

Soul Matters

September 2013

What Does It Mean to be a Person of Connection?

We live in a lonely time. For all the electronic ways of making connections we have today, 25% of the American people say they have no one with whom they can share intimate information about themselves. About as many say they have only one person, and that is most likely to be a life partner.

Church offers an opportunity to change this. Here we gather in community to do the work of connecting. Connecting with our inner selves, by hearing that “still, small voice within.” Connecting with God or the Holy. Connecting with those around us. Connecting to the greater community through service and partnerships. Remembering that we are a part of “the interconnected web of all existence.”

Practicing our spirituality together, we can remember that we are connected. Our small group covenants remind us of this by affirming our reasons for being together – to make deep connections – to have people with whom we can reveal our true selves – to be listened to with respect and understanding.

It is easy to lose our sense of connection. We may become engrossed in the roles we play at work or at home, allowing only a few aspects of our true selves. We may insulate ourselves from the troubles of others through fear, or a sense of inadequacy. We may forget to make time to connect with nature, to garden or walk in the hills, or bird-watch or play with our animals.

This month, as the church re-gathers following the long days of summer, we celebrate our deep connections, and renew others. Join with others in a Soul Matters group, another way to connect, and change your life.

With love and hope for all your re-connections,
Beatrice

Soul Matters is the creation of the Rev. Scott Taylor. Materials in this packet are from the Rev. Beatrice Hitchcock, and others as credited.

Our Spiritual Exercises:

There are three exercise, or “rituals of connection” below. All of them are action oriented. All of them designed to help us reclaim our connections. Do all three, if you can. Start now, and come to your Soul Matters group prepared to share your experiences.

Preamble to Exercise #1:

Several years ago, my sister Heather died of breast cancer. We had been close as adults, and her death was very painful for me. I had flown to Seattle to be with her when I knew she was passing, and had booked a return ticket three weeks later. She died only a few days after I arrived, and I stayed to help my brother-in-law with all the “arrangements” of death. During that time with David and their friends, I cried a lot, and laughed some, and shared stories, and got angry, and questioned a lot of things... A whole host of emotions were right on the surface and coming out whenever.

After a week or so, David said to me, “You know, I don’t think I ever really knew you before. You’ve always been Heather’s sister, or your father’s daughter, or Jim’s wife, or Elizabeth’s mother, or a UU minister. But now I feel like I really know you.” Heather and David had been married for 16 years, but David and I never connected until after her death, when the rawness of my grief allowed me to be just me.

Spiritual Exercise #1 **Honor a Deep Connection**

Your work here is the work of memory. All of us have, I hope, at least one memory of a time when we truly felt connected. A friend or lover who truly knew us, who we knew as well. A team or group of people in whose company you could truly be yourself, and in whose deep honesty you believed. A helping relationship that became something more, a real two-way connection between yourself and someone else.

Take some time to remember this person, or people, and what it was about that relationship that allowed you to connect. What was it that allowed for honesty and depth in your relationship? What, if any, were the stumbling blocks to that connection?

Come to your group with a story of a time when you felt really connected. Or write it down and share it with someone.

Spiritual Exercise #2

“Re-forge a Broken Connection”

All of us have broken connections in our lives -- people we loved and were close to once, but with whom we no longer have that connection. Sometimes this is because of circumstance... Classmates or neighbors or co-workers move away. You lose a beloved in-law through divorce. Perhaps a minor hurt or slight caused a gradual drifting away. Sometimes there are big, important reasons for breaking a relationship – betrayal, broken trust, deep wounds.

Rosh Hashanah, the Jewish New Year, starts at sundown on September 4th and ends at sundown on Sept 6th. Yom Kippur, the Day of Atonement, is the day when the Book of Life is sealed for the coming year; it starts at sundown on September 13 and ends at sundown the next day. In the Jewish tradition, the days between Rosh Hashanah and Yom Kippur are for making yourself right with God and right in your earthly relationships. It is a time for making amends and asking forgiveness. And forgiveness, when asked for, must be granted.

Think about those close connections you have had, and have no longer. Choose three people to try to mend relationships with or simply reconnect. Facebook and other electronic means of communication make finding people easier than ever. If you have simply lost touch, do an online search, or ask someone to do one for you. Find one another again, and then communicate. I don't recommend putting the intimate details of your life online. Face to face communication is always the best, Skype or other electronic voice with visual is second, then telephone, then letter. Do what works for you.

If you are trying to mend something that was broken, give yourselves some slack, both of you. Sometimes just saying you are sorry is enough, sometimes not. If you get stuck, pick up a copy of “Finding Forgiveness” from the brochure rack, or request one electronically from revmama@mtaonline.org. (Be wary of trying to re-connect with someone you don't think is trustworthy. It is possible to forgive someone from afar, and sometimes safer.)

Connections take two, and just reaching out may not recreate what you had. That's why I suggest you try reconnecting with three different people. Hopefully, at least one will work.

Come to your group with a success story, or at least an understanding of what didn't work and why.

Spiritual Exercise #3

Re-connect with the Yourself and the Holy

Very few of us take enough time for our spirits in the course of daily life. Spiritual practice, in a form that is meaningful for you, is important for your mental and physical health, as well as your soul.

