

Things called god

(Continued from page 1) **Rabbit**

to walk and run against and all this lovely grass to eat." The rabbit thanked the horse, and hopped further onward. A little while later, it came to a slow-running stream, and peaking over the bank, the rabbit saw a fish. The rabbit dipped its mouth into the water to ask "Friend fish, what can you tell me about the thing called 'god'?" Then the rabbit raised its head back up and put one ear into the water to listen for the answer.

The fish replied, "God is water I swim in: it surrounds me all the time, and gives me something to breathe and move through. It's something that everyone needs to live." The rabbit thanked the fish, bounded off again, and very soon after almost ran right into a tree. Craning its head upwards to look towards the very topmost branches, the rabbit asked, "Friend tree, what can you tell me about the thing called 'god'?"

The tree answered slowly, but without hesitating, "God is the sun that feeds me and all of my neighbors and family; I spend all of my days reaching upwards



towards it, and encouraging the shorter trees to do the same."

The rabbit

thanked the tree, and, seeing that it was getting late in the day, set off to go back home for the night. As the rabbit was approaching its den, its neighbor, the squirrel, called out from nearby, "Friend rabbit, after your day of asking the same question over and over, what can you tell me about the thing called 'god'?"

The rabbit thought for a very long time, and then said, "I can tell you that the butterfly cares deeply for the flowers, the horse wants everyone to have open fields to roam on, the fish knows everyone needs water to live, and the tree hopes its children will grow as tall as it has grown." And then the rabbit went down into its burrow, and slept for the night.

Source: <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/story/183482.shtml>

Speaking of God

When I Say God

Rev. John Haynes Holmes, (1879-1964)

But when I say "God," it is poetry and not theology. Nothing that any theologian ever wrote about God has helped me much, but everything that the poets have written about flowers, and birds, and skies, and seas, and the saviors of the race and God—whoever he [or she or it] may be—has at one time or another reached my soul! More and more, as I grow older, I live in the lovely thought of these seers and prophets. The theologians gather dust upon the shelves of my library, but the poets are stained with my fingers and blotted with my tears. I never seem so near truth as when I care not what I think or believe, but only that these masters of inner vision would live forever.

Source: *The Beacon Song and Service Book*, Boston, MA, 1935.

Self-Portrait

David Whyte

It doesn't interest me if there is one God / or many gods.

I want to know if you belong or feel abandoned.

If you know despair or can see it in others.

I want to know

if you are prepared to live in the world / with its harsh need

to change you. If you can look back with firm eyes

saying this is where I stand. I want to know / if you know

how to melt into that fierce heat of living / falling toward

the center of your longing. I want to know/ if you are willing

to live, day by day, with the consequence of love

and the bitter

unwanted passion of your sure defeat.

I have been told, in that fierce embrace, even the

gods speak of God.

Source: *Fire in the Earth*, Many Rivers Press, 1992

One True Light

Seven Paths to God

Rev. Dr. Forrest Church



...I affirm the Universalist belief that the One True Light, call it what you may, shines through many different windows. The

paths to salvation and enlightenment [and God] are many and various. Here, to me, are seven of the most familiar....

The Child: Rarest of the types, the Child views all creation as enchanted. ... The Child can find good, and therefore God, almost anywhere. Jesus said that we have to become like little children to enter the Kingdom of Heaven. He meant that many so-called adult qualities—skepticism, cynicism, world-weariness, and the like—can blind us to the heaven that is in a mustard seed, present only to the most open and least jaundiced eye.

...**The Lover:** The Lover's path to God is through the human heart. When Jesus tells the story of the Good Samaritan or answers his disciples' questions concerning how to get to heaven by suggesting that they "feed the hungry, clothe the naked, heal the sick, and visit those in prison," he shines his light down the Lover's path.

...The Lover almost always finds forgiveness (which is next to godliness) to be a natural act, one that leads to self-acceptance's deepest level, "peace with God."

The Champion: ...When the Champion serves, and therefore seeks, God, it is by pursuing justice. The Hebrew prophets were Champions, advocating the rights of the poor not as individuals but as a class. ...Champions ...temper their natural passion for justice with an appreciation for mercy....

