

# «Discovering your Spiritual Type»

Sermon by Rev. Ann Marie Alderman, May 17, 2009

The Unitarian Universalist Congregation of Hillsborough, NC

What is it about a Sunday Service that most “satisfies” you?

Is it that liberal religion is defined and celebrated here, Sunday after Sunday, same place, same time? Or is it the spontaneous and heartfelt parts of the service that grab you? Perhaps it is the moments of silence that you like best? Are you thrilled when a Sunday Service ends with a message of when and where to take action to make the world a better place?

Are you annoyed when a service or a congregational meeting doesn't begin or end on time? Do you feel embarrassed during joys and concerns? Does it irritate you when folks sitting near you mumble to themselves or fidget during prayer, meditation or a time for silence? Do you feel like you've wasted your time when you are asked to contemplate or reflect instead of directed to “do something”!

Each of us has expectations of what “church” should be.

There have been times on Sunday afternoons or Mondays, when I have gotten phone calls from individuals who have told me they needed less of some particular aspect of the Sunday Service and more of something else. Every time this happens, I am aware that the person calling is telling me something about their “spiritual type”.

Each of us has a primary way we take in information. Each of us also has a primary way of conceptualizing what is most worthy of our time and attention. The intersection between how we make connection and how we characterize “the sacred” is our “spiritual type”. Being familiar with your “spiritual type” will give you more awareness regarding what you come to church for and how that differs from what others may expect from a “worship” experience.

By understanding what your spiritual type is, you can gain a deeper appreciation for how what you need and what another need differs.

There two very different ways that each of us takes in information, or knows what we know. We either take in information through our rational mind, or by accessing feelings. Both ways are important and of equal value. Everyone both thinks and feels. Yet for most of us, one way or the other comes first. Some think first, then feel. Some feel first, then think.

There are also two different ways of *conceptualizing* that which we consider to be most worthy of our loyalty, devotion, or worship. One way of imaging starts by emptying the chatter in our own minds, allowing ourselves to be comfortable with “mystery”. The other way begins by defining, delineating, and organizing the chatter. Rather than beginning with emptying, we begin

by filling. Both ways of conceptualizing use symbols and images, but those images and symbols are very different.

Understanding the various spiritual types can help us to understand different styles of worship across different faiths, different styles of worship within a particular faith, and the variety of expression within a specific denomination.

Most importantly awareness of the variety of spiritual types can help us explore the differences in a particular congregation.

Why do some come to a worship service and feel completely satisfied, and other's leave the same service still hungry for something they know or feel was really missing?

Whatever our primary spiritual type is may be very dominant or it may be just a slight preference. No one type is the "right" one. No one type is the "truly" spiritual one. It takes all of the types together to fully express and appreciate all the ways that connection can be made that which is most worthy of our loyalty, devotion, worship...

To help you know what you're type is ...here are four sets of questions.

1. When you sing a hymn, do you look ahead to see if you agree with the words and are they more important than the tune?
2. Do you or would you especially enjoy hearing symphonic music during a Sunday Service?
3. Can you easily complete this sentence: The truth is \_\_\_\_\_?
4. Is it important to you that services, meetings, classes start and end on time?
5. Does the wording of the UU principles, your congregation's mission statement, or the statement of affirmation matter to you?
6. Are you especially interested in the content of most sermons and want to read more about whatever the subject is?
7. Do you take pleasure in intellectual inquiry and critical investigation?
8. Do you have a passion for congruence in thought and statement, wanting propositions to be demonstrably logical?
9. Do you want to hear more sermons about our UU heritage?
10. Does being right mean more to you than being in relationship?
11. Do you prefer classes where an expert speaks on UU history or a World Religions class over one on spiritual autobiography?
12. Do you like the Sunday service to be all of a piece, carefully planned, with a clear theme running throughout?

If you said yes to all or most of these questions, your spiritual type is HEAD. You "know" what you know with your intellect. You conceptualize by means of concrete images, diagrams, outlines.

Here's a second set of questions:

1. Do you feel as if you haven't been to church if you don't get to hug or be hugged by someone?
2. Is your idea of a good service one that deeply moves you, brings tears to your eyes?
3. Are you moved to give time or funds because of the people affected more than the "cause"?
4. Do you like meetings, classes, social functions, coffee hour because you can share conversation with those you like to be with?
5. Is time for Joys and Concerns very important to you whether or not you have something to share?
6. When you come to a Sunday Service, do you hope to leave knowing the speaker better than you did before?
7. Do you prefer an Adult RE class where people spend most of the time telling their stories, so that you get to know folks better...?
8. Would you like to see more opportunities for sharing your spiritual journey with others?
9. Do conflicts really matter to you, either energizing you or draining you?
10. Does being in relationship mean more to you than being right?
11. Are you satisfied if a sermon tells a good story, whether it has a clear proposition of an idea or not?
12. Do you love having the children in the service, especially when they are spontaneous and talkative?

If you answered yes to all or most of these questions your spiritual type is HEART. You know with your feelings and you conceptualize with personal story and through the images of faces.

Here's a third set:

1. When worship works, do you feel in tune with the whole universe?
2. Does the metaphor of life as a journey work for you?
3. Does setting aside time for prayer or meditation appeal to you?
4. Do you love being alone and wish you could be alone more?
5. Do you wish that you could find the perfect seat during a Sunday Service where you would not be disturbed or distracted by those seated around you?
6. Do you like the sound of a chime calling you to be present to the moment?
7. Do you wish there were more and longer silences during the service?
8. Is lighting the chalice and lighting candles during joys and concerns important parts of the service for you?
9. Do you love chants and rounds?
10. Is it important to you that the church building, inside and out, be a place of beauty and serenity?
11. Would you like to see more ritual included in worship services?
12. Does a class or a group focused on the sacredness of ordinary moments appeal to you?

