

“What Holds Us Together”

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Reflections from “BYOT” Class Participants

Kathleen Razmus:

Ostara, Angela, Virginia, and I took the Building Your Own Theology Part 2 course with rev. Jane this past Spring. It was 10 weeks of exploring different facets of theology with the goal of gaining some understanding of UU theology and clarifying what our own individual beliefs are. We discussed topics like “What is holy? Why do bad things happen? What do we know for sure? How do we account for evil?” And the topic of the day, “What holds us together?” With all of our various backgrounds, faith traditions and beliefs, what holds us together? I’d like to spend a few minutes answering that question.

I think there are at least two things that hold us together. One is the belief that we are all part of one another. And the other is a desire to see things more fully.

In today’s offering words, Mark Morrison- Reed says that there are “bonds that bind each to all.” And that in coming together, these bonds are unveiled. Together, we see connection and our vision widens. Like a puzzle – the individual pieces look kind of silly with their crazy edges and random colors. But when they come together, they reveal the beautiful picture. We believe that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. I think that this is part of what holds us together. The belief that we are all part of one another and that each of us holds only a piece of the truth. We need to come together because separately we only have a piece of the puzzle.

One of the unique things about UUism is that we have no creed. We instead have a covenant. Our covenant is about walking together with others who see life through a spiritual lens. People who are seeking meaning, making meaning, and helping others make meaning in their lives.

Being together expands our vision. It’s like when your friend or family gets a new car- say a gray Toyota Corolla. Previously, when you were driving down the road you never saw any gray Toyota Corollas. Now, you’re driving down the road and you see dozens of them. Your vision has been expanded. In truth, those dozens of gray Toyota Corollas were always there- it took the relationship with someone who had one for you to start to see them. Being together, hearing each other’s stories, expands our vision. What holds us together is the desire to have the complete picture, the desire to see the world more fully. We need each other to fulfill that desire.

Virginia Voigt:

I thoroughly enjoyed the time I spent in the Building Your Own Theology classes 1 and 2. They provided a scheduled time out to examine my beliefs in the context of a small group ministry. The structure of the curriculum helped to organize my exploration of various spiritual and religious topics. I don't think my beliefs changed so much as they were explored in more depth, with other fellow travelers who provided their insights, broadening my knowledge and perspective. Being with the members of the group in a personal and intimate way was as important, if not more important than consideration of the content. In fact, some of the content of the courses was too simplistic, asking members to categorize beliefs into one category, when they could fit into many. Getting to know the other members strengthened the bonds I have with them and to the congregation as a whole. I felt known, respected, and understood, reinforcing the good feeling I have about being a member of Channing. It was being in relationship, feeling known and valued that I have become more convinced that my beliefs represent the core of my spirit. I would describe my beliefs as transcendental and humanistic. I believe that holiness resides in nature with all the variation of life, the power and beauty in it, and in the human spirit. My beliefs are informed by direct experience rather than by a creed. Although the intellect is part of how I understand my beliefs, it is in the direct experience of nature and in relationship that I can intuit an understanding of others and myself, embrace life and the goodness in people, and the power to be someone who may better the world.

Credo

My faith is a living, breathing faith

A connection to nature and people

With reverence, curiosity, and wonder

Bringing self love

And love, respect, and generosity to others

Recognizing and understanding self and others

Who you and others really are

Accepting and appreciating all people and living things

Seeing opportunities and receiving grace

Angela Lesperance:

Reflections on the Theological Perspectives [Angela]

My theological perspective is in flux. From Christianity, which is my original faith, I am inspired by the morality and ethics of Jesus. I learned a lot about him in my youth and tried to model my life after his values and still do to this day. From Theism, I believe in a transcendent power that can help humans when called upon. From Mysticism, I hold high regard for personal religious experiences of union with all life. From Earth-Centered Spirituality, I believe we are an integral part of the natural rhythms of Earth, of life and death, and of creativity and destruction. From Humanism, I draw on the power of community, that we can do more together than apart or by ourselves. All this being said, when I took the quiz (beliefnet?) to see which religion best fit with my beliefs, I got Unitarian Universalism!

Ostara Hollyoak:

Inserted in your bulletin you'll find two selections from volume 2 of Richard S. Gilbert's book series on which the "Building Your Own Theology" courses are based. There's a piece titled "Theological Perspectives" which describes five different perspectives you might find among Unitarian Universalists. Following that are two questions from the same chapter. In our communications about this service, we suggested that you read these prior to the service; but they're also here for your reference.

I'd like to address the questions:

Is it *possible* for so many varied theological positions to exist in a single religious movement and a single congregation?

Not easily.

The greatest potential weakness of such a radical pluralism in sustaining and growing a religious community, I think, is the difficulty inherent in trying to create deep, collective spiritual experience among people who have no particular assumptions in common about how to engage with the sacred. What this means, to me, is that, for many of us, the Unitarian Universalist service will not be where we have our deepest collective spiritual experiences.

So, why do we do this? What *is* the strength— and not just the strength, but, for some of us, the *necessity*— of a religion such as this?

In the multicultural world we're living in, it takes some peculiar mental gymnastics to tell ourselves that the stories others are living are less true than the stories we inhabit. And those gymnastics, I think, are self evidently wrong to those of us here.

We could simply *accept* the beliefs and practices of others as just as true and right as our own, while only *engaging* religiously with those who share our most deeply held beliefs and practices, and that might be easier. But I believe that in a society that embraces religious pluralism, there's unique value in a fundamentally different *kind* of religion. This is a religion where we agree that what we can't know is as important as anything we do know.

And it's a religion where we take on the work of building a community where engagement with our differences is foundational to our reason for being together, and we treat this work as a sacred undertaking.

What we offer here is a place to hold the belief that it takes all of us to make a whole, and to revere that whole that is a diverse community.

Wholeness is an infinitely faceted jewel and we each hold the perspective of a single facet, ... *and* the jewel is ever evolving. And we affirm the jewel as something worth building a religion around.