The Servant: The Servant follows the most traditional path to God, relying on the authority of scripture, following the teachings of religious authorities, and joining together with others in religious fellowship.

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Readings from the Common Bowl

Day 1: "Silence is the language of god, all else is poor translation." Rumi



Day 2: "There are people in the world so hungry, that God cannot appear to them except in the form of bread." Mahatma Gandhi

Day 3: "i thank you God for most this amazing/ day: for the leaping greenly spirits of trees/ and for a blue dream of sky; and for everything/ which is natural which is infinite which is yes." ee cummings

Day 4: "We are all atheists about most of the gods that humanity has ever believed in. Some of us just go one god further." Richard Dawkins

Day 5: "The function of prayer is not to influence God, but rather to change the nature of the one who prays." Søren Kierkegaard

Day 6: "To you, I'm an atheist. To God, I'm the loyal opposition." Woody Allen

Day 7: "But I don't want comfort. I want God, I want poetry, I want real danger, I want freedom, I want goodness. I want sin." Aldous Huxley

Day 8: "I believe in God, but not as one thing, not as an old man in the sky. I believe that what people call God is something in all of us. I believe that what Jesus and Mohammed and Buddha and all the rest said was right. It's just that the translations have gone wrong." John Lennon

Day 9: "I talk to God but the sky is empty." Sylvia Plath

Day 10: "You can safely assume you've created God in your own image when it turns out that God hates all the same people you do." Anne Lamott

Day 11: "There is a rumor going around that I have found God. I think this is unlikely because I have enough difficulty finding my keys, and there is empirical evidence that they exist." Terry Pratchett

Day 12: "God gave us memory so that we might have roses in December." J.M. Barrie

Day 13: "If I should ever die, God forbid, let this be my epitaph: The only proof he

needed for the existence of God was music." Kurt Vonnegut

Day 14: "Whether or not you believe in God, you must believe this: when we as a species abandon our trust in a power greater than us, we abandon our sense of accountability. Faiths... all faiths... are admonitions that there is something we cannot understand, something to which we are accountable." Dan Brown

Day 15: "The feeling remains that God is on the journey, too." Teresa of Avila

Day 16: "Owners of dogs will have noticed that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they will think you are god. Whereas owners of cats are compelled to realize that, if you provide them with food and water and shelter and affection, they draw the conclusion that *they* are gods." Christopher Hitchens

Day 17: "I think God, in creating man, somewhat overestimated his ability." Oscar Wilde

Day 18: "Good luck explaining to God that you used to spank one of his heavenly beings." Mom gave a startled laugh. "Sophie!" "What? You did. I hope you like hot weather, Mom, that's all I'm saying." Rachel Hawkins

Day 19: "God, to me, it seems, is a verb, not a noun, proper or improper." Richard Buckminster Fuller

Day 20: "A baby is God's opinion that the world should go on." Carl Sandburg

Day 21: "There are all sorts of experiences we can't really put a name

to.... The birth of a child, for one. Or the death of a parent. Falling in love. Words are like nets—we hope they'll cover what we mean, but we know they can't possibly hold that much joy, grief, or wonder. Finding God is like that, too. If it's happened to you, you know what it feels like. But try to describe it to someone else—and language only takes you so far." Jodi Picoult

Day 22: "Live a good life. If there are gods and they are just, then they will not care how devout you have been, but will welcome you based on the virtues you have lived by. If there are gods, but unjust, then you should not want to worship them. If there are no gods, then you will be gone, but will have lived a noble life that will live on in the memories of your loved ones." Marcus Aurelius

Day 23: "I cannot believe in a God who wants to be praised all the time." Friedrich Nietzsche

Day 24: "I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don't notice it. People think pleasing God is all God cares about. But any fool living in the world can see it always trying to please us back." Alice Walker

Day 25: "If there were no God, it would have been necessary to invent him." Voltaire

Day 26: "But I always think that the best way to know God is to love many things." Vincent van Gogh

Day 27: "I don't know if God exists, but it would be better for His reputation if He didn't." Jules Renard

Day 28: "Some would deny any legitimate use of the word God because it has been misused so much.

