

The Human Condition

Covenant Group Session 2009–2010 First Parish in Cambridge, Unitarian Universalist
Inspired by “The Human Condition” by Kenneth W. Collier in *UU World*, Summer 2009

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Opening Words & Chalice Lighting

“. . . hatred has to do with enforcing separation and difference, driving apart that which is inherently whole. Love has to do with bringing together into a whole that which belongs together, seeing as whole that which is whole.”

—Kenneth W. Collier, “The Human Condition”

Check-in

How is it with your spirit?

Reading

“The ego is that part of the human personality concerned with one’s individuality, one’s separateness and autonomy. . . . We are who we are; we are our self. This is the ego. But there is a catch to it. All of a sudden, this wonderful ego discovers that it’s unbearably lonely. The great triumph of the ego is the realization that I stop at my skin, and the great tragedy of the ego is the realization that I stop at my skin. There are all those other people out there, and they are doing the same thing. They are autonomous; they are themselves; they stop at their skin. Therefore they cannot feel what I feel; they cannot know what I know or think what I think, or even perceive what I perceive. . . . This is existential loneliness. Enter the spirit. If the ego is about how we are separate, then the spirit is about how we are connected. It answers the question, ‘Who am I that is related to all those others out there?’ When we dwell in the ego we know that we are different; when we dwell in the spirit, we know that we are related, that we dance with each other and that the dance creates us, together, a unity. We live alone, to be sure, but not irreducibly alone, for we are also tied together as one whole being. . . . We are separate and we are connected.

What I am suggesting is that human brokenness happens when the ego suppresses the spirit. When the ego takes over, it is triumphant, but ultimately it becomes terribly and tragically alone. Then there is brokenness, and that is the human condition. . . . Religion, *religare*, is, as one proposed etymology of the word suggests, the great binding together. It is in ego that we are who we are alone, but it is in spirit that we are who we are in relationship. Both are necessary. The idea that one must triumph over and suppress the other, as if they are in an internal civil war, is an illusion. Both are necessary to make a whole human being.”

—Kenneth W. Collier, “The Human Condition”

Questions for Contemplation

- Collier says that brokenness happens when we allow our ego (separation) to suppress our spirit (connection). What do you think keeps ego and spirit apart and what brings them together. How do we heal the “existential loneliness” of the ego?
- Collier defines religion as binding together ego (separation) and spirit (connection). How do different religions of the world accomplish this? How do we, in Unitarian Universalism, do this or do we? Can we do it better?

Questions for Contemplation Cont’

- What practices do you use to connect your ego and spirit? Where do you look for inspiration and guidance to connect/balance ego and spirit?
- Why/how is community important for growth of spirit?

Before we begin our discussion, let's pause for a minute of silent reflection. Feel free to use pen and paper if you process more easily through writing.

Check-out

Likes and Wishes

Closing Words & Extinguishing of Chalice

“Religion is about the healing of brokenness; it is about holiness, that is, wholeness.”

—Kenneth W. Collier, “The Human Condition”

We covenant

- To abide by the below set of covenantal statements we developed together.
- To engage in at least one service project to the congregation or larger world.
- To hold an “empty chair” so as to always welcome new members (both into the group as well as into the larger program).
- To make meetings a high priority.
- *Insert the covenant your group developed here.*