

## Authority—UUFVB Covenant Groups—June 2018

### 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?

**Centering:** Find a stillness, hold a stillness, let this moment of silence ease your soul.

**Opening Readings:** Our UU living tradition is based on many sources of authority.

1. Words and deeds of prophetic men and women which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion and the transforming power of love.
2. Wisdom from the world's religions which inspire us in our ethical and spiritual life.
3. Jewish and Christian teachings that call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves.
4. 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.
5. Spiritual teachings of earth-centered traditions which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.
6. Direct experience of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to renewal of the spirit and openness to the forces that create and uphold life.

### **Topic Exploration**

Humanist theologian William R. Jones, Ph.D., uses the term "Functional Ultimacy" to describe a state in which human beings, while neither Gods nor omniscient, remain the ultimate seat of their own moral authority. This is due to what Jones called the "humanocentric predicament." We cannot shed our human nature in which "all cognition is relative to ourselves." Thus as human beings, only we can choose the source of ultimate authority for our lives. (*Richard S. Gilbert, Building Your Own Theology, Ethics, p11*)

Mary Pipher, Psychologist, UU, author of, "Seeking Peace: Chronicles of the Worst Buddhist in the World" writes, "my authority does not come from being a relaxed and happy person, but rather from being a person who has sought calmness and happiness all of her life. I address you as a woman who has spent plenty of time talking herself and others down from emotional ledges."

In the New Testament, it is frequently said of Jesus that, "he spoke as one with authority" but it was not the authority of a trained expert...as were the scribes and Pharisees who were the official authorities in his religion of the time. Thus, he turned that idea on its head. Jesus had now finished what he wanted to say, and his teachings made a deep impression on the people because "he taught them with authority, and not like their own scribes."(Matthew 7:28-29)

Both Pipher and the New Testament writers suggest that spiritual authority is something very different from being an "expert." Pipher claims an authority based on her own life, authentic experiences that

had a healing power. Jesus's authority seemed to come from within, and offer a healing power through his being or his words.

There must be an ultimate, final authority. There has to exist a person or place beyond which there can be no higher source. There has to be a person or place in whom resides inherent authority. That ultimate authority is God, according to Christian scriptures. What is your opinion?

### **Questions / Sharing**

1. Many UU's feel uncomfortable with the word "authority." What do you feel hearing these statements?
  - a. God is watching you.
  - b. Because I said so!
  - c. "I'm in charge now, here at the White House"
  - d. "Only I can fix it."
2. What are the sources of authority that you respect and follow?
3. Have past experiences with authority been healing or hurtful? Describe.
4. Do you have a sense of inner authority? If so, where does it come from?
5. Considering the root of the word authority, "author", ask yourself, "who is the author of my life?"
6. Did you write your own story or was the script written for you?

### **Closing Readings**

"He who leads least leads best." (*Sun Yat Sen*)

"To think for yourself you must question authority and learn how to put yourself in a state of vulnerable, open-mindedness; chaotic, confused, vulnerability to inform yourself." (Timothy Leary)

"As soon as we abandon our own reason, and are content to rely upon authority, there is no end to our troubles." (*Bertrand Russell*)

### **Check-out and reflections on today's session:**

Were you challenged to think differently? Were your needs for connection and spiritual growth met? Do you feel you were heard? What did you like or dislike about 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**