

Laughter

UU Fellowship, Vero Beach, FL, August 2015

Chalice Lighting

May we know once again that we are not isolated beings,
but connected, in mystery and miracle,
to the universe, to this community and to each other.

Check-in: How is your spirit right now?

Opening Reading

“Laughter is man’s most distinctive emotional expression. Man shares his capacity for love and hate, anger and fear, loyalty and grief with other living creatures. But humor, which has an intellectual as well as emotional element, belongs to man.” (Margaret Mead)

Topic Exploration

Laughter is an affirmation of our humanness, a face-saving way to express our anxieties, fears, and other hidden emotions. It breaks the ice, builds trust, and draws us together into a common state of well-being. Laughter is called "inner jogging." A robust laugh gives the muscles of the face, shoulders, diaphragm and abdomen a good workout, and sometimes even the arms and legs. Heart rate and blood pressure temporarily rise, breathing becomes faster and deeper, and oxygen surges throughout the bloodstream. We become alive! (Youth service on UU Humor, Sangerville, ME, February 15, 2004)

Questions / Sharing

1. Describe how and about what you and your friends or family are likely to laugh.
2. What has made you smile or laugh in the last 24 hours?

Other Side of the Coin

While humor and laughter are known to have healing effects, humor gone awry can be dangerous, demoralizing, and dehumanizing.

3. Share a time when you were hurt by humor, yours or another's.
4. How do you find yourself using self-deprecating humor?
5. Why do people laugh at humor used to belittle another person, as in a “roast”? Do you use such humor in talking about others?
6. How do you deal with individuals that appear to have no sense of humor?
7. What can we do to increase our sensitivity to the ways in which our humor or laughter might be hurtful to others?

Laughter’s Role in Evolution

Before our ancestors were talking or even thinking in human terms, they were probably laughing, says David Wilson Sloan, distinguished professor of biology and anthropology at Binghamton University. When it is appropriate, laughter puts everyone in a merry mood. Wilson suggests that, in a primitive life of scarcity and fear, laughter might have evolved as a signal for identifying periods of safety and satiety. “Fear and hunger are toxic to human development,

while laughter is the elixir that makes it possible, for our distant ancestors no less than ourselves,” Wilson says.

8. What do you think of this author’s theory about the evolutionary importance of laughter?

Humor and Religion

Mark Twain: “The secret source of humor is not joy, but sorrow; there is no humor in heaven.”

The Koran: “He deserves Paradise who makes his companions laugh.”

9. What do these two quotes say about our attitudes towards religion?

10. What part does humor play in your religious identify?

11. Share a joke or story that you enjoy and that you believe is funny.

Closing Readings

"As we welcome you to our Denomination, it is only fair to tell you what we are.

We are friendly. If you are not friendly, out you go!

We believe in tolerance and cannot stand intolerant people.

We are more non-competitive than other groups.

Freedom of belief is rigidly enforced.

Dogmatism is absolutely forbidden.

We aren't sure how ambivalent we should be.\

We are optimists. Anyone who doesn't look on the bright side depresses us.

We believe in equality; everyone is as good as the next person and a whole lot better.

Every Unitarian is a feminist, so he has to watch his language.

Our organization is run democratically because the president insists on it.

We are prompt about being late to meetings.

And to our wonderful faith we joyfully welcome you!"

(excerpted from a covenant session plan prepared by Bette Low, a member of Unitarian
Universalist Society of Fairhaven MA)

"Comedy is based on truth. You take the truth and put a little curlicue on the end," Sid Ceasar

Extinguish the Chalice

We extinguish this flame but not the light of truth,
the warmth of community, or the fire of commitment.
These we carry in our hearts until we are together again.