

ORDER OF SERVICE
November 20, 2005

Prelude	#397 Morning Has Come (Put words in OOS)	
Welcome and Introductions		Board Presence
Opening Words		Barb Hunziker, RE Co-Chair
Chalice Lighting		Jean Wiant, DLRE
Hymn	#68 Come, Ye Thankful People	
Story For All Ages	A, B, C's	Barb Hunziker, RE Co-Chair
Joys and Sorrows		
Hymn	#131 Love Will Guide Us	
Offering		
Homily	Thanksgiving and Spiritual Practices	Jean Wiant, DLRE
Closing Words		Jean Wiant, DLRE
Hymn	#168 One More Step	
Extinguish the Chalice		Jean Wiant, DLRE

THANKSGIVING AND SPIRITUAL PRACTICES

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UUFCC
NOVEMBER 20, 2005

Thanksgiving is a national holiday that we celebrate to commemorate the harvest festivals that were held in this country by the early settlers. The new settlers of Plymouth, Massachusetts, were unprepared for their first winter. Many died that year from lack of food, the cold harsh winter, and from disease. That spring, the Native Americans showed them how to grow corn and other crops in the new land. Their first Thanksgiving was a celebration of their success at harvest time. The food that was stored from that fall harvest was a promise that the colony would survive.

A year later, there was less cause to rejoice. Far less than a year's supply of food had been stored away. The 3rd year, the crops dried up in the fields due to a hot and dry summer. The Governor ordered a day of fasting and prayer. Soon afterward, it rained for quite a few days. To celebrate, November 29th was proclaimed a day of Thanksgiving.

During the years that followed, a day would be named when there was some special reason to be thankful. There might be several in one year.

In time, people came to feel that Thanksgiving Day should be celebrated by the whole nation at the same time. At the end of the Civil War, President Lincoln proclaimed the last Thursday in November as Thanksgiving Day for the whole nation. From that time on, Americans have celebrated Thanksgiving much as we do today.

The annual practice of giving thanks over a harvest feast serves to deepen the quality of our relationships with each other and within ourselves. It is a spiritual practice that we intentionally engage in, year after year. We are committed to making this activity a regular and significant part of our lives. Thanksgiving has continued to be a tradition during which we not only give thanks for what we have, but also to help others in need, much like the native Americans did with the early settlers before the first Thanksgiving.

In "Everyday Spiritual Practice" Scott Alexander says "that spiritual practice structures our lives with meaningful and maturing ways. Spiritual practices help us achieve more wholeness, satisfaction, depth, and meaning. They are any activity in which you can regularly and intentionally engage, and which significantly deepen the quality of your relationship with the miracle of life both within and beyond you. What makes a spiritual practice different from casual spiritual hobbies is intentionality, regularity, and depth. Whether it is sitting zen,

charitable giving, working with a spiritual director, or tending your relationship with loved ones, what shapes your efforts into a spiritual practice is your commitment to making the activity a regular and significant part of your life.”

Scott's book is a collection of writings from 40 Unitarian Universalists. He grouped their spiritual practices into categories or similar activities such as Engaging the Mind, the Body, the Heart, the Will, and the Soul. He says that we yearn for a sense of oneness with each other and all creation, knowing our place and our value. Finding the path to this knowing is different for everyone. There is no right path to a deeper spirituality. There are many paths, and they change for each of us from time to time.

Spiritual practices that engage the mind include such activities as silent retreats, sacred reading, and prayer.

Spiritual practices that engage the body include activities like martial arts, yoga, and fasting. Spiritual practices that engage the heart include relationships, marriage, and parenting. Spiritual practices that engage the will include social justice, simple living, and vegetarianism. Spiritual practices that engage the soul include such things as quilting, cooking, art, and gardening.

What is important to remember about spiritual practices is that no one practice is better or worse than another, what works for one person may not work for another, and even among people who share the same spiritual practice there are differences.

Now let's get back to Thanksgiving. The Native Americans engaged in the spiritual practice of the will when they taught the settlers how to grow food. It was a gift of knowledge and also an act of social justice. Otherwise, the settlers would have eventually all died off in another winter. The Native Americans also engaged in the spiritual practice of the heart by feeling compassion for the strangers in America and were compelled to act.

