

FOUR SPIRITUALITIES: AN INTRODUCTION

by Rev. Kit Ketcham, Jan. 9, 2005

Today begins a series of three sermons on one of my favorite theological questions: Who am I? We human beings ask this question about ourselves, about each other, about our institutions, about our world. We want to know ourselves; we want to know each other. And we want to be clear about who we are as religious folk.

We choose many approaches to this question. For this series, I am choosing to examine personality type and spirituality type, and how they relate to each other. My friend and colleague, the Rev. Peter Richardson has contributed to my thinking on this subject, through his book “The Four Spiritualities”, which describes a theory of spiritual development that is useful to us as UUs.

Today I present an introduction to the concepts behind personality inventories and their link to spirituality, according to Richardson. In the next several weeks, I will discuss the individual spiritual paths suggested by one’s personality inventory score as indicated by the *Myers-Briggs Type Indicator*, a popular personality sorting instrument used in educational, business, and counseling settings to help people understand themselves. How many of you already know your Myers-Briggs personality score?

Let me give first a quick review of the Myers-Briggs inventory concept and enough information to help you figure out tentatively what your own score might be, if you have never taken the test or have forgotten your results.

The MBTI has been used for many years to help people identify one of 16 personality types closest to their own preferences. According to the research community, our unique individuality begins to emerge at a very early age in recognizable patterns.

The MBTI, while not perfectly accurate, can be a powerful means for self-understanding and a starting place for one's spiritual journey. Even though this tool is a psychological instrument grounded in rigorous scientific research, it is easily accessible to and useful for the lay person who wishes to do some psychological self-examination.

Just as there is a recognizable difference of human personality types, so too is there a difference between the spiritual cultures of all religious traditions. The Four Spiritualities, according to Richardson, can be seen as a Rosetta stone for our spiritual life, gaining us entrance into every branch of religious culture using our own experience and individuality as guides. *Four Spiritualities* shows the parallels between personality types and how we practice human religion in widely divergent ways.

So---what is your personality type? Let me walk us through the basic categories of personality measurement. Remember that personality preferences are like handedness. You will use both of your hands as situations warrant, but one hand, either left or right, will be your hand of preference the greater part of the time. So it is, too, with these categories. You use all of them, but you use one particular combination more than the others.

The first letter of the Myers Briggs test reveals one's life attitude, or where we find our source of energy. If you are an Extrovert, you are more energized by events in the outer world; you are gregarious, like talking, groups, and have many friends. If you prefer Introversion, you are more focused on and energized by the inner world of ideas. You are deliberate, a good listener, and tend to have a few close friends. So your first letter of your four-letter type score would be E or I, depending on whether you are an Extrovert or Introvert.

The second letter of your score indicates how you perceive information, how you reason. Some of you prefer to look at what is present here and now, through your senses of touch, sight, hearing and so on. If you are a Sensing type, you are realistic, practical, observing facts directly, step by step, using common sense. If you prefer Intuition, you base your perceptions on the possibilities in situations, patterns, hunches, imagination, reading between the lines, with expectancy for the future.

So are you a Sensing type? Or an Intuiting type? Give yourself an S for Sensing or an N for Intuiting.

The third category or letter in your score has to do with how you make your decisions. Do you primarily use Thinking, basing your decisions on objective, impersonal, analytical, purposive, principled logic, aiming for clarity, fairness, firmness, and truth? Or do you primarily use Feeling to make your decisions, basing them on subjective, people-centered values? If so, you aim for harmony, mutual appreciation, trust,

tact, persuasion, worthwhileness, and humane sympathy.

If you are primarily a Thinker, give yourself a T for your third letter score. If you are primarily a Feeler, give yourself an F for your third letter.

The final category in the Myers-Briggs typology reveals how you orient or organize your life. If you prefer to conduct your life in a planned, orderly way, wanting things settled, organized, decisive, needing closure and completion of tasks, you are Judging in your life orientation, or a J.

If you prefer to conduct your life in a flexible, spontaneous way, keeping your options open, being adaptable and easily adjusting to new ways of doing things, you are Perceiving in your life orientation, or a P.

So if you are usually organized and decisive, give yourself a J. If you are more spontaneous and open-ended, give yourself a P.

Now you should have a combination of four letters, depending on whether you are Extroverted or Introverted, Sensing or Intuitive, Thinking or Feeling, Judging or Perceiving.

Would anyone be willing to share their particular combination of letters? Just call them out. I am an ENFJ---that is, I am extroverted, intuitive, feeling, and more of a planner than spontaneous.

