

## Session # 12 Grandad's Prayers of the Earth

### Overview

This book explores ideas about prayer. On their walks together in the woods, a boy's grandfather shares that trees, rocks and streams pray, as sure as people do: "The tall grass prays as it waves its arms beneath the sky, and flowers pray as they breathe their sweetness into the air." The boy listens hard to hear the natural world's prayers, but never quite hears them. Later, as he grieves the death of his grandfather, the slightly older boy comes to understand Grandad's message. Finding the beauty in others and in the world, is a prayer in itself.

**Goal:** To be familiar with prayer as a way of practicing gratitude.

**Principle:** Search for what is true.

**Source:** The sense of wonder we all share.

**Belief:** We believe that we can make choices using love and reason.

**UU Identity:** Practice gratitude.

**Holiday/Theme:** Prayer.

### Supplies:

Book

Copies of Take Home Page

Supplies for the activities you chose

Décor for the room or chalice lighting altar – a rock.

Camera for taking pictures for your own picture book

### Set Up:

#### Entering Activity:

#### Sharing Circle:

After the children have arrived, invite them to gather in a circle around the chalice for the story.

#### Chalice Lighting:

Bring out the chalice and candle, matchbook, match holder, and snuffer. Set out the chalice and the water bowl with rocks to drop in for sharing "Joys and Concerns."

Invite the children to recite with you the following chalice lighting words:

"To this quiet place of beauty we come from busy things, pausing for a moment for the thoughts that quiet brings."

Light the match and hold it to the candle wick.

"We light this chalice for the warmth of love, the light of truth and the energy of action."

Invite the children to share important things that have happened in their lives, passing a talking stick, shell or rock to indicate whose turn it is to share. This would be a good

session to pass around a rock as a Talking Stick. Have each child share a joy or a concern by dropping a different small polished rock into the water bowl.

Say something like: "We will now share our joys and concerns in our sharing circle.

Each of us will have a turn to speak while the rest listen. You don't have to share, you can always say, "pass."

After everyone has shared who wishes to, add one more rock and say, "For all the joys and concerns which remain unspoken, we add this rock."

You may prefer to extinguish the chalice flame with the snuffer at this point.

"Though we extinguish this flame, we kindle the flame to carry in our hearts together."

Read "**Grandad's Prayers of the Earth.**"

**UU Identity teachable moment:** Ask the children for their reflections on the story. Say something like, "Our fourth principle states that "We search for what is true." Show them the poster of the Do-Re-Mi Principles with the Principles in children's language. Sing it if you wish. "In this book, the boy doesn't understand at first what his grandfather tells him about prayer. What does it mean when his grandfather says "the words will always be right if they are real and true and come from the heart?" What does it mean "we pray because we are here – not to change the world but to change ourselves?" We Unitarian Universalists like to say thanks, sometimes by prayer or sometimes by taking a walk. Each person searches for what is true for them. Today, each of us will be able to think about how we say thanks." Describe the activities that you have prepared and invite the children to engage in them.

**Activities:** Choose from the following options.

**1) Take pictures for "Our Own Picture Book."**

**2) Make "Thank you" cards for family members.**

Invite children to think of someone they would like to say thank-you to. Provide card making materials such as construction paper, markers, glue, scissors, so that they can make a card. Write the words "Thank-You" so the children may copy them into their card.

**3) Go on a walk and listen for the prayers of the earth.**

What do prayers of the earth sound like? Can the children hear them? Take a walk and listen to the trees, to the wind, to the other sounds.

**4) Painting a rock.**

Collect a variety of rocks, about hand size. Invite the children to paint it with tempera paints. Prepare them for the fact that the paint will wash off eventually if placed outdoors, but invite them to place it in a garden or along a path.

### **5) Ways to pray.**

Invite the children to assume some postures of prayer as a way of feeling what might be right for them. Try:

- Kneeling (common with Roman Catholics)
- Clasping hand in front of chest (Christian, yoga asana)
- Praying with arms wide and palms turned up (Revivals)
- Kneeling on heels with forehead touching the ground (Islam)
- Bowing head
- Holding hands with others
- Lifting eyes to the sky
- Praying standing (Jewish)

Conclude by saying that “the words will always be right if they are real and true and come from the heart?” and “we pray because we are here – not to change the world but to change ourselves.”

**Closing:** Make a circle by linking hands. Say something like, “We as Unitarian Universalists (or repeat the name of your congregation) search for what is true.” Sing the Do-Re-Mi Principles song. “Go in Peace.”

### **Background for Teachers:**

Here’s an excerpt from an article which argues that gratitude should be the center of our U.U. theology. I encourage you to go online and read the rest of it.

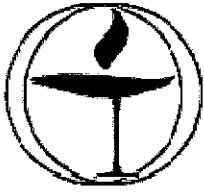
“I realize the idea of faith as a discipline may also sound like heresy to many Unitarian Universalists. Unless our faith is mere intellectual affectation, however, the defining element of our faith must be a daily practice of some kind. What kind of practice? For Jews, the defining discipline is obedience: To be a faithful Jew is to obey the commands of God. For Christians, the defining discipline is love: To be a faithful Christian is to love God and to love your neighbor as yourself. For Muslims, the defining discipline is submission: To be a faithful Muslim is to submit to the will of Allah.

And what of us? What should be our defining religious discipline? While obedience, love, and even submission each play a vital role in the life of faith, my current conviction is that our defining discipline should be gratitude. In the same way that Judaism is defined by obedience, Christianity by love, and Islam by submission, I believe that Unitarian Universalism should be defined by gratitude.

Why gratitude? Two dimensions of gratitude make it fitting as our defining religious practice. One has to do with a discipline of gratitude, and the other has to do with an ethic of gratitude. The discipline of gratitude reminds us how utterly dependent we are on the people and world around us for everything that matters. From this flows an ethic of gratitude that obligates us to create a future that justifies an increasing sense of gratitude from the human family as a whole. The ethic of gratitude demands that we nurture the

world that nurtures us in return. It is our duty to foster the kind of environment that we want to take in, and therefore become...”

From the U.U. World Article “The Heart of our Faith” by Galen Guengerich. Spring, 2007.

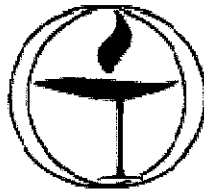


**Picture Book U.U. Identity: Grandad's Prayers of the Earth**

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