



# Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens

The Reverend Alison Wilbur Eskildsen, Parish Minister  
The Reverend Don Randall, Community Minister

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## “Finding Our Way”

© by the Reverend Alison W. Eskildsen

A sermon delivered on November 27, 2016

at the Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Athens, GA

### CENTERING THOUGHTS

*We cannot live better than in seeking to become better.* Socrates

*Why should not we have a poetry and philosophy of insight and not of tradition,  
and a religion by revelation to us, and not the history of theirs?* Ralph Waldo Emerson

*My heart is moved by all I cannot save: so much has been destroyed. I have to cast my lot with  
those who age after age, perversely, with no extraordinary power, reconstitute the world.*  
Adrienne Rich

*Hope is believing in spite of the evidence, and then watching the evidence change.* Jim Wallis

**SERMON** (*delivered after a retelling of the Greek myth of Theseus and the Minotaur and singing  
the anthem, “All Lifted Hearts,” by Jason Shelton & Kendyll Gibbons*)

### Rev. Alison

The phrase ‘Many windows, one light’ comes from an expression of Forrest Church and John Buehrens in their book, *A Chosen Faith*. The book contains reflections on Unitarian Universalism’s Six Sources, each a window through which we receive ideas about religion and life. We also look through personally different windows to understand the world.

Six Sources may not sound like much, but they cover just about everything—from personal experience to world religions, science, poetry, and to nature itself. Our liberal faith looks beyond the three traditional divine sources—direct divine revelation to ancient people, oral stories and written texts, and authorized religious tradition. In contrast, Unitarian Universalists often say ‘revelation is not sealed’, meaning new ideas and truths continue to emerge for our living tradition.

Today, we receive wisdom from the ancient Greeks and the myth of Theseus and the Minotaur. We can place this story into the context of our own lives and Unitarian Universalism’s Seven Principles. Stories like this offer meaning for adults and children because they express insight into the human condition, even very modern Athenians like you and me.

**CHORUS** (*The choir rises and sings the following to the tune from ‘Pirates of Penzance’*)

We are the very model of the modern somewhat spiritual,  
We've sev'ral sources fictional, mythical, and principled.  
We know the saints of Boston, and we quote their words heretical  
From Humanist to Mystical, in order rather versatile,  
We're very well acquainted, too, with matters atheistical,  
We understand persuasions, both the pleading and the logical  
About religion we are teeming with a lot of views,  
With many cheerful thoughts about ideas we have not any clues  
'Cause we're the very model of the modern somewhat spiritual!  
*(deep audible breath, then choir sits)*

**Rev. Alison**

Yes, Athens' very own Greek Chorus returns from a long hiatus. Welcome back.

Popular in ancient theater, the chorus added further description or commentary on what was occurring in the single-actor play. The chorus spoke lines in unison, danced and sang poetry, always expressing what the actor could not or would not say. Modern religious practices developed from ancient rites and dramas enacted around a village fire or on an early stage. So, in keeping with our city's ancient namesake we resurrect the Greek Chorus. Let them give a running commentary on this single actor-pastor preaching to you this morning.

**CHORUS** *(choir members cheer one of these)* Hip, hip, hooray! Excelsior! Hallelujah!

**Rev. Alison**

Theseus appears to be the hero of our morning's story. He bravely enters the dark, unseeing labyrinth to face the beast lying within. To reach the monster's lair he must find its center, travelling seemingly endless twists and turns, eventually leading him to the Minotaur that he must battle for his life.

Theseus represents you and me. Every day we wake up and face paths leading to the unknown. Some days we seem to take long winding roads that lead nowhere, others days our paths lead straight to some monstrous Hell, while yet on other days our paths are filled with love, joy, and little suffering. Like Theseus, we bravely face whatever awaits.

The labyrinth symbolizes the spiritual journey of life. The word is Minoan, pre-Greek, and referred to King Minos' actual palace on the island of Crete and found by archaeologists in the last century.

Labyrinth designs have only one way in and one way out, while mazes include false paths with dead ends and the way out is not the same as the way in. A labyrinth's path winds back and forth and around, so just when you think you're making progress, it sends you further away from the center, the journey's goal.

This center symbolizes going within yourself to find yourself or your god. In that deepest place of introspection, a Buddhist might find enlightenment, a Hindu might become one with all that is, a Christian might commune with their God. None of these experiences are like meeting the beastly Minotaur, though on any journey, we can encounter symbolic monsters of our own or life's making.

Once the journeyer reaches the center, the path must be retraced to return the journeyer back to the world. Bodhisattvas, Buddhist saints who have attained enlightenment, don't disappear into the ether, nor do communing mystics, nor did Theseus remain in the cave.

