 1952 Nobel Peace Prize for his philosophy of "Reverence for Life".

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Albert_Schweitzer
- Quote from: <https://www.quotetab.com/quote/by-albert-schweitzer/ethics-are-complete-profound-and-alive-only-when-addressed-to-all-living-beings?source=spiritual>

World Pantheism - The World Pantheist Movement promotes scientific pantheism, a nature-centered and naturalistic alternative to dogmatic supernatural religions. It is a form of spirituality strongly focused on Earth, love and care for Nature, human and animal rights.

- Quote from <https://pantheism.net/manifest/>

Jack D. Forbes (1934–2011) was an American writer, scholar and political activist, who specialized in Native American issues. He is best known for his role in establishing one of the first Native American Studies programs (at University of California Davis). In addition, he was one of the co-founders of D-Q University, the first Native American college located outside a reservation. Closing quote from *Columbus and Other Cannibals: The Wétiko Disease of Exploitation, Imperialism, and Terrorism* (2008)

- https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jack_D._Forbes
- https://www.goodreads.com/author/quotes/268653.Jack_D_Forbes

Many of the quotes are found in Jack D. Forbes' essay "Indigenous Americans: Spirituality and Ecos" which appeared in the 2001 Fall issue of *Daedalus*, available at: <https://www.amacad.org/publication/indigenous-americans-spirituality-and-ecos>