

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Small Group Ministry Session Plan

**Humanism and Environmental Destruction**

First Unitarian Universalist Society of Burlington, Vermont. Prepared by Ginger Hobbs, Aug.11, 2010

**Welcome and Chalice Lighting**

“What did the Easter Islander who cut down the last palm tree say while he was doing it? Like modern loggers, did he shout ‘Jobs, not trees; Or: ‘Technology will solve our problems, never fear, we’ll find a substitute for wood.’ Or: ‘We don’t have proof that there aren’t palms somewhere else on Easter, we need more research. . .’”

Jared Diamond, *Collapse*

**Brief Check-ins**

**Opening Reading –**

“... I believe that this earth is all the heaven we will get. . .”

“... I assuage my worries about the degradation of our planet with faith in a larger conception of nature, one in which we humans are just a part. Our manifest flaws of which greed and profligacy are not the least, seem to me to be part of nature’s inexorable and merciless script.

“If we cannot save ourselves from ourselves, and we do in fact spoil our nest, then we will be the ones diminished in numbers. Isn’t there relief in knowing that if this happens, we will be limited by this simple equation in our ability to cause further damage?

“Nature is a larger and stronger entity than we are. If we manage to create such astonishing toxicity that we take ourselves out completely, and take with us much of Creation as we have known it, that which remains will be necessarily emergent.

“I am perhaps perverse in taking this as a comfort, but even if we do get our act together and conserve as much as possible of what remains of our environment, nature always retains the capacity to wipe us out regardless.”

Ken Beck, Letter to Editor, *Harper’s Magazine*, July 2010

"I didn't write the book (*World without Us*) because I wanted the human race to disappear," Weisman says. "I wrote the book because I wanted humans to look around and think about what we're doing. . . .It's a way of looking at the environment by theoretically removing us, and seeing what stuff we'd leave behind. It's looking at our impact by extraction."

Alan Weisman, *World without Us*

**A Moment of Silence....**

**Main Subject: The danger that humans will destroy so much of the earth’s resources that survival of humanity is threatened**

**Individual communing:** 6 minutes per individual, 3 minutes of group response

Do you find hope in the thought that the earth could go on without humans?

Are humans the peak of evolution?

Do you think it is possible to halt human destruction of our planet?

How does humanism inform your thoughts?

Does your religious background influence your outlook?

### **Open Discussion**

### **What responsibility do humans have and who are they responsible to?**

#### **Business:**

Next meeting location:\_\_\_\_\_ Meeting Plan preparer:\_\_\_\_\_

Representative to Small Group Steering Committee\_\_\_\_\_

#### **Closing**

“Two hundred years ago, we learned to burn coal, gas, and oil. We start on the, in retrospect, quite radical project of digging up hundreds of millions of years' worth of biology, combusting it, and putting all that carbon into the atmosphere in one big flush.”

Bill McKibben on “Speaking of Faith,” NPR, Dec. 10, 2009

“The negotiation that's under way, we think is between China and the U.S. and the EU. It's really not; the real negotiation under way is between human beings on the one hand and physics and chemistry on the other. We're going to have no choice but to adapt, whether it's gracefully or in violent and ugly fashion to that demand of basic bottom line of the planet. But I think that we retain the capacity to do it in elegant and graceful ways.”

Bill McKibben on “Speaking of Faith,” NPR, Dec. 10, 2009