

Healthy Questioning about What We Believe--UUFVB Covenant Groups— September 2017

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 Readings

Some of the world's most revered religious figures were, at one point or another, wracked by doubt — Moses, Jesus, Buddha, and Mohammed all hesitated at times, unsure of their fidelity to their callings. In the Middle Ages, religious philosophers like Thomas Aquinas, Moses Maimonides, and Averroes began by doubting and used Aristotelean logic and reason to reaffirm their faith. Throughout history, doubt, it seems, has worked well for believers.

Sir John Houghton: "Knowledge is very limited. And to say you don't know is a very proper scientific statement. 'I may know sometime, but I don't know now.' And the same is true in the having of your faith. There are lots of things I don't know. And I have to remain ignorant or agnostic, whatever it may be, because I don't know. There are too many theologians and too many people out there who say, 'I know,' when there's no right to say that."

Mary Gordon: "The ability to question, the ability to take a skeptical position, is absolutely central to my understanding of myself and my understanding of myself as a religious person. It's very important to experience doubt. I think faith without doubt is just either nostalgia or a kind of addiction. And I'm not interested in that."

Kay Boyle: "There is only one history of any importance, and it is the history of what you once believed in, and the history of what you came to believe in."

Topic Exploration

The first beliefs in life come from the context of family, religion and culture into which a child is born. A child's world view is shaped by this context and early experiences. From this context and world view a system of beliefs is developed either consciously or unconsciously.

Some people continue to live contentedly with the religion/culture/belief system into which they were born. Others begin to question when their life experiences or observations are not in sync with what they have been taught. Still others begin to question as the result of a dramatic life event or changes in the world around them. Their search for their own truth leads to the development of a belief system that enables them to make sense of their world and their life.

The belief system also guides the way they live, the ethical sense they develop, and the way they interact with other people.

Silent Moment of Reflection

Find a comfortable position with a relaxed posture. Become aware of your breathing. Close your eyes. We shall sit in silence for approximately 3 minutes, until the facilitator announces the end of silence, at which time we shall share our responses to the following questions.

Questions / Sharing

1. What are some of the earliest beliefs you held as a child? What were the greatest influences in shaping those beliefs?
2. What led to the questioning, (if any) of those beliefs? What questions did you have, and where did you look for answers?
3. What new beliefs, if any, took the place of earlier beliefs and how did they evolve?
4. What was the process of change in beliefs? How long did it take, or is change still happening? Have you found the process frightening, empowering, or both?
5. What beliefs do you have now that you are beginning to doubt, if any? Why?
6. What beliefs do you have now that add a positive light, or faith, to your life?

Closing Reading

Reality is what we take to be true. What we take to be true is what we believe. What we believe is based upon our perceptions. What we perceive depends on what we look for. What we look for depends on what we think. What we think depends on what we perceive. What we perceive determines what we believe. What we believe determines what we take to be true. What we take to be true is our reality.
(David Bohm, 1917 – 1992)

Check-out and reflections on today's session

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