



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Animals

Hayward, CA, Wednesday Evening Small Group, Kathryn LaMar, 13 June 2018

CHALICE LIGHTING

Oh God, scatterer of ignorance and darkness, grant me your strength.
 May all beings regard me with the eye of a friend, and I all beings!
 With the eye of a friend may each single being regard all others.

Yojht Veda, xxxvi, 18

OPENING WORDS

1 min

In everything you recognize yourself again. Wherever you see life—that is you! What is this recognition, this knowledge apprehended by the most learned and the most childlike alike? It is reverence for life, reverence for the impenetrable mystery that meets us in our universe, an existence different from ourselves in external appearance, yet inwardly of the same character with us, terribly similar, awesomely related. Reverence before the infinity of life means the removal of the strangeness, the restoration of shared experiences and of compassion and sympathy.

Albert Schweitzer

SILENT MEDITATION

1 min

The first sound of the gong brings us to silence. Please take time to center yourself, and temporarily push aside whatever might be preventing you from participating fully in tonight's session. The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

CHECK-IN / FEEDBACK

40 min

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met.

BACKGROUND ON ANIMALS

5 min

Animals, referred to by John Muir as our horizontal (siblings), have long been recognized as essential to our development and well-being. Throughout history they have played a major role in human thought and culture. They inhabit our myths, fables, proverbs and stories. There is a profound, inescapable need for animals among all peoples, for while animals have inhabited a world without people, we have never lived without the companionship, example and practical help of animals.

Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, Earth Prayers.

Our relationship with animals today is complicated and has many dimensions: emotional, ethical, social, spiritual, scientific, and more. We love animals, we live with them, we use them, we work together, we play together, we eat them, we find sport in them, we protect them, they protect us, we learn from them, we eliminate those that get in our way, we mourn their deaths. We wonder and argue mightily over the ways to be in right relationship with animals.

The following information is from the Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry (UUAM)'s *Reverence for Life Program Manual*.

Biblical View of Animals

Western attitudes about non-human animals evolved primarily from profoundly human-centered Jewish and Christian sources. Organizers within these traditions often base their work on Biblical ideas of dominion and stewardship. Stewardship and dominion imply a hierarchy in which God has placed

humans above other animals: we are to treat them well as we go about using them for our own purposes.

Alternative Views

Today, many mainline Christians are reexamining their responsibility to other creatures as well as “stewardship” and “dominion”. Several of Mohammed’s teachings about food acquisition speak to compassion for animals in his own context, and both the Qur’an and Hadith describe animals as members of the community and the family of Allah.

Most Eastern religions explicitly recognize and honor animals’ inherent worth. Hinduism describes a kinship among all forms of life and calls humans to accept moral responsibility for that relationship. Jains refrain from killing any living being. Both Hindu and Buddhist traditions promote ahimsa, the avoidance of violence toward any sentient life form. Earth-based spiritualities encourage adherents to seek harmony with all life.

Today, many people find that their work for peace and justice leads them directly to work for nonviolence and compassion for all beings. For example, many peace activists oppose the oppression or killing of animals as a way to bring us one step closer to a peaceful world.

QUOTES TO PONDER

5 min

Quotes by Albert Schweitzer

By having a reverence for life, we enter into a spiritual relation with the world. By practicing reverence for life we become good, deep, and alive.

Reverence for life ... is the whole ethic of love in its deepest and its highest sense. And it is the source of renewal again and again for the individual and for humankind.

Each individual has to decide for himself how far he can remain ethical and how far he must submit himself to the necessity for destruction and injury to life, and therewith incur guilt

Until we extend our circle of compassion to all living things, humanity will not find peace.

Additional Quotes

Kindness and compassion towards all living beings is a mark of a civilized society. Racism, economic deprivation, dog fighting and cock fighting, bullfighting and rodeos are all cut from the same defective fabric: violence. Only when we have become nonviolent towards all life will we have learned to live well ourselves.

Cesar Chavez

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.

Mahatma Gandhi

Each of us, of course, must assume responsibility for awakening. Others may be responsible for our being born, but what we make of our lives, how deeply and intensively we live, is our responsibility, and ours alone. Part of being born again, in a Unitarian Universalist way, lies in waking up to the fact that all of life is a gift.

