

# JOURNEY IN... YEAR THREE

## THE DIVINE WITHIN STORY

This lesson's Big Ideas:

- 'Practice' implies having the discipline and commitment to do something over and over again until it becomes second nature. Artistic, musical, athletic and language skills are all things that demand practice, as kids know well.
- It takes practice to establish a strong connection to the divine presence within us and in our lives. We call this sort of effort 'spiritual practice'.
- Each person can find a spiritual practice that helps cultivate inner balance and depth. There are plenty of options to choose from, drawing from many traditions and schools of thought.

### Lesson Materials

- Copies of attached poems and prayers
- Nice paper
- Nice pens
- Ribbon
- Talking stick
- Chime

### TEACHER REFLECTION AND PREPARATION

🕒 Ahead of time

Don't put anything else into your mouth, like your projects, your worries, your fear, just put the carrot in. And when you chew, chew only the carrot, not your projects or your ideas.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Do you have a body? Don't sit on the porch! Go out and walk in the rain!

– Kabir

At the end of his spiritual talks, Gurdjieff said "Amen." When asked to translate "Amen," one of Gurdjieff's closet pupils answered, "Give it a try!"

– Michel Legris

Any act that protects life is sacred. Technology that is dedicated to life-saving purposes acquires sanctity as well, and its use becomes a holy act.

– Rabbi Zalman Schachter-Shalomi

Every act done in the sunlight of awareness becomes sacred.

– Thich Nhat Hanh

Every time you pick up a piece of trash along the road, say to yourself, "Holy, Holy, Holy is the house of the Lord."

– Edward Hays in *Psalms for Zero Gravity*

This is what you shall do: Love the earth and sun and the animals, despise riches, give alms to every one that asks, stand up for the stupid and crazy, devote your income and labor to others, hate tyrants, argue not concerning God.

– Walt Whitman

If you keep your practice steady, morning and night, summer and winter, there is nothing you cannot do and nothing that can harm you.

– from the *Upasakashila Sutra*

What is your preferred spiritual practice? How would you describe your commitment to it? What benefits do you reap? Are there any habits or acts in your life that are unrecognized spiritual practices?

Did you understand spiritual practice as a child? Imagine the gift you are giving your students, sharing this idea with them, offering them possible tools to find and keep their balance throughout their life!

### TIPS FOR A SUCCESSFUL LESSON

- You might find the word **discipline** a helpful tool, but be sure to clarify that in this sense, the word discipline doesn't mean that we punish ourselves. Discipline comes from an old word that means "teaching". When we commit to a new discipline, it means we're teaching ourselves something new.
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### YOUR FIELD EXPERIENCES: FEEDBACK AND NOTES

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## GATHERING AND FOCUSING

🕒 5-10 minutes

Check-in questions:

- What's a book that you've read more than once?
- Have you ever memorized something? A poem? The Pledge of Allegiance? A prayer? How do you memorize things?
- How do you feel when you hear or recite something you know by heart?
- Can words be part of your spiritual practice?

## PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE SHORT STORIES OF SACRED PRACTICE

🕒 20 minutes

The teacher can add elements like a talking stick or a chime to mark the end of the story to help organize the discussion.

### THOREAU

Henry David Thoreau was a Unitarian who lived and wrote more than one hundred fifty years ago. He chose to live a simple life and spent two years living in a cabin only half the size of our Story classroom. His spiritual practice was walking. Thoreau wrote that he had to walk every day! If he stayed inside, he said, he would rust! How can people stand to be in an office or a shop all day long?, he wondered. He wrote that there was no way he could have a healthy spirit unless he walked four hours every day, roaming around the fields and the woods. He felt completely free and didn't worry about anything in the world. He said, 'Don't think of it as having to exercise - that makes it sound boring. No, you have to walk like they say camels walk...did you know that camels are the only animals that walk and chew their cud at the same time? It's true.' When Thoreau walk, I'm chewing on thoughts. And you can't just walk in gardens or malls. If you want to practice walking, you'll naturally go to the woods and the fields. What makes it so hard sometimes to decide where to walk? I think that there is a magnetism in Nature that draws us on exactly the right walk. No matter where I walk, my spirits rise to meet the wildness outside.

### Wondering Together:

- I wonder where you like to walk?
- I wonder what you would think about if you walked for four hours?
- I wonder why walking can be a spiritual practice?
- I wonder if the fact that most of us drive more than we walk has affected our spiritual lives? Is driving a possible spiritual practice?

## **MOTHER TERESA**

Mother Teresa was a Catholic nun who believed in living simply and caring for others. She said that the best possible practice is doing ordinary things with extraordinary love. Every day, she began and ended her work with prayer. She owned only a sari and sandals. She spent every day caring for people who were dying. She bathed them and comforted them. Often, too, she cared for children and taught them ideas about caring and giving.

