

Unitarian Universalist Small Group Ministry Network Website
SMALL GROUP MINISTRY
Truths We Can't Prove
Main Line Unitarian Church, Devon, PA, Rev. Dr. Stephan Papa, March 2005

Opening Words & Chalice Lighting: From Goethe

“Then only are we really thinking when the subject on which we are thinking cannot be thought out.”

Reflection/Personal Sharing/Prayer (approximately 30 minutes)

(The facilitator should briefly remind the group of confidentiality/anonymity, that this is not the time for cross conversation, etc.)

Focus Readings: From *The New York Times*, Tuesday, January 4, 2005, p. F3.

Answers from scientists, futurists, and other creative thinkers to the question: “What do you believe is true even though you cannot prove it?”

“Irrational choices. I do not believe that people are capable of rational thought when it comes to making decisions in their own lives. People believe they are behaving rationally and have thought things out, of course, but when major decisions are made—who to marry, where to live, what career to pursue, what college to attend, people’s minds simply cannot cope with the complexity. When they try to rationally analyze potential options, their unconscious, emotional thoughts take over and make the choice for them.”

~ Roger Schank, psychologist and computer scientist.

“I believe, but I cannot prove, that all life, all intelligence, all creativity and all ‘design’ anywhere in the universe, is the direct or indirect product of Darwinian natural selection.”

~ Richard Dawkins, evolutionary biologist, Oxford University.

“For me, this is an easy question. I believe that animals have feelings and other states of consciousness, but neither I nor anyone else has been able to prove it. We can’t even prove that other people are conscious, much less other animals.”

~ Joseph LeDoux, neuroscientist, New York University

“I believe but cannot prove, that babies and young children are actually more conscious, more vividly aware of their external world and internal life, than adults are. I believe this because there is strong evidence for a functional trade-off with development.”

~ Alison Gopnik, psychologist, University of California, Berkeley.

“True love.... True love takes its own course through uncharted territory. It knows no fences, has no barriers or boundaries. It’s difficult to define, eludes modern measurement and seems scientifically woolly. But I know true love exists. I just can’t prove it.”
~ David Buss, psychologist, University of Texas

Focus Questions:

“What...[have you experienced as] true even though you cannot prove it?”

What experiences in life have special meaning and value to you, but are not provable?

How have experiences shown you something is true?

How do you react to supposed “truths” that you don’t believe?

What would you like to believe, but can’t get yourself to?

How open are you to new “truths?”

Checkout/Likes and Wishes

(This is the time for facilitators to ask participants what they liked about this meeting and what they might wish for future meetings. This is also the time for any discussion of logistics.)

Closing Words & Extinguishing Chalice: From Sir Isaac Newton

“I do not know what I may appear to the world; but to myself I seem to have been only like a little boy playing on the seashore, and diverting myself in now and then finding a smoother pebble or a prettier shell than ordinary, whilst the great ocean of truth lay all undiscovered about me.”