I said earlier Theseus *appears* to be the hero. But Theseus didn't defeat the monster and release of his fellow captives by himself. He took with him a wise gift from another person. Ariadne's love overcame any fear she had of possible paternal punishment. By taking Ariadne's ball of thread Theseus had a lifeline enabling him to find his way out of the circuitous cave. Theseus's lifeline resulted from Ariadne's gift of love. Together they defeated the monster and stopped an evil sacrificial practice.

This story affirms that we need each other. We need to be in relationship with others so that we can pool our talents and ideas in order to solve world problems. Diversity, not sameness, provides creative solutions. We need the infusion of new energy and ideas that difference contributes. Even in our own congregational life we need to be challenged with differing opinions and solutions.

Additionally, being in relationship makes traveling this mysterious, often terrifying, journey of life easier and happier. The wisdom and company of others helps us better manage the sorrowful times and celebrate the joyful times. I believe friends and communities form our own lifelines, providing us with saviors, even if we also believe in a divine savior.

**CHORUS**     *(sing like Ringo)*

We get by with a little help from our friends,  
with a little help from our frie...nds.

**Rev. Alison**

In the myth, romantic love motivates Ariadne to assist Theseus. But her love may also represent the Greek idea of selfless love, or (*ah-GAH-pee*) agape. This is the type of love I believe is at the heart of our Seven Principles.

**CHORUS**     *(recite by section—alto, soprano, etc) [from Carol Holst, p87, Rejoice Together, slightly adapted]*

- 1- Each person is important.
- 2 - Be kind in all you do.
- 3 - We're free to learn together.
- 4 - And search for what is true.
- 5 - All people need a voice.
- 6 - Build a fair and peaceful world.
- 7 - Care for our one earthly lifeboat.

**Rev. Alison**

When I was a hospital chaplain one summer during my ministerial formation process, I met only two UU patients. The mostly Christian patients regularly asked me to pray with them. They found comfort in prayer when they faced surgery or even death.

Now many of you know I'm not a theist and that I pray to the universe or the great

mystery. But I listened to them and offered prayers as they wished. My prayers didn't ask God to perform a healing miracle on them, not just because I don't believe in that kind of God, but because, if they aren't healed, I don't want to set up a narrative that God caused their sickness or abandoned them.

Instead, I asked for God's strength and comforting presence in their time of need. When appropriate, I reminded them of the love they had for family and their family's love for them. I repeated back to them what comfort and joy they had experienced in their lives. The God I prayed to was the Spirit of Love and Life that I believe is present in us all, divine or not. It didn't matter that we might not share the same idea of God.

But how do we comfort a UU? Should I recite the Seven Principles for the UU patients?

With one UU patient, she and I sang "Spirit of Life" together. However badly we sang, it reminded the patient of her UU community. It made her feel less alone. And, the words themselves gave her comfort.

**CHORUS**    (*sing softly*)    Spirit of Life, come unto me.

### **Rev. Alison**

Carolyn McDade, the song's creator, calls "Spirit of Life" a prayer. Our most identifiable UU hymn, we'll sing it later in the service.

Although that hymn may comfort better than reciting the Seven Principles, I think if we take the seven individually we miss their full value to guide and comfort. I believe that all together, moving from the First to the Seventh, they spell out Love.

It takes love to see the inherent worth and dignity in every person. It takes love to be kind and compassionate to oneself, to friends, and especially to strangers. It takes love to allow others to follow a path that might differ from our own. It takes love to allow others to have a voice. It takes love to live in peace with those we disagree with. It takes love to know we're all in this together, one planet, one lifeboat. It takes love to know however rocky and uphill our paths might be, there are others along the way ready to share our burdens, ease our way, and celebrate when joy is found.

You may not want me to recite the Seven Principles at your bedside or when you're struggling with a personal decision, but know that we are here for you. We are a faith and a community with love at its center. We may sometimes wind around and backtrack a bit as we move forward, but love will guide us; selfless love is our lifeline. So don't be a stranger here. Share in the life of this beloved community.

**CHORUS**    And the people say, "Amen!"

### **QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION**

1. What drew you to a Unitarian Universalist (UU) congregation and what keeps you returning?  
What is most important to you about the UU Fellowship of Athens?
2. Has Unitarian Universalism saved you in some way or offered you a lifeline? Share your story.
3. What prophet, author, scripture, writings, wisdom, or knowledge offers your best comfort or understanding of life? What makes this source especially meaningful to you?