

"Thank You for Your Loving Hands"

Thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways—
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
And if you ever doubt yourself, remember us, who love you well—
We know all the gifts you bring into the world each day.
So thank you for your loving hands, your loving heart,
your loving ways,
Thank you for the gifts you bring into the world each day.
—by Judy Fjell and Lisa Bregger

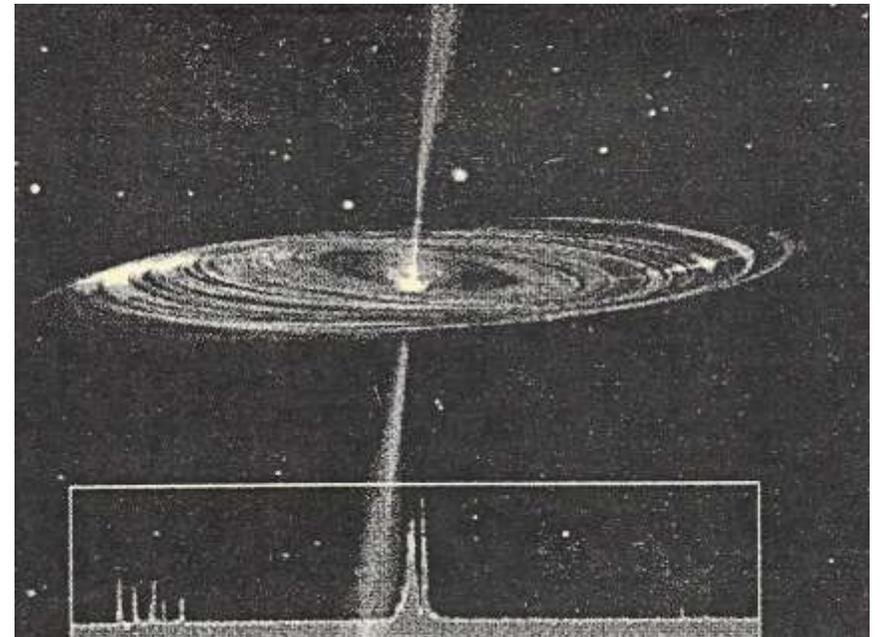
The Covenant

I commit myself:

- to come to meetings when I possibly can, knowing that my presence is important to the group
- to honor the group by letting the leader know if I will be absent, and to come to the group one last time and say good-bye if I need to quit
- to avoid cross talk, giving feedback or trying to fix anyone
- to share with the leader the responsibility for good group process by watching how much time I take to speak and noticing what is going on for others
- to not gossip about what is shared in the group, and not tell other people's stories
- to listen to what others share with an open heart, and to share deeply in my turn

Covenant Groups

Religion and Science



We are a way for the cosmos to know itself.

—Carl Sagan

Religion and Science

Chalice Lighting

While faith illuminated the glass, it does so by turning it into a mirror; the glass is dark and all we can see are the reflections of our own desires. The last three centuries of science have enabled us to penetrate this darkness and transform the mirror into a window on the universe. Now when we look out, the opaque glass has become translucent, with patches of transparency appearing. We begin to see what is truly out there; we come face to face with the terrible beauty of the cosmos that gave birth to us.

—Anne O'Reilly

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows

Silence

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

Religion has a big assignment. Comfort. Compassion. Fun. Nurturing the life of the spirit. Quiet. Inspiration. Motivation. Support for the children. Friendship.

—Jane Rzepka, Unitarian Universalist minister

It is true, just as many scientists are now saying, that humankind needs spiritual and moral reinforcement as never before. Or, in shorter words, it is true that we need religion. But unless the religion we find can really meet our need; unless it is free from false beliefs, from escapism, from trust in the miraculous and supernatural; unless it is a religion that fosters the utmost moral effort of which we are capable; unless it is an honest, clear-sighted, open-eyed religion, then we should be a good deal better off without it. So that scientists are only right turning to religion, if they remain scientific in the process.

—A Powell Davies, Unitarian minister

About the gods I have no means of knowing either that they exist or that they do not exist or what they are to look at. Many things prevent my knowing. Among others, the fact that they are never seen.

—Protagoras, *Essay on the Gods*

Like Don Cupitt today, I contend that the only authentically modern way of conceiving God is as an abstract way of referring to all that is

good in human life and community. Theology should be, therefore, the science of decoding traditional belief in a transcendent God in terms of a secular humanism.

—Torquil Paterson, *Anglican theological lecturer*

Today science marches on not so much via proofs as through the persuasive coherency of the picture it presents. What passes for truth in science is a comprehensive pattern of interconnected answers to questions posed to nature—explanations of how things work . . . though not—(always)—why they work.

—Owen Gingerich, *astronomer*

The universe itself is continually incarnating itself in microbes and maples, in hummingbirds and human beings, constantly inviting us to tease out the revelation contained in stars and atoms and every living thing. A language of reverence . . . begins with our understanding of this story as a religious story—a vision of reality that contains within it the sources of a moral, ethical, transcendent self-understanding.

—Rev. David Bumbaugh, *Unitarian Universalist minister*

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening

Round 1: What is one of your earliest memories of learning about the sciences (such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science, physics)?

Round 2: How does your understanding of science inform your faith?

Round 3: What did you learn from the readings and homework or from the thoughts of other members of the group?

Closing Words

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

—Albert Einstein

Closing Song

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business

Homework for the next meeting.

