

**Addiction and Grace:  
Building a Beloved Community,  
Where All People Have Inherent Worth and Dignity<sup>1</sup>**

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*Grace is...often thought of as a rather positive moment or event. However, we've all had experiences of extreme difficulty where, when we look back, we see that these were times when we transformed the most, when we made the biggest leap in our personal evolution....*

*In essence, grace is anything that helps us truly open — our minds, our bodies, our emotions, our hearts. Sometimes grace is soft and beautiful. It appears as insight.... Grace can also be quite fierce....*

*When we can begin to open enough to realize that there is grace in every situation, in each person we meet, no matter how easy or difficult we perceive them to be, our hearts will flower and we'll be able to express the peace and the love that each of us has within us.*

*We let go into this grace. It's something we fall into, like when we fall into the arms of another, or we put our head on the pillow to go to sleep. It's a willingness to relax, even in the midst of tension. It's a willingness to stop for just a moment, to breathe, to notice that there's something else going on other than story our mind is telling us. In this moment of grace, we see that whatever might be there in our experience, from the most difficult emotional challenges to the most causeless joy, occurs within a vast space of peace, of stillness, of ultimate well-being.*

—Adyashanti, [Falling into Grace, Insights Into the End of Suffering](#)<sup>2</sup>

Grace unfortunately has come sometimes to have rigidly Christian connotations, but the argument could be made that Taoism is a whole religion built specifically around a parallel (and historically prior) understanding of what Christians call grace. Following the way of the Tao is about letting go of control and floating with the current of the universe:

the Master acts without doing anything / and teaches without saying anything. / Things arise and she lets them come; / things disappear and she lets them go. / She has but doesn't possess, / acts but doesn't expect. / When her work is done, she forgets it. / That is why it lasts forever.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> I owe the title to Gerald May's excellent book, [Addiction and Grace: Love and Spirituality in the Healing of Addictions](#).

<sup>2</sup> Adyashanti, [Falling into Grace, Insights Into the End of Suffering](#), 221-222, 230.

<sup>3</sup> Stephen Mitchell, [Tao Te Ching](#), 2.

To consider another example of grace from the world's religious traditions, the title of the popular Buddhist teacher Adyashanti's latest book is called [\*Falling Into Grace: Insights on the End of Suffering\*](#).

And perhaps that's the key question surrounding addiction: Is your relationship to alcohol, drugs, food, gambling, sex, shopping, or any similar compulsion *causing you suffering* or *causing suffering for those around you*? If so, your relationship to one or more of those areas may be a problem. If you Google "UU Addictions" or "UUA Addictions," you will find links to various recovery and self-help options including alternatives to 12-Step Programs that includes the Buddhist Recovery Network, Save Ourselves ("a *secular* alternative to the religious language of most 12-step programs"), and SMART Recovery.

Perhaps counter-intuitively for those negatively impacted by someone else's addiction, many parts of the recovery movement emphasize that, while someone in your life is actively addicted, "Worry less about persuading him or her to stop, and go to a codependency group (such as Al-Anon, Nar-Anon, etc.) or to a therapist to talk about how the addiction is affecting you and how you may be unintentionally enabling the addict." Once someone in your life has chosen to seek help, "Worry less about directly aiding that person's recovery, and go to a codependency group or a therapist to talk about how the recovery is affecting you and how you can get the support your need."

In that spirit of finding a supportive network, my subtitle is "Building a Beloved Community, Where All People Have Inherent Worth and Dignity." That's a reference to the First Principle of Unitarian Universalism, which affirms the inherent worth and dignity of every person. That includes everyone: the addict and the enabler, the wounder and the wounded, the one who can't see a way forward and the one, who is walking a path toward healing and wholeness.

Too often **we compare our insides to others' outsides, and we feel inadequate**. The highly successful minister and interfaith advocate Welton Gaddy has been very public — including publishing a book — about his struggles with depression, which included hospitalization in a psychiatric unit.<sup>4</sup> Welton was surprised to find **"a more honest community in the hospital than he had ever known in churches."** Too often people think that a spiritual community is a place you go to be perfect, a place you go once you have everything else in your life figured out, a place to go where you leave your imperfections at the door. But Unitarian Universalism recognizes the inherent worth and dignity of every human being. No matter who you are or where you are in life, you are welcome here. That's why some

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<sup>4</sup> Wayne E. Oates, "Foreward" to C. Welton Gaddy, [\*A Soul Under Siege: Surviving Clergy Depression\*](#), 9.

of the largest and most well-known UU congregations are called not All Saints, but *All Souls*: All Souls Unitarian in Washington, D.C., New York City, Tulsa, and many others.

**This openness to *all souls* doesn't mean that anything goes.** Here at UUCF we have a Congregational Covenant that holds us accountable to values such as “to communicate with civility, respect and compassion,” “to keep an open mind and take responsibility for my own feelings,” and “to admit mistakes and forgive others.”<sup>5</sup> This covenant is part of our attempt to live together amidst all our diversity and all our humanity.

As we heard in the Chalice Lighting quote from Leonard Cohen, all any of us can do is “**Ring the bells that still can ring / Forget your perfect offering / There is a crack in everything / That's how the light gets in.**” I invite you to consider this morning, where are the cracks in your life? How might those places of seeming weakness paradoxically be the very places where you are *most equipped* to help others suffering from similar problems? How might those *cracks* in our sometimes seemingly perfect facades be invitations to let go, fall into grace, and let in the light?

