

## Preparation for Truth (theme for March)

The idea of truth is an important part of our UU tradition. Our Fourth Principle affirms “A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.” Our six Sources, which guide us in our spiritual growth and development, are drawn not only from various religious traditions but from science, art, history, and our own experience. In *The Seven Principles in Word and Worship*, Rev. Paige Getty states, “Institutionally, we have left open the questions of what truth and meaning are, acknowledging that mindful people will, in every age, discover new insights.”

How can we explore truth in our lives? Looking at different kinds of truth can be a good starting place. Here are a few kinds of truth.

**Factual truth** describes scientific truth, truths about the nature of reality that can change over time, as the advent of quantum physics has shown. Factual truth also includes events that can be proved to have happened or not happened. Much of the political controversy about “fake news” falls into this category.

**Cultural truth** includes the things we believe because of our culture, nation, organization, or family. People may believe that democracy is a force for good or that their monarchy is the best form of government. Some cultures maintain that women should have equality in all things, while other cultures insist that women should cover their faces. In some families seeking help when needed is a virtue, while in others it is seen as a sign of weakness.

**Emotional truth** acknowledges and expresses our current thoughts and emotions. When we express our feelings or act from our “gut intuition,” we feel true to our authentic selves. Emotional truth is often a “heart” truth, rather than an intellectual one.

**Poetic or artistic truth** describes meanings found in poetry, metaphor, narrative, art, music, and other artistic forms. A metaphor can be the most condensed representation of a truth. Poetic and artistic truths are often emotional truths, when, for instance, the feeling created is sometimes truer than what results from reading the facts. Mark Twain called this “lying toward the truth.”

**Spiritual truth** describes approaches to universal questions and mysteries. What happens after I die? Is there a God? How can I live without suffering? What is the meaning of life? Do I have a soul? For many people, spiritual truths may take the form of religious beliefs about these questions. Others, however, find spiritual truth through other paths, as novelist Mary Doria Russell says: “Maybe poetry is the only way we can get near the truth of God.” The act of seeking truth is itself a spiritual experience, as Rev. Matt Alspaugh suggests: “I hope that what you’ve realized by now is that truth, in our understanding as Unitarian Universalists, is not something that is just handed to us. We have to go looking for it. For us, truth is a verb, not a noun. It’s something we do. We search for truth, humble in the realization that the truth we possess right now is incomplete, uncertain, perhaps not quite right.”

As you ponder the topic, here are some thoughts from others.

There are very few human beings who receive the truth, complete and staggering, by instant illumination. Most of them acquire it fragment by fragment, on a small scale, by successive developments, cellularly, like a laborious mosaic. *Anais Nin*

Say not, “I have found the truth,” but rather, “I have found a truth.” *Kahlil Gibran*

The truth may be puzzling. It may take some work to grapple with. It may be counterintuitive. It may contradict deeply held prejudices. It may not be consonant with what we desperately want to be true. But our preferences do not determine what's true. *Carl Sagan*

I found power in accepting the truth of who I am. It may not be a truth that others can accept, but I cannot live any other way. *Alison Goodman*

Metaphors have a way of holding the most truth in the least space. *Orson Scott Card*

Every religion is true one way or another. It is true when understood metaphorically. But when it gets stuck in its own metaphors, interpreting them as facts, then you are in trouble. *Joseph Campbell*

I go to poetry because poetry gets me to wrestle with truth faster than anything. And poetry helps truth to win more often than not. *Rev. Mark Belletini*

Each of us brings a separate truth here, we bring the truth of our own life, our own story. We don't come as empty vessels ... But rather we come as full people – people who have our own story and our own truth ... Together we have truths. *Rev. Penny Hackett-Evans*

### **Questions to Ponder**

1. What was the view of truth in the family that you grew up in?
2. Which kinds of truth resonate with you most – factual / scientific, cultural, emotional, poetic, spiritual? Which is most elusive?
3. We believe some truths because of the influence of facets of our culture ... national, institutions, family. What beliefs do you think you have because of your culture?
4. Unitarian Universalists encourage listening to other points of view. Essayist Nancy Gibbs suggests that “listening takes particular courage in divisive times.” How does listening support our search for truth? What helps us listen, and what gets in the way?
5. How does your life tell your truth?
6. What role do you think religion plays in presenting, suggesting, or unfolding the truth?

### **Words of the Day**

A cultural truth is a truth believed because of our culture. Examples may be a belief in the superiority of independence, competition, or freedom of speech. The cultural basis for the truth may be hidden from our awareness as such; the behavior is “just how we do things.”

For the Gathering, think of a word or a phrase to complete this sentence: A belief I have because of my culture is ...

Some quotes and questions are partially based on material in the March *Touchstones*, “Truth.”