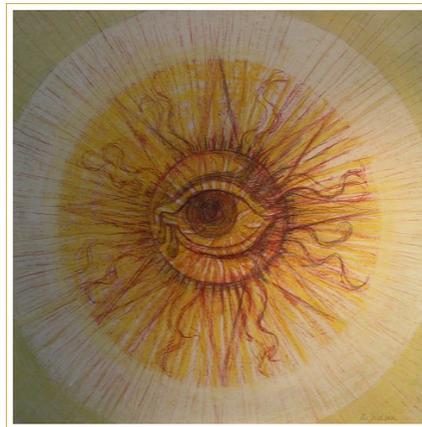
Certainly, it is the most burdened of all human words. Precisely for that reason it is the most imperishable and unavoidable." Martin Buber

Day 29: "The eye through which I see God is the same eye through which God sees me; my eye and God's eye are one eye,

one seeing, one knowing, one love." Meister Eckhart

Day 30: "I believe in God, only I spell it Nature." Frank Lloyd Wright

Day 31: "The place God calls you to is the place where your deep gladness and the world's deep hunger meet." Frederick Buechner





Faith and Theology

proof, the cosmological proof, and the teleological proof. The ontological proof was advanced by Anselm, the 11th century

of meaning, purpose, and value. None of these elements can be put under a microscope. Instead, we ask what ideas we need to have about the world in order to interpret our experience and account for its meaning to us."

Wrestling with God

Wrestling with God is never easy, and whatever the outcome of the match, we are likely to be changed. This was certainly the case with Jacob, son of Isaac and brother of Esau. Jacob wrestled all night long with an angel. In the course of that struggle, he was wounded when a blow from his opponent dislocated his hip. Undaunted by this injury, Jacob refused to stop until God granted him a blessing. In giving that blessing the angel said, "Your name shall no longer be Jacob but Israel because you have striven with God and with mortals and you have prevailed." In response, Jacob called the place where they had wrestled *Peni-El* (God's face) because, he said, "I have seen God face to face yet my life is spared."

Throughout the history of humanity, people have wrestled with God and with the idea of God. This is a central point of Karen Armstrong's book, *A History of God*. In the course of this struggle the understanding of God has continually changed and people have been changed by the struggle. Depending on the nature of the struggle, people have found their faith, deepened it, or had it called into question. God has become for some their ultimate concern, while for others the idea of God has become irrelevant. The latter often speak, as Jean-Paul Sartre did, of a "God-shaped hole" in their consciousness where God had once been. What to do with this hole is a challenge in our time for, indeed, we will fill it with something.

The Rev. Dr. Galen Guengerich, Senior Minister of All Souls Unitarian Church in New York City, has been involved in a wrestling match. The result was his book, *God Revised: How Religion Must Evolve in a Scientific Age*. In the fourth chapter he asks, *What's Divine?* and offers his answer to the meaning of the experience of God.

In considering the quest to find a satisfying concept of God, Guengerich recounts the three classic proofs for the existence of God: the ontological

proof, the cosmological proof, and the teleological proof. The ontological proof was advanced by Anselm, the 11th century archbishop of Canterbury. It was based entirely on logic. By defining God as a being of "which nothing greater can be conceived," Anselm concluded that if such an idea exists in the mind, it must also exist in reality.

The cosmological proof answers the question, "Who or what caused the universe to come into being?" Thomas Aquinas, the 13th century theologian, took Aristotle's concept of a "prime mover" or "unmoved mover" and Plato's idea of a "first cause" and identified them as God.

The third proof for the existence God, the teleological proof, is an argument grounded in design or purpose, in which God is posited as the intelligent designer.

In each case the proof leads to a God who is supernatural. Guengerich writes, "If you accept the conclusion that God isn't supernatural, as I do, then you have to ask whether a conception of God remains at all necessary in our attempt to interpret every aspect of our experience." Guengerich concludes that "God is not supernatural, and yet belief in God is necessary."