- I wonder why Mother Teresa chose to live so simply? Could you live with only one set of clothes and one pair of sandals?
- I wonder if you've ever helped someone by doing something ordinary with great love? How did that make you feel?
- I wonder what would happen if everyone made a spiritual practice of taking care of other people?
- I wonder how it feels to be with dying people every single day?
- I wonder if you've heard of other people helping and serving others?

## **JESUS**

Jesus of Nazareth was a great teacher who lived two thousand years ago. As a spiritual practice, he spent a long time in the wilderness, fasting.

Jesus was lead out into the desert by the Spirit, there to confront evil possibilities that tempted him to choose power and wealth over helping and teaching. He stayed in the desert for forty days and forty nights with wild animals. All that time, he ate nothing. He prayed and meditated. He saw angels. He saw the devil. He struggled with his own human desires and overcame the temptation to choose power and wealth, choosing instead a humble life of service and love. After forty days, he was very hungry. He came back to Jordan, empty in the belly but filled with the Spirit of God.

- I wonder what it means to be lead somewhere by the Spirit?
- I wonder if it takes practice to be able to overcome things that are tempting?
- I wonder why Jesus didn't take any food?
- I wonder how fasting can be a spiritual practice?
- I wonder if you've heard of other people fasting?

## **GANDHI**

Mohandas Gandhi was a leader in India in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. He was both a spiritual leader and a leader in politics. Three interesting spiritual practices gave Gandhi a sense of balance. The first practice was a vegetarian diet. Gandhi chose not to eat meat because he believed that violence was never a solution to a problem, not even the problem of a hungry belly. A vegetarian diet helped him to feel at peace with all creature around him. Often, he would fast, too, sometimes for as long as a month. Gandhi's second spiritual practice was silence. One day every week, Gandhi would remain silent all day long. He believed that refraining from speaking brought him deep inner peace and helped him to pay attention to his own thinking. The third practice that Gandhi took up later in his life was spinning thread and weaving cloth. Gandhi saw that the poorest people only had handmade clothes. If simple, rough cloth was good enough for his neighbors, it was good enough for him. He wanted to make his clothes by himself so that he didn't pay British companies that treated clothing workers in his own country unfairly. So, every day, Gandhi spun some thread on his spinning wheel to make his own clothes.

- I wonder which of Gandhi's three practices was the most helpful?
- I wonder why some people eat a vegetarian diet as a spiritual practice?
- I wonder how spinning thread every day could help Gandhi's spirit?
- I wonder if you've heard of other people practicing silence?
- I wonder if any of these practice would help you find a spiritual balance inside yourself?

## **PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE**

### **WRITING OUR OWN PRAYERS OR MANTRAS**

🕒 20 minutes

A mantra is a series of words or sounds that a person repeats while meditating in order to help them focus. Here are some mantras, both from the traditional Sanskrit and some phrases like mantras from other traditions. Let's repeat them (responsively or in unison – use a flip chart or chalkboard) three times each to see how it feels.

## Mantras:

*Om shaantih shaantih shaantih* (Om, peace, peace peace)

*Hare Krishna Hare Krishna*

*Krishna Krishna Hare Hare*

*Hare Rama Hare Rama*

*Rama Rama Hare Hare*

(Hare, Krishna and Rama are three Sanskrit names of God)

Holy Mary, Mother of God, pray for us sinners, now and at the hour of our death. Amen.

Thank you. Thank you. Thank you. Help me. Help me. Help me.

Om, May all be happy. May all be healthy. May we all experience what is good and let no one suffer.

Om, Peace, Peace, Peace

There are many different reasons and ways to pray. Three of the most common kinds of prayer are: 1. Thanksgiving, 2. Asking and 3. Apologizing. We don't necessarily have to ask or apologize to God in prayer; sometimes in prayer we ask our deepest self or we apologize to our own hearts. People can pray anywhere, any time, using any words that come or no words at all.

One prayer that does all three things – thanking, asking and apologizing – was a prayer the Jesus taught to his followers when they asked him for a good way to pray. Two versions of this prayer are in our Unitarian Universalist hymn book:

#513 (from Matthew 6)

Our Father in heaven

hallowed be your name.

Your kingdom come,

Your will be done

on earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts,

as we also have forgiven our debtors.

And do not bring us to the time of trial,

but rescue us from evil.

#514 (by Lala Winkley)

God, lover of us all,

most holy one,

help us to respond to you

to create what you want for us here on earth.

Give us today enough for our needs;

forgive our weak and deliberate offenses,

just as we must forgive others

when they hurt us.

