

LITTLE RED RIDING HOOD

Week #1 of a New 4-Week Series, "Metaphysical Fairy Tale Fun"

Rev. Stacy Macris Ros

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Okay, everyone. Well, tonight it's "Little Red Riding Hood." I thought it would be fun to take a spiritual look at some of our favorite childhood stories. Because, of course, in Unity we can take any movie, song, fairy tale and extract a spiritual lesson to apply to our lives.

So, during this four-week series, we're going to be looking at some of our most well-known fairy tales. Tonight, starting with "Little Red Riding Hood." And you know what? I found what I rediscovered: it's the original "stranger danger" story. And it surprises me that -- originally written in the 1600s -- that parents in the 1600s, everyone, were telling their kids to be aware of strangers. Like, back in the 1600s -- in little villages -- they were warning their kids, don't talk to strangers. I just think, like: What strangers were coming by?

Now, most of us know the Brothers Grimm 19th century version of this story, and sometimes it's also called "The Red Cap." But I found a different one, and I thought, "I need to use this one." And you'll hear in just a moment why.

So, first we're going to do a little reader's theater. I've invited my friends Jeff and Cassie here with me. So we can let you all know, we're going to reread the story of "Little Red Riding Hood," and then we'll go back and I'll tell you how we can apply the story to our own spiritual practices in life.

Okay; here we go.

Once upon a time, there was the sweetest little girl, and she was loved by everyone who met her, but most of all by her grandmother. The old woman adored her so much that she made her a small red velvet hood. It suited her perfectly, and from that day on, everyone called her Little Red Riding Hood.

One morning, her mother said, "Come, Little Red Riding Hood! Here's a piece of cake and a bottle of wine. Take them to your grandmother. She's sick and weak, and this will do her good."

See why I like this story? [Congregants laugh]

"Go before it gets too hot and remember to walk carefully. Don't stray from the path, or you might fall and break the bottle."

Must be good wine!

"And when you arrive, don't forget to say good morning before you peek around her room."

"I'll Be careful, Mother!" said Little Red Riding Hood, she promised with a smile.

The grandmother lived deep in the forest, about half a league from the village. Just as Little Red Riding Hood entered the woods, a wolf appeared on the path. She didn't know what a wicked creature he was and felt no fear at all.

"Good morning, Little Red Riding Hood," said the wolf."

"Good morning, Mr. Wolf!" she replied politely.

"Where are you going so early?"

"To my grandmother's house," she said.

"And what's that in your basket?"

"Cake and wine. Grandma's been sick, so mother sent me to cheer her up."

"Hmm. And where does your grandmother live?" asked the wolf.

"A little farther into the woods, under the three great oak trees near the hazel bushes. You must know it," she said.

The wolf licked his lips and thought, and thought, "What a tender young thing. She'll taste even better than the old woman. I'll eat them both, but I'll have to be clever about it."

He walked beside her for a bit, then said slyly, "Look how pretty the flowers are here, Little Red Riding Hood. Why not pick some for your grandmother? And listen: don't you hear how sweetly the birds are singing? You walk along so seriously as if you were going to school when the forest is alive with joy."

Little Red Riding Hood looked up and saw sunlight dancing through the trees, making the wildflowers sparkle.

Grandma would love a bouquet," she thought. "I still have plenty of time."

So she stepped off the path to gather flowers. Each time she picked one, she saw another one prettier farther away, and she wandered deeper and deeper into the forest.

Meanwhile, the wolf ran straight to the grandmother's house and knocked at the door.

"Who's there?" called the grandmother.

[Wolf disguising his voice:] "It's me, Little Red Riding Hood. I brought you cake and wine."

"Lift the latch," said the grandmother. "I'm too weak to get up."

The wolf lifted the latch, pushed open the door and, without a word, leapt upon the old woman and swallowed her whole. Then he put on her nightgown and cap, pulled the curtains, and lay down in her bed.

When Little Red Riding Hood finally reached the cottage, she was surprised to find the door standing open. The room felt strange and quiet.

"Oh, dear," she whispered. "Why do I feel so uneasy today?"