Rev. Forrest Church

Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That’s the problem. *A.A. Milne*

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men. *Alice Walker*

How it is that animals understand things I do not know, but it is certain that they do understand. Perhaps there is a language which is not made of words and everything in the world understands it. Perhaps there is a soul hidden in everything and it can always speak, without even making a sound, to another soul.

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Animals are living souls. They are not things. They are not objects. Neither are they human. Yet they mourn. They love. They dance. They suffer. They know the peaks and chasms of being ... In a wonderful and inexpressible way, therefore, God is present in all creatures. *Rev. Gary Kowalski*

Don't you find it a beautiful clean thought, a world empty of people, just uninterrupted grass, and a hare sitting up?
D.H. Lawrence

If reason and morality are what set humans apart from animals, then reason and morality must always guide us in how we treat them.
Matthew Scully

When we truly learn to suffer with other creatures and accept our intimate connection with all beings we will begin to end exploitation, violence, war, racism, hatred, and oppression. The ethical treatment of animals is a natural and inevitable part of acting from a place of compassion.”

Rev. Peter Morales

Compassion is ethical intelligence; it is the capacity to make connections and the consequent urge to act to relieve the suffering of others.
Will Tuttle

And the fox said to the little prince: (humans) have forgotten this truth, but you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed.
Antoine de Saint-Exupery

SONG: THE LAST OF THE GREAT WHALES 4 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNp5dc0v-3c>

BREAK 10 min

GROUP REFLECTION 40 min

IDEAS FOR GROUP REFLECTION

Share some stories of experiences you have had with animals: positive, negative, funny or sad.

If you could be an animal, what would you be? Why? Have people ever compared you to an animal? For what reasons?

Are there things you do or do not do regarding animals for ethical reasons? Tell us about them, and share your ethical understandings. (Examples: eating, wearing, sports, zoos & aquariums, medical research, boycotting certain products, hunting)

Have you ever had what you would call a spiritual experience with an animal? What was it? What was spiritual about it for you? Do you have a "totem" animal, an animal that has a special meaning for you, to which you are drawn, or that symbolizes something important for you?

What guides you in ethical thought and behavior? Do you have different guidelines for different species?

Describe relationships you have had with animals of other species, including those who share your home and those outside your immediate world, in the wild, or in crisis.

How are humans different from other species or the same? What thoughts, emotions, behaviors, and ecology do we have in common with others, or do not? Is any "difference" fundamentally unique to humans-to-other-species comparison, or is it only a matter of scale?

SESSION FEEDBACK 5 min

CLOSING SONG THE KEEPER (Frank Hennessy) 5 min

<https://soundcloud.com/frankhennessy/the-keeper>

[Lyrics at end of document]

CLOSING WORDS / EXTINGUISHING THE CHALICE 1 min

Go in peace.
Speak the truth.
Give thanks each day.

Respect the earth and her creatures, for they are alive like you.

Continued on next page

Continued from previous page

Care for your body; it is a wondrous gift.
Live simply.
Be of service.
Be guided by your faith and not your fear.
Go lightly on your path.
Walk in a sacred manner.

Rev. Gary Kowalski

THE KEEPER (Frank Hennessy)

One morning when the world was new and first we saw the sun
The Lord lay down to rest a while so pleased with what he'd done
And of all the creatures he had made he loved man the best
And so he placed into his hands the fate of all the rest

CHORUS

And all these things I give to you to keep and to protect
From the greatest of the big sperm whales to the tiniest insect
To rule with love and kindness the weak, the wild, the strong
And treat my creatures gently only you know right from wrong

But man was so conceited he couldn't see the worth
Of all the other creatures that shared this lovely earth
And one by one he hunted them for food and sport and greed
One by one they disappeared each species and each breed
CHORUS

After many years had passed the Lord came back to see
Men and all the others he'd left so fine and free
But where are all my silver streams and forests dark and green?
There was only dust and desert wherever man had been.
CHORUS

Where are all my animals the hippo and the whale?
And the fish that filled the oceans before your ships set sail?
The lion and the tiger and the elephant so tall?
I left you as their keeper, do you not recall.
CHORUS X 2