

## FOUR SPIRITUALITIES

Madan Laban Unitarian Church, Shillong,  
Meghalaya, India

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The one human reality is that we are spiritual. It is as basic as the air we breathe or the water we drink. And yet springing out of this oneness of our spirituality, how different we are from one another even when we are all Unitarians!

We are different from one another, spiritually, in four ways. This is true in families, in churches, in neighborhoods. How can this be when we are born from the same Earth, the same mother nature?

Even when we were babies we soon became different. If you have four children, the four may have four ways of growing spiritually.

Then as we mature, we do our work and raise our families. But at some point we ask, is this all there is to life? We feel what the Buddhists call dukhya, a feeling of unsatisfactoriness, a longing in us that is unfulfilled.

At this point in our lives remember that we are all different in four general ways. There is no one answer for everyone. If you are to move forward from dukhya, from a sense of unsatisfactoriness, you must find that one pattern from among the four that is best for us.

I call these Four Spiritualities. The Four Spiritualities are: the Journey of Unity, the Journey of Devotion, the Journey of Works, and the Journey of Harmony. Each of the four journeys is equally good. None is higher or lower than the others. We need all four in a church for it to be vigorous and alive! One of these journeys will be your journey. Let me outline each of them.

1. The Journey of Unity. This journey attracts truth seekers, lovers of the free mind, who work with the big picture whether it be of society, of nature, of spirit, of ethics.

For example, Albert Schweitzer tried to find one idea that would include everything he knew into one concept. All his life he was on a journey to find this one basic idea. He finally was on a river boat in the middle of Africa, and it had to stop for a herd of hippopotamuses in the water. He saw the afternoon sun bouncing off their backs and an idea suddenly flashed into his mind, the one idea he had been seeking all his life, "Reverence for Life."

Those on the journey of unity look for these exciting big ideas. The Buddha saw the idea of the Four Noble Truths and then spent the rest of his life preaching and showing this idea to others. William Ellery Channing saw the one great truth of "that unbounded spiritual energy which we call God."

You will find the Journey of Unity within all the great religions of the world. The Hindus call it

Jnana Yoga. You find it in the Prophet Amos and the Apostle Paul, in the Hindu philosopher, Vivekananda, in the Buddha, and the Islamic philosopher, al-Ghazali.

2. Journey of Devotion. The Journey of Devotion attracts those who prefer direct experience rather than ideas. To light a candle in remembrance, to inhale incense placed on the altar at dawn, to touch the earth with bare feet with gratitude in your heart, to make a pilgrimage to a sacred place, to hear the story of spiritual heroes, these direct experiences are central for the Journey of Devotion.

The great Hindu saint, Ramakrishna, was on this journey. He said:

What you gain by repeating the  
Name of God, with love ten times is  
the very essence of the scriptures.  
Be mad for God, truly be athirst for  
God, the Divine Intoxication.

In the Ramayana, in the beautiful poetic version of Tulsidas, you find the Journey of Devotion, for example when Hanuman first met Rama:

To clasp Rama's feet then Hanuman fell,  
What words his heart's rapture can tell.  
His body thrilled, no speech he found.  
As at the Lord he gazed spell bound.

If the Journey of Unity is led by the mind, the Journey of Devotion is led by the heart. Remember Nicodemus in the Bible, who could not understand

the mystic words of Jesus, but after the crucifixion it was Nicodemus who lovingly wrapped the body of Jesus in burial clothes and placed him in the tomb. The Pillars of Islam are all in the journey of devotion, invocation, prayer, alms giving, fasting, and pilgrimage. The English Unitarian, Sarah Flower Adams, who wrote "Nearer My God to Thee," was on the Journey of Devotion. Hindus call this Journey, Bhakti Yoga.

3. Journey of Works. In the Journey of Works it is central to be in covenant with the world and with others, to do your part to make the world work. The great archer, Arjuna, in the Bhagavad Gita followed this journey. Whatever is your place to do in the world, do it well and work for the good of all, not for your own gain. Practice what Krishna in the Bhagavad Gita calls non-attachment. "Whatever you wish that [others] would do to you, do so to them."

Moses, Confucius, Marcus Aurelius, Dana Greeley, Gandhi all followed this Journey. Gandhi said,

This world suffers bondage from work  
unless it is work done as yajna . . . In  
other words, any work dedicated to God  
helps one to attain [release].

