

Congregational Humanism:

Theory and Practice

containing theory, readings, liturgy, music, and thoughts
concerning living a humanist life in community

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"Hymn to the Light"
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"In this Time of Loss"
"Justice, Meaning, Purpose"
"The Solstices Teach Us"
"We Unite in our Differences"
"What is Holy to Humanists"
"Go. Now. Live"
"Yes, There's No Binary"

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About the Author

I bow to no priests either of faith or of unfaith.
I claim as against all sorts of people, simply perfect freedom of thought.

~ Frederick Douglass

. . . it is important that awake people be awake,
or a breaking line may discourage them back to sleep;
the signals we give--yes or no, or maybe--
should be clear: the darkness around us is deep.

~William Stafford

INTRODUCTION

One Sunday morning in 1926, John Dietrich, my predecessor as Senior Minister at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis, said,

We call them Humanists because they seek truth to the end that human life may be enriched; and we call them Agnostics because they recognize a realm in which exact knowledge is impossible and they refuse to fill this realm with unverified and unverifiable speculations.

Humanists tend to be inquisitive, joyful, and iconoclastic. We have realized that this world and our time in it is short—at least in the case of our present physicality and consciousness. This is both liberating and focusing.

Focus and liberation are the intention of these writings for assemblies of freethinkers.

First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis has practiced congregational humanism for more than a century. Here, I will share some of the learning from that practice.

A Theory of Mind

An ideal free thinking community accepts that free thought is necessarily dynamic. This dynamism requires flexibility and pragmatism. After all, naturalistic thinkers are committed to updating ideas according to new understandings. The theory of natural selection, for example, continues to change and grow more complex. Brain science; biology; anthropology; cosmology; physics . . . you name a human way of learning, and we are committed to adapt to its findings.

A free thinking community is dynamic.

As I write this, theories of the mind are changing rapidly. We are discovering that what we call our "minds" are much more than the old scientific model of a brain in a glass jar. You know, as in "They Saved Hitler's Brain!"

Dr. Dan Siegel, a professor of psychiatry at UCLA School of Medicine, has worked with physicians, neuroscientists, sociologists, anthropologists, and mathematicians to update our understanding of "mind." Dr. Siegel writes,

Your thoughts, feelings, memories, attention, what you experience in this subjective world is part of mind.

See the implications?

Your thoughts, feelings, memories, attention, what you experience in this subjective world is part of mind.

Right now, your mind extends several feet around you; if other sentient beings are near, your mind is interacting with other minds. What your mind is telling you, right now, is partially about what you are focusing on . . . You are right now what you are focusing on, but your mind is also how you are feeling at the moment. What you're thinking at the moment, yes, but also your mind is your many memories. Your mind is creating a subjective reality. The mind next to you necessarily is *not* thinking what you're thinking.

Dr. Siegel's definition of "mind" goes like this:

the emergent self-organizing process, both embodied and relational, that regulates energy and information flow within and among us.

That's difficult to catch:

Emergent.

A self-organizing process.

Embodied.

Relational.

Your mind "...regulates energy and information flow within and among us."

That's a long way from that brain-in-a-jar picture of the mind from the twentieth century. You can save Hitler's brain if you wish, but you can't capture Hitler's mind.

Yes, we free thinkers are committed to updating our thinking. Our minds are just not what they used to be. They are an

emergent self-organizing process, both embodied and relational, that regulates energy and information flow within and among us.

Relationally.

That's why we "congregate."

What's The Glue?

For those attempting to facilitate a gathering of freethinkers, here are some good questions to ask:

What might hold this community together: What's the glue?

How may we best practice humanity and justice together?

Where might such a gathering go?

Some Points:

All attempts to bring people together—to get people talking—are noble attempts. The outcome may be failure, but the attempt—that is noble.

Reflect: what is achieved by a limited “us”? A bit, perhaps. Maybe. But what might be achieved with the walls knocked down?

Ideally, a humanist gathering will:

1. Respect the autonomy of each and all.
2. Center the margins and let suffering speak.
3. Encourage all to listen, share, and learn.
4. Offer space and time for lamentation and joy.
5. Encourage integrity
6. Explore and underscore human capabilities.
7. Encourage deep thought and reason.
6. Create purpose and meaning through relationships.
7. Promote justice and peace.
8. Promote the flourishing of living things and the planet.

To implement a congregation of free thinkers, here's your mantra:

- The concept is flexible
- The concept is pragmatic

- The concept is love in action
- The concept is justice in action
- The concept is community in action

Surfing the Contradictions—Lived Religion

I define “religion” this way: “Religion is a set of shared practices and ethical commitments grounded in a worldview.” There are other definitions. But the following will be about ethical commitments within the worldview of free thinkers, humanists . . . there are many names for who we are.

Like it our not, you’re living your religion all the time. Like . . . morning breath . . . everybody’s got it. Or at least that’s the way sociologists of religion have traditionally framed our lives. You can choose “Roman Catholic;” you can choose “Secular” or “None of the Above,” but there’s a list, and you fit in it somewhere.

You exist. What you do is your . . . life? religion? philosophy? All of the above! Call it what we will, we’ve all got one. So. What’s yours?

More and more people are feeling cornered by the question.

I contend that the idea of religion—which appears to be as old as *Homo Sapiens* itself – springs from the mismatch between the *Sapien* psyche and how we find our lives to be going. We feel What, exactly?

We want What, exactly?

I think that we – all human beings of whatever stripe—desperately wish to feel at home in the universe and to feel that we have agency and direction in our lives.

Always have. Always will.

The German philosopher Martin Heidegger called that restless, uncomfortable feeling that we each have deep inside *Geworfenheit*, “thrownness.” It’s the feeling that we’re *here*, but we don’t really know where “here” is and we don’t know what to do next. That feeling can be debilitating. Or we can thrill in the expectation of what’s next. That, as Shakespeare said, is the question.

What do we do about finding ourselves thrown into this world? Oh, look: look at all of those beautiful, pre-packaged options! Buddhism. Islam. Lutheranism. Church of God in Christ. For some of us, our ancestors chose for us. For some of us, our culture chose for us.

Some of us are . . . skeptical . . .

Maybe. Just perhaps, reality is so complex that there is no right answer anyway.

The medieval Christian theologian Anselm (1033-1109) had a motto – *fides quaerens intellectum*. In English, “faith seeking understanding.”

Anselm’s motto is I think a concise summary of what theology is about. Theology starts in faith (or unfaith) and attempts to explain how that faith tradition works, without bursting the faith bubble. But that’s “theology,” not how to live your worldview, your religion.

I suspect that the moment faith seeks understanding, the faith ship has sailed . . . and started sinking.

Un-faith–unbelief–is at first an emotional, not a rational, position.

It’s not that faith can’t withstand questioning. Nor is it that faith cannot be understood. It’s merely that faith and understanding do not reside in the same zip code. You can live in faith-land or in theology-land, but between the two there is a great gulf fixed.

I suspect that for the most part, people don’t “do” theology to find logic and coherence in their beliefs. If the wide variety of disparate and contradictory beliefs held by many people is any indication, people look to theology not to solidify existing beliefs, but to find alternatives to weave into their lived practice for a little relief from that *Geworfenheit*. That “thrown” feeling.

The best book that I know of on this subject is *Lived Religion: Faith and Practice in Everyday Life* by the sociologist of religion Meredith B. McGuire.

In her studies, Dr. McGuire dug deeper than the easy labels of Buddhist, Catholic, Protestant, Agnostic, Muslim, and on. What do people *actually* do to cope with this big, overwhelming *Geworfenheit*?

A Protestant who never attends church, does Buddhist-style meditation, practices yoga, and carries an amulet to ward off cancer?

Contradictory much? You bet.

But, why not?

McGuire bases her thinking on the work of Clifford Geertz and Robert Orsi who asked, why do we do religion? Their answers:

To make the invisible visible.

To concretize the order of the universe.

To explore the nature of human life and its destiny.

To make human interiority visible and tangible (*Lived Religion*, 13)

That's a darn good summary, I think. Making the "invisible visible" might be about the supernatural, but it might also be about gravity and quarks.

Concretizing "the order of the universe" might be about that old children's song "He's got the whole world in His hand," but it can also be about fractals and the accelerating expansion of the universe.

"To explore the nature of human life and its destiny" may be about salvation and damnation, or it might be about saving ourselves from global climate change.

"To make human interiority visible and tangible" might be about holy rolling and testifying, but it also might be about finding coping skills for taking life's left hooks.

You get my point. Pre-packaged religions just aren't up to *Geworfenheit*. More and more people are choosing . . . *meh* and . . . *whatever*.

These are some of the people who may find meaning in gathering as humanists and freethinkers.

A Short Summary of What Ritual Is

First, ritual creates an inside and outside—a gathering with intention and focus.

The mere fact of showing up at a particular place at a particular time creates an inside and an outside. An “us” and an “us here together.”

Second, ritual is repetition in bounded space. The “here” plus repetition of what we have done before.

The word “liturgy” derives from Greek, λειτουργία—*leitourgia*, meaning “work of the people.” Liturgy is the container for the work we have gathered to do.

Ritual.

For some on Sunday, there is the ritual of making a hot caffeinated beverage, the partaking of carbohydrates, and the sacred reading of *The New York Times*.

Religion, Religious, Ideal Ends

In his classic work *A Common Faith* (1934), the pragmatist philosopher John Dewey distinguishes between *religion* and *religious*.

Religion, according to Dewey, is the traditions, creeds, and dogmas that we regularly related to that word. You know—Christianity, Islam, that sort of thing.

Religious, on the other hand, is about how we *connect*. “Religious” is about having ideals and seeking to live up to them and according to them. (I think there’s a good argument that Dewey’s idea of “religious” became the currently popular “spirituality” of our day.)

Here’s some religion for you: In the *Gospel According to John*, Jesus is reported to have said,

I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (14:6, New International Version)

That verse has been used as a cudgel, with many insisting this means that Christianity—and a particular flavor of Christianity at that—is the only way. That’s religion, with a capital R.

But what if we put a bit of *religious* spin on that saying: “I am a way and a truth and a life; I am *one way* to to connect and feel whole.”

Or perhaps: “There are many ways; many truths; and many lives; many ways to connect and feel whole.”

OK, that’s not so good as a way to sell a particular religion, but a good way to point out the complexity of being religious.

