

Religions of Star Trek

Lesson 10: On God and Q

Star Date 5.02.2020

Objectives: To reflect on two core theological questions on the nature of God and how we experience the Sacred in our lives, alongside the Star Trek entity “Q.”

Materials: Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop, login to Unity’s YouTube account.

Time allotments: Suggested for 60 minute online class.

1. Zoom Welcome (as youth arrive into the breakout classroom)

- Teachers and youth are expected to log on to zoom at 11:15am (15 min before class begins at 11:30am) so that everyone can be organized into correct breakout classrooms. We want to make sure there is an attentive adult in each breakout classroom with youth.
- Greet youth and ask everyone to correct their display name as needed. Ask everyone to select “gallery view” to see everyone else.
- Staff will take attendance.

2. Opening Discussion (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

- Who was able to attend the Coming of Age (COA) service last Sunday?
- From the service, what is one thing that stood out to you or you found meaningful?
- In your own words, what is COA? Will you be an “ager” next year?
- What is something you look forward to about writing your own credo (statement of belief)?

3. Chalice Lighting

Light a chalice at your home, invite youth to light their own chalices and say together:
“We light this chalice as a symbol of our faith, the light of truth and the warmth of love.”

Teacher reads: (from creator of Star Trek, Gene Roddenberry)

“I think God is as much a basic ingredient in the universe as neutrons and positrons. This is the prime force, when we look around the universe.”

“We must question the story logic of having an all-knowing all-powerful God, who creates faulty Humans, and then blames them for his own mistakes.”

4. Brief Check-in (5 minutes)

Continue weekly ritual/check-in (e.g. sharing a joy or sorrow so that everyone feels present in class).

5. Initial thoughts about “God” and the “Sacred”? (10 minutes)

Invite youth to reflect and offer initial responses to the following two core questions in our RE program:

- How is the Divine/Sacred present in each of us and in our lives?
- What is the nature of God or Higher Power?

Question: How do these two questions relate to each other? (I.e. how might our *understanding* of God be related to our *experience* of the Sacred/Divine in our lives?)

6. How is the Divine/Sacred present in each of us and in our lives? (10 minutes)

Teacher introduces: Rather than abstract theorizing, our lives may already reveal elements of the Sacred: in rituals, language, food, symbols... even greetings!

Leonard Nimoy had to come up with a special greeting for Mr. Spock and fellow Vulcans. So he recalled a time when he peeked during the blessing by the Kohanim, the Jewish priests.

- **Screen share (with audio):**
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1d83XOORP0#t=387> (the video is set to automatically start at min 6:28. Play to the end. Total time: 2:09 min)

Questions for discussion:

- How might the Vulcan salute – with its accompanying “live long and prosper” and the lesser known reply “peace and long life” – reveal the sacred in Vulcan culture?
- Any connections to religious practices you know? (Format is actually very similar to greetings among Muslims, *As-salāmu ‘alaykum*, meaning “peace be upon you.” More ancient variation is found in ancient Egyptian blessing “*ankh wedj seneb*” meaning “may he live, be prosperous, be healthy.”)
- How do we greet one another, and how might it reveal something sacred? (Modern handshake is thought to have originated as a gesture of peace, of having no weapons concealed in the hands. Bowing in many cultures and religions speaks of respect, humility, and deference to the other.)

7. What is the nature of God? Introduction of “Q” (20 minutes)

Teacher summarizes: Q is a super-powerful entity from a race of seemingly omnipotent, godlike beings who make up the Q Continuum. Q appeared to crews of several Starfleet vessels and outposts. Q typically appears as a humanoid man, though Q can take other forms. Q is best described as devious, unreliable, obnoxious, interfering, arrogant, and generally a pest. But regardless of Q’s hidden agenda, Q seems to have the best interest of humanity at Q’s core.

- **Screen share (with audio):** <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBwoEXITpho> (6:43 min)

Questions for discussion:

- What is the nature of “God” suggested by these series of lessons from Q? What are these episodes suggesting about Q/God and their role or function in human lives?
- Interestingly, questioning the nature of Q/God really seems another way to question the nature of our humanity: our mortality, powerlessness, limited knowledge, and the many fears that come from being finite and limited. How might theology (study of god) really be about anthropology (study of humankind)?
- Q seems to demean Picard as Q’s preferred teaching method – sort of “rubbing it in” that humans are finite, arrogant, and guilty. What do you think about God/Q/religion using this demeaning, judgmental manner to teach lessons to limited humans? Is this how you experience the Sacred in your life?
- Could there be another method, another less judgmental way that the Sacred is present in our lives? (Think back to responses to the earlier theological question of step #6).
- Read over Gene Roddenberry’s two quotes from chalice lighting (see step #3). He was both affirming and critical of religious belief in God. How do you think Star Trek does both?

8. Is there a God? (10 minutes)

Teacher introduces: Some Star Trek episodes and films directly challenge the very existence of God.

- **Screen share (with audio)** “What does god need with a starship?”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnxvKJAv5Ik> (3:16 min)

Questions for discussion:

- Like the powerful being *Sha Ka Ree* that Sybok (Spock’s brother) believed in, are gods ultimately false? That gods are really malevolent alien entities or just human creations that serve our needs and purposes? That we are just confused or superstitious in our understanding of God?

- Tough question: Should Sybok now become an atheist? Or might this experience actually help to further clarify his belief in God?
 - Tougher question: Can you imagine another way of understanding how “God might need a starship”? (*Hint: How might God need us, or use the “ship” of the church?*)
9. **Announcement:** The end of the semester is near. We have two more classes, one regular lesson and one closing celebration.
 10. **Extinguish the chalice,** saying together: *“May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts.”*
 11. **Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click “Leave” then “Leave Meeting.”

Viewing clips, in order of sequence:

- Leonard Nimoy had to come up with a special greeting for Mr. Spock and fellow Vulcans. So he recalled a time when he peeked during the blessing by the Kohanim, the Jewish priests: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=G1d83XOORPo#t=387> (the video is set to automatically start at min 6:28. Play to the end. Total time: 2:09 mins)
- Q giving lessons to Capt. Picard: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=kBwoEXITpho> (6:43 min)
- Some Star Trek episodes and films directly challenge the very existence of God. “What does god need with a starship?”: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=xnxvKJAv5lk> (3:16 min)