If you said yes to all or most of these questions then your spiritual type is MYSTIC. You conceptualize by emptying in order to make room for what is beyond your chatter. You use

intuition and comfort with mystery, to find union. Your images and symbols signify union with that which is beyond or deep within.

And, finally...

1. Do you like the UU slogan, “deeds not creeds”?
2. Do you believe that one of the best ways to find out who you are and what you believe in is to act publicly in concert with others?
3. Would you be highly complimented to be called an activist, or a visionary?
4. Would you rather engage in social action than attend a meeting?
5. Do you participate in advocacy groups that work for change?
6. Is part of your commitment to this congregation volunteering for social action endeavors?
7. Do you get goose bumps when singing, “We Shall Overcome”, or when you hear an inspiring folk singer?
8. Do you believe that the purpose of a church is to “comfort the afflicted and afflict the comfortable”?
9. Is it important to you that the newsletter, the bulletin board, the announcements make people aware of the ways that we can put our values into action in the community?
10. Do you wish your congregation were even more diverse and that work to end ableism, ageism, racism and all other forms of oppression were the main reasons to exist?
11. Do you believe that the purpose of a church is to transform the world through working for justice and equality?
12. Do you believe that church services must not only express convictions, but suggest action?

If this cluster of questions got the most yes's from you, your spiritual type is HANDS, you also know by means of your intellect, and you conceptualize with an ideal vision of what could be which you feel compelled to move toward.

If your spiritual type is HEAD you probably value the intellectual and speculative approach to worship, tending to appreciate what can be put in logical terms. Concepts are valuable to you. You likely favor heritage and form, what it you can see, touch, and or vividly imagine. Words and speaking are important. Your aim in coming to church is intellectual renewal, finding better ways of understanding what is worthy of your attention in life. Order, structure, and history are important. Corporate congruence is important. “Rank by Rank” is the kind of hymn you relate to.

When the HEAD type dominates, (if all of your yes's were only to those questions); you might be intolerant, dry and sterile in your rationalism. You might always be looking for the illogical, or what fine point one can argue with. You would grow by learning to wait, to slow the rush to think, learning to empty your mind.

If you related more to HEART, you probably also appreciate vivid images, but what matters to you will be filtered through your feelings more than your intellect. What you feel in the current moment is most important to you. You come to church to feel good. So, you may feel abandoned or forsaken by your religion when or if you feel disappointed or angry. You expect worship to be

about personal renewal and transformation. Spontaneity, warmth, memory, story, and finding practical ways to serve others make sense to you. “Amazing Grace” is your hymn.

The weakness of the type is the tendency to lapse into sticky sentimentality or a holier than thou attitude. Your growing edge may be found by seeking out opportunities to immerse yourself in learning to think critically, adding that skill to your immense ability to feel.

If you identified as a MYSTIC, hearing/listening is more important than speaking for you. Your aim is union, or renewal of your inner life. For you the Sacred is a creative force, met through journey into deeper union. Being, symbol, beauty, mystery speak to you. You relate to chants and repetitive phrasing. Time for contemplation is important.

You may have a tendency to become isolated and withdraw from the world, indifferent to its problems. Your growing edge may be to surround yourself with those who can provide a reality check...

The HANDS spiritual type includes those who are motivated by a vision of what could be. Deeply focused, they are the crusaders who value commitment and passion. They identify “We’ll Build a Land:” as a great hymn! Engaging in the transformation of society is when their spirit comes alive. A weakness when this spiritual type dominates can be found in moralistic fanaticism or in a tendency towards tunnel vision.

A growing edge might be learning to experience joy in the present moment, finding ways to balance out the urgent need to constantly work for a better world.

Exclusive dominance by any one type leads to its excess; dogmatism, emotionalism, withdrawal, or tunnel-vision. Any congregation that allows the expression of only one spiritual type will eventually drive out those who express themselves differently, and it will also too easily identify its particular spiritual type as THE RIGHT WAY....missing appreciation for balance and wholeness. It is important to be self aware to know what you need, and to learn that others may need something quite different!

Some of us may find that one spiritual type is particularly dominant for us. Yet most individuals and groups will have multiple spiritual tendencies.

How many of you scored so close in several areas as to not be able to identify any one dominant tendency? (that could be a sign of a very healthy balance or chaotic confusion!)

Both liberal and conservative churches contain folks who express all four of these spiritual energies. Every one of these spiritual types are found among those who might also identify as theistic, humanist and pagan....None of these types are better or more mature than the others, just different.

Here are some questions a congregation as a whole might ask...

Are we allowing a compelling spiritual vision to work through us to change the world?

Are we connecting with what has been done in the past and building a logical bridge to the future that reveals the roots of our identity as a particular spiritual community?

Are we building relationships of caring that allow us to really touch each other as whole human beings?

Are we opening ourselves in ways that we recognize the presence of the Spirit of Life that is moving among us?

Every particular congregation leans towards a particular cluster of activities and attitudes, one or two spiritual types may actually dominate. Yet if a congregation leans too far any one direction, not only will it draw those who naturally also lean towards that type, it will leave those whose expectations are different dissatisfied and hungry for what is missing. (How many times do folks say after a worship service that they still need to “go to church”?)

I hope that we use what there is to learn about ourselves and about each other to understand that spiritual energy is broad... arising from the head, the heart, from mystic union and found in the work of activism.

Wherever our spiritual energy arises, whether it be cognitive/intellectual or emotive/connectional or introspective/meditational or in terms of passionate activism, may it find its full expression...in our congregational life...

For further study see *Discover Your Spiritual Type: A Guide to Individual and Congregational Growth*, by Corrine Ware. An Alban Institute Publication. 1995.