Notice what John Dewey is doing. He published his book the year after publication of the *First Humanist Manifesto*, which he signed. That document had outlined a move from a vertical form of religion—human-to-god—to a horizontal form of being religious—human-to-human, human-to-living things, and human-to-planet.

The word "god," in Dewey's account, would no longer conjure visions of a monarchical judge or any sort of deity but, in Dewey's words, "god" would refer to "the unity of all ideal ends arousing us to desire and action." (p. 42)

"The unity of all ideal ends." Hmmm. "Arousing us to desire and action."

Frankly, I disagree with Dewey on one point. I don't think the word "god" is particularly useful in discussions of how to act ethically and morally in the world. The term simply refers to too many various and sundry ideas; conjures too many disparate images; and is ultimately either hopelessly subjective or smothered in a morass of tradition.

But "the unity of all ideal ends" is not a bad thing to strive for, provided that "ideal ends" are positive for those human-to-human, human-to-living things, and human-to-planet relationships.

And getting aroused to desire and action . . . yes, as Rev. Howard Thurman said, the world needs people who have come alive.

(To be clear about this: "ideal" doesn't necessarily mean "ethical." A white nationalist's ideal might be an all-white United States. That's a negative ideal. But that all people have a shot at liberty and well-being . . . positive and ethical ideal.)

You get the point.

Differentiating between "religion" and "religious" rather than "religion" and "spiritual" adds a dimension to the ideas.

It's something to think about.

Committing to Community

When I think of community, I think of the little one-room church about two miles from my family farm in the southern part of Illinois. That community took my father in during the 1930s. It's a small church in the middle of nowhere. It was about a mile from where my father's family lived at that time, in a two-room sharecroppers shack.

My dad was very up front about why he first became a Christian and joined that church: they had a potluck meal on Sundays after the service.

In those days, rural people still predominantly used horses and wagons for transportation, and consequently it took people a while to get home after church. So, people contributed what they could for a meal before the journey back to their farms.

My teen-aged father figured out that if he attended service, he could eat—something that was not a surety back at his parents' shack.

Thus, my father became a Christian. Soon, the church hired him as the custodian, which meant cleaning up a bit, and getting to the building early to build a wood fire in the pot-bellied stove on winter Sundays.

When my father went to war, the congregation put a photograph of him in the pew where he sat and kept it there until he returned.

Five years later, my mother and father were married there.

I attended services there sometimes as a kid. I went to revivals there. I remember, for example, a revival preacher who claimed he had grown up as a cannibal but had "found Jesus" and become a preacher. He really did have filed, pointy teeth.

The little church is between my family farm and the small town where my parents later went to church. And, when my father died, I drove by there with my mother and paid my respects to the building. When my mother died, I drove by again, to pay respects.

A couple of my kids now live on the family farm and they sometimes get lost out on the winding gravel roads that don't have any markers or signs. When they call, I always ask first if they've passed that church and which side of the car it was on.

And, anytime I get back to the farm, I stop by that church, because it is for me the essence of what a religious community can be—it nourishes; it teaches; it celebrates; it mourns; it remembers; and it is an anchor across the generations.

That is what religious community does well.

Religion Privatized

Martin Luther and the Protestant Reformation set in motion a wave that would eventually privatize the European Protestant religious experience—the depth and intensity of the individual experience often becomes more important than the communal.

In the United States, as the prevalence of “Cafeteria Catholics” attests, even Roman Catholicism has fallen into the chipper of individualism. The acid of Martin Luther’s Protestantism has by now melted what American fundamentalists once called “Romanism, ritualism, and rationalism.”

So, here we are . . .

The conservative side of Christian religious thought is overt in this subjective turn: “Do you have a personal relationship with Jesus Christ as your lord and savior?”

The liberal wing, from New Age to “spiritual but not religious” to atheism, is pure individualism at play—the goal is to “find myself” or to “be true” to myself.

Our souls (and/or minds) are completely our own, by gosh and by golly.

Consequently, in the United States today, seventy-percent of Americans *label* themselves Christian, but only seventeen percent attend church at least once a month.

Not much commitment! Aside from a commitment to self.

Congregational Humanism is here to counter this trend.

Congregating Congregation-ally and Committing to Commitment

You've probably read that being religious is good for your health. It isn't the *specific beliefs* that are good for you but the fact that you're doing something "religiously:" getting out of bed, brushing your teeth, and going somewhere, meeting people, co-operating with people, getting irritated by people; talking, sharing, learning.

It isn't religion that's good for you; it's congregating that is good for you.

Why?

Besides the fact of making it somewhere on time being good for you, congregational communities can also help us cope. If you get a scary medical diagnosis, I can virtually guarantee you that someone—or several someones—in a group of twenty or thirty people have also faced that diagnosis. Any life challenge you face, you can pretty well bet someone has also faced that difficulty. Congregations offer coping skills and social support. They make the utterly unthinkable into something imaginable.

I'm not attempting to set myself up as an authority. Rather, I hope in these pages to outline some things I've learned about congregating over time.

I'm Senior Minister at First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis. Each week in my words of welcome I mention to the long-term members and visitors that First Unitarian Society of Minneapolis (FUS) is the birthplace of congregational Humanism. What I mean by that is the insight in 1916 experienced by the newly-called minister, John Dietrich, and the people in the congregation. That insight is that religious community doesn't have to adhere to strict creeds or specific beliefs. As a matter of fact, we don't refer to religion at all.

What we have been doing at FUS for more than a century is truly counter-cultural. We have tried to live up to a quote from the great liberator Frederick Douglass: "I bow to no priests either of faith or of unfaith. I claim as against all sorts of people, simply perfect freedom of thought."

Gathering the Spirit, Gathering the Minds

People gather into groups for companionship; for an experience (positive, we hope) and to experience an ennobling sense of purpose.

The challenge in building such a collective project is creating the “din of conversation,” a brave space to share dangerous ideas. This is a space where people converse rather than pontificate (a counter-cultural activity for sure!); and a space that insists upon the “inherent worth and dignity of every person.”

That’s why at First Unitarian Society we stand up each week and repeat a short but punchy congregational covenant:

*This is our great covenant:
to dwell together in peace;
to seek the truth in love;
and to help one another.*

(Adapted from Rev. James Vila Blake.)

An ideal congregation (as ideal as real human beings get) of people is a dynamic intergenerational community that offers opportunities for celebration, creative renewal, relationship, and mutual support. Such a space is magical. And we seek to do it without imposing either “faith or unfaith.” We seek to achieve “perfect freedom of thought.”

No, there’s never a gathering of people in which everything is ideal or goes according to plan.

Having lived a long time, I now realize that here’s the thing about living a life: there needs to be a dream that can remain a dream. Each of us needs ideals.

Getting rich isn’t an adequate dream or ideal because no one ever seems to get rich enough. Getting famous isn’t adequate because nobody ever feels famous enough. A fancy new car will never do it because no car stays new and seldom feels all that fancy after a few months and some new ones have appeared that are even fancier.

A dream that can remain a dream. Ideals that are ideal.

Here's the thing: there's plenty of facts and figures and information out there. You can find that all by yourself. It flows over us like a spring downpour

In addition, most of us have plenty of options—but how do we find that dream, that direction that feels worthy of living? And, after we find a sustaining dream and direction, how do we keep going in that direction?

Congregations of people can aid in that journey.

It's Not Even Possible, But . . .

If you look it up in a textbook, what you're going to quickly discover is that building a congregational space of freethinkers can't be done.

Time-worn and cliched wisdom says that a group of people who don't agree on some very basic things about how reality works can't be in community. It's not possible to have Douglass' "simply perfect freedom of thought." You've got to have, as Douglass called it, a "priest of faith" or a priest of "unfaith."

Yet there are such places. As senior minister at First Unitarian Society, I'm not a priest of faith or unfaith. I'm just there to help people consider the options.

Some of the gathered congregation perceives reality as numbers; some through the scientific method; others through art and aesthetics. But still people can gather, because we believe that personal, subjective beliefs can be put aside for a greater good.

The core value of Humanism is that people matter more than ideas.

This is not what most people think. But it's a core Humanist value. What we think we believe is so contingent. So balanced on a knife's edge—where you're from; who your family is; what gender you've been assigned . . . all the arbitrary labels that get heaped on each and every one of us.

Humanism says that those are indeed arbitrary. If anything is sacred, then life itself is the most sacred thing.

We must hold to that truth because the universe we exist in *does not hold life sacred*. Far from it. (Ask all the rabbits and squirrels and deer and foxes and people who froze to death last winter how much nature cares.) Our empathy; our compassion; our caring is all the kindness that there is on this planet.

That's what has kept FUS together since 1881—a community that nourishes; teaches; celebrates; mourns; remembers: it is an anchor across the generations.

Such gatherings are possible. I believe it is a noble task to build them.

1. CALLS TO ASSEMBLY

Call to Assembly: A Welcome

Wherever you come from,
however you got here,
whatever you look like,
whatever you believe,

whether you have a
bank account or not,
however you are propelled
around this building,

you are welcome here.

All are welcome
as we strive to live
in integrity and justice—

in what the First Humanist
Manifesto called “a shared life
in a shared world.”

Join in and share.

A Call to Assembly: Renewing Faith

We ask "what's the point?"
to renew our faith,
to renew our trust

that our world is enough,
that we are enough.

We ask "what's the point?"
to remind ourselves

that loving our world
and each other is our way.

We ask "what's the point?"
to renew our faith that
loving choices create

a loving life.

Opening Words: Into the Circle

We gather into this circle.

We gather into this circle of care

to dream,

to envision,

to embody and achieve

the compassion we dream,

the justice we envision,

the dignity of each

in an ever-growing, ever-

flowing circle of love and justice.

Opening Words: "Earth and All"

We join together,
bringing both our
shadow and our light.

We join together,
opening our minds
and our hearts.

We join together,
embracing,
celebrating,
sharing

the beauty of each,
the beauty of self,
the beauty of the earth,
the beauty of all.

A Call to Assembly: Courage Is

We gather together here, now,
summoning our courage to be.
We gather, bringing our
weariness and our energy.
We gather, bringing our
wariness and our visions.

Like trees in rocky places,
our roots clutch. What
we find is each other.
What we find is each
other, holding tightly.

Courage is not certitude.
Courage is not assurance.
Courage is the willingness
to join in the attempt.
To join in the unlikely,
even the impossible.

Courage is a choice.
Courage is a way of knowing.
Courage is a way of joining together.

