

Atheism

Chalice Lighting

Sharing of Joys and Concerns

Silence, holding ourselves and each other in silent support.

Shared Readings

Cherish your doubts, for doubt is the attendant of truth. Doubt is the key to the door of knowledge; it is the servant of discovery. A belief which may not be questioned binds us to error, for there is incompleteness and imperfection in every belief. Doubt is the touchstone of truth; it is acid which eats away the false. Let no one fear for the truth, that doubt may consume it; for doubt is a testing of belief. The truth stands boldly and unafraid; it is not shaken by testing: for truth if it be truth, arises from each testing stronger, more secure."

Robert T. Weston

"A person will worship something—have no doubt about that. We may think our tribute is paid in secret in the dark recesses of our hearts – but it will out. That which dominates our imagination and our thoughts will determine our lives and character. Therefore, it behooves us to be careful what we worship, for what we are worshipping we are becoming."

Ralph Waldo Emerson

The greatest happiness of the thinking man is to have fathomed what can be fathomed, and quietly to reverence what is unfathomable." **Goethe**

How can I believe in God when just last week I got my tongue caught in the roller of an electric typewriter? I am plagued by doubts. What if everything is an illusion and nothing exists? In that case, I definitely overpaid for my carpet. If only God would give me some clear sign; like making a large deposit in my name at a Swiss bank. – **Woody Allen**

"Why bother to have an impersonal God?—you're back then with Spinoza and calling 'God' everything and therefore nothing. The Unitarians tried that and within three generations they're a spent force." **John Updike**, from a mid-20th century novel.

"Faith is not so much a binary pole as a quantum state, which tends to indeterminacy when closely examined. At the end of the millennium, and of a century that has the Holocaust at its center, the reasons for doubt in God's existence are so easily come by—His invisibility, his apparent indifference to the torrents of pain and cruelty that history books and the news media report, the persuasive explanations that science offers for almost all phenomena once thought mysterious—that church attendance must be taken ...as a willful decision to evade that G.K. Chesterton called "atheist respectability."" **John Updike**, *New Yorker*, 11/29/99

Deep Sharing/Deep Listening

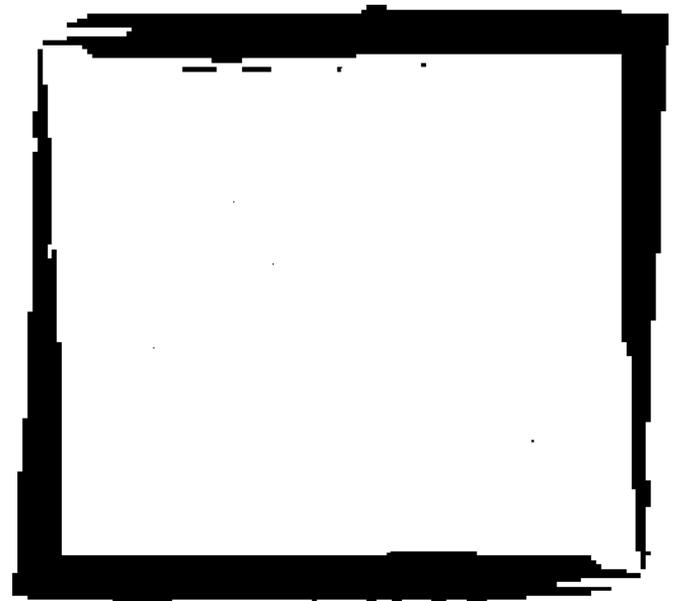
Discussion, if time

Group Business

Closing Words and Song "Go Now in Peace"

Covenant Groups

Atheism



Leaders Notes—Atheism

Recruit leaders for the several readings in the bulletin as people arrive.

When all are present, light the chalice, check in as usual, and enjoy the silence.

Ask your readers to read. Leave some silence between readings.

Remark that the subject of atheism is both small and large, because there are so many definitions of atheism. Virtually all of us at least act like atheists most of the time, some of us are very strict atheists all of the time. So our sharing this week might be about our theology, about our doubts, about our images of the divine, or about the play of mystery in our lives.

Do your first round of sharing.

Ask people to look at the empty box on the front of their bulletin. Can they think of an appropriate symbol for their idea about God that they would fill in the box with? If so...get out a pencil and draw it in.

Do a second round of sharing, in which people can share their drawing if they wish, add second thoughts, or reflect on what they have heard.

Close as usual

Homework for Atheism

Definitions of Terms (from strictest to loosest)

1. Atheism is the belief that, the nature of the universe being what it is, it is not possible for there to be a deity. (hard atheism)
2. Atheism is the belief that there is no Deity. (there could be, but there isn't)
3. Atheism is the belief that there is no God (using the traditional, old man in the sky image of god, leaving open the possibility of goddess, higher powers, etc.)
4. Atheism is not having beliefs about God, positive or negative. (soft atheism, which shades over into agnosticism, not knowing about God)
5. Atheism is not believing in the local God (this is the definition that got Socrates)
6. Functional atheism is living your life without God, even if you actually believe in God.

God Comes in Quietly

God comes in quietly and watches her.
Although she longs for the Presence,
She rejects every reflection that steps forward.
He stands behind her, in silence.

Hafiz, the poet,
Whispers in her ear.
Look around your life,
Rest in gratefulness.

All that you do is sacred.
It's time for a truce
Between you and God,
Says Hafiz.

Alicia Hawkins

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electric typewriter? I am plagued by doubts.
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—Emerson

Good Reasons to Be An Atheist

1. Because you have never had an experience you call an experience of God
2. Because you have suffered too much to be able to imagine that there is a God in charge of things.
3. Because you have outgrown the image of God you were given as a child and have not yet developed an image that you can use as an adult.
4. Because you are angry at what "God's People" have done in "God's Name".
5. Because you "have no need of that hypothesis."

Questions to Ponder

1. If you are an atheist, why?
2. If you believe in God, how does that change how you live your life?
3. If you don't believe in God, what does domination your imagination and to what do you pay tribute?
4. If you declared a truce with God, what would happen?
5. What images of God besides the old man do you believe/not believe in?