Don't get hung up on the language here. Spirit and soul are just words to describe that part of ourselves that connects, or longs to connect, to our deepest selves and to God, or the Holy, the Universe, or the interconnected web of all existence. Pick the words that work for you.

A spiritual practice can be any intentional practice that feeds your soul, calms your spirit, or gives you inspiration and courage. (Most of them lower your blood pressure, too.) Most people have one or two spiritual practices, even if they haven't ever given them that name. But the pace of post-modern life is such that most of us need more.

Think about your own spiritual practices. Do you keep a journal, or do yoga, dream work, or therapy with a counselor? Perhaps your spiritual practice is gardening or walking with your dog. Some of you have a spiritual partnership in a small group. My daily spiritual practices are prayer and reading inspirational literature. When I'm stressed I go to the Colorado College campus and walk the labyrinth, praying all the way. Perhaps you find your sense of connection to the Holy through helping others.

Make a list of what you do and when you do it, and then think about what else you need. Perhaps more of what you already do would be helpful. Sometimes you need more intentionality behind it. Are you aware of your connection to the world when you're walking your dog? Does journaling make you feel more connected to your true self, or more alone?

Most of us need more to support our lives. More peace, more courage, more hope, more inspiration. Daily spiritual practices can give us this. We have to make time to do this – to understand that it's important and give it priority, or it probably won't happen.

Your Exercise #3 is to commit to a daily spiritual practice that works for you. If you need help figuring one out, pick up "Spiritual Practices for UU's" from the brochure rack in the social room, or request one online: revmama@mtaonline.net.

Come to your group with your experience of reconnection to yourself and the Holy.

Connection

25 years ago a major study was done of interpersonal relationships and it was published in the American Sociological Review, which is the leading academic journal in sociology. Five years ago that study was replicated and repeated in order to measure the changes that had occurred in 20 years and a generation. The results were so stunning that they made the New York Times and the Washington Post. One of the key questions in the study asks participants, how many people they know with whom they feel that they can confide personal information? This is a measure again, of intimacy, of how many people a person knows well enough to share personal information. Respondents could give an answer that went from 0, 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9, or 10 or more—a whole range of responses were possible.

In 1985, the answer given most often, the modal answer for you statisticians out there—the answer given most often was three. Three. About a quarter of the people answered three. In 2004, the answer given most often was zero. Was zero. It gets worse. The number of people who said they had no one with whom they could confide personal information went from 10%—and that's awful enough. 10% in 1985, to 25% in 2004. This is a stunning, stunning change in the space of a generation. And the number of people who answered one was almost as high. So just under half of all Americans either know no one or only one person with whom they can share personal information. And if the answer is one the person is almost always a life partner. So what this means is that almost half of Americans—half—only half have a single, close relationship outside of the household. Imagine that. Imagine that.

Excerpt from a sermon by the Rev. Peter Morales
“Our Greatest Challenge”
2010 UUA General Assembly

Additional Reading

Choose one of the following to live with for the month.

We cannot live only for ourselves. A thousand fibers connect us with our fellow men; and among those fibers, as sympathetic threads, our actions run as causes, and they come back to us as effects.

— Herman Melville

The world is so empty if one thinks only of mountains, rivers and cities; but to know someone who thinks and feels with us, and who, though distant, is close to us in spirit, this makes the earth for us an inhabited garden.

— Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

We are all wonderful, beautiful wrecks. That's what connects us--that we're all broken, all beautifully imperfect.

— Emilio Estevez

I define connection as the energy that exists between people when they feel seen, heard, and valued; when they can give and receive without judgment; and when they derive sustenance and strength from the relationship.

— Brené Brown

Humankind has not woven the web of life. We are but one thread within it. Whatever we do to the web, we do to ourselves. All things are bound together. All things connect.”

— Chief Seattle

It really boils down to this: that all life is interrelated. We are all caught in an inescapable network of mutuality, tied into a single garment of destiny. Whatever affects one destiny, affects all indirectly.”

— Martin Luther King Jr.

We are all so much together, but we are all dying of loneliness.

— Albert Schweitzer

Family was even a bigger word than I imagined, wide and without limitations, if you allowed it, defying easy definition. You had family that was supposed to be family and wasn't, family that wasn't family but was, halves becoming whole, wholes splitting into two; it was possible to lack whole, honest love and connection from family in lead roles, yet to be filled to abundance by the unexpected supporting players.”

— Deb Caletti

The Secret Life of Prince Charming

Spirituality is recognizing and celebrating that we are all inextricably connected to each other by a power greater than all of us, and that our connection to that power and to one another is grounded in love and compassion. Practicing spirituality brings a sense of perspective, meaning and purpose to our lives.

— Brené Brown

The Gift of Imperfection:

Let Go of Who You Think You're Supposed to Be and Embrace Who You Are

When we know ourselves to be connected to all others, acting compassionately is simply the natural thing to do.

— Rachel Naomi Remen

We often forget our human connectedness. Throughout my life, I have felt the greatest beauty lies in this connection. It has been in the deepest connections with others that I have experienced the greatest degree of learning, healing and transformation. This connection is a powerful thing, with the ability to transform lives, and ultimately transform human experience.

— Kristi Bowman

Journey to One: A Woman's Story of Emotional Healing and Spiritual Awakening

When we get too caught up in the busyness of the world, we lose connection with one another - and ourselves.

— Jack Kornfield