



What About Animals?

Covenant Group Session, Greenville UU Fellowship Greenville, South Carolina

Revised by Sandy Westin and Denise Frick, February 2021

Chalice Lighting: *Here we are, together in this space. By our love and by our covenant, we make this a holy place. We light the chalice of Unitarian Universalism in honor of the light that lives in each of us, the light that shines among us, and the light we bring into the world.*

Check In: What is your favorite animal, and why?

Opening Words

I think I could turn and live with animals; they are so placid and self-contained.

I stand and look at them long and long.

They do not sweat and whine about their condition,

They do not lie awake in the dark and weep for their sins,

They do not make me sick discussing their duty to God,

Not one is dissatisfied, not one is demented with the mania of owning things,

Not one kneels to another, nor to his kind that lived thousands of years ago,

Not one is respectable or unhappy over the whole earth.

~Walt Whitman, *Song of Myself*

Questions for reflection and discussion:

1. If you have a pet now or have had one, what do you think the custom of keeping pets reveals about you? How has having pets, or not, affected your life?
2. With what animals have you had important experiences? What experiences have you had of inter-species communication? How have those changed your thoughts about animals?
3. Are there things you do or not do regarding animals for ethical reasons? Tell us about them, and share your ethical understanding. (Examples: eating, wearing, medical research, boycotting certain products, hunting, etc.)
4. We humans assume we are the only species with consciousness, caring and a cosmology. What evidence is there that may not be the case? What if it isn't? What are your thoughts on whether all animals feel pain and fear?

Readings – see below

A minute of silence, to ponder the readings and the questions.

Sharing

This is a time to speak without interruption and for deep listening. Deep Listening means no interrupting, no fixing, no saving, no advising, and no setting each other straight. Please share one or more of your responses to the session questions.

Break

Discussion

This is a time to respond to something another person said about the topic or to relate additional thoughts that may have occurred as others shared. Continue to practice deep listening.

Closing reading:

When we truly learn to suffer with other creatures and accept our intimate connection with all beings we will begin to end exploitation, violence, war, racism, hatred, and oppression. The ethical treatment of animals is a natural and inevitable part of acting from a place of compassion. ~Rev. Peter Morales

Check out: As we close our session, how are you feeling now?

Extinguish the Chalice

READINGS

I think dogs are the most amazing creatures; they give unconditional love. For me they are the role model for being alive. ~ Gilda Radner

Shall we, because we walk on our hind feet, assume only to ourselves the privilege of soul? ~George Eliot

Life is as dear to a mute creature as it is to man. Just as you want happiness and fear pain, just as you want to live and not die, so do other creatures. ~The Dalai Lama

Farm animals are far more aware and intelligent than we ever imagined and, despite having been bred as domestic slaves, they are individual beings in their own right. As such, they deserve our respect. And our help. Who will plead for them if we are silent? Thousands of people who say they 'love' animals sit down once or twice a day to enjoy the flesh of creatures who have been treated so with little respect and kindness just to make more meat. ~ Jane Goodall

We are acknowledging the interconnectedness of our lives with other animals. Their well-being is not separate from ours. On the contrary, we share the same fate. Moving forward, how we choose to be with animals will depend on how willing we are to be with them. Not as predator and prey, not as master and servant. But as kin, as partners, and as friends, strolling shoulder to shoulder along the dips and rises that stretch before us. We lose nothing when we do so. What we gain is our health, our happiness, our humanity. And friendships that are irreplaceable.

~ Aysha Akhtar, *Our Symphony with Animals: On Health, Empathy, and Our Shared Destinies*

Ask the experimenters why they experiment on animals, and the answer is: "Because the animals are like us." Ask the experimenters why it is morally okay to experiment on animals, and the answer is: "Because the animals are not like us." Animal experimentation rests on a logical contradiction. ~Charles R. Magel

How it is that animals understand things I do not know, but it is certain that they do understand. Perhaps there is a language which is not made of words and everything in the world understands it. Perhaps there is a soul hidden in everything and it can always speak, without even making a sound, to another soul.

~ Frances Hodgson Burnett, *A Little Princess*

I love to think of nature as an unlimited broadcasting station, through which God speaks to us every hour, if we will only tune in. ~George Washington Carver

Maybe it's animalness that will make the world right again: the wisdom of elephants, the enthusiasm of canines, the grace of snakes, the mildness of anteaters. Perhaps being human needs some diluting.

~Carol Emshwiller

If a group of beings from another planet were to land on Earth - beings who considered themselves as superior to you as you feel yourself to be to other animals - would you concede them the rights over you that you assume over other animals? ~Attributed to George Bernard Shaw

Teaching a child not to step on a caterpillar is as valuable to the child as it is to the caterpillar. ~Bradley Millar

The animals of the world exist for their own reasons. They were not made for humans any more than black people were made for white, or women created for men. ~Alice Walker