The settlers engaged in the spiritual practices of the soul, the body, and the heart, in return. Gardening was a creative art that fed the soul, and eventually their bodies. The Thanksgiving meal was a spiritual practice of the body, providing nourishment and building relationships with the Native Americans, which is a spiritual practice of the heart. So you see, spiritual practices can be linked to one another, remembering that no one practice is any more important than another.

I was asked today to deliver the sermon, encompassing Thanksgiving, Guest at Your Table, and A Book for Every Child. I was also asked to make it spiritual and not commercial. I would say to you that those three activities are all spiritual practices, maybe not for everyone, but each is a spiritual practice for some.

Those whose spiritual practice is Thanksgiving are engaging in body, heart, soul and often spiritual practices of the will. If you have grown any of the foods you are preparing, that is a creative engagement of the soul, just as is cooking. The meal

itself is an engagement of the body, providing nourishment. The relationships we have with the people at the table are spiritual practices of the heart. Finally, we engage in spiritual practices of the will by right actions such as recycling, simple living, being vegetarian, giving, or participating in social justice work.

Those whose spiritual practice is participating in A Book for Every Child are engaging in relationships of the heart, and right action of the will. This social action project provides new books for children in low-income families. The books are gathered at this Fellowship, sorted by age, and donated to local food banks where the children can select the book that they want. There are many ways to participate from monetary donations, book donations, making purchases at Barnes & Noble today, purchasing soup mixes, helping with the sorting and delivery of the books, and more. More information is available on the fliers you have received, or by calling Dagmar Wilson.

Those whose spiritual practice is participating in a Guest at Your Table are also engaging in relationships of the heart, and right action of the will. This social action project is coordinated by the UU Service Committee who uses the monies raised to defend the human right to water, the right to be free of torture, and the right to economic justice and human dignity. You can use the boxes on your dinner tables to show your children how important it is to support the efforts of UUSC, or you can write a check, put it in the envelope, and give it to Mary Alice Graetzer who chairs this very important project. You can become a member of the UUSC by donating \$10 for students, \$20 for seniors, \$40 for general membership, or \$75 for a matching grant opportunity. More information is available on the fliers that you have received.

I'd like to tell you a true story about a boy who loved music, and was so talented that he could play the organ at the age of nine. He and his family lived in Germany. The boy studied philosophy and theology to learn more about the answers to the really big questions of life, and he continued his studies of the organ, too. As the boy grew to be a young man of 21, he made a decision: he decided that he would concentrate on art and science until he was 30 years old; and when he turned 30, he would spend the rest of his life serving his fellow human beings.

In the meanwhile, he became famous for the way he played the organ, and wrote an important book about another famous musician, Johann Sebastian-Bach. He wrote about the life of Jesus, too, and that book also became well-known. The man was very successful and made a lot of money.

Now, it's not unusual for people to have unselfish dreams of how they will live, but it's more uncommon that they will follow through after they've lived like this man had. When he was 30 years old, the man - whose name was Albert Schweitzer - was a famous and important teacher, minister, and organist. And yet, he stopped teaching college, and began to study medicine. Eight years later, he and his wife

(who had become a nurse) went to a part of Africa to open a hospital, where there had never been one before. He paid for what he needed with money he had earned from his books and concerts, and with what he was given by groups like the UU Service Committee.

Dr. Schweitzer kept writing books at night, and took care of sick people in the hospital during the day, for 40 years. When he was 74 years old, the University of Chicago gave him an honorary degree, and a few years later he won the Nobel Peace Prize.

Clearly this man followed several spiritual practices engaging the soul in his music, his will by establishing and running the hospital in Africa, his heart in his marriage, and his mind by studying, teaching and ministering. Dr. Schweitzer found the spiritual paths that nourished him, and he in turn the world.

Susan Manker-Seale writes “We do not have to fit ourselves to someone’s prescribed discipline in order to feel we are being spiritual. Spirituality is with us always, and our individual situations will define the tools we choose to use, if we take the time to listen to ourselves and know our joys and yearnings, whether for quiet or a walk in beauty, for exercise or music, for sunsets or sunrises, for strenuous activity or holding hands, for the glance of a child, for effort or work that is meaningful, for the creative task or the work of community, or for the moments of appreciation which are available to us anytime and anywhere. Whichever path you choose, may you find that for which you search, and your yearning be fulfilled.”

Whether your spiritual practices include celebrating Thanksgiving, participating in Guest at Your Table and/or A Book for Every Child, or other things, may you all find the spiritual nourishment you desire and may you find peace.