Courage is knowing that
together, we will do what
none of us can do alone.

Opening Words: For the Grace of Now

The grace of now is sufficient, for
weakness teaches us strength;

illness heals the spirit; wounds
create an unscarred mind.

May I rejoice as best I can
in life's many difficulties,
little or large. May I rejoice.

For weakness teaches strength.
For the grace of now is sufficient.

(based on 2 Corinthians 12:9-10 KJV)

Opening Words: a New Story

Welcome to a new story!
Welcome to a day unwritten.
We gather to speak of possibility.

We remember the losses,
we celebrate the victories.
As a people of story,

we embrace the possible
over the probable,
weaving a story of hope.

Join us in the new story.
Join us in the day unwritten.
Join us in the future of possibility.

Call to Assembly: Giving Voice

Our ancestors speak to us and through us.
The soil and sky speak to us and through us.

The other animals speak to us and through us.
The plants and trees speak to us and through us.

All that is speaks to us and through us.
We are all a part of all that is.

Call to Assembly: An Invocation for Peace

We gather here, dedicated to peace and justice.

May the gentle dawn of acceptance and love
shine more vividly than blood and fire.

May our work of love and justice,
moving on its steady path,
quell the screams of hate.

May violence quicken our resolve for peace and love.

May calming waters drown consuming fire;
may the dove's flight be more
stunning than the eagle's.

May the gentle deeds of the peaceful
overshadow shouting and gunfire.

May our work of understanding and love shine
brighter than the hate on our instantaneous screens.

We, gathered here
in solidarity and hope,

may we be
peace.

Call to Assembly: Here for Each Other

We are here not for either / or.
We are here not for musts or shoulds.

We are here for both / and
and for the peace. We're here

for the faces. For the hands.
We're here for each other.

Call to Assembly: Abundance

Today we gather to celebrate abundance.
Today we gather to celebrate being enough—
enough as each one of us;
enough as a gathered community.
Today we gather like flowing water.

There are times to be ice.
There are times to be steam.
There are times to flow freely.

As the *Daodejing* says:

The highest good is like water.
Water benefits all things without argument.
It flows into the lowest places
and so shows the way
of the creative universe. (Chapter 8).

Today we gather like water.
Today we gather to celebrate being enough.
Today we gather to celebrate abundance.

Call to Assembly: Us. Here. Litany (to be read antiphonally)

Here I am,
my sibling.
Here I am.

Can you
hear me?
Here I am.

Saying you . . .
You. Here.
Now. We.

We are.
Here. Us.
Together.

Can you.
Hear me
here? I am

calling to you.
Calling to
us. You. Me.

Us together.
Here I am.
Calling. Let's

all say "yes."
Let's. Here.
Now. Together.

All say . . .
Yes!

2. CHALICE LIGHTINGS

Chalice Lighting: Gratitude

Some moments only grace
can get us through. A touch.
A glance. A word. Time.

Other moments a call comes
and the news is not disaster.
That moment is gratitude.

We light this chalice in gratitude.
Gratitude for grace.
Gratitude for gratitude.

Chalice lighting: Story

We tender this flame, opening the book,
turning to a page yet to be written.
Opening a story yet to be told.

May we fill this fresh page wisely.
May we write a new story into being.
May we together inscribe the page with hope.

Chalice Lighting: Wonder

We light this flame,
reminding ourselves
to treasure the magic
in the mundane,

the wonders of
carbon dioxide,
oxygen, nitrogen,
rapid oxidation

into light, heat, and
the dance of a flame.
We light this chalice,
kindling, remembering

our innate sense
of wonder at
the very real magic
of our world.

Chalice Lighting: Embracing Responsibility

We light this flame
reminding ourselves
that we are both
the light and the fire;
both warmth and darkness.

Reminding ourselves
that we are both
destroyer and sustainer.

We light this flame
embracing our responsibility
to the earth and to each other.

Chalice Lighting: Justice, Meaning, and Purpose

We light this chalice
remembering and honoring our own tradition
and celebrating the rich diversity of traditions among us.
As we search for justice, meaning, and purpose,
may we remember that justice, meaning, and purpose
live first in deeply listening to one another.

(This chalice lighting was written for a multifaith gathering.)

Chalice Lighting: Expectation

We kindle this flame in expectation.
Not the expectation that justice will soon prevail.
Not the expectation that the struggle will soon be won.

Yet in the expectation that companionship and joy
will be ours on journey.
We kindle this flame in community and expectation.

Chalice Lighting: We Unite In Our Differences

We unite in our differences in background and belief;
We unite—with gratitude and hope:
Hope for a world of differences;
Hope for a world that honors difference;
We unite in community
With gratitude for difference.

Chalice Lighting: Better Together

We light this flame.
The hope ignited is
the hope in our gathering

together.

We gather in this place.
We gather in this tradition.
We gather to ignite hope,

here, now, together.

Chalice Lighting: In This Time of Loss

In this time of loss
In this time of asking why
We light a flame of sharing
We light a flame of commitment.
In this time of why
We light this flame
Sign of our searching
Sign of our sharing
Sign that together we remember
Together we ask why
Together in sadness and joy
We share light.
Together we celebrate
What we are together.

Chalice Lighting: Hymn to the Light

Our light is the light of the sun,
keeper of all we love.

Our light is the light of the earth,
provider of sustenance.

Our light is the light of all living things,
life precious like our own.

Our light is the light of each of us,
bound together in need and hope.

Our light is the light of the cosmos,
keeper of all we have known

and all we will ever know.

3. READINGS AND MEDITATIONS

Litany for a Multifaith Gathering

(One:) We gather, acknowledging our sacred call to love our neighbors as ourselves.

(All:) We gather together in beloved community.

(One:) We gather in our human frailty, acknowledging our failure to love enough.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, remembering the prisoner, the homeless, the hungry.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming that all must be free of violence and fear.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming our dedication to justice.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming our dedication to walk in the ways of mercy.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather, proclaiming our dedication to walk in the ways of truth.

(All:) *We gather together in beloved community.*

(One:) We gather together in beloved community.

(All:) *May it ever be so!*

Gratitude for Food

We pause a moment
in the joy of this time
to call to mind gratitude
and thanks for this bounty.

We remember those
who grew our food.

We think of those
who have prepared
and brought us food.

We bring to mind
the forms of life
and the planet that
we all depend upon.

We give thanks as
we work to insure
that all may enjoy
life's bounty.

So may it be!

Yes, There's No Binary

The road not taken
is not a fork. That's
too simple a thought,
flipping some coin.

Either/or. Nope. It's
not this *or* that.
No *or* yes. It's *nor*/

neither and all
of the above and
more. The road
taken goes every

way at once. There.
There. They. Them.

What is Holy to Humanists?

Late in his life, the philosopher Richard Rorty – a well-known atheist – was asked by an interviewer if he could define holy. Perhaps the interlocutor thought the aging and dying Rorty would be stumped by the question or would fall into some traditional language of reverence. But Rorty was not stumped by the question. He responded, “Holy: the hope that someday my remote descendants will live in a global civilization in which love is pretty much the only law.”

For a Humanist, holy doesn't have to do with particular places, words, or books – or even particular ideas, which must always be under interrogation. Holy is a place where and when the basics of human flourishing are realized. Among these basics are the inherent worth and dignity of every person; a world community that stops the battling between clans, tribes, and nations; and respect for the planet and its creatures.

Dr. John Dietrich, founder of congregational humanism:

It does not frighten me to know that the universe has made me a part of its teeming, abundant life; that the same power that is breaking the lilacs into leaf is breaking me into a fuller flower of personality I am content to be a brother to the leaves, the flowers, the trees, and all the strange and beautiful world in which I dwell It does not sadden me to realize that for a little while the cosmic urge voices itself in this strange community of busy particles which I call myself. In me, in you, the Universe has spoken.

“On Life’s Renewal,” an Easter address (#957)

Not Knowing: Let's Join In

Let's all join in
the thought that we
do not know. Let's

join in the fact
of not knowing.

Let's all join in,
embracing mystery—
that's the place

to join together.
That place is here.

That place of not
knowing. There is
the place to

gather and hold
each other always.

All and All

What is it the sky is saying?
What is it, the branch?
What does the spider's weave tell?
What does the grass have to say?
What does the water whisper?
What the stone and the earth?
What is it everything is saying if
only we hear the breath?

It is all that is speaking.
It is everything that is,
one and one alone.
It is the all speaking when
each whispers, stutters, shouts.

What is it? What
is it the sky is saying?
You.
You have heard.
Remember, now.

A Lament Based on the Psalms

Injustice never ends and
so we too often cry in despair,
"There is no end of injustice!"

Yet, together, we care for each other;
we lift each other up. We listen,
even as we stand outnumbered.

In our struggle for justice
we find meaning; in our
struggle we find purpose.

Chalice Lighting: Grief and Joy

We light a flame
in hopes of warmth,

knowing that cold
will come again.

We celebrate life;
we mourn death.

We wish for joy;
we fear grief.

In our ideal world,
these are separate,
like day and night.

Yet, here,
in this world,
our real world,
night and day,
joy and grief
weave daily
in our lives.

We light this flame
celebrating life
with clear eyes
for what it is.

A Lament
(antiphonal reading)

We cry out in grief at
the suffering we see—
 people, all living things, the planet.
 Preventable suffering, yet
 it continues, on and on.

When we feel overwhelmed,
 we gather to find a path,
 to find new ways forward.

When we feel overwhelmed,
 we know that to our right
 and to our left are
 the faces of caring,
 faces of companionship.

Joining together,
 we find our refuge.
 We find our strength.
We find our wisdom.
 We find our way forward.

A Lament Based on the Psalms

How long will most be forgotten? forever?
How long shall justice lie hidden? forever?

How long will we look inside and find only sorrow?
How long will the worst take precedence?

People who love this earth, join
together in the days we have left,
so that the oppressors no longer
rejoice at the tears of the oppressed.

Still, I believe; I believe the good will join together.
I despair at the injustice that humanity endures.
I rejoice in the beauty that humanity has wrought.

May we! May we rise to our best selves.

A Lament Based on Psalm 28

My people are my rock.
Because they hear me,
they pull me from the pit

We listen to each other.
We join in peace.
We join in understanding.
We join in justice.
We fear no mischief in
each other's hearts.

We join together,
listening to each other,
listening to the earth.

A Lament Based on Psalm 56

Of human wrangling
there is no end.
Endless struggles engulf us.

