



**Wednesday Small Group (via ZOOM!)
 Session on Morality: Objective, Subjective, Individual, Collective?
 Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Hayward, CA, 27 January 2021**

CHALICE LIGHTING / OPENING WORDS **1 min**
Prayer for Conscience by Jane Ellen Mauldin

[READING IN THE ROUND] Shake me awake • when I cover my ears, • when I deny your call, • and try to justify my actions with • greed called practicality, • hunger called need, • desire called just desserts.

Flood my hearing with • the music of love • that pounds through my veins.

May my craving cease • and my sensitivity heighten • that each moment each day • my ears and heart are open • to you.

MEDITATION / CENTERING **5 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 today's session.

Song: Breathing In, Breathing Out

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dNBj23_irT0>

The second sound of the gong returns us to each other's presence.

CHECK-IN (2 ROUNDS) **40 min**

Please share some thing(s) about your life since last we met. Talk about how you feel about the beginning of the year, the decade, the new administration, your status with respect to the pandemic, or anything else important to you. How are YOU feeling today?

INTRODUCTORY CONSIDERATIONS **5 min**

MORALITY VS. ETHICS

Source: rawpixel.com, found on BetterHelp website:

It's understandable why one would think that ethics and morals are the same thing. Both are related to what is right and what is wrong. In fact, there is an important difference between the two terms. In a nutshell, ethics are external. They can be codes of conduct you follow at school or work, or a list of rules to follow in a religion. Morality, on the other hand, is internal. It is your own personal belief about what is right and wrong.

VIDEO: IS MORALITY OBJECTIVE?

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=i17sbgVyt90&feature=youtu.be>>

OBJECTIVE VS. SUBJECTIVE MORALITY

In *Quora*, in answer to the question “What is the difference between objective morality and subjective morality?”, Barry Goldberg, a self-described Philosopher, Sage, Luminary, Professional Thinking Person, wrote:

Well, it’s hard to say for sure whether there even is such a thing as “objective” morality in the first place, but if there were then it would need to be some set of moral rules or guidelines that apply equally to all people, regardless of culture, religion, personal interpretation, etc. Such morality would necessarily need to be based on something inherent to the human condition and not imposed by any external source.

Subjective morality, on the other hand, is when you have different groups or different individuals coming up with their own moral rules and guidelines that are different from those invented by other groups or individuals. Morality derived from religion is a classic example of such subjective morality. Sure, most religions *claim* to get their morals from some sort of omnipotent and omniscient god with a perfect moral sense, but since none of them can agree on what this god has actually said, this morality is by definition subjective to each particular religion (and interpretation of that religion).

SONG: ACCEPTABLE RISK (CHARLIE KING)

5 min

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1161jf7U48k>>

QUOTES ABOUT MORALITY

10 min

Freedom, morality, and the human dignity of the individual consists precisely in this; that he does good not because he is forced to do so, but because he freely conceives it, wants it, and loves it.

Mikhail Bakunin

Human well-being is not a random phenomenon. It depends on many factors--ranging from genetics and neurobiology to sociology and economics. But, clearly, there are scientific truths to be known about how we can flourish in this world. Wherever we can have an impact on the well-being of others, questions of morality apply.

Sam Harris

Morality is simply the attitude we adopt towards people whom we personally dislike.

Oscar Wilde

Compassion is the basis of morality.

Arthur Schopenhauer

Morality is only moral when it is voluntary.

Lincoln Steffens

There is a minimum requirement of morality, of moral compass, of decency, of moral empathy. And if you are incapable of meeting that minimum requirement, you can't even talk to me about policy.

Ana Navarro

What is morality in any given time or place? It is what the majority then and there happen to like and immorality is what they dislike.

Alfred North Whitehead

Morality binds people into groups. It gives us tribalism, it gives us genocide, war, and politics. But it also gives us heroism, altruism, and sainthood.

Jonathan Haidt

The struggle of democratic secularism, religious tolerance, individual freedom and feminism against authoritarian patriarchal religion, culture and morality is going on all over the world--including the Islamic

world, where dissidents are regularly jailed, killed, exiled or merely intimidated and silenced.

Ellen Willis

Basically, in 'American Pie,' things are heading in the wrong direction. It is becoming less ideal, less idyllic. I don't know whether you consider that wrong or right, but it is a morality song in a sense.

