

Do Unitarian Universalists Believe in God?

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Last week I was the theme speaker at the Western UU Life Festival, an annual gathering of UUs in Northern New Mexico. I was granted 7.5 hours of instructional time over three days and 40 unsuspecting subjects.

One of the exercises I inflicted on the group, was to have them partner up and have to answer the same question over and over again. "Who are you?" The one rule was they couldn't say the same answer twice.

So it was just: Who are you? Pause for answer. Who are you? Pause for answer. Who are you?

Think about it, how would you answer each round of that question. Because it's not a question we get asked all the time, at least in those words. Because actually every day we get asked the question, who are you, in a multitude of ways.

What would your answers be? On that first round

Who are you? On the second round.... Who are you? On the third.... Who are you?

Each repetition of the question is not a demand, but an invitation to step in deeper, closer, or more fully to truth.

Who am I?

I'm the fight I had with my mother in high school when I didn't call home to tell her where I was.

I'm the product of a racist society that conditions me to expect to be the norm

I'm the queerness that could never be suppressed from leaking out

I'm the water of the rocky mountains that quenched my thirst growing up

I'm the smell of chlorine that never quite got washed off after swim practice

Who am I?

I'm this motley collection of cells, this being of bone and brain, life, pain and exploration. I'm this heart that keeps on beating --

The soul that keeps seeking.

I'm this creature that I don't always know but seldom don't recognize

I'm a hiker, a dog lover, a terrible arts and crafter.

I'm ever moment I've lived through

Remembered and not -- the screw ups the missteps the words I would take back if only I could.

I bear the imprint of each relationship

Each wound and loving caress
Whose very nature altered
The course of my life.

Who am I?

Each question circles round
The deepest of truths
Of who I am
And who you are
And who we all are
Dependent
Connected
The I and the we

As the poet Rilke wrote:

*How can I keep my soul in me, so that
it doesn't touch your soul? How can I raise
it high enough, past you, to other things?
I would like to shelter it, among remote
lost objects, in some dark and silent place
that doesn't resonate when your depths resound.
Yet everything that touches us, me and you,
takes us together like a violin's bow,
which draws one voice out of two separate strings.
Upon what instrument are we two spanned?
And what musician holds us in his hand?
Oh sweetest song.*

Who I am is the product of a greater We
Living and loving first.

Who I am is the product of a greater We
That lived and loved first.

The question before us this morning is a good, albeit wrong question: Do UUs believe in God? The quick answer is of course some do, and some don't. Our rich tapestry of theological diversity within this congregation and the larger community of Unitarian Universalism, is a hallmark of our faith.

Now, when a question can have such a simple answer we must be suspicious.
Because it's rare for the most important questions to have simple answers.

Maybe there is a more important question for us to explore then....

And stay with me now.

Does our Unitarian Universalist faith necessitate God?

Now I will put my cards on the table quickly,
To flag any bias, so you can use it to discount what I am about to say.

(pause)

I don't "believe" in God, but I experience god.
This is the truth, as best as I can articulate it,
of my theism ---even if I tend to shrug off that word.

For me Words like God, belief, theist, feel too static,
constrained by false idols of old men
In the sky.

To say I believe in god seems to imply
I have a neat and tidy definition of god
That I think logically exists.

Beliefs after all
must be articulated
And understood.

Which is why I don't believe in God,
Because I do not understand God.
What god is or isn't

God is mystery.
Irreducible.
Beyond encapsulation or complete comprehension.

But it would be a lie to say I don't experience God in my life
In the moments where my breath catches up to the rhythms of the
universe
When words fail me, but presence saves me.

When grace bubbles up between us, unlocking a movement for creative love, invisible before.

It would be a lie to say I don't seek God's presence each day,
In prayer, in nature, with all of you. In moments of tension and stress.
When I don't know what to do.
When I feel lost and can't remember what's important
When I can't answer that question: who am I?

Does our Unitarian Universalist faith necessitate God?

If god means a belief in the supernatural: No.
If god means a personal relationship with the divine: no
If god means allegiance to all that you think is woo woo: no.

But if by God, we mean, some source of authority and accountability that is greater than simply and solely you? Or your narrowly defined circle of people to include or exclude?

Then yes, our Unitarian Universalist faith necessitates God.

But if by god, we mean, something greater, something beyond, something that cannot be formed into convenient idols or trotted out to give simple answers to complex questions?

Then yes, our Unitarian Universalist faith necessitates God.

But if by god, we mean that everywhere we look, we touch an elemental mystery revealed in our encounter with it. A mystery that cannot be grasped, only touched.

Then yes, our Unitarian Universalist faith necessitates God.

But if by god, we mean, a force that demands invites compels and merits a humble allegiance, to direct our life's work at the intersection of our joy and the world's need.

Then yes, our Unitarian Universalist faith necessitates God.

Call it what you will, and might. God, the divine, human potential, the interconnected web. I once met a woman in a hospital bed who called this force Sam. It doesn't matter. Unitarian Universalists of all theological stripes, must be in relationship with this "God." Humanist, Atheist, Pagan alike.

Because who we are -- who you are -- is the product of a greater We living and loving before you. And that makes a claim on who you are, and what we must be.

“To pray you open your whole self,” the poet Joy Harjo writes

*To pray you open your whole self
To sky, to earth, to sun, to moon
To one whole voice that is you.
And know there is more
That you can't see, can't hear;
Can't know except in moments
Steadily growing, and in languages
That aren't always sound but other
Circles of motion
Like eagle that Sunday morning
Over Salt River. Circled in blue sky
In wind, swept our hearts clean
With sacred wings.
We see you, see ourselves and know
That we must take the utmost care
And kindness in all things.
Breathe in, knowing we are made of
All this, and breathe, knowing
We are truly blessed because we
Were born, and die soon within a
True circle of motion,
Like eagle rounding out the morning
Inside us.
We pray that it will be done
In beauty.
In beauty”*