Where do we find hope?

There is trust in words
that have been spoken.

Despite all the words
that have been hurled,
we can find meaning,
talking with each other.

We weep until the pillow is soaked.
The air swallows all our tears.
Our solace is our words to each other.

We trust in our striving.
We trust in each other.
We join in striving;
we join in the march.

Lament (Based on Psalms 6)

Regret is thin gruel.
In our weakness,
in our anxiety at the times,
we find strength in each other.

May we remember the prophets,
their words and their deeds.
May we rise again in hope
as we dry each other's tears.

We hear the calls of our companions;
we hear the call of justice.
we join together to realize tomorrow.

Chant and Sing the Real
(can be read antiphonally by verse)

Go ahead—you know you want to sing a song of the earth to a new tune!
Go on—you know a chant can fill the void.

The imagination is more real than real, the song sang deep is all singing.
A holy sort of play, firmly embraced, is serious, serious, and free.

Sing on then, piercing the droning commonplace.
Sing on, knowing your notes are new and needed.

Listen: find your firm, sure voice. You hear it sometimes. Grasp it and fling it again!

Chant away the machinations of merely being;
join the struggle with the real, each moment a leap over some abyss,

each moment eternity.

Chant the unique and holy.
Enchant the disenchanting.
Sing until only in-cantation is real.
Sing deeply. Sing all song.

For Change

For the setting sun from an airplane window.
For the rising sun from a train window after riding all night.
For the rising sun and setting sun in directions that feel foreign.
For the sunlight even when we are lost.

For the times the heart has longed to be alone.
For the times the heart has ached for another.
For leaving in fear.
For leaving in hope.
For the way home.
For the way away.

For the windows and the suns we have seen.
For the windows and the suns we *will* see.

For memory and forgetting.
For the change that is our lives.

Why Humanists Don't Worship

The very act of worship creates idols and fetishes.
Creates separateness and entitlement.
Creates hierarchy. Others "the other."

The cosmos is a large and amazing place;
human consciousness is an amazing experience.
Our awe, wonder, and gratitude flow from our experience of this immensity.

Still, we must remember that emotions are human;
we must remember that the universe does not exist on a human scale nor for human purposes,
nor is our experience of consciousness more than a material experience, part of the fabric of the cosmos itself.

We do well to remind ourselves that each of us is a result of the cosmos,
of all that is.

When we attempt to remove ourselves from our wholeness,
artificially creating objects for veneration,
we perpetrate the illusion that human beings are unique or special.

This perception of separateness has created many of the problems humanity suffers from, and has created suffering for the planet and its living things.

Therefore, humanists do not "worship."

The Cosmos Doesn't

The cosmos doesn't
give credit. It's pay-as-
you-go and go as you
pay, like any one-off
mom and pop operation—
cash, thank you much.

The cosmos doesn't
cut deals—foxholes,
roadside, bedside—the
deals don't come, only
some luck if you're
lucky, like that last five
bucks into a slot machine.

Sometimes.

The cosmos doesn't
hate you, but like any
border agent, it wants
your things in order and
ready to go. Then it gives
you that stamp, and
you're good to go. Go!

The cosmos doesn't
give up, but you're on
your own, like every other
little thing. It's all about
dealing with the wheeling,
like you and everything
else does. The cosmos . . .

the cosmos is you.
And you and that. And that.
(Which it's impolite to
say.) And on, with no outside.

No outsider. No other.
The cosmos is us.
And how we love.
Or not. The cosmos.

The Liminal

You can't live there
long, in the liminal,
that old word for

that old word
"threshold," that
place for stamping,

stomping, and
being neither
there nor here.

That space for
transforming,
going or coming

from out to in, from
there to here. At
times the only

question is "how
long have I been
away?" "Could it be

that I'm back now?"
And where might
that "here" be?

We're always
between, if we're
thinking. Always

in the liminal
where that's
neither here nor.

Wind and Clover (for Rostam)

No. There are no words
in the face of great loss.
There are no meanings;

no purposes. Great loss
is and only is, like the clover
chilled in a late frost. Like

poetry. Like song. It is
and only is. Yet breathe—
you aren't asked for any—
No words. No meanings.

No purposes. Only being.
Only being here. Embracing.
Like the wind and the clover.

The Containers We Cast
(Religious Studies 102)

Clever potters that we are,
first we cast the jar,
the vase, the box,
then we fill it.
Clever carpenters

that we are,
first we nail the

box, the vase,
the jar, then we
sell it. Clever
glassblowers

that we are,
first we form
the vase, the box,
the jar, then set them
on a shelf—this,
here, can make
everything better—

that's the plan for
the containers we cast.

That's the plan that
never works out.

What We Find Here

We find here days that swirl into days.
We find here nights that drag into nights.

We find pain here and fear.
We find here others in loneliness, fear, and pain.

Which is not to say we do not find here
others who give comfort and even love.

Like a spring storm, lightening can sear the air,
yet rain may fall too, gentle, lulling.

What we find here is the will to find all we can find here,
hugging some, cringing from some,

yet aching, eager always for what we find here.

A New Liturgy
(a story told by the Daoist philosopher Zhuangzi)

Once three friends were discussing life. One said:

“Can people live together and know nothing of life,
work together and produce nothing?
Can people fly around in the air
and forget to exist,
forever and ever?”

The three friends looked at each other and burst out laughing.

They had no explanation, and so
they were better friends than before.

Then one of the friends died.

Upon hearing of the death, Confucius sent a disciple
to help the two remaining friends
chant the funeral obsequies.

Upon arrival, the Confucian found that one of the friends had composed a
song,
and the other was playing upon a lute.

The two friends sang:

“Hey, Sung Hu, where’d you go?
Hey, Sung Hu, where’d you go?
You have gone where you really were all along,
And we are here, damn it, we are here!”

When the Confucian heard this
he burst into the room and said,

“May I inquire where you found this
in all the books of funeral obsequies,
this silly singing in the presence

of the dearly departed?"

The two friends looked at each other and burst out laughing. One said,

"Poor fellow! He doesn't know the new liturgy!"

(Adapted from a translation by Thomas Merton)

The Solstices Teach Us

The Solstices teach us
that darkness comes,
that darkness goes.

The Solstices teach us
that light comes,
that light goes.

The Solstices teach us,
calmly, silently, to be
calm, silent. Learning.

The Solstices teach us
as we circle the sun
that everything flies.

The Solstices teach us
to remember the dark,
to remember the light,

to remember time.

The seasons. And love
as we circle the sun.

Equinox

Equinox teaches us
that the light
comes and goes.

Equinox teaches us
as we circle on
that all things fly,

that all things balance,
that everything changes.
Equinox teaches us

to remember the light,
to remember the dark,
to remember time.

The seasons. And love
as we circle the sun.

Seasons

Some see daffodils
with the first day of
spring; some see snow
or other things.

Some see rain,
some see ice.
For some it's a nightmare;
for others, it's nice.

Don't Say: an Antiphonal Reading

One: There's an elephant in the room
and it's large. It's big.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and it's not hid.

One: There's an elephant in the room
and nobody's going to say.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and everybody's afraid.

One: There's an elephant in the room
and no comment is welcome.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and not seeing it is expected.

One: There's an elephant in the room;
you must turn your head.

Many: There's an elephant in the room
and nothing can be said.

One: There's an elephant in the room
and if that's not said,

Many: nothing can be said. Say it:
There's an elephant in the room!

Hope, Nearly Not There

There's no package called hope.
Nothing at a shop to look for. Hope
won't store like hay in a barn. It is a

last leaf on a branch in deep winter.
It is a singular thing, firm when it's
found—a hand reached out. A word

to the marrow. Hope is fine grained,
like lavender gone to seed. Gossamer,
a moth's wings. There's no weight

called hope. It's a hand; a whisper;
a moment shared. Nearly not there.
But, like a shadow, there all the same.

Here for Beloved Community

May I be all in for beloved community.
May I be all in, despite the challenges.
May I be all here for beloved community.

May I be ready for the beauty because
I long for the possibilities. Yes, I am
here for beloved community.

May I see the beauty of
you in community; of
us in community.

May we be the beauty
of beloved community.
May we be the dream together.

We join here for beloved community.

A Meditation on the Words of James Baldwin

The American writer James Baldwin wrote this:

Perhaps the whole root of our trouble, the human trouble, is that we will sacrifice all the beauty of our lives, will imprison ourselves in totems, taboos, crosses, blood sacrifices, steeples, mosques, races, armies, flags, nations, in order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have.

Baldwin is outlining the humanist program here: he's naming the negatives, the places fear takes us:

"totems,
taboos,
crosses,
blood sacrifices,
steeples,
mosques,
races,
armies,
flags,
nations . . ."

Baldwin underlines the fact that fear is a very destructive motivator.

When you're fearful, you can't be free.

But here is the humanist answer: There are a good many things about the human condition that are extremely unfortunate—illness; suffering; loss.

But our finitude—the certitude of death—is *not* one of those extremely unfortunate things.

No, it's not fun to die, but the fact of death is not unfortunate.

As the atheist poet Wallace Stevens said, "death is the mother of beauty." Death is also the mother of freedom.

The concept of eternal life erases the need to achieve freedom for yourself, for others, and for the planet. For it is our finitude and our challenges and our losses and our potential losses that make a piquant life.

Piquant—provocative; stimulating; spicy.

James Baldwin defines the center of a humanist worldview—embracing finitude.

Our lives *will* end. But if we allow fear to be our motivator, we will sacrifice our freedom in “order to deny the fact of death, which is the only fact we have.”

4. CLOSING WORDS

(in Christian tradition called benedictions: *bene*, well and *dicere*, saying)

Closing Words: Go in Peace

Go in peace.

Go *be* peace.

Go be the answers
everyone searches for.

Go, relying on the power
of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words: That Most Difficult Magic

May we practice that
most difficult of magics:

turning words into
works. Turning

good thoughts into
actions for good.

May we work that
most intricate

of spells, together–
conjuring, knowing

that all of this
is all that is.

Knowing
that all of us

is enough.

Closing Words: We Go Now

We go now, out into the world,
embracing our responsibility to our earth;
embracing our responsibility to each other.

We go now—enriched and enlivened—
out into our beautiful, broken world.

Closing Words: Not Knowing

May we rejoice in not knowing.
May we rejoice in the process of not knowing,
in the possibilities of not knowing.

To know that we do not know . . .
May we take that challenge.

