

## Preparation for 4<sup>th</sup> UU Principle

Many religions are bound by a common creed. UUs, however, are bound by a set of principles. The 4<sup>th</sup> principle is the covenant to affirm and promote “*a free and responsible search for truth and meaning.*” UU minister David O. Rankin outlines common UU beliefs, including beliefs in the freedom of religious expression, in the toleration of religious ideas, in the never-ending search for truth, and in the importance of a religious community. These beliefs echo the importance of the 4<sup>th</sup> principle.

For UUs coming from faiths where creeds were requirements for belonging, the 4<sup>th</sup> UU principle can be a breath of fresh air. The affirmation contained in this principle promotes diversity in congregations. Christians, secular humanists, Pagans, atheists, agnostics, Buddhists, and others can all find a home through covenant. This sense of belonging may not be possible when the requirement to profess a common creed prevents any doubt or personal inquiry into one’s own truth. Parker Palmer calls the search for religious truth “the eternal conversation about things that matter.” This is the promise of our covenant with one another – to support each other in our shared search for truth and meaning.

How does one embark on a free and responsible search for truth and meaning? The UU “Build Your Own Theology” course guides participants in their spiritual journeys. Participants begin by examining the beliefs they were taught and determining which remain true for them and which they have rejected. Other topics explore the qualities of human nature, spiritual experience, and larger beliefs, including “Ultimate Reality,” death and immortality, sin and salvation, suffering, evil, and justice. Members use their life experience and sharing within the group to craft their own creed. This creed, however, is not fixed dogma. Instead these beliefs are an exercise within time, as malleable as life itself. Participation in the group balances the relationship between the individual and the Beloved Community. The process affirms and promotes the 4<sup>th</sup> principle and enacts the experience of covenant in deep sharing.

William Ellery Channing states, “I call that mind free which jealously guards its intellectual rights and powers, which does not content itself with a passive or hereditary faith: Which opens itself to light whencesoever it may come; which receives new truth as an angel from heaven.” Alan Watts, a Zen-trained philosopher, expresses it differently in *Mind over Mind*: “people get all fouled up because they want the world to have meaning as if it were words ... You are meaning.”

As far as we can discern, the sole purpose of human existence is to kindle a light of meaning in the darkness of mere being. *Carl Jung*

Words mean more than what is set down on paper. It takes the human voice to infuse them with deeper meaning. *Maya Angelou*

It is not the number of books you read, nor the variety of sermons you hear, nor the amount of religious conversation in which you mix, but it is the frequency and earnestness with which you meditate on these things until the truth in them becomes your own and part of your being, that ensures your growth.

*Frederick William Robertson*

The question mark is an inverted plow, breaking up the hard soil of old beliefs and preparing for the new growth. *Saul Alinski*

To be free to paint a tree or a flower or a sunset, you have to feel what it conveys to you: the significance, the meaning of it. *Jiddu Krishnamurti*

In what form did the spirit  
appear to you today,  
the blossom of a flower,  
the tug of a child's hand,  
the silent twinkling stars,  
an old woman smiling at the bus stop,  
a lover's gentle hug,  
a presence so close to your soul  
you could almost touch it,  
words of truth formed  
unbidden in your mind?  
The holy disguised in so many ways,  
may your senses open wide in recognition.  
*Jean M. Olson, Materializing*

Life is your teacher. How can you learn to understand your truth, if you deny your reality?  
*Lorraine Nilon*

## **Questions to Ponder**

1. What is an example of a way that you have participated in a search for truth and meaning that was important to you?
2. What is a belief that you have rejected from your family's faith or cultural tradition? What is a belief that you have accepted from another tradition or faith?
3. The 4<sup>th</sup> Principle also includes respect for everyone's beliefs. Consider a situation where your beliefs conflicted with those of others in an uncomfortable way. How did you navigate that situation?
4. What in our culture encourages the search for truth and meaning, and what works against it?
5. How can we as a UU covenant community support our members in the 4th Principle? How can we support the search for truth and meaning in the wider community?

## **Words of the Day**

For the Gathering, think of a phrase to complete this sentence: "One belief that has remained true throughout my life is ..."