She called out, "Good morning, Grandma!" But there was no answer. She went to the bed and drew back the curtains. There lay her grandmother, cap pulled low, face shadowed, looking quite odd.

"Oh, Grandma! What big ears you have!"

"The better to hear you with, my child," came the growling reply.

"But Grandma! What big eyes you have."

"The better to see you with, my dear."

"And what big hands you have."

"The better to hug you with."

"But Grandma, what a terrible big mouth you have!"

"The better to eat you with!" roared the wolf. And before she could scream, he sprang from the bed and swallowed Little Red Riding Hood whole. Full and satisfied, the wolf climbed back into bed, and soon began to snore loudly.

Just then, a passing huntsman heard the noise and muttered, "That old woman snores like a beast. I should check on her."

Also what my husband says. [Congregants laugh]

He stepped inside and saw the wolf stretched out in the bed.

"So it is you, you wicked creature!" he said, raising his gun. But then he thought, "Maybe the old woman is still inside." So instead of shooting... took a pair of scissors and carefully cut open the wolf's belly. After two careful snips, he saw a flash of red inside. A few more cuts, and out sprang Little Red Riding Hood, trembling but unharmed.

"Oh, how frightened I was! It was so dark inside!" she cried.

Then the huntsman cut a little bit more, and out came the grandmother, pale but alive. To make sure the wolf could never harm anyone ever again, they filled his belly with heavy stones. When he awoke and tried to flee, the weight pulled him down, and he fell dead on the spot. The huntsman skinned the wolf and went on his way.

The grandmother ate her cake and drank her wine and soon felt much better. [Congregants laugh]

As for Little Red Riding Hood, she thought to herself, "From now on, I'll never wander from the path again when mother tells me not to."

Some say that later, when she was again walking to her grandmother's with cakes, another wolf tried to tempt her off the path. But this time Little Red Riding Hood was wiser. She walked straight ahead and told her grandmother about the wicked creature she'd met. They locked the door tight. And when the wolf tried to sneak down the chimney, he fell into a great trough of boiling sausage water, and that was the end of him.

And from that day forward, Little Red Riding Hood never strayed from the path. And she lived happily ever after.

[Congregants applaud]

We tell our kids that story, everyone! It's crazy, isn't it? [Laughs] But I did get at least three -- I got a lot of different spiritual lessons we could glean from that. But I'm going to focus on three so that we can all live happily ever after.

So here's the three lessons I thought we could look at tonight. The first: to stay on the spiritual path. Don't stray from the spiritual journey. Don't be distracted by our five senses or be tempted by the human experience, because that probably would make the journey a little bit more scary for us.

And two: the importance of applying our spiritual quality or attribute of mastery. To master our thoughts, our words ... and that includes embracing a growth mindset.

And then number three: to use discernment and heart when we're walking along life's road and when we're faced with challenges. To really listen to that inner guidance; that spiritual wisdom; that intuition ... because really listening to that inner wisdom is remembering that we are one with the Divine. It's our connection with the Divine.

So, let's jump into this first lesson. And I'm going to spend a lot of more time on this one than the other two, because **DON'T STRAY FROM THE SPIRITUAL PATH** is really the foundation for the other two, as well.

So, if we're saying don't stray from the spiritual path, what does it mean to stay on the spiritual path? What does staying on the spiritual path look like? It means that we have a consistent spiritual practice.

That could be meditation, journaling, a gratitude practice, mindfulness, being present, breath work. Staying on the spiritual path could mean really listening to that intuition; to listening to Presence -- God within us and around us. It means taking classes so that we learn and grow in our spiritual understanding. It means being self-aware. Self-awareness is a big part of being on our spiritual journey. Being self-aware really helps us to grow and change, expand our consciousness. Staying on the spiritual path looks like being in and getting support from spiritual community. That's why we're here tonight, right? And being on the spiritual path also includes rest; retreat; taking time apart for a while.

So, going back to our main character, Little Red Riding Hood. First of all, she's in red. So, in Unity's 12 Spiritual Powers -- but also in many cultures -- the color red represents life: life energy, youthfulness, passion, vitality.