May we live bravely into not knowing.
May we live. Not knowing'
celebrating all that is.

Closing Words: May All Those

May those who mourn be comforted.
May all be sheltered in mercy.
May all be clothed by compassion.
May hunger and thirst be quenched in justice.

May all go in peace, rejoicing
in the power of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Go in Knowing

Go out into the world knowing
that freedom is the power
to dominate what dominates you.

Go, be the justice you lack.
Go, be the power you feel.
Go, be the compassion all thirst for.

Go, emboldened by the power of the human spirit.

Go, creating freedom.

So may it be.

Closing Words: Encounter Peace

May all that is bless
and keep you;

may joy and gratitude
shine in you.

Know that you are
a light in the world:

may all who meet you
encounter peace.

(Adapted from Numbers 6:22-26)

Closing Words: Neither Power Nor Politics

Be confident that neither death nor life,
neither power nor politics,

neither things now nor things to come,
neither mystery nor conviction,

nor anything on the earth or in the sky,
will ever separate you from love and compassion.

(adapted from Romans 8:38-39)

Closing Words: Consider the Depth

Consider the depth of the riches
and the wisdom and the knowledge

in human time. Consider the art
and the languages. Consider

how boundless the human imagination
is in this mysterious thing called life—

searching enigmas; finding threats:
discovering laws . . .

May we join in the discovery;
may we work for the good.

May we embody the best
of the human spirit.

So may it be!

(adapted from Romans 11:33, 36)

Closing Words: In Harmony with All

May the grace that is
in endurance and in hope
grant you to live in such

harmony with all, in such
agreement with all, that
together we may, with

one voice, create
grace, endurance and
hope for all that is.

(adapted from Romans 15:5-6)

Closing Words: Unshakable

Therefore, friends, be steadfast,
unshakable, always ready to help

our neighbors, knowing that doing
good for others is never done in vain.

(adapted from 1 Corinthians 15:58)

Closing Words: Love and Peace

Finally, friends, rejoice. Restore connections, affirm one another, walk with one another, even when

you disagree. Live in love and peace and love and peace will be with you.

(adapted from 2 Corinthians 13:11)

Closing Words: In Love and Compassion

May we hear our hearts:
teaching, learning.

May we hear our hearts:
the wisdom; the songs;

the heart's cries for compassion.

May we live in gratitude
for all that is. May all we do
be done in love and compassion.

(adapted from Colossians 3:16-17)

Closing Words: Lightly Upon the Our Earth

May our love only increase.

May our gratitude only increase.

May our love for the world
and compassion for its creatures

only increase as we, in kindness
for ourselves, in kindness for others,
learn to live lightly upon our earth.

(adapted from Thessalonians 3:12-13)

Closing Words: Grace, Mercy, Peace

May grace, mercy,
and peace be with us
as we work for grace,

mercy, and peace.
May we live grace.
May we live mercy.

May we live peace
as we live lightly and
lovingly on our planet.

(adapted from Thessalonians 3:12-13)

Closing Words: All Are Worthy

All are worthy,
therefore may we
strive for all to feel

worthy, have peace,
well-being. Strength.

All are worthy,
therefore me we
strive for justice.

(adapted from Revelation 5:12-13)

Closing Words: Go Be the Power

Go. Create justice.
Create love.

Be the way to peace.
Be the truth of peace.
Be the light of peace.

Go. Be the Power
in the human spirit.

Closing Words: Go Knowing

Go out into the world
knowing that you are enough—
enough to hold the world.

May love enfold you.
May compassion uphold you.
May justice show you the way.

Go, rejoicing in the power
of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Go Blessed in Life's Bounty

May you be blessed by life's bounty.

May you be kept in earth's embrace.

May light precede you.

May justice inform you.

May peace follow you.

May gratitude mark your way.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Live, Nourish, Create

May you live in love.

May you nourish justice

May you breathe compassion.

May you embrace the power
of the human spirit.

May you live in gratitude.

all the days of your life.

.

So may it be!

Closing Words: Go With the Power

Go out into the world.

Be fearless.

Ask questions.

Hold onto what is good.

Strengthen the weak.

Comfort the fearful.

Serve the suffering.

Do what makes you come alive.

Rejoice in the power of the human spirit.

So may it be!

Closing Words (Benediction) for a Wedding

May you live life curious.
May you rejoice in the process.
May you let go of the rage for control.
May you feel the flame and live well.

May you, every day, re-imagine reality's map.
May you keep exploring, even the dark places.
May you rejoice in the unknown.
May you hug uncertainty to you tight.

May you live life joyous.
May you find the miraculous.
May you continuously find gratitude.
May you love the messiness.
May you love yourself.
May you love all you love well. And well.

So may it be.

A Blessing for the Winter Holidays

May the holidays be as you dream.
And may your dreams embrace
the messiness of being human,
the ambiguity of relationship.

May your holidays be joyful,
in a joy tempered by loss,
in a joy of the bittersweet
flow of human life.

May the darkness and cold
teach us the deep truths
of light and warmth—that
they are our creation,
our doing,
and our joy.

May your holidays be as you dream,
remembering to be honored
participating in the great
cycles of the seasons,
in the circling of the earth,

and in the seasons of life.

So may it be

A Suggested Format for Humanist Meetings

GATHERING

Bell sound

Welcome and Announcements

Bell Sound

Opening music:

Chalice Lighting

Congregational covenant

Love is the spirit of this place
and service (is) its law.

This is our great covenant:
to dwell together in peace;
the seek the truth in love;
and to help one another

(based on the writing of Unitarian minister James Vila Blake, 1880)

Congregational Singing

Multi Gen:

Singing the Children to Class:

Go now in peace, may love guide all your ways
Beauty be the blessings of your nights and days
Truth on your lips and kindness in your deeds
Faith to follow where the human spirit leads.

SHARING

Joys and Sorrows

Reading (optional)

Offering (optional)

LEARNING

Talk

Congregational singing

Extinguishing the Chalice:

We extinguish this flame,
But not the light of truth,
The warmth of community,
Or the fire of commitment.
All of these we carry in our hearts
And in our minds
Until we are together again.

DEPARTING

Closing music:

Closing words:

MUSIC

Toward Thinking Freely: Propositions (More and Less True) Concerning Humanism
and Freethought

(in no particular order)

One believes in existence;
Another says, "There is nothing!"
Rare is the one who believes in neither.
That one is free from confusion.

Ashtavakra Gita 18:42
(500 BCE)

* * *

There are many ponderous tomes concerning Humanism. Some are worth the time. Many are not. In the following pages I intend to be pithy, not ponderous, concerning living a life of humanistic freethought.

* * *

Keep in mind that there is no single Humanism. There are many human expressions of a life well-lived that can be termed Humanism.

Hereafter, when I use the term, I mean a particular type of Humanism from a particular tradition. However, humility teaches of other ways and places of being across borders and boundaries of time, place, and culture.

* * *

There is no one way to be a Humanist or freethinker. Your viewpoint begins with your standpoint.

* * *

Some argue that the concept of the human has changed so much in the last century that it's time to move from "humanism" to "post-humanism" as a way of signaling this turn of thought. I'm good with that.

* * *

Freethinkers and Humanists usually adopt a naturalistic and materialistic worldview. This worldview implies that there is no difference between body and mind (all thought is embodied thought) and that human beings are each a temporary congeries of matter that has before and will later appear in a different congeries.

* * *

A naturalistic and materialist viewpoint implies that all matter everywhere is of equal worth and importance, whether that matter appears as a human, a squirrel, a cloud, or

a rock. Materialism also implies that the “boundary” we perceive between ourselves and “things” is an illusion. A useful illusion at times, but an illusion.

* * *

Here is the first proposition of Humanism: Every person deserves to be an end in themselves, not a means. Not a cog in a machine or a tool. Every person deserves the chance to freely choose a life of meaning and purpose.

Yes, that’s an ideal. No, no society manages it. But the process toward that goal is the highest calling of Humanism.

* * *

To repeat and rephrase: The first Humanist value is that no human being should ever be treated as a means rather than a free end in themselves—that’s the inherent worth of every individual.

* * *

The Bulgarian philosopher Tzvetan Todorov concisely summarizes Humanist philosophy: “the autonomy of the I, the finality of the you, and the universality of the they.”

* * *

Commitment implies vulnerability. Vulnerability is love.

* * *

The purpose and end of reason is to find the limits of reason.

* * *

Basic question: Are you going to *pray* about it or *do* about it? No, these are not mutually exclusive. But choose: which matters more? Seriously. Choose. Clarify your values.

* * *

Humanism stands or falls on the principle that each human being has worth and dignity merely by dint of having been born. Other living things and the planet itself also

have worth and dignity and deserve consideration and respect. Consider: what if all are the same?

* * *

The foundations of Humanism can be summed up in three propositions:

1. Everything is connected.
2. Everything changes.
3. Therefore, we must care for each other. ("Other" meaning all living things, and the planet.)

Think of them as the Three C's: Connection. Change. Care.

* * *

Humanists replace the perception of divine command with pragmatic behavior and altruism.

* * *

Awakening from superstition is not enough; we also must awaken to values.

* * *

Here is my shot at a definition of religion: "Religion is a set of shared practices and ethical commitments grounded in a worldview."

In this definition, non-theistic traditions fall into the category "religions." Humanism, at the least congregational humanism, is therefore a religion.

* * *

Why "shared" in the above definition? Because philosophical and religious ideas are necessarily processed in a subjective consciousness, but I'm not sure anyone can create a new religion whole-cloth. Many if not most of us cobble together a little of this and a little of that—eclecticism. Bricolage.

This rule pertains even to those who may think they are “purely” one religion or another. Syncretism is everywhere.

* * *

A question: What are we doing when we do religion? The answer to that question is not entirely clear, and it isn't agreed upon across cultures and governments.

* * *

In accepting the Nobel Peace Prize Albert Schweitzer said, "Humanism, in all its simplicity, is the only genuine spirituality."

* * *

Naturally, all of us wish to escape time and chance. This is not possible. Thus time and chance are the very marrow of living.

* * *

The study of being is called *ontology*. Being is not static; being is both dynamic and relational.

* * *

Here's the real, the ontological point: you live in reality. You exist. You breathe. You think. You struggle and live in your truth.

Still, it's difficult to brush that underbrush away. It's difficult to pull the weeds back from the stone and read the letters.

