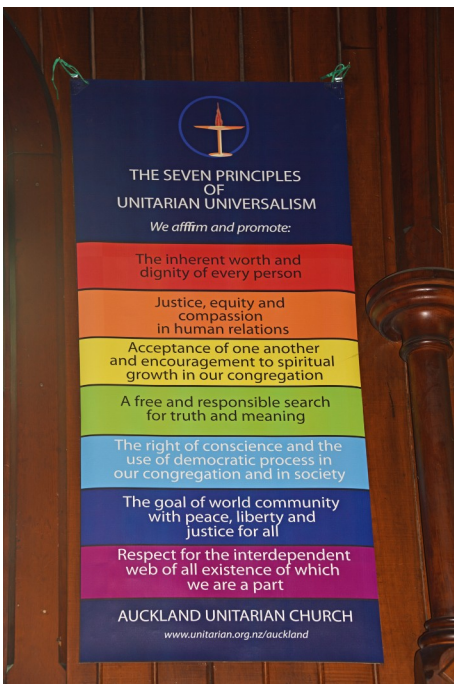




Auckland Unitarian Church  
Love beyond belief

## SPIRITUAL INTELLIGENCE

19 May 2024. © Barbara Thomborson



Today's service is brought to you by our third Principle, Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations, and our fourth Principle, A free and responsible search for truth and meaning.

The topic of spiritual intelligence is huge and fairly new in academic circles. This talk barely

scratches the surface of thought on the subject.

Currently, academic and professional communities recognise three main kinds of intelligence: Cognitive intelligence (IQ), emotional intelligence (EQ), and spiritual intelligence (SQ). Many psychologists advocate<sup>[14]</sup> the integration of spiritual intelligence (SQ) with both rational intelligence (IQ) and emotional intelligence (EQ). SQ helps blend cognitive and emotional intelligences. Essentially, SQ concerns recognising and connecting with the deeper dimensions of human experience as individuals.

I find it interesting that business researchers have greatly expanded the importance of spiritual intelligence and its application in commerce and government. Numerous business researchers and consultants think spiritual intelligence will address the multitude of unethical, even immoral, business practices that we hear so much about these days. Leaders with strong SQ would go far to combat the corruption in governments and corporations that often seems rampant.

As a business ethicist and author of 27 books, Danah Zohar is in the vanguard of promoting spiritual intelligence for business leaders. I've adapted her traits of people with strong SQ:

- Living a life that comes from your values and visions; acting from principles and deep beliefs; valuing people for their differences, not despite them; willingness to stand against the crowd because of strong convictions; and living authentically
- Little sense of ego; the sense of being a player in a larger drama; humility
- Self-awareness, especially of values
- Living in the moment; spontaneity
- Asking "why" questions in order to understand things and get to the bottom of them; curiosity
- Utilizing spiritual resources to solve problems in life; positive use of adversity

- Continued spiritual growth: a sense of personal progress and 'becoming'- learning skills to contribute to your own growth, to groups, and to improving the world; finding inner peace; compassion
- Feeling a call to serve, to give back; altruism
- A strong sense of the bigger picture; ability to stand back and see larger patterns, relationships, and connections; feeling absorbed in something greater than oneself; transcendence
- Making connections with oneself, others, and greater powers and the environment; investing everyday activities, events, and relationships with a sense of the sacred or divine; a sense of magic or awe

Do you see any of these traits in yourself? I reckon everyone here ticked at least a few of them.

Zohar's traits are very practical, but They say nothing about deeper spirituality, the kind we often see in religious beliefs. Missing from Zohar's business-oriented list is intuition. No surprise that intuitive people tend to have higher spiritual intelligence than those who favour a hands-on approach to life. Also missing from the business-inspired list of SQ traits is the idea that belief in something greater than ourselves requires intuition rather than identifiable evidence. Such belief doesn't come from analysing patterns in experiences or requiring enough patterns to believe in a greater power. You'll never attain spiritual intelligence through

numbers. Spiritual experiences, though, lead us to recognise when our SQ is active.

