

December Theme
Soul: the Practice of Revelation

Introduction

Some definitions -

Soul: the spirit or immaterial part of a person, the seat of human personality, intellect, wit, and emotions. Also, the principle of life, feeling, thought and action in humans, regarded as a distinct entity separate from the body. Of a spiritual nature, both immaterial and immortal.

Revelation: in religion and theology, revelation is the revealing or disclosing of some form of truth or knowledge through communication with a deity or other supernatural entity or entities.

So where do we Unitarian/Universalists find ourselves in all that? By some of those definitions, we all have souls. As for the classical concept of an immortal soul, some UUs believe we have them, some believe we don't. For some it's a question of great importance; for others it's irrelevant to their faith and beliefs.

As for revelation, many of us choose to look within ourselves to try to find what feels true. Others look outward, trying the sense the truths life and the world offer to us.

It would be lovely to offer up some concrete statements of UU belief on the subjects of soul and revelation. but in our non-creedal faith we can't. What we can offer are some questions and quotations that might help you find how those concepts resonant with you. And remember, the truth may not lie in the finding, but in the looking.

Questions for discussion and discernment on your own, or with each other:

Are "spirit" and "soul" the same thing?

How does life experience shape our soul? Or does it?

Are personality and soul the same thing?

What is the soul of our church?

What kinds of things have soul?

Can a soul be created? Damaged?

What do we mean when we say something is "soul-ful"?

What does it mean when someone says, "feed the soul"?

This month's theme was composed by Marty Nickerson and Penn Young with the other Worship Associates.

What is “an old soul”?

When someone does a terrible or evil act, does that mean they have no soul?

Does revelation occur in your life?

How do you know it when it happens?

Quotations and Short Readings

Before you tell your life what you intend to do with it, listen for what it intends to do with you.

Before you tell your life what truth and values you have decided to live up to,

Let your life tell you what truths you embody and what values you represent.

~Parker Palmer, Quaker Teacher

Revelation comes to those who are radically hospitable to what they don't know.

~ Rebecca Parker, Emerita Professor of Theology, Methodist Minister- dual fellowship in UUA

We cannot properly place our confidence in our own creations; we must depend upon a transforming reality that breaks through encrusted forms of life and thought to create new forms. We put our faith in a creative reality that is re-creative. Revelation is continuous.

~ James Luther Adams, UU Minister

Ancient dissectionists spoke of the auditory nerve being divided into three or more pathways deep in the brain. They surmised that the ear was meant, therefore, to hear at three different levels. One pathway was said to hear the mundane conversations of the world. A second pathway apprehended learning and art. And the third pathway existed so the soul itself might hear guidance and gain knowledge while here on earth.

~Clarissa Pinkola Estes, PhD.

The soul's health consists in the fullness of its reception. For ever and ever the influx of this better and more universal self is new and unsearchable. Within us is the soul of the whole; the wise silence, the universal beauty, to which every part and particle is equally related; the eternal One. When it breaks through our intellect, it is genius; when it breathes through our will, it is virtue; when it flows through our affections, it is love.

~ Ralph Waldo Emerson; Essayist, Poet, Lecturer, Transcendentalist

The Worship Associates are: Tom Bolton, Alexandra Businger, Alan Cantor, Jane Detwiler, Rita Ghilani, Masha Hoeffy, Margaret Homer, Maria Kempner, Julien Lafleur, Marty Nickerson, Jennifer Ollington, and Penn Young.

We celebrate this gift of life, and join in taking on the sufferings of this fragile world. We are this generation's bearers of an eternal message, drawn from ancient springs, that truth must grow, enlarge, and glow in creative freedom. Revelation is not sealed. It is lived anew in every heart.

~Rev. Stephen Kendrick, UU Minister

Poem: "Some Questions You Might Ask"

Is the soul solid, like iron? Or is it tender and breakable, like the wings of a moth in the beak of the owl? Who has it, and who doesn't? I keep looking around me. The face of the moose is as sad as the face of Jesus. The swan opens her white wings slowly. In the fall, the black bear carries leaves into the darkness. One question leads to another. Does it have a shape? Like an iceberg? Like the eye of a hummingbird? Does it have one lung, like the snake and the scallop? Why should I have it, and not the camel? Come to think of it, what about the maple trees? What about the blue iris? What about all the little stones, sitting alone in the moonlight? What about roses, and lemons, and their shining leaves? What about the grass?

~Mary Oliver, Poet, Winner of Pulitzer Prize and National Book Award