If you are interested in more detailed information about this test, there are several books on the market, and I can give you references later. One book, "*Please Understand Me*" by David Keirsey and Marilyn Bates, has a short-form of the test which gives very accurate results and a profile for each of the 16 personality types.

But what is the spiritual significance of our individual uniqueness, our personality? This question is a theological question: Who am I? Why am I here? What is the significance or the meaning of my life? Does my life matter? Does it have meaning? What can I contribute? Do I have a responsibility to contribute?

Three years ago at this time, I was working with a group of Coming of Age kids, middle schoolers. I asked them to make a list of all the things they knew for sure about themselves. When you are 12 or 13 years old, you are just beginning to be aware of who you are and what that means.

If you were asked now to make such a list, what would you put on it? Chances are, you would go beyond what you knew about yourself at age 13, which might only include things like your gender, your address, your friends, your family heritage. The adult you could probably include knowledge about your talents and interests as revealed in your career history; you probably would know your sexual identity and preferences; you would know how you prefer to conduct your life, what your ethical choices usually are, the kinds of people you most enjoy, the places that you find most appealing, the activities that you find fulfilling.

All of these aspects reveal your personality, your public side. We might think of our spirituality, our spiritual self, as our more private side. The religious path which we choose as adults is how we express our spirituality publicly.

The premise of the book *FOUR SPIRITUALITIES* is that, because of our personality type, we tend to feel most comfortable in a particular spiritual path which suits our typology. Richardson has identified four particular spiritual paths: The Journey of Unity; the Journey of Devotion; the Journey of Works; and the Journey of Harmony.

Each path has its own context, its own requirements, its own rewards, and what seems just right to one will seem awkward and contrived to another. It is important to remember that we are always growing and changing and our preferences may change as well. It is also important to remember that just as we understand and make allowances for others' personality preferences, we can understand and make allowances for others' spiritual preferences.

Those of us who prefer one path can begin to understand why others prefer another path and we can offer that acceptance to one another.

As we continue to explore the ideas of spirituality typology, we will be examining closely the two inside letters of your personality score. Your inside letters are either NF, NT, SF, or ST; in other words, you combine intuition and feeling or intuition and thinking; or you combine sensing and feeling or sensing and thinking. Whatever your combination is indicates how your mind and heart work together, how your reason and your faith interact to help you choose a spiritual path.

Each spiritual path we will discuss appeals more to one of these four spiritual typologies. No matter which path feels most comfortable to you, remember that that is one of the beauties of Unitarian Universalism---that you may seek your own path, unencumbered by dogma and asked only to be in right relationship with yourself, with others, and with the universe.

That said, let me tell you a bit more about the Journeys of Spirit that we will engage during the next few weeks. Today I will describe some of the most important characteristics of each journey and a couple of the spiritual mentors associated with each, just enough to tantalize you into coming back for the next installments! Because this is very interesting and exciting stuff, and I am sure you're going to like learning about it.

The Journey of Unity attracts persons who have an NT personality, that is, an Intuitive Thinking personality. The NT personality is a visionary, a problem-solver, an imaginative analyzer who considers possibilities, not just facts.

An NT loves to exchange ideas, engage other minds, test their own competencies, focusing on tasks, goals, and reaching understanding. They love speculative theories, models, systems thinking, global concepts, synthesis leading to unity.

NT personalities are change agents and strategic planners, comfortable with abstractions and nonrational ideas. They are rarely satisfied with the status quo but sometimes quicker to see what is wrong than what is right. They can be compulsive and perfectionistic and are often misunderstood as being stubborn or acting superior.

Their spiritual quest may be a search for physical experience, emotional encounter, and interpersonal understanding.

Spiritual ancestors for an NT personality might be the Buddha, who founded one of the world's great non-theistic religious traditions, and the American thinker Buckminster Fuller, who called himself a "design scientist" and proposed ethical, religious, and spiritual solutions to the world's problems beyond what other philosophers had yet conceived.

These two mentors are famous examples of NT personalities whose spiritual journeys have radically affected human lives. We will spend more time on the Journey of Unity on Jan. 23.

The Journey of Devotion attracts spiritual seekers who have an SF personality type, or a Sensing Feeling typology. SF personalities tend to be sensitive, loyal and caring, specializing in personal helpfulness and practical down-to-earth support for others. They tend to be family-oriented and can be found bringing meals to the sick, sending flowers, serving others in tangible, direct ways.