The 19th century German theologian, Friedrich Schleiermacher, concluded "religion is first and foremost an experience." Thus, Guengerich writes, "When people ask me whether I believe God exists, my answer is yes. I believe God exists in a way similar to the way beauty exists, but not in the way a person or an apple exists. An apple is a physical object that can be weighed and measured. ... While different in many other respects, beauty and God are both qualities of our experience. In this sense, the description of our experience of God is a theological task. Rather than trying to describe the physical world and explain its workings, as scientists do, theologians try to interpret human experience and account for its meaning. The periodic table of theological elements is laid out in terms

Connecting God to experience, Guengerich writes, "We have a word for the totality of the physical world; the word is universe. We also need a word for the unification of all the experiences in the universe; that word is God." He continues, "When I say I believe in God, I'm saying that I believe in an experience that transcends myself in this place and this moment. I believe in an experience that intimately and extensively connects me to all that is—all that is present, as well as all that is past, and all that is possible."

God is not supernatural. In fact, as Guengerich writes, "The only way God plays an active role in time is through us.

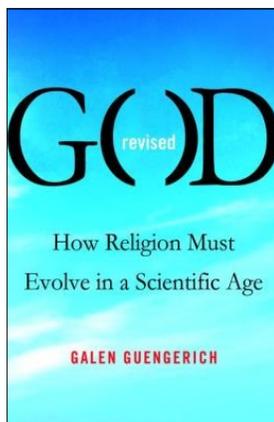
Consciousness and choice enter the divine picture through us—through our consciousness and our choices."

He continues, "To say that we are the presence of God in this world is not a metaphor. We are the face of God in this world, and God's voice and hands. God changes outcomes in this world only as we change them. God is not an independent agent, in

other words. God is dependent upon us. The active agency of the divine life emerges through our choices and actions."

Guengerich concludes, "This understanding of God is hard to accept—but not because it requires us to believe something miraculous about God. Rather, it requires us to believe something astounding about ourselves: that we are the divine in human form. As such, we bear the burden of the past and offer the optimism of the possible. Only we can extend the arms of refuge and sound the voice of hope. The God of all that is past and all that is possible—our source and destiny—is a God we can believe in." And a God with whom we will continue to wrestle.

Source: Touchstones



Talking with Children About God

Gabrielle Ricketts

In *When Children Ask About God*, Rabbi Harold S. Kushner writes, “We must speak to our children of God because if we don’t ... our children are liable to fall into one of two undesirable patterns. They may accept some of the simple-minded notions about God which are current in much of our society, notions which I consider inaccurate, intellectually compromising, and psychologically harmful simply to fill a vacuum. Or else, if they have the good sense and sensitivity to reject them, they may reject belief in God entirely and commit themselves to a life in which some of the most precious and valuable aspects of human existence are missing.”

... The language commonly used in our culture to talk about God, in combination with a child’s natural tendency to think in concrete terms, leads children to conceive God in human terms—just like us only more so. Some ways to counter their tendencies are: Speak less of what God is and more of how God or the divine is manifest in our lives. Cultivate the habit of pointing out the qualities we encounter in our daily living as experiences of God, qualities of compassion, generosity, integrity, beauty. Rather than saying “God is good, God is forgiving.” Learn to say “goodness is godly, forgiveness is godly.”

Rather than speaking of who or where God is, talk of when God is. This leads to focusing on feelings and on the experience of God within others, and ourselves, rather than apart from our human experience.

...When we can learn to say, “I don’t know; that is a question even grown-ups wonder about.” Let’s talk about it now, and let’s continue to talk about it as we both get older and smarter; then religious education becomes a shared search rather than the transferring of information from a full brain to an empty one. (Based on Rabbi Harold S. Kushner’s *When Children Ask About God*)

Source: All Souls Parent Resource Network

The Journey of Discovery

Michelle Richards

God has meant many different things to different cultures and people through history.