And here's her mother telling Red Riding Hood, don't stray. Well, metaphysically, mother represents love, but specifically wisdom of the heart.

So, there are times when we're on that spiritual path. We know we're learning, we're growing. We're coming to church; we're doing classes. And then we have a setback. And then we stray. And then we forget to listen to the wisdom of our heart. We get pulled in by the human world of distraction and temptation -- cake and wine; the cute looking wolf; the flowers; the trees; all the sparkly things.

And the sparkly things could also be the newest green juice; the latest meditation -- you know, upside down, twisting-around practice.

It could be money, career, success, fear of missing out. It could be falling back on negative self-talk. Or shame, guilt, ourselves so our own thoughts and positive thinking start to get skewed and off the path.

So, straying from the path happens in many different ways. It can also be when life just gets full and other stuff gets in the way: work, other responsibilities, family caretaking, home projects. And it's not that any of those are bad. They're all important. But sometimes we can let those other parts of our life take priority over our spiritual health.

So, we can be walking a spiritual path -- have a spiritual practice -- and then suddenly we find, *"Uh-oh, I've wandered off the path, because I got distracted by the five senses. I've been tempted by the human experience."*

And so here then we also have Mother -- this loving wisdom -- also saying, "Don't break the bottle." Don't break the bottle. Meaning: stay focused. Don't be juggling all these things, getting distracted, right? Stay focused. You're on the spiritual path.

And remember, the spiritual path -- the focus on the spiritual path is remembering our divine nature. It's remembering that we're a divine manifestation of life. That you are life. That you are a creative expression of life itself. And you -- this creative expression of life -- is moving through the world; is moving through the forest. Stay the course. Don't forget your divine nature, which is a creative expression of life.

So, then Little Red Riding Hood meets the wolf. And she doesn't realize at first that he's a wicked creature, so she feels no fear. So, this represents when we forget to check in with our own inner discernment. I'll talk about that a little bit more in just a moment.

But we can easily get off the spiritual path when we start to listen to the outside world. When we start really connecting with sense consciousness versus our inner self. We become disconnected from that inner spiritual wisdom. We may become spiritually naive. We may do spiritual bypassing: *"It's fine, God will protect me"* versus listening to our wisdom and discernment that tells us the safer road to go: *"This*

is the safe road. God gave you wisdom. Do that." So sometimes we lose; again, we get distracted from that inner spiritual wisdom.

And many times we get off the path when we're living a life on autopilot. Our thoughts, our beliefs -- they become wicked creatures. And they go on autopilot and then we don't take time to connect to or expand our inner knowing and spiritual understanding.

It could also be when we're going through a dark night of the soul. When we feel like we've been eaten up by life and we're in a dark space. And we have no more emotional or mental bandwidth. So, our thoughts -- our emotional, mental abilities -- are just depleted. And they cause us to stray off the spiritual path.

But let us notice that, on the path, she does take time out. She really does look at the flowers.

Now the ego -- the wolf -- the ego can see this as a distraction. Again, and it can be. *"Ooh, sparkly, pretty things over here."* It's the difference between performative practice and an awakening practice.

So, to our spiritual selves, when done with intention, being present is about taking the time to truly be fully present: to sit in quiet, to observe, to appreciate what's around us. To be in gratitude. This is where our breath and our mindfulness work; our meditation practice come in to support our journey forward. Even Jesus went apart for a while. He went to the mountaintop. He prayed. He disconnected from the physical world.

So, if Jesus took time out, you all could take time out, too. We can all take a time out.

So, this is really about integrating our humanness -- our five senses -- with our spiritual beingness. Bringing all the senses alive but with intention, which helps us then connect with our divine nature.

And lastly on this point of staying on the spiritual path: so, again, she's rescued from inside the darkness of the wolf. And this can represent those times when we go through the dark night of the soul on our journey. Because life can bring storms. The storm can be a major health issue. It can be a death. It can be a job loss. It can be a home loss. It can be a lot of things.

