

TIME TO ACTION

Week #18 of an ongoing series on "Unity's Foundational Teachings"

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When you think about it, how do you know that you're actually living the spiritual life? What's the difference between just kind of telling yourself, *"Well, you know I went to church once this week"* or *"I went to church once this year; I must be living the spiritual life."*

How do you really know that you're living the spiritual life? Is it when you can slap somebody on the forehead and say, *"Healed!"* and they actually get healed? Is that when you know that you're actually living the spiritual life? Or is it when you just have this natural glow from within and people can just see your spiritual radiance? Is that when you know you're living the spiritual life? Or maybe it's when you move into a cave and you meditate for 20 hours a day. Is that when you're living the spiritual life?

Or maybe it's when you begin to start thinking spiritual thoughts, and that's the sign that you're living the spiritual life. Because you're thinking spiritual thoughts. Or maybe you're having spiritual feelings. Like, *"I think that's a spiritual feeling. I must be living the spiritual life!"* [Congregants laugh]

Or maybe it's when your actions actually align with your spirit.

Because where I want to go tonight: I want to talk about actions. Because many of us have had many wonderful spiritual thoughts, and many of us have many wonderful spiritual feelings. But if you can't bring it down to your daily actions, I think we have a misstep here. That it really matters how we bring it down; that our behavior actually is integrity with our highest spiritual ideals.

And we want to think that it's okay when there's a disconnect. *"I know I'm acting badly, but I'm really a good person on the inside."* [Congregants laugh] Right? And we've all had those moments, right? Where you kind of witness yourself acting badly and go, *"Oh, please!"* And yet it's in the action that we demonstrate our true spiritual Truth. It's in the action where we demonstrate what we truly believe.

So are your actions aligned with your greatest Truth? Are you living your beliefs in a tangible, real way that you can see evidence – *"Oh, I did this and, yes, that's what I believe. That is my highest belief. I believe in forgiveness, and I live forgiveness."* Or, *"I live generosity"* or *"I lived love."* And you can actually see your beliefs expressing through your behavior.

So I had a big decision last week. And it was one of those decisions that had an impact on other people. And I really had spent a lot of time thinking about it and pondering it. And then I realized, the night before I had to make this decision, that I hadn't prayed about it once. Have you ever surprised yourself with that one? Like, you're thinking about it and you're thinking about it. And you're thinking, you know, *"It feels this ... What should I do? What should I do ...?"* But you realize -- you take a step back, and you're like, *"You know, I haven't prayed about it once!"*

And the direction my thoughts were taking me were not the direction that I felt spiritually guided. [Grimaces] You've all had that experience, right? The way you want to do it is one way and the way that it's kind of revealed for you to go is a completely opposite direction! But if we don't ever take it into prayer -- if we don't ever listen -- we never really get that full impact.

So part of our spiritual journey is being willing to listen to the direction that God is calling us. And that really has to apply to this idea that God is an active presence in our life. That God is active. That there is a flow to life -- there's an energy to life -- and that God is an active presence. And the more that we listen, the more we count on that, the more we turn our life over to that living, moving Presence that is within us, the better our life gets. That we want to live -- most of us want to live -- in grace and ease. But

to really live in grace and ease, we have to be willing to surrender our agenda for the higher calling of God. Because the truth is, sometimes we don't know!

How many of you know what's going to happen tomorrow? How many of you like to believe you know what's going to happen tomorrow? [Congregants laugh] Right? But there's this inner thing that we actually have to learn to surrender; learn to listen; learn to stop and open the gap to God.

Another example: this one wasn't my finest hour. [Congregants laugh] So someone called me, and I picked up the phone. And I had a reaction to what they were saying to me. I know it's hard for me to believe that I would ever respond to someone in a way that wasn't loving and holding the highest vision. But I got snarky! It's a spiritual term, you can look it up. [Congregants laugh] Straight up got snarky, straight up, I got snarky. Like, we'd already covered this; I'd already answered this. I knew what we were going to do; we had a plan.

And this person said, "Well, do you really want to do that?"

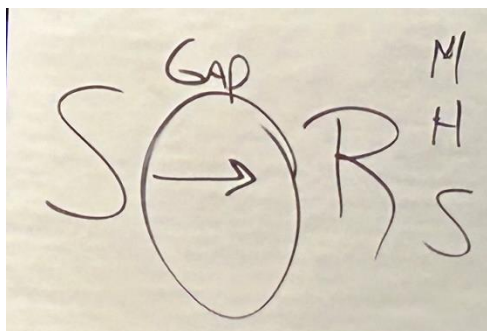
"YES!" Right? Now, did I take that into prayer before I said that? No! Did I listen to what God was calling us to do? No! I wanted ... my ego wanted what it wants. Can I get an amen? [Congregants: "Amen."] Right?

