

Humanistic Religious Naturalism--November 2014

UUFVB Covenant Groups

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

Humanistic Religious Naturalism is a belief system that promotes a reverence for all life, which Rev. Richard Gilbert says produces the moral imperative for “love in interpersonal relationships, justice in social relationships and trusteeship in our relationships with our environment.”

Topic Exploration

Humanistic Religious Naturalism, in general, can be thought to include these beliefs:

1. Creation is not governed by a supernatural being nor by supernatural forces. The idea of an afterlife is rejected, as is the existence of devils or angels.
2. Human beings are an integral part of nature. We are not separate and distinct from the rest of the natural world. We are related to every living creature, both plant and animal.
3. All religions have a responsibility to learn from science and adapt its teaching accordingly.
4. Both reason and reverence are important to human existence. Rev. William R. Murry, in his book, *Reason and Reverence*, claims “the human ability to think critically and constructively has led to many artistic, medical and technological advances, but it is only reverence, understood as feelings of respect and awe, that can save us from the hubris that would destroy all the good we have accomplished. Reverence is rooted in a deep understanding of human limitations. It keeps us from acting like gods and, thus, enhances our true humanity.”

(Rev. William R. Murry, *Reason and Reverence*)

Questions / Sharing

1. The difference between social justice and charity is highlighted by Murry. Staffing soup kitchens, working in homeless shelters, distributing food baskets, are charitable activities. Gifts to most charitable organizations go towards providing temporary relief to people in need. But this activity does not change unjust structures that cause inequality, suffering and oppression. Discuss the difference between advocacy and charitable deeds. Do you value one over the other? Practically thinking, how effective can you be at each level (provide temporary relief, or change social structures)?
2. We use our intelligence and our reasoning to determine what is true and right. This process relies on observation, reflection, critical thinking and testing by experimentation. Humanistic religious naturalism promotes both a respect for and reliance on scientific and observable data as a guide for living. At the same time, it recognizes that the application of scientific knowledge calls for the application of values and judgment, which are not scientific. Use of the rational mind and emotional mind both contribute to knowing. It is also the emotional mind that generates feelings of spirituality, an awe of the universe, an appreciation for beauty, or a sense of mystery and grace. How do you maintain a balance between your emotional and rational minds?

3. Since all living things possess the same will to live, our attitude toward all life should be respectful and reverential, according to humanistic religious naturalists. However, since all life also feeds on OTHER life, each person must reflect on how to apply this principle. Most of us will create a hierarchy in which some forms of life are more precious than others. Thus we might justify eating plants but not animals, or some animals but not others. We might approve the use of mice in experiments, but not monkeys. Do you have a hierarchy of what kind of life to protect? If so, what is it and on what has your decision been based?

4. Traditional Christian teaching is that humans have dominion over all other forms of creation. Humanistic religious naturalism holds that we are not dominant over nature--we are its stewards and trustees. Humankind has a responsibility to preserve and sustain the natural world. Yet, in pursuit of living as well as we can in the here and now, we have made decisions that have damaged, not protected, the natural environment. Do you think you have a role in being a steward of nature and, if so, how do you fulfill that responsibility?

Check-out and reflection on today's session

Closing Reading

"The values that should be embraced are those that make our lives more fully human. Our goal should not be to discover 'the truth,' or 'the meaning of life,' but to live as intensely as possible here and now. Becoming more fully human involves the transformation of the mind and heart from self-centeredness to a sense of one's self as part of a larger sacred whole and to a deep commitment to the human and natural worlds." (Rev. William R. Murry, *Reason and Reverence*)

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.

Housekeeping