

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website  
Session Plan

**Our Spiritual Connection With Animals**

Starr King Unitarian Universalist Church, Hayward, CA, Kathryn LaMar, 23 March 2022

**CHALICE LIGHTING / OPENING WORDS**

**1 min**

In everything you recognize yourself again. Wherever you see life—that is you! What is this recognition, this knowledge apprehended by the most learned and the most childlike alike? It is reverence for life, reverence for the impenetrable mystery that meets us in our universe, an existence different from ourselves in external appearance, yet inwardly of the same character with us, terribly similar, awesomely related. Reverence before the infinity of life means the removal of the strangeness, the restoration of shared experiences and of compassion and sympathy.

*Albert Schweitzer*

**COMMUNITY SINGING: WE CELEBRATE THE WEB OF LIFE 3 min**

**(No. 175 in Grey Hymnal)**

**SILENT MEDITATION / CENTERING**

**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 this session. 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. When you finish, choose who goes next.

**INTRODUCTION:**

**10 min**

The following information is from the Unitarian Universalist Animal Ministry (UUAM)'s Reverence for Life Program Manual.

Western attitudes about non-human animals evolved primarily from profoundly human-centered Jewish and Christian sources. Organizers within these traditions often base their work on Biblical ideas of dominion and stewardship. Stewardship and dominion imply a hierarchy in which God has placed humans above other animals: we are to treat them well as we go about using them for our own purposes.

Today, many mainline Christians are reexamining their responsibility to other creatures as well as “stewardship” and “dominion”. Several of Mohammed’s teachings about food acquisition speak to compassion for animals in his own context, and both the Qur’an and Hadith describe animals as members of the community and the family of Allah.

Most Eastern religions explicitly recognize and honor animals’ inherent worth. Hinduism describes a kinship among all forms of life and calls humans to accept moral responsibility for that relationship. Jains refrain from killing any living being. Both Hindu and Buddhist traditions promote ahimsa, the

avoidance of violence toward any sentient life form. Earth-based spiritualities encourage adherents to seek harmony with all life.

Today, many people find that their work for peace and justice leads them directly to work for nonviolence and compassion for all beings.

**QUOTES TO PONDER**

**10 min**

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.

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*

Animals are such agreeable friends—they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms.

*George Eliot*

Animals are living souls. They are not things. They are not objects. Neither are they human. Yet they mourn. They love. They dance. They suffer. They know the peaks and chasms of being ... In a wonderful and inexpressible way, therefore, God is present in all creatures.

*Rev. Gary Kowalski*

I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals.

*Sir Winston Churchill*

I think dogs are the most amazing creatures; they give unconditional love. For me they are the role model for being alive.

*Gilda Radner*

If a dog will not come to you after having looked you in the face, you should go home and examine your conscience.

*Woodrow Wilson*

Kindness and compassion towards all living beings is a mark of a civilized society. Racism, economic deprivation, dog fighting and cock fighting, bullfighting and rodeos are all cut from the same defective fabric: violence. Only when we have become nonviolent towards all life will we have learned to live well ourselves.

*Cesar Chavez*

The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated..

If you have men who will exclude any of God's creatures from the shelter of compassion and pity, you will have men who will deal likewise with their fellow men.

*Francis of Assisi*

If reason and morality are what set humans apart from animals, then reason and morality must always guide us in how we treat them.

*Matthew Scully*

He who is cruel to animals becomes hard also in his dealings with men. We can judge the heart of a man by his treatment of animals.

*Immanuel Kant*

When we truly learn to suffer with other creatures and accept our intimate connection with all beings we will begin to end exploitation, violence, war, racism, hatred, and oppression. The ethical treatment of animals is a natural and inevitable part of acting from a place of compassion.

Any society which does not insist upon respect for all life must necessarily decay.

*Albert Einstein*

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*

**PREPARATION FOR GROUP REFLECTION**

**1 min**

Read the Group Reflection questions, one by one.

**BREAK**

**10 min**

**CONCOMITANT WITH:**

**SONG: THE LAST OF THE GREAT WHALES**

**4 min**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bNp5dc0v-3c>

and

**SONG: AS AF HE KNOWS**

**5 min**

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=F61WpHx0eao>

**GROUP REFLECTION / FEEDBACK**

**40 min**

Two rounds, or respectfully discuss each participant's ideas AFTER they have finished. Take a moment of silence and consider your response to one or more of these questions. When you're finished with your own input, choose who will go next.

**QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION ON OUR SPIRITUAL CONNECTIONS WITH ANIMALS**

- 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?
- ☺ In what ways have animals added to and enhanced your life and relationships? In what ways have they not done so?
- ☺ Describe relationships you have had with animals of other species, including those who share your home and those outside your immediate world.
- ☺ Are there things you do or do not do regarding animals for ethical reasons? Tell us about them, and share your ethical understandings.
- ☺ Have you ever had 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?

**COMMUNITY SINGING: OPEN THE WINDOW** 3 min  
(No. 1022 in Teal Hymnal)

**FUTURE PLANS**

Suggestions for topics to be reflected upon at our fourth-Wednesday meetings?

Plans for second-Wednesday meal sharing and discussions—Restaurants, discussion topics.

**SESSION FEEDBACK**

What changes would you have made to the session to make it more meaningful for you?

Is it time to revisit our covenant?

**EXTINGUISH CHALICE / CLOSING WORDS** 1 min

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.

*Yojht Veda, xxxvi, 18*