

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Animals

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Stony Brook, NY, April 2014

Rev. Margie Allen and Rev. Dr. Linda Anderson

Chalice lighting and silence

Opening words *Song of the Builders* by Mary Oliver

On a summer morning

I sat down

on a hillside

to think about God -

a worthy pastime.

Near me, I saw

a single cricket;

it was moving the grains of the hillside

this way and that way.

How great was its energy,

how humble its effort.

Let us hope

it will always be like this,

each of us going on

in our inexplicable ways

building the universe.

Covenant (optional)

Check-in (optional -- share the meaning of your name. Why are you named what you are named?)

Topic Introduction

"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. In this session we will explore our own relationships with them. In this "web of all existence, of which we are a part," what part do animals play for you?

Quotations

Activity -- *(Facilitators: along with this lesson comes a plastic bag with 16 different stuffed animals inside. Please pick it up in Margie's office when your session begins and leave it there for the next person after your session ends.)*

Lay the stuffed animals on a table and ask participants to look at them all and pick up the one that "speaks to them" and take it back to their seats. Ask everyone not to share at this time why they picked the one they picked. We will do that in just a minute. If you do not recognize the animals, note that many of them have tags on them which say what they are.

Questions for group reflection

1. Which animal did you pick up? Tell us what that animal means to you.
2. Share some stories of experiences you have had with animals: positive, negative, funny or sad.
3. In what ways have animals added to and enhanced your life and relationships? In what ways have they not done so?
4. If you could be an animal, what would you be? Why? Have people ever compared you to an animal? For what reasons?
5. Are there things you do or do not do regarding animals for ethical reasons? Tell us about them, and also share your ethical understandings. (Examples: eating, wearing, sports, zoos & aquariums, medical research, boycotting certain products, hunting, etc)
6. 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?
7. Do you have any regrets about the way you have treated animals, or an animal?
8. "And God said to (Adam and Eve), Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it; and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the air and over every living thing that moves upon the earth." (Genesis 1:28) How do you feel about that? Do you agree that humans are meant to have "dominion" over every living being?

Likes and wishes**Closing words (Yojht Veda, xxxvi, 18) and Chalice extinguishing**

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.

Quotations

May I aspire to be the person my dog thinks I am. ~ bumper sticker

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

The creatures outside looked from pig to man, and from man to pig, and from pig to man again; but already it was impossible to say which was which. ~ George Orwell

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

I can't abide people who go soft over animals and then cheat every human they come across! ~ Diana Wynne Jones

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

May all that have life be delivered from suffering. ~ Gautama Buddha

Hair on a man's chest is thought to denote strength. The gorilla is the most powerful of bipeds and has hair on every place on his body except for his chest. ~ Anton Szandor LaVey

"I believe that the best way to create good living conditions for any animal, whether it's a captive animal living in a zoo, a farm animal or a pet, is to base animal welfare programs on the core emotion systems in the brain. My theory is that the environment animals live in should activate their positive emotions as much as possible, and not activate their negative emotions any more than necessary. ~ Temple Grandin

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

What is it about human psychology that makes it so difficult for us to think consistently about animals? The paradoxes that plague our interactions with other species are due to the fact that much of our thinking is a mire of instinct, learning, language, culture, intuition, and our reliance on mental shortcuts. ~ Hal Herzog

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