And so we, like Grandma, can also not be well in many different ways. Again, whether that's emotionally ... or maybe there's an unhealed part of ourselves that is still affecting us. So, grandma representing the past. Maybe there's a family or generational trauma that still needs some new life, some new energy, some nourishment there. Maybe there's an old part of ourselves that need to have some nourishment and love brought to it.

But sometimes it takes the unfamiliar and the fear and the darkness -- feeling like we've been eaten whole -- to invite us back into the light of claiming our divine essence, of jumping back into life again. And essentially -- and I love this! Because it's love. Little Red Riding Hood loves her grandma; her grandma loves her. But it's this love that she's bringing to Grandma.

And so, to remind ourselves that when we are feeling like we're straying off the spiritual path, and we're going through those dark nights of the soul, that it's love. It's love that we can welcome in. It's love that we can offer to ourselves for our own healing to make us feel better again.

So, it's from challenging experiences, it's from healing our own past wounds, that we can come back into the light and realize, *"Hey, I can keep going on my spiritual path. I can keep going on my path of spiritual truth."* And we make that commitment again and again and again to ourselves. *"I'm not going to stray from the spiritual growth, my spiritual life."* So that when a wolf -- a challenge, life's challenges -- come, and presents itself again like it did in the story a second time, now we've learned and we can more easily stay on the course.

It's not that we're going to always stay on the course. Sometimes, *"Uh-oh! Here comes another wolf!"* But now I've learned and I can get right back on course even faster and easier than I did before.

So, the invitation is to commit to your spiritual practices. To do your best not to stray from them.

Of course, consistency is the key. But remember that even the setbacks -- even the parts when we feel like we're getting swallowed up -- those are also part of your growth. As an expression of God, you have the wisdom and strength innately in you. So, you can walk through any challenge that life brings. And the more you stay steady, the more you expand your spiritual understanding and your spiritual consciousness.

So, the first lesson is **stay on the spiritual path and offer yourself love.**

The second lesson. The second lesson is that when we're on that spiritual path, we use the power of our words, thoughts and actions in a way that allows us to **HAVE A GROWTH MINDSET.**

So in the past seven to 10 years, I would say, there's been a lot more understanding about how we learn. And psychology has found that we either have a growth mindset or a fixed mindset.

A **fixed mindset** is when we say, *"I'm just this way,"* or *"I've always been this way."* It's thinking, *"I can't change, or I can never learn a new skill, or I'll never be able to. I can't [fill in the blank]."* In other words, you think that if you're not good at something or you've never done it that way, then you never can. You'll never be able to change or have a new behavior; a new skill.

Versus a **growth mindset**, which believes that change and learning something new is always possible. It sounds like, *"Well, I don't know how to do that now, but I'm willing to try."* Or, *"You know, I've been this way in the past, but I'm willing to try a new way of showing up, of acting or reacting. Let me embrace a new way of being in situations like this."* A growth mindset embraces challenges and new ideas. A growth mindset believes that effort and practice can lead to mastery.

And again, in Unity, we believe and teach that you already have this spiritual quality of mastery within you. So it's just a matter of remembering and tapping into your spiritual power or quality of mastery.

So, when we turn to our main character, Little Red Riding Hood -- this new young life, which could be a new idea, a new behavior. And she's heading towards Grandma. Again, the old way of doing things: a generational way of doing things.

And we're being reminded here that we can bring nourishment to the old, tired belief systems. We can bring what feeds us to those unhealed, unwell parts of ourselves to make us better again. So, instead of thinking, *"We've always done it this way in our family."* *"Our family doesn't have money or live long or happy marriages"* ... whatever it is. Challenge the five senses and the old way of thinking. Bring new life to the old thought, to the old belief.

So, instead of hearing what you've always heard, don't let old beliefs and thoughts eat you up. Instead of seeing with limited view, see it bigger and brighter. Instead of holding on with large hands to a fixed mindset, open yourself to a growth mindset of, *"Yes, I can!"* Instead of eating yourself up with negative self-talk and limiting thoughts, challenge the self-talk. Be impeccable with your word ... our last series.

