

Four Spiritualities: A Study in Type
A sermon offered at
Countryside Church Unitarian Universalist
In Palatine, Illinois on October 26, 2014
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It's that time of the year – almost Halloween – that spooky time when, they say, the spirits come out. So it seemed as good a time as any to cautiously, carefully talk about spirituality. {What? You know – this is the sort of time when Jon Stewart would put his hand up to his ear as though there was a tiny microphone through which his staff was speaking to him just like “real live newscasters” do.

What? They don't mean that kind of spirit? It's what? No ... thanks. I thought that when they said that the veil between this world and the spirit world was at its thinnest they ... no .. I see that... So – it won't be any easier for people to understand what spirituality is – or what the word means. Well... thanks.}

Well, darn, and here I thought that something that's beyond mere language to express was just going to sit down and explain itself and all of that to us. Instead – I guess we'll just have to grapple with this ourselves.

Spirituality is one of those troublesome words. The atheists in our midst have often quarreled with the word because it can seem so slippery and this has been too often proven by folks willing to apply the word spiritual to anything devoid of thought and so making the word almost meaningless. But I haven't found a good substitute for that place where our emotions, thoughts, intuitions, and physical being all meet. That place where we're able to see things dressed not in the language or dogma of religion nor obscured by our habitual thoughts and judgments, fears, and hopes -- but where we are able to see things as they *are*. That place where we can – even if only for moments, see things not as we are – but as they are. As William Blake once famously said, "If the doors of perception were cleansed every thing would appear to man as it is, infinite. For man has closed himself up, till he sees all things thro' narrow chinks of his cavern."

I'm pretty comfortable with the word spiritual – I see no more conflict between having a spiritual life and being an atheist than having a life of the mind and being a theist. Still, in preparation for this sermon, I was spending a few more hours down on the mat with the word when I noticed a book sitting on my coffee table – right in front of me -- *Waking Up* by Sam Harris. I only had time to dig into a chapter or two – but it was helpful. Harris sometimes gets on my nerves – because he can be so dogmatically anti-religious and, well, I'm a minister – so it rubs me the wrong way. But I still find nuggets of insight.

“The word “spirit” comes from the Latin *spiritus*, which in turn is a translation of the Greek *pneuma*, meaning “breath.” Around the 13th century, the term became bound up with notions of immaterial souls, supernatural beings, ghosts, etc. It acquired other connotations as well—we speak of the *spirit* of a thing as its most essential principle, or of certain volatile substances and liquors as *spirits*. Nevertheless, many atheists now consider “spiritual” thoroughly poisoned by its association with medieval superstition.

I strive for precision in my use of language, but I do not share these ... concerns. We must reclaim good words and put them to good use -- this is what I intend to do

with “spiritual.” I have no quarrel with ... general use of the word to mean something like “beauty or significance that provokes awe,” but I believe that we can also use it in a more personally transformative sense. ...there seems to be no other term ... to discuss the deliberate efforts some people make to overcome their feeling of separateness—through meditation, psychedelics, or other means of inducing non-ordinary states of consciousness. Hence, I appear to have no choice: “Spiritual” it is.”

And I agree – we need the word in order to speak meaningfully of those means by which we strive to cleanse our vision, see the nature of things as they truly are, see our belonging in that nature of things, and then strive to live in accord with that new vision.

Since August, my primary focus in preaching has been to provide a means by which each one of us can look a little more deeply into our ideas, opinions, hopes, visions, and our hearts and ask key questions that can lead to deeper, more authentic and purpose-full lives. I found some help this summer when, getting ready for our regional Unitarian Universalist learning retreat for lay leaders – I read *The Four Spiritualities* by the Reverend Peter Tufts Richardson.

I admit *The Four Spiritualities* sounds like a band from the 60’s but it’s a book based on the personality type system to which our prayer referred earlier – the Myers/Briggs Type Inventory. The inventory is meant to help us understand better how we are in the world and how we connect with others. Of course the prayer before was a joke and not a serious picture of the real prayers the various personality types might offer. Richardson created a thoughtful picture of the relationship between the sorts of personalities we have and the kind of spiritual lives and spiritual practices that are likely to appeal to us.

