

Session 11: World Religions

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Session Metadata	
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UU Source	World Religions
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Head / Hands / Heart	Head
Has Exercise	No
Has Ritual	No
Has Spiritual Practice Presentation	Yes
Special Blocks	None

Preparation

Email to Participants

Dear UU Wellspring friends,

Our next session is on [date]. We've talked about courage and love, prophets and prayer, and now we move to our next source:

“ Wisdom from the world's religions which inspire us in our ethical and spiritual life.

As Unitarian Universalists, we look not only to our Christian heritage, but to Buddhism, Confucianism, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Taoism and other world religions for inspiration.

Our goal in this session is not to become experts on all of the world religions. Rather, we will focus on how world religions “inspire us in our ethical and spiritual lives.” The readings and videos encourage an openness to the gifts of the world’s religions, recognizing that many of us value cultural, spiritual and theological gifts from our own religious histories, whether we grew up in the Unitarian Universalist tradition, another faith tradition or as someone who has had many or no particular faith traditions.

Stephen Prothero, in *God is Not One*, quotes from *Dimensions of the Sacred: An Anatomy of the World’s Beliefs* by Ninian Smart, (Berkeley: Univ. of California Press, 1996).

“For more than a century, scholars have searched for the essence of religion. They thought they found this holy grail in God, but then they discovered Buddhists and Jains who deny God’s existence. Today it is widely accepted that there is no one essence that all religions share. What they share are family resemblances—tendencies toward this belief or that behavior. In the family of religions, kin tend to perform rituals. They tend to tell stories about how life and death began and to write down these stories in scriptures. They tend to cultivate techniques of ecstasy and devotion. They tend to organize themselves into institutions and to gather in sacred places at sacred times. They tend to instruct human beings how to act toward one another. They tend to profess this belief or that about the gods and the supernatural. They tend to invest objects and places with sacred import. Philosopher of religion Ninian Smart has referred to these tendencies as the seven “dimensions” of religion: the ritual, narrative, experiential, institutional, ethical, doctrinal, and material dimensions.

Prothero, Stephen. *God Is Not One* (pp. 12-13). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

Again in *God is Not One*, the author Stephen Prothero states:

“One of the most common misconceptions about the world’s religions is that they plumb the same depths, ask the same questions. They do not. Only religions that see God as all good ask how a good God can allow millions to die in tsunamis. Only religions that believe in souls ask whether your soul exists before you are born and what happens to it after you die. And only religions that think we have one soul ask after “the soul” in the singular. Every religion, however, asks after the human condition. Here we are in these human bodies. What now? What next? What are we to become?”

Prothero, Stephen. *God Is Not One* (p. 24). HarperOne. Kindle Edition.

I hope you'll find time for these many opportunities to learn about other world religions and how they might inspire your ethical and spiritual life. If you are interested, Prothero's book, quoted above, "[God Is Not One](#)," reviews many of the world religions in depth and is available at most booksellers and some libraries.

Readings

- [The Pluralism Project](#) by Harvard University. Check the "Religions" menu item for essays on world religions and/or [Explore the inspirations from world religions](#) on the Unitarian Universalist Association pages.
- [Holy Curiosity and Holy Trouble](#) by Rev. Sean Dennison.

Media

- "[World Population by Religions 1990 to 2022](#)" produced by Data for You.
- "[World's Major Religions Holy Books Recitation Comparison 2020](#)" produced by "Let's Compare."
- "[2013 Ware Lecture by Eboo Patel: Standing Your Sacred Ground](#)" Talk begins at 22 min and runs for 36 min (with introduction by Rev. Peter Morales, former President of the UUA at 18:20). Full text can be found below the video.

Reflection Questions

- What aspects of world religions inspire you as a Unitarian Universalist?
- Why do you think Unitarian Universalists who come from such a variety of religious backgrounds find a home in UU communities?
- What parts of world religions challenge you?
- Which recitations from world religions stirred you? What emotions, thoughts and images arose?
- How do you respond to Eboo Patel's question: "How are all of us, with our beautiful resonances and our deep disagreements, to share a nation and a world together?"
- Is your religious background and history fully welcomed in Unitarianism?

I look forward to our time together.

Session Plan

Chalice Lighting and Silence

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 *religion,*of binding all things.

Victoria Safford in [*Walking Toward Morning: Meditations*](#). Skinner House Books, 2003.

Music for today is "[**Peace, Salaam, Shalom**](#)" sung in English, Arabic and Hebrew by Emma's Revolution.

Let's take a few minutes of silence to bring ourselves fully into this circle.

Check-In

What are you carrying in your heart tonight? How is your spiritual practice or spiritual companionship going?

Covenant Review

****Not for Facilitator:****Use whatever process your group has established to stay current with the covenant.

Is there anything about the covenant that we should address?

Spiritual Practice Presentation

Reflection

- What aspects of world religions inspire you as a Unitarian Universalist?
- Why do you think Unitarian Universalists who come from such a variety of religious backgrounds find a home in UU communities?
- What parts of world religions challenge you?
- Which recitations from world religions stirred you? What emotions, thoughts and images arose?
- How do you respond to Eboo Patel's question: "How are all of us, with our beautiful resonances and our deep disagreements, to share a nation and a world together?"
- Is your religious background and history, as well as your current theology, fully welcomed in Unitarian Universalism?

So What?

How does this reflection relate to your spiritual journey? What are you inspired or challenged to do next?

Gratitude and Closing

Have everyone focus on the chalice. Each person, as moved, says one or two words about something from this session for which they are grateful or how they are feeling in this moment. After everyone has said a word, close with a brief statement of thanks and appreciation.

Revision #2

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