And so what did I get to do? It's like, "Okay, so this person is asking me the exact same question -- the exact same question! -- a week later. Now could that possibly be, Richard, that your first answer was not the best answer?" Heaven's no! [Congregants laugh] Right?

And so I said, "Hmmm." Right? "I want to be curious about that." So I actually took it into prayer. "Okay, God, what's the answer here?" Like, and really kind of listen to a deeper voice than my own ego desires. And the guidance within me is, "No, they were right. We shouldn't go that way." [Grimaces; congregants laugh in response]

How many of you like calling people back and making amends for being a jerk? I don't like it. Like, I don't like it a bit! I don't like to call back and say, "I'm sorry I've got snarky with you. I think you were r-r-r-right." [Struggles to get out the word "right"; congregants laugh in response] You know, man, that was a bitter pill, right? "I think you were r-r-right, and we're going to do it your way. Thank you for having the courage to ask me again."

Now, did I like that? Yes, right? Now, my ego hated it, but my spirit loved it. Right? Because every time I don't check in, and I have to experience the difficulty of cleaning up a mess that my ego created one more time teaches me -- and this isn't the first time I've gotten this lesson, right? [Congregants laugh] But when I don't check in -- when I don't listen; when I'm not willing to turn everything over to God -- there's a problem. And it's me.



And so, what I want us to look at tonight is what I call "the gap," right? Let me; I've got my marker. [Draws an image on easel pad] Imagine that there's a situation. This could be a STIMULUS; it could be anything. It's life, right? And then, what do we want to do when life happens to us? We want to RESPOND.

And our ego believes that we should respond as quickly as possible. Right? Something happens -- "I've got to act quickly; I've got to take care of it, I've got to make it happen; I've got to respond quickly; I've got to do it." But what I want you to see tonight is: there's a gap. And this gap can be incredibly long. Right? And that our ego wants us to believe that it has to be quick, because our

ego doesn't have any patience. Because our ego knows that it's finite. Like, *"The jig's going to be up if we don't act quickly!"*

But if we listen to our spirit, this gap can be very long. And sometimes we don't even need to respond at all! Have you ever had that experience where something happens to you and you think, *"Well, I need to say something about that. I need to do something about that. That was just wrong."* And Spirit says, *"Just shut up."* Well, your spirit may not say it. My spirit says that to me. *"Just be still."* And you don't have to respond at all!

Because if you respond, it's just ego. It's just ego. No matter what they did -- no matter how small or petty or ugly it was -- do you really need to add to that pettiness, the ugliness, the smallness in the world?

And this is freedom. When we can have a gap between what happens to us and how we respond to it, that gap is pure freedom. Because in that gap, there's an infinite number of ways that we could respond.

And in Unity, you know, for the last 140 years we've talked about over and over again: take it to prayer. And the whole idea of taking it to prayer is that there needs to be a space for divine intervention. There needs to be a space for us to get hold of ourselves. There needs to be a space so that we're not responding to life over and over again out of our ego. And this gap is incredibly powerful!

And that's how we actually demonstrate that we are living the spiritual life -- is when we've created this gap. So that whatever happens to us, that we allow ourselves the moment.

And what I want you to see: it's actually a sign of abundance! Like, if you believe that you're blessed; if you believe that you're God's beloved; if you believe that you're a child of God, then you will actually give yourself that gap before you respond.

Now, what's interesting is, you can actually give yourself the gap before you have a reaction in your mind, heart or soul. Like, and I want you to see this gap is so powerful ... like, something happens and you don't even have to have a mental reaction to it! Like, if you practice the gap, you can have something happen to you, and you can just pause in that experience and not have a thought about it.

How many of you have ever noticed that your first thought is oftentimes a judgment about the other person? And then we have a feeling about it in your heart. And then, if we actually drop down and listen to our soul, it's a completely different reaction to life. **But it takes that gap for us to have the ability to shift gears and have a different response.**

That, over and over and over again, what I want you to see is that you have complete choice -- complete control -- how you respond to anything.

