

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
Our Beliefs and How We Came to Them
First Parish Church of Stow and Acton, MA. September 2023

Opening Words and Chalice Lighting

The chalice lit among us is a beacon

A beacon of hope, in a world in crisis

A beacon of possibility, made manifest in community

A beacon of warmth through our interconnections

A beacon of light illuminating our shared wisdom

A beacon of connection by our being together - *Debra Faulk*

Check-in/Sharing: This is the time to mention any issues or events on your mind that you would like to share. Review step up/step back and Community Service.

Topic: Our Beliefs and How We Came to Them

Goddesses, Demons, Djinn, Angels, Aliens, Heaven, Reincarnation, Predestination, Nirvana, Evolution, Marxism, Free Markets, Climate Change, Psychics, QAnon, Racial Purity, Individualism, Justice, Nationalism, Democracy, Monarchy, Equality, the Web of Life, Love - each is an essential truth to billions - and simultaneously a false delusion to an equally large population.

While we have confidence in our own beliefs, some examined, others taken on faith, it's often too easy to see others' beliefs as ridiculous, irrational or even evil. These differences can lead to a spat among friends or to a war killing millions.

As our beliefs guide our decisions and thus determine our actions, the totality of our beliefs direct our lived experience. Presumably the closer our beliefs match reality, the wiser will be the choices we use to weave the fabric of our lives. It has been said all beliefs are wrong, only that some are less so.

The universe vastly exceeds our ability to comprehend. The best we can do is inhabit a model our minds have constructed. Each of us lives in our own unique ever changing world shaped from experiences, memories and thoughts. And yet for every one of our beliefs there is someone holding an opposite view. How do we know what to trust, and what biases prejudice our conclusions?

Modernity has enveloped us all in its constant change; overwhelmingly rapid, disorienting and anxiety provoking. To navigate a future increasingly unknowable and uncertain, many seek to be grounded in the timeless truths and absolutes that dogma promises. Others surrender to a relativism where knowledge, truth and morality cannot be known. Between certainty and nihilism most of us seek a nuanced path with elements of trust and skepticism.

From our very first moments and throughout our lives our beliefs are constructed from a mix of perception, memory, testimony and reason. Perceived authorities, whether parent, peer, professor, president or pope seed many of these beliefs. But in the end our beliefs are the one aspect of our identity that we have total control over.

“Faith is not belief without proof, but trust without reservation.” - D. Elton Trueblood

“All money is a matter of belief.” - *Adam Smith*

“One life is all we have and we live it as we believe in living it. But to sacrifice what you are and to live without belief, that is a fate more terrible than dying.” - Joan of Arc

“The word 'belief' is a difficult thing for me. I don't believe. I must have a reason for a certain hypothesis. Either I know a thing, and then I know it - I don't need to believe it.” - *Carl Jung*

“We go wrong when we don't admit the unknowable complexity of reality, but we go dangerously wrong when we claim that one pale story—or an anthology of them—is truth.” - *Dean Koontz*

Possible Questions for Discussion:

- Which of your major beliefs were self-determined and which were received from others? Could you share any examples of how you came to a particular belief?
- What sort of things do you take on faith?
- Have there been events that have led you to reexamine or reject key beliefs?
- Are you selective with whom you share your beliefs?
- How do you respond to those whose beliefs are antithetical to you?
- How do you respond when your beliefs are challenged by others?

(Group will take a few minutes to consider topic and questions and then share).

Wrapping Up: How did you like this topic and session?

Closing Words “Faith is much better than belief. Belief is when someone else does the thinking.” - *R. Buckminster Fuller*