* * *

Embrace darkness. Embrace confusion, delusion, and convolution. Embrace, warmly, what it means to be. What it means to be alive. What it means to be human.

* * *

What has not been questioned has not been considered.

* * *

Find the essence of reality for you; then, go deeper. Nature is how things are; morality is how things ought to be.

* * *

Living authentically in intellectual integrity. That's a virtuous goal.

Living authentically is grounded in a sense of belonging; a focus on promoting the flourishing of living things; and the goal of building and sustaining communities of association.

* * *

"Integrity" is the match between inner convictions and outer actions. Integrity is our actions in honest relation to our experience.

* * *

The first question of human freedom—free will—can be philosophically challenging from an academic or philosophical viewpoint, but in practice—in practical philosophy—we know that all of us make choices; we also know that we often believe we have no choice when actually we do have choice; we also know that all of us think we are making choices when we are not.

These quandaries, self deceptions, and illusions are as true for the convict serving time as for the rulers of nations.

This complexity gives rise to ethical questions and thinking.

* * *

The pragmatist William James once said, "My first act of free will shall be to believe that I have free will."

* * *

We're not the same and that's OK.

* * *

Existence is co-existence.

* * *

Having a philosophy is not optional. You have one and you are acting on it right now. The question is how well and how ethically you are doing those actions. Ask yourself: how well am I doing life right now?

* * *

Humanism is communal liberation. Freethinking. Forward thinking. Humanism is an invitation to conversation. Humanism is a turn of mind; a product of the skeptical spirit.

* * *

Humanists say, "We are in this together—we are all we've got."

* * *

Humanism is an invitation to a conversation about the ongoing human projects of freedom and responsibility.

* * *

Humanism is not about finding ultimate reality but is about lived experience—how to live ethically here, now . . . because that's the duty of a human being who has been given the gift of life.

As Stoic philosopher Marcus Aurelius put it: "What nature requires, take, as long as that allows you to remain a rational animal, remembering that you are also a social animal."

* * *

Trusting as we do in science, most Humanists let go of the comfort provided by a dualistic world view—body/mind, science/religion, head/heart, and so on. Rather, Hu-

manists commit to the difficult work of seeing reality as a continuous whole, each “part” dependent upon all.

* * *

Who you are and what you should do in the world . . .

Let’s face it, there are lots of models and paradigms. A myriad of traditions.

Choosing one has a lot to do with the social norms one lives in. Human beings, however, are capable of re-thinking who we are and what we should do in the world. Ideally, every person should be given the tools and chance to do that.

* * *

In his book *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*, philosopher Friedrich Nietzsche wrote:

. . . do you call yourself free? I want to hear your ruling idea, and not that you have escaped from a yoke. (chapter 17, “The Way of the Creator”)

Humanists answer Nietzsche’s call.

Yes, we freethinkers have escaped from the yoke of many popular dogmas. And we have a ruling idea: human beings can solve human challenges.

* * *

There are militant theists; there are militant atheists. A militant Humanist is a contradiction.

* * *

Though most Humanists are not theists in any traditional sense, we have not rejected faith. Humanists know that faith cannot be forced and should not, generally, be faked. We respect the faiths of others. We ask only to be respected in our lack of traditional faith.

* * *

It's not that Humanists don't relish speculating about deities, it's merely that we don't speculate about them when we consider ethics and morality. Religious traditions yes, deities, no.

* * *

One thing I know about "the examined life"—it's rife with contradictions.

* * *

Every philosophical or religious tradition builds both cairns and walls.

The cairns guide us to that tradition's insights and truths. The walls say "this is in," this "out."

But who gets to decide?

* * *

There are many Humanisms and many ways to be Humanist. You choose.

* * *

"My religion is to seek for truth in life and for life in truth, even knowing that I shall not find them while I live." ~Miguel de Unamuno

* * *

Subjectivity is not the answer.

* * *

Remember: There is no "view from nowhere." Each of us must come to terms with what this means if we are to be free and ethical agents in the world.

This does not mean that we should not have a viewpoint but that we must problematize that viewpoint by considering as fully as possible the viewpoints of others. The phrase "nothing about us without us" well summarizes the challenge.

* * *

You want to find the truth? Check the moment. Check yourself. When you are in the moment, you are nearly always in the truth.

* * *

Humanism is hard work. Humanism is accepting the hard work of seeing the immensity of reality in its immensity.

* * *

Always: get back to first principles.

* * *

When we speak of our deepest being, our first commitment is not to speak of truth; or to speak truth; but to speak to today. Now.

We—all of us here—are here now. This is the meaning. The purpose. How to live into the next moment. Committed to those things beyond ourselves that deserve our commitment.

* * *

The meaning of being alive. Here—fill in the blank of your you society _____. Fill in the blank of all the labels you carry and all the labels forced upon you. And then? What is left?

* * *

Your experience is your truth There are so many truths. They wash across the dams and beat against the beaches. We toast each: To truth. To truth!

In this wash, this tide of time, we feel the sand—as if at a beach—slipping away.

* * *

St. Augustine of Hippo wrote:

Bad times! Troublesome times! Everyone is saying this. Let our lives be good; and the times are good. We make our times; such as we are, such the times are.

Ever it is thus.

* * *

Each life is a riddle that cannot be solved.

* * *

We are not broken. Because there is no wholeness. Perhaps, in the womb, for most unborn babies, all is well for a time. But the moment we hit the air . . . all bets are off.

* * *

We can think about our thoughts.

* * *

Sometimes saying nothing is the most eloquent thing of all.

* * *

Liberation—whether of nations, groups within nation-states, or self-liberation—is never elegant nor straightforward.

The philosopher Franz Fanon explored the topic of liberation in considerable depth.

Might oppressed peoples find “collective catharsis” in bloody revolution? Interestingly, Fanon thought so, while at the same time facing his own PTSD from experiences while with Algerian freedom fighters.

* * *

Although Humanism is often equated with scientific thinking, we must remember that the term’s nearest cousin is “humanities.” The humanities. Poetry. Music. Fiction. History. Art of all kinds. Religions *use* the humanities, but Humanism *is* the humanities.

* * *

Might we create a nation free of its post-colonial past? Free of its oppression and violence? Free to reimagine itself?

* * *

If you take the gods seriously, you off-load at least a part of human responsibility. To be Humanist is to take responsibility.

* * *

Not worshiping the sacred in nature restricts the vision.

* * *

If *you* don't have freedom and rights, *I* don't have freedom and rights—all that is domination. And domination isn't freedom or rights.

* * *

Being exists because of being-with. Meaning that I exist because you exist as a free agent in community exactly as I do, and visa-versa. That's community. That's freedom.

* * *

Read the poet Nizar Qabbani.

* * *

Isn't philosophy merely pie-in-the-sky nonsense? No. Every day we make philosophical assumptions and decisions. Decisions based on a worldview

Every day, these decisions and assumptions must be examined and questioned. Otherwise, the abyss.

* * *

Too often we live on adrenaline and confused emotions. A lover of wisdom will explore ways to stop and center. Will find ways to live leaning forward, in aspiration and hope.

* * *

How many of us have a clear answer to "What do you want to do right now?" I seldom have an answer to that question. Not until I remind myself to calm down and center. That's the point of what are known as "spiritual practices."

* * *

The fact of being is the fact of being interrelated and in relationship.

* * *

Humanists agree to be present with each other and with the world as we experience it.

* * *

Humanism is not a set of doctrines but a frame of mind. A frame of mind that seeks wisdom in human thought, whether that be in science or the arts; cutting edge or prehistoric.

* * *

Humans are social by nature and find meaning in relationships. Humanists long for and strive toward a world of mutual care and concern, free of cruelty and its consequences, where differences are resolved cooperatively without resorting to violence.

* * *

The joining of individuality with interdependence enriches our lives, encourages us to enrich the lives of others, and inspires a hope of attaining peace, justice, and opportunity for all.

* * *

Working to benefit society maximizes individual happiness. We work to free humanity from the brutalities of mere survival and to reduce suffering, improve society, and develop global community. We seek to minimize the inequities of circumstance and ability, and we support a just distribution of nature's resources and the fruits of human effort so that as many as possible can enjoy a free and fulfilling life.

* * *

The mistake of much Western philosophy is the goal it sets—happiness. This was an unattainable ideal. The idea provided a template to strive for, which is the why of models, but it sets people up for failure.

* * *

We live for the most part in the heat of the fray, the middle of the storm. Most of the time, rather than asking “how should I live my life?” we are asking ourselves, “what next?”

* * *

“What next?” in both an existential sense: What’s going to happen next? and in an ethical sense: What should I do in this sticky situation? I’m angry; I’m frightened; I may look like a fool. What do I do?

* * *

In this breathless spot, we need a peg to grab; a place to hang our hats; a lifeline and a safety belt. That’s what Humanism provides—a way forward.

* * *

Let’s be real: in moments of stress or danger, our first thought is protecting ourselves. That’s natural, normal human behavior. We can’t help ourselves—often our first reaction to a situation is fight or flight. Fear or anger.

The thing to do is not to beat ourselves up about feeling fear or anger. The thing to do is to realize that what we do next is in our power to decide. And we don't have to do the same thing as we did the last time . . .

* * *

Ethics comes in when we ask ourselves: When am I protecting myself when I'm not actually in danger? When am I reacting with a stress response when such a response isn't needed? Isn't even sensible?

* * *

Humanists take into consideration the human capacity to heal, and the human capacity to hurt. Given those capacities, what is best now, in this situation?

* * *

Humanists ask, What is required of me in this situation? We have that imperative: We must always treat others as ends, not means. Other people and things have worth and dignity. We don't trample on that for our own purposes.

* * *

Humanism isn't about what you don't believe. Or do believe, for that matter. Humanism is about actions and commitments. Central concerns. Humanism is about taking ownership of choices and consequences.

* * *

Your story is not my story. My story is not your story. That's OK.

* * *

It is important to remember that the concept of "religion" is a Western construct. For example, the Japanese had no word for religion until they were forced to find one when Westerners arrived and imposed Western notions in 1853.

* * *

Your religion or your philosophy is the heuristic device you use to navigate your reality.

* * *

You can't be Humanist alone. Not for very long, anyway. Humanism is about conversation, relationship, nurturing, and community. Even the sometimes solitary production of art and thought is ultimately about sharing.

* * *

Preoccupation with the self results in misery.

* * *

Be grateful to everyone. Seriously. That's grace.