Help us to resist evil

and to do what is good;

for we are yours,

endowed with your power

to make the world whole.

On small pieces of paper, invite each student to write a mantra or a prayer of their own. They can roll it up and tie it with a piece of ribbon. Ask them to try practicing this new prayer or mantra every day this week.

## Wondering Together

- I wonder if you've heard people pray here at our church?
- I wonder what kinds of things you've heard people pray about or for?

- I wonder if any of us has prayed before? When? Why?
- I wonder if you've heard anyone use a mantra?
- I wonder what you would say 'thank you' for if you prayed today? 'Sorry' for? 'Please' for?
- I wonder if you have to be sure about believing in God in order to pray?
- I wonder what it means when people say the word, 'Amen' at the end of a prayer?

## **PRIMARY ACTIVITY ONE**

### **MEMORIZING A POEM OR PRAYER TOGETHER**

🕒 10 minutes

Could you memorize a poem in 10 minutes? Read one of the poems below – the Mary Oliver poem for older groups, reading #602 for younger groups, or St. Francis of Assisi's prayer for any age group – and ask if any of them could memorize this poem or prayer? Memorizing beautiful poetry and sacred writings can be a meaningful spiritual practice, but it would be hard to do by the time Sunday School is over. What if we helped each other and memorized it together, each person remembering one line? We could recite a whole poem together!

Begin by giving out the poem and prayer sheets and picking one to work on. Read the poem out loud in unison. Next, each child will take one line of the poem, in order. Have the children mark their line on their sheet and sit in a circle in the order of the reading of lines. Early readers will need help with some words. Before you begin practicing, have them guess how many times they'll have to practice the poem together before they'll be able to do the whole thing with their pages turned over? Ask them what we should do if one or two or three people have trouble memorizing their line. How can we encourage and help each other? Each person will read his or her line in order until the whole poem is read. Do this several times until the group feels confident that it can recite the poem in this way without looking at the paper.

#### **Wondering Together**

- I wonder how memorizing a poem or prayer could be a spiritual practice?
- I wonder if you might consider memorizing something as a spiritual practice?
- I wonder if your grandparents or parents can recite anything from memory? Why did they learn it?

## **CLOSING AND LEAVE-TAKING**

🕒 2 minutes

Gather in a circle, take each other's hands and speak these words:

Deep peace of the running wave to you.  
 Deep peace of the flowing air to you.  
 Deep peace of the quiet earth to you.  
 Deep peace of the shining stars to you.  
 Deep peace of the infinite peace to you.

# POEMS AND PRAYERS

**#514 from Singing the Living Tradition**  
(based on Matthew 6, adapted by Lala Winkley)

God, lover of us all,  
most holy one,  
help us to respond to you  
to create what you want for us here on earth.  
Give us today enough for our needs;  
forgive our weak and deliberate offenses,  
just as we must forgive others  
when they hurt us.  
Help us to resist evil  
and to do what is good;  
for we are yours,  
endowed with your power

## **Prayer of St. Francis of Assisi**

God, make me an instrument of peace;  
where there is hatred, let me sow love;  
where there is injury, pardon;  
where there is doubt, faith;  
where there is despair, hope;  
where there is darkness, light;  
and where there is sadness, joy.

O Divine One,  
grant that I may not so much seek to be  
consoled as to console;  
to be understood, as to understand;  
to be loved, as to love;  
for it is in giving that we receive,  
it is in forgiving that we are forgiven.  
Amen.

## **The Summer Day**

**Mary Oliver**

Who made the world?  
Who made the swan, and the black bear?  
Who made the grasshopper?  
This grasshopper, I mean- the one who has flung herself out of the  
grass,  
the one who is eating sugar out of my hand,  
who is moving her jaws back and forth instead of up and down-  
who is gazing around with her enormous and complicated eyes.  
Now she lifts her pale forearms and thoroughly washes her face.  
Now she snaps her wings open, and floats away.  
I don't know exactly what a prayer is.  
I do know how to pay attention, how to fall down  
into the grass, how to kneel down in the grass,  
how to be idle and blessed, how to stroll through the fields,  
which is what I have been doing all day.  
Tell me, what else should I have done?  
Doesn't everything die at last, and too soon?  
Tell me, what is it you plan to do  
with your one wild and precious life?

**#602 from Singing the Living Tradition**  
(Lao-Tse)

## **Prayer for Peace**

If there is to be peace in the world,  
    There must be peace in the nations.  
If there is to be peace in the nations,  
    There must be peace in the cities.  
If there is to be peace in the cities,  
    There must be peace between neighbors.  
If there is to be peace between neighbors,  
    There must be peace in the home.  
If there is to be peace in the home,  
    There must be peace in the heart.

Lao-Tse  
Taoist