



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

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## **“The 4th Unitarian Universalist Principle: Our Search for Truth and Meaning...Together”**

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### **Centering Thoughts:**

*Because creation is always an act of faith, and faith is a spiritual issue, so is creativity. As we strive for our highest selves, our spiritual selves, we cannot help but be more aware, more proactive, and more creative. - Julia Cameron, THE ARTIST’S WAY*

*Believe nothing merely because you have been told it.  
Do not believe what your teacher tells you merely out of respect for the teacher.  
But whatever, after due examination and analysis,  
you find to be kind, conducive to the good, the benefit, the welfare of all beings -  
that doctrine believe and cling to, and take it as your guide. –Buddha*

*We need to be willing to let our intuition guide us, and then be willing  
to follow that guidance directly and fearlessly. - Shakti Gawain*

*There is not one big cosmic meaning for all. There is only the meaning we all give  
to our lives, an individual meaning. – Anais Nin*

**Readings:** UU Sources for Children, by Michelle Richards; Paper Bag Religion, by Ruth Gibson; It Matters What We Believe, by Sophia Lyon Fahs

### **Reflection:**

It does matter what we believe!

Have you heard someone say that “UU’ism is a religion that believes in nothing.’

Is this true? NO!

Other religions have one book, a defined path, a set of rules that adherents must follow, clothes that they must wear, how they wear their hair, statements they must echo that march them along a way that defines them to that particular faith tradition.

Do UU’s have dictates/mandates that must be followed in order to be called a Unitarian Universalist? No!

If so, would we all be required to wear purple hats, long curly hair, tie-dyed shirts, and sing Spirit of Life in every service?....No!

So, that means that we can believe anything that we want, right?! Wrong! Noooooo...

Could someone be a UU and profess hatred for another because they don't believe in the same god - if any? NO!

Again, we have our 7 Principles that connect all of us in this faith tradition!

Today, I want to talk about the middle principle, the 4th Unitarian Universalist principle - "The free and responsible search for truth and meaning." It is this principle in particular that challenges us to go and explore, to reflect, to struggle, to keep our eyes and our minds open in our "free and responsible search for truth and meaning." Our former Director of Religious Education, Katie Sadler Stevenson, beautifully described the 4th principle as the "keystone to an arch." She said that the 1st and the 7th principles are the pillars supporting the 2nd, 3rd, 5th, and 6th principles. But, it is this free and responsible search for our truth and meaning, our 4<sup>th</sup> UU principle - this keystone- that is not only our privilege, but it is also our responsibility! Other faith traditions may have one book that they draw from to find their truth.

Unitarian Universalists are challenged to seek meaning and truth in a responsible way – through everyday experiences, through the words of the wise ones, through the teachings of other faith traditions, through our own reflections and examinations, and through our engagement with others. Rev. Sam Byrd, says that this search is "an act of religious devotion." We take this pretty seriously. We make sacred the right and the responsibility in this search.

You know that visual of the arch that Katie Sadler Stevenson described? She was describing a poster of the UU Principles. And you know what sat beneath the arch – the preamble to the Principles - "We...covenant to affirm and support." Covenanting is something that we do with one another! It is a promise that we make.

Why do we come together? Why do individuals come to this fellowship? - Well, there are many reasons, but, I believe that one main reason we enter into the community here at the UUFA is to be supported in our challenge and our quest in our search. The Rev. Frances Manley, in her essay in the compilation of *Essex Conversations*, says that the 4th UU Principle is "the point where individualism and interdependence meet." She goes on to say, "a "free and responsible" search for truth and meaning does not mean a purely individual search because none of us is a purely individual being. Rather, it is inherently something we carry out both in the privacy of our own souls and in community with others."

I've heard many people say that they find their spiritual center by taking a walk in the woods, by meditating, by reading a book. This reflection is very important! It is through digesting and processing what we take in, through testing the ideas that we come up with, and sharing these ideas with others that we test their validity.

Adults sometimes think that they have things all figured out! You can see it in their eyes. You're talking about something that you believe in or have thought about and you see that wall come down before their eyes. They are not listening. Whereas, children, on the other hand, according to Michelle Richards in her book *Come Into The Circle*, "have not yet lost their sense of awe, mystery, and reverence for the ordinary things in life." We could all learn something from our children! - looking for and finding the magic and wonder in those simple things.

It would be easy to sit in an echo chamber and say "I believe in cookies." In this echo chamber, on our own, this thought comes back at us - and we can say, 'Yes, see? Did you hear that? Cookies are good!' But when I enter a conversation with someone else. You could say, 'Yes, cookies are good, I especially love Scotch Shortbread cookies.' And, someone else, could then chime in, 'Oh, I love the way that Snickerdoodles melt on my tongue.' Or, maybe, you might say to

me, “I’m gluten intolerant. I prefer a bowl of fresh cherries.” This widens our ideas on a desert, doesn’t it? I can respect that cookies wouldn’t work for you if you were gluten intolerant. Yet, I may have never had a Snickerdoodle, and I am going out and try one.

As we are exploring what we believe, we come here to test those thoughts, get and give feedback in a loving and supportive manner. That requires that we keep our minds open, that we listen to each other, respect that my truth may not be your truth, but that we stay engaged with one another.

For you adults, I challenge you to approach your quest with the eyes and wonder of a child - but don’t forget the heart. Remember those quotes that I shared at the beginning of the service by Albert Einstein. As we explore ideas, and we create ideals and values, we need to share these with those in our community. We need to create and maintain a safe place for us to grow our ideas and, like a scientist, test their validity in this safe place. We can’t forget the heart, though. It is using our heart through our compassion that we form these beliefs into values and turn them into our actions. For, Unitarian Universalism cannot simply be a cool community with great ideas, humble and heart filled ideals. We need to be a community where those shared values come together to create a better community for all.

Have fun with your quest!

Open your eyes to new things!

Read everything!

Ask Questions!

Really listen to others - even those with whom you disagree!

Explore in awe!

### **Resources:**

1. “UU’s 4th Principle” Sermon by Rev. Sam Byrd of UU Westfield Church 2016-3-16
2. “UU 4th Principle” Sermon Essay by Katie Sadler-Stevenson 2017-07-30
3. Essex Conversations: Visions for Lifespan Religious Education Essay: “The Principles Behind the Principles,” by the Rev. Frances H. Manly

### **Good Words for Going Forth:**

Walk softly. Speak truthfully. Love gently. Breathe deeply. Live wisely. Go in peace.

By Elaine Gallagher Gehrman, 1997 UUMA Worship Materials Collection (from the UUA online Worship Web)

### **Questions for Reflection & Discussion**

1. How have you searched for your truth? What ways have you explored to find what you believe? What events or places have given you the surprise of new insight into what you believe?
2. Do you see ways spirituality and human creativity are connected, and how are they related for you?
3. How can we as a community support each other in the search for truth and meaning?