* * *

Focus, try hard; shoot for being wise.

* * *

The less you grasp and obsess, the more free you are.

* * *

Not knowledge but wisdom; not knowing but being.

* * *

We don't discover reality. We discover how we feel about particular facts. These can be abstracted. It's not the happenings but *how we view* the happenings.

* * *

US society is utterly drenched in theological thinking. Much of it reactionary; much of it damaging to a large percentage of the population. Though many don't know it, the populace cries out for a positive theology.

* * *

Rituals are everywhere in human life. Ritual for mind and body and both. Ritual is centering and regenerative.

* * *

The dismissal of ritual is part of the Western move toward "rationality." It began in the Protestant rebellion against Roman Catholicism. Yes, too far is too far, but isn't the wholesale dismissal of ritual a distrust of certain aspects of being human?

* * *

First and foremost humanist ritual must not reproduce old systems of oppression such as patriarchy, colonialism, economic oppression, and on.

* * *

Is it possible to penetrate to the heart of truth? Plato thought so. And he thought that ultimate truth waited in a pure reality separate from the fallen world we experience. Early Christians adopted this idea, opining that the ultimate truth lies in the mind of the monotheistic god.

Needless to say, neither philosophers nor theologians have ever gotten close to articulating what ultimate truth might be. That's because there isn't one.

* * *

"Truth" is not fact. Facts are discoverable and measurable anywhere and everywhere, though understandings of facts change with time.

"Truth" is subjective, even when it is inter-subjective—held by many people. Truth changes.

* * *

Scientists, too, have often fallen under the spell of an ultimate truth being "out there." Sure, appearance and reality often are not the same thing. This does not imply that there exists an ultimate reality that is truth. Scientific inquiry finds facts, not truths.

* * *

If you haven't, read up on the Dunning-Kruger effect.

* * *

The Temple of Apollo at Delphi, Greece famously sported an inscription, "Know thyself." This maximum has been much repeated, and self-knowledge has become an obsession in the Western world.

There were, however, two other inscriptions at Delphi: "Nothing too much" and "Surety, then ruin"

"Nothing too much" hasn't been as popular over time as the first statement.

Diogenes Laertes, a 3rd century CE biographer of philosophers, thought that "surety, then ruin" refers to a skeptical frame of mind: "beware false certainty."

* * *

Competing world views cannot be reconciled by argument. A worldview—what Paul Tillich called an "ultimate concern"—feels true to the person who believes it.

* * *

Like a pancreas, everyone has an ontology and an epistemology; a worldview and a theology. Unlike a pancreas, these can be worked on without anesthesia.

* * *

Competing world views cannot be reconciled by argument. Competing world views can, however, be understood through conversation: listening.

* * *

The nineteenth century pragmatist philosopher Charles Sanders Peirce defined a belief as a "habit of action." That definition makes a lot of sense. I sit in a chair, and my habit is to believe the chair will hold up my weight. I go to a dentist believing that the hygienist and the dentist are competent in their crafts.

I believe that the sun will rise. Habits of action.

* * *

Pragmatist philosopher Richard Rorty added that the first question to ask of our beliefs is if they are the “best habits of action for gratifying our desires.”

* * *

But beliefs are also cliched assumptions. And herein lies a challenge.

* * *

The simplest check on irrational thinking is to interrogate our assumptions for any whiff of a teleology—a belief in a logical end. Apocalypse of any sort is probably an overstatement and a reach for meaning that isn’t there.

* * *

Reason creates constructs; imagination creates constructs. Some constructs we call technology. Some constructs we call art. We need all sorts of constructs.

* * *

When I claim that Humanism demands both bodily and mental/spiritual freedom, I am making a large and very political claim: that governments owe mental/spiritual freedom to individuals. What does mental/spiritual freedom entail? Beyond the physical, it requires safety, education, and leisure.

* * *

What is a spiritual/mental practice and what is not? For example, how about bicycling? Walking? Journaling? Listening to a motivational speaker? Is spiritual/mental practice what’s being done or the attitude concerning what’s being done?

* * *

Birds appear to be free, but they are not. They are constrained by the necessities that nature defines—from calories required to wind velocity. What human animals mean by

“freedom” is much more than nature’s necessities. For us, “soaring” means much more than velocity, drag, and wind speed.

* * *

Turning entitlement into gratitude is not an easy thing.

* * *

What is often called “mysticism” is a reliance on spontaneity and intuition. Not bad emotions to rely on much of the time.

* * *

Reason is a slower, more deliberative sort of emotion.

* * *

One purpose of reason is to question the results of spontaneity and intuition.

* * *

One purpose of reason is to question reason.

* * *

Gods and religions are products of the fruitful human mind. What is more wondrous, the products or the producer?

* * *

You have already passed the only entrance exam that Humanism has: you’re human.

We love you for your humanity.

* * *

Fundamentalism of any variety is about eliminating doubt. Pluralism is about accepting doubt as part of the nature of understanding.

* * *

Doubt isn't a thing to fear but a method.

* * *

The time you live in has some very good answers. Remember: all times do. Backwards and forwards. Very good answers. Grasp what you can. Leave behind what you must.

* * *

When considering a worldview—your own or someone else's—an instructive first question is this: Does this worldview consider that the world is as it appears to be?

If the answer is no, chances are the person subscribes to some portions of one of the world's religions. So many religions postulate an un-seen world.

* * *

If the answer is "no," the person may subscribe to some of the world's religions but may also be a freethinker.

* * *

"God" is a complex answer to a simple question: "What is the purpose of life?"

A simple answer: "Living life."

The purpose of life is sustaining the life of the organism. And, no, that's not much of a purpose. That's why we search for meaning.

* * *

"God" is a complex answer to some simple questions. Questions such as—

Why are we here?

What are we?

What should we be doing?

The simple answers are: "evolution," "primates," and "as much good for others and the planet as possible."

* * *

One question humanity has always faced is: What made me what I am?

or What made us what we are?

* * *

Right, left, or center, theologians characteristically posit a god that wills what said theologians find of value—fascism, capitalism, liberalism, justice, and so on. "God" is then a list of human preferences, not a deity with super-human agency.

The god concept is thus very useful in conjoining each person's subjective wishes with some vision of an objective world or community.

Deities are often wish-fulfillment.

* * *

An instructive follow-up questions is: How does reality appear to *you*?

* * *

This question may elicit an extremely subjective response.

* * *

An instructive follow-up question is: Is there a method for determining what reality appears to be among people? Is there a non-subjective way of determining the appearance of reality?

So, a sequence:

I reality as it appears?

How does reality appear to *you*?
 How does reality appear to *us*?

* * *

Is there some huge “objective” thing–being–out there that we all must answer to, be that one of the gods or science? Or is each of us answerable to our own rather un-absolute “out there” ?

* * *

Even if there does exist some deity, we don’t know what it is or what it wants.

* * *

Nature has remained constant. Intersubjective realities have changed over time.

Can philosophies and religions create an intersubjective reality that will aid in saving the planet and its living things?

Is there anything that might be “wanted” by all of humanity that might save us yet?

Just asking.

* * *

Proposition: Pragmatically, every human-created system ought to promote the flourishing of earth and its living things. Wide-spread and fairly-distributed flourishing of earth and its living things.

* * *

The search for purpose and meaning is natural for human beings. Abstractions and projections make it no more or less noble.

* * *

The first question of human suffering is “why?”

Sometimes the next is “who?”

Seldom the question is “how?”

* * *

A critique of naturalistic thinking is that it leaves no room for mystery. This is an erroneous supposition, revealing a very proscribed understanding of what a mystery is. Namely, that “mystery” must have something to do with the supernatural. There are, however, perfectly natural mysteries.

* * *

Keep in mind: Western colonialism forced European science and technology, and European metaphysics upon the colonized. Many people had no choice. People need choice.

* * *

Like democracy in its ideal form, science is a communal project. In both cases, the foundational assumption is that we have only partial knowledge at present and that future learning may disprove what is currently orthodox.

* * *

Human beings are able to say “ought” with some confidence because we can trace a history of human morality that posits new areas of compassion.

* * *

At present, we are unclear as to how human beings reach this “ought,” nor do we understand precisely how human beings developed a moral conscience. At the moment, the reason appears to be evolution and the number of neurons in our brains.

* * *

Several systems of ethics have been proposed over time, including Virtue Ethics,

Deontological Ethics, Consequentialism, Ethical Intuitionism (or Moral Intuitionism), and Ethics of Care. There will be more, since none of these get it exactly right.

* * *

Though denizens of "The West" have claimed that reason and science are the basis for a Western understanding of reality, an empirical look at Western actions does not bear this assertion out. Many if not most Westerners exist in a world in which they assume many things are unexplained and perhaps super- or meta-natural.

* * *

Humanists have never excluded the intuitive or the experiential. Except in our humanist gatherings. This is a mistake.

* * *

The greatest mistake of Christendom when it ruled was to insist that it held absolute truth.

* * *

Our intuition and our logic often don't mesh. This is, as the cliché goes, not a bug but a feature.

* * *

The ability to generalize is important to the way human beings live and develop groups. However, generalization has challenges.

* * *

The idea of monotheism is an idea of totalization and universalization. These have often been damaging concepts. Humanism must deny and resist totalization and universalization.

* * *

Human beings are more than what we do. There is meaning to our "be."

* * *

Transcendent theism is intellectual overreach. How might an animal that evolved to survive on the savannah of Africa know such a thing as a deity beyond our perceived reality?

* * *

The above proposition neither affirms nor denies the existence of gods. I am merely claiming that the gods are necessarily beyond the sensing capacities of *Sapiens*. This stance is often called agnosticism. I am an agnostic.

* * *

We know deity through revelation? Why are there so many contradictory revelations?

* * *

Overreach and overconfidence are the enemies of wisdom, whichever side of this debate one is on.

* * *

When the scientific method is used in a neutral and balanced way, it offers a way to achieve a communal evaluation rather than a subjective one.

* * *

If there's no death, why bother about life? Life is lively because there is death that is deathly. Denial of death is denial of life.

* * *

The classic deductive logic example is: Socrates is a man. All men are mortal. Therefore Socrates is mortal.

This can be written out as

$P = Q$

$Q = r.$

Therefore $P = r.$

Noticing that "Q" can be removed as in algebra.

This "proves" that Socrates will die. But notice that we already knew that.

* * *

"Sacred" texts are generally stories, whereas theology is speculation about those stories that often makes truth-claims. Therein is the challenge.

