

# UU Identity & History

## Lesson 7: Religious Humanism

3.21.2021

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**Objectives:** Explore Religious Humanism and its contribution to UU theology.

**Materials:** Teachers should download lesson plan and attachments onto their desktop.

**Time allotments:** Suggested for 60 minute online class.

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### 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. Zoom Icebreaker: 20 Questions (5 minutes, begin while waiting for everyone to arrive)

Invite a youth to be the “thinker” and think of one specific object for the group to guess (e.g. platypus, merry-go-round, Kashmir). The group has 20 yes-or-no questions to try and guess what the object is (e.g. Is it an animal? Does it move? Can you eat it?). The “thinker” can only answer “yes” or “no,” nothing else. Teachers should keep track of how many questions have been asked. The youth who guesses correctly becomes the next “thinker” and the game repeats as time allows.

### 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 white author and UU, Kurt Vonnegut)

*“I am a Humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I’m dead.”*

### 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. UU Six Sources Review (15 minutes)

**Teacher asks:** Who can name one of our UU sources? As a group, can we name all six?

Key words *bolded*:

- **Direct experience** of that transcending mystery and wonder, affirmed in all cultures, which moves us to a renewal of the spirit and an openness to the forces which create and uphold life;
- Words and deeds of **prophetic people** which challenge us to confront powers and structures of evil with justice, compassion, and the transforming power of love;
- Wisdom from the **world's religions** which inspires us in our ethical and spiritual life;
- **Jewish and Christian teachings** which call us to respond to God's love by loving our neighbors as ourselves;
- **Humanist teachings** which counsel us to heed the guidance of reason and the results of science, and warn us against idolatries of the mind and spirit;
- Spiritual teachings of **Earth-centered traditions** which celebrate the sacred circle of life and instruct us to live in harmony with the rhythms of nature.

**Teacher summarizes:** Since, historically, Unitarianism and Universalism come out of the Christian tradition, we've primarily talked about the fourth source—Jewish and Christian teachings. But we've also talked about personal experience of the sacred and words and deeds of prophetic voices. The Transcendentalists, who we learned about last week, were influenced by Hinduism and Buddhism! You have probably taken other RE classes that focused on earth-centered traditions, Buddhism, Hinduism, Islam, science, and myth. Today we are going to learn about Religious Humanism.

### Questions for Discussion:

- If you had to choose, what ONE THING makes someone “human”?
- Among three fundamental dimensions of Reality, what feels most important for you: The Divine, Human, or Nature/Universe? All of the above? None of the above?
- Writer Kurt Vonnegut, a white UU and a Humanist, said: *“I am a Humanist, which means, in part, that I have tried to behave decently without any expectation of rewards or punishments after I’m dead.”*
  - In your own words, what is Vonnegut saying Humanism means and what is he implying about religious beliefs and the afterlife?
  - Do you think that belief in the supernatural—including God and an afterlife—is in conflict with fully appreciating human potential and responsibility? Why or why not?
  - Do you think that affirmation of naturalism—that there is nothing greater or outside of the universe—is in conflict with believing in God? Why or why not?

## 6. What is a Religious Humanist? (15 minutes)

### Teacher summarizes:

- Humanist ideas began emerging in the late 1800s, after the Civil War (1861-65) and again after WWI (1914-18). Americans had seen so much bloodshed and suffering that they couldn't reconcile such suffering with belief in a loving god. While there are prominent African-American Humanists (especially related to the Harlem Renaissance), Humanism has primarily been a white movement.
- Modern Humanism in America organized in 1933 when 34 white signers (which included 17 Unitarian ministers) drafted the first *Humanist Manifesto*, which challenged theism and formally set forth the concept of *human* responsibility for our world.
- Unitarians and Universalists, still separate churches, both wondered: "Could a church be open to members who didn't believe in God?"

### Screen share lesson attachment 7a (Key Humanist philosophical points).

- Ask volunteers to read each point aloud.
- As a group, consider the statistics on page two.

### Questions for Discussion

- Do you think it's a good idea for Humanists and theists to be part of the same church? Why or why not?
- Do any of you consider yourselves to be Humanist?
- How would you explain to a friend from school that about half of the people in our church don't find God relevant to their religious life?

## 7. Beliefs Abound (15 minutes)

- **Screen share** lesson attachment 7b (Beliefs Abound).
- Invite youth to use the "Annotate" function and put a mark (color or stamp of their choosing) on each statement that aligns with their current beliefs.

*Teacher note: before scrolling to the next page, **erase all annotations**. Zoom draws on the screen not on the pdf itself.*

- Ask youth to raise their hands and/or share reflections:
  - Is it challenging to think about what you believe about God/gods?
  - Do you spend a lot of time thinking about God/gods?
  - Is it interesting to hear multiple different ideas about God/gods?

**8. Humanist Hymns (5 minutes)**

There's a joke that asks: *"How can you tell someone's a Unitarian Universalist?"*

Answer: *"When a hymn is sung, they're the ones reading ahead to see if they agree with the words."*

**Screen share** lesson attachment 7c (Hymn #331 and #651).

- Ask each youth to choose and share a word or phrase from one of the hymns that speaks to Humanist beliefs or simply touches their spirit.

**9. Extinguish the chalice**, saying together: *"May the light of truth and the warmth of love go with us in our hearts."*

**10. Leave zoom breakout classroom:** wait until all youth have left, click "Leave" then "Leave Meeting."