



Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

The Ethical Will

Hayward, CA, Wednesday Evening Small Group, 02 May 2018, Kathryn LaMar

CHALICE LIGHTING & OPENING WORDS

2 min

Apart from values and ethics which I have tried to live by, the legacy I would like to leave behind is a very simple one - that I have always stood up for what I consider to be the right thing, and I have tried to be as fair and equitable as I could be.

Ratan Tata

SILENT MEDITATION

2 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

35 min

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

BACKGROUND ON ETHICAL WILLS

10 min

An ethical will, or legacy letter (see website <celebrationsoflife.net>), is a way to share your values, blessings, life's lessons, hopes and dreams for the future, love, and forgiveness with your family, friends, and community. It is not a legal document, but rather a heartfelt expression of what truly matters most in your life. Ethical wills are not legal documents so they can take any shape the writer wishes. In most cases, they are written or typed, but they can also be shared widely through video platforms and social media. An ethical will may contain photographs or illustrations or take the form of a collage. It can read like a letter or a laundry list of ideas. It can be addressed to one's children and grandchildren, to a friend, or anyone and everyone else you think should read it. An ethical will reflects the "voice of the heart."

There are many reasons people may want to write an ethical will:

- It helps us identify what we value most and what we stand for.
- By articulating what we value now, we can take steps to ensure the continuation of those values for future generations.
- We learn a lot about ourselves in the process of writing an ethical will.
- It helps us come to terms with our mortality by creating something of meaning that will live on after we are gone.
- It provides a sense of completion in our lives.

In addition to the end of life, writing ethical wills may also be appropriate for betrothed couples, for expectant and new parents, for divorcing couples—to provide security and reassurance for the children involved, by providing tangible evidence of what's important to their parents, for growing families, for empty-

nesters, and for people at middle age and beyond.

The following is taken from the website *My Jewish Learning*, articles by Jamie Rubin and Rabbi Jack Riemer

An ethical will is not an easy thing to write. In doing so, one confronts oneself. One must look inward to see what are the essential truths one has learned in a lifetime, face up to one's failures, and consider what are the things that really count. Thus an individual learns a great deal about himself or herself when writing an ethical will.

Legal wills bequeath valuables, while ethical wills bequeath values.

Ethical will writing is a key part of end-of-life or hospice care, with many hospice nurses or social workers encouraging their patients to write one. If a person near death is unable or uninterested in writing an ethical will on their own, hospice workers can step in and help their patients with verbal ethical wills. These are nonjudgmental, non-threatening conversations social workers or chaplains have with dying patients that are either recorded with audio or video, or simply transcribed after talking to the patient about their life.

QUOTES TO PONDER

5 min

When death or dying comes calling at the door, like a bracing wind it clears our being of pettiness. It connects us to others. More alert to life's fragility, we reawaken to life's preciousness. To be fully human is to care, and attending to death prompts the most eloquent form of caring imaginable.

Rev. Forrest Church

It's because I work in ethics, and, more specifically, applied ethics, that I think it's important that if you have things to say that you think are right and you think could make the world a better place, it's important that many people read about them.

Peter Singer

My father, in a way, was a mentor in the way he instilled the basic values and ethics in me. My mother was a mentor by showing me an example to say that if women have tenacity, they can achieve whatever they have to.

Chanda Kochhar

Ethics is knowing the difference between what you have a right to do and what is right to do.

Potter Stewart

The first step in the evolution of ethics is a sense of solidarity with other human beings.

Albert Schweitzer

A garden is always a series of losses set against a few triumphs, like life itself.

May Sarton

The terrible error in the course of human civilization is undoubtedly the defective judgment that allowed religious authorities usurp the foundation of societal morality, in which all collective ethics of humankind must take a cause. This appalling blunder is comparable only to assigning the leper exclusive franchise to run beauty clinics in the society; this can only lead to cycles upon cycles of common infection syndrome.

Adebowale Ojowuro

Killing a bunch of Jihadis may be morally justified, to save humanity from their wrath, but it won't terminate Jihad for long. Jihad or Holy war would keep festering one way or another, until religious fundamentalism is eradicated from the human society. Until the whole humanity learns to scrutinize its most revered scriptures with the sharp tool of reasoning, Jihad will keep on striking over the world. If one does not have the basic conscientious capacity to refute the primitive textual verses of the scriptures that demand one to

kill or torture another being for holding a different belief system than one's own, then that entity is no being of the civilized human society, it is merely a pest from the stone-age. No Quran, no Bible, no Gita, no Cow, is greater than the human self. There shall be hope for harmony and peace in the world, only when fundamentalism is destroyed forever. Harmony is not a luxury, it is an existential necessity of the species. And to achieve it, if a hundred Bibles have to be sacrificed, then be it. But for no Bible, Quran or Gita, can harmony be compromised.

Anhjit Naskar

BREAK

10 min

GROUP REFLECTION

35 min

IDEAS TO TALK ABOUT DURING GROUP DISCUSSION

If you had time to write just one letter, to whom would it be addressed? What would it say? What would you leave out? Would you chastise and rebuke? Would you thank, forgive, or seek to instruct?

The following exercises were adapted from the book *What Will They Say About You When You're Gone* (by Rabbi Daniel Cohen), by Rabbi Jodie Gordon to help peoplecraft their ethical wills.

- Identify one or more courageous choices you made that were driven by your values in your personal, work, and communal life.
- Recall an experience when your values were challenged and you fought to uphold them.
- Identify a past and present moral dilemma in your life and chart the effects of making a courageous decision versus a convenient decision.
- What gives your life meaning?
- If you had your life to live over again, what would you do with it?
- What ideals, if any, would you be willing to die for?
- What would bring you more happiness than anything in the world?
- What is your individual mission statement or statement of values? Do you have one for your family?
- Tell the story behind an object in your house that was passed down to you that reflects the legacy of your family.
- Describe an out-of-the-ordinary event in your life. What led to it?
- Describe an experience when initial disappointment was transformed into gratitude. How did your understanding of the event change? Why?
- Identify three significant events in your life and trace their path to fruition. Were the events by chance or design?
- Identify three people who have made a difference in your life. How did you meet them? By chance or design?

PLANNING FOR FUTURE SESSIONS AND SERVICE PROJECTS

5 min

SESSION FEEDBACK

3 min

CLOSING SONG

We'll Pass Them On (Sally Rogers)

3 min

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gnMVIhtONp0>>

CLOSING WORDS

1 min

Every one of us receives and passes on an inheritance. The inheritance may not be an accumulation of earthly possessions or acquired riches, but whether we realize it or not, our choices, words, actions, and values will impact someone and form the heritage we hand down. *Ben Hardesty*