Homework: Religion and Science

This session focuses on the interplay of science and religion in our lives.

Despite the efforts of some to define away the problem, science and religion are in conflict. This state of affairs was of such concern to the late eminent evolutionary biologist Stephen Jay Gould that he proposed a radical solution in his 1999 book *Rocks of Ages*, whereby the two fields of knowledge would be confined to separate realms, which he called *magisteria*. Religion would be restricted to dealing with matters of morality and possibly questions of ultimate meaning, while science would be left to empirical description of the material world. The important thing is that the *magisteria* not overlap. Each field should stick to its own domain. The problem with this idea is that many religionists have not given up on describing how the world works, and science is steadily moving into areas that religion thought it had covered—new areas of endeavor, such as studies of the evolution of ethics and morals, the psychology of religion, the genetic basis of belief in life after death, and the existence of an independent soul.

Multi-millionaire John Templeton has established a foundation dedicated to establishing better compatibility of science with religion. It gives an annual prize of \$ 1,000,000 to the best work helping to achieve this goal. The playing field is somewhat skewed because the term “religion,” as used here, seems to be oriented toward the Christian faith with a God who acts in the world and responds to petitionary prayer. An illustration of the mindset: We're just working with the tools God gave us. There is no reason that science and religion have to operate in an adversarial relationship. Both come from the same source, the only source of truth—the Creator.

—Joseph Murray, *Nobel Laureate, Medicine and Physiology*

In America, scientists are more resistant to the idea of a personal god than the general populace is. Recent polls show that on the order of 30 to 40 percent of all scientists believe in a personal god, whereas these numbers are more than doubled for the population at large.

It was, of course, a lie what you read about my religious convictions, a lie which is being systematically repeated. I do not believe in a personal God and I have never denied this but have expressed it clearly. If something is in me which can be called religious then it is the unbounded admiration for the structure of the world so far as our science can reveal it.

—Albert Einstein

I am a deeply religious nonbeliever. This is a somewhat new kind of religion.

—Albert Einstein

We can even see signs of moral, or protomoral behavior in animals. Vampire bats share food. Apes and monkeys comfort members of their group who are upset and work together to get food. Dolphins push sick members of a pod to the surface to get air. Whales will put themselves in harm's way to help a wounded member of their group. Elephants try their best to save injured members of their families. In these examples we glimpse the beginnings of the morality that advanced to higher levels with human evolution.

—Victor J. Stenger

The Bible is a blueprint of in-group morality, complete with instructions for genocide, enslavement of out-groups, and world domination. But the Bible is not evil by virtue of its objectives or even its glorification of murder, cruelty, and rape. Many ancient works do that—*The Iliad*, the Icelandic Sagas, the tales of the ancient Syrians and the inscriptions of the ancient Mayans, for example. But no one is selling *The Iliad* as a foundation for morality. Therein lies the problem. The Bible is sold, and bought, as a guide to how people should live their lives. And it is, by far, the world's all-time best-seller.

—John Hartung

The spectacle of what is called religion, or at any rate organized religion, in India and elsewhere, has filled me with horror and I have frequently condemned it and wished to make a clean sweep of it. Almost always it seemed to stand for blind belief and reaction, dogma and bigotry, superstition, exploitation and the preservation of vested interests.

—Jawaharlal Nehru, *first prime minister of India*

Questions to Ponder

- What are some of your earliest memories of learning about the sciences (such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science, physics)? How did the experiences affect your thinking?
- To what extent can or should critical thinking be used in the same way for questions related to science and questions related to religion?
- What is the relationship, for you, between science and faith? Are they mutually exclusive?
- Is your life guided more by science or by religion? Do you use science and/or religion for different questions or aspects of your life? Do they overlap in any areas?
- What are the limits, if any, of scientific knowledge, as you understand it?

Leader's Guide: Religion and Science

This session focuses on the interplay of science and religion in our lives.

Chalice Lighting (2 min)

Ask someone to read the chalice lighting reading found in the bulletin as you light the chalice.

While faith illuminated the glass, it does so by turning it into a mirror; the glass is dark and all we can see are the reflections of our own desires. The last three centuries of science have enabled us to penetrate this darkness and transform the mirror into a window on the universe. Now when we look out, the opaque glass has become translucent, with patches of transparency appearing. We begin to see what is truly out there; we come face to face with the terrible beauty of the cosmos that gave birth to us.

—Anne O'Reilly

Sharing of Joys and Sorrows (10 min)

Ask group members to check in, telling in one or two sentences how they are doing this week. Share information about absent members.

Silence (3 min)

Give your group the gift of three minutes of silence. Time it if you would like.

Shared Readings (5 min)

Have each person in turn read from the shared readings found in the bulletin until all the readings are finished.

Deep Sharing and Deep Listening (65 min)

Do your three rounds of deep sharing and deep listening. Pay close attention to the time allotted each person to ensure that everyone gets a turn to share.

Round 1 (10 min): What is one of your earliest memories of learning about the sciences (such as astronomy, biology, chemistry, earth science, physics)?

Round 2 (40 min): How does your understanding of science inform your faith?

Round 3 (15 min): What did you learn from the readings and homework or from the thoughts of other members of the group?

Closing Words (1 min)

Read or ask someone to read the closing words.

The most beautiful thing we can experience is the mysterious. It is the source of all true art and science.

—Albert Einstein

Closing Song (1 min)

“Thank You for Your Loving Hands”

Group Business (5 min)

Pass out the homework for next time.