Now, am I saying that everybody in your life is wonderful and honorable and groovy? No! **But however they are showing up, this is our spiritual practice of how we respond to it.**

How many of you have noticed yourself responding to some way that maybe your parents would have responded to something? Anybody? Like you're just -- it's so in your blood, that you just respond the way your family has responded for maybe thousands and thousands of years. It's our only hope of truly transforming the planet: is that, when we can create this gap and say, *"Look, I'm not my father; not my mother. I'm not my grandparents or my great grandparents or my great, great grandparents. I am a full and complete expression of God just the way I am, and I get to choose how I respond to life at any moment. I get to choose! And when I choose that, I am actually set free from all of the bondage from my past."*

So can you see an area in your life where you have a tendency to respond the way others taught you to respond? Now that may be a very good thing. But maybe not. You get to decide.

"I'm in charge of my choices."

Together: [with congregants] *"I'm in charge of my choices."*

Okay; so can we agree that every response isn't equal? Right? Some responses could be better than other responses. Some responses can require [laughs] maybe a cleanup afterward in Aisle 6 because we had a leakage, right? [Congregants laugh] Right? Some responses are better than others. And what I want us to do is have the ability to slow down and actually choose.

Now, I want to take it one step deeper. I believe that we have to be able to discern the difference between what our head, heart and soul are saying to us. And when there's a decision, I want you to be able to tell yourself: *"What is my head saying about this? What is my heart saying about this? And what is my soul saying about this?"* Because when we can get to that level of clarity, I believe that we're actually free.

So, you want to try it? You want to play? I want you to think about a decision you have to make. It could be anything. I want you to think about a decision, right? It could be anything. And I want you to close your eyes. We're going to close our eyes. Nobody's going to touch you while your eyes are closed, I promise. Right?

You're going to close your eyes, and you're going to ask -- you're going to put all your energy up in your head -- and you're just going to listen to what your head says. So about that decision, what does your **HEAD** say about it? I want you to listen to everything your head says about that.

Now I want you to go move your energy down to your heart. And what is your **HEART** say about that decision? What does your heart say about that choice?

And now I want you to move down to your belly button: to your soul, to your center. And I want you to ask yourself what your **SOUL** says about that choice.

So, what's your thought about it? What's your feeling about it? And what is your guidance about it?

Alright; how many of you could really feel the different conversation that you were having between your head, your heart and your soul? Could you feel that?

Now, I don't want you to deny any part of this discussion. Right? I want you to know what your head thinks about it, because your head is here to keep you safe. It's trying to protect us. It has many thoughts that I want you to actually know what your thoughts are about that situation. And I want you to know what your feelings are about it. But I also want you to go below your head and your heart to your soul: to your center, to your belly. And I want you to connect with divine wisdom there.

Because for many of us, we do the head and heart thing really well. But we don't go below that. And I think the true way or the true path -- of really living a spiritual life is when we listen to our head; we listen to our heart; but we don't stop there. Because if we just listen to our head and heart, it's actually easier than going all the way down into your soul. Because your head and your heart, they're on top. They get the first voice! They're the ones that scream the loudest!

But when you go down to your center -- to that still small voice; to that place that just knows -- it doesn't scream. It actually just whispers to you. And when we can listen to that deeper wisdom of our soul, I think it changes the conversation.

Because do I want my mind active in my decision-making? Yes. Do I want my heart involved? Where's my passion? Where's my love? Do I want my heart involved in decisions? Yes. But where is my God in

this? And that happens when I go all the way down to my center -- down to my soul -- and say, *"What does my soul want to say to me about this situation?"*

And it's not always the same. That when we're talking about taking action and living our life -- expressing the glory of God that's within us -- yes, we can operate just mentally. And we can operate just from our emotions. And, you know, we can run our whole life just out of our emotions. But we can shift and go down to our center and really listen to what God's saying to us directly about our life. That there's a power that we have access to, but we have to get there!

So, let's do it one more time. Are you willing? So, I want you to look at your life and I want you to say, *"What's the biggest thing that's coming toward me in my life?"* And it could be anything. It could be, you know, a job. It could be retirement. It could be anything. What's the biggest thing that's coming toward you? And I want you to just ask your head.

So we're going to start: put again; put your focus on your head. Go up to your brain; put your focus on your head. What does your head want to say about that challenge or that problem, that situation? And just listen. What does your head want to say? What's your head's concern? What's your head's desire? What does your head need to say?

Now go down to your heart. What does your heart want to say? What's your heart's desire? What's your passion about that situation?

