

Session 13: Nature as Spiritual Guide

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Session Metadata	
Session	13
Title	Nature as Spiritual Guide
UU Source	Earth-Centered Spirituality
Unit	5th Source: Earth-Centered Spirituality
Head / Hands / Heart	Head
Has Exercise	No
Has Ritual	No
Has Spiritual Practice Presentation	Yes
Special Blocks	None

Preparation

Email to Participants

At our next session on Thursday, [insert date], we'll start our exploration of the spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions.

The language of this Source of our UU faith reads:

“ Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

UUA

As a part of our exploration of this source, we'll learn a little bit about three different earth-centered philosophies: Transcendentalism, modern paganism, and religious naturalism. None of the readings are very long, so if you find yourself intrigued by one (or more!) of the philosophies and want to go deeper, there are optional suggestions for further study of each. The readings provide much-needed context for this source and for transcendentalism, paganism, and religious naturalism, so start with those.

But since having a purely intellectual discussion about earth-centered spirituality would go against the very heart of this source, we will also seek out experiences that take us outside of ourselves and that bring us into the world of nature, intuition and awe. After all, Thoreau wouldn't want us to just read his words, but to live them.

Readings

- Optional: For a deeper understanding of paganism visit [Naturalistic Paganism](#).
- An [Earth-Centered Traditions](#) source by Rev. Carolyn Brown to help give context to the UU connection with earth-based traditions.
- Oren Lyon's remembrance of a [discussion with an uncle](#) about who he is. Filmed by the Sacred Land Project.
- A short selection from [Henry David Thoreau](#): *(Optional: the book [Thoreau as Spiritual Guide](#) published by Skinner House Books is part history, part philosophy, and part meditation manual.)*
- The text of a brochure about [modern paganism](#) within Unitarian Universalism: *(Optional: for those who are interested in learning more about modern paganism in a UU context, go to the website for [CUUPS](#), the Covenant of Unitarian Universalist Pagans.)*
- An introduction to [religious naturalism](#) by biologist Ursula Goodenough. *(Optional: for those who are interested in learning more about religious naturalism, [this website](#) is filled with information and inspiration. Goodenough's book [The Sacred Depths of Nature](#) is also highly recommended as a classic religious naturalism book that blends science and spirituality.)*

- [“God’s Tears”](#) (p. 64) from *Voices from the Margins: An Anthology of Meditations* edited by Jacqui James and Mark D. Morrison-Reed (book)
- **Optional:** for a deeper understanding of paganism visit [Naturalistic Paganism](#).

Readings

Attend a ritual with a [**CUUPS**](#)chapter, or another event with an earth-based religious group, that is open to all. Respectfully experiencing nature-based religions and traditions is as important as reading about them, if not more so.

Take some time and go out in nature (or as close to nature as you can get given your life surroundings). Sit. Breathe. Notice. Your task is simply to experience your divine connection to the natural world. Do this as often as possible before our session. Notice what it is like for you to be in nature and then journal about the experience. Come to our group ready to share your reflections.

Reflection Questions

- Do you connect with nature as part of your spirituality?
- How does that affect how you live your life?
- Have you had a “religious experience” in nature?
- What similarities do you see between transcendentalism, paganism, and/or religious naturalism and your own faith?

Reflecting on the pre-work:

- What was it like for you to sit in nature and experience it explicitly as a source of UU religious inspiration?
- What did you notice?
- How did it affect you?

I look forward to hearing about your experiences with nature, Transcendentalism, paganism, and religious naturalism! Also, check in to the [UU Wellspring Facebook****Page](#) for Spiritual Practices and UU Wellspring Community. If you post something about your experiences in UU Wellspring while you are there, you may find other UUs who are delving into the same topics!

We will begin reading *Heartwood: The Art of Living with the End in Mind* by Barbara Becker by our next session, so if you haven’t gotten a copy, now is the time!

I look forward to hearing about your experiences with nature, Transcendentalism, paganism, and religious naturalism!

Session Plan

Note to Facilitators: Since this session is about being inspired by the Earth, having part of this session outside makes it more experiential. Stay inside through check-ins, and then, weather permitting, take your group outside for the reflection time.

If it isn't feasible to take your group outside (no outdoor seating, mobility concerns, etc.), bringing some flowers or greenery to put next to the chalice brings some of the beauty of nature into the circle.

Next Year: This is also a good time to begin thinking about UU Wellspring programs for next year. As a facilitator or congregational coordinator, [review the programs offered](#) and consider your own interests. There will be a short video in the next session to introduce participants to upcoming opportunities.

Chalice Lighting and Silence

Today we start our experience of this UU source:

“Spiritual teachings of Earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.”

Our opening words are by Robin Wall Kimmerer from *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

“Breathe it in and you start to remember things you didn't know you'd forgotten.”

Robin Wall Kimmerer from *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

The Music today is to play a ten minute [audio section of bird sounds, with or without the video](#) or a [harmony in nature video](#).

Let's take a few minutes of silence to bring ourselves fully into this circle.

Check-In

What are you carrying in your heart tonight? How is your spiritual practice or spiritual companioning going?

Covenant Review

****Note for Facilitators:**** Use whatever process your group has established to stay current with the covenant.

Is there anything about the covenant that we should address?

Spiritual Practice Presentation

Reflection

Note for facilitators: If you're planning on going outside, bring your group out now before starting the reflection questions. Once your group is all seated outside, take a few moments of quiet and a few deep breaths to again become fully present.

Reflection Questions

- Do you connect with nature as part of your spirituality?
- How does that affect how you live your life?
- Have you had a "religious experience" in nature?
- What similarities do you see between transcendentalism, paganism, and/or religious naturalism and your own faith?
- Reflecting on the pre-work: What was it like for you to sit in nature and experience it as a source of UU religious inspiration? What did you notice? How did it affect you?

So What?

How does this reflection relate to your spiritual journey? What are you inspired or challenged to do next?

Gratitude and Closing

Have everyone stand, holding hands, around the chalice. Each person, as moved, says one or two words about something from this session for which they are grateful or how they are feeling in this moment. After everyone has said a word, close with a brief statement of thanks and appreciation.

Revision #2

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