Leaving behind the external focus or the internal focus and the judging or perceiving, Richardson was able to identify four points on a wheel of personality and spirit. Now no one is 100% one of these points – but you may find yourself more easily than you might expect as we explore these. However – if you share my type with me and the combinations of letters are already swimming in your mind – forget them and follow the names of each spiritual path.

The first one is Intuiting/Thinking or NT. Richardson calls this the Journey of Unity. They are the most likely to think their way to that sense of oneness. Think about the path the Buddha followed. As soon as he realized that there was suffering in the world he set off to meditate his way to a larger understanding. It was during a session of meditation that true insight came to him – and, although the story is colorful in its own way, not only the method of insight but the enlightenment that he achieved each demonstrated his faith in, his preference for the mind as the doorway to a sense of compassion that would not create more suffering for himself or anyone else. As it says in the Buddhist Holy Book – the Dhammapada “Clear thinking leads to Nirvana, a confused mind is a place of death. Clear thinkers do not die, the confused ones have never lived. The wise man appreciates clear thinking, delights in its purity, and selects it as the means to Nirvana.” That’s as NT as it can get.

Another example of a person on the path of Unity was Buckminster Fuller who used mathematics, philosophy, architecture, and science to find what he believed would be the way to achieving world peace and justice. Richardson quotes this classic poem of Fuller's

God ...is a verb
not a noun,
proper or improper;
is loving,
not the abstraction "love" commanded or entreated;
is knowledge dynamic,
not legislative code,
not proclamation law.
not academic dogma, not ecclesiastic canon.
Yes, God is a verb,
the most active,
connoting the vast harmonic
reordering of the universe
from unleashed chaos of energy.
And there is born unheralded
a great natural peace,
not out of exclusive
pseudo-static security
but out of including, refining, dynamic balancing.
Naught is lost.
Only the false and nonexistent are dispelled.

Well, it's not just long thinking that yields wisdom. Sometimes the insights of the path of Unity hit suddenly like the sound of one hand clapping – an idea that can surprise and clear away mental noise so that – in a flash -- the world is seen as it is.

But that's just one type the type opposite it on the wheel is the sensing/ feeling SF or the path of devotion. The seeker on the path of devotion wants a clear focus for devotion – a strong icon, a personal God, a cause with a face attached to it. They are physical people – people for whom the world comes alive through the senses – often people who are visual learners. Years ago I learned about Balinese dancers – who, out of a deep faith and years of practice, dance the story of a particular deity or hero or even an animal. But it is more than acting out – they are entirely given over to that spirit – almost possessed. They are in love with the deity – like Hildegard or St Francis. They are ecstatic in that love. They find their sense of coherence, belonging, transcendence through acts of love. Ramakrishna was a 19th century devotional mystic. He wrote: "If you must be mad, be it not for the things of the world. Be mad with the love of God." He was a popular teacher in his lifetime in India. I think of Walt Whitman – extravagant in his love, poetic in his expression and spending long hours working with the sick and wounded during the Civil War because what he worshipped was the beauty of this world – of the spirit of humanity and of every leaf of grass.

I have a wooden statue of Quan Yin the bodhisattva of compassion at home. Recently I oiled her and it felt very much like an act of devotion.

The next point on the circle of spiritualities and personalities is sensing/ thinking ST – the journey of works. These are works of dedication rather than devotion. These are

people dedicated to clarity of thought – but the armchair or meditation cushion is too confining – they are impatient to get out and alleviate suffering, they want to learn and serve directly – and concretely. They can be very, very different if they are Judging or Perceiving, though. If Perceiving, they can be activists and freedom fighters, hands on reformers, people who crave a challenge. If they are Judging they can be a passionate about the rules, responsible, organized, focused on measurable results, and thorough. But, no matter what – they are people who want to submerge in the task – and be of use. Around 1500 years before the birth of Jesus, Zoroaster taught and led. He wrote: Through good mind and through rectitude and through the deeds and words of wisdom we come near unto thee. I suspect that there are a lot of ST's among Unitarian Universalists. Pete Seeger's banjo said – this machine surrounds hate and forces it to surrender. Richardson mentions a Unitarian Minister Edward Everett Hale who started a social service society called the Lend a Hand club. Richardson pointed to both Moses and Confucius – two spiritual leaders who were concerned with order and rule and the doing of good and spent their lives in service to others.