And now let's go down to your soul. What does your soul have to say? What does God have to say? And to truly deeply profoundly listen and to be able to discern all three voices. Because many times we stop at our heart and we don't go down to our soul and truly listen to what God has to say to us.

You ready? Could you hear it?

You know, there is a Buddhist ... actually, it's Zen. And the Zen quote is, *"Before enlightenment, chop wood, carry water. After enlightenment, chop wood and carry water."*

I'm going to read from Layman Pang, a Buddhist in the Zen tradition. And he lived from 740 to 808. So a long time ago, right? This is what he wrote:

*"My daily activities are not unusual.
I am just naturally in harmony with them.
Grasping nothing, discarding nothing.
In every place there is no hindrance or conflict.
My supernatural power and marvelous activity
Is drawing water and chopping wood."*

And I want you to see that there's a process that we go through as we're living this spiritual life. And as we get more and more practice at moving from our head to our heart to our soul, there's a moment where we are no longer in resistance to life. We're just operating from our head to our soul.

And this Zen master -- this Zen teacher -- is teaching us that, when we no longer are grasping -- *"grasping at nothing, discarding nothing, in every place there is no hindrance or conflict, my supernatural power and marvelous activity is simply drawing water and chopping wood."*

See, if we truly want to live in grace and ease, then we have to be willing to step out of our head and out of our heart and down to our soul. And then everything we do becomes spiritual practice. Everything we do is being guided and directed by that one Presence and one Power.

Another Buddhist story:

A young boy comes to a monk and says he dreams of enlightenment and learning great things. When he got to the monastery, he was told that each morning he would chop wood for the monk's fires and carry water up to the monastery for their cleansing and cleaning and kitchen. He attended prayers and meditation. but the teaching he was given was rather sparse.

One day he was told to take some tea to the Abbot in his chambers, the head of the monastery. And so he did so. And the Abbot said he looked sad and asked why.

He replied, "Every day, all I do is chop wood and carry water. I wanted to learn. I wanted to understand. I wanted to be great one day, like you."

And the Abbot gestured to the scrolls that were on the shelf behind him, lining the walls. And he said, "When I started, I was like you. Every day I would chop wood and carry water. And, like you, I understood that someone had to do these things, but I wanted to be more, to move forward. And eventually I did. I read all of the scrolls; I met with kings and gave counsel to the famous. I became the Abbot. And now I understand that the key to everything is that everything is chopping wood and carrying water. That if one does everything mindfully, then it's all the same."

See, I believe that we have to educate our mind. We have to educate our mind with spiritual principles. But that that's not enough. We actually have to learn how to quiet our mind so that we can listen to something greater than our own thoughts.

And I think that we have to heal our hearts. Because when we act from our woundedness, it only creates more woundedness in the world. And, yes, we have all been wounded in one way or another. But as we heal our hearts of the woundedness of the past, we can move forward.

And in moving forward, we express our soul -- our divinity, our goodness -- in our daily activities that is transformative.

To make a difference in the world, we have to be able to understand and hear our mind, our thoughts. We have to be able to hear our heart, our passion, our desires. But we also have to heal our woundedness so that we're no longer operating out of our woundedness. And then we have to be able to connect with the greater Truth of our soul, and bring that into the most simple acts, even chopping wood and carrying water.

That, today, you're going to do so many different activities. You're going to make so many decisions. And there are going to be so many actions that give you an opportunity to do it from your thoughts, from your ego, from your woundedness or your heart. And it's going to give you an opportunity to do it from your soul.

I want you to be so practiced at creating this "gap," so that we're not just reacting unconsciously, but we're acting from a choice point. Each and every one of us gets to decide today: How much are you willing to live your spiritual life?

And your spiritual life isn't just about coming to church or praying or doing all the other spiritual things. Your spiritual life is really, every day, how much God are you bringing to every little thing you do? And the more God you bring to every little thing you do, the more the planet is healing.

Will you pray with me?

And I invite you to open your mind, your heart, your soul to the activity of God. And tonight, we just listen. And the moment that we're willing to say, "Thy will be done" -- the moment we actually want a higher influence in our life -- the more we move into grace and love; peace and love; ease and grace.

Tonight, give yourself a “gap.” Life’s going to come at you. And sometimes it comes at you hard and fast. But you don't have to respond from that. You can actually have a “gap” -- a space – and tap into your soul. And then respond from your highest Truth.

In the name and through the power of the living Christ, we give thanks. And so it is. Amen.

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