...Even if you have come to conclusions about God that are meaningful for yourself, you can teach your children questions about the nature of the divine have not been answered to the satisfaction of a great many free thinkers. You can explain that most people’s conceptions of the divine evolves as their faith development unfolds, and that there is much for us as we grow and learn more about the world.

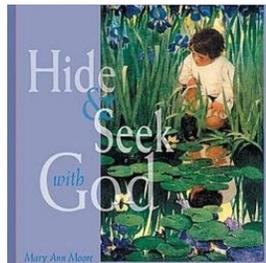
...By exposing our children to many different ideas about God from various religious traditions, and by communicating our own views about God (past and current), we can offer our children new possibilities that can help them grow spiritually.

Source: *Tending the Flame: The Art of Unitarian Universalist Parenting* by Michelle Richards

Family Activity:

Hide & Seek with God

Download the story *Hide & Seek with God* by Mary Ann Moore at <https://www.uua.org/worship/words/read-ing/5953.shtml>



Read the story to your children, then name, take a walk, a drive, a hike or a moment, and make a game of finding the divine. Travel in silence for a while, breath in peace. Let go of the past, put off the future, and be present. Use your five senses to see, hear, feel, taste and smell. Be light. Look for the divine. After a time share what you have discovered. Continue the game this month: Share experiences of wonder and awe, transcendent encounters with people, the moment which make you smile inside, the full silent darkness of utter peace, the joyous sound of your soul singing.

Source: All Souls Parent Resource Network

Does God Exist?

Rev. Dr. Rebecca Ann Parker

Thoughtful people of many faiths hold that if there is a God, God must be worthy of our devotion—not an enemy of what is good in us and not the divine authorizer for acts of injustice, terror, and oppression. The nineteenth-century Unitarian Theodore Parker put it well: the goodness of God is manifest in that God has given humanity the power to judge God.

...How people speak of God has profound public significance. To justify their actions, those who want to maintain that “America” is God’s chosen nation and has the right to destroy evildoers with God’s blessing need the old image of God as a sovereign, all-powerful father and warrior. Those who struggle for room to breathe, for freedom from oppression, for dignity and the right to exist, for wholeness and integrity, and for an end to war, welcome the death of this God.

Protest against unworthy images of God is a deeply religious act.

...“Does God exist?” ...It is a question borne in the suffering souls of human beings, and its meaning is a cry for hope: Is there any help for pain? Is there anything that will spring green from this bitter winter, with its dirty ice and slush? Is there any hope for the disempowered and silenced? The abandoned? And when everything human fails, and nothing that is within the power of human beings to do can be done, what then? *Does God exist?* Is there a source of healing and transformation that will bring about justice in heaven or on earth?

...Whitehead calls God “the fellow sufferer who understands,” “the poet of the world,” and the lure toward peace. Does this God exist? My intuition says yes. Yours may say no. However, the question is answered, it is provisional. ...Meanwhile, God invites us to open the door and cross the threshold into mystery.

Source: *A House for Hope: The Promise of Progressive Religion for the Twenty-First Century* by Parker and Buehrens

(Continued from page 1) **Intro to Theme**

Armstrong observes, in conveying some of Tillich's sentiments, "A God who kept tinkering with the universe was absurd; a God who interfered with human freedom and creativity was tyrant. ...An omnipotent, all-knowing tyrant is not so different from earthly dictators who make everything and everybody mere cogs in the machine which they controlled. An atheism that rejects such a God is amply justified." Karen Armstrong concludes her book, *The History of God*, noting that, "The idols of fundamentalism are not good substitutes for God."

Instead of the word "God," Tillich would have us consider the "ground of our being," the place where we stand, the relationships that connect us, the commitments that we hold, the loyalties that we honor, and the values that inform our actions. Tillich would also have us consider our ultimate concern, what we live for, and what, if necessary, we would die for. When we know where we stand and why, as well as what ultimately concerns us, our life takes on ever greater significance. We say "Yes" to life. Dag Hammarskjöld wrote in his wonderful book, *Markings*, "But at some moment I did answer 'Yes' to someone—or something—and from that hour I was certain that existence was meaningful..." Unitarian Universalist minister Gordon McKeeman knows about the power of such a "Yes." He writes, "Yes to life—more and more of life—To its brevity, its grief, its disappointments. To its possibilities, its magnificence, its glory. ...It is to remember death, and to love life and to accept them both as holy."