The final point of the circle is Intuitive/Feeling NF – the Journey of Harmony – this is also a path of ecstasy, poetry, and relationship. They have achieved the sense of unity that those on the journey of unity have – but they have done it through the heart more than the head. They want every person to have a sense of deep connection, belonging – but they don't care if it resembles their ecstasy or not – if the beliefs are the same or not – though they're often social idealists. Where Buckminster Fuller called his vision of a better world “design science” – the person on the journey of Harmony doesn't care if this is a science, if there's a blueprint first, or if the policies and by-laws agree as much as if they all promote a spirit of love, cooperation, and mutual respect - Harmony - then – everything else will flow.

These are people always open to new, to infinite possibilities – who have no trouble going ahead, learning while doing, making mid-course corrections – living evolution. Richardson quoted Loren Eisely, author of the immense journey who wrote: “Man is not totally compounded of the nature we profess to understand. Man is always partly of the future, and the *future* he possesses a power to shape. Perhaps there may come to us, in some such moment, a ghostly sense that an invisible doorway has been opened -- a doorway which, widening out, will take man beyond the nature that he knows.”

Richardson also pointed to Kabir the sufi mystic poet who lived a couple hundred years after Rumi. Kabir wrote

Do not go to the garden of flowers!
O Friend! go not there;
In your body is the garden of flowers.
Take your seat on the thousand petals of the lotus,
and there gaze on the Infinite Beauty.

If you've figured out or know your type, you may be tempted to think that it is superior to the others. More coherent, or more full of heart, more truly of service, more capable of capturing the true essence... Yet each one of these Journeys or paths is a true and good path toward the spirit – whether the spirit of God or the Creative movement of the Universe. There is no path superior to the others – nor truer.

They're all different ways of living, knowing, deciding, serving, and thriving. You may see yourself here – or you may find that you fall in a quadrant of the circle – and this is so. While we may have a dominant mode – truly we move through these journeys

throughout our lives. The purpose of knowing these styles and journeys is not so you can get your type printed on your name tag or that we should form softball teams of opposing “types”. But knowing these types may help over coffee hour when a disagreement arises about whether we’re doing too much outreach or service to the community or are too focused within. There are people here for whom the life of the spirit is about devotion and praise, reflection, meditation, or song and people here for whom the life of the spirit is expressed through serving coffee, transforming our fellowship hall into a magic garden, taking the train to a march in New York or Springfield, or teaching our children. The key is first to recognize that these are all journeys of value – and together they create a world. If no one makes the coffee we’re all in trouble and if no one works on the by laws we are trackless and if no one passes out the orders of service we are colder, if no one sings we are the poorer, and if no one offers their prayers, we lack a center, if we do not serve the world, we are hypocrites, if no one wrestles the ideas, offers human comfort, speaks of love or justice, if we do not gather for worship we could just as well be a social service club. We need all these journeys for the journey of religious community to have full life and dimension. And each one of us in our lives is the deeper, richer and wiser not only for appreciating those of other types – but if we ourselves, move around the circle – growing and widening our own spirits.

To do that requires a decision and a spiritual practice, the willingness to pursue those spiritual practices that have felt alien – but still look of value. That meditating you’re always meaning to get around to, the daily prayer that seemed like a good idea, the Pads meal you meant to sign up for or the letter to your congress person you keep meaning to write, the march you mean to attend next time, or the spiritual pilgrimage, or... whatever will take you around the circle. We will talk more about these paths and their practical application in congregational life and our personal lives in two Sundays – but now it is clearer.

The circle becomes a mandala of life’s journey – a spiritual practice, a way to understand our differences and commonalities and a way to hold close to one another like a spinning circle that, as long as we clasp hands – the center holds. This is a journey of spirit in which we can see and reach through the veils that keep us separated and by seeing through those veils and cleansing our vision we will grow in understanding. The mandala becomes a way to see forward to a balanced Journey for a community of such spirits as we have gathered here.