Work itself is a part of faithful living, doing our part. It gives us a clear identity for our role in the whole picture. We cannot solve all the problems of the world but we can be the faithful stewards of

our household, our village, our vocation, our congregation. Hindus call this Journey, Karma Yoga.

4. Journey of Harmony. Finally, is the Journey of Harmony, the quest to form a higher self matched by social idealism. In the words of the Buddhist monk, Thich Nhat Hanh:

. . . the most basic work for peace  
is to return to ourselves and create  
harmony among the elements within  
us--our feelings, our perceptions,  
and our mental states.

"Who do you say that I am," Jesus asked his disciples. The ideal was in their midst, it was in their persons, in their relationships, if they could only see it. The new world lives in the old world that now imprisons us. Cultivation of self, or raja yoga, passion for democratic process, for healing the world and the community which sustains us all, this is the fulfillment of the Journey of Harmony. And often we find a mystic vision, as in Emerson, Rabindranath Tagore or Lao Tzu. William Blake watched a flower:

To see a world in a grain of sand  
And a heaven in a wild flower,  
Hold infinity in the palm of your hand  
And eternity in an hour.

These are the four journeys, unity, devotion, works and harmony. You probably can guess which of

these four is your journey. You may see them developing in your children. All four journeys are equally good and worthwhile. But they are very different from each other. Sometimes what might seem wrong in others is simply different. A village, a church, needs all four. If a child is developing a spiritual pathway very different from yours, relax, appreciate the beauty of that child's life.

And when you reach old age, you can look back and say, "I have journeyed my way, and it has been good. And I have learned to appreciate the three other ways to journey and they all can be good also. As an elder in this world I can encourage those around me to live their own spirituality, and to advance as far as they can, and to feel my support, and to know that life, their life, is good."

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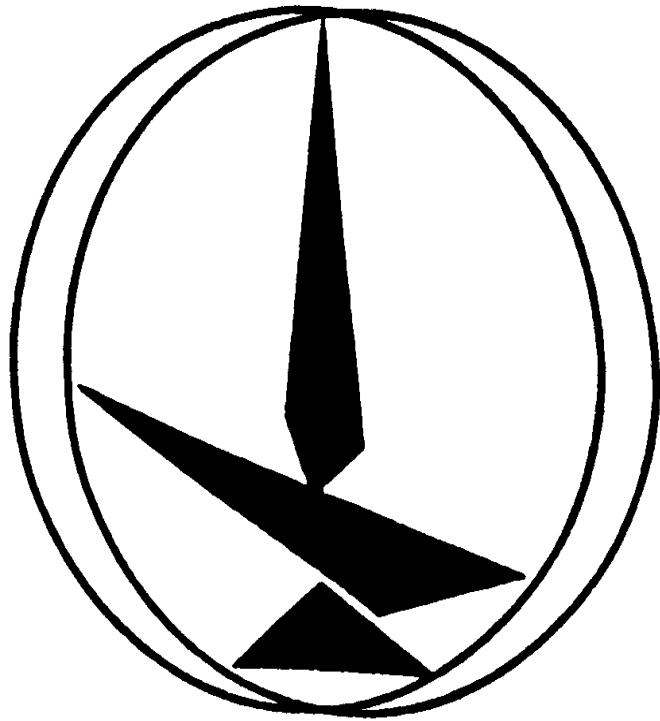
**Rev. Peter T. Richardson**

has been minister of the Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Andover Massachusetts, U.S.A., for 8 years and in the UU ministry nearly 35. He is married to Eleanor (Motley) and has two daughters and four grandchildren living in Maine. He is a member of the U. U. Ministers Association, the U.U. Historical Society, the Association for Psychological Type, the American Civil Liberties Union and is secretary of the U.S. Chapter of the IARF (International Association for Religious Freedom). In addition to articles and photographs he has self published two books of poetry and history and most recently published (1996), Four Spiritualities: Expressions of Self, Expressions of Spirit. Palo Alto: Davies-Black. ISBN 0-89106-083-9 Workshops relating to the latter have brought him to 8 U.S. states and three other countries in U.U. and M.B.T.I. circles. A workshop guidebook will soon be available. He authored the line in the Unitarian Universalist Association Principles, "Wisdom from the world's religions which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life." He lives in Andover, MA and can be reached at PTEMR@aol.com

*The Unitarian Universalist Congregation in Andover  
draws from the many religious traditions of the world  
to help individuals find pathways to spiritual growth in  
community.*

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Sermon by Rev. Peter T. Richardson



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