* * *

Neither theology nor science is going to set you free. Only you. Only you. It may be in a mathematical formula; perhaps a poem; perhaps a concert. Whatever.

What shall set you free? And what will you do with that freedom after you realize it?

* * *

It's relative. It's relational. It's real because it's what's happening as best we can figure.

* * *

What matters to you is what feels urgent to you. Money? Time? Family? Love? Health?

What do you prioritize? "Sooner rather than later"?

Examine your priorities.

* * *

Inhabit the question—live in the question.

* * *

What is at stake? For some, only an addiction to hurting others.

* * *

Let's face that you have the freedom to be irresponsible. You can hand your car keys to the first person you meet in the street. That's one kind of freedom. What philosophers call "natural freedom." And at one level such a thing can be liberating. "Natural freedom." Then there's this other thing Many call it spiritual freedom.

Mental/spiritual freedom is about the big questions—*why* should you—or shouldn't you—give your car keys to the first person you meet?

* * *

Normative behavior or instinctual behavior. They aren't always the same.

* * *

What if societal pressure to "pursue happiness" is a form of oppression?

* * *

Deny . . . whatever . . . all the time you like. Then look—why is . . . whatever . . . so desirable?

Now consider the desire for the religious, the mental/spiritual . . .

* * *

The desire for immortality is not a desire for immortality. The desire for immortality is a desire for life, which is emphatically not immortality.

* * *

All we know is bounded in time because time is all we know.

* * *

When I was a kid, the questions about immortality were things such as “How old will I be in heaven?” “Will I recognize people in heaven?” “Will people be married in heaven?”

All time-bound questions.

* * *

Several religious systems tell us that an afterlife would be a good thing.

But why . . .

Why would a life after this life—a consciousness after this consciousness, be a good thing? A thing to be desired?

Rather, isn't the finality of our finitude time enough?

* * *

Talking about the next world is talking about surviving, not liberation

* * *

One positive thing that a life after death *could* do: Right the scales of justice. That's an appealing thought, but unlikely, unfortunately . . . because it is wish fulfillment.

* * *

To put it another way:

When Frankfurt School philosopher Max Horkheimer was asked about the existence of God, he said, “without the ‘totally Other’ in the end the murderer triumphs.” My parents could never formulate that remark but I think that's why religion was so important in their lives. And why it is so important in the lives of so many poor, disempowered people.

* * *

Let's be real: Nothing—no human idea—will save you from the pain of loss.

Deny loss. Or take it in.

Denying it is to embrace the supernatural or the unknowable; accepting it is to embrace nature and the natural.

* * *

Notice how much and how little you notice. I suggest that we all find methods for noticing more.

* * *

There is always something we want, even if what we want is to break free of the bonds of desire . . .

* * *

Bob Dylan sang it: "Don't hate anything except hatred."

Yes, we exist in a hall of mirrors.
Strive to enjoy mirrors.

* * *

To get at how things are, we often have to leave questions hanging and contradictions unresolved.

Love those mirrors!

* * *

Call it "compassion." Call it "tolerance." Call it "love." What the world needs—and always has needed—now is a positive theology, philosophy, whatever. Positive.

* * *

How about the first leap of faith being toward compassion?

* * *

Look closely at any scripture you wish—notice that there's a very short list concerning what god is. Or how reality works.

* * *

Many Christian theologies trace the philosophy and science of the Western world. That's their first mistake . . .

* * *

Theologian David Tracey, one of my teachers, said, "Christian theology began when Greek questions were asked about a Hebrew narrative."

* * *

What if "truth" is charity—compassion—rather than some sort of observable reality?

Remember: a fact is observable; a truth is subjective, even when it is inter-subjective among many people or across much of a nation or continent.

* * *

Humanism is about constant reevaluation, revolution, and liberation.

* * *

Buddhism is there to teach us that addiction to ego is the most dangerous of addictions.

* * *

Contextualization isn't explanation. But it explains a lot.

* * *

Religions objectify. But each of us lives in subjectivity. Religions are about institutions and politics and society. Big things. This is both the glory and the horror of human re-

ligions: they are strong but we are weak, as the children's Sunday school song phrases it.

* * *

Unitarian Universalism is always in extreme tension because the "prophethood of all believers" is almost a reality there. Face it: If everyone in the church basement is Moses, and there's nobody circling the Golden Calf, what's the narrative?

* * *

But if everybody's Moses coming down the mountain, each of us must be careful not to hurl those stone tablets too far. Lest we hurt each other deeply.

* * *

What is "the truth that shall set you free?" (John 8:32)

What is truth?

What is free?

Who decides?

* * *

It is fairly clear that living in cliché and illusion can be rewarding.

* * *

Frames of meaning—heuristics from religions to philosophies to the rules of games—are chosen illusions and inherently false. Some appear healthier than others.

* * *

When you see an illusion, express your disillusionment.

* * *

What if secularization is religion's ultimate purpose? Religion's aim. Religion's conclusion.

What if secularization is the fulfillment of religion's urge and drive throughout human history?

* * *

The idea of the gods is that they somehow underwrite or underpin the structure of reality.

* * *

"Evil" occurs in the realm of human action, not natural forces. A serial killer or dictator are evil; an earthquake is tragic but "natural." This is an important distinction.

* * *

The Spanish philosopher George Santayana said, "My atheism, like that of Spinoza, is true piety towards the universe and denies only gods fashioned by men in their own image, to be servants of their human interests."

* * *

Human nature and the nature of being human—all the time, we are learning how to human.

* * *

Knowledge comes from nature—those DNA and gene and anthropology things.

Knowledge come from philosophy, and religion, and poetry, and song, and . . .

Humanism springs from all these. From open-ended questions and from artistic human pursuits—the humanities.

* * *

Frames are how we . . . frame our attempts to understand reality. Frames are how we process what we already know and also how we approach what we don't know.

Religions produce frames. Political agendas produce frames. People are good at producing frames, even when the frames are harmful to many. Or just plain wrong.

* * *

I have absolutely no fear of *being* dead whatsoever. I do, however, worry about *getting* dead. This can be a challenge.

* * *

Unfortunately, it's a rule of thumb that liberation movements turn into their opposites. Christianity. The rise of the idea of the middle class. And on.

* * *

The poet William Blake said, "Opposition is the greatest friendship." I'd add that continued questioning is the greatest honor for any concept.

* * *

Even though the human imagination appears to be limitless, thinking has limits.

* * *

"Idealism" is about finding cohesion in abstract propositions. Unfortunately, idealism tends to stay abstract. And only a proposition.

* * *

Obsurantismo. Scientismo. Ismo, ism, whatever—it's always too far and always across the bounds.

* * *

Something—Wittgenstein called it a picture—*something* holds us all, each of us, enthralled. Each of us is locked. In language. In metaphor. In stories. Pictures of reality.

* * *

Superstition. Prejudice. Feed those, and stay in your past. Starve those; feed reality, and advance. Grow up!

* * *

We can draw new pictures. And we are able to color outside of the lines.

* * *

Our pasts. Our authorities. Each has feet of clay. And hearts of stone. Clay feet and hearts of stone.

The human past—clay feet and hearts of stone.

* * *

What is left? Is *that* your being?

* * *

There is expression. There is interpretation.

* * *

Experience. Being here, now That, the experience, is. The interpretation . . . that is altogether something else.

* * *

What if we cannot express but only interpret?

* * *

Centrally, freethinkers are naturalists. We look to how we human beings communally perceive the world as a place to begin our speculations and our relationships. Subjectivity is great, in the arts. But not so fine in politics.

* * *

Prioritizing and codifying commitments—this is what religions and philosophies are about. What is most important and why?

* * *

Knowledge is accumulated, but its application takes wisdom.

* * *

Knowledge solves problems. Wisdom accepts problems.

* * *

Are you telling your story, or is your story telling you? We do well to stop and ask ourselves this question from time to time.

* * *

Philosophy and theology are always a mess—a broken down old mansion in metaphor. How to fix the Addams mansion? That’s always the question.

* * *

One way of “knowing” a god is through the *scriptures* that have grown up around that god. Another way of knowing a god is looking at the *traditions* that have grown up around that god. The scriptures and the traditions are not always the same. And thus yet a third way of knowing a god is by looking at the *societies* that grow up around that god.

* * *

Look closely at what you depend upon.

* * *

Do I write my own contract for reality or does reality hand me a contract to be signed?.

Or more realistically, is it something between?

* * *

Nothing is a-historical. Everything. Everything is within time. This is a basic commitment for those who claim to be secular. Every view is a view from somewhere.

* * *

Paradoxically, we often have nostalgia for a time of clear truth and meaning that has never existed. Impermanence. Multiplicity. Mystery. This is and has been the human condition.

* * *

The “problem of subjectivity” is not a problem; it merely is what is at the foundation of an individual’s thinking.

* * *

Everything you know has already happened. The future is guesswork.

* * *

The reluctance to surrender certitude is perhaps the most pernicious vestige of Christianity in Western culture.

* * *

Some important virtues:

gratitude
 compassion
 acceptance (meaning forgiveness)

* * *

Do rocks stare?

* * *

Humanism merely recognizes overtly what theistic religions recognize covertly: that the idea of divinity is an idealization of human actions and aspirations.

* * *

Humanism is more than a religion or a philosophy. It's a way of life. Humanism is a life stance that takes what appears at the moment to be the truth about our reality and deals with that truth, knowing all the while that—fifty years from now—things will look different.

* * *

Instead of looking to outside rulers or outside powers, Humanists look inside themselves and to each other for sustenance and solutions to the clear and present dangers of human existence.

* * *

The most difficult thing for anyone to remember is that it's not about you.

* * *

A society that has fallen away from its religious traditions expects more from art than the aesthetic consciousness and the "standpoint of art" can deliver.

* * *

Some ancient ideas (from the Lojong) slightly updated:

Remember that life is rare and precious.

Remember that change and death are inevitable.

Remember that every action has a result.

Remember that egotism means pain for yourself and everything you touch.

* * *

The difference: "congregational" humanists congregate; "secular" humanists do not congregate, at least in any traditionally "religious" way.

* * *

Ideally, the lives of Humanists will show that “the good life” and “the moral life” are not dependent upon traditional theistic beliefs.

* * *

Deny less.
Embrace more.

* * *

Connection. Change. Care.

* * *

Everything is connected. Everything changes. You've got people.

* * *

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