We are faced with a choice of no-God or gaining some clarity beyond traditional notions of God. In this constructive work, we might do well to address our wondering "To Whom It May Concern." For those who choose theism as their faith stance, the constructive work of articulating one's ground of being and ultimate concern is essential.

Unitarian Universalist minister Richard Gilbert writes, "I am increasingly taken by the idea that in our time the theological issue is not the existence or non-existence of God—as if that could be

proved or disproved. It is, rather, our capacity to experience the divinity in which we daily walk." He is not talking about theological proofs or even belief. The focus is experience. What is your experience of being alive and how does this inform your sense of God or no-God?

In our tradition, we are diverse in our beliefs. Many affirm atheism, while others are agnostic. Still others use the word God, but you would only understand what they mean by that word by asking them. Their understanding of what God or Goddess is or may be is as varied as the stars in the nighttime sky. And some



use other words to name for them what is most precious and profound.

Unitarian Universalist minister Forrest Church wrote, "God is not God's name, but our name for that which concerns us ultimately, which we worship and live for and trust. God therefore can be big or small. A big God enhances us; small ones do not. Someone once said that when we don't believe in God, it's not so much that we believe in nothing, but that we may end up believing in anything. In this respect, our popular gods have become very small indeed."

The genius of Unitarian Universalism is that belief in God and belief in no-God abide together: each valued, each respected, each necessary. We hold the beliefs that we do so that we might live life as well as possible, not to have them judged by others as either worthy or wanting. Belief is secondary to character, and character is secondary to the way we act in the world. Beyond God or no-God is the kindness, compassion, and generosity that we bring daily to our lives and to the world.

God is...

Rev. Richard Gilbert

God is...

A three letter word,
Partner in profanity,
Companion of the sublime,
The deepest down
darkness in me,
The rainbow wrapped
around my shoulder,
The mystery beyond all knowing
or wanting to know,
The poet's literary friend,
The justifier of a thousand
horrible deeds
and the why of a million-billion
acts of love.
The question as inescapable
as its is unanswerable,
The macro-cosmic mystery
and the micro-cosmic
explanation,
The word when there is a desert with
nothing to say,
And the subject of a jungle of books.
The without which nothing
and with which what?
God is the theist's joy,
The atheist's foil,
The agnostic's doubt.
God is a simple / deep dark
Light bright
up-tight, three letter word.

Source: *Living on Paradox Drive*,
by Richard Gilbert, 1987

I Live My Life

Rainer Maria Rilke

I live my life in growing orbits,
which move out over the things of the
world.
Perhaps I can never achieve the last,
but that will be my attempt.
I am circling around God,
around the ancient tower,
and I have been circling for a
thousand years,
and I still don't know
if I am a falcon,
or a storm,
or a great song.

Source: *The Rag and Bone Shop of the Heart*, 1992,
poem translated by Robert Bly

If I Were Asked

Rev. Victoria Safford

If I were asked to confess my faith or my beliefs out loud, and I were scrambling for some place to begin, I would start in the desert, in the lonesome valley, and say that first of all and ultimately, we are alone. No god abides with us, caring, watching, mindful of our going out and our coming in. The only certainty is mystery. We are alone, and because we are alone it is the chance connections, both chosen and involuntary, that matter most of all and ultimately help and heal and hold us.

We are alone yet intricately bound, inextricably connected to soil and stream and forest, to sun and corn and melting snow. We are alone yet bound by stories we cannot get out of to ancestors and descendants we will never meet. And all these natural conditions, these bonds we did not forge ourselves and yet cannot deny, are the strands of a theology, the seeds of faith, the beginning of *re-ligion*, of binding all things.