There are many awesome aspects to spiritual intelligence. 'Awesome' aspects of spiritual intelligence simply concern feeling awe. Experiencing awe can lead to a sense of transcendence, of connection with powerful, positive emotions that take us away from our usual consciousness. Awe can lead to magical thinking; Awe can even give us a sense of mystery and mysticism. Einstein's words from starting this service relate here: *The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.*

This brings us to consider art as spiritual experience. We have all experienced awe inspired by beautiful music; visual art (painting, drawing, sculpture, photography); architecture; literature; film; and performance art. Going to art museums and listening to music are ways to increase spiritual intelligence. Even more nourishing to SQ is experiencing art with others and sharing your thoughts and feelings.

According to psychologists, people who appreciate fairy tales and myths have good SQ. Also included in psychologists' list of SQ traits is a tendency to superstition. One set of my grandparents used to make up superstitions. My favourite was my cousins and I had to help with their dry garden by going out and killing spiders to make it rain. My grandparents probably just wanted to get us kids out of the house for a while. For most adults, appreciation of fairy tales, myths, and superstition

definitely requires a suspension of needing identifiable evidence. Note I didn't say SQ requires belief in fairy tales, myths, or superstitions; appreciating them does enhance SQ, however.

Nature is an inexhaustible source of awesome experiences. I'm sure everyone here remembers spiritual experiences in nature. a real highlight of my life was camping in a wilderness area, on a high hill, lying outside with a friend to watch 20 minutes of dancing blue-green-white-pink Northern Lights. I believed they were spirits in the sky. Awesome moments in nature come when you feel an emotional attachment to a particular place or empathise with an animal or plant. Being fully present when you're in nature enables you to turn more intimately into things like flowers, trees, birdcalls, even rocks. Who here has NEVER been awed by a beautiful sunset? The beauty in nature can take our breath away; sometimes it even stuns us into silence and stillness. The powerful emotions from experiencing awe in nature cement the memory in our brains. That's just one way that being in nature increases your spiritual intelligence. You can't have spiritual intelligence without spiritual experiences.

In this last part, let's consider the challenges and benefits Unitarians have with SQ. How does UUism benefit SQ? UUism is a secular haven for people looking for the benefits of religion without suffering through the current religions' requirements that don't make sense to us or work for us. Our Principles strongly foster many aspects of spiritual intelligence. I

started this service by mentioning principles 3: Acceptance of one another and encouragement to spiritual growth in our congregations, and 4: A free and responsible search for truth and meaning. All 7 of our principles allude to traits of SQ and nourish them.

Besides the 7 Principles, we have 6 sources in our Living Tradition that underpin our religious philosophy. The first source is “that transcendent mystery ... which moves us to the renewal of the spirit.” This alludes to spiritual intelligence of the religious type. As the first source in our Living Tradition, it is the fundament for the other sources that express our basic values. Like the principles, they all imply some SQ traits.

I personally think the best thing that UUs offer those looking for the benefits of religion in a secular way is community. In his book *Religion for Atheists*, the pop philosopher Alain de Botton has a whole chapter on Community. He posits that a ‘secular church’ provides a venue where participants can find a group of people they can trust because ‘church’ implies good morals. That sounds like us, right?

UUism’s biggest challenge to fostering SQ may be in our Living Tradition, source number 5: Humanist teachings which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit. For the most part, science is concerned with the physical world. Scientists demand hard evidence, preferably measured in numbers, to accept its findings. Remember how I said you cannot attain spiritual intelligence through numbers? In my decades as a

Unitarian, I've seen that UUism attracts quite a few scientists. Many of them were or are atheists. I do not imply that atheists have low SQs; I have heard, however, some espouse reasons for atheism based on lack of physical evidence for the existence of any greater power. You heard earlier that belief in something greater than ourselves requires intuition rather than identifiable evidence. Needing evidence that satisfies scientific criteria could impede good spiritual intelligence. To quote Einstein again, Science without religion is lame, religion without science is blind.

What are the take-aways from all this stuff about spiritual intelligence? Foremost, SQ is necessary for living well; those with good SQ function better than those with low or even average SQ. This is because it integrates and mediates between cognitive intelligence and emotional intelligence. The business world has embraced SQ as a strong trait for good leadership. Business ethicists have developed practical, secular traits of people with good SQ. However, we Unitarians are here because of an interest in religion, especially the benefits from regularly meeting with others in a trusted community. As fundamental statements of our values and purposes, our Principles and Living Tradition advantage us to grow in spiritual intelligence. Our value on a free and responsible search for truth and meaning, principle 4, encourages us to at least appreciate awe and transcendence in our lives. May awe and transcendence be a regular part of your life.