And that huntsman symbolizes our ability to cut away the old version of ourselves to free the new version of ourselves. But we can only do that by limiting ... We can only do that if we limit the negative thinking, and we don't limit the new ways of thinking and believing and knowing that we can have new abilities and skills.

So, embracing a growth mindset. Because growth begins when we stop limiting what we believe is possible. And we use the power of our words combined with our actions to create our new reality. It's up to us!

And then the last lesson in this story is to learn to walk through life in your spiritual path with an open heart, awakened awareness, while also **USING YOUR DISCERNMENT AND YOUR WISDOM**. And this is where we distinguish between our ego and fear and being human and our divine nature.

As soon as Little Red Riding Hood arrives to Grandma's house, the door opens and she asks, *"Why do I feel so uneasy today?"* That reminder to trust our gut feelings. Again, even back in the 1600s, the parents were telling their kids, *"Trust that gut feeling. Trust your intuition. Don't blow off those intuitive feelings that we get."*

Charles Fillmore, Unity's co-founder -- he defined intuition in "The Revealing Word" as divine knowing: the wisdom of the heart. So here again we have wisdom of our heart.

So, we use our GPS -- our God Protection System. As manifestations of God -- of the Divine -- we're never disconnected from that. We just need to become aware of it. We just need to make sure we can tap into it. And it's that inner voice. It's that inner voice of infinite Spirit. It's the love and wisdom that underlies and animates all of existence. And it is within you! And you are connected to all of it. And it's this intuitive knowing that is your oneness with Spirit.

So, a lot of times people will say, *"Well, how do I know the difference between my intuition and just my own mind?"* Your own mind: that's where we feel anxiety. That's where we have overthinking. You feel it in your head. If you're feeling anxiety, overwhelm, overthinking -- that's the head. That's the human part of you. Intuition is you really do feel it in your gut, and that's where we say it sits. Your intuition is in your soul. It can be in your heart, not just the surface-level love, but deep within the heart, soul, and that gut feeling.

And it's in this way that Little Red Riding Hood's journey symbolizes the developing soul. Her journey and ours is about awakening our spiritual wisdom: our spiritual discernment. And we need both wisdom and our heart together. Because if we're all heart and spiritual, then we're untethered. And if we're all in our head, then we're too tethered; we're too tethered to the human experience -- to the five senses.

So, we need to have a balance. So, we take the information into our heads, and then we run it through our heart -- our soul -- and we really listen to that inner knowing.

Remember: the spiritual truth evolves when we're centered in the truth of who we are. So, when we center ourselves in knowing and being. We center ourselves in knowing and being that we're loving awareness. Know that we are and we be pure light. We be divine essence in the world. It's in those moments that we're more receptive to hearing and following divine guidance. It's when we're really in touch with who we truly are.

And Little Red Riding Hood also focused, again, on her love that she has for her grandmother and her desire to extend love, loving kindness to her. So, in any situation -- in any interaction -- that reminder to extend and bring with you love; loving kindness.

And so, we can take our knowledge and we harmonize with -- that's the other quality of love -- we harmonize with divine laws, divine ideas, divine principles. And then we apply it -- the human part of us, the spiritual knowledge -- with our loving awareness. And then, that's when we're really naturally guided to our highest good.

When we bring it all together, the heart and the soul in that deep intuitive knowing, that's when we're open to and we hear and can be guided to our highest good.

So, this third lesson in the story reminds us to listen to that inner guidance and combine it with our heart. To be the heart-centered metaphysician. Take the intellectual knowledge and facts and then run it through the heart for guidance.

So, the story of "Little Red Riding Hood" teaches us not just about stranger danger, but it also reminds us that, even though life's path may include frightening experiences/challenging experiences, we can still stay committed to our spiritual journey. We can still remain open to growth and transformation; new ways of thinking, doing and being. And we can trust the divine wisdom within us. And it's when we walk with both discernment and an open, wise heart that we discover that life's challenges can lead us to a greater awareness of love and life itself.

And that's when we, too, my friends, can live happily ever after.

So, thank you for joining me on this first edition of "Metaphysical Fairy Tale Fun."

Blessings, everyone.

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