When I say *God*—and sometimes I do, because sometimes there is no other metaphor, no other symbol, no other poetry, no other offering—when I say *God*, I mean that place of meeting, that place where solitudes join.



The space between my hand and that dogwood, the space where the tiny feet of the ant brush the dry dirt beneath her, the space between Mercury and Venus, between electrons, which we unblinkingly believe in without seeing. *God* is the space in between, the bridge between solitudes, the ground where we meet, you and I, or any two, by grace.

If I were asked, I'd say that all of us, together, are alone, and the emptiness between us is waiting to be filled.

Source: *Walking Toward Morning* by Victoria Safford (Boston: Skinner House Books, 2003)

The Greatest Liberal of Them All

Rev. Forrest Church

God language can tie people into knots.... In part, that is because "God" is not God's name. Referring to the highest power we can imagine, "God" is our name for that which is greater than all and yet present in each.

...People sometimes tell me they don't believe in God. "Tell me a little about the God you don't believe in," I reply. "I probably don't believe in him either." I certainly don't believe in the great father in the sky armed with a bolt of lightning aimed at the heart of his adversaries. ...If the God they disbelieve in is anything like the God I disbelieve in, their God is too small.

Religion should never be small. Religion is our human response to the dual reality of being alive and knowing we must die. We humans are not the animal with tools or the animal with advanced language. We are the religious animal. On discovering that we must die, we question what life means. Who are we? Where did we come from? Where are we going and why? These are religious questions.

...What the religious liberal knows, illiberal seekers, in their obsession with orthodoxy, often overlook: we are most likely to discover God when we allow our minds to follow our hearts. If God is love, which is as good a metaphor as any, then how we love measures our knowledge of God's true nature and our closeness to God more tellingly than anything we may think or believe.

In sharp contrast, some theologians treat God as a cosmic butterfly, whom they capture, kill, and pin to a board for closer observation. Skeptics then point out that God is dead. However beautiful its wings, the concept just won't fly. Whether biblical or anti-biblical, both groups are peopled by hard-bitten literalists, taxidermists of the creation, wholly lacking an eye for the poetry of God. Theology is not a science, but an art.

Source: *The Cathedral of the World* by Forrest Church (2009)

Likeness to God

Rev. Douglas Taylor

William Ellery Channing, the father of American Unitarianism, ...preached a radical theology of human nature. This was a rebellion from the Calvinist theology of the day, a theology that spoke of humanity as being totally depraved and in need of God's grace, of a humanity bound to sin and with no power by which to change the situation. Only through the grace of the all-powerful God above could a person be saved. In his sermon, *Likeness to God* [Discourse at the Ordination of the Rev. F.A. Farley, Providence, R.I., September 10, 1828], Channing



writes, "What, then, is religion? I answer; it is not the adoration of a God with whom we share no common properties; of a distinct, foreign, separate being; but of an all-communicating parent. It recognizes and adores God, as a being whom we know through our souls, who has made man in his image, who is the perfection of our own spiritual nature, who has sympathies with us as kindred beings" He goes on to say, "Above all, adore his unutterable goodness. But remember, that this attribute is particularly proposed to you as your model; that God calls you, both by nature and revelation, to a fellowship in his philanthropy; that he has placed you in social relations, for the very end of rendering you ministers and representatives of his benevolence...." Channing, here demonstrates how radical his Christianity was at that time, indeed it might still seem radical to most Christians today. God is a model of goodness. We are beings who do good because we have within us the image of God, who is "unutterable good." We are not disobedient sinners, flawed creatures, depraved souls bound to sin with no good in us. We each have what Channing called the *Divine Seed* within. He said, "I reverence human nature too much to do it violence."

Source: *Our Cornerstone: A sermon about our Unitarian Universalist theologies* by Douglas Taylor

Small Group Discussion Guide

Theme for Discussion God / The Divine

Preparation prior to Gathering: (Read this issue of the journal and *Living the Questions* in the next column.)

Business: Deal with any housekeeping items (e.g., scheduling the next gathering).