Those on the Journey of Devotion are polar opposites from those on the Journey of Unity. Instead of focusing on the cosmic, as do NT personalities, the SF person focuses on the present, upon matters at hand, with attention to detail, appropriateness, tradition, and connectedness. SFs live for sociability, and interpersonal considerations are always on their minds. As Sensing types, they are interested in facts, but not about things, rather about people.

Sensing Feeling folks prosper best in structured settings; they work well with traditional values and are culture bearers, stressing continuity and propriety. They are spontaneous in their approach to others, beginning with a warm smile and friendly greeting. You will hear stories from an SF, rather than abstract or symbolic reasoning. Their approach to life and to spirituality is hands-on, rather than metaphoric.

Spiritual mentors or guides for the Journey of Devotion include Mohammed, the founder of Islam, that practice of complete and uncompromised surrender to God, and St. Francis of Assisi, who is often thought of as the patron saint of the environment because of his connection with animals and nature.

We will learn more about the Journey of Devotion in two weeks.

The Journey of Works attracts those persons who have an ST mind and heart connection; in other words, those who are Sensing Thinkers. An ST is a realist, always in touch with the facts, accurate, objective, impersonal, aware of relevant details. They tend to be more linear in their organization, looking for clear-cut results from their efforts. They are skilled administrators, responsible, efficient, careful, analytical.

They are known for their directness, which can feel like brutal frankness. They can be excellent negotiators, not swayed by subjective feelings. Fairness is a hallmark for a Sensing Thinker.

The Journey of Works is practical and involves a lifetime of effort, a constant and responsible attention to leading a productive life. Work is the means for meeting all obligations and responsibilities, giving life dignity

and the respect of others.

STs prefer direct, experience-based, often physical activities, working with their hands or otherwise directly in situations, trying things out to see what works best, often preferring technical tasks to those requiring people skills. They love tools, gadgets, and creating things with those tools.

Once they are clear about an idea, “Just Do It” might be their motto. When an ST believes she or he knows what is right or true, then life becomes a matter of living in accordance with that reality. Sometimes STs are seen as prejudiced or old-fashioned, but STs like to work with reliable structures that lead them toward right action.

Spiritual mentors for the Journey of Works might be Moses, who is credited with founding what became known as Judaism, the father of Christianity and Islam, and also Confucius, who stands as the pillar at the center of Chinese religion, affecting the political and social development of that nation for many centuries.

We will learn more about the Journey of Works in February.

Our final Journey is the Journey of Harmony, the spiritual path of many who have an NF, or Intuitive Feeling, personality typology. An NF is enthusiastic and insightful, recognizing the personal needs of others, the community, and the world. They like to help others achieve the possibilities. They are always looking for ways to make life better for themselves and others and can keep the goal, the motivation, and the hope alive in themselves. They tend to be facilitators of discussion, working toward consensus for social harmony and good.

With their warm and friendly manner, NFs will often be good communicators, bringing creative imagination and the gift of language to their work. 44% of clergy are Intuitive Feelers. Always, NFs must find increasing meaning and spiritual purpose in life.

At times, NFs will take criticism too personally, doing their best work when they feel appreciated and supported. But they are persistent when a deep value is at stake. They need to trust others with whom they work and all of them have doubtless had experiences when their good faith was taken advantage of.

The Journey of Harmony is represented by two spiritual mentors: Rabindranath Tagore, an Indian Brahman, was part of the renaissance of Hinduism in the past century, writing hundreds of poems, songs, and mystical, passionate essays about the oneness of life. Jesus of Nazareth is another mentor for those on the Journey of Harmony, as his short ministry exemplified the people-centered revolutionary movement that was early Christianity.

We will learn more about the Journey of Harmony in February.

I hope I have given you some food for thought and self-exploration. I hope you will give some thought to your own personhood, who you are as a human being, what your existence means to the universe and in relationship to those around you. And I hope you will come back in two weeks and in February to find out more!

Let's pause for a time of silent reflection and prayer.

Our closing hymn is #318, We Would Be One.

BENEDICTION:

Our worship service, our time of shaping worth together, is ended, but our service to the world begins again as we leave this place. Let us go in peace, remembering that each of us has our gifts and our limitations. May we seek the journey that is right for us individually, understanding that all paths can lead to the top of the mountain.

I close with these words from the Dharmapada of Buddhism: Better is your own dharma, however weak, than the dharma of another, however noble. Look after your self, and be firm in your goal.

Amen, Shalom, Salaam, and Blessed Be.