Don McLean

SONG: AMERICAN PIE (DON MCCLEAN)

8 min

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VhX3b1h7GQw>>

The preservation of peace and the guaranteeing of man's basic freedoms and rights require courage and eternal vigilance: courage to speak and act--and if necessary, to suffer and die--for truth and justice; eternal vigilance, that the least transgression of international morality shall not go undetected and unremedied.

Haile Selassie

We don't need any more regulation from government. You don't need overarching moralism to tell you how to live because human beings actually have a pretty well-developed moral center. The more government intrudes on the basic decisions you make, the further away you get from your natural morality.

Lisa Kennedy Montgomery

But the relationship of morality and power is a very subtle one. Because ultimately power without morality is no longer power.

James Baldwin

In Christianity neither morality nor religion come into contact with reality at any point.

Friedrich Nietzsche

The more highly public life is organized the lower does its morality sink.

E. M. Forster

Our morality is based on so many factors: of where we were born, who we were born to, what values were instilled in us, what values we chose, the way that our lives have shaped us. That dictates so much of what we assume is our morality, and also the culture, all of these things.

Oscar Isaac

Women are at once the guardians and the well-spring of the world's faith, morality, and tenderness; and if ever they are degraded to a commonplace level with men, this fine essential quality will be impaired, and their weakness will have to beg and follow where now it guides and controls.

John Boyle O'Reilly

Religion is no more the parent of morality than an incubator is the mother of a chicken.

Lemuel K. Washburn

Science by itself has no moral dimension. But it does seek to establish truth. And upon this truth morality can be built.

William Masters

Morality is the least of my concerns. To me, morality in a society that--however moral its pose--is hierarchically organized is simply a lie, an alibi for the inequalities that exist in society.

Peter Handke

Reverence for life affords me my fundamental principle of morality.

Albert Schweitzer

Morality, like language, is an invented structure for conserving and communicating order. And morality is learned, like language, by mimicking and remembering.

Jane Rule

One of the great questions of philosophy is, do we innately have morality, or do we get it from celestial dictation? A study of the Ten Commandments is a very good way of getting into and resolving that issue.

Christopher Hitchens

I am free, no matter what rules surround me. If I find them tolerable, I tolerate them; if I find them too obnoxious, I break them. I am free because I know that I alone am morally responsible for everything I do.

Robert A. Heinlein

The assumption that animals are without rights and the illusion that our treatment of them has no moral significance is a positively outrageous example of Western crudity and barbarity. Universal compassion is the only guarantee of morality.

Arthur Schopenhauer

We keep on being told that religion, whatever its imperfections, at least instills morality. On every side, there is conclusive evidence that the contrary is the case and that faith causes people to be more mean, more selfish, and perhaps above all, more stupid.

Christopher Hitchens

SONG: STREAMS OF GOLD (GEORGE MANN) 4 min

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=h624SDIVZ6k>

PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION 1 min

Read the questions for reflection, one by one.

BREAK: 5 min

GROUP REFLECTION 50 min

Questions For Reflection on Morality

- Did your parents (or others playing that role) teach you right from wrong? How?
- When did you decide to construct your own code of ethics, or moral compass? Was this a result of a precipitating event, or did it happen gradually?
- What are the guiding principles of your personal moral code (i.e., on what do you base your major life choices, and how do you make decisions?)
- What is it that helps you make decisions now? What strategies do you use?
- Have you ever done anything that is against your moral code? Why? What happened?
- What are some guiding moral principles you would like to see adopted as universal (e.g., compassion, kindness, reverence for life, respect for others and contrary views?)
- How do you think that individuals should handle conflicts between their own morals and the laws they live under?
- When religious “laws” and civil laws conflict, how should society respond?

- Did any of the quotes resonate with you, or catch you up short?

SESSION FEEDBACK AND FUTURE PLANS

5 min

- How did the session go for you?
- Do we need to make any format changes to make these sessions more useful to you?
- Should we revisit / modify / or build a new covenant?

SONG: HEALING HAND (WRITTEN BY MARC BLATTE, PERFORMED BY DISTANT THUNDER)

<<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bUj6Dzd-0jQ>>

EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS

5 min

This is my simple religion. There is no need for temples; no need for complicated philosophy. Our own brain, our own heart is our temple; the philosophy is kindness. Dalai Lama XIV