

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things...which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all of those who adhere to them.

- *Emile Durkheim, as quoted by David Sloan Wilson in Darwin's Cathedral*

Out of Our Yearning

We speak to the god, the goddess, the spirit of life, the eternal.

We speak to the mysterious thread that connects us one to the other and to the universe.

We speak to the deep wisdom at the center of our beings.

We embody the yearning of all people to touch each other more deeply, to hear each other more keenly, to see each other's joys and sorrows as our own and know that we are not alone, unless we create solitude for ourselves; and even then, community awaits us.

Out of yearning we have come to this religious community.

May we help each other proclaim the possibilities we see,

to create the community we desire, to worship what is worthy in our lives, to teach the truth as we know it, and to serve with justice in all the ways that we can,

to the end that our yearning is assuaged and our lives fulfilled in one another.

Let us go, now, into the silence of the faith that is unique to each of us, and still the same.

Let us be silent together for a moment.

[Pause.]

May peace be yours.

- *Susan Manker Seale (from For Praying Out Loud by L. Annie Foerster)*

...We believe faith should come across us like a blinding light, transforming us, subsuming us in divine rapture. We want to be like Paul on the road to Damascus, knocked to the ground by a truth we cannot deny. If our faith is not like this, we reason, it is no faith at all.

But faith is not always so dramatic. It is sometimes a quiet shaping – an edifice built, stone by stone, from the hard labors of our heart.

- *Kent Nerburn, Make Me An Instrument of Your Peace: Living in the Spirit of the Prayer of St. Francis*

Through our direct experience, we ... may discover a profound sense of wonder about the gift of life and be led to gratitude, renewal of the spirit, and openness to the forces that create and uphold life. "Belief is many things," said one of our modern leaders, A. Powell Davies, "and so is disbelief. But religion is something that happens to you when you open your mind to truth, your conscience to justice, and your heart to love." In Unitarian Universalist congregations, we do

not try to make one another fit a given pattern of experience. But we do discover together that there are religious dimensions in all our varied human experience.

For us, religious experience is direct and personal. It may be joyous – a transformative moment of awakening like being present at a child's birth. Or it may be as painful as the birth itself or as wrenching as grief. Sometimes it takes something very close to our own death, or the death of someone we love, to break through our usual defenses and remind us what a gift it is to be alive and to be able to love. Part of all authentic experience is deeply inward – beginning to trust what Channing calls "the power of God within." But often it is dependent on the agency of others whose insight, courage, and love helps us expand our idea of what human life can be.

- *John A. Buehrens, Our Chosen Faith*

Religion is so much more than just spirituality. What religion seeks to do, and what spirituality cannot accomplish alone, is to reunite our divided selves. The role of religion in our lives is to give us integrity. Integrity, which literally means the state or quality of being entire, complete and unbroken. Spirituality is the Band-Aid or cast that indicates a broken heart or fractured life. It has no healing powers of its own, and yet promotes the environment necessary for good health to return. Religion is the mending of the break or fracture itself. Religion reacts with spirituality to seal the wound and fill in the cracks. And good religion, good religion leaves no scars.

...So rather than go it alone, rather than trade in one fable for another, I prefer to call upon the bedrock of religion... I need trustworthy relationships, tenacious communities of support. This is the only way I can sustain the journey toward wholeness, toward an undivided life. The journey has its solitary passages—it sure does. But it is simply too arduous to take without the assistance of others. Because I have such a vast capacity for self-delusion, I will inevitably get lost en route without correctives from outside myself.

- *Rev. Greg Stewart, "I'm Not Religious But I Am Spiritual" sermon (September 16, 2007)*