### **Benediction**

May you have the vision to recognize the door that is yours,  
the Courage to open it,  
and the wisdom to walk through.

— Jan L. Richardson, *In the Sanctuary of Women*

### **Resources for Recovery**

- **Unitarian Universalist Addictions Ministry:** <http://www.uua.org/care/addictions/index.shtml>
- **Books on Addiction and Recovery:** <http://www.uua.org/care/addictions/128268.shtml>
- **Alternatives to 12-Step Programs:** <http://www.uua.org/care/addictions/152569.shtml>
- **September is National Recovery Month:** <http://www.recoverymonth.gov>

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<sup>5</sup> To Read the UUCF Congregational Covenant, visit [http://www.frederickuu.org/about/UUCF\\_Covenant.pdf](http://www.frederickuu.org/about/UUCF_Covenant.pdf).

## For Further Reading

- **Forrest Church, “The God-Shaped Hole”** (November 12, 2001): Sermon about his struggle with alcoholism. One of his insights in recovery was **“Want what you have. Do what you can. Be who you are.”** To read the sermon, visit <http://www.forrestchurch.com/writings/sermons/God-Shaped-Hole.html>.
- \_\_\_\_\_, [\*One Prayer at a Time: A Twelve-Step Anthology for People in Recovery and All Who Seek a Deeper Faith.\*](#)
- Dan Cryer, [\*Being Alive and Having to Die: The Spiritual Odyssey of Forrest Church\*](#): “The story of the remarkable public and private journey of Forrest Church, the scholar, activist, and preacher whose death became a way to celebrate life. Through his pulpit at the prestigious Unitarian Church of All Souls in New York, Church became a champion of liberal religion and a leading opponent of the religious right. An inspired preacher, a thoughtful theologian and an eloquent public intellectual, Church built a congregation committed to social service for people in need, while writing twenty five books, hosting a cable television program, and being featured in People, Esquire, New York Magazine, and on numerous national television and radio appearances. Church grew up the son of Senator Frank Church of Idaho, famous for combating the Vietnam War in the 1960s and the CIA in the 1970s. Like many sons of powerful fathers, he rebelled and took a different path in life, which led him to his own prominence. Then, in 1991, at the height of his fame, he fell in love with a married parishioner and nearly lost his pulpit. Eventually, he regained his stature, overcame a long-secret alcoholism, wrote his best books—and found himself diagnosed with terminal cancer. His three year public journey toward death brought into focus the preciousness of life, not only for himself, but for his ministry. Based on extraordinary access to Church and over 200 interviews with family, friends, and colleagues, Dan Cryer bears witness to a full, fascinating, at time controversial life. An honest look at an imperfect man and his lasting influence on modern faith.”
- Augusten Burroughs, [\*Dry: A Memoir\*](#): “From the *New York Times* Bestselling author of *Running With Scissors* comes the story of one man trying to out-drink his memories, outlast his demons, and outrun his past. A memoir that’s as moving as it is funny, as heartbreaking as it is true. *Dry* is the story of love, loss, and Starbucks as a Higher Power.”

## Recommendations from Members and Friends of UUCF

- Phil Simmons' [\*Learning To Fall: The Blessings of an Imperfect Life\*](#): “Simmons was just thirty-five years old in 1993 when he learned that he had ALS, or Lou Gehrig’s disease, and was told he had less than five years to live. As a young husband and father, and at the start of a promising literary career, he suddenly had to learn the art of dying. Nine years later, he has succeeded, against the odds, in learning the art of living. In this surprisingly joyous and spirit-renewing book, he chronicles his search for peace and his deepening relationship with the mystery of everyday life.”
- Brené Brown, **“The Power of Vulnerability”** (June 2010): “Brown studies human connection — our ability to empathize, belong, love. In a poignant, funny talk, she shares a deep insight from her research, one that sent her on a personal quest to know herself as well as to understand humanity.” Available at [https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_on\\_vulnerability.html](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_on_vulnerability.html).

- \_\_\_\_\_, **“Listening to Shame”** (March 2012): “Shame is an unspoken epidemic, the secret behind many forms of broken behavior. Brown, whose earlier talk on vulnerability became a viral hit, explores what can happen when people confront their shame head-on. Her own humor, humanity and vulnerability shine through every word.” Available at [https://www.ted.com/talks/brene\\_brown\\_listening\\_to\\_shame.html](https://www.ted.com/talks/brene_brown_listening_to_shame.html).
- Noah Levine, ***Dharma Pun: A Memoir***: “The story of a young man and a generation of angry youths who rebelled against their parents and the unfulfilled promise of the sixties. Levine's search for meaning led him first to punk rock, drugs, drinking, and dissatisfaction. Having seen the uselessness of drugs and violence, Noah looked for positive ways to channel his rebellion against what he saw as the lies of society. Fueled by his anger at so much injustice and suffering, Levine now uses that energy and the practice of Buddhism to awaken his natural wisdom and compassion. While Levine comes to embrace the same spiritual tradition as his father, bestselling author Stephen Levine, he finds his most authentic expression in connecting the seemingly opposed worlds of punk and Buddhism. As Noah Levine delved deeper into Buddhism, he chose not to reject the punk scene, instead integrating the two worlds as a catalyst for transformation. Ultimately, this is an inspiring story about maturing, and how a hostile and lost generation is finally finding its footing. This provocative report takes us deep inside the punk scene and moves from anger, rebellion, and self-destruction, to health, service to others, and genuine spiritual growth.”