

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website

Session Plan

Pets and Animals

Unitarian Universalist Fellowship of Raleigh, NC, November 29, 2016 – Chris Abbate

Chalice Lighting & Opening Thought:

On a summer morning
I sat down
on a hillside
to think about God –

a worthy pastime.
Near me, I saw
a single cricket;
it was moving the grains of the hillside

this way and that way.
How great was its energy,
how humble its effort.
Let us hope

it will always be like this,
each of us going on
in our inexplicable ways
building the universe.

~ *Song of the Builders* by Mary Oliver

Check In: Talk about one thing you have learned or a significant feeling or thought you have had since our last meeting.

Exercise

Write some words or phrases to describe a pet that you loved, or a pet or animal that you have some contact with or that you admire. If you brought a picture of a pet or animal, briefly describe what you love/d about her/him.

Topic: Pets and Animals

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." ~ Elizabeth Roberts and Elias Amidon, *Earth Prayers*

"Animals are such agreeable friends—they ask no questions, they pass no criticisms." ~ George Eliot

"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

"Animals don't lie. Animals don't criticize. If animals have moody days, they handle them better than humans do." ~ Betty White

“The greatness of a nation and its moral progress can be judged by the way its animals are treated.” ~ Mahatma Gandhi

“Some people talk to animals. Not many listen though. That's the problem.” ~ A.A. Milne, Winnie-the-Pooh

“I ask people why they have deer heads on their walls. They always say because it's such a beautiful animal. There you go. I think my mother is attractive, but I have photographs of her.” ~ Ellen DeGeneres

“Four legs good, two legs bad.” ~ George Orwell, Animal Farm

“If slaughterhouses had glass walls, the whole world would be vegetarian.” ~ Linda McCartney

“animals never worry about Heaven or Hell. neither do I. maybe that's why we get along” ~ Charles Bukowski, *The Last Night of the Earth Poems*

Questions for Discussion:

Our relationship with animals has many dimensions: emotional, ethical, social, spiritual, scientific. We love animals, we live with them, we use them, we work together, we play together, we eat them, we find sport in them, we protect them, they protect us, we learn from them, we mourn their deaths. In this "web of all existence, of which we are a part," what part do animals play for you?

If you could be an animal, what would you be? Is there a particular animal that you identify with or resemble?

Share some stories of experiences you have had with animals: positive, negative, funny or sad.

In what ways have animals added to and enhanced your life and relationships?

The way we interact and care for animals reflects our deepest nature. What does caring for a pet or animal teach us about ourselves, about how we should treat others and the world around us?

What is our role as humans to care for or respect, not just pets, but animals in general?

Are there things you do or do not do regarding animals for ethical reasons? If you eat meat, do you feel conflicted at all about killing animals for food?

What does losing a pet teach us about life and death? What is unique about the pain of losing a pet? How is it different from losing a family member or friend?

Closing Thought:

Apprehend God in all things, for God is in all things.

Every single creature is full of God and is a book about God.

Every creature is a word of God.

If I spent enough time with the tiniest creature – even a caterpillar –

I would never have to prepare a sermon. So full of God is every creature.

~ Meister Eckhart