Opening Words: *Out of Our Yearning* by Rev. Susan Manker-Seale

We speak to the god, the goddess, the spirit of life, the eternal. We speak to the mysterious thread that connects us one to the other and to the universe. We speak to the deep wisdom at the center of our beings.

Chalice Lighting (James Vila Blake) adapted (In unison) *Love is the spirit of this church, and service is its law. This is our covenant: to dwell together in peace, to seek the truth in love, to serve human need, and to help one another.*

Check-In: How is it with your spirit? What do you need to leave behind in order to be fully present here and now? (2-3 sentences)

Claim Time for Deeper Listening: This comes at the end of the gathering where you can be listened to uninterrupted for more time if needed. You are encouraged to claim time ranging between 3-5 minutes, and to honor the limit of the time that you claim.

Read the Wisdom Story: Take turns reading aloud parts of the wisdom story on page one.

Readings from the Common Bowl: Group members read selections from *Readings from the Common Bowl* (page 3). Leave a few moments of silence after each to invite reflection on the meaning of the words.

Sitting In Silence: Sit in silence together, allowing the *Readings from the Common Bowl* to resonate. Cultivate a sense of calm and attention to the readings and the discussion that follows (*Living the Questions*).

Reading: *Natural Theology*

by Rev. David O. Rankin

Is there such a thing as God? I saw a sunrise at Jackson Hole. I fell in love years ago. I caught a tear in my father's eye. I watched a lily bloom. I saved a boy from drugs and death. I touched the hand of Martin Luther King, Jr. I feel the warmth of children.

I laugh almost every day. I hold the hem of hope. The only God I can possibly know is the God of life—and life is endless.

Living the Questions: Explore as many of these questions as time allows. Fully explore one question before moving on. (These are adapted from a discussion guide created by All Souls Unitarian Church, Tulsa, OK)

1. Do you remember the first time you felt the presence of something larger than yourself? What were the circumstances? Where their people around or were you alone? Share your story.
2. Let's imagine God is only revealed in a way you can best experience... for you would God be revealed as a feeling? a person? an experience? a contradiction? a paradox?
3. How would you explain God to children?
4. Have you ever experienced something you would call looking into the eyes or the face of God? What were the circumstances?
5. When do you feel closest to God? When do you feel the most distant from God? If you are uncomfortable with God language: When do you feel most connected or disconnected with yourself, with others, with life itself?
6. What has helped you translate other people's images of God to your own?
7. If you reject the concept of God what God concepts are you rejecting? How do you relate to Galen Guengerich's "Revised God?"

The facilitator or group members are invited to propose additional questions that they would like to explore.

Deeper Listening: If time was claimed by individuals, the group listens without interruption to each person who claimed time.

Checking-Out: One sentence about where you are now as a result of the time spent together exploring the theme.

Extinguishing Chalice

(Elizabeth Selle Jones) (In unison)

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.

Closing Words Rev. Philip R. Giles

(In unison) *May the quality of our lives be our benediction and a blessing to all we touch.*

Not God's Name

(Continued from page 2) **Seven Paths to God**

The Dreamer: Dreamers are myth-makers. ...Dreamers draw more on imagination than experience. They invent rather than discover God. ...Given the mystery of God's nature, Dreamers may come closer to certain aspects of God's nature through their vivid imaginations than do others through their experience of common reality.

The Mystic: The Mystic is the most introverted and attentive of God's seekers. ...The Mystic seeks illumination through long stretches of quiet contemplation. ...The path to God involves self-emptying. Mystics aspire to become open vessels for the Holy Spirit.

The Star Gazer: The Star Gazer divines God in cosmic details. ...Their virtue is humility. ...Humility invites the Star Gazer to embrace all others as one, mysteriously born, fated to die, children of creation, seeds of a divine mystery.

...Whichever path you follow, in your search for God you will never finally discover what you seek. God is far too mysterious and multi-faceted for any of us to comprehend. God is not even God's name, but our name for that which is greater than all and present in each.

Source: <http://www.allsoulsnyc2.org/publications/sermons/fcsermons/seven-paths-to-god.html>

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